



Advancing Women in Leadership

JOURNAL

VOLUME 42, 2023
ISSN 1093-7099

EDITORS: BEVERLY J. IRBY, NAHED ABDELRAHMAN, AND BRAD BIZZELL
ASSISTANT EDITOR: JORDAN DONOP

Full Length Research Paper

Career Trajectories of Women Faculty Who Became Academic Administrators

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Accepted August 17, 2020

Women faculty often view academic leadership as incompatible with their work-life balance, detracting from research and teaching commitments, resulting in a loss of autonomy and an abandonment of discipline, promoting change in their relationships with colleagues, and placing an increased emphasis on budgeting, regulations and compliance (DeZure et al., 2014). Many researchers suggest that institutional culture works against leadership development for faculty, making the transition from faculty to administrator unlikely (Barden & Curry, 2013). It is increasingly important to identify the key factors that make the difference for women faculty to assume these roles. As such, in this study qualitative methods were employed to examine the experiences and career trajectories of 16 academic women who held tenured, fully promoted faculty positions prior to becoming administrators. The researcher found evidence to support future recruitment and retention in higher education leadership.

Keywords: Faculty development; higher education leadership; women's advancement; work-life support.

Although many faculty are leaders, scholar-leaders are becoming increasingly rare. Furthermore, fewer faculty are choosing to move into administration despite the fact that they have the potential to be successful academic leaders. The reasons many faculty with leadership potential cite for overlooking administrative roles and opportunities are: incompatibility with work-life balance, reduction in research and teaching commitments, loss of autonomy, abandonment of discipline, changes in relationships with colleagues, and increased emphasis on budgeting, regulations and compliance (DeZure et al., 2014).

Women make up almost half (49.7%) of tenure-track faculty positions in the United States. While this data is encouraging, only 39.3% of women occupy tenured positions and they still lag behind men as they are promoted to full professor. As of 2018, women held 34.3% of the full professor positions at degree-granting post-secondary institutions (Catalyst, 2020). According to Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association (TIAA) Institute, only one in ten women (or about 9%) achieve promotion to full professor (Flaherty, 2016). The same is true for women's presence in administrative leadership positions. While 48% of newly appointed provosts and 42% of newly appointed deans are women, only 30% of presidents are women at bachelor's and master's institutions (American Council on Education (ACE), 2017), which has increased from 26% in 2016 (Johnson, 2016).

Gender inequality in higher education administration continues to be a widespread problem, illustrating pervasive gender-based obstacles that permeate academia. For example, women continue to be recruited to administrative positions less and service roles more often than men (Dominici et al., 2013; Mirsa

et al., 2012; Mirsa et al., 2011). In addition to issues of inequality, women often hold back on administrative opportunities due to concerns around the impact on future choices, as well as politics and professional sabotage (Oguntoyinbo, 2014; Tiao, 2006; Ward & Eddy, 2013). Further, many women expect advanced academic positions or appointments to be out of their reach, especially if they desire a work-life balance. The perceived imbalance is highlighted in several articles (Bothwell, 2018; Ward & Eddy, 2013) suggesting many women are not interested in leadership positions at this critical time when the need for administrators is growing, indicating the need to better understand the reality faced by women leaders in academia and create a supportive climate and culture on campuses.

Persistent societal and personal economic strains have caused many university employees to delay retirement plans, but there is no denying the aging of university faculty and senior leadership. Just over half of tenured faculty are 55 years of age or older (The Center for WorkLife Law, 2013), and current estimates from the American College President Survey 2017 advise that 58% of college presidents are older than 60 years of age with 11% over age 71 (ACE, 2017). Further, 54% of presidents have plans to retire within the next five years (ACE, 2017). As women continue to increase their presence in numbers among faculty ranks, the need for female administrators grows to fill the gap of retirements and bring more diversity to administration in institutions of higher education. This presents an urgency for campuses to cultivate women's sense of agency and purpose to realize the administrative shortage soon to be left by retiring baby boomers.

Literature Review

The literature underscores the absence of women in higher-level administrative roles in academia (ACE, 2017). Among those in administrative roles, many women report being coaxed, persuaded, or sponsored towards their positions often resulting in non-traditional trajectories (Woollen, 2016). While these women's intentions may not have been set on administration, they ultimately served, often in short-term, temporary roles that led to lengthier administrative work. Why aren't women occupying college presidencies and other top tier administrative roles (dean/provost/vice president) at the same rate as their male counterparts? The answer may be related to several factors, which fuel the gender gap in the top roles. They include: pay inequity, differential standards, nontraditional pathways, and inadequate support (Fitzgerald, 2014; Gibson, 2021; Woollen, 2016).

