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## Diversity Leadership in Higher Education

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## [Diversity Leadership in Higher Education](#)

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### Introduction

This paper will focus on issues relating to diversity leadership in higher education, the assessment of diversity leadership issues, and suggestions for successful diversity leadership initiatives. Higher education is in the process of creating more opportunities for a diverse faculty body and issues such as mentoring, building recruiting networks, and creating sponsorship programs are at the forefront of current discussions. Moreover, developing institutional strategic plans and initiatives are essential in the development of diversity leadership agendas. Additionally, issues relating to the distribution of power and participatory management are of particular interest to many institutions of higher education.

The impetus for diversity leadership agendas in colleges and universities is related to the recognition that faculty ranks need to reflect societal realities. Many institutions of higher learning are becoming increasingly aware of the advantages that a diverse faculty can offer such as intellectual competitiveness, an organizational culture that fosters diversity pedagogical practices, and advancing cultural scholarship perspectives. According to Aguirre and Martinez (2002), "The association between diversity and leadership is synergistic because diversity promotes change as an emergent agent in the structuring of higher education, while leadership promotes practices that identify diversity as a nested context for achieving balance in the social relations between higher education and society" (¶ 12). While the notion of diversity leadership is relatively new in the context of higher education, administrators are beginning to adjust cultural and institutional initiatives and leadership agendas accordingly.

The concept of diversity leadership involves additional consideration regarding the management of recruiting, mentoring, and promotion of minority faculty within the three areas of higher education. Aguirre and Martinez (2002) discuss "leadership practices identified within three components of the academic culture: research (e.g. conducting activities that augment the knowledge base), academic (e.g. participating in activities that define organizational culture), and educational (e.g. teaching as a learning process)" (¶ 13). Each of these areas requires specific management properties relative to the institution's culture and expectations regarding faculty and leadership performance. Finally, the promotion of diversity leadership and senior-level administration in colleges and universities allows an organization the opportunity to transition and transform decision-making processes, policies, standards and procedures, and the direction of scholarly research activities. Institutions of higher learning that are interested in fostering a diversity leadership agenda will need to either restructure and reallocate existing budgets and/or use new resources for supplemental job creation and diversity program development.

## Leadership in Higher Education

The academic landscape of most higher education institutions is one in which momentous changes and challenges are occurring. As student populations continue to expand nation-wide, colleges and universities will continue to offer employment opportunities for those individuals who rise to the level of quality and scholarly practice necessary for employment. Individuals involved with the leadership of institutions of higher learning must develop transformational leadership qualities and attributes to lead with commitment, passion, vision, and integrity. Transformational leaders have the ability to develop, change, adapt, and reinvent their own skills and abilities but more importantly, a good leader needs to have the ability to direct and affect these initiatives in others so that a progressive academic community follows successfully. Highly effective higher education leaders possess the ability to operate within political, symbolic, structural, and human resources frameworks (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Current leaders in administrative positions should have the ability to enable and develop performance in their academic faculty ranks. Leading with vision in a constantly evolving society is paramount to the success of a higher education leader and the overall success of his or her institution.

The notion of a leader as a learner is one which higher education leaders should pay particular attention to and merits discussion in this paper. According to Ramsden (1998), “the concept of academic leadership as a process analogous to university teaching” is one in which leaders learn from listening to colleagues about how to lead effectively (p. 245). Capable administrative leaders must adopt followership qualities when dealing with academics who are highly qualified leaders as well. Practicing followership skills is an asset that masterful leaders possess and this attribute allows one the ability to step aside and follow when other individuals in the organization have skills that are better matched for specific tasks. A synergistic relationship is most advantageous when administrators and faculty work collaboratively, offsetting individual strengths and weaknesses. A team effort versus a hierarchical structure allows for a dynamic new kind of leadership that counters the historical mistrust between faculty and administration.

Leading wisely involves a balance between personal philosophy, vision, pedagogical knowledge, and a willingness to transcend daily challenges and/or political struggles. Author Kevin Cashman (1998) describes a masterful leader as one who is focused on “feeding the community” (p. 180). Cashman states that an exceptional leader is authentic, has vision and purpose, and creates value through contribution and action.

Masterful leaders understand the necessity to flexibly operate in each of the four leadership frames that include political, symbolic, structural, and human resources. By employing these organizational frames, a conspicuous leader minimizes conflict while understanding the “differences in needs, perspectives, and lifestyles among competing individuals and groups” within the institutional structure (Bolman & Deal, p. 15). The values of higher education have invariably been associated with access to a successful life and employment, scholarly activities, political activities, freedom of choice, intellectual pursuits, and most recently, diversity. Higher education leaders must address each of these expectations and utilize the notion of community outlined by Gardner (1990) that includes:

1. Wholeness incorporating diversity.
2. A shared culture.

3. Good internal communication.
4. Caring, trust, and teamwork.
5. Group maintenance and government.
6. Participation and the sharing of leadership tasks.
7. Development of young people.
8. Links with the outside world (p. 116-118).

