

Women in Leadership – annual report

Presented January 2020

Background

After attending the Senior Women Academic Administrators of Canada (SWAAC) conference in Halifax in spring of 2018, several women from Brock were inspired to continue the conversation they started at the event.

One step was to participate in the Niagara Leadership Summit for Women (NLSW). In a session called *A Conversation with Brock Administrators*, Ingrid Makus, Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences (FOSS), Diane Dupont, Professor of Economics and Interim Dean of Graduate Studies, and Angela Book, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies in FOSS, described their roles and worked to dispel some deeply held assumptions about administrative leadership.

The Women in Leadership initiative was started to continue the momentum of the SWAAC conference and the NLSW panel. The initial meeting in November 2018 became the first in a series aiming to build a support network among women leaders at Brock and to recognize and foster leadership wherever it is found within the University.

Goal

The mission of Women in Leadership is to support women in formal and informal leadership positions, and to encourage the next generation of potential women leaders. To achieve this, WIL concentrated on the following goals during its first year:

1. Encourage and support Brock women to attend SWAAC;
2. Increase awareness of WIL initiative;
3. Develop a “trusted network of mentors” among women leaders at Brock; focus on connecting young women at Brock with established women leaders to encourage the next generation of women leaders;
4. Increase Brock participation in next Niagara Leadership Summit or Women.

Accomplishments

In April 2019, the SWAAC conference was held in Waterloo. Six women from Brock attended, representing an increase from the previous year.

Monthly meetings were held in 2018-19, several of which included panels of women leaders from within Brock as well as the broader Niagara community. Panelists shared their experiences with leadership, their stories of seeking and assuming leadership positions, lessons learned along the journey, and encouragement for potential leaders.

The initial meeting of Women in Leadership was promoted via personal connections, emails and conversations. Later, a Brock News story introduced WIL to the broader University

community and helped to increase awareness of the initiative. A WIL website, created with support from staff in the Faculty of Social Sciences continues to be hosted and maintained by the Faculty. The site includes background information on the initiative, brief summaries of past meetings, relevant links and resources, as well as a schedule of upcoming meetings. Email and social media, continue as primary vehicles to promote awareness of WIL meetings, as well as word of mouth. The distribution list has grown steadily and currently sits at 68 with more names and emails being added regularly in response to individual requests.

Several WIL attendees participated in the University's formal mentorship program. Participants were encouraged to share their experiences, including via a proposed panel discussion at this year's NLSW. A condensed version of the proposed presentation will be shared at the February 2020 WIL meeting. Furthermore, the idea of piloting a parallel mentorship initiative through WIL that could complement the Brock program has been proposed and will be discussed in 2020.

WIL organizers used their affiliation with FOSS to promote the Niagara Leadership Summit for Women (NLSW) 2019. FOSS communications supported the event by sending targeted invitations to FOSS members and to senior members of other Faculties, and by contributing to an article in the Brock News. WIL members established a steering committee to support and encourage Brock participation in the event and to offer guidance in the development of proposals. Dean Makus sponsored 14 students to attend. To coincide with NLSW 2019, the Brock Library created displays of notable historical women leaders using materials from the University archives. Library staff shared the story of one of those local leaders in more depth at a subsequent WIL meeting.

Next Steps

WIL meetings are scheduled to continue throughout 2020. Some activities and priorities are still being determined but are expected to include the following:

- Develop a focused mentorship program within WIL;
- Explore ways that WIL can support Indigenization, decolonization on campus;
- Develop proposals to increase presence of historical women leaders on campus;
- Offer a student internship to support research into women of historical significance to Brock University/ Niagara region;
- Promote Brock participation in SWAAC 2020;
- Seek and obtain support from senior University administration for WIL initiatives, possibly including official Brock participation in the global HeForShe movement.

Final Words

Several themes and key messages recurred throughout many discussions, including: the importance of "finding your tribe," a group of trusted allies to whom you can turn for support; the importance of formal and informal mentorship; the need for women to trust in their own skills and abilities; and the value of teamwork. WIL aims to support each of these themes.