Among women whose careers culminate in administrative appointments, the research demonstrates that trajectories are non-linear instead of a linear progression from faculty member to department chair to dean to provost. According to Ward and Eddy (2013), "women actually *lean back* from the ladder of academic progress, promotion, and leadership, because of a perception that advanced positions in academe are not open to women, and particularly women who hope to make time for a family or life beyond work." There is abundant data supporting the zero sum outcome when women's professional work is combined with family and other interests. This ideology is commonly recognized in higher education and often dissuades women from advancing their careers into the administrative realm. Results from a work-life balance study (Bothwell, 2018) showed that children restrict women's progress. Women tend to make decisions either to forgo children or delay advancement to administrative roles until children become independent young adults (Ahmed, 2017). Woollen (2016) interviewed 6 women presidents who experienced nontraditional journeys to their positions. The results of her research echoed those of Fitzgerald (2014), who found that women's advancement is often delayed, disrupted or due to their competing demands, lack of quality mentoring, and training.

Interviews with 17 tenure-track women with preschool children across four public universities demonstrated some women's slow progress to full professor (Vancour, 2012). The findings of this qualitative study were consistent with the results of Mason and Goulden's (2004) seminal research about the leaky pipeline which results in some women leaving academia and others falling short of their goals to becoming full professors. With many executive positions in higher education administration requiring promotion to full professor, this equates with some women unqualified and others fearful to leave their faculty roles for administrative ones (Ward & Eddy, 2013). This underscores the importance of mentoring, training and development programs to prepare women for administrative roles and to demonstrate the importance of embracing opportunities along

their professional paths that will enhance their leadership potential.

There are opportunities for environmental changes, as well. Ahmed (2017) found that academic "women with young children are likely to leak out of the pipeline." Lack of family friendliness results in some tenure-track faculty leaving academia in search of a better balance. This presents a shortage of candidates for administrative roles, and it also creates an unsupportive climate. Family-friendly policies and practices, however, facilitate healthy work-family integrations and enhance the overall climate in higher education (Lester & Sallee, 2009; Vancour, 2012; Vancour & Sherman, 2010; Ward and Wolf-Wendel, 2012).

Purpose of the Study

Deeper insights into the unique experiences of women in administrative leadership is important to remove barriers and close the gender gap. Much of the literature suggests that institutional culture works against leadership development for faculty, positioning the transition from faculty to administrator as unlikely (Barden & Curry, 2013). Even among faculty, evidence suggests that they want leadership with academic experience, but seldom support their colleagues and programs designed to develop leaders (Barden & Curry, 2013). Yet, with the persistent need for female administrators to assume leadership positions, it is critical to identify the key factors that make the difference for current female academic leaders holding administrative positions at universities across the country. In an era focused on creating workplace flexibility to support faculty development and success, it is necessary also to examine workplace supports, family supports, and intrinsic characteristics that enable some women to overcome obstacles and realize their administrative goals. Considering the reasons faculty, especially female faculty, cite for ignoring leadership opportunities, it is important to examine what factors enable some women to overcome barriers and boundaries to secure leadership roles in academic administration.

In this research study, I sought to answer the following questions with regard to academic women administrators' career trajectories to direct future work rooted in theory: (a) what enables women leaders to triumph over barriers and challenges to find success; (b) which factors supported their development toward their current administrative positions; and (c) which best practices exist for effective workplace offerings and leadership development initiatives to support women's advancement.

Methods

Women's unique experiences, perceptions, and expressions that resulted in their current administrative positions were examined in this study. Qualitative inquiry was used to identify emergent themes derived from one-on-one, in-depth interviews with 16 female administrators that focused on items relative to the three aforementioned research questions. Specifically, a phenomenological framework was used to understand the unique lived experiences of women leaders from their perspectives.

Further, the researcher asked a series of open-ended questions derived from the literature that provided rich narratives and descriptions, enabling her to identify themes and make generalizations regarding how their phenomena was perceived and experienced (Creswell, 2007). The interview protocol included the following questions: (a) Describe your transition into academic administration. (b) Describe the challenges of your position in academic administration to your work-life-family balancing act. (c) How is your balancing act better or worse?

