



# Our Voices

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## *Women have natural leadership skills So why are so few in high-ranking leadership roles?*

By Aasa Marshall – WRC Volunteer

IT'S A QUESTION THAT NEEDS TO BE asked as women gain numbers in the corporate world, but fail to make gains into the highest levels of leadership.

This International Women's Day we focus on the theme Strong Leadership, Strong Women, Strong World, and ask how we can deconstruct the barriers that keep women from top leadership positions in both the business and government spheres.

Women may make up 48 per cent of the Canadian workforce, but only 5.8 per cent of the Financial Post 500 have women as CEOs or in head roles; for Fortune 500 companies, 3.6 per cent of CEOs are women. Of 190 world leaders, 19 are women. What's the problem?

According to a recently article by the Harvard Business School, a subtle but deeply-engrained gender bias still exists in the workplace, that keeps women from reaching top roles that are traditionally—and currently—held by men.

What is needed is a shift in language and perspective, according to Kristan Nielson of People Lead Leadership and Team Development. Nielson, who has developed leadership workshops for organizations and corporations, said there is a need for women-centred leadership training, and for mixed-gender leadership training to shift its focus from defining “masculine” traits as the norm for leaders. When men show leadership traits they are perceived as “assertive”; women showing the same traits are seen as aggressive or inappropriate.

The focus instead, said Nielson, should be on gender-neutral traits that are shared by all leaders, which are the core of her training sessions. To become



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## PROVOST AND VICE-PRESIDENT (ACADEMICS)

### *Dr. Dru Marshall*



U OF C IS THE ONLY U15 (a group of 15 leading research-intensive universities in Canada) with top 2 senior leadership positions filled by women. It was one of the reasons that Dru Marshall accepted the position of Provost and Vice-President (Academics) in August 2011.

Throughout her career, Marshall has been involved at the highest levels of amateur sport as a coach, trainer and physiologist. She helped lead the National Women's Field Hockey Team to medals in the 1999 Pan Am Games and the 2001 Americas Cup. "Coaching an athletic team at the

national level was a great experience to be prepared for the position of Provost" says Marshall. "I have learned how to communicate well, empower people not to be afraid of making mistakes, deal with politics, recognize conflict, and solve issues quickly. Coaching is maximizing everyone's potential. [As Provost] I work with many high performance academics who don't like to be controlled. My job is to help them perform their job and make their job easier."

Although more women are filling numerous top jobs in the public service including U of C, only 17.7% of senior officer positions were held by women at Financial Post 500 companies in 2010, a modest increase from 16.9% in 2008 according to research firm Catalyst. Marshall believes that a good supportive system such as mentoring from outside field and training is necessary to promote women in leadership. "We need to motivate young women to be interested in the leadership track."

Marshall is highly regarded for her work about women in sport and physical activity. The Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women in Sport and Physical Activity, or CAAWS, has twice recognized her as one Canada's most influential women in sport in Canada. She is a sought-after speaker and presenter at academic, government and association conferences and events across Canada, and is currently chair of CAAWS. She has published more than 30 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters, more than 60 reports, manuals, abstracts and articles, and contributed to over 60 research projects. She has a long list of prestigious coaching awards, and continues to mentor young coaches today. Prior to her current position, Marshall held a series of senior roles at University of Alberta including Deputy Provost and Vice Dean in Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation.

effective leaders, she lists a few skills that both men and women need to develop:

1. Being self-aware, by having the ability to understand yourself and the way you impact others
2. The ability to influence others by communicating a compelling vision
3. The ability to motivate others to develop themselves, and spur them to action
4. The ability to build trusting relationships
5. The ability to welcome and react well to feedback

None of these abilities, she said, can be attributed to any gender, but apply to everyone.

In her TED Talk from December 2010, Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg says that to gain higher leadership roles, women have to "sit at the table". Too often women under-value their knowledge and skills; they also tend to attribute their success to external factors.

"If you ask men why they did a good job, they'll say 'I'm awesome,'" said Sandberg, "...if you ask women why they did a good job they'll say someone helped them, they got lucky, they worked really hard... No one gets the promotion if they don't think they deserve their success."

Nielson echoes this sentiment, and said she emphasizes this fact in her women-only leadership training sessions. These sessions are important because women need a place to network, to support each other, and to learn about their identity as leaders apart from their male colleagues. Through her training sessions, women are learning to negotiate for their needs, challenge gender bias, and to be authentic leaders by embracing gender-neutral leadership skills, rather than trying to "act like men" in order to get ahead.

As women come to understand their ability to lead, and leaders like Nielson challenge gender bias within organizational structure by getting top executives to shift their perspectives, more women can claim their place at the top.

The WRC Awards 2012 Presentation Ceremony was held on March 7 at the University of Calgary. The ceremony is supported by the U of C Alumni Association and the Students' Union.



# WRC Awards

CELEBRATING WOMEN'S WISDOM, RESILIENCE AND COMPASSION

## *Distinguished Alumna*

### JENNY GULAMANI-ABDULLA

WITH OVER 17 YEARS of experience in the area of immigration law, Jenny is the President of her own immigration consulting firm. A member of the International Bar Association, with a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy from The University of Calgary,

and, a Juris Doctor degree in Law from California, Jenny is a Regulated Canadian Immigration Consultant recognized by the Federal, Provincial and Territorial Governments of Canada. Jenny leads her team to diligently respond to the needs of diverse groups of clients from Central and South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, as well as from Europe, North America and Australia. To Jenny, immigration to Canada is not only about submitting a case. It is about altering lives of individuals and families that will forever change their direction.

