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Inspirational women at Edith Cowan University: women in leadership project

Linley Lord (ed.)
Edith Cowan University

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INTRODUCTION

*Inspirational Women at Edith Cowan University* is an initiative of the Women in Leadership Project. It is part of the Project’s ongoing commitment to recognising the achievements of University women.

This booklet profiles 10 exceptional University women who have excelled in their chosen careers. In their stories, these women outline their career history - their reasons for their choice of career and how they got to where they are today. They discuss the difficulties that they encountered along the way (such as sexism, racism, negative attitudes, lack of confidence) and how they dealt with these. They talk about the influence of role models on their careers and their own personal qualities which have contributed to their success. Some words of advice to career-minded women complete their stories.

These stories are about women who have achieved, regardless of the obstacles. They are about dedication, determination, commitment and belief. These women serve as exceptional role models to other University women as well as sources of encouragement and inspiration.

Prepared and edited by:
Linley Lord
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Robyn Quin

December 1996
Lyn Bloom has been employed at the University in the Department of Mathematics since 1982 and was promoted to the position of Senior Lecturer in 1994. She is currently an academic staff representative on the Policy and Planning Subcommittee of Council, a member of the Executive of the Faculty Honours and Higher Degrees Committee, Faculty representative on the Doctoral Studies Committee, and a member of the Academic Staff Association (ASA) and National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) committees. She is also the Postgraduate Co-ordinator for the Department of Mathematics.

As a Townsville youngster, Lyn enjoyed mathematics. She aspired to go to university despite the fact that nobody in her family was tertiary educated. Lyn was always encouraged by her mother to study but encouragement came in the face of considerable opposition. Financially, her family was not affluent and Lyn relied on scholarships throughout her undergraduate years. Relatives criticised her choice of career, believing that girls did not study anything let alone mathematics. Growing up in a country town led to an expectation that she would enter the workforce after completing her lower secondary schooling and progressing beyond Year 10 was quite a significant hurdle. Unable to enrol in both physics and mathematics in her Townsville school, Lyn moved to a Brisbane boarding school to complete her final two years of secondary school.

Not discouraged by these obstacles, Lyn went on to complete a Bachelor of Science (Honours) at the University of Queensland. Initially, she had intended to major in physics but her preference for mathematics, and the fact that she could enrol in an Honours programme at an earlier stage, prompted her change of stream. Following the completion of her Bachelor of Science, Lyn was offered a tutorship in the Department of Pure
Mathematics at the Australian National University (ANU) in Canberra. At the same time, she enrolled in a Master of Science in mathematics and followed this with a PhD in the same area. After leaving ANU, Lyn spent 12 months as a tutor in mathematics at the University of Tasmania before accepting a position with Murdoch University when it opened in 1975. While at Murdoch, Lyn completed her Diploma of Education as a part-time student.

In addition to her mother, Professor Hannah Neumann was an influential role model in the early stages of Lyn’s career. Hannah was a Professor of Mathematics at ANU at a time when few women occupied professorial positions. She was a source of inspiration to Lyn and continually encouraged her in her endeavour to pursue a mathematics career. In fact, it was Hannah who offered Lyn her first tutorship in mathematics. Additional encouragement came from her husband, Walter, who holds a Personal Chair in Mathematics at Murdoch University. He encouraged her to develop her career rather than adopt a “women-stay-at-home” attitude.

Lyn attributes much of her career success to the encouragement she received from her mother, husband and Professor Hannah Neumann. However, she has always been reasonably determined and strong-willed. She believes that women can do whatever they want to do and should not be discouraged by the negative attitudes of others. Her advice to women is to aim to do as well as possible and to realise their own potential.
As a teenager, Nerida had her heart set on becoming a Research Scientist. Studying came naturally, she had a passion for chemistry and science, and had established her own chemistry laboratory at home to develop this interest further. After completing her secondary education, Nerida completed a Science degree in South Australia and followed this with a PhD in Physical Chemistry. At this stage of her career, barriers were not evident and she received every encouragement to continue with a science career. She was successful in winning scholarships throughout her studies and was the first woman to be awarded a postgraduate CSIRO scholarship. She was also the first woman to be awarded a CSIRO overseas postdoctoral scholarship, which she took up at the University of California on completion of her PhD. She successfully applied for a 12-month Damon Runyon Memorial Fund Fellowship for cancer research which she undertook at Oregon State University. This was extended to a two year period, which was rather unusual in those days.