Describe the obstacles encountered on the pathway to your position in academic administration. Specifically, what stood in the way of your success? (d) If you were involved in previous leadership roles, explain how those experiences shaped your decision to pursue your current academic administrative position. (e) How has your schedule changed with your position in academic administration? In what ways is an improvement over your prior faculty schedule? (f) How would you describe others' perceptions of women in academic administrative positions? What did you experience from colleagues when you decided to pursue and then occupy your current academic administrative position? (g) How would you describe your training and preparation to occupy your position? Do you feel that academia adequately prepares faculty to occupy administrative positions? Did your institution nurture your interest in academic administration? What do you know about succession planning? (h) If you think that there is a better time in a faculty career to pursue an administrative position, when would that be? Do you think it's possible to return to a faculty position after a position in administration? Do you think you would want to go back to being a professor? (i) How do you think institutions can better support faculty climbing the administrative ladder? What supports are you aware of that you believe make a difference? and (j) What qualities are essential to future leaders? How do you think these qualities shape academic administrators?

Nonprobability sampling was used to engage academic women employed at universities across the United States and in Canada who represented institutions of various Carnegie classifications. Once IRB approval was obtained, participants were recruited through a professional association listserv, and through the recommendations of women participating in this study. The participants occupied either the position of associate dean, dean, associate vice president, vice president/provost, or president. Each 45-60-minute interview was audio-taped. The researcher transcribed the audio recordings verbatim to facilitate analysis. Data was analyzed, categorized, and coded for emergent themes.

Results

Sixteen women were interviewed over the course of fifteen months beginning at the end of 2015 and 2016. Five interviews were conducted in person and eleven were conducted via Skype or FaceTime. Interviews involved: two university presidents, six provosts, two associate provosts, five deans, and one associate dean. The years in their current roles ranged from as

little as two months to as many as 12 years. However, the majority of administrators were experienced, having served an average of 11 years in various administrative roles. While the majority of women held only one administrative role at a time, a few women occupied two roles. For example, one woman held two interim dean positions, while another woman was a chair and an associate dean and another was an associate provost and dean simultaneously.

A few women built their careers at the same institution where they served as administrators, while the majority moved around rising on their career ladders with each new position. The universities where the administrators were employed at the time of the study were located in: California, Connecticut, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Ontario, Canada. Five of these institutions were private. The administrators originated from the following academic discipline areas: Arts (9), STEM (4), health (2), and business (1). In terms of training, four women were ACE Fellows; eight women participated in a Harvard, ACE New Provost, or Leadership Training for Women in Higher Education (HERS) training; three women attended local professional development seminars; and one woman reported that she received no training.

In terms of their domestic demographics, diversity was expressed and/or observed as related to their sexual orientation, partnering, and motherhood. Fourteen women were partnered with eleven of these women describing themselves specifically as married. About one-quarter of the women were in same-sex relationships. Seven women reported that their partners were employed in academia either as faculty or administrators. Eleven women had children, ranging in ages from 8 to 22 years at the time of their interviews.

Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect her anonymity in the presentation of findings that follows. Additionally, participants are not described in a manner that includes specific personal, geographic or institutional characteristics. The information shared cannot be linked to anyone in particular. See Table 1 below for a breakdown of the Relevant Demographic Characteristics for each administrator.

The themes—normative career path, gendered issues, necessary sacrifices, job security, and supports and training—emerged in response to the three aforementioned research questions as significant to women's progress in the academy. The themes can be categorized as personal, interpersonal, and organizational. They are described generally and specifically with supporting evidence below.

Overall the results of this study underscored important facets of administrative life, career trajectories for success, and best actions for facing present and future leadership challenges. While women often described unplanned entries into administration followed by struggles to overcome self-doubt, competing demands, and institutional issues, they also told stories of strength, determination and perseverance.

Table 1

Relevant Demographic Characteristics

Name	Primary Position	Approx. Years in Admin	Discipline Area	Family	Professional Administrative Preparation
Lily	President	20	Arts	PWC	Harvard & HERS
Amelia	President	22	STEM	P	ACE
Grace	Provost	14	Business	PWC	ACE
Rose	Provost	28	STEM	PWC	ACE new provost & Harvard
Zoe	Provost	12	Arts	PWC	Harvard
Emma	Provost	8	STEM	PWC	ACE
Isabella	Associate Provost	9	Arts	P	Local
Sophia	Associate Provost	20	Arts	PWC	Local
Olivia	Associate Provost	9	Health	PWC	HERS
Mia	Dean	17	STEM	N	HERS
Emily	Dean	6	Arts	P	HERS
Madelyn	Dean	19	Arts	P	Harvard
Chloe	Dean	4	Arts	PWC	ACE
Avery	Dean	22	Arts	PWC	Local
Ella	Dean	15	Arts	C	None
Ava	Associate Dean	3	Health	PWC	Harvard

