**Panel #1: Developing Leadership Skills**

“Cultivating Women as Academic Leaders—Claiming the Role with Intention”

White Paper prepared for APSA Short Course on “Gendering Political Science: Strategizing New Directions for Advancing Women in Political Science.” August 28, 2013, Chicago, IL.

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***Introduction***

After four decades of efforts to fully involve women in the academic workforce, only 42 percent of all full-time faculty members are women (Curtis, 2011). Women make up just 34 percent of the tenure-track academic workforce and represent 28 percent of full professors. Women in higher education earn roughly 80 percent of what men earn. Not all full-time positions are tenure-track; women hold 44 percent of the non-tenure track, full-time positions (compared to 33% for men). More than half of the academic workforce today is employed part-time; here again women are overrepresented (55% to 45%) relative to men. Within political science, women make up less than one-quarter of faculty in the discipline (APSA, 2004). Thus the ranks of women prepared in the traditional ways to assume executive leadership roles in higher education are rather thin. Yet the American Council of Education report *On the Pathway to the Presidency* found that in 2007 women were 38 percent of all chief academic officers, 50 percent of “central senior academic affairs officers” (e.g., associate provost or dean of graduate studies), and 36 percent of academic deans. Seventy-four percent of college and university presidents are men; 87 percent of those are white and a majority is over the age of 61 (Lederman, *Inside Higher Education*, 2012).

The premise of this short course is that enhanced leadership skills will advance women to positions of influence in departments and universities; once there, skilled female leaders supported by facilitating organizations, allies, and resources, will bring about institutional change. This paper is tasked with exploring the question of how to cultivate leadership skills among women in academe. More broadly the charge is to draw from the gender politics research literature in examining women’s prospects in the discipline and in academe more broadly.

***Context: The Gendered Nature of the Academy and of Academic Work***

The traditional path to academic leadership is through the professoriate. Success as an assistant professor leads to tenure and promotion to associate professor. Continued success leads ultimately to full professor. Once tenured, faculty either choose to continue with a career oriented around teaching and research or pursue an administrative leadership path. The internal path to a presidency generally includes time as a department chair, an academic deanship, and experience as a provost and executive vice president for academic affairs. Increasingly today institutions select presidents from outside the academy with backgrounds in business or politics. The linear and somewhat singular nature of the internal path to academic leadership requires an individual to demonstrate effective leadership in each of the varied roles, even though very little of what is required to achieve success as a faculty member translates to effective preparation for broader institutional leadership. Women and minorities, relatively new to the academy itself, face additional challenges at each stage. Women have to continue to fill the pipeline at every stage but as the statistics above demonstrate, the attrition rates for women from assistant to full professor foreshadow their low numbers in institutional leadership roles.

Similar to the political realm, academia is a highly masculinized work environment situated squarely in the public domain: “Founded by men for men, the academic world propagates career architectures and rewards behaviors that are masculine in nature and origin, suited to the men who once exclusively pursued them” (Dean, Bracken, and Allen, 2009, p. 240). Gender inequities in the modern workplace are rooted in the historic separation of spheres: the masculine sphere of paid work and the feminine sphere of domestic life. The empirical reality of large numbers of women in the workforce has done little to force the integration of public and private spheres. Evidence of the gap is most visible in the pernicious images of what constitutes a good worker and academia is not immune. As Joan Williams notes, the “ideal worker” is someone whose commitment to work (time) is unlimited, who can move at will (or seek outside offers for salary reasons), and needs no time off for childbearing or child-rearing (Williams, 2003). These gendered expectations exclude most women from equal opportunities to succeed. Policies enabling women (and men) to stop the tenure clock or to allow part-time tenure tracks are intended to rectify this inequity but they do nothing to radically change the discriminatory assumptions of academic work. Additionally, there is evidence of backlash against faculty who take advantage of the policies (Faculty and Families Project, 2001).

