

# INTERNATIONAL PROJECT PARTICIPATION BY WOMEN ACADEMICS

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The internationalization of higher education has led to changing roles for academics, including opportunities to participate in international projects. The extent to which academics feel prepared to enter this arena has received little attention. This study examines women academics' perceptions of barriers to, facilitators of, and career benefits of pursuing international projects. Thirteen women academics participated in semi-structured interviews that illuminated six core themes: the benefits of international roles, influences on motivation, enablers and barriers, expanded personal and academic world views, and ways of gaining international competencies. Suggestions are given for supporting academic women to pursue international opportunities.

Key words: women's career development, women academics, internationalization communities

L'internationalisation des études supérieures entraîne une évolution dans les rôles des professeurs, qui se voient ainsi entre autres offrir la possibilité de participer à des projets internationaux. Dans quelle mesure les professeurs se sentent-ils prêts à entrer dans cette arène? Voilà une question qui a peu été analysée. Cette étude porte sur les perceptions qu'ont des universitaires de sexe féminin sur les obstacles à la participation à des projets internationaux, les facteurs qui la facilitent et les impacts positifs sur leur carrière. Treize professeures ont pris part des entrevues semi-structurées axées sur six thèmes clés : les bienfaits retirés des participations à des projets internationaux, les facteurs jouant sur la motivation, les catalyseurs et les obstacles, l'élargissement des visions du monde personnelles et professionnelles et les façons d'acquérir des compétences internationales. Des suggestions sont fournies pour inciter les universitaires de sexe féminin à profiter des débouchés internationaux.

Mots clés : promotion de la carrière des femmes, universitaires de sexe féminin, internationalisation

The changing world of work demands that academics incorporate global perspectives into career development. The global economy has affected how business is conducted through access to new markets and increasing diversity in the work force (Collin & Young, 2000). Shifting borders throughout the world lead to new trade, travel, and educational opportunities. International partnerships have an impact on employee mobility as people from different countries work together. As a result, people require cross-cultural competencies to be successful in careers that are increasingly global in nature (Herr, 1993a, 1993b). As institutions in the public and private sectors internationalize their mandates, they need to consider the human dimensions of global enterprise. This includes equipping the workforce with the attitudes, knowledge, and skills required for international employment (Arthur, 2000, 2002; Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2002). International competencies complement people's technical skills for ensuring success in working across cultures and across countries (Wilson, 1999). People with the foresight to incorporate international experience into their career planning have a tremendous advantage in current and future employment contexts (Arthur, 2000; Hansen, 1990).

This article focuses on the employment context of higher education. Changes in the world of work, including the influences of globalization, have affected academic life. Academics have increasing opportunities and pressures to incorporate international scholarship as an integral part of their academic portfolios. This can be achieved in many ways through the internationalization of higher education. For example, international partnerships have changed where education is conducted and how it is delivered. The links between international experience and the employment context of higher education have not been examined in terms of opportunities, barriers, and how international roles enhance women's careers. The purpose of this research was to provide a better understanding about how women academics develop international competencies and the pathways that influence their career development.

## CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCES ON THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN ACADEMICS

Three bodies of literature provided the foundation for our inquiry. First, we considered the context of academic institutions in light of mandates and practices related to internationalization. Second, the literature on women's career development provided a foundation from which to examine barriers and enablers that facilitate women's participation and mobility. Third, the literature from business and management provided examples of the barriers and facilitators that impact women's careers in the international marketplace. This literature was instructive for examining potential influences on the career development of women academics.

### *Internationalization of Higher Education*

Changes in the world of work due to globalization have changed the nature of institutions in higher education and the nature of academic roles (Marginson, 2000; Scott, 1998). Internationalization has been characterized as "a process that prepares the community for successful participation in an increasingly interdependent world" (Francis, 1993, p. 5); however, multiple and competing values drive the internationalization of higher education (Arthur, 2003). Although it is beyond the scope of this article, the potential local benefits of internationalization must be examined in light of concerns regarding economic motives and exploitation of education consumers. Institutional pressures for international partnerships and revenue generation are driving forces through which academics are encouraged to participate in international projects. Faculty members are expected to participate in the commercialization of curriculum, instruction, and supervision of learners from diverse countries and cultures, and the design and delivery of education in other countries and/or through the use of technology.