(For Family: PWC=Partnered with children; P=Partnered only; C=Children only; N=Neither/single & childless)

Specifically, in response to the first question (What enables women leaders to triumph over barriers and challenges to find success?), participants discussed the importance of being fully promoted and having supportive relationships to overcoming obstacles that were associated with gender bias, rigid schedules, and workload. Comments originating from question two (What factors supported their development toward their administrative positions?), provided evidence that it takes a village at home and at work to support women’s development in higher education. While credit was given to amazing partners at home and support staff at work as critical to their success, women also emphasized the importance of flexibility, training, and mentors. The third question (What best practices exist for effective workplace offerings and leadership development initiatives to support women’s advancement?), reinforced the need to change women’s attitudes towards the college presidency as a viable and attainable position. It is important that there are opportunities for them to learn more about this professional path. Faculty

need to better understand what chair, dean, provost and presidency roles involve. Effective workplace practices to support women’s advancement in the academy should incorporate opportunities for women that showcase the relative advantage and compatibility, as well as the complexity of these roles, while allowing women time to observe and practice alongside other administrators. Each of the five themes are presented in detail below.

Normative Career Path

Participants emphasized the value of being fully promoted to professor before entering long-term administrative roles. Most noted that they knew it would be very difficult to become fully promoted after becoming an administrator, mostly because there would not be adequate time to focus on their research and writing. Others emphasized the need to experience the promotion process to enhance their ability to prepare evaluations and better understand faculty roles.

Most women transitioned through each of the sequential administrative roles—chair, dean, provost, and president—or they were on track with a plan to progress in this order. They all described to a similar ideology premised on a ‘normative career path’ that is considered critical in developing a trajectory towards the presidency (Woollen, 2016). A few women noted that they believed it was essential to stay the course and spend time in each position in order to learn the ropes. A couple of women followed slightly different paths as department/university committee chairs, directors, and then deans. However, each woman interviewed was successful in that she had upwardly climbed her career ladder.

Universities like the straight ladder approach, according to a provost who skipped one rung along her path. She explained that it helps to develop a strong foundation in understanding budgets, revenue streams, promotion and tenure processes, and charring committees. Administrators expressed great value of competence in these areas. “I wouldn’t recommend anyone jumping levels no matter how good they are. There is something about developing the skills, the communication, and the approaches that one learns as they go up through that hierarchy,” stated Provost Isabella. Sophia noted that these experiences taught her about budgets, revenue streams, promotion and tenure process.

In terms of crossing the great divide, Emily explained that she always wanted to be an administrator, while all of the other administrators described the opportunity as either something that “opened up,” resulted from “being at the right place at the right time,” or something they “initially said no to.” However, no woman reported regretting her career move. In terms of presidential aspirations, most women felt similarly uninspired to occupy that position. Even the two presidents interviewed had different perspectives and experiences. Lily felt it was a natural career progression, and she shared, “You reach a point when you realize you are ready to inhabit that next level.” However,

Amelia's transition was much like her first introduction to administration. She said,

If you asked me two years ago, I would have said that I could not imagine a scenario in which I would be a college president...I can't say that my steps were toward this as an end. It was definitely not a goal of mine until it happened.

Among the remaining administrators, the sentiment was that presidency would not fit with their lifestyles, family, and/or ideals. The presidency was viewed as being all consuming and rooted in politics and fundraising. Possibly it was the combination of women's perceptions and the reality of the position that did not fit their career expectations. Madelyn, a dean with 19 years of administrative experience said, "I have no desire to become a president. When you are a president, you don't have a life. I value my life too much."

Necessary Sacrifices

Regardless of the level of administrator interviewed, there were important challenges encountered that hindered their progress. Some challenges were related to the shift in responsibilities and schedule resulting in work-life imbalance, while others had to do with gender, age, personality and relationships.

Moving from the fairly flexible schedule of teaching, office hours and meetings to a rigid, planned schedule was noted as requiring a considerable adjustment period. Much of the adjustment came from a lack of control over their schedules. Women reported meetings and events occurring from early in the morning to late in the evening that other people added to their calendars. It took time to learn the ebb and flow of the administrative calendar, like when there were busier times during the year. Commencement was cited as an overscheduled season thanks to multiple student convocations, award ceremonies, and faculty recognition activities all occurring around the same time. Mia said, "Some weeks I'm out every night. If it's an important component, you have to put up with it."

