



UTAH WOMEN & LEADERSHIP Project

Mission and History

MISSION:

Our mission is to strengthen the impact of Utah girls and women. We serve Utah and its residents by producing relevant, trustworthy, and applicable research; creating and gathering valuable resources; and convening trainings and events that inform, inspire, and ignite growth and change for all Utahns. Our goal is to move mountains for Utah girls and women.

HISTORY

In November of 2008, Utah Commissioner of Higher Education Bill Sederburg, Associate Commissioner Lucille Stoddard, and Dr. Susan R. Madsen met to discuss concerns about why more women were not enrolling and graduating from Utah colleges and universities. Shortly after this meeting, it was decided that Dr. Madsen would lead a comprehensive research project to explore these issues within the state during the following academic year. Hence, in May of 2009 the Utah Women and Education Project (UWEP) was created with the initial purpose of collecting data that would help postsecondary institutions attract more young women to attend college and then retain them until graduation. Due to interest in the project, and assistance from Utah Valley University personnel as well as other higher education institutions throughout the state, the mission expanded. In addition to the initial undertakings, UWEP team members wrote and published policy and research briefs, a research directory, IPEDS reports, and worked with Utah 2-1-1 and a host of interns and volunteers to create a comprehensive database of women's resources in Utah. Drs. Cheryl Hanewicz and Susan Thackeray were particularly integral as members of the UWLP research team.

Over \$200,000 was raised for the two-year project, with over \$75,000 coming from UVU (President's Office, Academic Affairs, Center for Engaged Learning grants, and donations from departments, schools, and colleges). Other core funding was provided from a federal leadership grant, a donation and grants through the Utah System of Higher Education, and other donors and sponsors. A UWEP team was created along with a state-wide advisory board (included representatives from all public higher education institutions), a UVU support team, and a host of interns and volunteers from United Way of Utah County and the community. A large community board was also established to help guide the Utah Women and Education Summit, which was held in November of 2010. By the end of the Project (June 2011), the effort had received substantial media attention and the UWEP team had created [Research and Policy Briefs](#), [Research Snapshots](#), [Partnered Reports](#), and [Videos](#) to help disseminate the findings.

UTAH WOMEN'S COLLEGE TASK FORCE

After the UWEP completed its initial charge and presentations were being made around the state, there became a clear need for a more organized effort to assist Utah in figuring out how to move forward with a social change effort that would lead to more women attending and completing postsecondary degrees and certificates. The plan to form the Utah Women's College Task Force (UWCTF) was discussed and

recommended to the Governor by the Governor's Education Excellence Commission in May of 2011. A planning team was then formed to work during June and July to draft the Task Force Charge, which included determining the course of action needed to produce the following four outcomes:

1. Raise awareness with key stakeholders and with Utah women of the need for women to seek postsecondary certificates and degrees for livable wage careers, successful family- and home-building, participation in society as an educated community member, and personal satisfaction.
2. Engage opinion leaders and influential Utahns to advocate for women's preparation for and participation in postsecondary education.
3. Collaborate with the college and university campuses and other organizations to identify the range of successful actions that can increase the participation and completion rates of Utah women in postsecondary education, including raising the educational aspirations of Utah women to the level of a postsecondary certificate or degree. Make recommendations and advocate for the most effective actions for Utah.
4. Assess effectiveness of actions taken in increasing the number of Utah women completing a postsecondary certificate or degree.

The planning team created a [Task Force Information Sheet](#) and also provided a list of potential Task Force members to the Governor. The Governor made final committee selections and approved the letter of invitation in August. In early September, invitation letters were mailed and acceptances tracked by the Governor's staff. The Honorable Olene Walker (former Utah Governor) and Bonnie Jean Beesley (Vice-Chair of the Utah Board of Regents) were invited and accepted invitations to co-chair the Task Force.

