

“Do what gives you energy.”

Nursing Major and Undergraduate Research Intern Emily Luckhardt ('17) recently sat down with Dr. Susan Larson, Professor of Psychology; Chair, Division of Sciences and Mathematics; and 2016-2017 President of the Executive Board of the Council on Undergraduate Research, for a conversation about women in research and leadership roles.



Left: Emily Luckhardt ('17), Right: Dr. Susan Larson, Professor of Psychology; Chair of the Division of Sciences and Mathematics; 2016-2017 President of the Executive Board of the Council on Undergraduate Research. Photo Credit: Krys Strand, 20 March 2017.

Interview Date: 20 March 2017

Location: RDO Conference Room, Grant Business Center, Concordia College, Moorhead Minnesota

Interviewer: Emily Luckhardt (EL)

Interviewee: Dr. Susan Larson (SL)

Affiliation with interviewee: Student activities coordinator for summer undergraduate research program, served on Logistics Subcommittee for 2016 Celebration of Student Scholarship, undergraduate researcher.

(Start of Interview)

EL: Thank for you for meeting with me today.

SL: Thank you for wanting to meet.

EL: Would you please describe the leadership positions you currently hold at Concordia and with the Council on Undergraduate Research?

SL At Concordia I currently serve as the Chair for the Division of Sciences and Mathematics and that is a part-time administrative position that provides some administrative oversight, but also provides support for the departments and programs in the science and math division. I also am serving this year as the President for the Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR) and that is a three-year term: one year as president elect, one year as president, and one year as immediate past president.

EL Which leadership positions at Concordia or elsewhere have helped you to rise to these leadership roles you currently hold?

SL Right, I think that's a really positive framing, "rising to these roles", because not everyone views administrative work that way (laughter), but I appreciate your positive framing of it. Well, at Concordia, I have served as Department Chair for Psychology, and I was interim Co-director of the Women's and Gender Studies Program. Those roles were certainly valuable, but I also served as the Director of Undergraduate Research (UGR) and National Fellowships at Concordia for seven years, and that was helpful in leading to my current position at Concordia as Chair for the Division of Sciences and Mathematics. With the Council of Undergraduate Research, I have been on the Executive Board as a Chair for the Psychology Division, and I was also in different committees over the years. I have also had a number of opportunities to provide consultation and facilitation with other institutions through my work with CUR. I think all of those positions and experiences have factored into the CUR position I currently hold.

EL Hearing you talk about these positions, they are all leadership roles. As we conclude our celebration of Women's History Month, what is your perspective as a woman on women in leadership?

SL Good! (laughter) I have a good perspective.

EL Would you comment on the current state of women in leadership and especially women leaders in higher education?

SL I think that it varies depending on what thing you are thinking about, but I certainly am attentive to the fact that the most recent presidential election has raised some questions for me about women in leadership. I think that a lot of the negativity that was sometimes projected onto Hillary Clinton maybe was as much about her being a woman seeking the presidency as anything she has done or not done as a women leader. We need to continue to pay attention to women's leadership, especially in elected office. While the state of North Dakota and the state of Minnesota are represented by female senators, there is a long way to go. In terms of leadership in higher education, we are seeing more women move to high power leadership positions, but women are still underrepresented. I also think that even when there are women leadership positions there may be circumstances when they don't feel like they have a voice in their institution in the same way as their male counterparts do. So while we may see women in certain leadership positions,

women may lack the ability to be leaders in other ways. There is still a lot of room to support the development of women leaders in higher education and beyond.

Women are faced specifically with the challenge of work-life “balance”. I say balance although I don’t really like that word; work-life integration is probably better. Research will support, even in higher education, that women spend more time engaged in domestic activities than their male counterparts. So, even if it is just a few hours per week more, those are fewer hours spent developing professionally or just having a less busy or stressful life. Places like Concordia and elsewhere paying attention to the work and life needs of professionals is important in leadership development.

EL As you have stated, there are certainly some challenges presented for women in leadership. As a woman in leadership, what are some skills you believe have been helpful in the positions that you have held, and currently hold, to be an effective and respected leader?

SL I think there are some skills that are important for almost any leader, but I think for women in leadership there’s a challenge of making sure that you have voice, and that you can exercise your voice and be listened to. Often women’s voices may be given less attention than their male counterparts. Although, I say that knowing that in my own experience, that hasn’t been the case. But it can be true, and we need to be mindful of that. Women, as they develop leadership, need to be thinking about how they use their voice. But for any leader, how we give voice to others is an important part to leadership. How do we - for a lack of a better word - empower people to feel like they are contributors? How do we listen to their voices while also having our own perspective?

EL Could you share any specific instances that you believe have contributed to the learning and development of your leadership skills?