Most women understood and accepted the all-consuming and pervasive nature of their administrative roles. In response, Isabella, a new provost replied:

Your role really does change and the culture and the work environment are different...I think it's really important that we set our own boundaries. We aren't necessarily going to change the job pressures and challenges and expectations. Although we can manage some of that, part of the work is accepting that.

It is common for academic leaders to cite conflicting responsibilities of family and work (Selzer et al., 2017) and women generally are willing to share their struggles to find balance. The women in this study were no different. From associate dean to president, no administrator claimed to have achieved a work-life balance. Amelia described the roles she occupied as very demanding, pervasive, and never ending. However, women appeared to be satisfied with their administrative choices. A provost, Olivia, confessed:

It took me a while to get used to the schedule. I am not going to lie about it. I am a writer and a scholar. It was tough to pull me away from that, but then I fell in love with administration because of the leadership and the vision.

Some administrators discussed their work-life imbalance as it specifically related to motherhood. They shared feelings of guilt associated with being absent from family activities and missing opportunities for work. They described periods when they needed to craft a web of family-related support services and enhance their reliance on their partners to meet their work goals. They also noted that motherhood led to delays in their professional advancement and adjustments to their expectations for success.

The concerning question is whether or not the costs were worth the benefit. While administrative schedules are less flexible than most faculty schedules, the tradeoff usually was more money. While women said it was worth it, considering the expressed impact they described their roles as having on their lives, it is not certain whether or not they received a fair return on their investment. The women interviewed reported important time missed with family, increased stress and time pressures, infertility, and declining health among the costs. Emily, a dean whose training was in health shared, "I'm exhausted. I don't exercise. I've gained 35-40 lbs. The hours are tough. It's hard to turn it off. I have to be present which takes away my time for me and family." Ava, an associate dean, similarly disclosed, "The biggest sacrifice is exercise. The work is really hard. Just the work load. The first couple of years I felt like I worked in an emergency room—constantly managing crises—student crises and faculty crises." The implications related to their competing demands may result in irreversible health and other issues.

While mothers did their best to be present for their children's activities, they described sacrifices and missed events. Those with older children and/or young adults repeatedly noted that they would not have become administrators while their children were small. Those who had small children during their administrative tenures reported spending small fortunes on after-school drivers and childcare. Avery, a dean noted that her family hired a driver to help alleviate the stress when talking about the demands associated with the extracurricular activities of three children close in age and the impossibility of getting them to and from activities on time while both parents were working full-time, demanding hours.

Sophia, a vice-provost addressed the pervasive nature of her role and the inability to unplug on weekends and vacations because no one else could cover her responsibilities. She said, "I am the provost when the provost is gone, but no one is the vice provost when the vice provost is away." She credited her amazing support staff to her ability to keep her head above water. A provost and a president both shared their philosophy: "you can do everything just not all at once." Provost Zoe added, "I have done it on the backs of both my research and the rest of my life." Consistently, these women expressed their continuous struggles

to maintain rigorous research and writing agendas throughout their administrative careers.

Gendered Issues

There were some stereotypical gender challenges faced by the administrators in this study that were fueled by gender bias. This appears to interfere with how women see themselves and possibly how others see them, too (Ely et al., 2011). Some women recalled instances when they perceived that they were not listened to or taken seriously based upon their gender. It was shared that it left them questioning their effectiveness as leaders. For many, administration was described as male-dominated, a culture to which both genders subscribe. Traditional leadership development programs are designed either to get women to subscribe to male-oriented approach or help women to fix what is wrong with them (Ely et al., 2011). As a result, women find themselves on an endless treadmill. This translated in this study to women expressing feelings that they have to work harder than their male counterparts to prove themselves.

Gender bias was underscored when women discussed their internal struggles. They described their lack of confidence, self-efficacy, in the face of struggles, especially when competing against male colleagues for resources. "I have to wonder am I 'good enough?' Being young and a woman there is a perception that I am being held to a higher standard. It's exhausting having to prove myself," shared Emily who was 46 at the time of her interview. She said she felt that this was a double standard for women compared to men.

