

THE CHRONICLE
OF HIGHER EDUCATION®

Diverse Leadership for a New Era

How to recruit and support
an inclusive administration



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CHRONICLE PHOTO

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INTRODUCTION

WHEN Freeman A. Hrabowski III arrived at the University of Maryland-Baltimore County as vice provost in 1987, then-president Michael K. Hooker told him that Hrabowski himself would be president there someday.

“I looked at him and laughed and said, ‘Yeah, right,’” recalls Hrabowski. He had served as a dean at two historically Black colleges, but Hooker told him: “Freeman, your problem is you grew up as a Black kid in Birmingham and you put limits on yourself. You don’t show it to everyone, but I can tell.”

That perception rankled, but 35 years later, Hrabowski says that Hooker wasn’t wrong. He was doing the job of a tough, effective mentor, helping Hrabowski recognize and wrestle with some psychic scars from his civil rights [activism](#) in Bull Connor’s segregated South.

Hrabowski was appointed UMBC president in 1992 and has since become an iconic academic leader. The university’s myriad achievements under Hrabowski include remarkable student success, particularly among STEM students from underrepresented minorities and low-income families. To give just a partial sense of how much impact one leader can have, consider: UMBC now produces more Black bachelor’s-degree recipients who go on to earn Ph.D.s in the natural sciences and engineering than any other university in the United States. The 1,400 alumni of the Meyerhoff Scholars Program that Hrabowski and Baltimore philanthropist Robert Meyerhoff created in

1988 [have gone on to earn](#) more than 800 graduate degrees. Hrabowski has mentored numerous leaders in academe and elsewhere.

But are future generations of leaders like Hrabowski getting the encouragement and opportunities they need to fulfill their potential and help millions of students achieve theirs? *The Chronicle* spoke with more than 30 college leaders, higher-education scholars, and consultants about how colleges can foster diversity in their administrative ranks and support leaders once they arrive. From this report, you will learn:

- Why higher-ed leaders think administrative diversity matters, and how they answer skeptics who say it doesn’t.
- Whether colleges are living up to the many equity statements they issued after George Floyd’s murder.
- What changes in institutional culture, hiring practices, anti-bias training, and mentorship are most effective.
- Why the pandemic-era “great resignation” job market is both a challenge and an opportunity in academe.
- What two-year, historically Black, and Hispanic-serving colleges can teach other institutions about cultivating and supporting diverse leadership.

Along the way, you’ll see up close how widening the range of administrators fits into several colleges’ overall plans on



MARLAYNA DEMOND, UMBC

In his long tenure as president of the U. of Maryland-Baltimore County, Freeman A. Hrabowski III has been widely recognized for mentoring many leaders of color and helping achieve remarkable student success.

diversity, equity, and inclusion – DEI – an abbreviation sometimes followed by “B” for “belonging” or “J” for “justice.”

Immersing themselves in the details of process, colleges must not lose sight of what’s at stake: A glance at the headlines,

says Hrabowski, underscores how many people in today’s world are failing to bridge chasms of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, politics, and culture.

“If we don’t learn to do it in our colleges,” he asks, “where can we possibly learn?”

SECTION 1



Does Administrative Diversity Matter?

EVEN ASKING THAT QUESTION, in most academic circles, is considered obtuse at best, outrageous at worst. But skeptics do ask. In some state capitols, they ask loudly and pass statutes that outlaw or constrain diversity and anti-bias training for students and employees of public colleges. Republican-backed laws — like [those](#) in Florida, Iowa, Oklahoma, and Tennessee — are sometimes framed as combating critical race theory, but they can disrupt many kinds of diversity education and training programs broader than that label might suggest.

In a recent [essay](#), Yascha Mounk, an author and political scientist at the Johns Hopkins University, explained his objection to America's current diversity discussions. News reports have anticipated a 2040s "minority majority" consisting of

TAKEAWAYS

Skeptics argue that academe's focus on diversity is divisive and distracts from more-important issues.

Diversity advocates counter that a diverse administration, faculty, and staff are crucial to serving increasingly diverse students.

The Covid-19 pandemic and George Floyd's murder spurred more-intense demands for diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout academe.

Colleges are responding to those calls, but progress is slow, and frustration and fatigue are perils.

“whites, a group portrayed as cohesive despite the vast ethnic and religious differences,” and “‘people of color’ — who were portrayed as having a meaningfully shared identity despite hailing from vastly different parts of the world and comprising individuals from just about every race known to man.”

