

# Opportunities for Women's Leadership and Promotion at Western Washington University

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for

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Commission on Gender*

## **Introduction**

Western Washington University, like many higher education institutions, strives to foster and maintain a diverse group of faculty and staff in order to better serve students and the residents of Washington State. Evidence suggests a diverse workforce also contributes to job satisfaction and greater retention. Diversity among the workforce does not simply mean the presence of people from a variety of identity groups, but, also, their representation across types of occupations. Ideally, women, people of color, LGBTQ individuals, people with disabilities, and employees from other underrepresented groups should have equitable representation in positions that have decision-making power.

While diversity initiatives often focus on increasing the representation of people of color, this project addresses the representation of women in leadership. Western has had mixed success in recruiting and retaining women to a variety of leadership positions. The lack of equitable representation of women in leadership at Western is likely due to a variety of institutional, socio-cultural and individual factors and this project was developed to better understand what might contribute to the issue. Western's Commission on Gender Equity decided to speak directly with women employees at Western about their experiences in leadership and/or their aspirations and barriers to entering leadership positions. This report summarizes those interviews by looking for patterns and unique insights that lend themselves to recommendations for the university. For the purposes of this project, leadership includes senior administration, positions such as deans, associate deans, and chairs, directors of divisions and institutes, and other comparable positions.

## **The Study**

For the project, 4 members of the committee interviewed 18 people (17 women, 1 trans\*<sup>1</sup> individual) in a variety of positions. Commission members recommended potential participants and the interviewers developed a list of individuals they believed might have particular insight. For example, employees and former employees in leadership positions, women in male-dominated disciplines or offices/divisions, and women with children. Interviewees included people interested or serving in (or who served in) both faculty and professional staff leadership positions. The great majority of interviewees are over 40 years old, 4 of 18 are racial/ethnic minorities, and 1 is trans\*-identified. For the most part, I am unable to specifically talk about the influence of race/ethnicity and gender identities in order to protect their privacy.

Interviews were held in a variety of settings including the office of the interviewer, the office of the interviewee, and public spaces like coffee shops; the interviewee specified the meeting place. The interviews were typically between 45 minutes and one hour. Participants were assured of confidentiality and viewed a draft of the report before its public release to assure an acceptable level of confidentiality. A project like this can be challenging because often employees are easily identified; I have done my best to obscure identities and gain permission from participants to use their words. Also, I don't specify participant characteristics such as age, position, race/ethnicity, in an attempt to guard participants' privacy. Typically in this type of study, I emphasize direct quotes rather than my own interpretation because participants' comments are insightful and facilitate our understanding of the topic. I have worked to organize responses into themes and, at the end, make recommendations based on these findings. As a final note, I have edited some quotes to eliminate superfluous words such as "like" and "you know" or tense issues; if an edit is more substantial, I indicate it with an ellipse.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans\* is an umbrella term describing transgender, nonbinary, and other gender nonconforming identities.

## **Summary of Interviews**

In this report, I cover a variety of topics that can influence both women's work experiences at Western and their interest in moving into leadership positions. Some factors directly affect women's work in leadership while others, like campus climate, indirectly influence women's interest in leadership positions. While this report focuses on some of the challenges to gender equity at Western, it is important to note that almost all participants had largely positive experiences as employees of Western Washington University:

In terms of access to resources and support and training, I've not felt like I've had limitations to that. Most everybody's been accessible to me if I wanted to have a conversation. I've received a lot of support at all levels.

I have felt very fortunate and humbled that I've been encouraged and supported.... I haven't experienced any of the negative experiences others have had....

## **Campus Climate: Experiences of Bias and Discrimination**

Participants reported a variety of incidents of gender bias and while most of these experiences do not rise to the legal definition of discrimination, they influence the climate for women. Some of these incidents were experienced by women in leadership positions, others were experienced by women faculty and staff, more generally. As leaders, participants believe their visibility makes them more vulnerable to criticism and scrutiny, a situation that made a few women reluctant to put themselves in the limelight. One participant explained, "I've already experienced...being condemned for decisions I've made. I don't necessarily want to keep putting myself out there for another public beating."

Many women reported common, minor transgressions such as meetings dominated by men resulting in unequal participation and/or having their ideas attributed to men in meetings. One participant believed that when leadership disproportionately approves of men's opinions in these settings, it impacts the confidence of fledgling women leaders.

A few participants reported more serious concerns such as being consistently asked to complete work outside of (and below) their current position description or being demeaned in the workplace. Some reported experiences related to social perceptions of gender such as an emphasis on their role as mothers or gendered interactions that are inappropriate to the workplace.

There was one male leader in the office, and he continually and affectionately addressed me as sweetheart. And I tried to brush it off, and I thought maybe it was just a slip and that's how he chats to females in his life. But I noticed it was constantly directed to me, and so I had to assertively tell him and remind him, I prefer to go by [name]. And it kind of stopped him in his tracks. And somehow with that exchange he felt offended rather than me, even though I would never call him sweetheart.

I feel guilty if I'm late to the office or take a long lunch break. I just don't see that same standard applied across the board.... Is it because I'm female or is it because of my choice to pursue parenthood? That's often commented on and questioned rather publicly. Would a guy be asked "How old are you? Are you and your partner going to have kids soon? What's that look like?" It just doesn't seem appropriate to ask anyone and I don't see that question being posed to men around the office.

Other participants described navigating their leadership positions within the context of being a woman, experiencing differential gender expectations related to work, and having their gender made salient during interactions with men employees.

Being a woman infiltrates my daily operations. It's often left to me to just take care of...things that would be seen as... administrative assistant in nature, even though I'm a director.... I don't feel like it would be handed off if it was a male in my same position.... In some of the meetings, I'm one of the minorities as a woman, so there's not many other players to hand it off to... After I'm asked, I often [wonder], "Would you have asked me to do the exact thing had I been a man sitting here across the table from you?"

I had to have a meeting with the chair and two union reps... and literally in that meeting, my department chair looked at me and said, "It's awfully brave of you to be advocating for yourself in this meeting with all of these men" (Laughing) ... That felt like--are you intentionally trying to intimidate me, because that seems like bullshit. I even called the union rep after the meeting to voice that this comment felt problematic, but was told to let it go.

A few participants recounted more egregious experiences with discrimination. I am including a rather long account of a woman in a leadership position who continually struggles to do her job in a male-dominated, sometimes hostile environment. It illustrates the potential risks for women working in male-dominated positions. They must not only navigate how to perform in a highly-gendered setting, but the greater potential for hostility and disrespect when in a leadership role.

