PROPEL – Program for Preparing Early Leaders

BIG PICTURE COMPONENT FRAMEWORK

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1 The importance of seeing the ‘big picture’

Academic leaders need to have a big picture vision and know how to get there by understanding the structures and systems that will enable the enactment of that vision. These include “policy formation, managing relationships, working with challenging staff, involvement in various aspects of planning, and attending meetings” (Scott, Coates & Anderson, 2008).

Potential future leaders need to gain understanding about how their university and the university sector work in order to see the big picture and develop inspired leadership visions. At the same time they need to become aware of the – often conflicting – pressures confronting universities and staff in universities.

2 The PROPEL Big Picture Component

The Big Picture Component will allow PROPEL participants insight into how universities work on a day to day basis through attendance at high level committee meetings, such as the University Thesis Examination Committee, the University Education Committee, the University Research Committee and so on.

Each participant will attend at least two meetings, one in the teaching and learning area and one in the research area. For each meeting participants will write a short general reflective report which will be given to the meeting chairs. In addition, there will be a discussion sessions held among the participant group where meeting experiences will be shared.

Attending such meetings will help PROPEL participants develop a realistic picture of how the university operates and enable them to “connect the dots”, to experience the complexity of academic management.

3 Identifying appropriate committees

Committees identified in the Big Picture Component will:
- Be at university governance level
- Have a regular schedule of meetings
- Deal with topics which give an insight into issues of significance to the university as a whole.
- Be active in developing options and solutions. (Committees which are mainly concerned with approvals are not preferred.)

Chairs of selected committees will be contacted by the PROPEL Project Manager to seek approval for a PROPEL participant to attend a set number of committee meetings during the training year.

Other events may also be selected for PROPEL participants to attend, such as Faculty or UOW planning meetings. Attendance at such events can be negotiated between the participant, PROPEL Project Manager and the event coordinator.

4 Selection of committees to attend

A full list of committees will be available to participants at the PROPEL Leadership Skills Workshop. Participants will be asked to state their preferences for the committees they wish to attend.

Participants are expected to attend at least two different committees during the 12-month PROPEL Program. One committee should have a teaching focus and the other should have a research focus. In addition, participants may also choose to attend a committee with an overall governance focus.

The PROPEL Coordinators will allocate participants to committees as appropriate.

5 Support for participants to complete the Big Picture Component

Supporting materials will be provided to participants, including structured tools for recording and reviewing their observations during committee meetings. These will help participants focus on:
- Leadership skills and style demonstrated by the Chair
- Other committee members who adopt a leadership role
- Dynamics in the room and how they are managed effectively
- Types of topics on the agenda
- How issues are dealt with and resolved
- How the committee deals with situations where they can’t reach agreement
- External forces affecting the university or the faculty
- How academic and administrative issues overlap
- Connections between vision, strategy and operational planning

The PROPEL Project Manager will provide follow-up support at regular intervals to ensure participants are managing to attend their selected committee meetings and are meeting with the Committee Chairs for follow-up discussions. The PROPEL Coordinators will liaise with Committee Chairs if any difficulties arise.

6 Schedule of meeting attendances and follow-up discussions

The schedule of meeting attendance is to be arranged as best suits the participant and the Committee Chair. As a guide:

- First committee attendance – November-December 2010
- Second committee attendance – February-March 2011

Participants will be expected to attend at least one meeting of each committee during the training year. Where the Committee Chair approves, participants may arrange to attend a number of consecutive meetings of the same committee. This will allow progress and development of issues to be observed.

After each committee attendance, participants are required to schedule an appointment with the Committee Chair to discuss their observations. This discussion should take place as soon as possible following the committee meeting.

For each meeting attendance, participants will write a short general reflective report which will be given to the meeting chairs.

7 Confidentiality

All PROPEL participants will be required to provide the committee chair with a signed confidentiality agreement which states that they will not disclose any confidential or sensitive information they have received as a result of their participation in that committee.

Participants will be advised that they should step out of a committee meeting at any time that the committee is discussing sensitive matters regarding the participant’s own Faculty.

8 References