An expanded definition captures the broad range of internationalization activities that are connected to academic roles.

Internationalization of higher education is the process of integrating an international dimension into the teaching/learning, research and service functions of a university or college. An international dimension means a

perspective, activity or service which introduces or integrates an international/intercultural/global outlook into the major functions of an institution of higher education. (Knight, 1994, p. 3)

International projects involve academic activities that may be conducted in local contexts or through offshore delivery of academic expertise.

Internationalization has changed the rules and roles of academic work. International scholarship is increasingly becoming the expectation for faculty members as evidenced in changing norms for hiring practices and criteria for determining merit and promotion. However, little research has documented how academics incorporate mandates for internationalization into their academic practices.

Participation in international projects requires academics to gain expertise beyond the usual scope of their academic role. Similar to international project work in the private sector, academics must consider expanding their repertoire of academic expertise to include project management and soft skills such as intercultural communication and conflict management to support working across cultures (Arthur, 2002; McDonald & Arthur, 2005). The preparation of academics for international projects and the methods through which international competencies are gained have not been identified in the literature. At a time when higher education is gaining increasing importance for the export market, parallel efforts must be given to support academics in the development of competencies for international roles.

Contextual forces that impact the career development of academics must also be examined. Acker and Armenti (2004) emphasize that the structures and ideologies of higher education impact working conditions for women. In particular, they note the importance of expanding a critical examination of how global trends influence women academics' experiences in higher education. A few sources examine the ways in which global influences on university work may affect male and female academics differentially (e.g., Brooks & Mackinnon, 2002; Currie, Thiele, & Harris, 2002; Luke, 2001). An overriding concern in the current study pertains to the career mobility of women academics and their access to international roles that enhance their academic profiles.

*Barriers and Facilitators to Women's Career Development*

In reviewing the literature on women and international careers, we noted the many themes that are reminiscent of the earlier literature on women's career development. The issues for working internationally parallel these issues to explain women's access to and mobility within the domestic workforce. Many variables, both internal and external, serve as barriers or facilitators of women's careers (Patton, 1997; Worell & Remer, 2003). Betz (1994) has summarized how individual factors and environmental factors influence women's career development, depending on the presence or absence of these factors (Patton, 1997). External barriers and internalized messages are believed to reciprocally influence both the scope and nature of career mobility (Betz & Hackett, 1997; Farmer & Associates, 1997). For example, the demand for women's participation in the labour force has not been matched by their representation across employment sectors, and women continue to be under-represented in high-status (and usually high-paying) occupations (Davey, 2001; Drolet, 2002). Social stereotyping about occupational roles continues to affect women's career aspirations and the perceptions of available options held by young women (Worell & Remer, 2003). Many other environmental barriers and facilitators have been identified as potential influences on women's career development, including lack of role models, a null environment that neither encourages nor discourages individuals and perpetuates the status quo, family-career conflicts, self-efficacy, and expectancies for success (Betz, 1994; Fitzgerald & Weitzman, 1992; Lalande, Crozier, & Davey, 2000) Despite the burgeoning literature in the career development field during the past 25 years, there continue to be serious impediments to women's career development (Worell & Remer, 2003).