This casting, Mounk writes, gives osten-

Diversity Terminology

The following are some of the terms, used by academics and others involved in diversity work, that you'll encounter in this report.

Apida: Refers to Asian/Pacific Islander/Desi American. Desi is sometimes used to describe members of the South Asian diaspora, among them people with origins on the Indian subcontinent.

Bipoc: An umbrella term that includes those who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

DEI: Refers to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

MSI: Used to describe minority-serving institutions, which enroll a significant percentage of minority students. Such institutions could include tribal colleges, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), and Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs). A college is considered an HSI if at least 25 percent of its full-time undergraduates are Hispanic.

sibly marginalized groups hope that their experiences will become more mainstream and spurs fears among some ostensibly mainstream groups that their country will become unrecognizable and that they may even be relegated to a subordinate status.

“The set of assumptions which underwrites both these hopes and these fears is mistaken,” Mounk writes. That is because Census Bureau classifications of “white” versus “non-white” rely on “highly questionable assumptions.” For example, he explains, the child of two white immigrants from Spain counts as Hispanic and someone with seven white great-grandparents and one Black great-grandparent is considered Black.

The quickly growing number of mixed-race Americans have much more complicated, nuanced self-perceptions, Mounk argues. In trying to counter racial inequality, elites are reinforcing divides.

Peter Wood, president of the National Association of Scholars, a nonprofit that “upholds the standards of a liberal-arts education ... fosters intellectual freedom, searches for the truth, and promotes virtuous citizenship,” says that if diversity “is defined solely as proportional representation of identity groups,” then fostering it is not only unimportant but also detrimental in the realm of academe. That effort, he says, “fans the flames of division on campus, creates incentives to perpetuate grievance culture, and erodes the integrity of the academic enterprise.”

Fostering a diversity of ideas, on the other hand, is worthwhile and important, says Wood. “Ideally,” he says, “a university is served by administrators who do indeed represent a wide variety of perspectives but who also maintain generosity and openness to one another’s views. In my view, colleges and universities who pursue race, ethnic-group, and gender diversity in appointing administrators have the least chance of achieving that kind of intellectual generosity and temperance.”

Mark Bauerlein, an emeritus professor of English at Emory University and an editor at *First Things*, a journal of religion and public life, says that in academe, diversity has become such a fraught word that it is useless. Colleges gravitate to it, he says, in an attempt to distract and mollify angry students who rightly see hypocrisy in talk



MADDIE MEYER, GETTY IMAGES

The murder of George Floyd in 2020 led to protests like this one, led by Clemson U. football players, and to statements by many institutions promising greater equity and diversity.

about diversity at institutions predominantly run by white men.

And predominantly male and white they are. According to data from CUPA-HR, the association for human-resources professionals in higher education, only 32 percent of presidents are women and only 14 percent are members of racial- or ethnic-minority groups. Furthermore, if change is coming, it is likely to come slowly because presidents most often rise from the academic hierarchy, and while 45 percent of provosts, 57 percent of vice provosts, and 45 percent of deans are women, only 13 percent of provosts, 14 percent of vice provosts, and 16 percent of deans are from racial- or ethnic-minority groups.

The DEI plabum, Bauerlein says, is also a

copout from discussing entrenched societal problems like lousy K-12 schooling, culturally starved home environments, persistent standardized-test-score gaps, and decades of woefully low Ph.D. percentages for underrepresented minorities in many fields. Liberalism doesn't know what to do about those tough, unyielding problems, says Bauerlein, a onetime liberal turned conservative, "so it chases after ever-more fugitive theories of racism," among which he counts systemic racism and test bias.

MISSION AND STUDENT SUCCESS

Advocates of diversity initiatives disagree with most if not all of that, but they say they would rather engage with overt cri-

tiques like these than hear dissent grumpily muttered from the back row and left unaddressed.

They acknowledge that categorization can be messy. Not all underrepresented minorities are poor, and not all minorities are underrepresented. And yes, as Mounk points out, identities are ever-more “intersectional” — broad categories like Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American contain multitudes, while individuals increasingly identify with a variety of heritages, gender and sexual-orientation descriptors, and other traits within themselves. Moreover, those intersectional identities sometimes shift over time.

