

Introduction

Twelve months on since our first International Women's Day editorial (Butler-Henderson et al., 2021), the *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice* presents this Special Issue, which examines the leadership challenges and opportunities for women in higher education learning and teaching. While much of the content for the special issue originated in Australia, women in other countries such as the United States face problems in attempting to move into leadership positions.

Devlin (2021b) reports that university leaders in Australia are nearly three times more likely to be a man than a woman, and men hold 54 of the 74 top jobs in Australian higher education. Not only do female academics continue to be underrepresented in senior academic positions in Australia but the same holds true internationally (Sharafizad et al., 2021).

In addition, there is a trend for women to occupy leadership roles related to teaching and learning or engagement, compared to research and development or administration. Further, research highlights the trend for women to engage in internal leadership roles compared to men, who are more likely to engage in industry engagement leadership roles (Allen et al., 2021). The proportion of women awarded nationally competitive research funding is also disproportionate (ARC, 2020; Oliveria et al., 2019), which leads to fewer scholarly outputs (such as journal articles or conference presentations). There is an obvious concern among female academics to progress into leadership roles, whilst shifts are occurring, they are painfully slow.

The pandemic due to coronavirus (COVID-19) has exacerbated challenges for women. Women working from home during lockdowns faced several new demands, such as home schooling and increased carer responsibilities (Walters and Bam, 2021). A national study in South Africa found the increasing demands of academic work alongside the domestic challenges created situations many reported as "overwhelming" and "unbearable". This created competing roles, resulting in a sense of guilt. The pandemic had far reaching impacts on the work of scientist, many who could not continue their work in their home environment. Nearly nine in ten (88 percent) of scientists reported lab work disruptions due to COVID-19 (Michalehko et al., 2021). 34 percent of female scientist reported carer and home responsibilities further disrupted their return to scientific work, compared to 21 percent of men. Half reported the inability to concentrate, had unexpected complications to manage in their home environment, or had limited space to work from home.

To improve the institutional performance, our argument is there are numerous benefits and advantages to having diversity in leadership structure. The challenge is to identify the models and strategies required to build capacity in women to progress into leadership roles. This Special Issue provides insights into the current challenges women are facing to advance their careers and brings together some well-conceived models and strategies to build leadership capacity in women.

Low number of women in leadership roles

A review by Allen et al. (2021) indicates there is a gender disparity in the academic leadership environment in Australia. For example, only 28 percent of vice chancellors in Australia are women (Butler-Henderson et al., 2021). Turning our attention to the United States, while women have earned the majority of doctoral degrees over the past 15 years, only 27 percent of tenured faculty are women (Silbert et al., 2022). Additionally, they hold only 39 percent of the academic dean appointments, 38 percent of provosts, 22 percent of presidents and 10 percent of system presidents

at these leading institutions. While five percent of the schools have had three or more women presidents, fully 46 percent have never had a woman president.

Devlin, through her invited Commentary, highlights the gender disparities in academia across Australian universities. Devlin has received multiple responses to her recently published book *Beating the Odds: A practical guide to navigating sexism in Australian universities* (Devlin, 2021a), which formed the essence of her Commentary. Her book was released at a time of heightened awareness, dialogue and emotions around the way women are treated in highly sexist workplaces across Australia.

Emeritus Professor H.Y. Izan is a retired Business School professor from the University of Western Australia, who led and fostered excellence in the finance profession. **Chapple** presents an analysis of Izan's impact on the women professoriate in finance. Her journey, including achievements and challenges, has led the way for female professors in the years since. However, Chapple reflects that only 18 female professors have been appointed in finance since Izan.

Livesay et al. turn the spotlight on nursing academics in the 37 Australian universities that offer nursing education. A careful reading of institutional data reveals that there has been a steady decrease of nursing academics and that although most women in the healthcare and nursing academic workforce are women, they are a minority presence in leadership roles. The authors argue that male nursing academics are more visible in academia precisely because of their numerical scarcity and consequently there appears to be a glass escalator in place that assists men into leadership roles.

Challenges women are facing

The intersection between gender and race, culture, religion, and/or age present further barriers for women to leadership opportunities and success (Abalkhail, 2017; Bagguley & Hussain, 2014; Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

Aiston examines the leadership challenges for women within the Hong Kong academy, including the intersection of gender, ethnicity, culture and age. The study reports gender inequality is not positioned as a 'woman's problem' and women's leadership programs need to shift away from a "fix the women" framework, to developmentally examine what women want. Systemic change is required to address power and patriarchy barriers. The paper has transferability across global jurisdictions, as the findings are relevant for Asian higher education.