In addition, a transformational leader must be adaptable and progressive if his or her institution is expected to remain competitive, viable, and representative of society's values and goals.

Historically, faculty ranks and the organizational structure of most colleges and universities in the United States have been comprised of white Anglo American educators. Diversity leadership initiatives offer many challenges to current administrative leaders, department heads, and senior faculty search committees. As the populations in the United States continue to evolve and include more individuals of color, affirmative action policies have demanded minority and women faculty representation in institutions of higher learning. Higher education leaders are faced with the need to employ diverse faculty and they are called to facilitate and manage those initiatives. According to Ramsden (1998), "An appreciation of diversity permits the leader to respect different goals, agendas, needs and strengths in staff, and to avoid the view that there is a single 'right system' for the work unit while at the same time not compromising on values or vision, or avoiding action" (p. 230). Keeping this in mind, diversity leadership initiatives that are currently being discussed and addressed in higher academia can benefit from this type of leadership and predilection. In addition, diversity leadership search committees need to be aware of the fact that alternative methods can be useful in the search for diverse faculty members if successful diversity leadership initiatives are expected. The "right" search system should and can have many variables and institutions must address how they will foster, develop, search, and hire accomplished individuals of color.

#### Assessment of Diversity Leadership Issues in Higher Education

While addressing the current issues relating to diversity leadership in higher education, the research reveals that there is much work to be done in the area of development as well as inclusion into senior-level administrative positions. Aguirre and Martinez (2002) outline three distinct areas for consideration when developing a diversity leadership agenda, "In evaluating an institution's response to diversity issues one could focus on a) the number of minority faculty participating in the research mission of the institution, b) the extent of minority faculty participation on governance activities, and c) the incorporation of classes that focus on diversity issues into the curriculum" (¶ 22). If a university wishes to cultivate a diversity leadership agenda, transforming the institution's mission, vision, and goals should be overall considerations. Furthermore, universities and colleges must develop a diversity program that creates opportunities in all areas of academia, research, and management functions.

Despite efforts currently in process in many colleges and universities to provide and develop diversity leadership within the ranks of faculty members and administrative positions, leadership preparation programs are doing an insufficient job of addressing individual needs of minority and women leaders.

A successful diversity leadership agenda must involve the efforts of state and federal government officials, administrators, professional administrator organizations, and faculty members to collaborate in the improvement and support of educational leadership programs (Clark & Clark, 1997, ¶ 1). In many universities, the challenges associated with researcher versus practitioner have created particular concerns regarding the development of effective educational leadership agendas. Research I universities have an overwhelming focus and concentration on the quality of research their faculty members are producing and those universities reward faculty accordingly.

The notion and implementation of a diversity leadership agenda requires a conscious attempt to restructure and realign the university's overall direction and focus. Clark and Clark (1997) state that Research I universities are mainly concerned with the development of competent researchers who study the attributes and qualities of leadership rather than developing conspicuous educational leaders (¶ 2). Many of these types of universities reward faculty researchers based upon the study of leadership more so than the actual application to theory of leadership within the classroom and curricula. The addition of another agenda such as diversity leadership creates more questions and dilemmas that require restructuring, budget allocation, and job creation.

In a study conducted by Clark and Clark (1997) at the University of Arizona, an educational leadership task force was assembled to restructure the College of Education. After assessing the need for a restructure and overall reorganization, the task force "appointed 19 members consisting of urban, rural, and county school superintendents, public and private school principals, a school board member, a community college administrator, an international scholar, members of the College of Education faculty, administration, and staff, a business leader, and the Executive Director of the Arizona School Administrators' Association" (¶ 5). The task force needed to address the issues of educational leadership as well as diversity leadership within the department of education since the research revealed that the program lacked direction, vision, and purpose. The overriding goal was to create a leadership agenda for the department of education as well as improving community leadership mentoring relationships district wide. The intent was to create a leadership program that developed teachers, curriculum, and leadership practices. In addition, the program needed to address the development and preparation of individuals for state superintendencies and principalships.