The barriers became obvious when she began to seek employment. Limited opportunities in the science profession within Australia prompted a move to New Zealand in 1970. She secured a temporary junior lectureship in Chemistry at a local university but, despite her qualifications, she was placed on the lowest level of the salary scale. (This was the first of a series of barriers that were to eventually deny Nerida the opportunity to work in the field
that she loved). She brought this obvious inequity to the attention of the Vice-Chancellor and was subsequently placed on the top of the salary scale. A senior colleague accused her of doing a disservice to the men in the Faculty, who were working to earn a living, and informed her that a young, married female was not welcome in science. Having completed her one year appointment, she was awarded a two-year postdoctoral fellowship. She remained at the institution for a further 12 months to oversee the supervision of a final year Masters candidate. She was not, however, provided with any employee status during this time and her name was removed from all official documentation associated with the supervision of the student.

Rejection from the science world, coupled with the realisation that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to pursue a science career in the climate at that time, forced Nerida to choose an alternative career path. In the early 1970s, a demand existed for physics and mathematics teachers, for which her qualifications were suitable. She taught physics and mathematics in the tertiary and secondary education sectors before recommencing her studies to obtain formal educational qualifications. She completed a Diploma of Education Studies and a Diploma of Teaching. Her work in education led to an interest in education research but the doors to a research career remained closed due to her teaching commitments. To open these doors, Nerida enrolled in a second PhD in education.

After completing her PhD, she was offered a position at Deakin University in 1984, her first formal academic appointment. Again, she was placed near the bottom of the salary scale but, after speaking out, was moved to a higher level. It was then a matter of making up for lost time in her career. She achieved this through perseverance and hard work. No favours were provided. With a goal in mind, she remained committed, determined and focused, believing in her own ability.

The fact that nobody had ever told her, prior to her first rejection, that she should not be pursuing science was a strong influence that kept her striving. She was also encouraged as a youngster by an unusual mentor - a friend of her grandfather. Likening her to Madam Curie, he continually wrote to her to encourage her, believing that she would one day become a professor. His influence on her career was particularly powerful as he had envisioned something beyond what she thought she could become. Sadly, he did not see the day that she became a professor.

Nerida believes that doors will continue to slam and barriers will still be present for women. She feels it is crucial to look for the next open door when one has slammed and to turn the negative experiences into positive ones. She emphasises the fact that seniority does not imbue magical qualities. Women need to develop strategies to cope with rejection and criticism.
SUSAN EVERSON
Senior Administrative Officer
Academy of Performing Arts

Susan Everson has been employed at the Academy of Performing Arts for the past 12 years and holds the position of Senior Administrative Officer. Susan is also a member of the Academy’s Board of Management, staff elected representative of University Council, a member of the Joint Consultative Committee for General Staff (having assisted with award restructuring for general employees), and is involved with the mentoring project for the University’s Springboard training and development programme.

Susan’s university career commenced in 1976 when she was appointed Payroll Clerk with the WA Teacher Education Authority (WATEA). This position involved administering the payroll for all the colleges which were operating independently at that time. Eighteen months later, in 1978, Susan was offered the position of Staff Clerk with Churchlands Teachers College, as it was then known. With knowledge that WATEA was within a year of being disbanded and a belief that its working environment was not conducive to personal development, Susan saw the offer as an opportunity to move forward and accepted.

The position of Staff Clerk was a valuable experience, given the opportunities that were available to assist staff with various issues. In fact, it was the interaction with a wide range of staff - from cleaners to security guards to academics - that Susan valued the most. At a later stage, when the colleges became independent from WATEA, Susan again took over the payroll duties.