We had a very [expertise-based] meeting. . . . [regarding] simple things, I mean, it's not rocket science.... And we have three females in the room, a whole bunch of guys. All three of the females are not considered [people with expertise in the topic, but managers]. And so when they were explaining the idea. . . , I think I was probably nodding my head in agreement. And all of a sudden, this guy stopped and said, "Do you really even know the meaning of [this topic]?" And I stopped and I was a little in shock, and I said, "Um, yes, I do." And I thought it would stop right there, but [he] actually said, "Well, then explain it to me." I took a deep breath, and I looked around the room, and I think all the other people were shocked, and no one said a word, and I said, "Sure, absolutely" and so I explained it to him. Then he looked at me and said, "Oh, you do know that" and then just continues. . . . Coming out, another person said, "I admire how you handled that in there. If it was me, I would have walked out of the room." And I said, "No, because that's useless. It doesn't take us anywhere when you do that."

It seems unlikely this direct, public challenge to leadership competence would have occurred if the leader was a man. Later in the interview, the participant discussed her strategies for working in a hostile environment, mainly working to avoid vulnerability. She expressed empathy for men who must struggle to adapt to changing gender representation and expectations. She ended the interview with this assessment: "Change is difficult and there will be times that are upsetting. But it doesn't bother me. I will continue to press on until the day that I retire."

(laughing)

### **Male-dominated settings**

Women who worked in male-dominated settings—whether a particular discipline, division, or work group (e.g., deans) reported significantly more issues with gender bias and inequity. In addition, simply functioning in settings where they are an extreme minority could be trying.

Some felt they had to work harder to maintain legitimacy or unwillingly became a spokeswoman for women.

It's exhausting, feeling like you always have to be on guard and trying that much harder to just be seen as an equal.... Not just money, but status or your position within your workforce...how you're perceived.

When I move outside the department, depending on the environment, it becomes very obvious that you are a woman, and it's a strange thing for me to suddenly realize, wow, there aren't a whole lot of women here (laughing).... So all of a sudden I feel like I am wearing a hat that I wasn't even aware that I had to wear, but it's very obvious that I am a woman in a room full of men.

The lack of representation of women in these settings is self-perpetuating because women literally cannot see themselves in leadership

We have to nurture the pipeline and it will be easier as more women are in leadership. It's like Catch-22...if you don't, literally, see yourself in that group, even if you know consciously or rationally that you can pursue these opportunities if they present themselves, if you don't see yourself there, it's a barrier.

The climate for women can be negatively affected when group cultural norms and practices are developed in a highly-gendered setting. Women leaders in these highly-gendered settings explained the effect in meetings using terms like "the good ol' boys stuff," "mansplaining," and the "bro culture."

I would be in a meeting in a roomful of [males] and there'd be a topic of conversation, and I would say something which I thought was a good idea, and it would just be ignored. Then 20 minutes later, the [male leader] would cycle back to it and say that idea and attribute it to a man in the room, which really annoyed me. And it was very endemic, that kind of culture.

Several women talked about the challenges of working in male-dominated or historically male-dominated settings. In a variety of ways, they pointed to the established ways of doing business that, while not intentionally discriminatory, resulted in unequal access to power and decision making. Primarily, this was due to established relationships between male leaders that meant they might call each other and informally make decisions. Women discussed how men

sometimes get together socially or casually discuss work-related issues in the bathroom.

Sometimes they felt left out, for example, in not being invited to participate in activities, but, generally, they understood the interest in getting together in comfortable settings—which may exclude women.

So when they continue the conversation that started at [a] meeting in the men's bathroom and then make a decision and... come out and announce it to their colleagues or when they make those decisions when they're golfing, boating, or biking on the weekend together...those are not decisions that should then stand.... [They should think], "Of course we're going to brainstorm ideas if we're out boating or biking together on the weekend, but then we need to not treat them as done deals." We need to treat them as starting points for the conversation and see if our other colleagues agree.

It was a culture of men who all knew each other because, inevitably, it's been men who've been in positions of power in the institution for a long time...it's kind of like this old boys' network. Things get done with a conversation here and a conversation there, and I'll do this and you do that. And I never felt like I was a part of that process, partly because I was a woman... so I was never within that culture.

While the practice of excluding women might not be intentionally sexist, participants wanted men to 1) be conscious of what was discussed and whether decisions were made in same-sex social environments 2) develop a strategy to apprise women of these casual interactions that might later lead to formal decisions. Greater attention to the influence of informal discussions and decisions could help level the playing field, so that women could equally participate in decision making. Social interactions may also foster important networks—a reality that cannot be addressed by simply keeping people in the loop. Instead, participants suggest that social relationships may be an important mechanism in sustaining the gendered nature of power and leadership at Western.

It's not just the golfing...usually what winds up happening is, they then know somebody in the state and maybe that's a governor, maybe that's a legislator... Now you have exposures, professionally, that you wouldn't have otherwise.... I think there's a lack of understanding of how that can remove people from systems or provide access... it's not conscious.



Some of the people involved in those...events may have been people in the emerging pack. Well, if you're in the emerging pack but you're never invited... So does that mean you have to invite women? No. What it means is those informal relationships should be across gender. They should be across all kinds of diversity. And if you're going to do that, I think you're obligated to look at yourself and say, "How have I reached out in other ways?"

Participants were not suggesting that men (especially men in leadership positions) should stop socializing outside of work, but that there should be a conscious approach to finding ways to make connections, foster networks, and provide information to individuals who do not have informal access through gendered activities. Women at Western have historically attempted to create more informal access and networking opportunities through professional women's groups or gatherings. However, since women are less likely to hold positions of power, these groups can't provide the level of networking and access to power that same-sex men's groups do.

Two participants also mentioned challenges to maintaining informal relationships with colleagues of the other sex. It is important to acknowledge that gender can result in inequitable opportunities, not only from different treatment, but perceptions of relationships between men and women. When a heterosexual man and woman meet for coffee or a social activity, their meeting can be suspect.

There was a senior faculty member...I would meet with...and he was a mentor to me, so that was valuable. I had a divorce... and when he found out, he said, "Should we not meet for coffee anymore?"... And I was like, "Did you think this was a date? What does that have to do with this at all?"... I was just kind of blown away. I said, "No, I think it's fine." (laughing)... We took a break for a while after that.

This participant went on to discuss the penalties faced by women in especially male-dominated work settings. Being a woman made it difficult to build informal relationships and, as she was talking, she realized how significantly that could affect opportunity.

I think about women faculty in male-dominated departments or colleges, and that really penalizes you.... Let's say you go golfing with this guy or you go out for beers, it's suspect. But then who is going to get you ahead in those departments and colleges? Men,

primarily...it's rare in those male-dominated colleges to have a bunch of women at the top. So the access to power. Wow, I hadn't thought about that.

