

### Opening

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**David Porter:** Welcome to this edition of the *ASCILITE Wavelength Podcast*. I am your guest host, David Porter. In this episode, we talk to the creators, coordinators and participants of ASCILITE's Women in Academic Leadership Initiative. We learn what prompted this upstart program and the difference it has made for its participants in such a short time. This is the ASCILITE Wavelength Podcast.

### Part 1: Women in Academic Leadership

**Porter:** Gender equity and higher education continues to be the focus of institutional discussions and initiatives, and for good reason. The 2021 statistics compiled by the Australian Department of Education, Skills and Employment show that women account for 58% of academic staff, with the remaining 42% being male, however, at the level of associate professor or professor, men account for 80% of these higher level positions. In early 2021, ASCILITE launched its Women in Academic Leadership program to provide mentorship and support for academic women attempting to break into the professoriate—that's levels D and E, or the level of associate professor or professor, according to Australian academic ranks.

However, the initiative really began well before 2021 with conversations amongst Sue Gregory, Chris Campbell and Petra Redmond and others. We're going to hear from Sue, Chris and Petrea.

**Sue Gregory:** I'm Professor Sue Gregory. I'm at the University of New England. I'm a member of the ASCILITE Executive and have been since 2012 and started the Women in Academic Leadership Program in 2020.

So, we decided not to do this in 2020 due to COVID and began in 2021. So, we put out the call for mentors and mentees, and we are now 18 months into the program with many mentors, many mentees and many outcomes from our 2021 beginning, where many of our academic leaders and have now been promoted.

**Chris Campbell:** I'm Chris Campbell, the President of ASCILITE.

The Women in Academic Leadership is a really nice story that ASCILITE have in that at an ASCILITE Conference...and remembering that ASCILITE conferences are very community oriented. Someone went up to the previous ASCILITE President and spoke to her about the need for having an initiative, such as Women in Academic Leadership, to help provide a supportive community for women wanting to apply for promotion to the next level, as well as support collegiality around grant applications and other aspects of women in academia.

**Petrea Redmond:** My name is Patricia Redmond. I'm a professor at the University of Southern Queensland. I'm also on the ASCILITE Executive Committee and a Co-Coordinator, but also a mentor and mentee, for The Women in Academic Leadership Initiative.

In 2019, at the ASCILITE Conference in Singapore, I actually approached Chris and some of the other executive people, because I wasn't on the executive at the time, to ask if we could have a women in leadership program. And there was some interest from other people at the same time. So, we

started a conversation. Of course, then COVID hit, and although that was still in the back of the executives' mind, it actually didn't get started. The next minute I know, I'm on the ASCILITE Executive, so I did put my hand up as one of the co-coordinators of The Women in Academic Leadership Program, because I was interested to see how we could get this started and how we could successfully help level D's and C's get promoted to their respective next levels.

**Porter:** Chris explained the challenges and why these particular levels were targeted for the program.

**Campbell:** So, when people are doing their journey from a senior lecturer through to becoming an associate professor, they're actually moving on their academic journey from being a lecturer or a senior lecturer through to going onto a university's professoriate, and once they're on that professoriate, some universities actually consider them to be senior staff members. And as such, sometimes the promotion application process is a little bit different. But, it also means that there's an extra level of responsibility. So, universities don't tend to, I guess, promote everyone, and that is quite an interesting thing in itself. And it means that women can sometimes feel a little bit uncomfortable in the space. By having a supportive community with small groups, it can then allow people to really thrive in those groups, become more comfortable talking about their leadership and their leadership journey in order to actually do their application for promotion, as well as other applications.

**Porter:** I met one last member of the initiative's leadership team who provided a bit of an overview of the program.

**Huber:** I'm Elaine Huber. I'm an associate professor at the University of Sydney Business School and the Academic Director of the Business Co-Design Team. I am one of the Co-Chairs of the Women in Academic Leadership Initiative at ASCILITE, and my role on that is twofold. So, I'm one of the organisers of the all-group sessions, and we have a range of speakers, but I'm also a mentor to one of the groups of women on the program.