In 1982 the colleges were amalgamated and the WA College of Advanced Education was established. Susan’s career took another step forward when she moved into Special
Projects Accounting. It was here that Susan found a role model and mentor in Hec Jackson. Generous with his time, Hec Jackson provided valuable support and guidance to Susan who was relatively new to the College’s accounting procedures. Further re-organisation of the College structure resulted in significant changes to the accounting functions and Susan’s duties became more varied. While this was a valuable learning experience, negative practices associated with staff selection, coupled with the absence of equal opportunity policies, provided a catalyst for another career move.

Already working with the Academy of Performing Arts on a special grant, funds became available in 1984 for an Administrative Officer. Susan applied for the position and was successful. Two role models/mentors within the Academy, Dr Robert Vickery and Dr Geoffrey Gibbs, were influential in the further development of Susan’s career. Their guidance, assistance and ongoing support enabled Susan to learn much about processes, diplomacy, people interaction and she was encouraged to take on new challenges such as public speaking and council membership. Their influence has contributed significantly to Susan’s self-confidence and job satisfaction. That satisfaction is still present today after 12 years of service with the Academy.

Susan also attributes her success to her determination and, in a small way, to ‘being in the right place at the right time’, as changes were occurring in the College’s operations. A move to the Academy at the beginning of devolution resulted in additional responsibilities and subsequent job expansion. In addition, the Academy recognises its staff for what they do and not for what they have in terms of qualifications. Such a policy has benefited Susan’s career enormously, given her decision early in life to dedicate her time to her family.

Despite the absence of strong female role models during her career, Susan has formed strong networks with University women. Of particular importance have been the female Equal Opportunity Officers and the assistance that they have provided over the years. Susan also values the Women in Leadership programme and recognises its importance to women and their careers.

Susan’s advice to women, particularly younger women who are aspiring to higher positions, is to broaden their experience by becoming involved with the University through committees, training programmes, and the Women in Leadership Project.
Sharon Harford joined Edith Cowan University in 1994 as the Bookshop Manager in the Division of Facilities and Services, responsible for overseeing and co-ordinating the University's four bookshops. Early in 1996, she was promoted to the position of Senior Administrative Officer in the Executive Directorate.

Sharon’s career commenced in education before it moved into books. On completion of her secondary schooling, she enrolled in a Bachelor of Education in Art at Curtin University. She taught for a period of three years before resigning to travel overseas. Arriving in London in 1987, Sharon moved to an area that was home to a prestigious bookshop. A passionate reader and a lover of books, she aspired to work at that bookshop whilst studying for her Diploma of Art History. A part-time position was later advertised and Sharon was successful in applying. She was employed there for three and a half years before returning to Australia in 1989. Six months later, she returned to London and resumed work at the same bookshop, this time in the position of Assistant Manager. She continued in this role, part-time after the birth of her children, and took on additional responsibilities such as accounting functions for three of the bookshop stores.

Family reasons prompted another return home to Australia and she resumed her teaching career for a brief period. Knowing that her heart was in books, she resigned from her teaching position to seek a career in the literature industry. In 1994, Sharon applied for the position of Bookshop Manager at Edith Cowan University. She was overwhelmed by the selection criteria and the fact that she had had no experience in the tertiary sector but decided to apply regardless. Prior to submitting her application, Sharon visited all of the University’s bookshops. Realising what could be done with them, she was determined to win the position and was successful.
She was initially nervous about managing four bookshops because she had only been an Assistant Manager. Adjusting to the changes associated with her new position was the biggest difficulty in Sharon’s career. However, her managerial competencies soon became obvious when significant improvements were made to bookshop operations. Aware of the need to improve campus community and provide a hub on campus for students, Sharon introduced a range of new services such as fiction novels, second-hand CDs, magazines and memorabilia. These changes were designed to shift the focus away from textbooks and improve the friendliness of the stores.

Sharon was instrumental in the development of the new Mount Lawley bookshop, an experience that she refers to as nerve-wracking! Responsible for its design and layout, this was one of Sharon’s most significant achievements in her position as Bookshop Manager.

In 1996, Sharon was promoted to Senior Administrative Officer. She was not looking for another job and initially laughed at the prospect of applying for a HEW 9 position when the advertisement was distributed to divisional staff. On second thoughts, she realised she was capable of doing the job and applied for the position. After moving into this position her first thoughts were “I want to go back to the Bookshop” but, on reflection, she had overlooked the learning curve of the new job. Now, having made it through the learning process, she has no regrets. Asking for assistance when uncertain enabled her to cope with these changes, a strategy that has benefited her in other aspects of her career. Her determination to succeed was another important factor in easing her through this process.