The 2004 APSA “Report on the Advancement of Women in Academic Political Science in the United States” identified four reasons that women remain under-represented among the academic ranks of political scientists: a “leaky pipeline” of prospective political scientists; the dual-burden created by the simultaneous demands of achieving tenure and family responsibilities; hostile institutional climate; and a “one size fits all” culture of research that rewards single-authorship or co-authorship with immediate colleagues. Strategies for addressing these negative forces are limited to acknowledging the problem, encouraging departments and institutions to reconcile job and family demands, encouraging a collaborative culture of research, and encourage research on the status of women in the profession. It might be worth reviewing the current status of these recommendations in light of the goals of this short course. As Jill Tarule, et.al., note that when professional education organizations devote some attention to issues of gender—establishing a committee, hosting a workshop or special event for women, or publishing books or articles on gender issues—these efforts are created as an addition to and in the margins of the dominant work and practices of the organizations and, thus, have little influence within or upon the organization itself in any way” (2009, p. 46). What does this suggest for the work of collaborators in this short-course? What will be the ultimate outcome of this work?

Women who survive until tenure despite the challenges face new hurdles as associate professors. A 2006 report of the Modern Language Association’s Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession, “Standing Still: The Associate Professor Survey,” showed that women associate professors in the association were less likely to be promoted than their male counterparts, and it took women from one to three and a half years longer than men to advance to full professorships, with women at doctoral universities lagging farthest behind. Joya Misra and her colleagues (2011) found that disproportionate time spent in teaching and service was a significant obstacle for women associate professors to attaining full professor rank. Their survey at one Research University found dramatic differences among associate professors. Although associate professors of both sexes worked similar amounts of time overall—about sixty-four hours a week—the distribution of work time varied considerably. Men spent seven and a half hours more a week on their research than did women; women associate professors taught an hour more each week than men, mentored an additional two hours a week, and spent nearly five hours more a week on service (Misra, 2011, p. 24).

National data across all disciplines confirm these findings. University of Pennsylvania education researcher Laura Perna’s analysis of National Study of Postsecondary Faculty data reveals that, nationwide, women at four-year colleges and universities are 10 percent less likely than men to attain promotion to full professor, even after controlling for productivity (career-refereed publications), educational background, institution type, race, ethnicity, and nationality (2001). Perna’s findings suggest that gender differences cannot simply be attributed to men being more productive researchers or having more experience than women. Instead, they point to entrenched institutional practices that may disadvantage women. The underlying problem is that of “the gendered organization, whereby work policies, interpersonal networks, and embedded attitudes have evolved from the life experiences of the traditional male bread-winner, creating an unequal playing field favoring the advancement of men” (Bilen-Green, Froelich, and Jacobson, 2008, p. 2). Women must work harder to be visible in gendered organizations. When interpersonal networks are closed, visible leadership roles as committee chair, project lead, or regular participant in campus-wide events can raise a woman’s profile.

***Developing Women as Academic Leaders***

What is the most effective way to develop women as academic leaders given the considerable constraints? Several themes worth discussing emerge from the literature on leadership in higher education and nearly all of them focus attention at the individual rather than institutional level.

First, scholars identify **self-efficacy as a “viable on-ramp” for women** as they aspire to academic leadership positions (Ely and Meyerson, 2000; Sloma-Williams, McDade, Richman, and Morahan, 2009). Research linking self-efficacy to career development is most often grounded in Bandura’s (1997) theoretical framework. Self-efficacy is the belief in one’s own capabilities to organize and execute the sources of action required to manage prospective situations. “Underlying many of the behaviors helpful for leadership positions, it functions as a major predictor of goal-setting behavior, the degree of effort devoted to a specific task, and actual task performance” (Sloma-Williams, 2009, p. 52). Singer (1991) found that the higher a woman’s self-efficacy, the more likely she was to aspire to a leadership position. Self-efficacy differs from self-confidence in important ways. Self-efficacy refers to believing in one’s sense of agency—believing that one’s ability can produce specific and desired results—while confidence functions as a more generalized appreciation of one’s own abilities. Dean, Bracken and Allen (2009) champion the **power of personal agency** as: “individuals accepting the responsibility and claiming the authority to be the means through which they accomplish their desired goals. Personal agency involves the individual capacity to act independently and make free choices and the responsibility to do so. This necessitates ability, intentionality, authority, and accountability.”

