

Part I: Preliminary Information

Title: Mentorship as A Means of Female Empowerment: A Resolution to Lessen Gender Inequality on College Campuses

Abstract: The issue of gender inequality is one that is prevalent in many different aspects of our culture, yet is especially dangerous in the context of a college setting where many young adults are growing into their beliefs and self confidence. The rates of sexual assault, negative body image, and lower employment rates in female college graduates show the detrimental effects of gender inequality as it exists within the campus culture. To find a solution to this problem, I will combine research on the issues of sexism most relevant to college females, the value in mentorship both between women and for women, and relevant leadership theories to create a mentorship program that addresses these issues and encourages female empowerment.

Part II: Problem Description and Personal Statement

Gender inequality is a consistent and dangerous force that is present in many cultural and social spheres. In North America, gender inequality is a leading contributor in incidences of sexual assault, negative body image for females, and a gendered gap in the success of male and female graduate students that is created not only by internalized bias of employers, but also a lack of self confidence among women employees. This is a problem that puts women in both physical and economic danger. A continued denial of and inattention to gender inequality creates an environment where women not only continue to be marginalized, but it also feel as if the system of oppression they live within is normal, and any negative feelings or experiences they have while within that system are unnatural and due to a personal fault of their own.

While gender inequality affects women on many different levels, some of the areas in which they are most prevalent for young adult women is the sheer amount of sexual violence they experience. 1 out of 6 American women will experience sexual assault in their lifetime, and

when isolated to women in college, that number increases to 1 in 5 (Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network). Additionally, women who are enrolled in college are three times more likely to become a victim of sexual assault as compared to other women their age (SAAM). Victims of sexual assault not only suffer from physical ailments after rape and sexual assault, but they are also 27 times more likely to abuse drugs, 3 times more likely to suffer from depression, and 4 times as likely to contemplate suicide (Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network). Sexism and gendered power structures are a huge contributor to the amount of female sexual assault victims.

In her essay on conservative gender norms and rape culture, Jill Filipovic explains that “Aggression is such a deeply entrenched characteristic of maleness that it is often justified through references to nature and evolutionary biology. It further bleeds over into the sexual sphere, wherein men are expected to be aggressive sexual actors attempting to ‘get’ sex from passive women who both hold and embody sex itself” (Friedman and Valenti, 19). The cultural norms in which society excuses the sexually aggressive behavior of men conditions women to believe that any sexual violence they experience is due to their own faults. This includes things like body language, sexual history, and clothing. Although federal acts such as Title IX and the Violence Against Women Act have made strides in providing funding for programs to help end sexual assault, the issue will continue to persist unless we make cultural changes to both the way men perceive women, and the way women perceive themselves (SAAM).

Another prevalent issue in gender inequality is negative body image in women and the overwhelmingly disproportionate amount of women who suffer from eating disorders. Statistics state that 25% of women on college campuses suffer from bulimia nervosa, and that 69% of women (about 20 million nationally) engage in some sort of disordered eating (Colvin). A shocking 81% of ten year old girls express a fear of being fat, and 35-57% of adolescent girls engage in crash dieting, diet pills, or laxatives. Negative effects of disorder eating can range

from low heart rate, to kidney failure, and in 20% of serious cases, death (National Eating Disorders).

As is apparent from these statistics, girls begin to develop negative body image at a very young age, which not only puts them in physical and emotional danger, but also makes them less likely to be successful as adults due to a lack of self esteem. The over-sexualization of women in the media convinces women that they will not be successful or loved if they do not fit the film and television standards of a “beautiful woman”. In contrast, women are then often criticized for their obsession with their appearance and labeled as “shallow” or “self absorbed” by the same society that judges them by these standards.

These issues are merely two from an endless list of detrimental effects that are created by the systematic marginalization of women. Women are consistently told to bend to the will of a patriarchal system that puts them at an unfair and often dangerous disadvantage. To prevent the continuation of gender inequality, it is necessary to intervene in the lives of young women early on to try and pull them from this cycle, which is why I am proposing the implementation of a mentorship program that will address these issues.