Sharon’s career has been largely influenced by her father, a former company manager. Being the eldest child, she was expected to achieve, to be successful. Her father had always encouraged her to attend university although nobody else in the family had been. He had emphasised the importance of a degree, regardless of whether or not it was used. His death at an early age from a stress-related condition has taught Sharon a valuable lesson. She keeps this in perspective in terms of balancing work with a healthy lifestyle. Her partner has been particularly influential and the sharing of responsibilities has enabled her to focus on her career.

While some of Sharon’s career success can be attributed to the support she received from her father and partner, her organisational skills, communication and interpersonal skills, and positive attitude have played a major part. According to Sharon, professionalism is the most important ingredient for a successful career. She also advises women to swallow their pride and ask questions when unsure, to take advantage of staff training opportunities, to be open to suggestions and change, and to be fair, reasonable and honest.
Dr Adrianne Kinnear has been employed at Edith Cowan University for the past 21 years. She is an Associate Professor of Biology and the Chairperson of the Department of Applied Science.

Adrianne's career began with a Bachelor of Science (majoring in chemistry) at the University of Western Australia. She was the first member of her family to attend university and entered under a Teacher's Bursary. At that time, very few females enrolled in a science programme and she was one of only three female students in first year physics. As part of her first year studies, she was required to complete a biology unit. This sparked an interest in zoology and prompted her to change her major to zoology in second year. On completion of her science degree with honours, Adrianne enrolled in a PhD in marsupial physiology and spent many hours at Rottnest Island as part of her study on the growth and development of the quokka. After gaining her PhD, she moved to Canada to take up a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Alberta.

Her scientific career was influenced significantly by a female Professor at the University of Alberta. Generous with her time and money, she was an important role model who encouraged Adrianne to present at conferences and gave her more confidence in her research. It was while she was in Canada that Adrianne was first exposed to feminist ideas and the disadvantaged position of women in academia. Betty Friedan’s book “The Feminine Mystique” had a powerful impact on her at a time when she was helping to compile a set of statistics describing the position and status of women within the University of Alberta. This period marked the beginning of her evolution towards feminism.
On her return to Western Australia in the mid-1970s, Adrianne accepted a position at one of the local teacher's colleges. The teaching was enjoyable and challenging and began Adrianne's long-term interest in the teaching of science to non-scientists. The position also catalysed a change in the direction of her research from mammalian physiology to soil ecology, an area of research which she realised was much neglected. Fascinated with the area, she managed to acquire the necessary equipment, develop the skills and establish herself as a researcher in this field. Subsequently, she has developed a wealth of expertise in soil mite ecology.

Whilst working at the Teacher's College, Adrianne witnessed the discrimination in employment that existed against the best female students graduating from such tertiary institutions at that time. This further reinforced her feminist views and raised her awareness of the sexism in her own professional environment.

The lack of voice and "invisibility" of women in academia remain major barriers, Adrianne believes, and the support of women and empathetic male colleagues has been critical to her career. She has also found women's conferences invaluable, regarding these as crucial to a woman's sense of belonging.

Adrianne attributes her success in her profession to a strong, intrinsic interest in her subject area; her commitment to, and genuine enthusiasm for, making science come alive for students; and constantly reminding herself that people are the most important resource.

Adrianne encourages career-minded young women to decide on their ultimate goals and remain true to their principles. She stresses the importance of pursuing goals regardless of other people's discriminatory practices and procedures, and advises women to seek like-minded women and men for support and encouragement.
Yvonne's career began with a Bachelor of Commerce (Economics) at Melbourne University. Her decision to pursue an economics career was a result of default rather than personal choice. After completing her secondary education, Yvonne intended to enrol at a Teacher's College to study secondary teaching. However, better than anticipated matriculation results, and a Commonwealth Scholarship, prompted her to consider university studies. As she was not interested in Science or Languages, Commerce was considered to be the next best option. She opted for an economics stream in preference to accounting and, to her delight, enjoyed the study of economics.

