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The topical interests [training needs] of women in K–12 and post secondary administration were quite similar. Those interested in providing professional development opportunities should be attentive to the fourteen areas of training needs indicated by the respondents [in this study].

# Topics of Interest to Women in Educational Administration

Marilyn L. Grady and Doreen Gosmire

## Topics of Interest to Women in Educational Administration

Leadership in education has long been considered a man's role; fortunately, more and more women are calling for their institutions to recognize their worth. Throughout the United States, the majority of the students enrolled in programs in educational administration are women.<sup>1</sup> Women who are certified as administrators and underemployed are a wasted resource to the education profession.<sup>2</sup> It is clear that women must serve as role models and mentors for other women.<sup>3</sup>

The struggle to gain leadership positions continues in the 1990s. A survey conducted by *The Executive Educator* and Xavier University shows that women are best represented among the ranks of elementary school principals (39.7%), followed by junior high/middle school principals (20.5%), and high school principals (12.1%). The lowest percentage (10.5) of female school administrators work as school superintendents.<sup>4</sup> In 1991 fewer than six percent of superintendents were female; so the numbers are increasing.

Female administrators in postsecondary institutions have long been a beleaguered minority. Despite affirmative action requirements of the 1970s that mandated the placement of more women in faculty and administrative positions, women are still underrepresented in postsecondary administration. Colleges and universities in the United States employed an

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average of only 1.1 senior women at the level of dean and above per institution according to the Office of Women in Higher Education.<sup>5</sup> Women tend to remain concentrated in a small number of lower-status areas that have been traditionally viewed as women's fields, such as nursing and home economics, or in support roles, such as student affairs.

Historically, employers have limited women's chances to exercise power. The majority of office firms surveyed by the U.S. Women's Bureau in 1940 barred women from positions of authority. During the next 30 years, women's share of occupations classified by the Census as managers and administrators rose slowly; from one in nine to one in six. During the 1970s, women posted unprecedented gains in management occupations, and in 1980 and 1990, respectively, they claimed 30% and 40% of the jobs the Census Bureau classified as managerial, executive and administrative.<sup>6</sup>

The evidence shows a gap between the overall gains that women have made in management and the gains that women have made in educational leadership positions. Reskin and Ross<sup>7</sup> point out that invisible barriers separate women from top jobs and genuine authority. Natale<sup>8</sup> quotes Sandra Tonnsen, an associate professor of education leadership at the University of South Carolina at Columbia: "Discrimination is subtle, but it's out there."

Why are so few gains being made? Furthermore, why do women in educational leadership lag behind the gains of women in management positions? The answers often are framed in issues and concepts such as place boundness, training and development.

Individuals at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln have been working to develop and foster women as educational leaders since 1986. Through the leadership of a faculty member, the department of educational administration has organized and sponsored an annual national conference focused on the training and development of women as educational leaders. The conference has served over 800 educators throughout the country in various ways. Grady & Bohling–Philippi examined the needs and training interests of women administrators at the K–12 and postsecondary levels. The topics investigated by Grady and Bohling–Philippi<sup>9</sup> have served as a focus for the Women in Educational Leadership Conference and other staff development efforts. However, as time has elapsed, once again the training needs of women in educational administration need to be reviewed. This study was designed to answer two specific research questions:

1. What topics—administrative skills or personal concerns—are of greatest importance to women in educational leadership positions?
2. Is there a difference in the topical interests of women administrators in K–12 education and those in postsecondary education?

## Methods

A survey instrument was developed to identify the topical interests of participants at the Women in Educational Leadership Conferences. The topics included in the instrument were derived from a review of current literature, conference evaluations, and from the survey conducted by Grady and Bohling–Philippi.<sup>10</sup>

Eight hundred individuals have attended the past annual conferences (1987–1993). Of the 800, we were able to locate 216 individuals to participate in the survey. We found that most conference attendees were no longer at the address we had on file for them. We mailed the survey to the 216 subjects during December 1993. The participants included educational leaders in K–12 and postsecondary education. Although conference participants were from the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Malaysia, only subjects from the United States were included in this study. All respondents were female.