In my time at Elon I have personally seen and experienced the negative effects of gender inequality both at the university and away from it. As a volunteer in the Mentoring Violence Prevention Program, I have been to secondary schools in the Alamance Country district to give presentations on the prevention of sexual and relationship violence.. Each time my co-presenters and I taught a classroom, we were met with push back from both male and female students about ideas like rape culture and victim blaming. These students had never heard of these concepts before and therefore had a hard time understanding or agreeing to them. On a day where we had dealt with a class that was particularly aggressive in their disagreements, I was approached by one of the female students after the session was over. As I spoke with her, I realized she had a large amount of knowledge on the subject of unhealthy relationships and she told me she one day

hoped to go to school to be a human service studies major. I then asked her why she didn't raise her hand to answer our questions during the presentation, and she responded that she was afraid that the boys in her class would make fun of her. She said that she often got picked on when she raised her hand in class, and that there was one group of boys in particular that would target her whenever she disagreed with them. This girl who couldn't be older than fifteen was already afraid to voice her opinion because she feared how the men around her would react to an intelligent woman.

On campus I have felt a similar kind of pressure to dull my own intelligence and opinions in the presence of men. As an active member of EFFECT (Elon Feminists for Equality, Change and Transformation), I have been apart of many events where I was insulted and yelled at just for being present. During our Walk Against Victim Blaming, an event where people dress in varying states of revealing attire and march through the campus to fight against the stigma of "slut shaming", my friends and I were yelled at by men in cars as they passed by, calling us "stupid sluts", "bitches", and telling us to "take it off". At our Pay Equity Bake sale in which we sold goods to people according to their identity's mean salary, we were confronted by many male identified students who told us we were "making this up" and "being unfair". When we tried to explain the meaning behind the event and the statistical evidence we had to back up our claims, the students gave us the finger and walked away. As a female student I have found time and time again that no matter the number of personal experiences or numerical evidence I can provide to help make my point, when confronted by a male student on my beliefs, I am belittled and ignored.

In classes where the majority is of female identity, I still observe men raising their hands and giving more personal opinions than females. Additionally there is statistical research that shows that male students are more likely to be called on and to speak frequently and at length in

class discussions (Berg and Ferber 629). When I go out to parties, I see men touching women without their permission and encouraging them to drink well beyond their capacity. As a SPARKS Peer Educator, a job where I am gifted with the opportunity to talk with other students about sexual health, relationships, and substance abuse, I have had many females share with me their experiences of sexual violence. Then the very next day, I would present to a classroom where students would tell me they believed that it's "not rape if you've been drinking."

When I reflect on these experiences, it pains me to realize that my experiences as a college student haven't been very different than the experiences of that fifteen year old girl at the Alamance high school. My desire to participate in this research stems from the pain and uncertainty I have felt about my own abilities simply because I am a female. I want to build upon my leadership abilities not only to prove to myself and to others that I am capable, but also to change the way that leadership is perceived, making it a more equitable concept that encourages men and women to work towards solutions for gender inequality and other issues together.

I feel that the Leadership Prize is necessary in me completing this project because there is much research that needs to be done about the issue of gender inequality on college campuses, specifically on Elon's campus, and I require the financial support and resources the Leadership Prize would provide me with in order make this research happen. I am confident that I am the right person to conduct this research because I have had much experience on campus as a leader in organizations that deal with similar subjects such as SPARKS Peer Educators, Spectrum (Elon's Queer-Straight Alliance), and the Gender and LGBTQIA Center. Additionally I am a Women's and Gender Studies minor and my education in this subject is something that both gives me the academic qualifications to conduct research in the discipline. It also provides me with the motivation to want to make this project successful. Above all, I am passionate and committed to the cause of gender equality for women of all identities, in all places. My goal is

not just to implement a solution, but to provide the guidance and motivation for others to keep this project alive and to create their own movements of change so that the issue of gender inequality on college campuses and throughout the world can be deconstructed from many angles.

Part III: Plan for Intellectual Inquiry

Although gender inequality is a world wide problem that cannot be solved in the span of two years, and in fact may never be eradicated completely, I intend to use this research time to discover which among the many different facets of this issue are most prevalent and most important to college-age women in order to provide my population with the best solution possible. A large part of my research will be in the form of meeting with relevant staff, faculty, and students at Elon in order to strengthen my understanding of the ways in which Elon's population both thrives and struggles with concepts related to this issue. One way to organize this research would be by implementing a task force around women's issues. Elon already has task forces for other minorities on campus such as the Presidential LGBTQIA Task Force and the Presidential Task Force on Black Student, Faculty, and Staff Experiences. Both of these initiatives have been very successful in impacting campus climate and collecting information from these Elon community members on issues important to them. By creating a task force dedicated to the experiences of women on campus, we would have access to a regulated and long standing group of dedicated people who could give us accurate information on women's issues, and I would work with this task force to implement my solution.