The Women in Academic Leadership Initiatives was really an idea that was put forward by members of the ASCILITE community, and the aim really is to support and guide women, at the sort of senior lecturer and associate professor levels, to make that step up to the senior levels, to get promotions to higher levels and also to build a network amongst that group of women. The Women in Academic Leadership Program entails a number of webinars, where we get together as a large group and we invite speakers to talk about their academic leadership journeys. The other part of the Women in Academic Leadership Program is a mentoring initiative, where groups...small groups come together...so, two or three academics with somebody who's at a level above them who can guide, give feedback and kind of just support each other through the promotion process or other award applications that people might be interested in and just share what's going on across Australasia.

**Porter:** Petrea additionally elaborated on what differentiates and makes the ASCILITE Women in Academic Leadership Program unique within the sector.

**Redmond:** So, you might have a mentoring program in your university, or you may be part of other professional associations that have mentoring programs, too. But ASCILITE is actually running in a niche program, so we're looking specifically for women at level C and D or Lecturer and Associate Professor who want to get promoted and who work in technology-enhanced learning in higher education. So, that is the focus of the work that we do, whether that is in our service, in our research, in our teaching. That is a focus for the people who are working in this area. I think it's important for ASCILITE to show leadership in the space, where women in academic leadership, in

terms of technology-enhanced learning and higher ed intersect. So, we're really in that small niche area, and that's the people who are in our association, they're the people that we are trying to provide service for as members of ASCILITE.

**Porter:** And I talked with some of those members and participants in the program. Chris has already mentioned some of the challenges women in academia face with rising through the ranks, but I wanted to find out about some of the specific challenges that our participants faced. Here's what they had to say.

We start with an observation from Chris.

**Campbell:** Female professors and associate professors, they've often had quite a hard journey, and there's still a glass ceiling in some places, in a lot of places.

**Collis:** I'm Professor Christy Collis, and I am the Associate Director of the Academic Transformation portfolio at University of Southern Queensland.

All right. Well, there are two challenges that I would say are specific to women in higher education in career building. The first is simply statistical. If you look at the statistics about who achieves level E in terms of gender and who achieves level B, you'll see that women are highly represented in the level B level and inadequately represented at level E level. So, when you want to address what problems are we facing, the statistics tell you what problems we're facing right there. There are obviously a huge number of reasons behind those statistics, but one of the things I really notice in mentoring that is challenging for women is...and this is something that's not just women, it's also specific to Australia...so, for Australian women, it is really difficult and that's just being able to say I'm good at things. In Australian culture, standing up and saying, "I'm really good at my job, and I'm very smart" is not really a culturally acceptable thing to do, particularly for women, who really aren't supposed to stand up and say, "I'm really smart." And so, mentoring has been particularly useful.

**Lynn Gribble:** Hi, I'm Lynn Gribble from the School of Management and Governance at the University of New South Wales.

So, for me, I'm a single mum, and I'm a single mum of a child who's just finished HSC and just commenced university studies. I didn't call out how that impacted me in my work or why it was important in my work. And all of a sudden, I was in a group that was saying to me, "How can we support you? What are the challenges that you're facing? Yes. No wonder you're tired". There's a large mental load with that I wasn't recognising any of those things because I didn't know any differently. So, all of a sudden, what being with a group of women did was that they heard me differently. They supported me differently. They encouraged me differently. So, I have other mentors, but I probably haven't had that unique experience of saying to me, "Well, yes, it is tough," or "How can I support you as a woman who's experiencing this," not just at being experienced, but because women have been, perhaps and maybe wrongly, that we are culturalized to do things in a certain way. So, you know, if I do something, it might be seen as aggressive, whereas if a male does it, it's just assertive. So, actually managing the perceptions, being able to talk about the frustrations, being able to recognise that I'm not alone on that journey has been invaluable for my development and growth.

**Camille Dickson-Deane:** Dr Camille Dixon Deane, Senior Lecturer Higher Ed at University of Technology Sydney.

Because we are positioned in society as nurturers, carers, we have these different labels that are assigned to us, but then we reach academia and then we have different expectations. Even though

they still expect us to be nurturing and caring, they want us to do the same thing like all the guys do. The guys just go for it. They don't care. Shrug their shoulders; move on. They want us to do that, but in their views, if you do it, you're wrong. So, you have this pull and tug of "We want you to act like us, but don't."

So, you have this, and it's a real struggle of a space. Because I always ask people, especially male leaders, who ask me to do some things, "I am going to do it this way. Is that OK?" And there's always a pause. And sometimes the pause is, "Why is she asking me such a stupid question," or "Why does she want to do it that way?"

And I said most people who answer me to that last part is that's why I'm asking you the question, for the simple reason that you would expect it to be done a different way, and that other way is not necessarily how I would do it.