Institutional identities contain multitudes, too. Take the University of Maryland-Baltimore County. It is classified as a minori-

“Ideally, a university is served by administrators who do indeed represent a wide variety of perspectives but who also maintain generosity and openness to one another’s views.”

ty-serving institution, but “underrepresented minorities” don’t make up the majority of its students. Of its roughly 9,200 full-time undergraduates, 21.3 percent are Black or African American, 8.7 percent are Hispanic, 24.5 percent are Asian, and 33.7 percent are white, while 5.5 percent identify as multiethnic and 4.6 percent as international.

A Black student from Jamaica will likely have a considerably different worldview

than a Black student from downtown Baltimore or one from West Africa. But does the complexity of identities nullify the importance of emphasizing diversity, as skeptics suggest? No, says UMBC’s president, Freeman A. Hrabowski III — the complexity accentuates that importance because of the huge benefits that diversity offers.

Other colleges in the area, he explains, were traditionally white or Black. UMBC was founded in 1966 as the state’s first public higher-education institution inclusive of all races. All the more so because it is near Columbia, Md., a community established in 1967 in part to eliminate racial, religious, and class divisions.

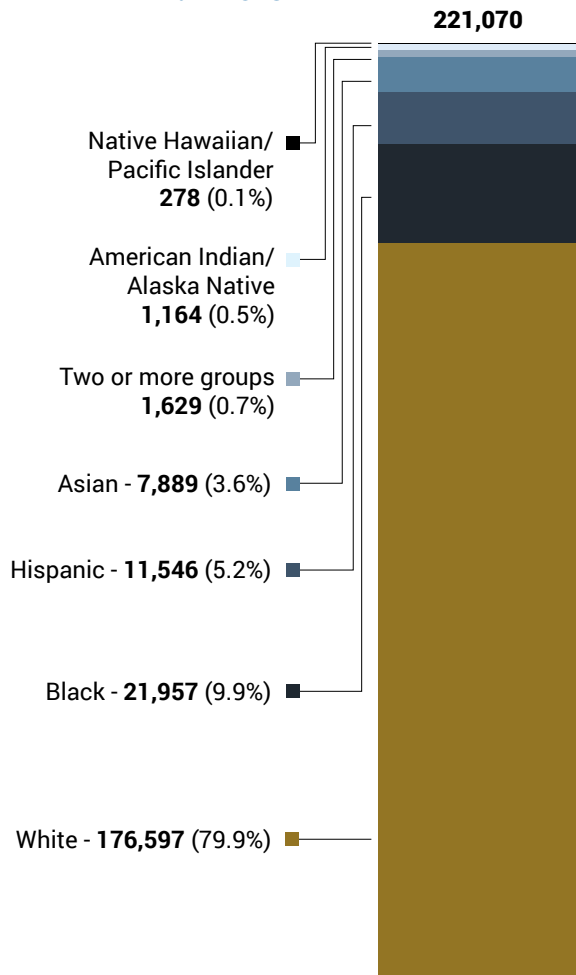
About 60 percent of UMBC students have a parent from another country. Many are from military, diplomatic, and intelligence-service families with complicated origins and frequent relocations. The university has “domestic and international diversity,” Hrabowski says, and “when you walk around the campus, it feels like the plaza of the U.N.”

That enriches the cultural exchange on campus and the cultural competence of graduates, he says, and corporations and government agencies value the cosmopolitanism of UMBC alumni. The National Security Agency certainly does, with 1,200 UMBC graduates having worked there. Employers know, Hrabowski says, that solutions are “stronger as people can add different ideas and angles to attacking a problem.”