*Women in the International Marketplace*

Literature from the business and management field identifies several barriers and enablers for women's participation in the international marketplace (Adler, 2002; Taylor, Knox-Napier, & Mayrhofer, 2002). In a landmark discussion paper, Adler (1984) examined several myths surrounding the participation of women in international careers. During the last 20 years, research efforts have attempted to ascertain the validity

of claims levied against the successful participation of women in the international marketplace. This growing body of literature suggests that there continues to be resistance against women's entry into and mobility within the management hierarchy through international assignments. For example, research has focused on women's reluctance and internal reasons for not pursuing international assignments (Fischlmayr, 2002; Stroh, Varma, & Valy-Durbin, 2000), the reluctance of home-country male managers to send females on international assignments (Linehan, 2002), barriers for the acceptance of women in positions of influence by foreign partners (Caligiuri & Cascio, 1998), and working conditions outside their home countries (Napier & Taylor, 2002). In general, findings suggest that the primary barriers for participation in international assignments lie with home and work conflicts, restraining conditions within home organizations such as overlooking women as viable candidates for international projects and making assumptions about their career interests, and gender stereotypes that exist within both home and host countries (Caligiuri & Cascio, 1998; Mayrhofer & Scullion, 2002; Stroh, Varma, & Valy-Durbin, 2000). Although each factor appears to influence the performance of women on global assignments, considerable evidence suggests that the most serious constraining influences lie with the home organization. As noted in an earlier study of female managers, "The most difficult job is getting sent, not succeeding once sent" (Adler, 1991, p. 296).

Despite the evidence of barriers, participation in international careers shows positive outcomes. In an introduction to a special journal issue on women in global business, Taylor, Knox-Napier, and Mayrhofer (2002) summarize the research noting that women succeed at working abroad even in environments that are unwelcoming. It appears timely for research to articulate the factors that facilitate the success of women on global work assignments (e.g., Caligiuri & Cascio, 1998). Beyond business and management contexts, researchers have not examined women and international careers in other occupational sectors. Given the concerns levied about women entering traditionally male occupations, additional study is needed on the extent to which international roles are gendered.

Toren (1999) notes that women entering traditionally male

occupations are usually regarded and treated as strangers. This may partially account for the stereotyping and exclusion portrayed in the literature about women working in the international marketplace. Additional research is needed to examine the extent to which the “glass ceiling” has transferred to “guarded borders” in the international workplace. Our study emerged out of curiosity to explore the factors that pose as barriers and enablers related to the career development of academic women through participation in international education and, specifically, international projects.

#### METHOD

The overriding goals of this research were to gain a better understanding of both how women academics develop international competencies and the pathways that influence their career development. In particular, we examined women’s perceptions of barriers and facilitators to participation in international projects conducted in other countries.

We invited women academics at one Canadian university to participate in our research. Through an e-mail notice, we notified them about a website address where they could locate further information about the study, including a letter of invitation and consent form. Criteria for eligibility were that the participants were full-time employees of the institution and that they had experience working in another country in at least one international project. We interviewed 13 women academics, ranging in ages from 33 to 61. The academic rank of participants included four assistant professors, six associate professors, and three full professors. All participants were Caucasian; the majority identified their ethnic background as European countries, Russia, or the United States. Because of the potential for identifying participants from faculties with few women academics, their faculty affiliations remain unnamed.

We developed an interview protocol of semi-structured questions, focusing on international projects and international employment competencies while encouraging the unique perspectives of each participant (Kvale, 1996). The interview content revolved around seven guiding questions:

1. What relationship do you see between participation in international projects and your career development?
2. What is the significance for your career development of working on international projects?
3. What are the barriers to your participation in international projects?
4. What are the enablers for your participation in international projects?
5. What competencies have supported your success in international projects?
6. How did you acquire competencies for international projects?
7. What advice would you give to other women academics about their careers and participation in international projects?