Jenny is of South Asian descent, born in Africa. At the age of 10, her family immigrated to Canada. She has been educated in Canada and the United States. She is currently pursuing her Masters in Law at the University of London. Jenny is married with two children, aged 11 & 15. As a member of the visible minority and a woman, practicing in a still male dominated field, Jenny believes that a sense of balance and continuous education is required for one to overcome challenges and truly thrive in today's society.

Jenny serves as the First Vice President at the Business & Professional Women's Club of Calgary where core programs are steered to improve the economic, employment and social conditions of women. In her work too, whether it is with widows, women at risk, or pregnant wives longing to be re-united with their husbands, Jenny shows compassion by providing women with access to justice that they might not otherwise be able to afford. Concern for others happens to be at the heart of everything Jenny does.



## *Distinguished Student*

### OLA MOHAJER

OLA MOHAJER HAS BEEN a student leader since her first year on campus within and beyond her academics. She currently serves as Students' Union Vice President Academic where she tenaciously represents over 25,000 undergraduate students.

Ola has demonstrated wisdom and professional excellence by publishing on metabolism in the human gut which has been implemented into Biochemistry labs and is used by all students going through the Biochemistry and Biological Science programs. She also completed a BSc and a BA in at the same time.

Ola Mohajer is an archetype for overcoming challenges and trail blazing for women and through her efforts has inspired many young women from a variety of backgrounds. She demonstrated this resilience by her winning past SU elections as a Faculty Representative even when people wrote "terrorist" on some of her campaign posters. Despite this overt display of hatred, Ola continues to advocate for students. Her overcoming of challenges culminated last winter when Ola managed to win the 2011 Students' Union election for her current executive position.

Ola demonstrates compassion through having served as VP Events for a human rights group as well as a peace and mediation group. She has also engaged in numerous public speaking opportunities focused on the values of Islam and what it means to be a Muslim woman, correcting any stereotypes people have about women in Islam. She also educates youth on human rights in Canada and in separate talks, informs them about the importance of their engagement within their schools and communities. Her most recent talk was to empower high school female minority low-income students to pursue post-secondary education. Through her speaking engagements, community service, advocacy, and academic excellence Ola has impacted and educated thousands of people in the Calgary community, young and old, male and female, across all barriers.





## THE SHEILA O'BRIEN AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP 2012

### Aasa Marshall



AASA MARSHALL IS A Development Studies major with a passion for global social justice issues and travel: her studies have included a group study program in Ghana in the spring of 2011, and she will complete her final semester abroad in Melbourne, Australia. She previously studied print journalism and worked as a newspaper reporter prior to attending U of C.

Aasa joined the Events and Education Coordination team at the Women's Resource Centre in September 2010, and became a team lead of that committee in September 2011. She is involved in organizing many activities and events including the weekly knitting circle and 'Activism 101' workshop series. The extensive diversity training she has received through

the WRC volunteer program, in combination with her international travel experiences, has instilled in her a deep respect for cultural differences and inquisitiveness about other societies and their practices.

Aasa joined the WRC because of her dedication to women's equality and as a way to meet like-minded people. The centre has been her home on campus throughout her time at U of C, and she has grown immensely as a result of the people she has met and the conversations she's had around the WRC table. She has developed close bonds with her peers at the WRC and can always be counted on to approach new visitors and welcome them into our space. Aasa is a valuable member of the WRC team and the impact she has had, and is having on women's lives on the campus is immense. Aasa was selected by her WRC volunteer peers to be recognized for her outstanding contributions to the WRC.

For more information on the award, please visit:  
[http://www.ucalgary.ca/women/volunteer\\_award](http://www.ucalgary.ca/women/volunteer_award)



### I support the Women's Resource Centre.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

- I would like to volunteer.
- I would like to be notified of events & information.
- I would like to have a copy of the WRC newsletter.
- I would like to donate to the WRC

There are several ways to donate to the Women's Resource Centre including online donations by credit card. We also accept donations by cash, cheques, and new books for our growing Women's Resource Library. A tax creditable receipt is provided with each monetary donation.

#### Enclosed is my donation of:

\$50     \$75     \$100     \$ \_\_\_\_\_

#### Send donations to:

Women's Resource Centre, MH318, 2500 University Drive  
 NW, Calgary, Alberta, T2N 1N4

Online Donation: [www.ucalgary.ca/giving](http://www.ucalgary.ca/giving)

## How can you support the WRC?

### BY VOLUNTEERING

Volunteers are the heart and soul of the WRC. All of our programs are led by volunteers representing different sectors of the community campus including students, staff, faculty and members of the Calgary community. The WRC team works to facilitate the projects, ideas and creative initiatives of our volunteers and the centre is defined by and for the women who volunteer with us and enjoy our space. Volunteering is an excellent way to take advantage of our beautiful space, interact with women from diverse backgrounds, and learn through dialogue and research.

### THROUGH SPONSORSHIP

Sponsorship is an excellent way to see tangible growth and success at the WRC. Our yearly outcome-based assessments include important consultations with the users of the centre as well as key community stakeholders. When you support our centre you will receive a yearly package highlighting our activities, challenges and successes as well as newsletters describing upcoming events and including feature articles.

**GET INVOLVED!** If you are interested in becoming a volunteer, mentor or a sponsor, drop by our centre, visit our website at [www.ucalgary.ca/women](http://www.ucalgary.ca/women), call us at 403-220-8551 or email us at [women@ucalgary.ca](mailto:women@ucalgary.ca)

