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# WSLDI: Women Staff Leadership Development Institute

## Flora Stone Mather Center for Women Research Brief Series

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## Women Staff in Higher Education

Although women make up the majority of staff in higher education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021), they must overcome structural and personal barriers that their male counterparts do not have to face (Toutkoushian, 2000). Women staff in higher education face wage disparities, implicit biases, uneven workloads, and are more likely to fall victim to unfair hiring/promotion practices (Ho, 2021). A recent study showed that women employees in Higher Education were not satisfied with their career development and social adjustment (Parveen et al., 2021). These hurdles have been proven to hinder the career advancement of women staff in higher education. Women hold the least senior administrative positions and are the lowest paid (Whitford, 2020). These disparities highlight a need to equip women staff members on campuses with the tools they need to lead authentically. Universities across the country have implemented women's leadership development programs in an effort to support women staff members as they pursue their career goals. Studies show that to effectively develop women leaders in higher education, leadership programs should focus on the personal, interpersonal, and organizational levels. They should also emphasize relationship-building as a central outcome in the curriculum, teaching methods and evaluation (Selzer et al., 2017). Ely, Ibarra, and Kolb (2011) view leadership development as identity work and propose that successful women's leadership programs should consider topics in light of gender bias, support women's identity work, and focus on leadership purpose. Given these findings, the Flora Stone Mather Center for Women at Case Western Reserve University launched a Women's Staff Leadership Development Institute to help women staff members excel in their careers.

## Women Staff Leadership Development Institute

The Flora Stone Mather Center for Women (Mather Center) at Case Western Reserve University is a community space and a social innovator empowering women and advancing gender equity through research-informed action. The Mather Center developed the Women Staff Leadership Institute (WSLDI) in 2008 as a program to equip women staff members with the tools they needed to lead. WSLDI was developed by CWRU employees who had previously attended the HERS (Higher Education Resources Service) Leadership Institute (HLI) and benefitted greatly from the training. HLI was expensive, however, and CWRU would only be able to fund one attendee per year, which would likely prohibit attendance by the most underserved women staff. The HLI alumnae decided to take advantage of existing resources on campus through the Weatherhead Executive Education program to develop their own version of HLI. Inspired by Weatherhead, the alumnae added coaching along with elements of the HLI programming, and WSLDI was born.

The cohort and alumnae connections of WSLDI persist, as the creators identified strong participants among the early cohorts and brought them on as board members and coaches for future cohorts. Today, the program continues to attract trainers and coaches from the graduates, and alumnae work with campus partners to select the next cohort among the applications received each year. As described below, the cohort experience is one of WSLDI's biggest benefits, and this persists well beyond their graduation day, as evidenced by their continued enthusiasm and support for the program in new roles.

Today, WSLDI is a year-long eighty-hour program offering women-identified staff an opportunity to enhance and energize leadership and career development skills through education, coaching, and the building of professional networks. WSLDI participants work to grow their confidence when making effective career decisions and generating positive outcomes in relation to career advancement goals. They achieve this by developing a deeper awareness of themselves as a leader, a deeper awareness of the diverse needs of others in leading, a greater understanding of the impact of institutional context, and an ethic of service as a change agent within higher education. Upon completion of the program, participants will have received a 360 evaluation, a learning style assessment, a career development plan, updated professional documents, and an executive leadership certificate.

## WSLDI Participant Demographics

The purpose of WSLDI is to provide a university resource and support system for professional staff seeking to further their personal and professional career development. The program is meant to complement the staff development offerings already provided by other departments at the University. Since inception, WSLDI has had 155 women-identified staff members complete the program (through the 2021-2022 cohort). These staff members came from over 60 departments, and were at various levels in their career journey. As of August 2022, 103 were still employed by CWRU, and included in demographic data.[1] Of these participants, 71% identified as white, 12% identified as Black or African-American, 3% as Asian/Asian-American, 1% identified as Latinx, and 1% were multiracial/ethnic. No women who identified as Native American or Alaska Native have participated in WSLDI that we are aware of. Table 1 shows this breakdown, as well as the proportion of women staff at CWRU and nationally that each group represents, to assess how WSLDI compares in representation. The table also shows the proportion of all staff, regardless of gender, that each group represents.[2]