I use these examples, because, even when the relationship is not critiqued by others, participants can be mindful of the risk. Suspicion of these interactions may inhibit the ability and willingness for men in leadership positions to mentor women and, also, may encourage same-sex social activities. A lack of these opportunities may result in less power and opportunity for women leaders. The reality of gender and friendship among heterosexuals may mean that a formally-recognized mentorship or sponsorship is necessary for these cross-gender support systems to flourish.

### **Women Must Work Harder**

Participants reported a variety of gendered expectations at work that impacted them. Women were more often associated with their domestic lives and believed they often needed to work harder than men in similar circumstances. The reasons for working harder are complex and not necessarily due to differential work expectations for men and women. Women experienced instances where they were asked to do typically gendered work (e.g., clerical tasks) that were outside of their job description; as faculty, they reported more advising and emotional labor with students, both because they were more often asked and also because they believed they were more aware of student needs

While some participants' accounts of working harder were not directly related to leadership, they informed women's attitudes towards taking on leadership roles. If women believed they had to work harder or face greater scrutiny due to gender bias, it made the possibility of moving up less attractive. Participants reported a variety of ways they worked harder including the emotional labor required to negotiate gendered expectations at work:

We both worked at Western in leadership positions and had children together. We'd go to a Western social event and people would ask me about my kids, and they'd ask him about his job. And I love talking about my kids, so it's not that. It's just that very subtle difference of defining gender by certain roles....an example of [needing to] really see women in professional positions, not just in a gender role.

My associate dean was a male...and we would go to events outside the university together, and people would assume he was the dean because he was tall and male. And it was very tiring, you know, constantly having to assert this.

Participants also reported working harder because of their concerns about how they would be perceived. This generally seemed to be an internalized response rather than a response to external feedback.

I feel there's no way I should leave before Friday at 5:01 p.m.... I have a few comparable colleagues...who seem much more comfortable taking the hour and a half long lunch break or leaving at 3 on a Friday afternoon. I'm not quite sure if it has to do with years or if it has to do with gender.... Why have I placed that pressure on myself?... The male colleagues just don't seem to have a problem with it, whereas I'm freaking out if I'm 3 minutes late into the office.

In addition to gendered assumptions about women's social position, participants also had to navigate gender beliefs on the job. This included deciding whether and how to bring up discriminatory and/or sexist behavior and how to negotiate a leadership role—a role stereotypically associated with men—within the context of being a women.

Women have to be more conscientious of any messages they're giving out in business meetings and so forth, so you downplay sexuality or gender.... If you're meeting with a man, you have to be more conscientious of how that might be perceived, so that you're taken seriously. So in some ways you're denying your gender..., finding the balance between authentically portraying who you are and the image that will be appropriate for a business setting.

Participants in leadership positions also discussed working to balance the requirements of the job, many of which are stereotypically viewed as masculine (e.g., assertive, decisive, directive), and the perceptions of women who have these characteristics. This is one of the many, subtle ways that women in leadership believe they work harder—they must continuously

evaluate how they are perceived as women in addition to fulfilling the requirements of the position. Some participants discussed differential expectations of men and women in leadership positions.

I'm expected to have a softer touch than my male counterparts, especially when dealing with manager problems with my student employee team or with [external individuals].... And I'm an assertive person by nature, and so I'm constantly told to soften it or bring it down just a little bit (laughing). I don't think a male would be asked to soften up. Their assertiveness and frankness would be embraced as a positive quality, not something to tone down.

If I'm a woman coming to the table... I have to be direct and smart because I could be walked over, and I experienced that. But...at my division meetings [with subordinates], I always told stories and brought out the emotional, the more intimate parts of me. I knew how I was perceived; "You're business-like, smart, intimidating."... [if you were a man would it have been as difficult for people?] No, then I would've looked like a Bruce Shepard. (laughing)

The culture of assertiveness and how it's perceived—male versus female.... When I try to preserve my work time for initiatives that my job deems important and high priority, it's often shrugged off... and I'm suddenly seen as bitchy or lacking team spirit.... It unfortunately comes with saying no to archiving for other people or always being a hundred percent available.... How that "no" is received is pretty negative.

Women in leadership positions need to decide how and whether to bring up issues of gender bias. Some didn't want to be perceived as angry, others thought carefully about how to approach gender bias in a way that would result in change rather than discomfort and hostility. One participant who worked in a rather contentious, male-dominated setting believed complaining showed weakness and vulnerability that might escalate hostilities. She explained, "If you start to discriminate against me, I will walk away from you.... If I show that it bothers me, there will be a next time."

A few participants described in detail how carefully they consider their approach to bias at work as a leader.

Had I been direct, I think it would've cooled the relationship. Some people would've been hurt, would not view themselves as having done anything and have difficulty

hearing it. So I tended to characterize things as how I saw other women being impacted, not so much my experience. So I raised issues.... "Have you thought about this?" But you have to be in the position I was in to do that, which is why I suffered earlier in my career to get to that position. (laughing)

One participant recounted an incident where she didn't speak up in a leadership meeting when her ideas were attributed to a man in the room. She explained her reticence: "I felt like I would be drawing attention to myself and seeming like a bad sport." Another participant also described not speaking up; her strategy was to showcase her competence and expertise in an effort to combat men's views that she is less knowledgeable.

I have talked to some male leaders at this university who tend to be a little demeaning, they want to explain something to me because they think I don't get it when I get it.... So I just come back with my own credibility and my own merit, but I've never really confronted anybody.

In addition to the extra work of negotiating gender and gender expectations on the job, participants reported a variety of other ways that they felt that they had to work harder than men. It's important to note that women in high-level positions stressed that the work expectations for both men and women in these positions are exceptionally high. Still, participants often reported working harder due to gender bias.

When somebody asks, "Did you have to [work harder)]," I would say no. Did I observe that if I wanted to maximize my ability to impact things, that I would need to do that, the answer's yes! Is that true for everyone?... Well, I would say women and people of color tend to be in situations in which their particular style may not make them be seen. You know, they may not have access in the same ways, so they're going to get ahead based on proving themselves.

This participant makes an excellent point that will be more fully addressed in the section on views of leadership. While not all women believe their leadership style differs from men's, many believed there were significant differences. When leadership is evaluated within a particular framework, one developed in a historically male environment, then different ways of achieving objectives may be less valued and less visible. "[Women] also need to prove

themselves among their male peers.... And that's what I see—showing leadership and probably doing twice as much.” (laughing)

Participants mentioned an interest in collaborative work and listening to others as leaders, especially subordinates, but also noted some criticism of that style.

