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Fall October 27, 2011

Leading Large-Scale Social Change: Women and Higher Education in Utah

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SESSION PROPOSAL:
INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE
2011

**LEADING LARGE-SCALE SOCIAL CHANGE: WOMEN AND
HIGHER EDUCATION IN UTAH**

Panelists

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Susan R. Madsen is an associate professor of management in the Woodbury School of Business and the Orin R. Woodbury Professor of Leadership and Ethics at Utah Valley University. She has published two scholarly books on the development of women leaders and has authored/co-authored over 50 peer-reviewed articles primarily in the areas of leadership, ethics, individual change, work-life issues, and strategic faculty development. Susan is currently continuing her research on the lifetime development of women leaders in the United Arab Emirates, China, and the U.S. She is also an independent leadership and change consultant.

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Cheryl Hanewicz is an assistant professor in the Technology Management department at Utah Valley University. She has also served as an Assistant Dean in the College of Technology and Computing as well as Senior Director of Student Success and Retention. Previously, she taught technology-related courses at Eastern Michigan University. Cheryl has over 20 years of computer and managerial experience in both the business and academic environments. In addition to teaching, she has published technology-related books and articles, participated in national conferences, and consulted with Macmillan Computer Publishing USA and Prentice Hall as a technical editor.

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Doug Gardner, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor of College Success studies at Utah Valley University. He completed his Ph.D. in Educational Organization and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His research includes higher education institutions and college students. Specifically he is interested in issues regarding access to and success in higher education. Recently he has focused on access to higher education for women in the state of Utah and first-generation college students. Dr. Gardner teaches first-year experience courses and career exploration courses helping students to adjust to the demands of college and to identify major and career goals.

Short Description (up to 50 words)

One of the most challenging types of leadership today involves influencing societies toward social change. The purpose of this session is to present the details of one complex, large-scale project created to lead efforts within Utah to understand and then motivate more young women to attend and graduate from college.

Abstract (500-1000 words)

One of the most challenging types of leadership today involves influencing societies toward social change. Often social change involves a wide variety of stakeholders (e.g., government leaders, legislators, higher and public educational system employees, religious leaders and members, business owners and employees, families and private citizens). Creating social change is often a daunting and difficult task, but doing so successfully provides an intriguing case from which others can study and learn. One such leadership case is the Utah Women and Education Project (UWEP). Within the state of Utah the number of women who enter higher education institutions and who complete higher education degrees is outpaced by men (Madsen, Hanewicz, & Thackeray, 2010). While the rest of the United States is seeking for ways to increase the number of men accessing and succeeding in higher education, the state of Utah is concerned with helping women successfully make the transition from high school to college and to complete educational goals (Utah Foundation, 2009). With support from the Utah System of Higher Education, the Utah State Office of Education, Utah public colleges and universities, and others, the UWEP was created to carry out research to help the state understand 1) why a lower number of young women are going to college initially after high school and 2) why Utah has a higher number of women who start college but do not complete their degrees. Many leaders and citizens within the state have expressed concern that Utah is below the national average when it comes to women enrolling and completing postsecondary degrees. This is a cause for concern for many reasons. Clearly, individuals, families, communities, states/regions, and countries benefit in a wide range of ways from a more educated citizenry. Although many speculate regarding the

causes and challenges at the heart of this broader phenomenon, Utah stakeholders have been unclear when it comes to the deeper complexities of this issue in the lives of young female Utahans. The purpose of this session is to share details about the UWEP (elements, change process, and strategies) which can serve as an effective case study related to leading a complex, dynamic, large scale, and statewide (U.S.) social change effort.

The focus of the two-year UWEP was to lead efforts within Utah to understand and then motivate more young women to enter college and obtain their degrees. According to Sax (2008), there has been minimal research on how college affects women, and most of what we do know has come from aggregate studies. Prominent educational researchers, such as Astin (1985), Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), Seidman (2004-2005), and Tinto (1993), believe that precollege characteristics, including family influences, friends, and educational accomplishments and experiences are important contributors to educational choices. A scholarly model, primarily based upon Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of reasoned action, was created to study background characteristics, including beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behavior. Although research was at the core of the UWEP social change effort, other project elements were foundational to this type of change. The critical components of the UWEP social change effort have included the following:

1. *Briefs, Reports, and Research Snapshots:* The UWEP team released a series of innovative *Research and Policy Briefs* and statistical reports in spring 2010 to update all Utahans of existing and new research regarding women in education. These reports are assisting educators and administrators in understanding the Utah phenomenon in more depth. Press releases were distributed widely and strong media coverage followed.
2. *Utah Women and Education Resource Database:* The UWEP engaged over 25 interns and volunteers from around the state to develop and release an extensive database of resources that can enable girls and women of all ages to obtain assistance with their educational needs, goals, and challenges. A partnership was forged with prominent United Way entities in Utah which lead to connections with the Utah Food Bank. This database was released on October 4, 2010 through the Utah state 2-1-1 directory at the Utah Food Bank.
3. *Primary Research:* The core purpose of the project was to collect extensive qualitative and quantitative data from young women throughout Utah who had never attended college, had dropped out, or had successfully completed college degrees. Data were collected at sites throughout Utah as well as online. The studies focused on understanding the perceptions of young women toward education and the surrounding influences on their college decisions. Results from this primary research were shared widely in Utah through a series of "Research Snapshots" released in spring 2011. Scholarly articles will follow.
4. *Utah Women and Education Summit, Presentations, and Materials:* On November 12, 2010 UWEP hosted a statewide conference to disseminate our research findings and facilitate "research-to-action" dialogue. People from higher education, K-12, religious, government, nonprofit, business, and the community attended. Presentations continue to be offered around the state. Twelve Research Snapshots were written and released to the public, and three 5-7 minute videos regarding the results were produced for wide use throughout the state.

The belief guiding the UWEP is that formal postsecondary education is a critical foundation for girls and women of all ages to fully develop themselves toward reaching their inherent potential. This interactive panel session will provide attendees with details of how one project has started the process of large-scale social change within Utah. It also serves as an example for leadership scholars and practitioners of how scholarly research can be a core component of leading change. Organizational and social change at the state level is a difficult undertaking. It ultimately takes a comprehensive action plan that includes stakeholders at all levels (e.g., governor, educational leaders, teachers, counselors, parents) to be effective. UWEP researchers' have taken critical steps to create such a change strategy that can be a model for other organizations or states. Leadership lessons learned from guiding this major social change effort will be shared and discussed.