Asian women are under-represented in WSLDI compared to the percentage of CWRU and national women staff[3] they make up; they are overrepresented as a portion of CWRU staff compared to national. Black women were represented in the program at approximately the same level as the national demographic of women staff, but underrepresented compared to their percentage of CWRU staff. Black women are also overrepresented on CWRU staff compared with the national percentage. Latina women are significantly underrepresented in WSLDI compared to their CWRU and national percentages, but they are represented at about the same rate at CWRU as they are nationally. White women were overrepresented compared to the national percent and the CWRU percent, but are represented in the same percent at CWRU as they are nationally. Finally, multiracial/ethnic women make up a very small percent of WSLDI, as well as CWRU and national women staff; they are represented at CWRU at about the same percent as national women staff.

| Category              | Program %(a) | CWRU Women Staff % | CWRU Staff % | National Women Staff % | National Staff % |
|-----------------------|--------------|--------------------|--------------|------------------------|------------------|
| All Women             | --           | --                 | 59%          | --                     | 60%              |
| Asian Women           | 3%           | 11%                | 6%           | 6%                     | 4%               |
| Black Women           | 12%          | 22%                | 13%          | 13%                    | 8%               |
| Latina Women          | 1%           | 11%                | 2%           | 12%                    | 7%               |
| Native American Women | --           | >1%                | >1%          | >1%                    | >1%              |
| White Women           | 71%          | 61%                | 36%          | 61%                    | 37%              |
| Multiracial Women     | 1%           | >1%                | >1%          | 2%                     | 1%               |

Source: CWRU Office of Institutional Research; U.S. Department of Education IPEDS Human Resources Survey 2021-22. a: Totals do not add to 100% due to rounding; 13 participants (13%) are missing or unknown.

[1] Provided in aggregate by the Office of Institutional Research; did not specify international staff separate from their US-recognized racial/ethnic category.

[2] Group names in table are abbreviated for space

[3] Defined as all full-time, non-instructional staff on IPEDS

To explore additional impacts of the WSLDI program and learn more about our participants, the Mather Center launched a retrospective survey. We received 39 responses, which was sent to all 155 alumna of the WSLDI program. Thirty-seven participants (95%) identified as cisgender women, 2 (5%) preferred not to respond. Thirty-three (85%) participants were white, and 6 participants (15%) were Black/African-American. Participants did not report any other racial/ethnic identities. The data from this follow up survey is used to present the program implications in this brief.

## Program Impacts

### *Changes In Employment*

Of the 39 participants, 28 responded to questions about any changes in current job status since WSLDI. Sixteen participants (57%) reported a new position that was a step-up. Two other participants reported multiple job changes since completing the program. One made a lateral move followed by a step-up, and the other reports that they have changed several times, have significantly increased their salary, and feel deeply fulfilled by the work in their current role. Participants also reported other changes in their career after WSLDI. Eleven participants (39%) reported a promotion. Another 11 reported a new leadership role within the university and 3 reported a leadership role in a professional organization. Seven participants (25%) reported a leadership role elsewhere, including roles at another university, work in a local non-profit, and the Staff Advisory Council (SAC) on campus. Nine participants (32%) reported other forms of promotion or leadership, including taking on new responsibilities in their existing role in pursuit of promotion and mentorship roles. Twelve participants (43%) are now supervising more people than they were prior to the program. Fourteen participants have pursued additional degrees or certificates since completing the program, including Master's degrees and PhDs, coaching certificates, and DEI certifications.

### *Psychological and Skill-Based Improvements*

We asked participants 25 questions regarding these psychological/cognitive outcomes, skills, and their overall opinions of the programs, based on the target program outcomes, and asked them to rate their agreement on a scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). The majority of participants said they “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with all the statements, indicating positive change as a result of the program. Participants reported improvements in their confidence in their leadership skills, awareness of issues regarding diversity and institutions, and ability assess their own skills and needs and the needs of others.

All evaluation measures were summed into one total evaluation score, with a possible score from 25 (the absolute lowest, strongly disagreeing with all elements) to 100 (the highest possible, strongly agreeing with all elements). This measure was then centered, so it ranged from 0-75. Participants who were missing on all questions were excluded from the total score. The average score is around 45, so largely positive (responding “agree” to all statements would provide a score of 50).