One of the things I chose to do in my leadership role was talk to as many faculty across campus as I could to figure out how they saw the role of our division.... I think that desire to work with where people were and how they were thinking about things rather than coming in with my own agenda wasn't valued because my approach was gendered. I had colleagues ask, “Why?” And telling me things like, "I can't imagine why you'd take time to do that or find it worthwhile.”

Working harder, then, not only includes additional time on position-related tasks, but also a variety of time devoted to leading while female. In a final note, a few participants mentioned the work level of directorships. It appears institutions and centers often struggle with a lack of resources such as administrative support, directly serve students which can be specially time consuming, and seem to have lower prestige, that is, the positions seem less likely to lead to promotion. It might be worth investigating whether these positions are disproportionately filled by women; one participant noted, “Women end up being in a lot of these directorship roles. What type of work is that? And of what value is that to the university?” These mid-level leadership positions could be “gateway positions” for moving women into higher-level leadership positions, but, currently, may be dead-ends for female leaders. Without appropriate resources to direct these programs and perhaps mentoring or support for women in these roles, they may look more like “extreme service” rather than leadership development.

In summary, participants point to a variety of ways they work harder due to the additional burden of being a woman on the job. They must grapple with gendered assumptions about their domestic life and professional position, face greater scrutiny, monitor their behavior in order to

navigate the difference between leadership characteristics and expectations for women's behavior, and work harder to receive benefits and privileges that men acquire more easily.

### **What can women bring to the table as leaders?**

Participants discussed their leadership styles within the context of talking about their position. While some characterized their style as specific to women, others did not do so explicitly, but mentioned approaches often ascribed to women. Participants reported values such as fostering a collaborative work environment, talking with faculty and staff to develop priorities for the position and/or unit, reducing hierarchy, being respectful, skillfully managing conflict, giving difficult news without creating a crisis, and a focus on organizing and following policy. Participants also mentioned significant preparation for meetings and other settings where they were visibly leaders.

Women haven't had as much access in relationships, the end result is...it's easy to be dismissed. One of the things I did was I spent a lot of time studying things, knowing things, making sure I never went into a meeting without (laughing) being really educated.... I would just say as a pattern, women who are successful probably had to do that more.

Participants believed that their unique approach could foster a positive, more equitable work place. For example, in meetings one participant noted, "I tend to be more attentive to the space and the room and whose voice is there." This implies that increasing representation of women in leadership could foster greater equity. Several leaders spoke about being mindful of who was in the room, mentoring individuals with potential, and making sure faculty and staff had a voice in decision-making processes. All of these foster a more equitable workplace.

I tend to be a pretty bossy chick, so leadership is appealing.... I've enjoyed having the opportunity to test how to be in a leadership position and still kind of get along with people, because I think that that would be the type of leadership I would like to establish. So I've been trying hard to be a leader who can both bring people together, but still make hard decisions.....

I have never shied away from leadership opportunities either.... Whenever I've been given the opportunity, I've said yes because I thought I could do a good job. (laughing).... It's not about you. You're just helping move something along in a way that empowers people.

As a woman, experiencing the kinds of things that I have in my life has made me unwilling to turn a blind eye when I see marginalization or injustice happen, and that means I have to figure out what the problem is and tend to the emotional needs of people, as well as the legal or institutional processes and procedures..... There's a lot of emotional labor, tending to all of the different personalities in play. Five years of my male colleagues before me who were just unwilling to do any of that work...and so I had to.

Participants noted that women are socialized into caregiving, nurturing, and cleaning up messes and some saw it as a strength in leadership, both in getting organized and in interpersonal interactions.

People make jokes; they say "She expels a student, and the student says, "But she was so nice." (laughing) Because I didn't do that out of power and authority. People can sense that...and they always say that I showed respect.... I think it's very intuitive. What I've found in these jobs, that I've learned from other women as well, is we tend to be a lot more intuitive than the other sex.

As a woman I was socialized to clean things up...and think about how things work and how do they serve people, and are people being taken care of? And so that's the kind of mindset I take into a leadership position. When I come in, I do an assessment of everything that's working, everything that's not working, what are the complaints people have, what paperwork needs to be done, what rules are we not following, and then I try to fix all of those things.

Although not consciously pointing out, participants in leadership roles were likely to report working very hard. They often ascribed this to personality, but research suggests it's a characteristic typically held by women workers, because they both are more likely to be concerned about criticism and must work to counter negative gender beliefs.

In my personal experience, I do not feel I have been held to a higher standard. I do hold myself to a very high standard.

If something needed to get done...I would get it done, regardless of who helped or who didn't help.... We'd drive everything. We'd never drive the goals of the university, that's the university's job, but we would drive to get it done.... I'm a very patient



person, to a point. And I think that is probably more of a woman's trait. I don't know how many guys would've stuck it out.

Women also talked about aspects of gender socialization that they believed inhibited their ability to lead and their attempts to consciously resist their socialization.

When I find myself in leadership positions...I need to fully set a boundary between, am I seeking collaboration and collegiality or am I just seeking...confirmation?  
(Laughing)...Am I trained as a women to seek approval...? And I have to sort of scour that out of myself.... I consciously have to think, "It doesn't matter what he thinks, what matters is what we're talking about. And I don't care if he likes me or doesn't like me."

I was on a couple of dean search committees...and I noticed that when we came to our finalists, one of the common questions in the discussions that we had with the finalists when they were women was, "Is she going to stand up for us? How tough is she going to be when push comes to shove and all the deans are fighting for the same resources?"... I thought, this is why women don't get into leadership because we're expected to behave in a certain that we're not trained to behave in. We're trained to be people that cause everyone to get along and work together.

## **Representation**

While many participants mentioned unique, positive characteristics that women might bring to leadership positions, they did not believe these characteristics were always valued. A participant recounted how meeting with faculty and staff was deemed unproductive and a waste of time. Another noted that while her unique approach to challenges was an advantage, "it can be odd at times when you are one of the few women in the room." This statement implies that while women may have unique approaches to leadership that benefit the university, they don't always get to enact them due to their underrepresentation in leadership. Another woman recounts an experience early in her career in leadership:

It's [a test] where you're green or you're red or you're blue.... And my boss...walked up to me and looked over my shoulder and said, "You are too green." Which was process oriented. "If you want to be successful, you've got to be more red."

In addition, women (and people of color) are often overrepresented in positions related to students, meaning that some leadership spaces have greater gender balance while others are especially male-dominated; for example, external affairs. These heavily male-dominated settings sometimes lead to negative experiences in leadership for women, both due to bias and a lack of support.