Right, so I wanted to let you know up front that this is the way I'm going to handle it. And they go like, "Well, why?"

Well I go, "Like, because that's how it's supposed to be handled."

And they go like, "Yeah, but you've only been in the country X amount of years. You can't address it that way."

And I go like, "There we go."

So, there's this expectation sometimes when you have conversations with people, and they have a label or something in their back of their heads as their own...I called it their own signposting of what that person should be and how they should behave within the context of doing their job. And I typically ask, any of my male leaders, I call them gendered leaders, "Why could I not do it the same way a male counterpart would have done it?"

And they go "Well..." Sometimes it blatantly say, "It's because you're female." And sometimes it's a stutter. They go like, "Well...", because they don't want to say that.

**Porter:** Participants also shared their motivations for joining the program.

**Gribble:** To join the women in academic leadership program for me was an opportunity to talk leadership from a female perspective, to understand how to navigate the complex systems that we're in at university, with a particular focus on looking to develop for promotion, but also in leadership perspective. And often, there are things that I may not know or I may not be privy to through other networks, and having a dedicated focus on women, by women, for women, I have found to be really supportive in understanding my journey and also for me to support other women in their journey. And that's been quite an extraordinary process to recognise how together we can transverse our academic careers.

**Redmond:** One of the things that I was really hoping to from my own perspective was to get promoted. That was, you know, that was really the core part of it. And the second core part of it for me, which is one of the areas that I know I'm lacking is having some more information about grants. So, I felt reasonably confident in the rest of my academic career, but that getting grants was something that I just wasn't able to do. And perhaps that's because it's such a low rate for education people getting grants, or maybe it was the way I was doing things.

**Dickson-Deane:** So, in response to your question about what prompted me to get involved with Women in Academic Leadership through ASCILITE. I've been doing a lot of other mid-career

programs within the field as well as external to the field and more institutionalized, and I thought it would have been good to have one that is more topic related and more specific to the field that I work in. And ASCILITE offering that service is a very good segue into blending my space in terms of what I focus on, as well as my position at the institution.

**Collis:** Well, two things prompted me to get involved in the Women in Academic Leadership Initiative. The first is that I've benefited terrifically from career mentoring myself. And so, it's something I really want to be able to offer back to other scholars, to share the kind of benefits that I've reaped from professional mentoring. The second reason is this is a great network, not just in terms of sort of pragmatic professional network building, but also in terms of meeting a lot of really smart, ambitious, intelligent people. So, joining a mentoring network, I have found, is a really productive way to join an active and engaged community of practice.

**Porter:** As Elaine explained earlier, the program entailed some small-group mentorship as well as larger community gatherings. In my conversations, the participants elaborated on how they experienced the program and what they valued.

**Collis:** The way that this program was structured with individual mentoring and then coming back together as a community of practice was really useful. My mentees and I felt at all times as if we were part of this broader community of practice, with community exchanges and discussions going on around us, and we also did individual mentoring work. So, we were both working closely as individuals and as part of a wider group, which was really useful and also really stimulating because we could come back to the bigger group and discuss some of the things we've been going through or discussing or reflecting on in our smaller mentee meetings. And that was really useful to come back to the group and say, "Hey, we talked about this..." and to hear the other groups say, "Yeah, we talked about that, too."

Yeah, so that structure to this program is particularly well designed.

**Huber:** So, when we initially formed the mentoring groups, we worked really hard to look at each individual applicant and fit together people we felt were from different institutions, so that they could come into that mentor group without any preconceived notions of who they were or what they were currently doing or what they've done before. And to really sort of have the opportunity to open up together within that group and build that trust and build those relationships and sort of share the journey, share some of the pains that they might be going through and the difficulties they might be having in a kind of open way. And we really did think about, for example, one of the groups, we put together people from a similar discipline within the group so that they could understand what some of the issues are. For example, in a business discipline, publishing with strict business tables of where you can publish and what the values the different journals are the people within that mentoring group really understood some of those struggles because they'll experience them in their own institutions.

**Redmond:** One of the other interesting things about the ASCILITE Women in Academic Leadership Program is that it's a group mentoring program. So, it's not a one-to-one mentoring program, it's usually a one-to-two or one-to-three, depending on how big the groups are. So, it's important that all of the mentees are able to get something out of that. So, trying to find firstly some common ground where we can speak to each other about things and the fact that we're all in technology-enhanced learning helps to find that because some of the content base is similar even if we're in different disciplines within our universities. The other thing I think that's also important is that the

mentors learn from mentees. It's not like you're only getting something from the mentor, it's that it's actually the collaborative relationship between the group that's important.

