

Council election strategy for Siauliai University Council election



Enabling women to run for the elections for the university's council

The EU-funded structural change project INTEGER has taken on a pioneering role at Siauliai University (SU) and in Lithuania as a whole. This project was fundamental to promote institutional transformation in a higher education institution. During the project's implementation, the Council elections were planned to take place. Considering the striking underrepresentation of women in the university's Council, the SU Council Election Tactics and Strategy Plan were developed within INTEGER in order to encourage a gender-balanced representation of the Council.

Several activities were undertaken in order to empower female candidates to run in the university's Council elections, such as: communication with the highest management staff at SU through formal meetings; consultation with the university lawyer about the possible ways of making women's representation in the Council's election; participation in the preparation of the election regulations; search for women candidates from SU representatives according to criteria such as loyalty to the university and commitment to implement gender equality at the university. As a result of these initiatives, the number of women to the Council significantly increased from 0 % in 2011 to 36.3 % in 2014.

A collegial management body without women

According to the Lithuanian Law on Higher Education and Research (2009), the Council of a state university is one of the main collegial (corporate) management bodies. The university Council is responsible for approving the institution's vision and mission, as well as a strategic action plan, set the management procedures, and use and disposal of the university's funds. In Siauliai University (SU), in 2010, the Council was composed of 11 male members (no women).

Considering the important role of this body, there was a pressing need to change its male-dominated composition. In Lithuania, there is no any legal document supporting quota systems for achieving a gender-balanced representation in decision-making bodies of an institution. Therefore, it is hardly possible to apply quotas in a local university.

On the other hand, the predominant masculine academic culture, along with persisting stereotypes and unconscious biases about women in society and particularly those in higher academic and management positions, have clear repercussions on the limited female representation in the university's management bodies.

Having the abovementioned issues in mind, SU decided to draft a strategy to increase women's representation in decision-making bodies.

A strategy to increase the number of women in the university's Council

The aim of this initiative was to increase women's representation in the 2014 SU Council elections up to 25 % (i.e. reaching the university's critical mass). SU's strategy integrated a thorough planning for each phase of the election process.

More specifically, the detailed set of actions taken within this strategy included:

- 1 Development of the Siauliai University Council Election Tactics and Strategy Plan. Informing the Rector and Chair of the Senate about the proactive participation of the project's team in the election.
- 2 Consulting the university's lawyer about possible ways of making representation of women in the Council's election more fluent.
- 3 Contributing to the preparation of the election regulations by providing suggestions and participating in discussions.
- 4 Searching for women candidates from SU's representatives, lobbying and recruiting according to the following criteria: 1) loyalty to the university; 2) preparation and willingness to implement gender equality in the university.
- 5 Writing a public letter to the Rector reminding him about the employers' duty to implement equal opportunities of women and men at the university. The letter was announced during a meeting at Rector's office.
- 6 Meeting with female candidates and identifying the potential candidates who have experience in academic and management fields and expressed their motivation to run for the elections. This was necessary to ensure the support from the scientific community, students and external representatives.
- 7 Changing the regulations for the SU council composition. The changes proposed by INTEGER's project team (particularly section 17.1) ensured a higher openness for female candidates to participate in the elections. More specifically, the requirement to have 10 years of experience in management and supervision was reduced to five years. This guaranteed broader possibilities to women to become candidates.
- 8 Designing individual election campaigns to each of the female candidates: identifying and highlighting specific competences of each candidate to work in the Council, assisting in building a professional decision-making image, using different publicity and communication elements for each candidate.
- 9 Participating in interviews which were broadcasted on the university's webpage and through a local TV station.
- 10 Monitoring of the election process (internally and externally).
- 11 Raising awareness about the results of the elections to the University Council.

Outcomes and lessons learnt

As a result of these actions, four women were elected to be part of the university's Council. The number of women to the Council significantly increased from 0 % in 2010 to 36.3 % in 2014.

Lessons learnt from the process:

Be prepared for the unexpected. Be aware that you may be confronted with academic (pedagogical & research) routines that may put some obstacles in the process. In addition, decision-making on the senior management level can be less democratic. Be ready to cope with structural and leadership changes.

Be helpful not obstructive. All interventions should be consistent with the academic life cycle referring to local/national law.

Learn about the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) culture features. Staff working in STEM fields have their own culture with its own characteristics. STEM professionals and disciplines usually rely on numbers, data and direct outcomes. Thus, they might not be the social sciences savvy when it comes to gender issues, gender sensitivity and equality. Capacity building, competence building, or awareness-raising trainings' content should follow an outcome-based approach. Traditional trainings are not effective. Search for non-traditional training forms.

Knowledge is key. Keep in mind that STEM academics and professionals, as well middle and top management may not be gender sensitive. Thus, efforts to raise their awareness and build competences need to be made. The more people are gender sensitive, the easier will be to move towards structural change.

Contacts/Further Information

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Further information

[How to increase women's representation in the 2014 SU's Council elections?](#)



[INTEGER's website](#)



[INTERGER's Online Guidelines](#)



More good practices

[EIGE's collection of good practices](#)



[EIGE's approach to good practices](#)



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TOOL: Self-regulation