Self-efficacy can be cultivated through “**mastery experiences**” and “social modeling” (as well as social persuasion, according to Bandura). Within the realm of academic leadership, opportunities for mastery experiences may come most directly through faculty roles in service to the institution or to the profession. This presents women with a dilemma of sorts; a large service commitment has been found to delay promotion and limit time for research. Yet, campus-based service offers women the opportunity to lead effectively outside the constraints of a limiting department culture and to attract the attention of leaders in the administration. This means women must exercise care in selecting leadership opportunities that align with their existing skill-set enough so that they can be successful, but offer the chance to test the boundaries of their capacity so that they can learn.

Social modeling can occur through **mentoring** and/or the presence of **role models**. A 2008 study based on 221 doctoral-granting institutions in the United States tested the proposition that women in senior academic leadership positions can facilitate institutional change and improve recruitment, retention, and advancement of women within the professorial ranks (Bilen-Green, Froelich, and Jacobson, 2008). The results are encouraging, but not definitive. Descriptively, they confirmed that the proportion of women in the top administrative ranks is comparable to the percentage of women in the professorial ranks but they are not able to sort precursors from results—do more women administrators lead to more tenured women or vice versa. Yet “having more women in formal leadership positions actually models the desired culture change in a conspicuous and powerful way, while opening valuable networking opportunities for both women and men to experience a new outlook” (p. 4). They argue that rather than adding more women at the front end and encouraging them through the career maze, more significant progress in advancing women can be made by adopting a proactive approach that places senior women in academic leadership positions will speed the progress of women as full participants at all levels of the university.

In the absence of visible female role models on campus, “**constructed environments**” may play an important role. There are several institutes and professional development opportunities targeted at enhancing leadership skills for women in higher education at the chair’s level and above (e.g. HERS, ACE Inclusive Excellence National Women’s Leadership Forum, Spellman College Women of Color Leadership Conference). The efficacy of these training programs designed to cultivate women leaders in higher education has not been documented, although anecdotally they are widely viewed as successful.

Mentoring occupies a prominent place in the literature and in the recommendations of the 2004 APSA Advancing Women Report. Mentoring is one of a cluster of professional assets that have been found to accelerate promotion with both professional and psychosocial benefits accruing to the mentee. Mentoring implies an active relationship in which the mentor makes a personal investment in the success of the mentee. Mentors professionally socialize mentees in the norms and customs of the organization, share wisdom and lessons of experience, provide encouragement and critical feedback, and often facilitate the mentee’s career by providing appropriate opportunities to take on leadership roles or encourage career progression in other ways. Mentors introduce mentees to influential networks of information providers and opportunity-makers and teach mentees how to identify appropriate professional networks for themselves in the future. Kanter (1977) argued that women require mentoring more so than men in order to overcome the inequities and unequal opportunities within gendered organizations. When organizational structures are not equally permeable for everyone, people and networks become critical conduits for career progression. However, researchers have noted the difficulties professional women face in forming mentoring relationships (Dean, 2009). Since many mentoring relationships begin when the prospective mentor identifies with his or her mentee, it is particularly problematic that mentors often overlook “those who are unlike themselves” (Hall and Sandler, 1983) intentionally or unintentionally perpetuating the “old boys network.” Whether because of a small number of available senior women or because of limited access to networks where mentors can be found, women must work harder to initiate the mentoring relationship.

A study of 657 women Chief Academic Officers (CAOs) at U.S. colleges and universities confirms the positive role of mentors (Dean, 2009). A majority of women CAOs had a mentor at some point in their career (82%) and many were still being actively mentored (47%). Women perceived their mentors as incredible professional assets, as resources, as guides, and as role models who supported and facilitated their professional development and advancement opportunities. The relationships exhibited caring, loyalty, and constant encouragement—a powerful combination for women. Yet, the research also demonstrated that these powerful relationships are most likely to develop within institutions that create mentoring cultures through support, resources, and positive rewards. Further, mentoring drops off as women age and advance to higher positions within the institution. If the ultimate goal is to promote more women to presidencies, consistent mentoring along the career ladder is critical. Although fewer than half of higher education institutions in the U.S. have leadership development programs for women and people of color, opportunities exist elsewhere through national professional development programs. All of the accumulated evidence suggests that mentoring works—for those at the beginning of their careers (Blau, Currie, Croson, and Ginther, 2010) and those at the senior level of academic leadership (Bornstein, 2009).

