



Faculty Lunches with the Dean (Leisha DeHart-Davis)(#14)

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Date : March 13, 2017

This is the final post from my most recent faculty lunch. The others have focused on the work of Shea Denning, Jessie Smith, and Jill Moore. This one summarizes an important initiative that Leisha DeHart-Davis is doing in partnership with Margaret Henderson and Kim Nelson. In fact, they just received the School's new Diversity Impact Award for their collaborative work on *Engaging Women in Public Service*.





Leisha DeHart-Davis

This initiative is focused on equipping women to assume public service leadership positions in government (federal, state, and local) and nonprofit organizations. It includes research, targeted training, and convening stakeholders interested in achieving greater gender balance in public service leadership. The goal for the *Engaging Women* team is to become a nationally recognized hub of engaged scholarship around public sector gender issues. In addition to work in North Carolina, the team has met with women in Virginia and South Carolina about their own organizational efforts.

The first three years of *Engaging Women* have covered a range of activities—three conferences that have included sessions on communication and networking, work-life integration, body language for women who lead, and women partnering with other women for success. A summit for local government managers and assistant managers offered on hands-on media coaching from two women who are award-winning television journalists. The group also has hosted a number of small workshops around the state—including one on making a powerful first impression.

In the coming months *Engaging Women* will offer another summit for women managers and a conference of interactive workshops focused on designing your bold professional future, identifying habits that limit your success, and building your negotiation skills. It will include Rebecca Ryan, the futurist who helped with our strategic foresight process.



Kim Nelson

It was interesting to hear Leisha talk about the group's interest in figuring out how to have an



impact beyond conferences and workshops. They are beginning to focus their efforts on increasing the number of women pursuing public leadership positions, and initially they are targeting local government. Only 1 in 5 of North Carolina's city and county managers are women, which is an improvement from a few years ago when it was closer to 1 in 10. [Here is a data visualization tool](#) showing the geographical distribution of women county managers in North Carolina. Local governments are losing out on potentially great managers if the talent pool is skewed so much in one direction.



Margaret Henderson

Leisha and her colleagues currently are trying to identify the talent pool for manager positions, primarily from assistant managers and department heads. They are conducting engaged research to better understand the needs and experiences of aspiring local government managers, and they have met with small groups of women in Hickory, Transylvania County, and Charlotte. They also are tracking the progress of women who are applying for local government leadership positions. The *Engaging Women* team hopes to design and offer a week-long professional development "boot camp" to better prepare women to pursue top local government leadership positions.

There was a fascinating moment in the lunch when the other faculty members—all women—talked about the potential value of the *Engaging Women* work for their clients. They also wanted to explore whether some of the workshops might be made available for women faculty members at the School (possibly attending with one or two of their clients). I certainly will find ways to support those kinds of opportunities if there is interest in making it happen.

It is clear that Leisha, Kim, and Margaret—our own impressively engaged women—are doing



important work that will support more women moving into public service leadership positions. I can't wait to see how the initiative continues to evolve in the coming years.



Rebecca Ryan