The other part will consist of my attendance at various women's conferences to learn what issues are affecting women across counties, states, and internationally. At these conferences I hope to not only learn information about the problem of gender inequality, but also to gain

insight and knowledge from fellow women leaders in order to create the foundations of my solution. My plan to study in Los Angeles, California as a part of the Elon in LA program in the spring of 2015 will benefit this aspect of my research as it will provide me the opportunity to connect with a larger population of women whose experience will be very different from mine, but with whom I anticipate I will be able to relate to in many ways.

Additionally I hope to complete an internship with a Women's Rights organization, such as Women's Campaign International or Planned Parenthood, in the summer of 2016 in order to continue my education even when I am not at school. I will also put a focus on researching feminist and queer theories that will be conducive to finding the causes and effects of gender inequality relevant to the issues I find are most pressing. Some theories I will consider will be compulsory heterosexuality, the "male gaze", and hegemonic masculinity.

Once I understand the core issues facing young female college students, I will then expand upon my idea to discover a concrete resolution that is founded in the benefits of mentorship between both fellow female college students and female college students and their faculty and staff advisors. Previous research shows that the majority of college graduates who were successful post graduation had a personal connection with a professor during their college experience (GALLUP). It has also been shown that graduates are almost twice as likely to thrive in areas of well being such as sense of purpose, financial success, and physical health if they had a mentor in college. For the purposes of my research, I will explore these elements as they apply to females in college specifically, considering that under the same conditions, females are less likely to become full time employees (63%-52%), in addition to having a higher rate of unemployment.(GALLUP). I will explore the different effects between having connections with a professor, a faculty mentor, or with an older fellow student.

It is my hope that in finding out more about the positive effects of mentorship I will be able to develop and implement such a program at Elon that will give way to a population of young women who are more confident and secure in who they are and what they can do. I will also research the ways in which a sense of “sisterhood” or friendship between women can strengthen not only their sense of security and community, but also their sense of selves. I will model my program after other successful women’s mentorship programs like Million Women Mentors and Young Women Rock! that pair up younger women with older, more experienced women in settings that encourage them achieve their personal goals and problem solve larger women’s issues together. In this program I hope to help facilitate connections between women across campus from Greek life, differing majors such as Business, STEM fields, and Performing Arts, and student organizations such as SGA, EFFECT, Spectrum, the Center for Racial and Ethnic Diversity Education, and the Women’s and Gender Studies discipline. It is important to me that I include women of different identities in this program because the issue of intersectionality is one that is vital in implementing solutions that will work for all women, not just one group of women. The program will pair first year female students with older ones, and older students with a staff or faculty member. The women will provide support and guidance for each other in regards to both personal and professional issues such as internships, relationships, and self-confidence. The women will also work together with other mentor pairs in the organization to address issues that are facing women on campus. In doing this I hope to create an environment where women from all walks of life can come together and make strides towards a more welcoming and improved environment for women at Elon.

The type of leadership I would like to grow in and use to implement my solution is not positional, because I believe that can often only encourage the structural inequality that I am trying to fight against. Instead I intend to become an agent of change and to use thought

leadership as a tool to inspire, not control. I am most interested in transformational leadership because I think that is the essence of what I hope to achieve in this mentorship program. The underlying themes of enthusiasm and energy that the theory describes will be essential to making this program fun and successful. I am also hoping to implement a type of participative leadership, because I want to encourage the women in the mentorship program to become active decision makers and to learn to make those decisions together. In order to expand upon my knowledge of differing leadership styles, I intend to complete independent research on the subject, but also take a course in the foundations of leadership here at Elon. I believe this course will help me identify my own personal style of leadership, as well as be able to extend my knowledge to the women I work with via the mentorship program so that they may also find a method of leadership that works for them. Additionally, I will attend leadership conferences that focus on the importance of women in these roles in the hopes it will further my skills and strengths. Through this leadership program specifically, I hope to learn to skills of patience and persistence, to lead by example, and to build relationships of trust with both those working with me and also those who may not understand the reasoning behind my system of change. I know that this is a large task that I cannot accomplish without involvement from my fellow peers and advisors, and I would never want to try and solve this problem without working hand in hand with those that it directly affects.

