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FACULTY TO PRESIDENCY

Women in Higher Education:
Spanning the Gap from Faculty to President
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Abstract

The population of the United States is over half female. Women in the United States receive 57 percent of higher education degrees awarded each year. With these numbers continually increasing, one might assume the number of women leaders in our colleges are also growing at the same rate. They are not. This paper looks at the arguments behind why the ratios are not growing at a faster percentage. It also examines possible ways to start changing that trend.

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“A different frame. In the halls of academe in the first half of the twentieth century. At first women were transgressive just by virtue of being there. Their very presence transgressed the boundaries of “correct practice.” Their actions, too, were transgressive, either because no one told them what correct practice was, or else the practices were designed with men in mind... We are all trapped in language as it always already is; not static, no but dragging all its histories of meaning making behind it, histories of meaning making that we have made our own in the ongoing accomplishment of ourselves as academic subjects. When we make a critique of any discourse, or attempt to dismantle it, we are also inside it.” (Davies, 2006)

Times have changed. Up until the 1950s half of American jobs were not offered to married women. Now, it is illegal to discriminate for job positions based on gender. Women have more job opportunities offered than ever before.

Education experiences for women have changed too. The days of home economics classes and teaching schools for women, while men studied more important life skills are gone. I guess I should be thankful. I am a woman who decided to go back to school at age 30 and pursue a bachelor’s degree. I enjoyed it so much; I decided to complete my Masters of Business Administration because I wanted to teach at a nearby community college. I finished that and became an Assistant Professor at a nearby two year college. A few years into that career, I realized I wanted to be someone who had a voice in the planning at my college. I set my sights on administration. I was nearly 40 years old, had four children still at home, and started by doctorate degree.

I’m not alone. Because of changes in society, the number of female students pursuing degrees has increased. Social change has shown a trend in more women entering higher

education than ever before. Women going [back] to school can be contributed to many things. The more women that enter the workforce, the less discrimination there is towards working women. Increase in birth control methods has given more control over their childbearing years. Fewer children at home make it easier for women to enter the workforce. Divorce rates are at an all-time high. Women need to be able to provide for themselves. I too fit into some of those categories.

With more women going to school, and finishing their degrees, it seems we would also be seeing a large increase in women working in higher education. However, that is not all true. Even with all of the social and legal advances, and the number of women in leadership roles in higher education still has some work to do before equality can be claimed. Women in higher education are required to have more personal and professional development and more levels of education or experience than their male counter parts to be promoted into positions of leadership.

Maybe I should consider myself one of the lucky ones. I became the Assistant Dean of Finance and Operations at my college and part of the small percent of women who make it to the top of administration. But I quickly learned I am small percentage of women serving in these positions in higher education.

This paper will look at the number of women in leadership roles in higher education to determine why the percentage of women in leadership positions in higher education remains a minority. My purpose is to present the evidence I have found through the literature I have researched and show that women are not advancing to positions of leadership at colleges as quickly as I did. I will explain why this might be the case in higher education. There are several reasons I feel this is true. The first is because administration positions in higher education are not

equal for men and women. Second, I explain how the path women take to get to the top is different. Finally, I show there are different expectations for women in these higher education leadership positions.

Counter argument

I recognize by looking at the headings of the articles, people are going to disagree with my position in this paper. The research shows the number of women in higher education is on the rise. In 1986 only 3.8 percent of women were granted doctorates. (Cook, 2014) Today, 57 percent of higher education graduates are women. (Lapovsky, 2014). That is impressive! The benefits to higher education are numerous. With each level of education completed, there are more benefits to the individual and to society.

I can dig into that just a little deeper and explore how education is beneficial to wage earners. People need to have trades and skills to bring to the workforce. This is done through higher education.

There is also an economic impact through new human capital. The benefit of new talent and new leaders are obvious for society. Looking at the sustainability of growth and development there are several benefits. There is new resource and development from new talent as they enter the work force, bringing the latest technology and ideas into the field. Other social benefits arise from mixed classes within the education system. The inequality between races and genders are lessened, as minorities and women enter the workforce with higher education degrees and obtain better jobs. This raises the earnings of the family and changes the quality of life.