Using content analysis to sort data from the interviews, we identify key themes, employing a three-stage process. The steps in the data analysis were undertaken with the general progression from macro- to micro-analysis. The broadest categories were extracted first and became the six main themes. Sub-themes were identified by categorizing the various components related to each core theme. The progression of analysis is chronologically recounted as follows:

1. All transcripts were read once as an overview to gain a general understanding of the breadth of data.
2. Notes were taken to record tentative themes, based on the frequency of identification by, and among, participants; six themes were thus formalized.
3. The transcripts were reviewed for the second time to identify content relevant to the study but outside of the topics queried by the specific questions. Adjustments to the wording of the six themes were made to more accurately reflect data content.
4. A number was assigned to each theme. Each transcript was then reread a third time and numbers were penciled in the margins to correspond with those of the themes. A comment made by a participant that corresponded to a given theme (i.e., 1 to 6) was given its number.
5. The numbered comments were then listed by theme number to have a summary of all points made relating to each given theme. The core



- themes were based on comments made by all participants; therefore, the core themes represent unanimous facets of experience.
6. The sub-themes were extracted from the six themes lists by counting the frequency of comments pertaining to each theme. The most frequently mentioned (i.e., by more than three participants) points became the 15 identified sub-themes.
  7. A chart was constructed to illustrate all points and their frequencies of identification made by participants, for each of the 15 sub-themes. In this way, all relevant data were made available to validate the study and its conclusions.

One researcher initially conducted these steps. In the next level of data analysis, a second researcher reviewed the material to check validity of the themes and to confirm the associations of sub-themes both within and between the core categories. Third, a copy of interview summaries, themes, and sub-themes was mailed to each participant to reflect on her responses and to elaborate on and/or correct information that she deemed to be important.

## RESULTS

Participants identified a wide range of international experience as relevant to their career paths, including participation in international development projects both prior to and during their tenure as academics, teaching on-site in other countries, and research collaboration with international partners. The variety of experience attests to a broad scope in defining “what counts” as international experience. The opportunities for international projects secured by individuals — including research collaboration, presentations at international forums and associated networking, and teaching experiences — are examples of how participants gained experience that they viewed as relevant for their academic careers.

### *Benefits to Participation in International Projects*

Through participation in international projects, women academics reap benefits for themselves, for their academic institution, and for their home society.

The personal benefits in some way enhance women academics' quality of life. For example, all participants indicated that they had acquired greater cross-cultural understanding from their international research, a benefit that enhanced communication with others of different cultures, whether at home or abroad.

[Y]ou just learn to think a lot differently, you have different perspectives and you have a deeper understanding of the sort of world problems and you can see so often both sides of . . . perhaps an international conflict in that things, the dogma you quite frequently read in the paper or a particular interest group taking a particular position about a company . . . that is doing something internationally, it's not that simple; you know, it is really very complex.

Participation in international projects also helped participants manage cross-cultural transitions and reduced fear associated with experiencing novel situations in a foreign culture.

I noticed with friends who have not traveled much during their lives and they say "okay, well you know, I'll retire early or whatever and then I'm going to travel," and generally speaking it's a bit of a disaster because they're not used to coping with the fact that you have so many things out of your immediate control.

Benefits to the institution consisted of the participant's better ability to establish rapport with her home students of various cultural backgrounds. For instance, all participants felt that because their institution had an increased focus on attracting foreign students, these students benefited from professors and teaching that is geared toward cross-cultural diversity and commonality. The institution also benefits from the research carried out and the recognition that accompanies such projects.

[O]ur Masters program is headquartered in [country not named to protect identity] . . . and we have had students from I think 14 countries, the program started in 1996 and they're in the seventh class, and 16 countries have been involved to date.

Societal benefits result from a general increase in cross-cultural awareness and understanding. Participants indicated that while the

world is becoming smaller and travel more widespread and frequent, at the same time that global technology enables various cultures to communicate more freely, cross-cultural teaching and research foster greater understanding. These experiences were connected to women academics' strong value of making a difference through their international project work.

[T]he CIDA projects are always about poverty alleviation so the logic goes that they will alleviate poverty in poor western [country not named to protect identity] by improving, or by giving kids, as they grow up better job opportunities, and they will do that by giving them better education, and they will do that by improving the quality of the teaching, therefore we will work on professional development for teachers, so that's what we are actually doing.

#### *Motivation to Pursue International Projects*

Whether a women academic decides to participate in an international project depends on peer and mentor influences, the type and availability of work abroad, and the project location.

