

Universities Australia Executive Women & L.H. Martin Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Management

Mentoring Program for Senior Women¹

1. Background

In 2007 Universities Australia Executive Women (then the AVCC Senior Women's Colloquium) was granted a WPP grant for the project **The Second AVCC Action Plan for Women Employed in Australian Universities 2006-2010**. One component of this grant was:

Developing leadership skills in female university staff, particularly at senior levels.

Scott et al (2008) have recently documented the importance of leaders having access to a diverse range of learning opportunities appropriate to their roles. This long recognised need (that mirrors what we know about good university teaching) together with the readiness of a group of senior colleagues who have significant leadership experience at the highest levels to share their knowledge and experience² lead the UAEW Executive to agree in February 2007 to progress a mentoring programme for senior women that would draw on the expertise of recently retired (male and female) Vice-Chancellors who remain active participants in the sector.

At the 12 November 2007 UAEW meeting members provided valuable input to the development of the Executive Women's Mentoring Program including proposals for emphasis on:

- The need to complement rather than replace programs within universities and university groupings (such as the ATN)
- Clarification of career goals, opportunities and sector drivers
- Negotiation of contracts (principles and experience)
- Networking strategies
- Development of political competency
- Negotiating the public role/public persona (especially in regional communities)
- Understanding the nuances of governance and due diligence
- Mentor and mentee training.

On the basis of member feedback it was also decided to include recently retired DVCs and Registrars in the program and also develop a shadowing component with current VCs/DVCs and Registrars.

The following year, in the implementation phase, UAEW recognized the synergies that exist with the proposed program and the mandate of the newly established

¹ Whilst we have drawn on a number of sources UAEW wish to make special reference to the work of Anita Devos, who challenged our thinking and extended the program design challenge.

² A sample of potential mentors were contacted to gauge interest and their universal in principle agreement to participate provided a strong foundation for development of the project.

L.H. Martin Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Management, especially given the Institute's role in developing and delivering the leadership programs previously conducted by the AVCC/UA.

For UAEW it was highly desirable to have the proposed program co-ordinated through the institutional 'home' of L.H. Martin. For L.H. Martin this represents an opportunity to develop complementary programs for the sector, as well as the opportunity to conduct evaluation and research around the program. An agreement, initially for the 3 year period 2008-2010, was signed to this effect in November 2008 and the first expressions of interest from potential mentees were sought early in 2009.

2. Mentoring and its importance in Higher Education

Higher Education in Australia is undergoing substantial change. The Higher Education sector is subject to the global imperatives of addressing environmental and social sustainability, responding to the global financial crisis, adjusting to the influence of the new world players of India and China, the creation of the European Higher Education Area through the Bologna Process, and the continuing accelerated development of communication and information technologies. In addition there are those forces that are specific to our sector: the opening up of access to higher education both domestically and internationally; pressures on funding, coupled with the student as 'consumer'; the growth of the higher education 'export market'; differences in generational aspirations and expectations of students and staff; and the concomitant demands to maintain quality and standards. (Fullan & Scott, 2009)

In Australia over the coming years we will also see a refashioning of our system with the implementation of recommendations of the Bradley and Cutler Reviews (2008) which will impact on organisational structures as well as cultures of learning and teaching and research...and leadership. Importantly the Bradley (2008) Review has a strong focus on equity and social inclusion and proposes participation targets that will demand realignment of strategic priorities for individual institutions and the sector.

In this demanding environment the need for capable, professional leaders who have the capacity to 'chart uncertainty' (Watson, 2003) echoes the demands voiced a decade ago (Coaldrake and Stedman 1998). In a pragmatic sense there is also the more recently recognised need for us to expand our rapidly diminishing pool of potential leaders, as we prepare for the imminent retirement of a significant proportion of academic staff members (Hugo, 2005).

Ideally, in this program our response to these changes will be firmly directed towards future needs whilst drawing on the wealth of experience of the past. This future orientation generates one of the most significant challenges for a mentoring program: **the capacity to draw on past experience whilst simultaneously transforming that experience into leadership responses appropriate to current and future contexts.** It is our intention that both mentors and mentees will (following Pfeffer & Sutton 2006) *use their knowledge and share their experience whilst doubting what they know*. This is in some ways reflective of the

'post-heroic' leadership model that has been so clearly articulated in the Women in Leadership Program at the University of Western Australia (de Vries, 2005). There is however a challenging difference. Whilst recognising the importance of distributed leadership within universities, and peer to peer mentoring for women, this program focuses on women in senior roles on the premise that leadership at the highest institutional levels does make a difference (Bell, S. & Cameron, H. 2004) and that women should have equal access to such roles and be supported to succeed in them in ways that recognise their unique contribution as women leaders.