Non-market impacts of education make a difference to society too. Educated people become better citizens participating in their government. The crime rate drops. Obvious benefits include better health leading to lower medical costs. These are benefits to society as a whole. Better standards of living reduce overall costs per capita and raise the GDP.

In addition to more women becoming educated, the trend of women in top administrative positions is also increasing. Since the early 1990s the number of women promoted to a president's position has continued to rise. In 1986, only 9.5 percent of college presidents were women. By 1998 that number doubled. From 2006 to 2011 there was a nearly a 15% increase in women presidents of colleges. (Cook, 2014). In 2014, 26 percent of college presidents are women. (Lapovsky, 2014)

Someone might also point out that Community colleges are an exception to the rule. One third of public two year colleges are now lead by women. (Cook, 2014). By looking at only community colleges, it would seem women are holding more positions in education. The numbers seem to be increasing. We must be starting to bridge the gender gap we have been hearing about for so many years.

My Argument

“If the proportion of women who serve as senior administrators and full-time faculty provide a standard for equity, then women, as presidents, remain underrepresented,” ACE concludes. Women make up 57% of faculty and senior administrative staff, but less than half that percentage of presidents (Cook, 2014).

I am not here to argue that the numbers for women in higher education have improved. My position on women leaders in higher education is this: although the number of women in higher education is growing, it is not as rapidly as one would think. Women have been increasing

their portion of presidencies positions by approximately one percent every two years. While, it is encouraging to see the rate increasing, instead of decreasing, the rate of growth is very slow. If women continue to increase their share of college presidencies at this rate, it will take 48 years to hold half of the college presidencies (Lapovsky, 2014). I want to find a way to say that a little louder—48 years at the current rate of growth. If this is true, I'm not sure gender equality has quite happened. There are several issues that seem to lead to this problem of growth.

All positions are not created equal. At first glance, studies show that there are more women than men in higher education. (Curtis, 2011). After all, women make up the majority of students in colleges and have for the past 37 years. (Ward & Eddy, 2013). In the beginning faculty positions, women represent half of the assistant professors. The number drops to 42 percent for associate professors. (Ward & Eddy, 2013). As we look at higher positions, both tenured, and in leadership, we see these numbers start to fall. (Curtis, 2011).

This is especially true in four year colleges who only employ approximately one-third of their chief academic officers are women. This is compared to community colleges who have approximately half of the same position filled by women. (Ward & Eddy, 2013).

I feel this might be a good time to add my personal experience is not the same as the national average. My college shows slightly different numbers. Of the 23 faculty positions on campus (full time and adjunct) 43 percent are women. When we look at the administration on campus, half of the division heads are women. Looking at the administration on campus we have a Dean (currently filled by a male) and the Assistant Dean (Me), also representing 50 percent women. My experience (of seemingly equality) as I have recently bounded up the ladder from faculty to administration is not a normal course of events. I was blind to the differences at other

colleges because I had no experience outside of here. I have only become aware of the problem as I interact with other college administrators, and read about the discrepancies other colleges have faced.

The ratio of female to men faculty may be increasing, but the ratio of women to men in administration is not increasing at the same rate. In 2013 only one in four college presidents were women. (Ward & Eddy, 2013). Comparative imbalance is similar in higher education overall, with more males occupying senior leadership positions.

Different Paths. Another reason I think there are less women in leadership positions in higher education is the route they have to take to get to the top. Although, some woman may eventually end up in the same place, the path men and women take to get there is not quite the same. Women take a more traditional path, and it takes longer for them to climb up the ladder. As a rule of thumb, women spend more time in the classroom and teach for longer periods than men who are hired into the same positions. Three-fourths of women presidents have previously been faculty members, compared to two-thirds of men in. (Cook, 2014).