Completion of her degree led to academic positions in Canada, Scotland, Melbourne and Tasmania. The largest part of her career has been in academia, but she has also been employed in economics departments in the banking industry and has worked as an economic analyst in a private consulting practice.

In the 1960s and 70s few paths were seen as appropriate for women and very few pursued an economics career. Yvonne was the sole female academic in the economics department while employed at Melbourne University in the 1960s. The same situation occurred ten years later when she held a position with the Tasmanian College of Advanced Education. Even when she accepted a position at Churchlands Teachers College in 1979, few women
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Associate Professor Yvonne Melotte was appointed as Associate Dean of the Faculty of Business in 1992. She is Faculty representative on the University Programmes Committee, Student Admissions and Progress Committee and is Chair of the Academic Information Technology Committee.

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were employed in economics. Although still predominantly male, the proportion of women in the profession has increased since the 1980s. The major constraints on her career came from the institutional context which operated and the difficulties associated with juggling family responsibilities (raising her three children) and career aspirations.

Throughout her career, Yvonne has been influenced by a number of significant people and it is to these people that she owes much of her career success. Two of her male lecturers at university - Geoffrey Blainey and Jim Perkins - were especially significant and were critical to her career. They were inspirational teachers and exceptional role models who illustrated the richness of a life in academia and economics. They helped establish Yvonne’s attitudes towards her discipline and provided confirmation that academia was a worthwhile and rewarding career.

She has also enjoyed support from colleagues, both male and female, that she has worked with over the years in the Faculty of Business. The support of other women within the University was particularly important in her decision to apply for the position of Associate Dean in 1992. Although she had quietly decided to pursue this promotional opportunity, it was reinforcing to be approached by female peers and encouraged to apply.

Perseverance, a strong sense of equity and the ability to think strategically are personal qualities which have assisted Yvonne in her career. In her position as Associate Dean, she is respected for her ability to work with diverse groups and her willingness to contribute to the Faculty in a variety of roles.

Having confidence in one’s abilities, seeking the support of colleagues, and setting reasonable goals are Yvonne’s ingredients for a successful career. She advises women to plan a career path, accept available opportunities and not to become discouraged if goals take longer than anticipated to achieve.
Associate Professor Robyn Quin has been employed at Edith Cowan University since 1985 and is currently the Head of the School of Language, Literature and Media Studies. At University level, she is Deputy Chair of Academic Board, Chair of the Teaching and Learning Committee, the Academic Board representative on the Student Admission & Progress Committee, a member of the Planning & Resources Committee and the Vice-Chancellor’s Budget Advisory Group. At Faculty level, Robyn participates on Faculty Board, Courses Committee, Research Committee, and the Professional Development Committee.

Robyn’s career began with the completion of a Bachelor of Arts in English and History at the University of WA. This was followed by a Diploma of Education. She taught for a period of four years in secondary schools; a period which coincided with the introduction of Media Studies into secondary schools. After becoming interested in this area, Robyn enrolled in a Graduate Diploma in Media Studies at the Australian Film and Television School and followed this with a Masters degree in the same area. After teaching for four years, Robyn accepted a position with the Education Department as a Consultant in Media Studies before joining the WA College of Advanced Education in 1985. In 1987 she became Head of the Department of Media Studies in the then School of Arts and Applied Sciences. In 1991, the School of Language, Literature and Media Studies was established in the Arts Faculty and Robyn was appointed as Head of School.

Despite a successful career in the University sector Robyn does not deny that there have been obstacles. She pointed specifically to a phenomenon that is still observable after a decade - the ‘token woman’ syndrome. During the 1980s women fought hard to overcome
their traditional exclusion from decision-making processes and succeeded in gaining appointment to committees and other decision-making bodies, both in their own right and as a result of long overdue affirmative action strategies. The response of some males to this challenge to their supremacy is to dub any female member of a committee the ‘token woman’. Such tactics, she believes, function to undermine women’s sense of self-worth and confidence in their ability to contribute. It also relays the message to male colleagues that a woman’s presence has more to do with the need to abide by the rules than for any potentially valuable contribution a woman might make.

