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Learning to Lead: The College Experiences of Women University Presidents

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MOSAIC
meaning ▪ opportunity ▪ students ▪ activism ▪ integrity ▪ connections

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Program Submission

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Program Title:

> Learning to Lead: The College Experiences of Women University President and Governors

Target Audience:
- Senior student affairs officer
- Graduate students
- Faculty members
- Administrators in Graduate and Professional Student Services
- Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Knowledge Community
- New Professionals and Graduate Students
- Small Colleges and Universities
- Student Affairs working in AA
- Women in Student Affairs
- New/entry-level professionals
- Midlevel manager
- Community & 2-year colleges
- Fraternity & Sorority Affairs
- Parent and Family Relations

- Student Leadership Programs

Program Abstract: (80 words)

Although developing leadership is an important topic in the higher education today, the percentage of women found in high leadership positions remains quite low. In fact, little has been published about how high-level women leaders actually developed. This workshop will present the results of two qualitative research studies exploring how 10 women university presidents and 10 women governors became effective leaders, with a particular focus on influential events, individuals, activities, and opportunities during their undergraduate and graduate educational experiences.

Presenter Background Information

Dr. Susan R. Madsen is an associate professor of management at Utah Valley State College. She has recently interviewed 10 women university presidents and 10 women governors for two qualitative research studies on the leadership development of high level women leaders. She was awarded one of the 2006 NASPA Region V/WISA research grants to support this work. Susan presents locally, nationally, and internationally on her work in this area. Her past research is widely published in scholarly journals, and she is currently writing books on the results of her leadership development research. For the past 15 years she has also been an independent management consultant focusing on leadership, change, training, wellness, work-life, and performance improvement.

Program Description/Summary

Susan was awarded one of the WISA/NASPA Region V research grants and was encouraged by the WISA president to present my research in a workshop format at this conference.

Developing leadership is a topic of interest to individuals throughout all types of organizations including educational institutions, government agencies, and corporations. However, the percentage of women found in high leadership positions is quite low. Many women are interested in leadership, but opportunities for in-depth development are rare. In fact, little has been published about how high-level women leaders actually developed. I have been conducting two qualitative research studies to explore how women in specific positions learned to become effective leaders. The information gathered from this research project will be indispensable as future leadership development activities and initiatives for women in all types of organizations are designed and implemented.

For each study, I (Susan) conducted two to three-hour interviews with ten women leaders. Each was audio taped for transcription. The interviews are generally structured, with follow-up questions as topics and issues arose so that I could collect detailed answers and rich descriptions. The questions focused on all life stages (including childhood and youth) and include topics such as the following: educational, mentoring,

and coaching history; involvement in politics, sports, and school leadership during childhood, youth, and adulthood; sibling and family details; positions throughout careers (including volunteer); formal career plans; coping with pressures; struggles, challenges, and solutions; work-family issues and career breaks; spouse, peer, and leader support; emotional issues; and other development opportunities and experiences. I also asked participants for recommendations to women aspiring to become leaders. Each interview was (and some are still being) transcribed and is being analyzed through thematic generation and coding. This type of research is termed "phenomenology" and is used to find themes and commonalities from in-depth explorations of relatively new research areas.

It is expected that this study will help individual young women as they create their own self-directed developmental plans and/or experiences. It will also be foundational for those organizing and planning leadership development opportunities. Finding the similarities between these influential women is important for all business and societal organizations. Importantly however, is that it can be used to create developmental opportunities for young women (specifically in junior high, high school, and college), and it will provide information that will be helpful in increasing their self-esteem and self-efficacy. I am already discovering the types of developmental activities that work in helping women learn to become effective leaders. As counselors, advisors, and faculty are aware of important developmental strategies that can result in higher levels of leadership preparation, more opportunities can be designed and provided for young women in junior high, high school, and college. Young women interested in leadership can use information from this study to guide their personal development goals and objectives as well. This data is also important (for similar reasons) for women of all ages. Many women want to learn and develop. They yearn to make a difference and lead efforts leading to positive change. The findings of this study are helpful for individual women as well as those who design and implement leadership training and development interventions for women in K-12, college, and workplaces (government, educational institutions, and business).

The previous paragraphs have described my full research projects. It seemed important that reviewers understand the depth and breadth of the project to be able to visualize my proposed workshop. As you can imagine, I have collected large amounts of data from this research study. For this workshop, I propose that I present the results of the research related specifically to the women's college (undergraduate and graduate) experiences. This would include meaningful and influential activities, events, individuals, and opportunities. What were the things that helped them develop the leadership skills and abilities to become the leaders they have become? As staff, faculty, and leaders in higher education, we search for the types of activities and experiences that make a positive impact on the students who attend our institutions. This workshop will address those issues framed around the interviews of these women.

How does this proposed workshop relate to the conference theme? I had to smile as I reviewed the MOSAIC theme because this program addresses (in some way) all of the thematic areas. I have already analyzed many of the results and will present information

that touches in all areas.

The proposed program format will include a workshop that will include an interactive format. I will present information with PowerPoint slides related to one area and then will ask questions and open each segment for discussion and comments from the participants. The participants will enjoy hearing stories and experiences that I will share from the presidents but will want to discuss how they can use the results in their institutions and positions. I have not attended this conference before so I don't know the size of audience that may be attending. If it is larger I may divide discussion segments into small groups. I have already described the research study in detail. This provides the framework for the conceptual and theoretical foundation for this program. I have already addressed some of the expected learning outcomes for participants in the previous paragraphs. I will add, however, that those who attend will love this workshop. I have presented pieces of this research in many formats thus far and it is very interesting and engaging information. Participants can immediately see how it is applicable to their situations. The bottom line is that the workshop will discussion the various types of things that "made the difference" in the development of high level women leaders.

Program session outline (I'll assume it is 1.5 hours but it can be shortened or lengthened). It is important to note that at this point I have not analyzed all of the data. Things may emerge that may influence the final workshop outline. I have taught courses, workshops, and seminars professionally for years and know how to design an engaging session. These are my initial ideas:

1. Importance/significance of leadership for young women today (4 minutes)
2. Overview of workshop session (2 minutes)
3. Overview of research studies (5 minutes)
4. Backgrounds of 10 presidents/10 governors (4 minutes)
5. College majors and interests (5 minutes)
6. Influential activities (e.g., service, leadership, jobs, research projects, sororities, clubs, sports) (10 minutes)
7. Discussion with participants #1 (10 minutes)
8. Influential individuals (e.g., parents, faculty members, employers, deans/leaders, church leaders, advisors, counselors) (10 minutes)
9. Discussion with participants #2 (10 minutes)
10. Influential events (e.g., awards, trips, conferences, protests, criticism, successes/failures, learning moments, illness, family issues) (10 minutes)
11. Discussion with participants #3 (10 minutes)
12. Influential opportunities (5 minutes)
13. Discussion with participants #4 (5 minutes)
14. Conclusion and summary (10 minutes)

Thank you for your consideration.