The education level of men and women in higher education administration differ on some levels too. Women are more apt to have a doctorate degree than their male counterparts.

Typically, they hold more education degrees than men do also. (Cook, 2014).

There also seem to be more exceptions for men who apply for these positions. A recent article from Higher Ed Jobs caught my eye with the article title *If a female president is good for the Ivy League, why not for the rest of us?* The article commented that in the past year, a former football coach, military officer, and an elected official were recently appointed to college or university presidents. The argument suggests that they may be great leaders. I am sure they had

charismatic personalities, and showed great experience in their previous fields. But they did not meet all of the standard requirements that a president of academe had to meet. They did not have to “check all of the usual boxes”. They did not have any significant academic experience.

(Sandeem, 2015). This is a good example of the saying is that women are hired based on what they've done, while men are hired based on their “potential,” a sexist plot based on stereotypes. (Cook, 2014).

Women presidents in higher education got there by a traditional career path. They proved themselves as scholars, taught in the classroom, and then rose through the ranks to the top positions at colleges.

Different expectations for men and women. There may be a few more women finding positions at the top as college presidents or provosts, but they are held to a different set of standards than the men they work with.

In a recent study conducted by HERS (Human Education Resource Services, a leadership training organization for women) the two main challenges that kept women from climbing to the top were discouragement and sabotage. (Oguntoyinbo, 2014). Unfortunately, some women take the closeness of their relationship with others and use it against them. It's easy to do. We trust other women with our secrets, problems, challenges and sadness. (Brock, 2008). They take these secrets as a sign of weakness and use it against us.

Women also encounter more criticisms constantly having to prove themselves worthy of leadership roles. They are criticized for their leadership styles. Historically, men have been seen as the dominate sex, where women are more submissive. When women have loud personalities, or strong leadership styles, they are often called names and criticized.

Women are also condemned for choosing to have a family and a professional career.

Women presidents are less likely than men to be married. Since between 2006 to 2014 women in leadership positions who were married increased 63% to 72%. (Cook, 2014)

Women presidents are less likely than men to have children; 72% of women presidents have children compared with 90% of men. If the women do have children, they are usually grown and living on their own by the time a woman pursues her career.

Single mothers also have unique challenges and are an underrepresented minority in higher education leadership. The challenges of single mothers typically represent another category in higher education in general—poor women. With fewer resources it's often hard to justify going back to college, even if you know the reward. Although there are Pell grants and other financial opportunities for single mothers that are usually only part of the concern. Time is usually a bigger constraint than money (although, they usually do not have either). Managing work, with classes, and time with the children is not an easy model to figure out. I think this correlation is obvious, in order for more single mothers to be eligible for presidency positions; they first have to finish school.

I am more than aware of the challenges of a single mother attending school. I was a single mother of four during the time I worked on my MBA. I always had two jobs, sometimes three. I did not want my homework to take away from precious time with my children, so homework was something I did not even begin until after 10:00 P.M. I slept very little for several years. I almost quit several times. I had to take a few breaks over the years because I could not afford text books. Or the gas money to drive to school that semester. Looking back over my transcripts, there were times I did not do as well as I would have liked. Somehow, I made it. Again, I was one of the lucky ones.

Recommendations

Women account for more than half of the population of the United States. They are also leading men in degrees. Despite all of this, they hold less than half of the leadership positions on a state and national level. (Thomas & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2015). What can we do to start changing these trends?

Support, not Sabotage. I cannot say this enough. I tell it to my friends, coworkers, students, daughter, nieces, and sisters (anyone who will listen). I think I have even posted it on Facebook. Women need to stop sabotaging each other, and start lifting each other up. We are amazing creatures! We are smart. We are beautiful. We are strong. We are also our own worst enemies. If we would only support each other, I am confident we could rule the world.

Mentors. 60 percent of current college presidents are in their sixties. If the percentage of women among new hires continues to rise, the aging presidency should create increasing opportunities for women. (Cook, 2014). We need to start preparing women to take these positions.