SL I think this year my role with CUR has been very helpful, because serving as president, I chair the executive board, and that has required me to think of my leadership role in a different way than I have had to at Concordia. Because I am working with over 20 board members, from different institutions across the country, who are very capable and busy professionals, I have been challenged to think about how to collaborate in the most effective and efficient way. Also through CUR, I have been able to work with our executive officer, Elizabeth Ambos, who is wonderful. She is fantastic at running the organization but is also a great mentor, and she has been helpful in developing my thinking about leadership. Working with people from many different institutions in my work with CUR has allowed me to find a number of mentors outside of Concordia, but certainly I have found mentors at Concordia. Jim Aageson was a particularly influential mentor when I began my work as Director of Undergraduate Research. I have also developed some supportive relationships with Concordia colleagues, and our conversations have been important in my development.

I know there are specific leadership programs people have taken part in, as well. I have had less involvement in specific leadership development programs, but I think there are some good

resources out there for people who are interested in leadership development. For students, I highly recommend the NEW (National Education for Women's) Leadership Development Institute which is something Tri-College puts on. It is a week-long event held each summer for women - students and non-students. Concordia students and staff have participated in the past, and I had a great experience as an on-site logistics coordinator of the event one of the years Concordia hosted it. This year it is hosted at MSUM.

EL From serving in various leaderships roles, are there general characteristics or styles of leadership that you have found to be most effective or ineffective?

SL I think that a strong leader must have the ability to listen carefully and engender people's trust. To be effective as a leader people must trust that you are paying attention to what their needs are and thinking about the good of the organization you are serving. So I think listening and trust are effective characteristics. There is a degree to which being an organized person and being able to remember what things need doing are also helpful skills. Oftentimes with my work, teambuilding has been an important component. That has certainly been the case with CUR and undergraduate research. For me, another skill that has made me effective at leading certain initiatives is being a strategic thinker. I think that a person can be a leader even though strategic thinking isn't their strongest skill, but at some point, that is a pretty important piece in leading groups and organizations.

EL What has been one of the most important benefits or influential aspects to you from serving as the president of a national organization of over 12,000 members? Has anything about the experience surprised you, in either a positive or negative way?

SL I can kind of think about the benefits in a variety of ways. There are certainly benefits to me individually, but I also like to think that the work I am facilitating and supporting as president benefits the whole UGR enterprise, including our 12,000 members who are mostly faculty and professionals who support students. This organization, in particular through our executive officer, national office staff, and many volunteers, is doing a lot of great things to support UGR. It is nice to think that I play a small part in that, and as I do so, I reap some personal and professional benefits through the experience.

It is exciting to be able to contribute to what is an important and significant learning initiative. One of my departmental colleagues has helped me think of how UGR is distinct from other important high impact learning experiences that students engage in, because research is really the currency of the academic. It is what academics do. Being a scholar is a part of the life of the academic, and I think there is special place for helping students think about research and scholarship. Being a part of an organization that is doing that broadly is exciting.

One of the exciting things that CUR has been focusing on this year, something that was put into place before my presidency and that I am thrilled to be a part of, is broadening of CUR's reach internationally. CUR co-sponsored a World Congress of Undergraduate Research held at a

university in Qatar last fall, and I am visiting the University of Windsor in Canada to talk about UGR at the end of this month. It is exciting for me to be a part of broadening the impact of CUR internationally.

EL What factors were most key to building a successful faculty-mentored undergraduate research program at Concordia College?

SL Critical to building faculty-mentored research is faculty interest in and support for doing this work. Developing a strong undergraduate research program requires thinking differently about how we offer an education to students than what was typical, say 25 years ago, so faculty interest and support has been a critical factor. What then follows is student demand or interest in UGR programs. It starts with faculty advocates who are engaged in bringing this work forward. That engages students and makes other students start to say; 'Hey I want to do something like that too; what about an experience like that for me?' At a place like Concordia, when students come up to faculty and say; 'I've got this cool idea, and I would really like to do it', faculty are often supportive of that.

EL How does faculty-mentored undergraduate research support Concordia's strategic plan?

SL As we think about whole-world, whole-life, whole-self, UGR can support all of those pieces of the strategic plan. Research is the kind of learning experience that benefits students while they are here, but also provides them with skills for the whole of their life. I think UGR fits with the strategic plan vision of moving away from the typical credit hour and helps us consider differently what the learning experience is for the student. One of the key components of the academic part of the strategic plan is the idea of building competencies, character, and willingness to take risks. UGR provides students opportunities in all of those areas.

EL How would you like to see faculty-mentored undergraduate research grow or progress at Concordia? And, is there an institution whose research program you would like to see Concordia model?