The task force compiled information from educational leadership research, professional associations, and successful business and corporate entities to develop a rubric outlining specific traits, characteristics, and skills associated with outstanding leadership. The result of the task force's deliberations led to the creation of the Educational Leadership Program with corresponding curricula and procedures for developing, fostering, and mentoring appropriate faculty leadership. The Education Leadership Program is now the vehicle for five distinct educational leadership programs, which include the Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership, the Master of Education in Educational Leadership, the Leadership Development Center, the School Executive Program, and a certification program (¶ 9). A specific intention of the Education Leadership Program was to realign and merge the roles of researcher and practitioner and to rethink the importance each role has in the overall success of the program and the concept of leadership practice.

Long-term goals for the program are to develop and strengthen educational leadership attributes in its students and faculty while fostering leadership throughout the department and community at large. Although the University of Arizona has created a new leadership agenda within the College of

Education, the focus is directed on leadership development more so than a particular emphasis on diversity leadership. While the University's attempt to foster leadership qualities in the community at large, in its students, and its faculty is commendable, a specific agenda needs to evolve with particular focus and pragmatic solutions in the area of diversity leadership. Moreover, particular attention to diversity leadership in faculty and senior-level administrative positions seems to be lacking. "Diversity requires that higher education respond with energy and emotion in order to motivate persons in society to change the parameters that define inclusion" (Aguirre & Martinez, 2002, ¶ 29). Inclusion needs to be addressed regarding women and minority in the leadership agenda at the university and these individuals need to be included in the decision-making processes campus-wide. The leadership of the university should reflect the societal realities of the community, especially a southwest community, where minority influences are self-evident. Diversity leadership appears to be a secondary thought in the Education Leadership Program at the university. Furthermore, the concept of diversity leadership needs to be carried across the board and campus-wide if a successful leadership initiative is anticipated.

Political agendas of the 1960s and 1970s led to the current debates regarding cultural diversity in higher education institutions and gave rise to many female and minority groups demanding equality. According to Smelser (1993), the discussion surrounding affirmative action in higher education involves much debate as well as rhetoric:

Universities reacted to these demands—and the demands of governmental and other pressures for affirmative action—with varying degrees of responsiveness and effectiveness. Now both the values of and procedures for affirmative action are in place, and the increased presence of most of these groups is visible. Recently, the debates have taken a more distinctively cultural turn—hence the salience of the terms "cultural diversity" and "multiculturalism" (¶ 7).

Historically, universities have been known for controversies, debates, liberal intellectual thought, and diverse opinions. Although Research I institutions have been associated with elitism, access to opportunities, status, and enhanced lifestyles, they also represent a cultural symbolism. Part of this cultural symbolism involves the debate over diversity representation in higher academia and positions in senior-level administration.

Notoriously liberal, institutions of higher learning have addressed issues relating to employing minority faculty and fostering diversity leadership by adding to the number of women and minorities in various capacities campus-wide. However, many institutions are experiencing difficulties positioning these groups in doctoral-level faculty employment as well as at the highest levels of management and governance. Smelser (1993) adds to this discussion and addresses some of the reasons why diversity leadership has stalled:

In faculty hiring policies universities have likewise committed themselves to increase the numbers of women and minorities in an absolute sense. Particularly with respect to certain minorities—Native Americans, blacks, and Hispanics—this is currently a collectively impossible goal because of the small pool of doctoral candidates that appear in the market in any given year. The resultant situation is a heady competition for scarce minority candidates, including the practice of one institution pirating such candidates from another. Individual minority candidates may benefit from this process, but it does not seem to address the general problem of improving access for all minorities (¶ 22).

Although many institutions of higher learning may have honorable intentions to develop and foster diversity leadership agendas, the lack of doctoral-level candidates in some minority groups has hindered this process.

Anglo American women and Asian Americans have fared better than most other minority groups in faculty placement since these two groups represent the highest number of doctorates completed in relationship to other minority groups. The question becomes whether universities are responsible for seeking out and employing women and minority groups, and/or are they additionally responsible for the recruiting and training of these groups in doctoral-level programs where individuals can be groomed for diversity leadership positions within the university. In order for a diversity leadership agenda to succeed, it seems as though a multi-lateral approach is necessary.

Via affirmative action, universities need to target, foster, and develop women and minority groups throughout an individual's entire collegiate program starting from the bachelor's degree and continuing on throughout the doctorate. The writer believes this can be an insurmountable task for universities to accomplish alone and that the individual must take responsibility for his or her own academic career. A shared direction and vision must be supported both by the individual and by the universities and viewed as a partnership process. If universities are doing what is required of them by offering employment to women and minority groups, the writer believes it is the individual's responsibility to rise to the level of achievement so that those opportunities can be realized. Of course, universities can achieve successful results if a genuine effort is made at all levels of academia to recruit and foster diversity leadership with programs that support women and minority groups. Additionally, search processes need to focus on this issue by adjusting and creating alternate formulas. The writer believes that universities can play a larger role in the development of diversity leadership by realizing that the agenda requires much more accountability. Ultimately, the realities of diversity leadership in higher education involve more than creating and leaving positions open so that universities can fill a female and minority quota.