A second obstacle to women’s advancement is the “boys’ club” syndrome. On Robyn’s arrival at the University, a strong social and professional network existed among male employees. This was largely played out in extra-curricular activities from which women felt they were generally excluded. Although Robyn feels that this has changed, she believes that traces are still apparent. These vestiges are especially evident in the organisation of administrative meetings. Often organised at short notice or for an early morning start, little consideration is given to the lives of working women and to their varying routines.

Robyn has refused to let these attitudes discourage her and has continued her involvement with committees and other University activities. Her own female colleagues have been a constant source of support and advice.

She has also valued the encouragement she has received over the years from influential male role models and is grateful for their career assistance. On appointment to the University, Robyn was employed in Professor John Renner’s faculty. Recognising the contribution that women could make, he continually sought input from women, valued their contributions and ideas, and encouraged his female staff as much as possible. His influence led to Robyn’s increased involvement on University and Faculty committees and a growing confidence in accepting responsibility.

Professor Pat Garnett and Professor Tony Watson, both heads of department in the then School of Arts and Applied Sciences, have played similar roles and have been influences on her career. As a new head of department, Robyn was keen to develop her leadership skills. Together, Pat Garnett and Tony Watson provided support and advice pertaining to departmental matters. From them, Robyn learnt the importance of the tabled paper, the value of lobbying and most importantly, how to read a budget.

In addition to the assistance provided by role models, Robyn attributes her success to the additional hours that she devotes to her work, her desire to take on new tasks, and to her
expanding interests. She has been involved in a variety of projects from the promotion of international education to the establishment of professional courses.

Robyn urges all career-minded women to put themselves forward and have a go. At present, women are loathe to grasp the nettle by both hands and put themselves forward for positions of responsibility. Robyn is concerned that despite the increase in the number of senior women in the University, there are no more women on committees such as Academic Board than when she first joined the Board seven years ago. She believes this is partly due to the uninviting atmosphere characteristic of some committee environments, coupled with the associated 'token woman' comments still heard today. However, Robyn feels that this is likely to change with the increasing participation of female staff at all levels within the University.
Mary Rawlinson’s career began in England when she commenced work as a Comptometer Operator with Peat Marwick & Mitchell - a position that involved a considerable amount of travel round Europe and England with the company’s auditors. In 1972, as part of the ‘Ten Pound Pom Scheme’, Mary departed England for Australia and took up the position of Administrative Officer at Royal Perth Hospital.

An opportunity arose in November 1975 for Mary to join the Nedlands Teachers College as an Assistant Ledger Machinist. From here her University career began to develop. In 1980, Mary moved to the position of Salaries Clerk which was a considerable achievement, given the barriers that she was confronted with at that time. There were serious doubts as to whether a woman could perform this job and, unbeknown to Mary, she was placed on a three-month trial before being formally offered the position. Negative practices in relation to staff training were also implemented with only male colleagues invited by their supervisors to progress to tertiary study. Despite these obstacles, however, Mary proved that she was able to fulfil the requirements of the job. On reflection, Mary regards this position as the most rewarding of her career because of its autonomy and the responsibility associated with salary processing.

In 1982, amalgamation of the colleges into the WA College of Advanced Education enabled staff to nominate desired positions and they were appropriately placed within the new structure. Motivated by a desire to obtain experience in a different field, Mary requested a position in the Budgeting department. Further reshuffling saw another move to the position...
of Staff Clerk and consequently to Senior Staff Clerk. At this time, Mary was studying for a Bachelor of Business in Information Systems at Curtin University but decided to move into a Personnel stream instead. As a result, Mary was the only staff member of Personnel with a degree in a related field.

In 1987/1988 Mary moved to the position of Acting Welfare Officer. She was involved in conducting induction interviews, exit interviews and organising arrangements for academic staff.