Singh explores the leadership experiences of seven international women academics in Australian universities. Using a case study methodology, Singh is able to provide a deeper insight into the challenges and opportunities afforded to these women, a relatively unexplored area. She focuses on their intersectionality, defined by their gender and migrant status. Her findings show that these women had two main challenges, the first being an interruption to their research activities because of taking on leadership positions, and the second the administrative overload due to an unfamiliarity with Australian university procedures, policies and processes.

Watson's examination of Australian-based female academics about their experiences since COVID-19 suggests that rapid measures are needed to support women undertaking academic careers. This paper focuses specifically on female perspectives on career progression, motivation and female academic status. The female focussed experience captured in this study provides rich insight into the additional responsibilities that COVID-19 has required by *all* academics, but additionally for women as the primary carers creating greater hardship when already constantly facing reduced gender disparity. This paper offers reflections for the Higher Education sector to continue to

integrate and support the female academic workforce and provides longer-term solutions that address gender equity for positive economic and social growth as a nation.

Livesay et al. report on the career challenges faced by nursing academics as they navigate and negotiate clinical and academic settings and call for new understandings of the role of practitioner academics. That is, academics with professional and clinical backgrounds.

Konjarski et al. report female academics are often given the task of teaching first year students, not only guiding them through curricula but helping them transition to higher education studies. The teaching load associated with this is significant, often creating hurdles to female academics' transition through the academic ranks.

Leadership development

There is a changing landscape of academic leadership with a much greater emphasis on flexibility, agility, innovation, and team-based structures. More broadly, leadership in higher education is moving towards models that focus on building capacity, as well as shared and distributed leadership.

Singh further explores the need for leadership development, suggesting that universities need to provide international women academics with more formal mentoring support structures. While the women interviewed were often provided with a local mentor it is suggested that a platform to network with other international women academics would be beneficial. This is supported by **Livesay et al.**, who note the importance of mentoring and support programs for women leaders but do reveal that there is a dearth of leadership training and opportunities in universities. It is argued that career trajectories to leadership in university settings assume a 'traditional' teaching-research pathway and less considered in the practitioner-academic.

Konjarski et al. describe an initiative that was adopted to support women involved in teaching in a First Year College at an Australian university. Through an in-depth study of participants in the initiative, the authors explore the impact of workshops and events that had been designed by female academics at different stages of their careers to help teaching-focused female academics advance their career aspirations. The authors report on how the initiative served as a community of practice, improving collegiality, and empowering participants to drive change around the status of teaching focused careers, thus enhancing career and leadership opportunities for the women.

Tangalakis in their paper highlight the Women in First Year (WiFY) initiative to support women in a multi-disciplinary First Year College in an Australian university, with a focus on teaching and learning. This initiative improves collegiality, empowers change, and enhances career and leadership opportunities. Built on the overarching aim of *women leading women*, it provides peer support and fosters a culture of advancement.

Ryan and Goldingay propose inclusive leadership practices using engaged pedagogy that promote the importance of power sharing. This including mutual recognition and full participation by teams to promote learning communities. They suggest taking a holistic approach to value a variety of experiences, knowledges, and aspirations that different team members bring.

Enhancing performance

We claim that having women in learning and teaching leadership positions in universities will enhance performance. **Devlin** provides ideas for women and men to support women to secure leadership roles. Australia is often referred to as a 'lucky country', which can further be enriched through fostering its rich and diverse female academic community into well-supported future leadership roles, as explored by **Watson**.

This under-representation of women in leadership roles in higher education is also examined by **Harvey and Jones**. Their paper centres on women's reticence to claim leadership, noting that the ways women typically contribute to such leadership aligns with a distributed leadership approach. The authors acknowledge the challenges of identifying and acknowledging one's particular leadership contributions among those of others in such an approach. The authors share evidence-based strategies that have supported women to self-acknowledge their leadership contributions, providing useful guidance for female academics in a range of circumstances and roles.

Conclusion

In this Special Issue **Harvey and Jones** state, "It is time for women academics to accept the challenge – to rightfully claim their leadership" (n.p.). We recognise the many women who have challenged the system, and those whose efforts have been thwarted. We encourage women and men, in power sharing, to work together to break down the barriers of gender, race, culture, and religion, so that our current and next generation of female academics can rightfully claim their leadership. This Special Issue is an important step to bring to light these challenges for women and the changes required to grow and support women in leadership in higher education teaching and learning.

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