Three women simultaneously occupied two administrative positions at the time of this study. One woman held two interim dean positions, another woman was a chair and an associate dean, and the third woman was a dean and an associate provost. While there is no research specifically addressing the perils of holding two full-time, demanding administrative roles at the same time, it seems futile and unfair to the women confronted with this reality. The pressures dual-position careers impose upon women may lead to burnout, unsatisfactory performance evaluations, and their decision to lean out of future opportunities (Ward & Eddy, 2013). Dual-position careers likely originated from gendered ideals that support women's participation in service, mentoring and caregiving (Flaherty, 2018; Mirsa et al., 2012). Research shows that women identify and are viewed as helpers, which may lead to them being asked and their acceptance of two positions when institutions are in need (Mirsa et al., 2012). Women in this study described the exhaustion their increasing demands fueled, how their fear of failure caused them to work longer hours, and their perception that they were the only ones able to step forward when asked.

Additionally, they recalled feeling sensitive toward words used to describe administrative prowess. They acknowledged witnessing other women who were evaluated on gender, and they shared comments that their colleagues made: "It's her personality;" "She was very ego-conscious;" and "She really couldn't cut it."

Job Security

While about half of the women served one university across their careers, the other half of the women climbed their administrative career ladders by moving from university to university. The latter found themselves in at-will appointments without the protection of tenure, a safety net allowing them to return to their faculty role if their administrative positions were terminated. There were drawbacks noted to being in both situations. If women remained loyal to one university, they reported always feeling like the faculty member in the room to other administrators. They also worried about one day having to return to their faculty role, and the perception of failure that may accompany it.

Grace, a provost, described the awkwardness she found while occupying an interim position to which she also applied as a national search ensued. She knew that she had no other role aside from faculty to return to, and she did not want to teach again, recognizing how her field had changed since she last taught. She also worried about the changing relationships with colleagues and having to earn their respect again in a new role. Grace had spent her entire career at the same institution, and she felt very fortunate and relieved when she found out she was selected to be the permanent provost.

Women who changed universities feared being out of a job at the whim of a new president and being back on the job market. While Rose, a provost, was grateful to have been provided with a faculty position until she found a new job at another institution, she felt deflated having been removed without notice when a new president was hired. While this is the nature of these positions in many institutions, efforts to mitigate the impact on these professional roles may mitigate the feelings of rejection described by some of the women interviewed.

Unique stories describing similar obstacles that stood in the way of becoming and sustaining leadership roles were told by each woman interviewed. Perseverance and determination were obvious characteristics these women leveraged to triumph over personal, interpersonal, and organizational barriers while overcoming new position challenges, loneliness from changing relationships at work, recognizing areas for development, and renegotiating their work-life roles.

Identity is tied to sense of purpose, especially for women whose leadership approach is aligned with consensus building, fostering relationships, and authenticity (Ely et al., 2011; Selzer et al., 2017). Mentors, sponsors, and informal networks, can help to script a new leadership identity for women.

Support and Training

Many women underscored the value of great mentors in helping them advance in their administrative roles. While several women noted that there were not good women role models, especially among those in STEM disciplines, there was preference shown for and the benefit of mentors expressed regardless of gender. Mentors were credited with advising,

coaching, and identifying their leadership potential, as well as making important introductions and collaborating with them on research. A few women recognized their sponsors who, as they described, promoted their movement into leadership roles. Their sponsors mostly were influential men in their institutions.

While informal networks are important, they can be unreliable as the women in this study realized. One of the most predicted, but challenging occurrences shared was the changing relationships women encountered. A few women shared that their transitions from faculty to administration were collegial. Mia, a veteran dean said, "I had been a faculty member for 17 years prior to becoming dean, so they didn't see me as selling out, but rather as a good liaison." The majority of women, however, described their transition, consistent with the literature, as going to the dark side. They shared their experiences being treated differently by even their closest academic friends/colleagues. Another dean, Emily said, "I was warned. I thought 'I'm the same person,' but it's true. There really is this 'us' and 'them' thing." Lily, a president said, "they did this 'us versus them' routine. It was like I had a Scarlet A as an administrator."

As surprised as many women were by the unexpected and unpleasant changes in some of their relationships in their informal networks, they were overwhelmed by the support they found among their partners and new allies—their staff. Twenty-five percent of the women interviewed originated from STEM disciplines, so it was not uncommon to hear tales of demanding large grant-funded research projects and labs that required significant time onsite. A few of these women also told stories of returning to work as faculty within days of birthing their babies in order to maintain their studies. Women credited their partners, especially those who adjusted their careers in some way to support their advancement. A few partners switched positions and schedules to provide more childcare, while others were willing to give up tenure and start over in new states with new jobs.