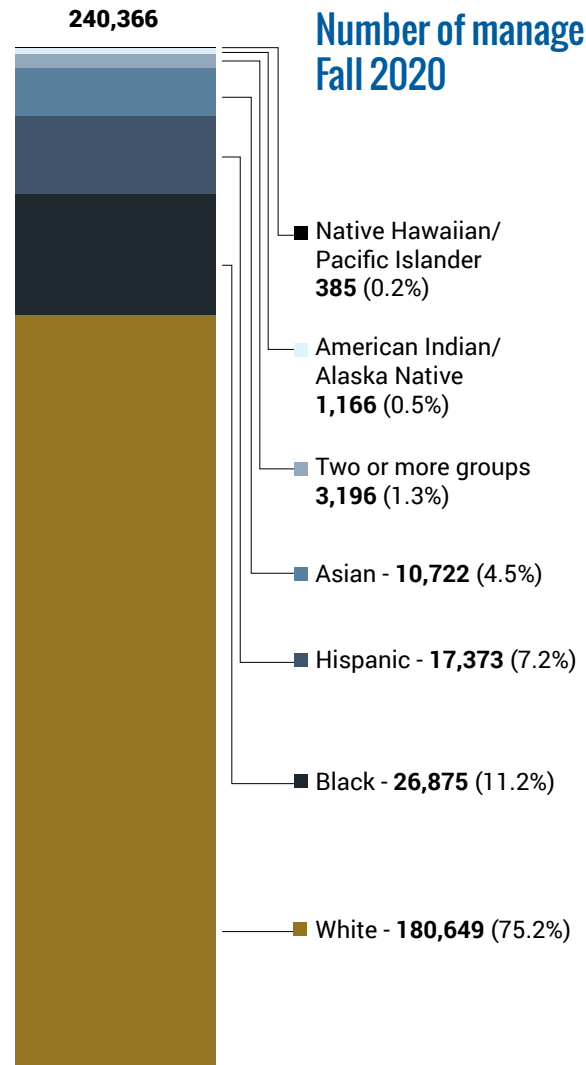
The diverse faculty members teaching the diverse students are led by a diverse administration, Hrabowski says — the provost is a British physicist; the vice provost for academic affairs, a Portuguese biochemical engineer; the dean of the graduate school, a Black woman electrical engineer; the dean of the engineering school, an out, and outspoken, gay man; the dean of science, a chemist who began postsecondary education at a community college; and so on. “You put that team together and you see how they approach problems from very different perspectives and it makes for a very rich conversation,” Hrabowski says. And that also serves

Diversity in Higher Education's Administrative Ranks, 2013-20

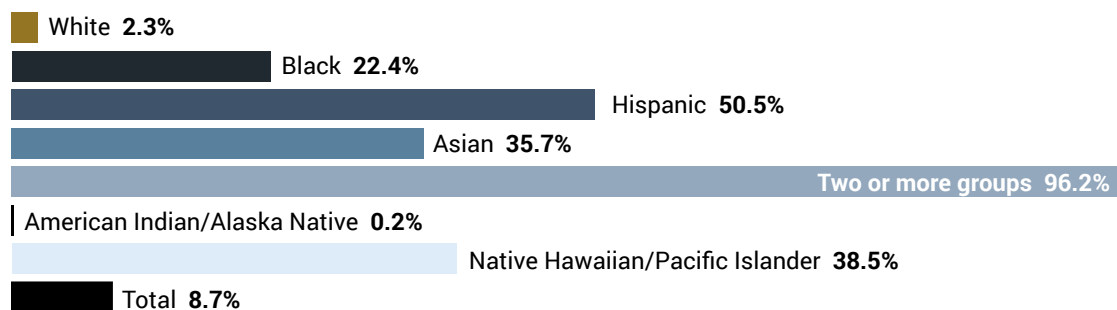
Number of managers, Fall 2013



Number of managers, Fall 2020



Percentage change 2013-2020



Note: Data cover full-time managers at degree-granting four-year and two-year public, private, and for-profit institutions in the United States that were eligible to participate in the Title IV federal student-aid program in 2013-14 and 2020-21. Managers "plan, direct, or coordinate policies and programs, and may include some supervision of other workers." Management job titles may include president, provost, dean, chief diversity officer, registrar, and director of student services. Total number of management employees does not include nonresident aliens or people whose race or ethnicity was unknown. Percentages may not add up to 100 percent because of rounding.

Source: *Chronicle* analysis of U.S. Department of Education data



TIM TRUMBLE

Paulette Granberry Russell, president of the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education, worries that momentum is slowing in colleges' efforts to become more diverse.

as a model for the rest of the university.

Most higher-education leaders also acknowledge the importance of intellectual diversity among many other kinds.

Shaya Gregory Poku, associate vice president for institutional equity and belonging at Wheaton College in Massachusetts, says that the diversity-of-ideas critique might be used to deflect or quash conversations about other kinds of diversity.

"What people think and how they identify are important forms of diversity, but different streams of diversity," she says. The ideology conversation mustn't be allowed to supplant discussions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, neuro- and physical diversity, and

other classifications, however blurry and messy they may sometimes be.

Why not?

On one level, Poku and others say, out of ethical obligations to reflect society's varied population and to right the wrongs of a higher-education history that for centuries was tailored to the elite. More immediately and practically, however, the emphasis on diversity, equity, and belonging concerns colleges' core mission: to help students succeed.

