What is PROPEL?

PROPEL is a one-year intensive leadership program for pre-leadership academics. It is a single, homogeneous program which brings together multiple facets of leadership development. It consists of six interrelated components — Mentoring, Network, Big Picture, Leadership Skills, Active and Reflective — each focusing on the development and practice of broad leadership skills and the growth of confidence as a leader.

The PROPEL Program targets academic staff who are at a ‘pre-leadership’ stage of their career, but have shown leadership ability and potential. Traditionally, leadership training is only available to those already in leadership positions. The PROPEL Program takes an unashamedly proactive approach by giving potential future academic leaders a taste of the day-to-day complexities of universities well before they commence their first leadership roles.

PROPEL is not just about training academics for a particular leadership role. It is about laying the foundations for their entire leadership career. Someone who is a skilful leader will inspire people around them and take their university forward, even before they reach a formal leadership position.

The importance of mentoring to academic leadership development

Being in a mentoring partnership with a successful academic leader offers pre-leadership academics an invaluable opportunity to learn from the leader’s knowledge, experience and insight. Mentoring is both an opportunity for self-development and a leadership skill which itself must be learned and practised. Pre-leadership academics who experience a successful mentoring partnership will develop a mentoring ‘mindset’ which they carry forward into future leadership roles.

The PROPEL Mentoring Component

The first of the six elements in the PROPEL Program is the Mentoring Component. Each PROPEL participant will be assigned a mentor for the duration of the Program (12 months). Mentoring will be carried out through regular intentional dialogue between the two partners and will involve agreed objectives and clearly defined responsibilities and expectations. The mentor's role will be to lead the participant through explorations of his/her own abilities, goals and professional development plans. One of the main roles is to help participants take stock of where they are now and where they want to be.
Identifying the PROPEL participants

The PROPEL Program participants will be ‘pre-leadership’ academic staff, that is, they will not have held an institutional leadership role.

Participants will be selected based on a range of factors, including demonstrated leadership characteristics, energy and enthusiasm for new ideas and ways of working, and strong research and teaching performance.

What’s involved in being a PROPEL Mentor?

- Mentors are matched with a PROPEL participant from outside their own Faculty. (Participants and mentors will be given the option of declining their selected partner and being rematched.)

- All mentors and participants are introduced at the PROPEL Program Launch, which will include a brief mentoring training session and full details of the Program requirements.

- Participants attend a three-day Leadership Skills Workshop. Mentors are welcome to attend certain sessions if available.

- First meetings of mentoring partnerships are held within four weeks of the Leadership Skills Workshop:
  - mentoring agreements are completed (clarifying details and objectives);
  - schedule of face-to-face meetings is set (average one hour per month).

- Regular mentoring discussions are held over the next 11 months focusing on:
  - Working through the results of self-assessment and 360 degree feedback instruments completed by the participant prior to the commencement of the Program.
  - Preparing an individual development plan for the coming 12-months.
  - Developing the participant’s selected leadership skills.
  - Supporting the participant as he/she plans and carries out the leadership action project.
  - Preparing for and debriefing following the participant’s attendance at committee meetings.
  - Self-reflection and reflection on the PROPEL Program.
  - Setting longer-term leadership goals (beyond the PROPEL program) and developing action plans to achieve them.

- One year from the start of the Program, final mentoring meetings will be held to conclude partnerships and mentors will be invited to the PROPEL participant graduation.

The PROPEL Coordinators will provide follow-up support at regular intervals to assist partners maintain momentum and revisit goals.
Addressing partnership concerns

While many positive outcomes will be achieved from the mentoring partnerships, difficulties may arise from time to time. Mentoring partners are encouraged to be open and honest with each other about issues and look for solutions. If the participant wishes to explore issues which are outside the agreed scope of the mentoring partnership, you may need to refer him/her to other more appropriate sources of support. The PROPEL Coordinators may be called on for assistance at any time during the mentoring partnership.

Privacy and confidentiality

Mentoring partners must agree to confidentiality. Conversations should be regarded as private and information disclosed should not be passed on, used or in any other way revealed. Privileged or sensitive information should not be shared between mentoring partners.