Since I moved higher, I feel like people are purposely challenging me-- about my capability, about my knowledge of the field...it's constant. I don't believe [men] are purposely doing that. It's really culture and mentality.

[In a former position in a male-dominated discipline], I was a department chair and associate dean, and I really enjoyed those roles, which is why I looked to become a dean.... Part of that was that I had a female dean that I reported to; I didn't consciously understand how much of a difference that made, but it really did make a big difference.

Increasing the representation of women in leadership across the university would facilitate an environment that could encourage other women to pursue leadership positions. Participants report lacking female role models in leadership and the stress of serving in male-dominated settings. These settings were sometimes uncomfortable due to the gender balance, but beyond discomfort, heavily male-dominated settings appeared to increase the likelihood of gender bias in meetings including unequal participation, less attention to women's input, and a devaluation of different approaches to an issue. In addition, lack of representation makes it difficult for women who are considering leadership to literally see themselves in the position.

Positions that are historically male might look a certain way, making it difficult for others to see a woman with a very different style in the position. This is not to say that there are not different styles among men and among women, but that there may be a pattern in styles of people who have historically served in leadership, styles more strongly associated with masculinity. As a result, searches may be biased against women because the desired characteristics are developed from historical performance in the position.

I think about places like facilities, IT, certain academic disciplines—I'd love to see...additional support around the searches.... I worry we might continue to keep searching for the person that feels like the fit of the team we have, rather than thinking about the team we want to create and who can help us shape that in a new and different way. I think it can become intentional or an unintentional way in which candidates get weeded out of processes.

When asked about increasing representation of women in leadership, one participant said that part of it is similar to increasing the representation of people of color—hire more of them. But she also noted that women are highly represented at the university, so another approach may be warranted—one that increases the movement of women at the university into leadership positions. Many participants believed the solution to climate issues, bias, and possibly developing innovative approaches to a variety of challenges was relatively simple—develop a strong commitment to increasing the representation of women and other underrepresented groups in leadership.

Maybe you don't have a lineup of women who are ready to take on a leadership role. That's why you have to nurture it and... just make it happen for her... Not just magically wait for that person to come along when there are so many roadblocks to achieving that.

One of my colleagues was saying, "We just need to always make sure that we have two women in our final four every time." And I said, "No, we need four women in our final four. If you want to hire a woman, freaking hire a woman!"

I will say that in part I took the position because it is about time we had women in leadership... We have amazing white men in this department, in this college, who would do well in that position..., but I think it's about time this university got some people who look different in leadership.

While it is not legal to hire women based on their gender, it may be possible to increase the likelihood of hiring women by cultivating potential leaders within the university—the interviews suggest that many women are "reluctant leaders," that is, it hadn't occurred to them to step into leadership positions until they were encouraged or explicitly asked.

### **Reluctant leaders**

Several participants in leadership positions described themselves as reluctant leaders. That is, they didn't begin their careers with aspirations for leadership and hadn't considered serving in a leadership role. They often reported that someone along the way encouraged them or told them that they were leadership material. They also described finding mentors, often mentors they sought out themselves, who encouraged their leadership.

[When] I moved into these leadership positions, it wasn't that I was seeking them. In fact, I was rather reluctant at every step. I was encouraged to be department chair, then associate dean, then dean.... So it was never that I was seeking leadership roles, they just happened to come my way. I got support for it, and so I stepped in.

Probably because I am a woman and how I've been raised and nurtured, [I'm] a reluctant leader. I don't feel like I've actively pursued it...., it just wasn't part of the plan. I don't know if people start with that plan, I have no idea.

I took this position (laughing) under a little bit of duress.... He couldn't get anybody to apply for the job, so he sought me out and asked if I would do it.... I would say I was curious about it, [but] I would not have gone into this role had [he] not reached out to me. And so I wonder sometimes how much more we have to do to reach out to women and say, "Have you considered doing this?"

One participant who served in a leadership position discussed the need to actively reach out to women and individuals from other underrepresented groups in order to recruit them into leadership.

[What is important in] recruiting and engaging young women is talking to them, encouraging them, allowing them to imagine themselves in leadership positions. I think a lot of women don't even think that's for them whereas men are like, "Yeah." So we have to do a little extra work to remind women and to encourage them to step in.

Some participants believed that many women had too much on their plate to consider moving into leadership.

I think a lot of junior women faculty already feel overwhelmed, it's that life balance, and aren't even imagining themselves in those jobs.

There's a reason that I think we see women after a certain age stepping into more leadership positions.... You have time... then it becomes easier to do that.... I wonder if

it's just that or if it's also connected to women not being perceived as leadership material if they're too young.

Being more open to negotiating leadership positions, expectations, and timing may help recruit younger women into leadership positions. While this may be a burden initially, it could be a worthwhile investment. One participant describes the effect of flexibility on her leadership trajectory and the influence it had on her job satisfaction.

I was nominated, and I said no, obviously, because I had a one-month-old (laughing). But nobody accepted a nomination and [the dean] called me, and said, "When you rejected the nomination, you said...it's not the right time.... Would you say yes if we came to an arrangement that would make the timing work for you?" ...If that hadn't happened, I would certainly not be here today [in a leadership position]. It was somebody taking a leap of faith, having a less than ideal situation in the short term so that a better situation [could occur].... And the people in my department also supported that...and it made me proud. I felt supported. It was awesome.

This is an excellent example of an inconvenient compromise that resulted in a woman taking on a leadership role earlier in her career than is typical at Western. It is important to note that this compromise arose because there were no other options. Perhaps this type of flexibility could be encouraged at other times, not just as a last resort. Flexibility could include interim expectations, job sharing, and other compromises that might help younger faculty and staff (both in age and experience) enter leadership early on.

### **Concerns about work-life balance**

Participants discussed work-life balance in a variety of contexts. The excessive work demands in many leadership positions were of particular concern. Participants also discussed how childrearing responsibilities impacted women's consideration of leadership positions. Several participants weren't interested in a position that would prevent them from achieving a reasonable semblance of work-life balance.

Women really take on a lot in leadership. I have hardly ever seen any women that would be called slackers (laughing)... That's the part that would separate me from wanting to do that at this stage in my life.

Work-life balance... maybe it's more important for women than for men... I think maybe we're less willing to compromise... For me, looking ahead, if I cannot have work-life balance with this job, I will choose my life over my job every time.

Women in leadership positions who felt unsupported in their efforts to balance work and family life, found it took a toll on their well-being.

I said to the person who recruited me for this job, I cannot work a lot of evenings and weekends. I am strung out [due to family obligations]. And he wagged his finger in my face and he said, "If you work evenings and weekends, it's your own damn fault..." The first year, I worked all the evenings and weekends... just trying to get some semblance of sanity for [the program].

