



INSTITUTIONAL CULTURES and HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERSHIP: WHERE ARE THE WOMEN?"

**Report on a Conference held at the University of Cape Town
27 March and 28 March 2008**

27 March 2008

OPENING SESSION

Welcome: Dr Lesley Shackleton:

Dr Shackleton officially opened the conference by welcoming delegates and reading conference greetings from Dr Judith White, President of HERS America and Dr Susan Harwood, Programme Director, WEXDEV in Australia.

The conference had been convened to explore how institutional cultures affected the paucity of women in higher education leadership. Dr Shackleton clarified that although institutional culture impacted on a broad range of issues including class and race, the focus of this particular conference was gender.

Opening Addresses

Two speakers, *Dr Mamphela Ramphele* and *Prof Lidia Brito*, spoke to the topic of diversity in leadership in higher education in South and Southern Africa. The issues around leadership, institutional cultures and the gender-based power constructs that challenge higher education today are not peculiar to universities in Southern Africa, some of which have, in addition, also been exposed to armed conflict, disease and natural disasters.

Both speakers noted that universities, as places of learning and knowledge production, play key roles in providing critical intellectual leadership to guide the transformation both of themselves and the broader society. Leaders of the future are educated in the universities of today.

South African higher education institutions strive to be non-sexist and non-racist. In order to achieve this Dr Ramphele challenged universities to address institutional cultures which are awash with gender-based power constructs that contribute towards keeping women out of higher education leadership. Whilst accepting that employment equity legislation provides a good framework to eliminate racism and sexism from society, she highlighted how we are often blind to the subtler forms of discrimination which pervade our institutional cultures.

Dr Ramphele concluded that all must acknowledge that our society has a strong sexist, racist and authoritarian culture. She called for the redefinition of power away from the control

model to an enabling model. Good leadership seen in this context then becomes empowering for all to rise to their full potential for the greater good of the institution and society as a whole. Lastly she called on all those present to move beyond talking about these issues and to take action.

Prof Brito pointed out that universities often state their commitment to equity in their vision and mission, but continue to measure their success in terms of numbers. This results in a failure to understand how the subtle forms of discrimination in institutional cultures create barriers to women's success. She called on higher education institutions not to ignore the wealth of women leadership available in their institutions and cautioned that failure to do so would lead to institutions missing out on at least 50% of the skills needed. Prof Brito emphasized that it is not only the task of university management or broader society to effect change, but that women themselves have a critical role to play. It is the responsibility of all women to amplify their voices, to show their faces, and to support one another.

SESSION 1: THE PIPELINE:

Recruitment and retention of women postgraduate students and women staff at universities.

Prof Kathy Driver, Prof Rocky Ralebipi-Simela and Prof Cheryl de la Rey
Chair: Prof Magda Fourie

Professor Driver and Professor Ralebipi-Simela addressed the topic of postgraduate women students. Both speakers referred to the decrease in the proportion of women post-graduate students especially at the Doctoral level. Literature has shown that there are many reasons for this, such as the work-life balance and disempowering institutional cultures. Although many South African higher education institutions have mission statements, equity plans and targets, equity officers and resources to address the issues of recruitment, retention and success of black and female students in general, there appears to be little that specifically targets postgraduate women. The reason for this could be that for most institutions, recruitment and retention of diverse staff are not considered to be key performance indicators.

Prof Ralebipi-Simela listed positive institutional factors promoting success in postgraduate studies, including targeted admission, a positive study environment and financial aid. She concluded that the multifaceted nature of obstacles to women's career success necessitates similarly complex and targeted interventions.

Prof Driver aimed focused on the retention and development of junior researchers. In order to encourage more women to participate in postgraduate studies and to retain them in the institution there needed to be well-structured postdoctoral programmes for female academics with clear objectives and deliverables and sufficient mentoring and networking opportunities. She offered some personal perspectives from her career, which included learning to say no and to "never complain, never explain".