These diversity advocates urge skeptics to consider statistics like these:

- Colleges increasingly serve students who are from underrepresented-minority

groups and low-income backgrounds. The Census Bureau [reports](#) that in 2019, “40.1 percent of non-Hispanic whites 25 and older had a bachelor’s degree or higher, up from 33.2 percent in 2010. In that same period, the percentage of Blacks 25 and older with a bachelor’s degree or higher rose from 19.8 percent to 26.1 percent; Asians from 52.4 percent to 58.1 percent; and Hispanics from 13.9 percent to 18.8 percent.”

- Researchers reported in a 2018 [paper](#) that “overall graduation rates for underrepresented minority students of all races/ethnicities are positively affected by increased diversity of their faculty.” In the words of a first-generation Latina senior at Georgetown University who [spoke to](#) an ABC news reporter in the summer of 2021: “When I have a Latino professor, I feel more confident.” Latino professors “have been in my shoes,” she said, “being the first to kind of lift your family out of a difficult situation. ... For a student to come on a campus and not see anyone else that looks like them, the message is: you’re an outsider.”
- The American Association of University Professors [reported](#) in fall 2020 that while underrepresented minorities made up 32.6 percent of the U.S. population, they made up only 12.9 percent of full-time faculty members.

Diversifying the faculty and staff doesn’t happen by accident, DEI advocates argue. It takes consistent, deliberate efforts, and a diverse administration is more likely to bring that conscientiousness and innovation in creating environments, including faculty demographics, that serve students well.

Most college administrations, however, are not that diverse. “Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and Asian men make up less than one-tenth of administrators (7 percent),” CUPA-HR recently [reported](#). “Minority women also make up less than one-tenth of administrators (9 percent) but are slightly better represent-

ed among administrators overall than are minority men.”

At the risk of oversimplifying, then, one might summarize the pro-diversity argument this way: Less-diverse administrations create a less-diversified faculty and staff (although staff, at lower to middle tiers, have more diverse numbers, according to the CUPA-HR report). Those administrations are not always well attuned to the needs and experiences of increasingly diverse student bodies. The generally more homogenous

“For a student to come on a campus and not see anyone else that looks like them, the message is: you’re an outsider.”

institutions they create are not serving underrepresented-minority and low-income students well.

How do colleges know they aren’t serving those students well? From data points like these:

- Undergraduates who are both low-income and first-generation students graduate at a rate of only 21 percent, compared with 66 percent for students who are in neither of those categories, according to a recent report by the American Council on Education and the University of Southern California’s Pullias Center for Higher Education.
- Even as the percentages of Black and Latinx students have increased, according to the report, the current 17-percent-age-point gap in college-degree attain-

ment rates between Black and white students is roughly the same as in 1990, while the gap between Latinx and white students has increased.

- College degrees are often the platform for students' wealth generation, elevating prospects for them, their families, and society as a whole. The pandemic, however, has disrupted that. The National College Attainment Network, a nonprofit organization that works to further college access and student success, reported that as of the end of March 2022, federal

Like all kinds of innovation, innovation in diversity can be scaled up to potentially powerful effect.

student-aid applications in 2022-23 were down 8.9 percent from the year before. Renewals from current students declined 12.3 percent, and renewals from Pell Grant-eligible students dropped 15.6 percent. Those figures, NCAN explains, "portend very bad news in the short term for college student retention, persistence, and completion rates."

To help ameliorate such disparities, the ACE/Pullias report calls for, and is titled, "Shared Equity Leadership: Making Equity Everyone's Work." The authors urge "collaborative and inclusive" leadership that draws from the practices, values, and personal journeys of administrators and faculty and staff members. Those, in turn, build upon a

variety of cultural backgrounds and experiences. In other words, a more diverse administration is beneficial, the authors say, especially when it works in an intensely collaborative way that brings diverse experiences, views, and areas of expertise into conversation with each other.

Such conversations affect "the way diverse ideals and values are carried and understood," says Michael Benitez, vice president for diversity and inclusion and an associate professor of multicultural education at Metropolitan State University of Denver. For example, the university recently announced that starting in the fall of 2022, it will offer full tuition scholarships for its current roughly 70 Native and Indigenous students, intensify efforts to cultivate rapport with local Native elders and leaders, and provide the resources and support to assure Indigenous students' success. The policies, he says, make sense from the standpoints of restorative-justice and reconciliation. He is referring to the Cheyenne and Arapahoe Nations that once inhabited what is now the university's Auraria Campus. The Lakota, Ute, Kiowa, Comanche, Apache, Shoshone, and other nations also sometimes inhabited it, the university says.