3. The importance of mentoring senior women leaders

The continuing imperative to maximise the participation and success of women in senior university management and leadership roles is clearly articulated in the **Second AVCC Action Plan For Women Employed in Australian Universities – 2006-2010:**

'...universities must draw more upon under-represented groups, particularly their women staff. They must attract, appoint and retain more women in professional and management positions. They must improve the participation, success, and leadership of women in research in order "to capitalise on the intellectual capital and potential of significant numbers of successful female undergraduates, honours students and research higher degree students".³ They must develop their staff to take on leadership positions which involve management of significant financial and human resources and working in a competitive entrepreneurial and political environment.'

(AVCC, April 2006)

The latest data on the Second Action Plan for Women (prepared by Julie Jackson for Universities Australia, November 2008) suggests that progress in the sector over the past five years (2003-2007) at senior levels is slow, role and portfolio specific, and fragile in the categories where the representative numbers are small. Women account for only 23% of Vice Chancellors (compared to a high of 30% in 2004), 22% of DVCs/PVCs⁴ (virtually unchanged from 21% in 2003) and a similar unchanging 38% of senior executive administrators (HEW 10 and above). The inertia at the DVC/PVC levels is of particular concern as it is from this pool that institutional leaders are increasingly drawn (O'Meara and Petzall 2009).

There is also a growing evidence base that despite the existence of a robust legislative and monitoring environment that was well established by the 1980s, gender inequities persist in the academy. Recent research suggests that (generally unintentional) gender bias in universities operates below levels of consciousness generating 'micro-inequities' that generate significant cumulative disadvantage (Valian, 1998; MIT, 1999; Morley, 1999). These 'micro-inequities' in tandem with outmoded institutional structures hinder the advancement of women. (NAP, 2006, Wylie et al 2007)

³ Bell & Bentley, Women In Research, 2005, 25.

⁴ This data should be read cautiously as there may be anomalies in terms of whether institutions have reported DVCs and PVCs or just DVCs.

It is in this context that resistance to women's leadership also persists and presents particular challenges for women:

'Study after study has affirmed that people associate women and men with different traits and link men with more of the traits that connote leadership... Mentoring is one of the primary means available to individual women to traverse the 'labyrinth of leadership' in a context where "the lessening of activism on behalf of all women puts pressure on each woman to find her own way.' (Eagly and Carli, 2007, 67)

4. The UAEW/L.H. Martin Approach

At L.H.Martin we endeavour to ensure that rigorous scholarship informs program design and content. In the field of mentoring the evidence base is neither conclusive nor uncontested. This is especially so in relation to mentoring programs in the academy. Nonetheless mentoring has been a component of many Australian universities' women's leadership programs since the 1990s and there continues to be strong demand for mentoring programs, and belief in their transformative power.

Surveys of Australian universities show that close to half have mentoring programs for women and that groups such as ATN-WEXDEV and its constituent universities have been leaders in this field in Australia (Chesterman, 2003). Yet there is also evidence that women may not always be well placed to develop relationships with influential mentors (Deane et al, 1996; Quinlan 1999; NAP,2006)

Mentoring has received increasing attention over the past decade and there is a substantial body of literature that describes programs, approaches and dynamics of mentoring (Ragins & Kram, 2007; Chesterman 2003). There is also a body of work that focuses on evaluation of mentoring programs, but much of this is case specific and not necessarily generalisable. There is a much smaller body of critical literature which focuses on the socio-political context of mentoring and the power relations of the mentoring relationship. There is also little that focuses on the experience of mentors (Devos, 2005).

Devos (2005) argues that the growth of mentoring of women in Australian universities may be seen as linked to the development of the enterprise university (Marginson and Considine, 2000) in which individualism and competitiveness are increasingly valued. If this is the case **one important objective of the program will be to provide women with the strategies to negotiate this competitive environment whilst remaining simultaneously collaborative** (Brooks and Mackinnon 2001).