Following a staff member’s illness at Mount Lawley Campus in 1988, Mary was invited to take up the position of Campus Administrative Officer. Experience in this area enabled Mary to apply for the position of Campus Manager when it became available in 1991. Initially, Mary was only invited to act as Campus Manager until the position could be filled and was told that she would not get the position permanently. Despite this negativity, Mary applied for the position and was successful. She was the first non-academic, female staff member to be appointed as Campus Manager and was thus the highest paid female member of general staff at that time. Mary already participated on a number of University committees (Joint Consultative Committee for General Staff, Hay Evaluation Committee, Equal Opportunity Committee, Occupational Health and Safety Committee) which gave her a good knowledge of the University’s expectations, policies and procedures. Mary was also a Sexual Harassment Officer for the University and attended a number of other meetings and interviews, often in a female senior support staff capacity.

Early in 1996, restructuring in the Division of Facilities and Services enabled Mary to take up her present position as Human Resources and Training Co-ordinator within that Division. This was a newly created position involving the provision of advice and support to the Directorate Management Team and all staff on matters pertaining to Human Resource policy and practices. In addition, Mary is involved with the training requirements for the Division’s staff, the Customer Focus Workshops (which are held regularly for specific areas), the Strategic Business Planning process for the Division as well as routine Directorate responsibilities.

To a certain extent, Mary feels that she did not consciously seek to be where she is today. Preferring to avoid the ‘here-I-am, pick-me’ strategy, Mary concentrated on doing a good job and, as a result, career opportunities became available. However, Mary does attribute some of her career success to her loyalty to the University, dedication, approachable nature, ability to be non-judgemental, and to her friends and mentors Jenny Browne, Sherry Saggers and Ann Ingamells. These senior University women have assisted Mary
throughout her career by providing support, advice and information on issues ranging from study techniques to campus activities. A strong believer in the mentoring concept, Mary is currently involved in the mentoring aspect of Springboard - one of the University’s training and development programmes. In co-operation with other senior women, Mary hopes to initiate a mentoring programme for the University’s general staff.

Mary’s advice to women who are seeking to develop their careers is to increase their visibility by becoming interested, not only in their own areas, but in other areas within the University. Mary also advises women to be loyal to the University, to put in a good day’s work, to trust their own intuition, to establish mentor relationships wherever possible, to try new things and to “Trust the Universe”.
Jennifer Sabbioni was appointed Senior Lecturer in Kurongkurl Katitjin (School of Indigenous Australian Studies) in 1994. She participates on the University’s Equal Opportunity Committee, the Faculty of Arts’ Faculty Board Committee, Higher Degrees Committee and is Convenor of the Aboriginal Research Committee. Prior to joining the University, Jennifer sat on its external Advisory Committee and was the metropolitan representative on the Premier’s Women’s Advisory Group.

When Jennifer visited her local CES office to enquire about employment opportunities, she had no idea where it would eventually lead. Wanting to do something more constructive with her life when her children had all reached school age, she approached the CES for employment assistance. There, she met Aboriginal employment officer Jim Morrison. After viewing her school records, he suggested that she progress to further study rather than enter the workforce.

Following Jim’s advice, Jennifer enrolled in a bridging course at the Western Australian College of Advanced Education (WACAE) and followed this with a Diploma of Teaching. She was later offered a teaching post in a remote area of WA but declined the position due to family concerns. Instead, she remained at WACAE and enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts. Her love of learning and thirst for knowledge saw her continue her education and she enrolled in a Master of Philosophy at the University of WA. For this award, Jennifer examined the reasons for the success of Aboriginal students in the tertiary education sector. On completion of her Masters degree, Jennifer was employed at the Aboriginal Education Consultative Council for a three month period. She later accepted a position with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). This was not a particularly happy time in her career as it was there that she came up against the negative attitudes of
fellow employees. There was a belief amongst many ATSIC staff that Aboriginal people were lacking in skills and required coaching in all that they did [even today Jennifer feels that people still find it difficult when they meet an Aboriginal person who is articulate and can work efficiently]. These problems were more to do with the lingering of past ATSIC policies than about being female. Initially, she was angered by these attitudes but many others were experiencing similar problems and together they formed a group. Sharing common interests and dreams, they identified issues that required change and appointed a spokesperson to pursue these changes. As a result of this proactive strategy, their voices were heard and changes were made to a number of ATSIC’s policies and procedures.