Women need mentors on every level. There is especially a need for women mentors in positions which is primarily dominated by men. From the time they are students, to when they become college presidents; they need someone to look up to.

“ I entered school as a single mother, welfare recipient, and fragile student. Undoubtedly I lacked the skills, knowledge, self-esteem, and /or vision necessary to glean the full benefits of a liberal arts education and to earn a college degree that might enable me to work productively and to support and nurture my family. Yet, at North Seattle Community College, and later at the University of Washington, Seattle, I was supported and challenged by dedicated, able and patient instructors who encouraged me to transform my life positively through the pathway of higher education. My passage guided by those teachers’ whose feminist classrooms became places where I was able to

build bridges connecting my own knowledge of the world to crucial new knowledge, skills, and methodologies.” (Adair, 2008)

Mentors take on many roles. They can be coaches, friends, teachers, or guides. Each mentor has something different to offer. A good mentor goes way beyond simply advising. They offer insights and ideas that inspire and teach their ‘students’ how to excel. They offer timely and constructive responses to work. A good mentor will model values of the discipline, teaching by example. They will help lead a young woman into her new academic position. (Kartje, 1996).

A mentor is not going always going to be cheering you on. Some of my most memorable mentors let me know what I was doing wrong, and were tough on me. I think their honesty helped me the most. According to a study conducted in 2012, 65 percent of women who are mentored will go on to be mentors themselves! (Nelson, 2015).

I have always had several women that I have aspired to be more like. However, most of the leadership positions in my life are filled by men, and I never had the opportunities to be mentored by a woman. I feel I could have truly benefited, and still could, from a woman mentor to help me become a good leader for my college.

Build Experience. Build Courage. We can start preparing women to become the next leaders of a college by helping them advance in their current positions. We need to continue to offer high quality, affordable educational opportunities to help train women with the skills they need for advancement. In addition to the large number of seminars offered, we need to find a way to offer more web based, or alternative ways to gain these skills. Often smaller colleges do not have the resources to send their faculty to these types of seminars. Additionally, male presidents and department chairs will not understand the need for these types of trainings specific

to women. This leaves the women paying the cost themselves. Travel across the country to attend seminars, is not in everyone's budget. We can find ways to offer these trainings to women to help them to start advancing their careers.

We need to train women how to fight for themselves. They need to be able to campaign their strengths and talents. Women are also less likely than men to claim characteristics such as leadership abilities on their resumes. (Thomas & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2015). This might be because women are less confident of their own leadership skills. When they don't have this confidence they do not take advantage of leadership opportunities.

Very recently, I was having a conversation with my Dean about my own leadership skills. I have always felt that I lacked leadership skills. I am not shy, and I am very comfortable with myself, but I have never seen myself as a leader. My Dean was surprised I felt this way, and gave me many examples of how he had seen me be a leader, part of the reasons he promoted me to Assistant Dean. I think if we can foster those ideas in women. Maybe this type of encouragement will give them the confidence they need to move forward.

Change hiring practices. Part of the change needs to come from how colleges recruit candidates for future leaders. Colleges portray stereotypes about what a leader should look like within the institution. We need to make sure these new job descriptions are unbiased, and can be filled by a man or woman.

Selection committees need to be fairly chosen. Because there are a larger percentage of men in the top academia positions, it stands to reason; there will be more men on the hiring committees. Educate human resources on the need to fill out committees with equal numbers of men and women, to allow for an unbiased committee.

Conclusion

The number of women in academics is increasing. The number of women leaders in academics is also increasing. However, the rate of both is not equal. As we move closer to a time where 60 percent of the current presidents will retire, we need to plan to help women develop the skills they need to fulfil these positions.

I feel there are steps we can take to start that transition. As women, we can support other women. We need to find ways to lift them up, and be careful to never sabotage. We can become mentors to younger, less experienced women. We need to help other women start to build experience and boosting their resumes. We can help them find the courage to fight for themselves and become the next great leaders in colleges for generations to come.

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