Academic peers and mentors may encourage participation if they have experience with that project or a similar one, have traveled to the research site or area, and/or believe the potential academic to be a good fit in terms of competencies for that situation. For example, one participant told how she first met a new colleague at a conference. He invited her to write a chapter for his book because he was familiar with, and interested in, her area of expertise. He was a professor at a European university from that region; a subsequent cross-cultural research project between his country and Canada resulted.

And he approached me at a conference and said would I be interested in a chapter in a book he's doing, and so I did that, and then he said let's translate it into Italian, and he was the translator and published it in Italy, and so he became interested in my work and said 'why don't we do something together?', and so we talked about it, and so we're doing . . . [the study] . . . with the students there and I do it with students here . . . and after we had the data gathered, I was over there and we would work together on the data on two different occasions.

The type and availability of work will be consistent with the competencies and academic expertise of researchers. For instance, a

project in Latin America, which involved teaching children, was of utmost interest to one participant who spoke fluent Spanish and was, herself, a teacher of similar grade levels. In another project, language competency combined with professional experience to open opportunities for participation in international projects.

I was invited to participate as a nurse with a group of young people that were going to have an exposure to another culture . . . and that sort of started me on a path of going short-term a few times. My first time was to Mexico . . . and then I went to Paraguay, South America, and then to the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

Other factors that influence academic women's decisions to pursue international projects pertain to logistical reasons. For example, participants considered when and where this work is being conducted to coincide with their ability to leave home and work commitments. All participants stated that flexibility in their academic schedules is limited and may not mesh with a project's time frame, determined by such factors as funding tied to the fiscal year and seasonal weather patterns (e.g., monsoon season) in the country where the project is located.

When I go to China it's typically for a month, up to six weeks, so that's a substantial block of time. That's both personal and professional [barrier] because that's away from your life at home . . . but it's also a weight on your ongoing responsibilities at work. . . . The Chinese have their schedule . . . when their school, when their teachers are on holidays and are free to come to say, a summer class or something. If we want to see them teaching, we have to go when classes are in session and if we want them to be free to come to classes as students themselves, it has to be when they are on vacation, so there are all kinds of Chinese restrictions as well as restrictions here.

Location of the project represents more than a geographical location and refers also to cultural influences. For example, one participant commented that she would not go to a place that did not recognize women as equal in status and value with men.

[T]hey did ask me at one time, . . . I think it was Saudi Arabia, to go there and teach a course. It didn't materialize but I [said], you know, I know how women

are treated there. If you send me over there, am I going to be accepted? Are they going to even listen to what I say . . . so I wouldn't want to put myself in a position like that.

*Participation in International Projects Reduces Ethnocentrism in Academic Practices*

Ethnocentrism, the belief that one's own culture is superior over others, is a major contributor to bias, especially in a cross-cultural forum. Researcher expectations based on ethnocentric assumptions about the people one is studying affect interpretations of data in research projects and related researcher bias. For instance, researchers from two different cultures, both scoring data for the same study, might not score the same way.

[Research] takes longer because you're doing it by long distance . . . it's messier. . . our research is fairly messy anyway, especially class research is not black and white unless you do something like surveys and count things up . . . and even then, developing and scoring (the) scoring sheets, it gets messy and then you're doing it in two languages . . . it's very messy and the problem with getting a rate of reliability — are they scoring it the same as we are? . . . [I]t's difficult to get interrelated reliability. Because of that, you want to make sure you're scoring things consistently.

Similarly, research ethics would be affected by cultural interpretations of observed behavioural phenomena. One participant recounted how some of her colleagues working on a teaching project were disappointed to discover what constituted as cheating among the Central American students, when in fact these students simply shared information to ensure each other's success.

[W]e certainly discovered in [country unnamed to protect identity], and since then I have discovered this is actually quite common in many cultures, cheating, what we would call cheating was a normal way of life, and in fact how you were helpful, so if you had . . . a very narrow inflexible point of view, yes those students cheated, yes by the university calendar they should have been expelled, but if you . . . looked at it from their culture, . . . you could get beyond that to see well, preferably helping one another is part of what you do here.