Rather than simply reinforcing the established approaches to women's leadership development of the past, the UAEW/L.H.Martin Mentoring Program aims to implement an evidence based approach to implement positive and effective change through strategic targeting of specific obstacles in the 'career labyrinth' of senior university women; and to therefore advance the cause of their professional development. It aims to recognise, as Devos (2005) suggests, the positive

'politicising potential' of such schemes rather than reinforcing stereotypical leadership norms.

The mentoring framework is designed to allow the mentees to identify the major challenges that they expect to face as leaders. It is hoped this will lead to, following Louise Zachary (2000), 'a process-oriented relationship involving knowledge acquisition, application and critical reflection.'

Indeed, studies of mentoring schemes in universities both in Australia and overseas strongly suggest that mentoring is most effective when it is focused on particular issues. This is in part due to the fact that the discovery of one complete mentor- with the time to fulfil all required functions- is inevitably rare.

As William Silen, Harvard Medical School, suggests:

'How often can one find a single individual who is able to serve as an advisor/guide, developer of talent/coach, opener of doors/advocate, role model, interpreter of organizational or professional rules, protector, rule setter/boss-and carry on all of these functions on a long term basis?...More likely, the mentee will have to find multiple persons, each of whom can serve one or two of the many different functions of the complete one.' (Silen,1998)

Accordingly, the LH Martin/UAEW mentoring scheme will be structured on the basis of matching mentors' experience and potential to address specific challenges identified by mentees. It will have three components:

- a. The mentoring relationship with a recently retired VC/DVC
- b. A shadowing component with a current VC/DVC/Registrar
- c. Peer networks facilitated through shared experience and workshops.

4.1 Program assumptions

There are a number of assumptions that underpin the objectives and design of this program. In particular it is assumed that:

- women experience universities differently to their male colleagues and that, as a minority in most institutions, women as leaders face particular challenges
- the program, operating outside the institutional context, is designed to complement other supportive relationships and institutional programs and following Kram (1988), it is one component of a range of support and learning opportunities
- a mentoring relationship is thus neither exclusive nor necessarily enduring, it is time and need specific
- a mentor in this context is a wise and trusted counsellor and confidant
- the relationship between the mentor and the mentee is premised on mutual trust and respect
- whilst each party brings to the relationship different levels of experience, knowledge and status this should not result in an inherent imbalance of power or a hierarchical relationship
- women leaders do not have particular deficits that have to be addressed (Devos, 2005), it is their identified challenges that are the focus of the relationship

- mentoring does not necessarily involve identifying with a mentor (Devos 2005), thus a mentor is not necessarily a 'role model'. (This is important especially in terms of 4.3 in Responsibilities of Mentors)
- mentoring offers an opportunity to learn through association, insight and reflection
- whilst the program is focussed on identified challenges it is not intended to be narrowly instrumentalist in terms of career progression. Our intent is to assist mentees to look through new windows rather than expecting mentors to open doors
- Mentors and mentees will be given the opportunity to share their experiences through annual workshops, which will in turn inform the design of the program.
- Evaluation will be an integral component of the program.

4.2 The Benefits of Mentoring⁵

From the literature it is proposed that the following benefits may be expected from the program:

For the mentee

1. Improved leadership strategies and problem solving skills
2. Extended networks
3. Increased and nuanced knowledge of the sector.
4. Enhanced self-knowledge, confidence and professional identity
5. Understanding of ethical leadership and decision-making
6. Improved understanding of the importance of the leadership role, and the capacity to contribute to the sector, leading to greater career satisfaction
7. Clearer identification of areas for professional growth
8. Enhanced competence and wisdom to negotiate institutional and sectoral politics
9. Greater understanding of senior appointment processes and how to negotiate these
10. Greater understanding of the mentoring process and therefore improved capacity to mentor.

For the mentor

1. The opportunity to extend contribution to the sector through a new initiative
2. The satisfaction of sharing knowledge and experience
3. The opportunity to have a formal role in developing the next generation of female leaders in Higher Education
4. A context for productive reflection on their own leadership and enduring contribution
5. A learning opportunity through relationships with mentees whose experience may be very different to their own
6. Increased knowledge of change in the sector, particularly of the impact on institutions of the new policy environment

⁵ This section of the framework has been constructed with reference to the excellent mentoring frameworks developed by Columbia, Harvard Medical School, Murdoch University and the University of South Australia.