I felt like [parenting demands] wasn't really understood, the sense that work-life balance was important and that I needed to be there for my family... It wasn't explicit, but I felt there was this implicit sense that I wasn't as committed to my job as someone who wouldn't have been doing that....

Two parents reported that they were able to serve in a leadership position because their spouse was a stay-at-home parent or the primary caretaker. Another participant who was a single parent described live-in childcare, a cadre of other part-time caregivers, and bringing her child to work with her on the weekends. While this participant illustrates it is possible to raise a child while working 50-60 hours weeks, it certainly doesn't describe work-life balance.

Several participants acknowledged the daunting hours their positions required. Unfortunately, this limited study isn't able to assess whether, overall, women in leadership work more hours than men, but participants discussed the significant workload for all genders in leadership as an issue.

I am a person that has a very strong sense of responsibility, and I will work to get the job done... I've often said, you either need to be a single person or you need to be in a situation where your partner is not (laughing) full-time residence in your home.... I don't know that there's ever been a male in this role. It's never that anybody was pounding me to work those 60 hours a week, but it was the sheer volume of what the

job entailed and meeting deadline after deadline. What I perhaps... should have done differently, or maybe a male in this role would have done differently, is at one point just put the hands up and say, "You know what, I can't do anymore."

Participants in leadership who had an interest in supporting work-life balance among their staff grappled with the reality of job demands in their division. One participant discussed wanting to offer generous maternity leave and flexibility in schedule—benefits she did not have as a younger leader, but she could not find a way to do this: "The level of work that needs to get done sort of works against the ideas of being family-friendly or having work-life balance."

Participants looked for positive role models regarding work-life balance while, at the same time, didn't see a solution to the crushing demands of many leadership positions. It is possible that significant cuts in state funding have resulted in additional work for leaders on campus. For example, deans have a significant role in fundraising for their colleges—a relatively new expectation.

Some of these jobs become all consuming, and you haven't a life and that's not what I want.... The higher up you move in a university, the more you need to be available...and your time, it's no longer in your control.... The reason I thought of [a former senior administrator] is she was so open in a letter to the campus when she left. "I'm not willing to give this much of my life" ...and I thought, I've never heard a woman say that publicly..., this is too all-consuming. She tried it, she saw what it was like, she said, "No, thank you."

He works hours that mere mortals shouldn't work. Now maybe that is always going to be the role of the dean....but I think we also need to see leaders who make decisions that are healthy for them, and I think maybe that is more important for women.

Although not in leadership, one participant discussed the value of a role model who emphasized work-life balance. Because several participants discussed having difficulty setting limits and worrying about criticism from others, modelling healthy work behaviors may be especially advantageous for women.

Academia...does offer more flexibility.... That said, it's a gas; it will fill the time we give it. When I first came here, (senior female faculty) said that... her role model for work-life balance was (male faculty member). At the stroke of the end of class, X is outta here. He does not take work home--he has this very, very clear division. It was such a relief to me to have someone say to me, "See this person who very clearly establishes work-life balance? That's my role model."... And maybe it also helped to have heard that from another woman, a parent of children comparable in age to my own and a tenured professor.

### **Intersectional considerations**

Typically in studies, I discuss intersectional identities throughout the findings. However, because of the relatively few women of color in leadership positions, it is difficult to discuss the uniqueness of their situations while maintaining confidentiality. This also applies to the one trans\* employee I interviewed. My general observations are probably not unexpected.

Unsurprisingly, it's often unclear to women of color whether their negative experiences are due to being a woman, a person of color, or a woman of color. One recounts a man with the same racial/ethnic identity who is treated differently; another participant is unclear whether their mistreatment is because they are generally perceived as a woman or they hold a trans\* identity.

Holding multiple marginalized identities may result in worse treatment, especially in a leadership position. Some participants look to others who have one similar aspect of their identity (gender, race/ethnicity) in an effort to understand the root of their mistreatment (e.g., "I was not the only woman in the room"). I also observed that these participants were more likely to hesitate when asked whether being a woman influenced their experience. In one case, the participant did not think being a woman influenced her leadership experience. I asked whether being a black woman affected the participant's experience. She replied immediately, "Now that's different and affects everything tremendously." Some women of color reported working harder, generally within the context of racial/ethnic identity, rather than gender. When asked if she worked harder, one participant responded:



I would say yes. That's like a mantra in our community. Whatever your peer [does], you've got to do twice as much.... We're kind of raised that way, you know, no matter what, they're going to up the ante. If that requires a bachelor's, you'd better get a master's. If that requires a master's, you'd better get a doctorate.... Because we're a representative.... They're judging a whole bunch of people by me and my reaction. As unfair as that is..., they're looking for the stereotype..... There is no anonymity here. (laughs)

Obviously the underrepresentation of people of color at the university affects the ability to improve their representation in leadership. In a previous study at the university, I found that faculty of color were especially burdened with service due to their race/ethnicity. Women of color seemed to bear more of the burden of these service expectations; one would expect this would make them less available for work that may facilitate promotion to leadership. One participant in leadership noted, "Now, women of color...I don't want to ask them [to participate] because I already know how much pressure's put on them to do so much work."

### **Increasing the representation of women in leadership**

Thus far this report describes the climate for women employees on campus including experiences with bias in the workplace and the additional risks within male-dominated settings. I also discuss the experiences of women in leadership including many participants' experiences of being reluctant leaders. In addition, participants discussed the additional workload for women in leadership due to their need to navigate both their gender in settings that have been historically male and being socialized to avoid criticism and meet all expectations. The participants noted that particular individuals, chiefly supervisors and mentors, were key to their movement into leadership.

Accounts from participants imply that there are certain actions that may improve the representation of women in leadership. Admittedly, some of the problems imply solutions that are unlikely such as improving work-life balance by limiting work hours for senior leadership

and, perhaps, in directorship positions. Other actions seem more likely including developing more intentional approaches to sponsoring and/or mentoring and fostering more flexibility in positions. Finally, the most important action to addressing issues with climate for women leaders is by increasing the representation of women in these positions. At the least, this means there will be more than one woman in the room to address bias as it occurs. At best, over time it will change expectations about leadership style, assumptions about competence, and other gender-based barriers to women in leadership. One participant believed that creating term limits for academic positions such as chair might increase leadership opportunities for women. She pointed out that, in a white, male-dominated setting, even if the representation of women and other underrepresented groups improves, it won't increase diversity in leadership without term limits. While many women are reluctant to serve in positions where they cannot maintain a semblance of work-life balance, there are women employees who have an interest in leadership positions as they stand or would have an interest with encouragement. One of the most important recommendations to improve promotion of women into leadership is better mentoring and sponsorship.