SL I don't know if there is a specific model that Concordia would want to emulate, but I would like to see us continue to think about how we integrate undergraduate research into the curriculum, both in terms of our courses and our workload. One of the challenges with faculty-mentored research is that it takes a lot of time. So how do we find the time for it in the context of our other responsibilities? One of the things we often say in higher education is that faculty control the curriculum. There are the exceptions, as you know, you are a Nursing Major, and the Nursing Association, in part, controls your curriculum. So, this isn't to say that everybody can go off and do what they want with their curriculum, but we have some opportunity to make decisions about how the curriculum factors in our own work and our students' work and the types of experiences they have.

In thinking about ways we can integrate research into the curriculum and create research-supportive curricula, we can ask ourselves; 'When are classes offered? How many classes will

faculty teach in a particular year? Is it better to have more course offerings or fewer course offerings giving faculty more time to do other work, like mentoring UGR?' There is room for us at Concordia, and elsewhere in higher ed., to think about how we are using the curricula in support of our UGR program. That is not to say that is the only direction we want to go, because there are limits to how we incorporate UGR into the curriculum. We should be continuing to envision what we can do to support summer research and how we can support research in general at Concordia.

EL: Are there any institutions that you think find that place for UGR or scholarship in balance with faculty load?

SL: I think The College of New Jersey more than any place has done a really careful and critical assessment of faculty work, student work and aligned workload with their goals for UGR. Allegheny College has also done some good work with workload integration, although they have a very different model since they have a required senior research experience for all of their students. Workload conversations and changing our culture are hard, because the things we do now are valuable and we don't change without giving up things that are important. But, to better integrate UGR into faculty work will require making space to do things differently. Both TCNJ and Allegheny have been able to have conversations about how to integrate UGR into workload and I think that would be something good for Concordia. I think Hope College is another school that does really good things with UGR, especially their summer research program in the sciences. But, compared to some schools, Concordia does a lot more with undergraduate research outside of the sciences, and I am proud of that.

EL: What is the Callsen endowment for undergraduate research at Concordia?

SL: We had an alumna of Concordia College who created a significant endowment to fund UGR in the humanities and social sciences. The donor, Dr. Margaret Callsen, was a faculty member at Oklahoma State University and adjuncted at a number of other institutions over the years. She started her career in family sciences and did a lot of work with community education. During her retirement, she moved back to ND and she was very involved in community activities. She was an active member of the FM AAUW, she volunteered for almost 20 years at the Hjemkomst Center, and she also volunteered at the Rape and Abuse Crisis Center. It is wonderful to have this gift, and one of the things I wanted to do as Director of UGR was to have an event that would honor her. She wanted to make a gift to Concordia to support programs of study that often have limited access to grant funding. The endowment will be used for a variety of UGR initiatives including student travel, faculty-mentored summer research, and community-based research. On Wednesday, March 29, we will have a series of women's leadership activities, including women's leadership workshops led by Lorri Sulpizio from the University of San Diego to honor Dr. Callsen. I'm thrilled that in addition to a number of faculty, we have over 40 staff members signed up for the workshops, because often, unlike faculty, staff don't have access to professional development funding and don't have as many opportunities to participate in leadership

development workshops. In the evening there will be a keynote address by Dr. Mary Dana Hinton, who is President of the College of St Benedict and who will speak on Mission-Driven Leadership for Women. Finally, this event will also launch Cordopedia, which is the online digital encyclopedia for Concordia College. The creators of Cordopedia, Lisa Sjoberg, who is the college archivist, and Joy Lintelman, Professor of History, focused initially on women from Concordia. We are very excited to be able to acknowledge the donors who supported the development of Cordopedia at the event, but are also thrilled to honor Dr. Margaret Callsen by providing these leadership opportunities on our campus.

EL: Wonderful!

SL: Yes, I'm very excited. I know a number of Margaret's friends from AAUW and they were pleased with the idea that we would do something to honor her. Her endowment will enhance UGR at Concordia significantly and it is a wonderful legacy.

EL: Would you say more about AAUW and how people who might want to get involved in AAUW can?

SL: Sure. One of the reasons I decided to get involved in AAUW was to honor Margaret, and regrettably, I never did that in her lifetime. When she was visiting with me about her gift, she talked about the importance of AAUW and providing voice for equitable access to education for women and girls. We also had a Board of Regent member, the late Joyce Monson Tsongas, who previously encouraged me to think about AAUW. Between those two women, I realized it would be important to be involved in AAUW and to support the work they do to support women and girls. Our local branch provides scholarships for women, and as a national organization AAUW focuses on access to education and equity for girls and women. They continue to have an important mission despite the fact that at Concordia we see lots of female students and female professors and leaders. But, our situation is not seen the world over. Even close to home, we are facing an all-time low for women in computer science, for example, and there are still certain branches of engineering that remain unmoved in terms of the number of women who participate. So while we might not always notice gender disparities in terms of education at Concordia, it's still important to be mindful of access to education for women and girls in this country and the world.