### Suggestions for Successful Diversity Leadership Initiatives in Higher Education

The complexities of the diversity leadership debate involve many issues and ultimately, universities and society at large needs to address the questions of merit, entitlement, and the value and purpose of affirmative action policies. What do we value as a society? What direction are we willing to support? What are the results and/or our cultural expectations for the role that higher education plays? Are we willing to accept the notion of process before product? Who is responsible for the development of women and minority leaders within academia? Does the responsibility lie with the individual, higher educational institutions, society at large, or a combination?

While many institutions of higher education are concerned with diversifying their faculty ranks, several factors play into the discussion and the difficulties surrounding those efforts. According to Smith, Turner, Osei-Kofi, and Richards (2004), recent diversity initiatives have encountered limitations:

Across the country, hundreds of campuses are engaged in efforts to diversify their faculties ethnically/racially, in response to both internal and external pressures. While fueled by numerous arguments related to the increasing diversity of their student body and the need to prepare all students for a diverse society, the reality is that perhaps the least successful of all the many diversity initiatives on campuses are those in the area of faculty diversity (¶ 1).

Although faculty diversification efforts have been rather successful with Asian Americans and Anglo American women, Hispanic, African American, and American Indian groups continue to be historically underrepresented. Much of the research in this area significantly reports that the reason for the underrepresentation of these groups is the fact that earned doctorates are relatively low. Without proper credentialing, diversity leadership incentives will be unsuccessful unless this factor is remedied. Research has indicated that these minority groups represent only 12% of the Ph.D.'s and only two percent of those Ph.D.'s are African American, excluding clinical psychology and education, thus creating a finite pool of applicants available for placement (Smith, Turner, Osei-Kofi, & Richards, 2004, ¶ 4). Although the pool of minority applicants appears relatively low to substantiate a successful diversity leadership campaign, Trower and Chait (2002) "point out that even in fields with more scholars of color, such as education and psychology, the faculty is not diverse" (¶ 6). Alternatively, universities continue to insist that the low pool numbers have created bidding wars for qualified minority faculty representation.

Several recent studies researching these issues revealed that although university administrative leaders suggest that bidding wars are prevalent, the research indicates that those notions are untrue, mythical in nature, and generally misleading. According to a study conducted by Smith, Wolf, and Busenberg (1996), the research discovered several fallacies:

The study, examining the employment experiences of scholars who had recently earned doctorates with funding from three prestigious fellowship programs, found that the underrepresented scholars of color, even in this group, were not highly sought after, and that the bidding wars were vastly overstated. Moreover, the majority of the scientists in this study (54%)—all underrepresented scholars of color—were not pursued for faculty positions by academic institutions (¶ 9).

Furthermore, the study discussed how to alleviate minority leadership underrepresentation in universities and colleges by suggesting changes and alternatives in search processes. Department heads and senior faculty hold a great deal of power in policy decisions and hiring processes by creating standards based upon their notion of quality, appropriate credentials, and scholarly research/productivity expectations. Administrators have generally allowed these policy decisions to be made at the department level, thus creating further distance from those hiring practices. Some researchers have stated that individual prejudices, fears, and political leanings of those individuals creating hiring policies at the departmental level have led to the exclusion of minority representation.

Individuals involved with the hiring practices of their institutions have tended to offer employment to individuals they feel most comfortable with as well as those individuals they culturally and socially relate to and understand more readily. Moreover, many researchers are pointing out that minority qualifications play a much smaller role in hiring decisions than most universities are willing to concede (de la Luz Reyes & Halcon, 1997; Merritt & Resken, 1997; McGinley, 1997, ¶ 11). Furthermore, these researchers have revealed that cronyism is still prevalent and preferential hiring strategies continue to exist.

Since the diversity debate has many factors involved, it is important to discuss how universities and colleges can create successful diversity leadership agendas. Future hiring trends in diversity leadership initiatives must include support and input from both the departmental and administrative levels. Search processes, hiring standards, and decision-making policies need to be specifically



targeted and seriously considered if genuine efforts for success are expected. Smith, Turner, Osei-Kofi, and Richards (2004) state that if the following three designated conditions are not met, faculty diversification initiatives will suffer:

(1) The job description used to recruit faculty members explicitly engages diversity at the department or subfield level; (2) An institutional “special hire” strategy, such as waiver of a search, target of opportunity hire, or spousal hire, is used; (3) The search is conducted by an ethnically/racially diverse search committee (§ 3).