### **Mentoring/sponsorship**

Mentoring and sponsorship are two different ideas that can make a difference in promotion. Research suggests that formal, extensive mentoring programs may not be worth the investment. While people involved in formal mentoring programs, especially group mentoring, believe their skills have increased and report positive networking experiences, studies suggest that these programs don't significantly increase promotions. One participant discussed a formal mentoring program developed in their division. Developing the program's curriculum and

meeting plans was very labor-intensive and the program did not last. The participant believed it was helpful, but was unsure whether it resulted in promotions.

Several participants mentioned the positive role that mentoring had in their professional lives. Mentoring can be especially effective for women who do not see themselves in leadership positions. Successful mentoring seems to arise in two ways—the potential mentee seeks out a mentor that seems appropriate or leaders stay alert for employees with potential and directly engage with them.

I have encouraged multiple females. I would say, “I can see you in an administrative position, I can see you in a leadership role.” So I have encouraged I don’t even know how many, but I’ve encouraged many females to go on. I’ve done that with males as well.

Generally, participants did not believe that formal mentoring programs would be successful because the mentoring relationship is only successful when it is voluntary and is a good fit.

The whole concept of mentorship is not somebody who is assigned to you. You seek out your mentor, and the person becomes a mentor to you.... There were a couple department chairs that I really sought out, one was a male, one was a female. When I was associate dean, of course my mentor was my dean, who was male.

I have found mentors through just working with people and realizing that there was somebody that I looked up to that was willing to give me their time and whatever wisdom they had to offer. They couldn’t have been replaced by putting somebody else there. It was just the right person at the right time.

While a group program that addresses particular topics could be helpful, the type of mentoring that participants deemed most helpful is between people who have something in common (a group identity, a type of work) and is often initiated by the mentee. Participants reported helpful mentoring through a professional association, with a leader in their unit, or with someone who can help them navigate their minority status whether that is as a woman or a person of color. Participants in leadership positions talked about actively encouraging people in

their work areas who they identified as having potential. Although leaders mentored men and women, some participants believed women may need additional, explicit encouragement.

I think [mentoring] could help guide people who might have confidence issues; someone who can encourage you to step out of your comfort zone.... It wasn't until I felt more confident in my position that I got a mentor.... I was able to bounce things off of him and say, "How should I approach this" and "This is my current challenge."

I think oftentimes women don't have the same kind of path of, this is my ultimate goal. You keep putting one foot in front of the other, and what you're called to do or motivated to do—you end up in this leadership role twenty years down [the road].... I think, again perhaps [it's] my gender, that men might have more career ambition per se and so...carve out their course of actions.

One problem with relying on leaders to seek out mentees is that it may overburden women in leadership because there are fewer women and they may be more likely to seek out the mentor role with their employees. While certainly men mentor women at the university, it seems women disproportionately do this work.

Women end up doing more work because they're mentoring other women who feel comfortable going to them or they are willing to put in the time to do the nurturing, because it is a form of nurturing. I will say though that I have had very good mentoring relationships with men on campus as well, but it was very serendipitous.

Since women in leadership report more work in a variety of other areas due to both gender expectations and their lack of representation, they already have less time to mentor. One participant described the conundrum: "[We] talked about how to have a mentorship program, then you have to find women. If somebody said to me, 'How many people could you mentor?' I would say, 'Zero' (laughing), but I'd want to."

Another participant was also concerned about women-led mentoring or professional development groups because she was mindful of where the power was located.

I was thinking about how we can create more centralized support for women in leadership, where we can encourage junior faculty women to imagine themselves in leadership...And I don't think the brown bag (women's leadership group) is [that]

helpful.... If men have most of the power, then segregating into groups of women that become support groups, how is that going to help?

Clearly, men also need to be engaged in intentionally fostering leaders if Western hopes to improve gender equity by promoting from within. Mentoring can take a variety of forms, although mentoring seems most successful outside the confines of a formal program. The mentoring can be ongoing, for example, meeting monthly or episodic, for example, reaching out to employees with potential to ask if they've considered leadership.

### **Sponsorship**

During the year, the idea of sponsorship came up in Commission meetings. Sponsorship differs from mentorship because it addresses differential power and access during the effort to promote people in underrepresented groups. While a mentor might give feedback and talk through issues, a sponsor is just that—a person in a leadership position who commits to promoting an employee with promise. Sponsorship acknowledges that many decisions are made in rooms of leaders and that those without access to these “halls of power” are less likely to succeed. Since women are underrepresented as leaders, they are less likely to have an advocate in decision-making circles. A sponsor not only puts forth the name of a sponsee for promotion, but is also alert to opportunities that will help the sponsee make connections, develop skills, and showcase performance. One participant had a sponsor in a former institution.

I think the sponsor idea is a great idea, and I think that would work. [Former supervisor] was a sponsor for me. She was a mentor as well, a role model that I modeled myself after...., but she was also definitively a sponsor. She would promote. She would stand for me. She would bring my name forward. She would volunteer me for important assignments that were high profile.

Another person believed a sponsor might influence promotion by cultivating leaders within spaces that address diversity. She noted these individuals would be likely to possess

values that the university promotes and are more likely to be a member of an underrepresented group. One participant pointed to me during the interview:

You're volunteering for this project..., the diversity group should be a place in which there would be connections and mentoring and [development of] aspirational goals.... That's a puzzlement, because those are the places, I think, that are lost opportunities for the institution.

Because women are often overrepresented in service, these types of service groups may provide an additional opportunity to seek out and develop potential leaders.

Many participants were adamant that mentorship and sponsorship opportunities should not be limited to women. First, because their subsequent promotion can be suspect if it is viewed as preferential treatment, but also because connections with men, both leaders and future leaders, are important to success in male-dominated settings. In addition, mentors/sponsors cannot be mainly women as men still dominate the positions with the most power.

### **Work-Life Balance**

Work-life balance can be very difficult to achieve in leadership positions at Western Washington University and, likely, in most higher education settings. With less funding from the state, the demands may be even greater. The interviews suggest a few recommendations that support work-life balance, although, admittedly, they may only make leadership positions a bit more palatable without actually changing the workload.

Participants discussed flexibility of schedule as important. Generally, faculty mentioned flexibility as a strong advantage to their positions that supported work-life balance while staff wished they had more flexibility. There was a sense that work schedules could be more flexible and alternative work arrangements could help in striving for work-life balance. Participants believed the university had an overly-rigid approach to work hours and settings that influenced both people with family obligations and commuters. "Western as an institution could inspire

people to have [more] flexibility.... Why are we making people drive three hours?" One supervisor described her support for schedule flexibility in order to facilitate further education and training for promising employees.