Prof Cheryl de la Rey's presentation focused on the recruitment and retention of women staff. Women in academe frequently use metaphors such as: "a battle to be fought", "a chilly climate" or a "glass ceiling" to describe their work experiences. Prof de la Rey suggested that metaphors are useful tools to examine and describe institutional cultures. Research done on gender discrimination and institutional cultures had confirmed that women do reach a 'glass ceiling'. Although legislation and policies address the issue of gender equity in the work place, implementation is a problem and women report gender discrimination even after there have been policy changes. This is the result of a lack of understanding of the complexity of gender discrimination in institutions, and has been termed the 'opaqueness' of the glass

ceiling. An example is the vagueness of 'merit' as a criterion for selection of staff. If understandings of good leadership are based on constructs of masculinity, this influences understanding of merit. She acknowledged that much research had already been conducted about the reasons for women's continued absence in senior leadership positions. Much was known at the individual, institutional and societal levels but that it was still not clear how the intersection of these variables impacted on career advancement. Prof de la Rey called for more systematic research on factors affecting retention such as masculinities in leadership, institutional and organizational barriers, and the influences of society's gendered cultures.

She concluded by posing four challenges to all involved in the struggle for gender equity, namely to unravel the complex and subtle biases and discriminations; to ensure transparency in procedures; to understand minimum requirements; and to ensure clearly defined and articulated criteria that are appropriate for higher education institutions.

SESSION 2: SOCIAL JUSTICE

Speakers: Prof Cheryl Potgieter and Prof Jonathan Jansen

Chair: Dr Edna Kunjoku

The two speakers in this session examined the intersection of race and gender in the academic environment, and the issue of gendered institutional cultures and how these pervade academic labour policies and practices.

Prof Cheryl Potgieter said that the intersection of race and gender in South African higher education institutions remains a bad news story as illustrated by the fact that there are very few women, black or white, who occupy leadership positions in top management. There has been little change in the experiences of black women who are potential leaders in academia. She said that recent theorizing on the intersection of race and gender has focused on the negative experiences of black women in the hostile white academic environment, and that there is a lack of engagement by white women and men with the race and gender issues of transformation. University management (which she read as white and male) often talks publicly about making the university an inclusive space, but this is seldom based on a social justice framework. Prof Potgieter called for more nuanced analyses of the gendered and racialised higher education environment and suggested that research should focus on the non-traditional owners of power, for example faculty appointment committees and faculty administrators. She challenged universities to move beyond mere compliance to changing attitudes and cultures. Women leave higher education because of their negative experiences of institutional culture. Prof Potgieter concluded that if universities are serious about retaining women staff, they should not dismiss black women's experiences of racialised knowledge, sexist stereotypes and the politics of pedagogy.

Prof Jansen argued that achieving equity is primarily a political problem. The challenge lies not in any lack of policy or lack of implementation but rather in the practice of equity. He referred to the recent racist and sexist incident at the University of the Free State. The publicity around this incident focused on race alone illustrating how easy it is to overlook the gender element. He believed that the male dimension to the oppressive cultures in our universities needs to be named.

He drew attention to the lack of adequate strategies to identify, nurture and grow women leadership which results in the pool of women remaining small. Prof Jansen cautioned that desperation to achieve gender and race equity can result in serious errors in terms of appointments.. Institutions should not settle for less than outstanding appointments. One has to accept that gender equity will be hard to achieve and that strategies will have to be sharpened in order to achieve results. Gender/race equity is not in itself the goal but must

form part of transformation of knowledge. It is not enough to appoint blacks or women, what must change is the way people think about race and gender in order to effect real change.

Prof Jansen concluded by saying that the commitment of University leadership is the single most important factor to ensure race and gender equity in our institutions. The solution does not lie in redefining the selection criteria but in changing the minds and perceptions of people making the appointments – in this the role of heads of departments is particularly important. The duty of all is to express outrage and apply pressure when committees show disdain for applicants based on race and gender.

SESSION 3: LEVERS FOR CHANGE

The role of national and institutional policies and higher education organizations in bringing more women into higher education leadership positions.

Panelists: Dr Molapo Qhobela, Dr Theuns Eloff and Dr Lis Lange

Chair: Dr Edna Kunjoku

Dr Qhobela reiterated that the South African government is sincerely committed to the issue of gender equity. He recognised that progress towards equity in higher education has been slow, and felt that the problem does not lie with lack of policy, but whether it is integrated into decision-making. In terms of staff composition, the Department of Education (DoE) has initiatives to target women researchers through donor funding and focusing on scarce skills. However the equity challenge remains and it will be the institutional leaders who will effect most change. He said that the DoE is keen to hear what the education sector feels the department can do differently in order to help the process along without interfering with the autonomy of institutions.

