A Career Advancement Program for Women Administrators

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Prior to 1970, almost all administrative positions in American colleges and universities were occupied by men. Those few positions that women held usually were at the bottom of the administrative career ladder. Graham (1973), for example, noted that no major coeducational university had a woman president. Thus, higher education administration has been, and remains, a nontraditional career for women.

Since 1970 large private foundations and organizations in higher education have combined efforts to address the dearth of women in administration (Bernstein, 1984). Together they have offered career advancement programs, i.e., programs designed to give women additional expertise in management and career planning, as well as to provide them with a supportive network in order to obtain administrative positions with increased responsibility and/or pay. These career advancement programs have varied in length from a few days (often during the course of a year) to a month. Speizer (1984) reported that such programs have been successful in facilitating some movement of women to upper level posts such as vice presidencies and presidencies.

Unfortunately, large numbers of women in lower-level administrative positions and in faculty positions have had little or no access to
career advancement programs. This has been due largely to the scarcity of such programs and to selection preferences that favored those already committed to administrative careers and occupying higher positions. This limited access may have contributed to the fact that the vast majority of women administrators remain pocketed in entry-level positions as well as a few higher ones such as registrar, head librarian, student affairs officers, and head of units in nursing, home economics, and continuing education (Moore, 1984).

This article describes a pilot program that addressed the problem of limited access for most women administrators and faculty to career advancement programs. The Career/Leadership Development Program for Women in Higher Education Administration (CLD Program) was a response in one state by a local foundation, a university and its counselor education program, and a loosely knit network of women administrators.

Previous Programs Funded by Major Foundations

Bernstein (1984) reported that in 1970 both the Ford Foundation and Carnegie Foundation began to focus resources on the problem of underrepresentation of women in higher education leadership positions. The Danforth and Donner Foundations and Lilly Endowment later joined Ford and Carnegie in promoting women's administrative advancement. Although it is difficult to place an actual dollar amount on the support provided by these foundations, Bernstein (1984) estimated the total as more than 3 million. These grants supported a variety of programs including a. the American Council on Education's National Identification Project (ACE/NIP), b. the Institute for Educational Management (IEM) at Harvard, and c. Higher Education Resources Services (HERS). The following paragraphs summarize these programs and characteristics that tend to either include or exclude potential participants.

In 1977 ACE/NIP was established with a grant from the Carnegie Corporation. Its purpose is to identify talented women who are ready to move into senior administrative positions. In each state, women who are already in administration hold regular meetings, under the auspices of ACE/NIP, for purposes of networking. The state groups also designate the best and brightest of their members to participate in national forums on issues in higher education. The Office of Women in Higher Education reported in 1986 that 52 women who have attended national forums have become presidents.