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February 1, 2021.

### **Growing Women Leaders on Our Campuses**

Undergraduate students' experiences often afford opportunities for emerging student leaders. The student population has grown to be predominantly female (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Perceptively, women's leadership development is a concept of the past due to high numbers in female enrollment in colleges and universities nationwide (Wendle, 2021). Research proposes that the leadership development has a far greater impact when identity is considered during developing upcoming leaders (Brue & Brue, 2018). This presentation examines leadership development for students who identify as women and the challenges that curtail their opportunities in a world that is seemingly equitable. The concept of developing women leadership is presented through a lense of mentorship for women by women with intentionality.

While campuses have become co-ed across time, female leadership continues to requires cultivation of women leaders who can transition from academic to professional settings. Challenges faced by women will be examined through student development and intersectionality of the identity of women from an historical examination of cultural norms, power dynamics, perceptions of the role of women, female behaviors and how they have navigated the landscape of higher education will be discussed. There is a connection that occurs when there are interactions with someone who has "been there, done that". It allows women mentors to

enlighten students about what to expect in the professional world and strategies of growth that assist their development. Mentoring programs that allow for sharing stories from real-life situations in the workforce can influence the preparedness of students in becoming professional leaders.

Fashioning after a model at Frederick Community College's, Frederick, MD, the *Women to Woman Mentoring program*, young female leaders are developed during their early adolescent years while studying secondary education (Woman to Woman, 2021), we seek to discover attributes that open pathways to the leadership development of women that continues after secondary education and into the college experience. How do we replicate this model on college campuses to develop undergraduate women leaders? We hypothesize that the development of women leaders on our university campuses will occur by incorporating professional women with industry-specific experience in mentoring roles with female students and further that this will be highly effective in transforming young female leaders through their professional careers.

According to Uhl, Bien et al., (2007) "leadership remains largely grounded in bureaucratic a framework." Based on that premise, it is imperative to understand the leadership development process, you must understand the complex leadership systems. This idea is based on the Complexity Leadership Theory (CLT) and is diluted through a strategy names Complex Adaptive Strategies (CAS). Through CAS, you can match the complex leadership systems and establish equitable practices for women in leadership development. Looking at the history of higher education, women have consistently been required to learn strategies of leadership bureaucracy to gain entry and access to education and leadership opportunities (Wendle, 2021) and by mentoring high school through college-aged women with identity in mind, they can

approach the complex leadership systems with matched CAS that allows equity and development for leadership in women.

Two organizations have established programs in women's leadership development that have longevity in their success by using Women's Only Leadership Development (WOLD). In WOLD, women learn leadership traits and characteristics develop that are more aligned with their natural abilities. The Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. and Harvard University have developed models for leadership development for women through their lifespan. Transformational defines the leadership development process that causes change in individuals and social systems and moves their followers through growth and into leaders. Middlebrooks and Haberkorn (2009) offer their study "results found that mentors' conceptualization of their role and activities aligned with established leadership concepts specifically those leadership behaviors associated with transformational leadership" (p. 1) yielded outcomes demonstrating authentic leadership styles with CAS that align with WOLD. Belenky et al's. (1986) study showed that women learn through connectedness. Women Only Leadership Development (WOLD) and leadership development programs that establish relationships between women and their leadership goals through relationships are proven to be successful.

Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. list outcomes that include 1.) Strong sense of self 2.) Seek challenges and learn from set-backs 3.) Display positive values 4.) Form and maintain healthy relationships 5.) Identify and solve problems in the community (Girl Scouts, 2016-2020).

Harvard University's Women's Education Program lists outcomes as 1.) developing strategies for prioritizing equity agenda 2.) exploring ways to strengthen and sustain collaborative relationships 3.) gaining essential communication and negotiation skills 4.) understanding the

nature of professional challenges (gender and racial bias) 5.) self-care 6.) creating a lasting network of women leaders (Women in Education Leadership, 2021).

In looking at these two models that cover lifespan leadership development for young women through college aged and professional women, four common themes emerge that can be placed in the context of desired outcomes of women's leadership development; 1.) self-care and understanding 2.) seeking and understanding challenges 3.) develop skills and strategies 4.) cultivate and sustain relationships/networks. Three strategies that can assist in accomplishing these outcomes include 1.) life leadership development 2.) education 3.) career navigation. This can be materialized through three levels of mentoring. The first level would call for high school guidance counselors to identify female students with leadership capacity/potential. The identification process will be vetted through a structured intake process that will allow the guidance counselors to sort through referrals, self-referrals and guidance counselor selection. Simultaneously University students would be selected in much the same way as the high school students, through faculty recommendations or campus staff and self-referrals. Students and those who might recommend students will be accessed through educational information sessions, fliers and technological advertisements. The second level of the mentoring program entails pairing the high school students with a university level female student who has similar major and/or career interests. During this level, the high school student serves in the role of mentee and the college student serves in the role of mentor. The university student would be trained in mentoring the high school students for college readiness as they transition into their college entry. The mentees and mentors would participate in shared activities that may include campus events, guest lectures, and workshops. This would allow the mentor to help the mentee transition and acclimate to university life. The third level of the model would continue after the mentor

graduates from college, transforming their role from college student mentor for a high school or underclass student to professional mentoring a college student. The three levels of the mentor program would inspire life leadership values, promote continued education and assist with career navigation, matching up with the three outcomes in the design.

During intake, demographics will be collected to identify intersectionality of identity and leave space for further examination of women's leadership development. An assessment will be provided to the mentee participants upon application, during their first year in college and upon graduation from college. The mentor participants will complete assessments upon application to the program, one year into their participation and during their first year in their career. The assessment instrument will include prompts that address, self-perception, self-identified leadership attributes, leadership goals, leadership skills, strategy confidence, life-long leadership designs, education and career expectations from participants. Findings will be correlated for tracking purposes and used as tools to reevaluate and implement improved strategies for women's leadership development.

## References

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