7. The opportunity to see a familiar world through a different lens
8. Greater understanding of the mentoring process and therefore improved capacity to mentor
9. Enhanced self-esteem through recognition of continuing professional contribution.
10. Recognition through the LH Martin Associates Program.

For the sector

1. A new avenue for formal support and development of women leaders
2. Great awareness and visibility of senior women in the sector
3. Enhanced contribution and broadened links with past leaders
4. Evaluation and research that will lead to stronger conceptualisation of the mentoring process and improvements in program design.

4.3 Negotiating a Successful Mentoring Relationship

Zachary (2000) identifies four key stages of the mentoring relationship:

- a. preparation of the mentor, preparation of the relationship
- b. negotiation of the relationship- a conversation to reach mutual understanding which becomes the “road map” for the relationship
- c. the enabling phase
- d. coming to closure – continuation of the process until goals are achieved and a decision is made to end or renegotiate the relationship.

Responsibilities of the mentee

1. Develop a framework for working together: identify challenges; be clear about needs and expectations and communicate these to the mentor; negotiate a meeting schedule, format and boundaries of availability and respect these.
2. Generate a simple statement of agreement on the basis of the above.
3. Communicate any planned absences/variations in schedule in advance if possible.
4. Respect difference and remain open to learn from experience.
5. Prepare to be challenged.
6. Seek feedback and respond respectfully.
7. Embrace opportunities.
8. Continue to learn about effective mentoring to maximise the benefits and improve capacity as mentors.
9. Communicate clearly and honestly and respect confidentiality.
10. Communicate your involvement in the program to your university as a way of encouraging other senior women to participate in the program.

Responsibilities of the mentor

1. Model good leadership in the relationship consistent with the Program
2. Be available within negotiated parameters (minimally once per month for a 12 month period) and renegotiate as necessary.
3. Communicate any planned absences/variations in schedule in advance if possible.
4. Use the skills of active and empathetic listening that your leadership roles have demanded.

5. Provide constructive feedback.
6. Allow for difference and recognise differing learning styles.
7. Prepare to be challenged.
8. Share experience generously.
9. Continue to learn about effective mentoring to maximise the benefits and improve capacity as mentors.
10. Communicate clearly and honestly and respect confidentiality.

4.4 Dealing with problems in the mentor/mentee relationship

1. Communicate difficulties directly and in a timely fashion – mismatches do occur in mentoring programs generally and it is possible they will do so in this Program..
2. The length of the mentoring relationship should be confirmed at the first meeting and there should be no expectation that it will continue longer than this time. However, this does not preclude a longer relationship if both parties agree.
3. Revisit expectations regularly in an open and frank manner. Ensure they are shared and remain realistic.
4. Agree on a 'no blame exit strategy' that is premised on maintaining respect, dignity and confidentiality.

5. Monitoring and Quality

Development of the program will be overseen by a National Steering Group and the mentor database will be maintained by L.H.Martin. L.H.Martin will also facilitate workshops, maintain an online resource site for mentors and mentees and provide an information contact point, currently through Professor Bell s.bell@unimelb.edu.au

Conclusions

Whilst there are many questions that might be raised re the efficacy of mentoring programs the available evidence, plus the sheer longevity of many programs, suggests that developments will be in the sphere of 'how?' rather than 'why?'. The partnership of UAEW and L.H, Martin presents an opportunity not just to have a positive impact on leadership quality and gender profiles in the sector, but also to advance our knowledge of how such programs might be designed to ensure the most positive results for the mentee, the mentor, and the sector. The program will also enable L.H.Martin to extend mentoring programs to other cohorts as expertise is developed and processes are refined.

SB: 14.4.09

Works Cited

Bell, S. and Bentley, R. 2005 *Women in Research* , Report prepared for the AVCC
Available at:

www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/documents/policies_programs/women/Bell-BentleyAVCC.05.pdf

Bell, S. and Cameron, H. 2004 *Equality and Diversity, National Comparative Study: Australia*, PriceWaterhouseCoopers: UK.