Higher Education South Africa (HESA) is the united voice for 23 public universities. It has three key roles: advocacy, sector support and strategic research. *Dr Eloff* described the 2005 Women in Higher Education Executive Leadership (WHEEL) programme that offered leadership and management development opportunities to 20 women in senior positions and explored possible future interventions by HESA. Among these were HESA becoming a conduit for the members' wishes by putting pressure on Vice Chancellors and senior managers; establishing a Community of Practice of those who work in the development of women in universities; developing a set of best practices; identifying aspects of institutional culture that act as barriers to women; liaising with HERS-SA in offering workshops for women managers; facilitating bringing equity issues before Councils and other levels of senior management; and cooperating with the Department of Education to ensure a better flow of information about women managers.

The responsibilities of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) centre around providing advice to the Minister of Education and monitoring change within the system through compliance with policies and quality assurance criteria. *Dr Lis Lange* stated that the CHE is often faced with equity, and particularly gender equity in the areas of monitoring and quality assurance.

In monitoring the CHE has made gender a dimension of its statistical analysis and can thus map the gender profiles of institutions, particularly at the staff level. Research has been carried out on the impact of institutional culture on student success and this showed that the gendered culture significantly influences the day-to-day life of women students. However, she felt that the institutional audits came closest to the raw and difficult aspects of equity. The HEQC's notion of equity focused on previously marginalized groups, especially women and black students and staff, and went beyond increasing numerical access to trying to unpack the processes, understandings and behaviours hidden behind the numbers. The

audits attempt to assess transformation success and examine different strategies to put women into positions and then support them. She believed that it would be valuable to undertake a more comprehensive analysis of the gender outcomes from individual institutional audits to gain a system-wide picture. She called for a qualitative approach to quantitative data.

In reflecting on the specific issue of equity she agreed that gender is not been emphasized as much as race. For the CHE and the HEQC the point of entry to equity had been race and not gender. A further challenge for the HEQC centred around the conceptual link between equity and quality, and the need to recognize that not all institutions are the same.

Panel discussion on best practice: Highlighting examples of successful levers for change

Panelists: Dr Margaret Orr, Dr Lesley Shackleton, Ms Reena Budree, Ms Denise Miller, Ms Dorothy Garland

Chair: Prof Denise Zinn

Wits WonderWoman programme: Dr Margaret Orr

Due to unforeseen circumstances at the last minute Dr Orr was not able to attend the conference. She tendered her apology and made a copy of her presentation available. See the HERS-SA website at www.hers-sa.org.za

HERS –SA: Dr Lesley Shackleton

HERS-SA is a managed network that aims to improve the gender equity amongst the leadership in higher education. Its activities include the annual HERS-SA ACADEMY, lobbying, research, networking, and the provision of focused workshops on demand. Since HERS-SA started operating in 2000, it has provided professional development for over 900 women across South Africa and from other African countries. A copy of the presentation is available on the HERS-SA website at www.hers-sa.org.za

University of KwaZulu-Natal: Reena Budree:

The University of KwaZulu Natal has several externally funded programmes aimed at the development of women students and staff. These include:

- Lectureships
- Graduate scholarships
- WOSA - for women in science, agriculture and engineering
- Teaching relief for blacks and women on cusp of promotion. Also black/women Masters and PhD students being appointed as relief lecturers
- Women in leadership leverage (WILL)
- LEAP Academy

A copy of the presentation is available on the HERS-SA website at www.hers-sa.org.za

HESA: Denise Miller:

Ms Miller gave an overview of the Women in Higher Education Executive Leadership (WHEEL) programme and Tertiary Education Linkages Programme (TELP) both of which have recently come to an end. She highlighted the problem of donor-funded programmes and their continuation once the funding ceases. One of the challenges is to find out how to institutionalize the programmes to allow them to become part of the core business of the institutions. Both programmes were well documented so the data exists about successes and failures. Web address for HESA: www.hesa.org.za

Association of Commonwealth Universities: Dorothy Garland:

“Whispers of change” which is about to be published is the third in a series of publications by the Association of Commonwealth Universities addressing gender equity in leadership in Commonwealth higher education institutions. Across the Commonwealth, women continue to be significantly under represented in leadership positions, with Australia being the country with the highest proportion of women leaders. Ms Garland said that in response these dismal statistics the Association of Commonwealth Universities had undertaken various initiatives and developed teaching modules which are adaptable for different countries. It had also collaborated with University of London to support graduates in leadership training and development. She believed that the most valuable of these interventions are the user-friendly training modules for women on leadership. She congratulated South Africa on this Conference and bringing a focus onto the issue of diversity and equity in higher education leadership.