The benefits to mentoring extend **to developing early career expectations** and exercising “intentionality” in constructing a career path. In a study of community college presidents, Eddy (2009) found that all of the men but none of the women intentionally planned to ascend to a presidency. As one woman in the study noted, “It wasn’t something that I felt strongly about. I mean, I was considering it and I guess I kept thinking what harm would it to do apply for this position here and what harm would it do to pursue the next step. It was kind of like, well, I’d take one step and see if that felt okay and then take the next step” (Eddy, 2009, p.20). Men, on the other hand, actively sought their presidencies through encouragement of mentors, through a series of promotions over time, and with an intentionality that was lacking in the female participants. “Men operated with an assumed right to the position and an unquestioned link between their gender and the position” (p. 21). Sheryl Sandberg’s admonition, “Don’t leave before you leave” has relevance here. It may be that as a woman learns more about the various leadership roles within the institution, some will be of more interest than others; but women with skill and talent should always work and plan as if one day they will lead the institution.

Curtailed career expectations are not limited to the United States. Nicola Dandridge, chief executive of Universities UK, says “I’m struck by how many women academics want to stay as academics and not move into management and administration, referring to the ghastly hours that being a vice chancellor requires and decide that that is not for them.” Statistically women are more likely than men to succeed in applications for senior leadership positions in the UK, but women do not apply in the same numbers as men (Anyangwe, 2011). At an earlier stage in the academic career, one of the main risks predicting women’s exit from higher education prior to achieving tenure is a lack of well-developed career expectations. For women to advance to positions of academic leadership there must be more intentionality in constructing a viable path within the organization, acknowledging and overcoming the obstacles presented by gender.

***Conclusion***

Leadership is a socially constructed role (Dean, Bracken, and Allen, 2009). Women have the skills, aptitude and disposition to be highly effective and transformational leaders; the type of leader required to effect change in institutional policies and practices. However, numbers matter. Attaining a critical mass of women in the leadership structure is especially important in preparing an institution for change. “The observation that ‘few women want to go to places where few women are’ describes a self-reinforcing cycle requiring bold organizational action to interrupt” (Bilen-Green, Canan, Karen A. Froelich, and Sarah W. Jacobson, 2008, p.4). Individual women must also take direct action to interrupt the self-reinforcing negative cycle by developing and exercising personal agency. Role models, mentoring relationships, and effective networks accelerate professional advancement, but self-efficacy (agency) is required to actively seek and exploit the daily opportunities to demonstrate leadership potential and an essential element in intentionally planning for a career as a leader in higher education. Doing so requires successfully navigating and surviving the gauntlet of academic careers lived out in highly gendered organizations.

After reading this literature and producing the paper, I believe I could have been (and should continue to be) more strategic in constructing my own path. We can’t ignore the barriers gendered institutions present, but we can decide to set them aside in favor of exercising more personal agency and taking more professional risks. Women are well suited to be academic leaders and administrators because, in general, women excel at multi-tasking, quick decision-making, inclusive agenda-setting, communication, mediating conflict, project management, and in creating a shared vision and getting buy-in from colleagues.

For those familiar with the research literature on candidate emergence and progressive political ambition, the parallels with achieving success as academic leaders is striking. The pipeline is important, but not the sole explanation for women’s underrepresentation. Attributing low numbers to women’s lack of ambition is only legitimate when the structural, cultural, psychological context for developing and exhibiting ambition is taken into account. Success is still more attractive in men than in women—ambition even more so. Political role models have proven important for attracting the attention of young women, but less so as a motivating force for women to declare themselves a candidate. Similarly in academe, women at the highest levels can mentor and serve as role models for those that will follow but it is less clear that they are a catalyst for women undertaking direct leadership roles themselves. Perhaps we should approach the pursuit of leadership roles more like political campaigns; candidates don’t win an office by waging a stealth campaign. Cultivating women as leaders requires us to be better campaigners and call the essential institutional work we do leadership.

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