Where our culture values the individual and competition, here was a culture steeped in group values and co-operation. The experience reminded this participant of equally valid but sometimes polar-opposite cultural rules and motivators.

*Enablers Outweigh Barriers for Participating in International Projects*

The logistics of participating in international projects will ultimately determine whether a particular international opportunity is pursued. Enablers are factors that facilitate participation in a direct way. For example, all participants reported that adequate funding was an important aspect of international research, as was family support.

[F]unding is a big issue too. But I find that [our university] is pretty generous in terms of the funding opportunities. [E]xternally would be SSHRC for me, but I think internally there are opportunities available for travel.

Several participants had spouses who were eager and able to provide support such as accompanying her and assisting with operational tasks such as child care and accommodation arrangements.

[My husband] could probably go down and set little business projects up, so he's always said to me if I was able to get . . . even a teaching position somewhere, in a different country then, he said, go for it.

Barriers consist of those factors that could prevent a woman academic from undertaking an international project. For example, children were mentioned as a potential logistical barrier, especially if the research location was considered unsafe because of health issues or political instability.

I couldn't go abroad because it was a big deal for us to even be pregnant and therefore we didn't want to jeopardize my health, or the baby's health so we decided not to take those chances, and so I could have gone to India to do a project, . . . but I couldn't.

Lack of flexibility in scheduling during the academic year could also prevent participation in a research project having a definite time frame.

[C]learly we would have to negotiate around our academic responsibilities here, and actually a colleague of mine, one of the men on faculty, and I had [collaborated about] the courses, and in fact, the first time I was there I taught one and he taught the other and the next time we switched, just because of timing.

*Participation in International Projects Broadens Academic Horizons*

The participants stressed that international projects do not facilitate career building. Instead, all participants reported that they engaged in international work to enhance their sense of personal and professional rewards.

I think it intrigued me personally to be more open to international work in the future. So it opened my eyes to the possibilities and the rewards, at this very personal level, you know, becoming colleagues with people and its rewards. The university perspective, as probably in the eyes of seeing, it was a career-enhancing move regardless. . . .

First, such participation builds competencies that help academics understand and relate to people of various cultures collaboratively. One participant reported that her research in the Middle East made her so much more empathetic toward this culture, and appreciative of her life and career opportunities in Canada. She felt motivated and grateful as a positive influence that she could reflect about and discuss in the local academic community.

You learn as I am sure anybody who has done international work in politically sensitive areas, you learn how much propaganda we hear, and you also learn about the atrocities that nobody ever hears about. You can be very proud to be a Canadian.

Second, academic credibility increases with experiential learning in other cultures. Participants considered working in countries with great cultural distance an asset for gaining credibility. They believed that they gained a broader knowledge of humanity after experiencing different cultural behaviour from their home environment. Several participants noted that they were now actively sought out by their own institutional colleagues and external agencies as the “person who does the

international stuff,” and the local expert. As one participant noted, “I think in my case I sort of became the international person, or one of the members of faculty that did international work and that it was good for the profile of the department and the faculty.”

*Developing Competencies for International Projects Is Multifaceted*

The skills required for conducting successful international research result from inherited personality traits, the social environment during one’s formative years, life experience, and formal education. These competencies culminate in a dynamic set of expertise that academic women acquire over a lifetime.

Personality competencies include a person’s attitudes, attributes, and genetic endowments (e.g., disposition such as a sense of humour).

[G]rowing up with another culture . . . [there are] personal experiences you can have that help shape you into who you are, what you’ve become, and how you accept situations and experiences and so forth. . . . [J]ust learning cultural sensitivity from an early age. . . .

Professional competencies include such aspects as communication (e.g., understanding the language and cultural etiquette) and interpersonal and organizational skills. In one participant’s words,

“[Y]ou go into a community and facilitate a discussion of ideas and events that the community can then resolve and you facilitate that process rather than swooping in as an external expert and imposing some kind of development solution.”