A copy of the presentation is available on the HERS-SA website at www.hers-sa.org.za.
The ACU web address: www.acu.ac.uk

28 March 2008

SESSION 4: THE CHALLENGE

Speaker: Dr Mala Singh

Chair: Prof Martin Hall

The challenge to South African higher education – How do we facilitate the participation of more women in higher education leadership

Dr Singh provided an overview of the key issues raised during the first day of the conference. She contextualised the issues raised and synthesized the key understandings from the presentations to be:

- the need for both quantitative data gathering and qualitative analyses around gender and cultures
- an interpretation of leadership which included all levels and areas within universities from students to staff union structures and academic leadership, and which re-conceptualized leadership beyond current masculine models
- the need for a transformation of institution cultures which shifted values, cultural conceptions, cognitive understandings, social relations, and expectations and perceptions of women
- the potential of higher educational institutions to break patterns of social reproduction in society as they educate new generations.

These understandings pointed to the need for a conceptual re-thinking of gender equity and transformative leadership. Mobilization and a political confronting of power relations was required, as well as interventions to build women’s confidence and capabilities. Identities needed redefinition as did role assignments and images of women’s work. These called for re-socialization of both men and women. New models of organizational operation were required which engendered policies and practices. Curriculum reform should be guided by feminist scholarship, and strategic interventions were required to promote the synergies of equity and excellence.

Dr Singh highlighted the actions that had been suggested during the previous day. These centred around the need for more research to provide information for progressive interventions, and the need to develop strategies and good practices to increase numbers and transform institutional cultures. She emphasized the importance of sustainability and of documenting initiatives, and the need for monitoring and coordination. Different agencies had different responsibilities. There needed to be coordination across government departments, and the CHE, HESA and different structures and groupings within individual organizations also had roles and responsibilities.

She concluded her analysis by urging delegates to question what universities are educating for and to explore what their role in our society should be.

Dr Singh's presentation is attached.

Consideration of Conference Declaration and Action Plan

A draft Conference Declaration which had been prepared by the Conference Steering Group was circulated. Delegates were encouraged to ask questions, provide comment and offer suggestions for improvement of the draft. A lively discussion ensued in which a number of suggestions were put forward. The conference delegates then gave a mandate to the Steering Group to amend the draft taking into account the suggestions and discussion. It was agreed that this final version would be presented to the Minister of Education, and representatives of the HESA and CHE at the end of the Conference to take back to their respective organizations for consideration and further action. A copy of the final Conference Declaration is attached as Annexure 1.

A discussion to outline the way forward then took place. Among the suggested actions were:

- Improvement of recruitment and selection procedures to strive for the elimination of cultural biases and gendered merit criteria.
- Wide dissemination of the conference papers and outcomes (papers on websites, media, circulation of the Declaration to all universities and regional consortia, etc).
- Expanding discussion around leadership development for women beyond the executive layers to include students (HESA and DoE to action).
- Stimulating research into gendered institutional cultures by obtaining dedicated funding from the Department of Education, the NRF and other relevant organizations.
- Revisiting policies to ensure that gender is placed centrally in all policies.
- HESA to ensure that the Declaration resulting from the Conference is put onto its Agenda for action.
- Continue the ground-breaking collaboration between the Department of Education, the CHE, HESA and independent non-profit organizations such as HERS-SA as reflected on the Conference Steering Group to ensure progress in transforming higher education leadership.
- Encouraging institutions to utilize the resources available in Gender Studies units and departments in institutions.
- HESA to consider establishing a Community of Practice around diversity in Leadership in higher education, with a specific focus on gender.
- Requiring institutions to report annually on gender equity at leadership levels to the Department of Education and to their Councils.