EL: Concordia is sending six students to the National Conferences on Undergraduate Research (NCUR) held in Memphis, Tennessee in April. What makes NCUR a unique opportunity for students? Is there anything about this conference you would like to highlight?

SL: What I think is wonderful about NCUR is that it is a multidisciplinary conference. Very often when students go to conferences with faculty they will go to a discipline-specific conference. For example, the Association for Psychological Science Conference is a fabulous experience for students who attend, but they are only learning about psychology. With NCUR, students can learn about psychology, but they can also learn about dance, and theater, and chemistry, and

history. All the disciplines are represented there, and that is one of the real strengths of NCUR. Another strength I see with this conference, and when I have gone with students I have talked to them about this, is that it is a very low-risk opportunity for them to learn how to network in a professional way. There are certainly some faculty and UGR program directors at NCUR, but students get to meet mostly other students and they can engage with and network with them. And these are also not the people who are deciding if they get into graduate school or get a job, so the students can network in a way which allows them to develop professional skills without it being a risky situation.

EL To what extent is Concordia's Celebration of Student Scholarship (COSS) like NCUR? Are there things about NCUR that shaped how COSS was developed?

SL When the Celebration of Student Scholarship was developed into a full-day event, we tried to honor the multidisciplinary nature of NCUR as we showcased the work our students are doing. Rather than having, for example, all the chemists in the same room and all the English students in the same room, we sought to mix up the sessions and allow students to learn about different disciplines and the kind of scholarship that happens in different disciplines. Because many of the student attendees don't know what they want to study or do for a career, this format may give them the opportunity to be inspired by a new area of study.

EL How can and have you measured the impact of faculty-mentored undergraduate research at Concordia?

SL During the time when I was Director of UGR I tried to supervise UGR students doing assessment of UGR. As my current student, Adam Kessler, would say, it is quite "meta" as his undergraduate research is on undergraduate research and its impact. What we tried to do with his project was a summative assessment of the impact of the NSF STEP grant on student researchers. We were particularly interested in assessing alumni and having them reflect on their experiences with UGR and how that impacted their careers and their futures. Although our response rate wasn't as high as we would have liked, what we see is that these students experience a positive impact from undergraduate research on their decisions about their career and their career outcomes. Many of them did end up in graduate or professional programs and can very clearly talk about how this experience was critical in helping them think about where they wanted to head in life and what their futures would hold. Our alumni, as well as our current students, report many positive learning gains associated with their UGR experience.

EL Finally, what advice do you have for graduating seniors of Concordia as they pursue their next steps and consider the types of leadership roles they might undertake?

SL I was just asked this question in another capacity about what advice I would give to young women and one of the things I often go back to, is advice that somebody gave the students in my Women in Science course, a recommendation to figure out what gives you energy, and do that. There is always a lot that can be done, and each of us has many choices to make. Doing what energizes you

will help ensure you spend your time on activities you are passionate about and that you enjoy. That certainly was my experience as Director of Undergraduate Research. I loved my experience getting to know students across campus who I never would have gotten to interact with had I not been in that role. I loved being able to talk to faculty about how they did their work and how UGR could be incorporated into it. There will be things about any work that may not be that exciting or may be a little bit tiresome, but they can be outweighed by those things that are really energizing and exciting for you. So, one piece of advice is that if you have the good fortune as I have to be able to ask; what are the things that are energizing? and figure out how to do them, take the opportunity. Reflect on your own skills, abilities, desires, and learn about ways that you can enhance or improve them. Where you have deficits, where you know something isn't your strength, think about what you can do to enhance this area so that you can achieve what you are excited to do in this world and for this world.

EL: Is there anything you'd like to talk about in addition to the questions we've already covered?

One thing I would like to say is something about is culture change. I often say that when I started as Director of UGR that one of my primary goals was to find a place at the table for student scholarship. There are a lot of places at the Concordia table for many important things, but it didn't seem like student scholarship was getting the kind of attention it deserved. I am excited to think that we have gotten there. Sure, there is room to grow and to enhance our UGR program. There is lot we can learn from other institutions and other ideas on our own campus that we can implement. But, a primary goal for me as director of undergraduate research was to find a way to make this a learning priority on our campus, and I am pleased to have played a role in doing that. I look forward to seeing where it goes in the future.

EL: Thank you for meeting with me today.

SL: Thank you for being interested!

(End of Interview)