After 18 months with ATSIC, Jennifer successfully applied for a lectureship in Aboriginal Studies at the University of Tasmania. This was a particularly exciting position for Jennifer due to the large numbers of students enrolled in the units and she enjoyed teaching such a large group of enthusiastic learners. However, three years later, tragedy struck when Jennifer’s young son lost a battle with meningitis.

Shortly after, a position was advertised at Edith Cowan University and Jennifer decided it was time to return home to WA. Initially, she was employed as Kurongkurl Katitjin’s Student Centre Co-ordinator before being appointed to her current position of Senior Lecturer. She is currently enrolled in a PhD at the University of WA and is examining the life of a travelling pastoral inspector for her dissertation.

Jennifer owes much of her career success to CES employee Jim Morrison. He was her first source of inspiration. Recognising her potential, he convinced Jennifer that she had something to offer and provided the initial encouragement. Additional support and encouragement came from her grandparents, particularly her grandfather. Although not tertiary educated himself, he had an appreciation of education and saw it as a means to change. Up-front Aboriginal people such as Michael Mansell have been influential role models throughout Jennifer’s career. Achieving much through their tertiary education, they have illustrated that achievement is possible for Aboriginal people.

In terms of her own qualities, Jennifer attributes her success to her pleasant mannerism, her ability to listen and accommodate others’ opinions, her ability to care for others and to appreciate people for what they have to offer. Her advice to young women, particularly Aboriginal women, is to clearly establish a long-term dream, an ultimate accomplishment. Once this goal is in mind, it is important to set smaller dreams along the way so that there is always a sense of fulfilment.

Since the death of her son, Jennifer’s views have changed enormously. She believes that nothing is an obstacle, that everything can be overcome and if you can’t jump over an obstacle, go around it.
Maureen Wall is the Senior Administrative Officer for the Faculty of Health and Human Sciences. She is Deputy Chair of the University Senior Administrators Committee, a member of the new Occupational Health and Safety Policy Committee, Faculty Courses Committee, Faculty Board, Faculty Information Technology Committee, Self Management and Reflective Practice in Teaching and Learning (SMART) Advisory Committee, and the Women in Leadership Conference Committee.

Maureen's career commenced in the UK where she was employed in a number of secretarial positions at Director/Managing Director level. In 1981 Maureen and her family migrated to Australia. Initially, she found it difficult to obtain employment but secured a position as Typist with the Legal Aid Commission in 1984. Shortly after, she was promoted to a newly created position of Secretary to the Head of the Cost Section. A desire to obtain a position with additional scope prompted Maureen to accept a position as Secretary to the Deputy Town Clerk with the City of Wanneroo. She commenced work there in 1985 and was later appointed to the position of Acting Public Relations Officer. However, the absence of promotional opportunities provided the impetus for another career move.

In 1987, Maureen became Secretary to the Head of the School of Community and Language Studies on the Nedlands campus of WACAE. Following the sale of this campus and the move to Mount Lawley, a new position of School Administrative Officer was created. Maureen was hesitant to apply but despite this initial anxiety, she did apply and was successful. She has been in an administrative role since 1991 and was promoted to Senior Administrative Officer after the college attained university status.
Although some negativity confronted Maureen following her first promotion to School Administrative Officer she worked at establishing her own networks, having recognised the importance of building relationships with other University staff.

Maureen attributes some of her success to her open management style, her attempts to keep in touch with the perspectives of staff at other levels, and to the fact that she has taken advantage of any available opportunities. However, role models and significant others have also played a part. There was no training support for Maureen’s new position and it was necessary to constantly tease out procedures and create them where there were none. Observing others along the way also helped develop her skills and she cites one of her former male supervisors, who had particularly good people skills, as a particularly helpful role model.

Her mother was also a strong influence and her death at an early age contributed, Maureen believes, to her strength, independence and determination. Over the years, Maureen has developed friendships with other senior University women. These have provided excellent role models and learning opportunities, as well as support and encouragement when needed.

Maureen advises career-minded women to establish relationships with female colleagues and to learn from each other. Conscientiousness, patience, initiative, a desire to learn new skills, and the ability to put in extra effort when the situation may not demand it are Maureen’s additional ingredients for success, together with the backing of a supportive family.