It is reasonable to presume that institutions of higher learning need to take a more active role in how they go about their current diversity leadership agendas and how they will foster the development of women and minority leaders within their ranks. It is no longer acceptable for administrators in higher education institutions to state that the applicant pool is significantly low when cases studies have revealed that many minorities who hold Ph.D.'s have expressed that they are not highly sought after and bidding wars have been disclosed as convenient myths.

Attitude and structural changes are necessary within institutions of higher learning if significant changes are expected in diversity leadership practices. Researchers Smith, Turner, Osei-Kofi, and Richards (2004) outline several recommendations for implementing a successful diversity leadership initiative:

1. On-going support for scholars of color entering faculty ranks.
2. Urging current faculty to become involved with programs addressing diversity issues.
3. Changing and addressing hiring/search practices for diversity employment.
4. Developing job descriptions that are relevant to institutional diversity.
5. Employing institutional interventions such as target of opportunity hires and incentive programs.
6. Using strategies that allow a department to bypass the usual search process or that alter the composition of search committees and that are employed by any field or subfield (§ 12-13).

Diversity indicators and exceptional hire strategies are tools that researchers suggest can be successfully employed by universities and colleges. An exceptional hire strategy or special-hiring interventions may call for curriculum vitas and letters of support written on behalf of the applicant that provide data and information about an individual's unique and diverse qualities. These strategies allow institutions the opportunity to search outside the regular search processes or to bypass or enhance regular search processes generally employed. In addition, search committees should be composed of diverse members who include underrepresented minority groups.

In a case study conducted by researchers Smith, Turner, Osei-Kofi, and Richards (2004), “three large elite public research universities—each of which are member institutions of the Association of American Universities (AAU)—agreed to participate as partners in this study” conducted between 1995 to 1998 (§ 14). The findings revealed that when exceptional hire strategies or special-hiring interventions were employed, minority faculty hires were the result in greater percentages. The researchers determined that intentional hiring strategies should be available when searching for diverse faculty and that these methods do not have adverse or negative effects on the quality or expected credential standards of those individuals finally hired. In fact, the researchers noted that all three institutions hired minority

faculty with exceptional backgrounds and education credentials. According to Smith, Turner, Osei-Kofi, and Richards (2004), "an inspection of the actual institutions by name, reveal degrees from the top tier of research universities in virtually all cases" (¶ 35). The final data revealed that exceptional hire strategies and special-hiring interventions are tools that work well in the search for diverse faculty.

### Conclusion

Higher educational institutions represent microcosms of the societal structures in which they operate and most campuses have many opportunities for their students and faculty members. Smelser (1993) points out several interesting thoughts regarding the many choices available to individuals on a university campus:

The university campus, as a liberal and voluntaristic arena, has a range of freedom of choice. Within some limits, an individual student can choose to be serious or flippant in his or her commitments to academic study, to become "intellectual" or "anti-intellectual," to take a vocational or a liberal route in the curriculum, to adopt a traditional "Joe College" or "coed" role, to become politically active, to become bohemian, to go out for different kinds of activities such as athletics, band, or drama if able and interested, to join clubs, or to go it alone. Similarly, a faculty member has an element of choice as to whether to be a scholarly loner, a conscientious teacher, a participating or nonparticipating citizen in of academic community, a faculty conformist, or a faculty protester (¶ 32).

It is clear that the cultural and social dimensions in university life can be varied and diverse and yet there is still a great deal of work to be accomplished in the areas of faculty diversity and leadership. Much discussion has been given to developing diverse faculty although, the writer believes that more consideration for diversity needs to be addressed not only at the faculty level but also at the highest levels of administration in all institutions of higher learning. Developing diversity leadership in senior-level administrative positions should be part of the discussion and an on-going initiative.

As the population in the United States continues to evolve and include more individuals of color, institutions of higher learning will continue to evolve as well. The writer believes that opportunities are available to anyone who chooses to rise to the level of his or her own personal ideal of success and institutions of higher learning are welcoming those individuals who chose academia as a scholarly pursuit. A final observation the writer wishes to discuss is the fact that the process of diversity leadership initiatives should be viewed as a continuous flux and not particularly as a finished product. As more individuals of color consider careers in academia, the pursuit of doctoral degrees amongst minority groups is paramount to the notion of a diverse faculty as well as a diverse administrative leadership. Ultimately, it is the individual's responsibility to pursue an academic career and to complete the doctoral degree and it is the institution's responsibility to foster, develop, search, and hire those accomplished individuals of color.

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