Educational competencies are comprised of formal (i.e., degrees and accreditation) and informal (e.g., positions held on Boards and associations in paid and voluntary capacities) learning at school and in other community and service enterprises.

I was part owner of a clinic for a few years which gave me a huge competency towards the consultatory roles, I wrote a lot of medical legals in the sense that I was asked to testify in court related to Workmen’s Compensation . . . so that gave me a lot of skills . . . a lot!



## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The changing world of work has affected the nature of academic roles, increasing pressure to incorporate international perspectives. This change needs to be accompanied by career-planning processes to help women academics develop and articulate their competencies for participation in the international workplace (Arthur, 2004).

Despite the limited sample size, the findings of this study point to some critical directions for women academics' career development. In discussing a framework for interventions designed to expand women's career options, Patton (1997) refers to strategies addressed by Hackett and Betz (1981) for fostering women's career-related, self-efficacy expectations. Three important components are included in the framework:

- providing exposure to female role models;
- helping women to address the underlying sources of anxiety in relation to pursuing non-traditional domains of employment in their career development; and
- actively supporting women to develop interests, skills, and competencies. (Patton, 1997)

We believe this framework has high utility for encouraging women academics to develop both the confidence and competence for working internationally. Rather than waiting to be invited to participate in international projects, women academics can be proactive about positioning themselves to gain relevant experience and take initiative to make international connections. First, it is important for women academics to have contact with role models and mentors. Substantial evidence suggests that women pursuing academic careers benefit from support (Collins, Chrisler, & Quina, 1998). Mentoring programs typically take on the form of matching newer academics with associate or full professors. de Janasz and Sullivan (2004) suggest that faculty need to develop multiple mentoring relationships across their academic career. The dissemination of "acquired wisdom" from the professorial network enhances the acquisition of career competencies. This requires articulating steps towards building and consolidating an academic

career, including ways for women academics to incorporate international perspectives. It also entails defining the competencies that are valued for international projects and identifying ways for women academics to gain relevant experience. Career-related interventions are required that facilitate career building and career enhancing accomplishments for women academics. These are important considerations for helping women to expand the scope of their academic portfolios and to incorporate participation on international projects as a viable career direction.

A key finding of this study is that participants perceived their international experience to extend beyond their academic roles. Although participants gained international experience through their academic roles, they were adamant about the personal benefits. The personal learning and enjoyment of interactions in other cultures was both a precipitating force for pursuing further experience and an outcome of international experience. The institutional benefits of faculty members participating in international projects appeared to be consistent with the overriding mandates for campus internationalization. Women academics discussed how they had broadened their personal worldviews, reduced their ethnocentrism, and incorporated international perspectives into their teaching and research. Participants consistently discussed how their international experience added global dimensions to their personal identity and to their academic role. Further research is needed to elaborate on these processes and to evaluate efforts through which faculty contribute to mandates for internationalization in higher education.

The review of barriers and enablers that emerged from the experiences of participants offers several interesting insights that are consistent with the literature on women's career development. In particular, the interface of dual careers and the work-family interface surfaced as a major consideration about participation in international projects. This conclusion mirrors literature that discusses the complexities of women's career decision making based on the salience of multiple-role demands (Worell & Remer, 2003). Additional factors in the local environment such as funding to support international activities and balancing demands of international projects with demands during the

academic calendar year are important considerations for infrastructure. Safety considerations were also identified as external factors that would lead to interests in working in particular countries or concerns about hardships encountered in particular foreign environments. There are challenges related to the status of women in other countries. Some participants noted their reluctance to take on international project in countries with restricted norms about female gender roles. However, in countries with traditional gender roles women academics may have the potential to make the greatest influence. Research from business also suggests that the treatment afforded women during international projects may be less restrictive because usual gender roles are relaxed to focus on the expertise of international consultants (Caligiuri & Cascio, 1998).