Like all kinds of innovation, innovation in diversity can be scaled up to potentially powerful effect. For example, Hrabowski's success in wrap-around support for underrepresented STEM students at UMBC has long been a model for programs at other colleges. In the spring of 2022 the Howard Hughes Medical Institute announced plans to elevate its support to a whole new level, with a \$1.5-billion investment in what it is calling the Freeman Hrabowski Scholars Program. That will support up to 150 early-career scientists committed to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in science, at up to \$8.6 million per scholar.

DIVERSITY AND WELLNESS

Colleges are also increasingly attentive to the intersection of student success and student wellness. A recent study by Sarah K.

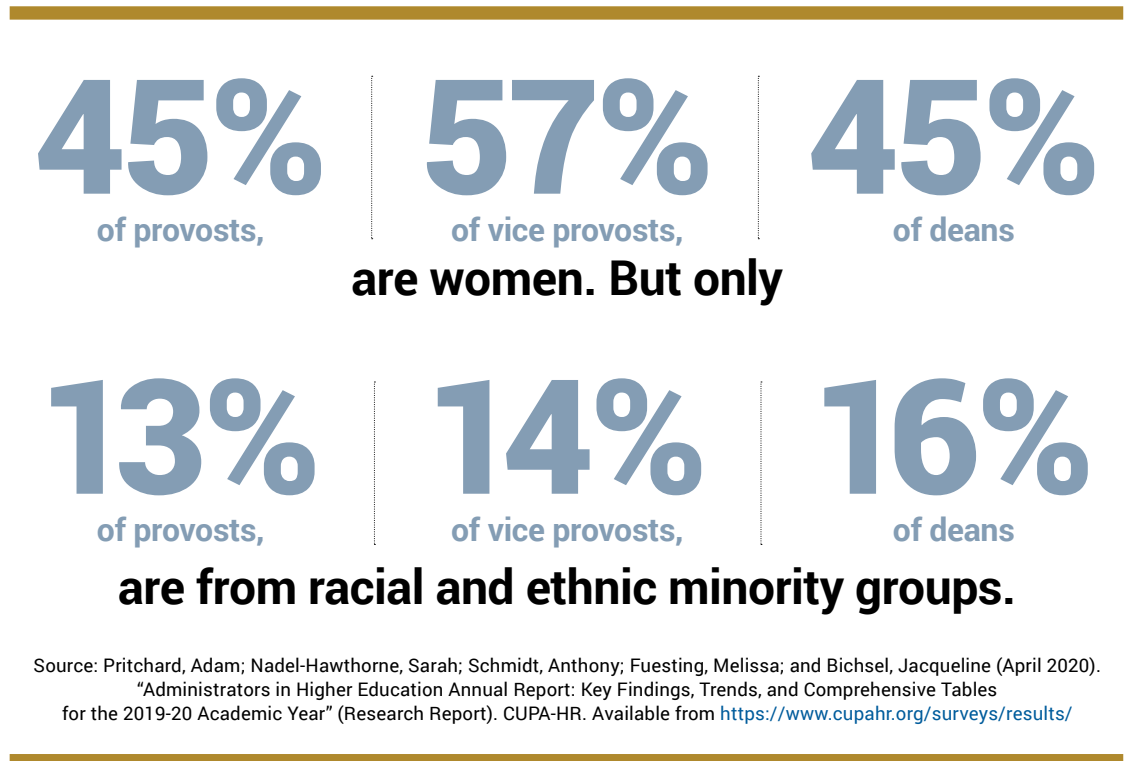
Lipson, of Boston University’s School of Public Health, and colleagues at the University of California at Los Angeles, the University of Michigan, and Wayne State University [found](#) that for college students overall from 2013 to 2021, depression rose by 135 percent and anxiety rose by 110 percent. Put another way, the proportion of students experiencing mental-health problems doubled in that time.

The long-term, multicampus study (350,000 students at more than 300 campuses) went further, though, analyzing differences in prevalence and treatment across race and ethnicity. Nonsuicidal self-injury and symptoms of eating disorders rose the most among white students, but in all other categories — “depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and one or more mental-health problems” as a summary worded it — increases were greatest among nonwhite students, especially American Indian/Alaska Native and Asian/Pacific Islander/Desi American students. (Desi, part of the

acronym Apida, is a term sometimes used for members of the South Asian diaspora, among them people with origins from the Indian subcontinent. Like so many terms describing demographic groups, it has spurred some [controversy](#).) “Arab American students experienced a 22-percent jump in mental health issues, but had an 18-percent decrease in treatment over the eight years of the study, highlighting a critical gap between onset of symptoms and accessing help.” In 2020, treatment declined the most among Apida and Black students.