### *Successful Elements*

One of the most successful elements of the program was the 360° feedback review. Participants felt they received good feedback which helped them identify areas for improvement, while also building confidence in the areas in which they were doing well. Below are two selected quotes from their responses:

*“This survey helped solidify my thoughts on areas where I excelled and needed some improvement.”*

*“While hesitant to receive the feedback at first, it gave me more confidence. I realized I had to be more confident in myself, and the areas I needed to work on.”*

Many participants also responded well to the learning styles assessment. Not only did participants feel it helped them understand themselves better, but they also felt it helped them work better with their teams through acknowledging the different learning styles of others.

*“This was one of the most valuable aspects for me. I think about this all the time in relation to how I function, but also being constantly aware that other people have different learning styles and approach things in different ways.”*

WSLDI participants have said that sessions have helped them to have a better understanding of values identification, risk-taking, and managing change through managing up as part of career management. Participants have also stated that the career visioning session made them feel “very enlightened,” “optimistic about moving forward,” “less alone,” “hopeful,” and “more connected with my cohort.” Participants shared that the session made them feel more clearly about their past, present, and future, and that they appreciated the level of comfort and support that was provided. Program findings also showed that participants had a better understanding of where they are on their leadership journey, how to view leadership as a mindset and not a position, and learned some tangible ways they can advance their leadership mindset.

A past WSLDI participant stated the following about her experience in the WSLDI program:

*“The WSLDI program gave me the opportunity to create a career plan that really focused on what I hope to accomplish as a leader here on campus. By providing tools like the ECSI and the Kolb Learning Styles Inventory, I have been able to pinpoint my strengths and areas of needed improvement. By identifying and focusing on these areas, I believe that I’ll be able to better navigate my career and how I plan to show up as a professional in the world.”*

#### *The Importance of the Cohort*

The ability to be part of a cohort of other women staff was both a significant draw for initial applications to the program, and one of the most widely cited favorite parts. When asked why they chose to apply to WSLDI, one participant told us:

*“I wanted the cohort feel. To meet other women who were looking for professional support.”*

Following completion of the program, many participants emphasized the importance of the cohort, and it was one of the things most missed during the year of virtual meetings because of Covid-19.

*“The most influential part of the program [was] our cohort connections.”*

*“I really loved the cohort model of learning alongside other women at the university.”*



WSLDI Cohort 2021-2022



## Future Implications

The Mather Center is dedicated to effectively evaluating the WSLDI program for continuous improvement. Pre- and post-evaluations have been implemented to measure the change in participants' career decision-making efficacy and self-efficacy. Recommendations from these evaluations are used to guide improvements in future iterations of the program.

Many studies highlight the even larger disparities that women with intersecting identities face (e.g. Byrd et al., 2019; Toutkoushian et al., 2007), so it is also a goal to engage more women of color in the program. It is significant to note that while women are only slightly over half of the percent of staff overall, there are also concentrations by gender within specific occupations. For example, at CWRU, nearly ten times as many women as men serve in office and administrative support occupations, while thirteen times as many men as women work in natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations. Similarly, there are twice as many Black/African-American employees in service occupations as white employees (regardless of gender); this is in fact the only occupational category in which Black employees outnumber white employees. Thus, it is important as we move forward, when considering, how to make sure our programming feels beneficial to those working in a variety of settings, and not only white-collar employees.

The Mather Center would also like to make an effort to not only empower women leaders on campus, but also work to ensure that systemic barriers on campus are removed so that women can flourish. Researchers suggest that to create an environment that fosters a sense of belonging in women employees, companies need to recognize women leaders who are driving progress and do the cultural work required to create a workplace where all women are valued (Burns et al., 2021). Companies can also put practices in place that ensure promotions are equitable, track and ensure inclusive hiring practices, and have accountability systems in place to hold leadership accountable (Burns et al., 2021). Senior level sponsorship and high employee engagement has also been found to create more inclusive environments where women can thrive. At an institutional level, the Mather Center would like to continue to advocate for policy change and develop gender equity trainings to help educate the campus community on their role in creating inclusive space for women to succeed.

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