Bradley, D. et al 2008 *The Review of Higher Education Report*, Canberra

Available at:

www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Review/Pages/ReviewofAustralianHigherEducationReport.aspx

Brooks, A and Mackinnon, A (eds) 2001 *Gender and the Restructured University: Changing Management and Culture in Higher Education*, Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press: Buckingham

Chesterman, C. 2003 'Advancing Mentoring through a Network for Women in Higher Education across Continents and Contexts'

Available at: http://www.atn.edu.au/wexdev/local/docs/advancing_mentoring.pdf

Coaldrake, P & Stedman, L. 1998, *On the Brink: Australia's Universities Confronting Their Future*, QUP: St Lucia

Cutler, T. et al 2008 *Review of the National Innovation System*

Available at:

www.innovation.gov.au/innovationreview/Pages/home.aspx

Deane, E., Johnson, L., Jones, G. and Lengkeek, N. 1996 *Women, Research and Research productivity in the Post-1987 Universities: Opportunities and Constraints*, DETYA: Canberra

Devos, A. 2005 *Mentoring, women and the construction of academic identities*, PhD Thesis, University of Technology: Sydney

Available at: <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/dspace/handle/2100/273>

Eagly, A. & Carli, L. 2007 'Women and the Labyrinth of Leadership', *Harvard Business Review*, September pp63-69

Fullan, M & Scott, G. 2009 *Turnaround Leadership for Higher Education*, Jossey-Bass: San Francisco

Hugo, G. 2005 'Academia's own demographic time-bomb', *Australian Universities Review*, 48, pp16-23

Kram, K. 1988 *Mentoring at Work: Developmental Relationships in Organisational Life*, University Press of America: Lanham & London

Marginson, S. and Considine, M. 2000 *The Enterprise University: power, governance and reinvention in Australia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Morley, L. 1999 *Organising Feminisms: the Micropolitics of the Academy*, Macmillan: Hampshire

National Academies 2006 *Beyond bias and Barriers: Fulfilling the Potential of Women in Science and Engineering*

Available at: www.nap.edu

O'Meara, B. and Petzall, S. 2009 'Selection criteria, skill sets and competencies: What is their role in the appointment of vice-chancellors in Australian universities?' *International Journal of Educational Management*, Vol. 23 No. 3, pp. 252-265

Pfeffer, J & Sutton, R 2006 *Hard facts, dangerous half truths and total nonsense*, Harvard Business School Press: Boston.

Quinlan, K.M. 1999 'Enhancing Mentoring and Networking of Junior Academic Women: what, why and how?' *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, vol 21, no.1 pp31-42

Ragins, B.R. and Kram, K. E. eds. 2007 *The handbook of mentoring at work : theory, research, and practice*, Sage Publications: Los Angeles

School of Science, MIT, 1999 *A study in the Status of women Faculty in Science at MIT Massachusetts*

Available at:

<http://web.mit.edu/faculty/reports/sos.html>

Scott, G. et al 2008 *Learning Leaders in Times of Change: Academic Leadership Capabilities for Australian Higher Education*, ALTC: Sydney

Silen, W. 1998 'In Search of the Complete Mentor', *Mentations*, Vol 5, Fall 1998

Available at: http://www.hms.harvard.edu/dcp/mentations/fall_98/searchofmentor.html

Valian, V. 1999 *Why So Slow? The Advancement of Women*, MIT: Cambridge MA

Vasgird, D. & Hyman-Borwne, E. *Mentoring: Responsible Conduct of Research e-course*, Columbia Center for New Media Teaching & Learning (CCNMTL) in collaboration with the Columbia University Center for Bioethics and the Columbia University Office for Responsible Conduct of Research.

http://www.columbia.edu/ccnmtl/projects/rcr/rcr_mentoring/introduction/index.html

de Vries J. (ed) 2005 *More than the sum of its parts*, Organisational and Staff Development Services, UWA

Watson, D. 2003 *Universities and civic engagement: a critique and a prospectus*. Key-note address for the 2nd biennial 'Inside-out' conference on the civic role of universities – 'Charting Uncertainty: capital, community and citizenship.' Ipswich, July 2003.

Wylie, A. et al 2007 'Women, Work and the Academy: Strategies for Responding to 'Post-Civil Rights Era' Gender Discrimination', *New Feminist Solutions*
Available at: [www.barnard.edu/bcrw/newfeministsolutions/reports/NFS2-Women Work and the Academy.pdf](http://www.barnard.edu/bcrw/newfeministsolutions/reports/NFS2-Women_Work_and_the_Academy.pdf)

Zachary, L.J. 2000, *The Mentor's Guide: Facilitating Effective Learning Relationships*
Jossey-Bass Publishers: San Francisco CA.