A team approach was taken to raising families and maintaining fulfilling partnerships when women became administrators. While the team-parenting approach was hailed, it also was described as precarious. Advance planning, willing partners, a support system, and flexibility were keys to their success and their sacrifices were evident. Provost Zoe felt torn between being present at work and at home, which was evident when she spoke about her teenage daughter. She shared:

Balancing schedules and responsibilities with my husband and knowing when I can make the compromise I need to make with my kids...My daughter is in grade 11 and she is at the point where I don't know when she is going to talk to me but I want to be there when she chooses her incredibly ill-timed moment.

The majority of the women interviewed did not enter into administration until their children were either in high school or college. They expressed that it would not have been fair to their families to engage in this role while their children were younger and needed them more.

A few administrators credited their "amazing staff" as instrumental to their success. In some instances, they credited their staff for being their cheerleaders, encouraging them when the going got tough. At other times, they described their staff as their protectors, who guarded their schedules and them from too many meetings or convinced them to take more time for themselves and their families. No matter what it was, it made a difference in the day-to-day function for these administrators, and they were thankful. The heartfelt way they described this support demonstrated its significance to their development.

In addition to partners, staff, and mentors, support from their institutions and supervisors was valued as an ingredient of their success. Each of administrative position held prepared these 16 women in intangible ways. Some reported increased confidence while others focused on new knowledge of how her university worked and its culture. Chloe, an administrator nearing 60 years of age at the time of her interview shared:

Now the only obstacle is my age. I am a dean, a low-level administrator, with big ideas. I feel like I can have a national impact. I've organized all of these regional consortiums. I like to accomplish things, but I feel as though I have a limited number of years left to be able to accomplish stuff.

While time spent in their positions was invaluable to shaping the careers of these women, investing in training and professional development opportunities for all levels of administration appeared to make a difference. While some leadership training was afforded to the majority of the women interviewed, it wasn't uniform and it usually was at their request. Additionally, some women had to first overcome a few hurdles, such as seeking approval from several levels, waiting—sometimes for years—until funding was secured, and attending a less than optimal training to get to the training they felt they needed. Women also suggested that they had to be creative in negotiating the funding for their training by knowing who to ask, where the money was and how the university could cover their leaves of absence.

Four administrators (Provost Emma, Dean Chloe, President Amelia, and Provost Grace) were ACE Fellows, but this came at a cost beyond the financial expense that their institution experienced. They made a point of noting that it wasn't easy on their families. For a few women, it was a challenge to arrange for their partners to accompany them when the host institution was farther from home. In order to make this work, partners negotiated leaves or they made the farther-than-they-liked commute on weekends. A few other administrators noted that they wanted to be an ACE Fellow, but it was impossible given the increased pressures on their families and/or their institutions. Dean Avery said:

I wish I was able to take advantage of the ACE Fellow program. I met a lot of people who really thought that was critical, but the kind of family life that I had didn't afford me to be gone for a year.

Even among some administrators who were ACE Fellows, the challenges were voiced strongly. Emma, who before becoming a

provost was able to commute to her fellowship university, described the commute as a “huge time sink,” before adding, “I think it’s the best program, but I think it’s the hardest one, if you are trying to balance or to have a life and a fellowship at the same time.”

Eight administrators participated in a formal training such as HERS or the Harvard Management Development Program. While these programs also required travel, they weren’t as far from their homes or they didn’t have to be gone for as long, making them doable. Almost every woman reported that she attended at least one administrative training (e.g., chair training, dean training or a new provost seminar) held on their campus. It was clear that regardless of the program, women reported selecting the option that was the most valuable, convenient, accessible, and affordable.

Recommendations

Administrators generously shared their experiences and knowledge of effective workplace practices and leadership development initiatives to enhance interest, participation and retention in administrative roles while supporting women’s advancement in the academy. They addressed their efforts to provide opportunities for women at all levels of administration on their campuses. This will enhance retention and succession planning, saving valuable financial resources and time. Provisions with work-life considerations and supports are likely to have the greatest return on investment but need to be thoughtfully constructed. Developing qualified faculty with aspirations to become future administrators makes good business sense when recruitment and retention efforts are demanding and budgets are constrained.

While institutions stand to benefit from what women will gain through formal training and development offered by organizations like ACE, Harvard, and HERS, these opportunities will continue to be out of financial reach for many institutions and women with leadership potential and aspirations. Where resources are limited, alternate creative solutions should be developed on campuses, within systems, and in partnership with local leadership development programs.