Such figures, college leaders say, underscore the importance of diverse administrations that are attuned not just to the purely academic needs of students but to all aspects of their well-being necessary for successful and satisfying college experiences. Primarily white administrations can try to ameliorate these problems, but diverse administrations, many experts think, can do so more effectively.

Are more-diverse administrations,



faculties, and staffs a cure-all for these deep-seated ills? Of course not. Nor should it be assumed that a demographically diverse administration has a deep understanding of, or commitment to, DEI concepts.

But advocates say that diversity is necessary for if not sufficient to solving them. And, they say, for students who extend their gaze beyond their immediate circle of professors and advisers, seeing diverse campus

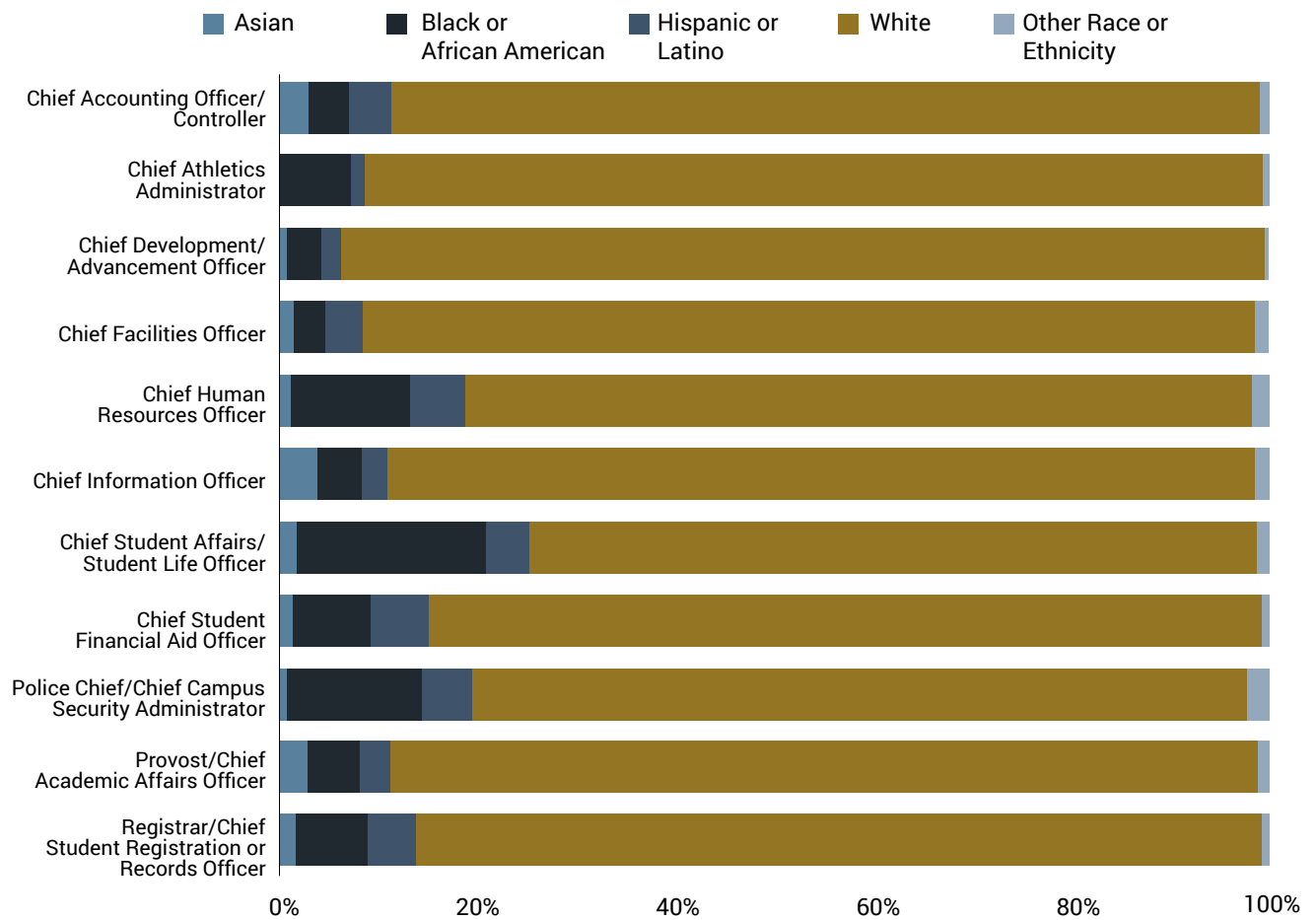
leaders — deans, provosts, vice presidents, presidents — is affirming in itself.