The Task Force held four meetings: September 28, 2011; October 26, 2011; November 30, 2011; and January 4, 2012. The membership recommended that three working committees also be formed to move the charge forward in this limited timeframe:

- Awareness Committee (Chaired by Mark Willes, President and CEO of Deseret Management Corporation)
- State Policy Committee (Chaired by Lynne Ward, Executive Director of Utah Educational Savings Plan)
- Educational Policy Committee (Chaired by Alan Hall, businessman and Weber State University Board of Trustee)

The membership of these committees included Task Force members and other critical stakeholders in the community. The committee chairs presented preliminary recommendations at the November 30 meeting and gave their final recommendations at the meeting on January 4, 2012. The final [Task Force Recommendation Report](#) was released on February 21, 2012 after a presentation to the Governor and his Education Excellence Commission.

UTAH WOMEN AND EDUCATION INITIATIVE

The Task Force spurred great excitement and momentum within education and the community. Their most fundamental recommendation was that the Governor's office create and sponsor (initially through one-time legislative funding) the Utah Women and Education Initiative (UWEI) to be used as a "hub" for coordinating future work. In FY 2012-13, legislative funding of \$100,000 was appropriated to the State Board of Regents to assist in implementing the recommendations of the Utah Women's College Task Force and to continue the work of the UWEI. The Commissioner's Office, on behalf of the Board of Regents and all of USHE, served as the agency accountable for the allocated funds, and is where the UWEI was directed and coordinated for a few years. Mary Ann Halladay served as UWEI's first Director, while Dr. Madsen remained involved as the Senior Advisor to UWEI. The funding was a Governor's priority for the 2012 legislative session.

During the 2012-2013 year the UWEI worked very productively and effectively in making the changes needed and following the Task Force recommendation. The organization partners for UWEI included the

Governor's Education Excellence Commission, the Utah System of Higher Education, the Utah State Office of Education, Prosperity 2020, and the United Way of Salt Lake. The initial UWEI sponsors included the Utah System of Higher Education, Utah Valley University, Utah Higher Education Assistance Authority, Utah State University, Wells Fargo, Love Communication, and Prosperity 2020. Even after substantial impact, however, a new Commission came to Utah who did not support the efforts of the UWEI. Hence, only half the funding was received the following year (50k) and the UWEI moved to the Utah State Office of Education (USOE). Little was accomplished this year by USOE and they did not ask for ongoing funding. Because the research and resources were so important, Dr. Susan R. Madsen took the Initiative back under her oversight and found funding (thanks to Utah Valley University, Wheeler Equipment Co, UESP, the University of Utah, and Rich & LeAnn Crandall) to hire part-time coordinators. Drs. Michelle Taylor and Anne Wairepo were particularly supportive and assisted with funds and other types of support. With additional funding from United Way of Salt Lake, the Beesley Family Foundation, and the Campbell Family Foundation, the Initiative continued its work promoting women and education. Another critical partner for this work is the Utah Education Network. In June of 2016 the UWEI became part of the Utah Women & Leadership Project as one of three Initiatives under its umbrella.

UTAH WOMEN & LEADERSHIP PROJECT

Responding to requests for research on women's leadership in Utah, Madsen started the Utah Women & Leadership Project (UWLP) in 2013 and combined the two initiatives formally in 2016. Up to this point the work was conducted primarily by Dr. Madsen, a student, and some volunteers, outside of her paid employment as the Orin R. Professor of Leadership and Ethics in the Woodbury School of Business. However, with support from key UVU administrators, community supporters, and many donors, Madsen's statewide projects have extended in scope and reach to promote women of all ages and now incorporate the importance of leadership as well as education. Robbyn Scribner joined as a primary researcher and assistant director in 2016 and remained a core team member until 2020. Other key team members through the years have included Bonnie Mortensen, Deirdre Miller, Kimberly Williamson, and Heather Sundahl. Over the past decade, Dr. Madsen and her team have hosted a host of events and gatherings; produced and published scores of research briefs, snapshots, and resources; and connected thousands of women to the ideas, information, and inspiration they need to move forward with their own education and leadership goals.

In 2020, the Project moved to the Utah State University (USU). Dr. Madsen was hired as the Inaugural Karen Haight Huntsman Endowed Professor of Leadership in the Jon M. Huntsman School of Business, with a segment of her role designated for working with Extension. The UWLP's mission is expected to expand and deepen as it now partners with Utah's only land-grant institution tasked with statewide impact.