**Dickson-Deane:** So, in participating in this program, what was I call the absolute gem, was the collaborative nature, the ability to share across, not only within the group, but external to the group as well, across boundaries and across different positions. And having the overarching sessions, where you have you meet someone in the field and you have that conversation in from leadership point of view, has always been beneficial. But also that cross pollinating within your small tiny group is also great. And hearing from other mentors as well as what they're doing with their mentees, also. It's great. It's like a three-fold kind of mix and fit kind of positions, right? I think those were the benefits, the huge benefits, because you hear that you're not the only person struggling. You're not the only person understanding things differently or seeing the differences in how people approach things, but you also have what I call a shoulder to whinge and weep on when things don't go your way.

Based on my experience, one of the things I've realised is that you can't go into these kinds of programs or anything unless you're open. And what I realise, a lot of people hold a lot of cards to their chests when they go into these programs and look to see what other cards they can add to their chest, as opposed to sharing their cards and I think sharing is. There's a difference between sharing and collaborating, and then the people understand there's a difference between sharing and collaborating, and a lot of people come in to collaborate but not to share. And I think these programs their foundation is about sharing. And I think that should be highlighted as you go into the program so that people are aware that they should come in present, willing to absorb and to understand what's going down. But they should also come in to share their own experiences, because that's what makes the whole system of these kind of mentoring programs work.

**Porter:** When we come back, we'll hear about the outcomes of the program and what lies ahead for Women in Academic Leadership

## Mid-Program Break

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## Part 2: Women in Academic Leadership

**Porter:** Welcome back. I've been talking to the leaders and participants of ask alights women in academic leadership initiative. The inaugural run of this combination mentoring and community of practice program will wrap at the end of 2022. The participants shared with me some of their successes and the outcomes.

**Huber:** So, the kind of halfway points of our first time two-year initiative, we called on each of the mentor groups to share some of their successes with us because we wanted to celebrate those. And, we'd already started to see, I think, five or six people have gotten promotions up to the next level, either up to associate professor or to professor level, which was fantastic. We didn't expect really to see that until towards the end of the two years. But there were also other smaller gains, what sort of teaching awards, fellowships attained, grants achieved, and just these sort of other smaller

achievements that possibly wouldn't have even been applied for had some of the people within our group not had this support and encouragement from their mentor groups.

**Redmond:** So, one of the major outcomes was obviously getting promoted. You couldn't wipe the smile off my face for months when that happened. And the other thing that is more recent is...My workload was...I was struggling trying to get everything done, and I was feeling guilty all the time. Then, I was letting down my teaching, I was letting down my service and the ASCILITE crew, and I was letting down my fellow researchers, especially if they weren't in my university. So, I had this guilt feeling the whole time. And I spoke a bit about feeling overwhelmed with everything that I had to do, and the mentor just said, "You need to stop doing something." So, I did. I just went to my boss, and I said, "I can't do all of it." She had a look at this workload calculator, which is nominal hours, and she had a look, and she said, "Oh, you are well over what you need to do. Yes, I'm happy for you to drop that role." Just in terms of mental health, it made a big difference, and it just opened up my timetable. My calendar now actually has space in it.

**Dickson-Deane:** One of my huge triumphs coming out of the program would be that I was planning to go for promotion. I then put a hold on it and I said, "You know, try something else first, and then I'll go for promotion next year." That was my ultimate goal—to set the foundation for how I approach my promotion documents. I have a world of resources to draw from, a world of expertise as well to draw from and to see what people, even though it's not internal to my institution, see what other institutions do and how you manipulate...I call it manipulate because that's what promotion is about, right? Manipulating a seed and telling people it's a flower? Right? So, how do you manipulate and manage that and massage that into a great speaking point for yourself to be promoted? So, that was what I was hoping to get out of it, and I did get that. So, now I have different avenues, I have different approaches, I have different people I can lean on—different resources, which is very much important—different types of resources that you can go for, etc. That was attained as the one goal that I came for, and I got that one goal and that's definitely there. They are the goals that I've gotten along the way.