Closing address: Hon Minister Naledi Pandor

The Minister addressed three main issues, namely what is expected from our universities, what is transformation and a message for current and future women leaders in higher education.

The Minister said that although we expect universities to be places of innovative change and dynamic transformation, 14 years into the new democracy universities have not changed that much. The same old practices and curriculums are still in place, despite regular debates about transformation, discrimination and exclusion. Transforming universities should embed non-racism, non-sexism and democracy in all its practices. Universities should be about personal growth, intellectual maturity and an introduction to a world beyond our borders. Institutions should be based on the fundamental belief in democratic values and practices.

She called on women leaders in higher education not to emulate current leaders but show courage and give attention to the transformation agenda in a way that effect real change.

Signing of Declaration and end of Conference

Prior to reading the final Conference Declaration to the delegates Dr Shackleton explained that a similar declaration of intent had been accepted by universities in Australia some 10 years ago. This had started a process that had resulted in Australia having the highest proportion of women in higher education leadership in the world. She hoped that this Conference had started a similar process towards diversity and equity. She requested that conference accept the Declaration. This was done.

She then called upon the representatives of the different agencies to sign receipt of the Declaration, and asked them to take it back to their organizations for consideration, adoption and action. Minister Pandor, Dr Lis Lange (on behalf of the CHE) and Prof Rachel Gumbi (on behalf of HESA) signed the Conference Declaration.

In concluding the Conference Ms Nasima Badsha thanked all involved: the Steering Group, speakers, chairs, panel participants, delegates, and sponsors including the CHE, HESA and DoE and the EDTP Seta. Prof Ndebele, Vice Chancellor of the University of Cape Town, was thanked for use of the facilities at University of Cape Town. Appreciation was expressed to the Minister for supporting the Conference and making time to present her address.

Annexure 1

DECLARATION ON WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERSHIP

Preamble

This Declaration is addressed to government, higher education institutions, educational and research establishments and organisations and individuals who are responsible for ensuring equity in higher education. The Declaration complements existing charters and regulations regarding gender equity. The Declaration calls for action to improve gender equity in academic, administrative and executive leadership in higher education at all levels.

We acknowledge that significant progress has been made to promote gender and race equity in higher education in relation to student access. However, we are concerned that the low

representation of women at all levels of higher education leadership and the cultures in our higher education institutions continue to contribute towards perpetuating old patterns of racial and gender discrimination.

We believe that a focus on improving gender equity in higher education is one strategy, amongst others, to change prevailing institutional cultures into ones that are more inclusive and embracing of diversity.

Acknowledging that:

- Issues of gender and race cannot be viewed in isolation.
- The experience of women in higher education is not homogenous.
- Higher education is both an agent and object of change.
- There are many women qualified to take on leadership roles.
- Improving gender equity across higher education leadership will both provide positive role models and bring additional perspectives and approaches to leadership, and thus impact on institutional cultures.

We commit ourselves to improve significantly the representation of women in senior academic, administrative and executive leadership positions in all of our institutions.

We call on:

- **The Department of Education and the Council on Higher Education** to promote the importance of equity at senior leadership levels. The Department of Education should consider the setting of targets (with timeframes) for the representation of women in senior positions in higher education.

- **The CHE** to monitor progress towards gender equity in leadership positions.

- **HESA** to draw up a National Plan of Action on women in leadership in higher education which would support institutional and sector-wide initiatives towards the attainment of the targets set for the representation of women in senior positions.

- All higher education institutions to:

- a. Commit to identifying institutional barriers to equity of participation and success in leadership and undertake innovative ways of addressing these impediments.
- b. Initiate annual monitoring and reporting to university Councils on gender equity across senior positions
- c. Undertake an examination of university employment policies and their implementation, particularly as they impact on senior leadership positions.
- d. Promote and monitor fair and effective representation of women on senior committees and external bodies to which the university nominates members or representatives
- e. Facilitate women's participation in leadership development initiatives.
- f. Promote a holistic, integrated and sustained approach to gender equity.

***This declaration was drawn up at the Conference:
INSTITUTIONAL CULTURES AND HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERSHIP
WHERE ARE THE WOMEN? 28 March 2008, Cape Town***