They're dedicated, and they're persistent [in developing skills and advancing].... They take classes sometimes during their lunchtime, or change their lunchtime. It's everything you wished people would have done for you earlier in your career.... If they're talented and good performers, that's the way to reward people.

One participant reflects on how a lack of flexibility narrowed her opportunities for advancement.

Flexible schedules [are important]..., like in my own life, there were opportunities I didn't take because I had other requirements. There are a lot of us that have parental responsibilities. Commuting is my issue.... We could allow some flexibility in work schedules and I think that really has to come from the top.

Western seems to be reluctant to allow employees flexibility in schedule and work location. Sometimes flexibility is not possible (e.g., teaching a class), but more often than allowed, it is possible and advantageous. With burgeoning technology options, individuals can increasingly meet remotely and use online tools to complete work without being in the office. As a reminder, my previous study found that faculty of color were more likely to live in Seattle so that their partners had job opportunities. Fostering a culture that emphasizes results over strict schedules could create a more positive work environment for all employees.

Everybody seeks work-life balance, and many people at this university work really, really hard, and they don't have that balance.... That's a non-gender issue; it's a quality of life issue.... There are dads who need flexibility in their schedules as much as moms do...[and] both parents need adequate childcare to help them work.

Participants mentioned childcare as an issue repeatedly, although, it is my understanding that the university previously had a daycare that did not prove financially viable. Participants noted the long waitlist at the Child Development Center; one joked that you had to get on the waitlist before conception. However, the Child Development Center is

most advantageous to faculty because it operates on an academic schedule. Increasing access to childcare may encourage more women to consider leadership. The university should, at the least, learn more about the availability of accessible, affordable childcare in Bellingham.

Finally, participants' greatest concern about serving as leaders is the lack of work-life balance in leadership positions. Admittedly, this is also the most difficult issue to address. Perhaps before making recommendations, there should be a more in-depth discussion of the challenges of maintaining work-life balance for senior-level administrators and directors. As higher-education institutions continually must do more with less leading to increased work hours among leadership, the reality may be fewer women are willing to serve in these positions because they appear to be more likely to prize work-life balance.

### **Increasing the number of external hires**

Participants discussed ways to improve the recruitment of women into leadership positions. First, by increasing the number of women in the applicant pool. While the university takes many steps to assure a diverse pool, a few participants discussed the need to personally reach out to potential hires, even if they are not looking for a job.

When we do searches, I think there's a responsibility at very high levels to try to figure out how you do the outreach. I used things like LinkedIn. I would go through and search who's out there...then I would look at whether or not I knew anybody who knew them. Then I'd look at whether or not I could do an outreach to encourage them into the pool. I didn't have to know them to do that.

I didn't always know people. I would go out and search. A good example is [name], he's not working for us, but he was a student body leader. He was in my LinkedIn, and he got a promotion, so I sent him a note. "We have a job opening, have you ever thought about blah, blah, blah?" Now he didn't come, but you have to consciously make those efforts.



In addition to personally reaching out to potential applicants, it may be useful to review required qualifications in job announcements. A few leaders talked about positions that required particular characteristics that reflected the way the job had been done, but weren't necessarily required for the job. A review of job announcements may ascertain whether required qualifications emphasize typically masculine characteristics that aren't vital to the position and minimize stereotypically feminine qualifications that are useful in the position (e.g., collaboration).

Another challenge to increasing the number of external hires illustrates how societal notions of gender can influence inequality. In a heterosexual relationship, a man is less likely to move for his spouse's career than a woman is for hers. Relocating to Bellingham may be even more challenging than a move to a bigger city with more professional job opportunities. Women, like other underrepresented groups (people of color, LGB and transgender individuals), appear to face greater challenges when their partner cannot find a job. Perhaps not all spouses can be accommodated within the university, but the process of spousal accommodation could be clarified and commitment to accommodation could be strengthened. For example, extending eligibility for accommodation so, if an appropriate position opens, spouse get priority. In addition, the university could develop stronger relationships with other businesses and organizations in order to facilitate employment of spouses.

### **Summary of recommendations**

In the previous section, I discussed several strategies that might increase the representation of women in leadership at Western Washington University. I will close with a brief summary list of recommendations related to the above topics.

- Find ways to promote mentor and sponsor relationships

- Training for potential leaders on the importance of mentors and sponsors and how to seek them out
- Support for leaders interested in more intentionally mentoring and/or sponsoring promising employees
- Use women's professional development group(s) to address setting limits to work, understanding leadership style, developing aspirations, and addressing bias
- Offer trainings about addressing bias and recognizing gender inequity in work settings
  - Require or encourage participation from supervisors/leaders
- Hire more women in leadership; explore ways to increase representation, especially in male-dominated divisions and disciplines
  - Consider cluster hiring, that is, more than 1 woman in an area at a time
- Develop stronger dual career assistance including eligibility for positions throughout time of spousal employment and strengthening relationships with other potential employers in the area
- Find ways to support more flexible work schedules and work settings when possible
  - Read governor's guidance re: flexibility and sustainability, trip reduction; don't privilege families with children; stress well being, stress 21st century workplace
  - Review policies related to works scheduling
  - Signal support from the top and tie work-life balance to the strategic plan
- Senior administration should hold guided conversations about work culture/overwork culture and how to potentially reduce hours required in senior positions
- Find ways to encourage non-transactional interactions in department and employment-related groups in order to build positive interactions and relationships which can influence equity and communication. Develop a plan and opportunities including training and facilitated events that emphasize "playfulness," team building, etc.
- Review access to childcare, including the Child Development Center and other availability and access issues
- Review gender balance in directorships of institutes and centers, work expectations, and whether these positions could become sites for leadership development and promotion
- Review job descriptions for required and preferred qualifications that overemphasize masculine styles

## **Conclusion**

While this report has mainly focused on obstacles to the advancement of women into leadership roles at Western Washington University, it is important to note that the great majority of participants evaluate their overall experience at the university positively. It was my aim in this report to gain insight into barriers to promotion and to deepen the institution's understanding of the climate for women on campus in a few particular areas. An important aspect of this type of study is that it signals the importance of previously neglected issues and historically

marginalized populations. Participants expressed gratitude that the university and the commission are considering how to improve the representation of women in leadership. The Commission on Gender Equity believes that taking action on some of these recommendations will improve the climate for women, generally, and increase opportunities for women to serve as leaders at Western Washington University. This work furthers the university's commitment to equity and justice and, with this goal in mind, I offer this report to the Western Washington University community.