Especially like the speaker panels, the different speakers that have spoken over the periods of time and the value that they've brought from different perspectives, that is also invaluable to me, because I think that idea of being renowned in this space and known for that kind of work is different than how it is visioned in the US, right? So, that value system is a little different. So, understanding that value system going forward as well and how people moved from one step to the other step, sometimes horizontally, sometimes vertically. So, understanding all of that, I think I've landed for the loss. It'll be two years to the end. Uh, a wealth of knowledge and the things that I can draw from for quite a while.

**Gribble:** For me, the real outcome of doing Women in Academic Leadership was to when to back myself, and other ways to ask and other ways to get to support, that was outside of my own institution, outside of my own network. And I think that the thing that I've really noticed, as I said, is this community, you know, that here we've been in lockdown and this community has just opened up where people say, "Oh yes, you know, you're part of this, and so I can help you with that. Or you know, how can I be part of that?" And of course, despite being in lockdown and I haven't met any of these people face to face, I feel like I could send an email tomorrow or this afternoon, and this person would respond with "Sure," or "If not me, this person," or "How do we help?" or "Have you thought about this?"

So, that's invaluable. Because, if you were going to take your leadership journey in any institution academically, it's not a solo journey, and it's as much about followership as it is about leadership. It's

about will people join with you and support you to get there. So, this is this great opportunity to be with a group of like-minded people who together are saying, "Let's get there, and let's change the landscape." And that to me is completely different than anything else that I've experienced. So, I've been on other, you know, programs for women and leadership, etc., but this particular program is about women supporting women to go their next step in their own journey, not in a predefined journey. And that's what I think makes it truly unique.

**Campbell:** It showed me that I could deliberately choose my journey, and so, I started to think about where I wanted to be and what I wanted to do.

**Huber:** So, as well as the many achievements that we've had as part of the mentoring group, there's also been some people who've decided to leave academia. And of course, hopefully it wasn't because of Women in Academic Leadership, but it did give them the opportunity to talk about what's ahead of them and look at what's ahead of them in more detail and talk to people about that. And for some people, they realised this wasn't the path for them and decided to go into the professional sphere—so, stay in academia, but not as an academic. And we were able to give support and advice about applying for that kind of position, and it'll be really interesting to see how that transition has worked out for that person.

**Porter:** And as this round of Women in Academics Leadership draws to a close, Chris Campbell and Elaine Huber provided a bit of a preview of what is to come.

**Campbell:** The women in Academic Leadership initiative is just closing the first group with the first two-year cycle. So, we have about six months to go. And after that, so from next year, there will be a new group.

Some people may still be involved in that if someone has moved up a level in those two years, they might like to then become a mentor and continue. Other people might come back once they achieve that goal, if that was a goal.

**Huber:** So, we're hoping at the end of the first round, the first two years, at the ASCILITE Conference, to have an opportunity to meet, because, of course, we've run this program totally online these past 18 months. And so, we were hoping to get a grant to support some sort of workshop or connection activity at the conference.

So, we will be putting out a call for expressions of interest to join the next round of Women in Academic Leadership sometime in the second half of this year, and that notification will come out via the ASCILITE Bulletin. It will also be on the ASCILITE webpage for Women in Academic Leadership.

**Porter:** And to find out more about Women in Academic Leadership and other ASCILITE activities go to [ascilite.org](http://ascilite.org) and click on Get Involved.

### Closing

**Porter:** And that concludes another *ASCILITE Wavelength Podcast*, thanks to our guests, the women in academic leadership organisers Chris Campbell, Sue Gregory, Elaine Huber and Petrea Redmond and the program mentors and mentees, Christy Collis, Camille Dixon-Deane and Lynn Gribble.

Music for the podcast is produced and performed by Kevin MacLeod of [incompetech.com](http://incompetech.com). Thank you for listening to the ASCILITE Wavelength podcast. Find out more at [ascilite.org](http://ascilite.org).



## Epilogue

**Host:** Hi, I'm David Porter, one of the producers of the ASCILITE Wavelength Podcast. I wanted to take a moment to invite you to be part of the podcast. We've designed the ASCILITE Wavelength Podcast to be community contributed. We invite academics, professionals and affiliates passionate about learning and teaching in tertiary education to pitch and produce podcast segments. If you are interested, we invite you visit [ASCILITE.org](https://www.ascilite.org) and check out the Connect section for further details and submission guidelines. And we at ASCILITE want to thank you for listening.