One important motivator for participating in international projects appears to be encouragement and recognition from academic peers. Becoming known as an expert in one's field, along with networking, appears to be crucial for developing a profile that is known by others as deserving of consideration for international partnerships. However, beyond expertise and networking, participants identified the importance of peer support and encouragement for becoming involved in international projects. This suggests the importance of interpersonal connection in academic roles for women to feel confident about expressing their expertise in an international forum. The support of others such as mentors has been named as an important influence on women's career development in general (Richie, Fassinger, Linn, Johnson, Prosser, & Robinson, 1997; Young & Richards, 1992) and for facilitating women's participation on international assignments (Caligiuri & Cascio, 1998). Another important motivator for participating in international projects relates to a values orientation in working for social change and for making positive contributions to people in other parts of the world. This social justice perspective appears connected to the centrality of relational values that have been identified as important to women's career identity (Crozier, 1999).

The bottom line for participants in this study was that international experience should be viewed as "career-enhancing" rather than "career-building." In other words, participants were mindful of the demands

required in the early years of an academic career pertaining to research, teaching, and scholarship. Until academics have established a solid base of experience, including tenure, participation in international projects was not viewed as a desirable direction. In fact, several participants noted that international work could detract time and energy needed for productivity in more traditional domains of academic life. The advice offered by participants was for women academics to get their careers established first, then enhance their careers through participation on international projects. Most participants drew a direct connection between building a solid academic record and reputation that would be considered as reputable across countries. While women academics are establishing their academic careers, they can be gaining relevant and transferable experience in preparation for work on international projects.

The advice noted by participants requires further examination regarding the costs and benefits of international dimensions of academic women's careers. Many concerns have been raised about how the "old norms" in academia become rules of behaviour for women academics (Acker & Armenti, 2004). There is a constant interplay between the explicit pathways for academic success and the implicit experiences and personal costs for women of pursuing career success. For example, it was surprising to find little evidence in this study that the work/family interface was a core issue for participants because it has been identified as a significant tension for women faculty (Armenti, 2004; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2003). In our research with women academics in Australia, partner support was identified as a major factor in contemplating international work (Patton & Arthur, 2007). It is possible that the current study involved a unique group of academic women who had appropriate support in place. The perspectives of women academics from more diverse backgrounds would also diversify the narratives about women's experiences of working in international roles. Alternatively, we caution readers who expect to see traditional gendered concerns reflected in the data and might feel disappointed that this was not reflected in the data obtained from participants. It is precisely due to the representation of barriers pertaining to women's participation in international work in other fields that lead us to inquire about the experience of academic women in higher education. More research is

needed to understand how internationalization has impacted women's academic roles, the extent to which pressures for international involvement advantage or disadvantage women, and the responsibilities of academic institutions for supporting women in pursuing international roles. More practical information is needed about how to help women academics develop competencies for working internationally.

### *Implications*

It was interesting to see the variety of experiences that participants considered under the inclusion criteria of international projects. The wide range of activities noted by participants suggests an expanded view of "what counts" as international experience. Several participants described a fuller repertoire of international experience as contributing to their personal and professional development. An implication of the selection criteria for this study, which focused on international projects in another country, is that some women academics who have developed international competencies through other means may not have defined themselves as eligible for participation. A wider net needs to be cast in future research to include a broader range of avenues for gaining and implementing international experience.

Another implication of how international experience is defined has to do with the criteria through which academics are evaluated. The impetus for campus internationalization and specifically funded projects has led some faculties to incorporate international dimensions into their selection, merit, and promotion policies. However, there are controversies about "what counts" as international experience and how that experience compares to traditional sources of scholarly work. It is ironic that Canadian universities are pursuing international projects and that faculty may experience pressure to engage in international work when the formal institutional rewards/recognition for such work are inconsistent and ambiguous. Faculty members may be concerned about a two-tier system in which priority would be given to international projects and less credit would be given to academics whose focus remained on local activities. It appears that there is a lag between mandates for internationalization, and how those mandates translate into the domains of academic scholarship in domains of teaching,

research, and service.

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