**Table 1. Future Training Topics\***

	Total N	Total Mean	K-12 N	K-12 Mean	Higher Ed—N	Higher Ed—Mean
Conflict Resolution	206	1.534	122	1.410	84	1.714
Communication Skills	196	1.750	115	1.678	81	1.852
Use of Technology	200	1.875	118	1.907	82	1.829
Evaluation and Appraisal	203	1.892	121	1.868	82	1.927
Culture and Climate	197	1.929	116	1.922	81	1.938
Legal Issues	194	2.000	114	2.079	80	1.888
Motivation	194	2.005	114	2.026	80	1.975
Career Mobility	191	2.026	112	2.80	79	1.949
Staff Development	196	2.036	116	2.017	80	2.063
Group Techniques	196	2.082	117	2.060	79	2.114
Stress Management	195	2.129	118	2.017	77	2.286
Time Management	195	2.190	115	2.009	80	2.450
Financial Issues	194	2.237	112	2.313	82	2.134
Coping with Success	196	2.255	115	2.217	81	2.309

\*Based on Likert-type scale with 1 representing greatest interest, and 5 representing least interest.

## Results

All 216 instruments were returned. Of these instruments, 127 were completed by K-12 educational leaders and 89 were completed by postsecondary educational leaders. The surveys were analyzed using the Mann-Whitney statistical test. A significance level of .10 was identified.

The purpose of the study was to determine the topics of greatest interest to women at the K-12 and postsecondary levels and to determine whether there is a difference between the topical interests of the two groups. Fourteen topical interests were identified. These interests and their mean ratings are listed in Table 1.

The 216 respondents indicated greatest interest in the topics of conflict resolution and communication. These topics are similar to the areas of development that are requested by women who are in managerial positions in other fields.<sup>11</sup>

The Mann-Whitney U Test was used to determine whether the distributions of scores of the K-12 administrators and postsecondary administrators differed significantly from each other.<sup>12</sup> Results of the survey analysis showed a difference between the K-12 administrators and the postsecondary administrators in leadership development as a past training topic.

There were two significant differences found between K-12 and postsecondary respondents regarding topics for future training. The topics of conflict resolution and time management were viewed differently by the K-12 population and the postsecondary population. There were no other significant differences found. The results of the Mann-Whitney U Test are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

## Discussion

The findings of this study are helpful to individuals who are attempting to assist women who seek careers in educational administration. Those interested in providing professional development opportunities should be attentive to the fourteen areas of training needs indicated by the respondents (Table 1).

The findings of the study are limited due to the size of the sample. We, however, found that the topical interests of women in K-12 and postsecondary administration were quite similar. For those offering seminars for women, this information will be useful in that a program can be prepared that can meet the needs of both groups using these topics.

**Table 2. Past Training Topics**

Past Topics That Were Rated	Mann-Whitney P Value
Leadership Development	.0838*
Skill Development	.1508
Career Mobility	.3004
Networking	.7837
Personal Development	.8332

**Table 3. Future Training Topics**

Future Training Topics Rated:	Mann-Whitney P Value
Conflict Resolution	.0029*
Time Management	.0042*
Legal Issues	.1010
Financial Issues	.1384
Communication Skills	.1492
Stress Management	.1673
Career Mobility	.2076
Use of Technology	.3776
Evaluation and Appraisal	.4997
Coping with Success	.5916
Motivation	.6695
Group Techniques	.7289
Culture and Climate	.9306
Staff Development	.9728

\*Significant = .10

Universities and school districts should examine these findings in relation to the professional development and preparatory experiences they provide. The needs indicated by respondents to both the 1987 study and this study are topics and skills that can be addressed within the classroom or workshop setting. Providing more experiences in these areas will serve the profession of educational administration.

Professional development sessions that focus on administration—the job itself and the changing administrative role should be provided. These sessions would encourage female teachers to consider administration and would widen the pool of potential female candidates.

Professional development sessions should be followed by workshops for women who want to apply for administrative positions. These workshops would also be helpful in identifying women who should be encouraged to apply for administrative positions.<sup>13</sup>

Programs should be designed to give women additional expertise in management and career planning, as well as to provide them with a supportive network. Programs should be highly accessible in terms of admissions policy, cost, and sites where the programs are offered. Career advancement as well as the development of leadership skills should be emphasized. Career counseling should be part of the program as well.<sup>14</sup>

Ultimately opportunities for skill development and networking must be provided if women are to attain and succeed in administrative positions. It appears that women's interests and program needs have remained stable in recent years. The challenge is to increase the number of women participating in the programs and to strengthen the network of mentors and role models in the profession.

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