The literature suggests faculty see academic leadership as presenting an unwelcomed challenge to their work-life balance, scholarship, and relationships (Selzer et al., 2017). In response to this divergence of incongruities, there are quality, affordable opportunities that can enhance recruitment and retention of academic leaders. A new approach to leadership development that addresses the needs of women today is warranted. Since traditional approaches to leadership are structured around a male-focused work ideology that is an all-consuming commitment to one’s career, it is not surprising that the qualities of leaders include: competitiveness, authority, assertiveness, self-promoting, and risk-taking (Parker et al., 2018; Selzer et al., 2017). Further, women’s leadership development initiatives attempt to strengthen these qualities in women, forcing them out

of their comfort zone without a safety net, while oftentimes ignoring the development women need and desire.

Women in contrast to men more often lead by building relationships, inspiring followers, and adopting a leadership identity that is tied to a sense of purpose (Ely et al., 2011). As such, effective women’s leadership development requires a culture that supports their exploration in the role, provides opportunities for authentic and candid conversations, concentrates on realizing their purpose, and allows them to consider gender issues while developing their leadership identities (Elly et al., 2011; Parker et al., 2018; Selzer et al., 2017).

The women interviewed shared the following recommendations based upon programs they were a part of or knew of from their colleagues: Establish a future leaders program; offer system-wide leadership trainings; provide regular opportunities for women administrators to gather, communicate and release stress; create tools to communicate work-life supports (e.g., childcare, adult care, dual career), and develop options for job shadowing to establish transparency of the demands and expectations. The administrators interviewed also emphasized the importance of following special considerations when developing leadership development training initiatives for women. Initiatives should consider transparency and focused preparation that enables women to overcome the barriers to assume positions, like the presidency. Several administrators noted that campus/system-wide initiatives need to provide safe spaces free from direct supervisors that engage women from different disciplines and areas. Opportunities that engage women from different institutions, even women from outside of academia, can provide a safe environment for training. They cautioned that events not be convened between women and their direct reports. Other administrators recommended that opportunities include a combination of informal and formal opportunities to accommodate various levels of interest and commitment among diverse groups of women. There is a need to abandon outdated notions and inaccurate gendered stereotypes about what it means to be an administrator (Dunn et al, 2014). Authentic conversations may have an altering effect on women’s professional development in this area. Finally, a recurrent piece of advice was to make sure leadership development initiatives address women’s work-family responsibilities by offering support on campus and in the community.

Conclusions

The results of this research are meaningful to the advancement of women in academia and aim to enhance the literature. They provide evidence to support immediate practical applications and to reshape the imminent career development of faculty and administrators. The findings portray the specific experiences of 16 women leaders and underscore work and family factors that enabled them to break through the academic glass ceiling. They also identify effective workplace practices in higher education, and support solutions to shape future recruitment, retention and advancement of women in administrative positions.

The continuing challenge for institutions of higher education is identifying talented faculty along with quality and effective initiatives for their development into academic leaders. It is not likely that a surplus of qualified faculty suddenly will enter higher education with the desired interest and requisite skills to assume administrative roles. This is why the future of higher education depends upon concrete strategies designed to cultivate interest in administrative positions, while demonstrating a commitment to diversity in hiring, mentoring, and promoting faculty (Reid, 2012).

Professionals should not have to choose between being an effective leader and being a happy, healthy person. Policies in higher education traditionally have focused on faculty, staff, and students, while the unique needs of administrators have gone unnoticed. One of the popular reasons why women said they were not interested in assuming administrative roles had to do with their assumptions about the all-consuming, pervasive and unbalanced demands that would be imposed upon their lives. Even though most women expressed that their expectations in this regard were realized to some extent, all agreed that there may be a better way to meet the requirements of their positions. While work-life balance may pose a challenge for women who want to work their way up the academic ladder, workplace supports are a solution to helping these women achieve success.

Transparency in job expectations, setting limits and seeking balance across roles and responsibilities are the keys to effective succession through the ranks. Research shows that work-life supports pay off, exceeding the obvious benefits. Employees are more committed to their employers when work-life supports are offered, even if they cannot take advantage of them at the time, and the payoff far exceeds productivity and job satisfaction. They include enhanced recruitment, higher retention rates, lower health insurance costs, decreased absenteeism, and improved focus. The literature and promising practices underscore the increasing relevance of childcare, lactation support and adult care to meet the needs of faculty and administrators in academia across their lives (Mooney, 2013). Innovative supports are gaining popularity and improving caregivers' experiences. Following the lead of professional associations like the College and University Work-Life-Family Association, promising practices can be shared and the results can be realized.

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