Part IV: Feasibility, Budget and Timeline

My proposed plan of inquiry is not only feasible within the timeline, but I believe the outcome of my research is one that will be stable enough to become a long lasting program at Elon that can continue on even once I graduate. To begin with, in my preparation for this application process, I have already connected with many students, faculty, and staff members

and explained to them my hopes for this project. The response to my intended outcome was very positive and I have already laid the groundwork for future connections, as well as established a system of support for when I am prepared to put my plan into action. Because I already have specific people and organizations I know I would like to work with and learn from, I will be ready to jump into both the research and collaboration processes as soon as possible.

Additionally, the conferences I plan on attending to further both my research and my leadership skills all happen within a time frame that fits the requirements of the Prize and also line up to my personal timeline of where I intend to be in the process of my project.

Since the bulk of my completion of this plan will involve personal collaborations with members of the Elon community, my costs will mostly lie in attending conferences and providing incentives for those who help me with this process, as well as those who become a part of the projected mentorship program. Because my solution will need to be flexible to attend to the needs of the female community at Elon, I intend to leave a sum of money that will be available for me to use once the mentorship program begins. The use of this money may vary from creating a campus-wide event for women, to bringing in a speaker to talk to members about personal well being and empowerment, to providing women with the ability to attend workshops or smaller conferences that will help them build the skills we identify as necessary for female success.

My approximate timeline for completion of this project will be as follows,-Spring 2016 will involve my attending a leadership and women's conference in California, conducting personal research in order to solidify the most significant gender inequalities for my population, and, finally, meeting with community members who I identify as vital to my research. Fall 2016 will consist of taking the foundations of leadership class, confirming the issues most important to Elon women, and then using that information to create a concrete plan of execution for the

mentorship program. I will also use this time to find interested participants and create incentives for them to become a part of this project. Finally in the Spring 2017 I will implement my solution and facilitate the activities and meetings that occur as a result of the mentorship program. A detailed explanation of specific costs will follow below. Any money remaining after the fact will be used for tuition expenses.

Proposed Budget:

Books

<i>Everyone Leads: Building Leadership From the Community Up</i>	\$25
Misc. books for Leadership Course	\$100
	Total: \$125

Conferences

Women Empowering Women Forum, San Diego, California

- Entrance fee \$90
- Gas (from Los Angeles, CA) \$25

Total: \$115

Granger Leadership Academy

- Registration Fee \$50
- Round trip ticket from Raleigh to Rhode Island \$350
- Three nights in a hotel \$387
- Food while at conference \$100

Total: \$887

United Way Women's Leadership Summit

- Registration Fee \$895
- Round trip flight from Raleigh to Dallas \$250
- Hotel for three nights \$350
- Food while at conference \$100

Total: \$1, 595

N.O.W (National Organization for Women) Conference

- Registration Fee \$50
- Round trip flight from Raleigh to New Orleans \$450
- Hotel for three nights \$450
- Food while at conference \$100
- Transportation/ Shuttle Fees \$100

Total: \$1,150

Costs for mentorship Program Facilitation (Fall 2016 & Spring 2017)

- Food for meetings \$500

- Food for events \$500
- Incentives for participants (gift cards, phoenix cash, etc.) \$500
- Speaker on Women's Rights and/or Leadership \$2,500
- Group t-shirts/ other merchandise \$800
- Flyers/ Outreach \$500

Total: \$5,300

Tentative Grand Total: \$9,172

Timeline:

Fall 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Independent Research on Leadership/ Women's Issues/ Issues specific to Elon Community ● Begin building Women's Task Force to research campus issues
Spring 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Elon in LA ● Outreach to possible collaborators and participants ● Continued research ● Finalize and implement Women's Task Force ● Finalize issues to focus on within mentorship program
Summer 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● N.O.W National Organization for Women Conference
Fall 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Course in Foundations of Leadership ● Meeting with collaborators and participants ● Outreach meetings for participants
November 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Finalize plan for mentorship program ● Decide on events/ workshops/ meeting times for mentorship program ● Continue search for participants
Spring 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Program begins
February 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● United Way Women's Leadership Summit ● Finalize group for mentorship

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> program ● Decide on events/ workshops/ meeting times for mentorship program ● Begin meetings and events
March - April 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Granger Leadership Academy Conference ● Conduct monthly meetings & frequent events for program
May 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Evaluation of program's success

Part V: List of sources

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