ARE COLLEGES KEEPING THEIR WORD?

Beyond those arguments for diversity are two more: Students demand it, and in the aftermath of George Floyd’s murder in 2020, colleges promised it.

Of 300 colleges sampled by NASPA-Stu-

Senior Administrators by Race and Ethnicity, 2018-19



Note: Totals may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

Source: Pritchard, Adam; Li, Jingyun; McChesney, Jasper; and Bichsel, Jacqueline (April 2019). "Administrators in Higher Education Annual Report: Key Findings, Trends, and Comprehensive Tables for the 2018-19 Academic Year" (Research Report). CUPA-HR. Available from <https://www.cupahr.org/surveys/results/>

dent Affairs Administrators in Higher Education and the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education for a 2021 [report](#), 230 issued antiracist statements advocating equality and respect. Those statements were issued by half of public two-year colleges, 87 percent of four-year publics, and 92 percent of four-year privates.

Were those statements politically correct lip service, or have colleges made real efforts to become more diverse?

One of the report's authors, Paulette Granberry Russell, president of the diversity-officers association, says many colleges have made progress in the two years since. But, she says, diversity and student-affairs officers fear that momentum is slowing. That's not out of sinister uninterest but because colleges face myriad challenges and administrators are exhausted chasing after solutions, especially during the chaos of the pandemic.

The association's members, Granberry Russell says, think that there has been progress over the last two years, but "the concern is, are institutions pulling back?" They mustn't, she says, because diversity, equity, and inclusion are central to solving other key problems, including recruitment, retention, higher graduation rates, and better post-graduation job prospects.

That thinking contains both a mission-centered and a business-centered argument for emphasizing diversity — it will help colleges not just survive but also thrive, and as UMBC's Hrabowski pointed out, students' future employers like the skills and mind-set that diverse college environments produce. But Granberry Russell is among the higher-education experts who argue that while the business rationale is legitimate and important, the better reason to concentrate on diversity, equity, and inclusion is because it's the right thing to do.

After all, she says, the reason historically Black colleges and universities, tribal colleges, women's colleges, and other specialized institutions were created was because academe was primarily serving affluent white men. Far beyond business rationales, diversity redresses those historical and



COURTESY OF MARK BAUERLEIN

Mark Bauerlein, an emeritus professor of English at Emory U., says diversity has become such a fraught word that it is useless — and is a copout from discussing entrenched societal problems like lousy K-12 education.

societally ingrained prejudices. Granberry Russell cites an [essay](#) making that case in the realm of geosciences and says that the argument applies to higher education over all.

Over the last 20 years, she says, diversity has evolved from a compliance matter to a multicultural worldview to a broader, more intense activist mandate to "live our values." The George Floyd murder and Black Lives Matter protests, coupled with medical and other inequities highlighted by the pandemic, added an exclamation mark.

Among the challenges Granberry Russell sees:

- cultivating diverse leadership
- promoting understanding of, and support

for, diversity efforts through education and training across the ranks of administrators, faculty and staff members, and students

- finding the resources for diversity programs in a time of strained budgets
- managing expectations for, and fatigue with, progress that usually comes slowly even when things are going well

AVOIDING DIVERSITY FATIGUE

Granberry Russell wishes progress were faster, “but if you are going to do this work, you have to be in it for the long haul because the things that led us to where we are did not happen overnight” and are “deeply entrenched in existing policies, procedures, and practices.”

Colleges, like other sectors of society, need to get used to the idea that diversity work isn’t a one-and-done accomplishment but

“There is going to be some fatigue. There is going to be some discomfort. That’s how you know you’re doing it right.”

a constant struggle, says Raquel M. Rall, an assistant professor in the graduate school of education at the University of California at Riverside. She uses the analogy of personal health and fitness. You don’t reach your short-term weight goal, lower your cholesterol, achieve cardio- and resistance-training benchmarks, then stop and spend the next

three years eating potato chips on the couch. You must maintain and progress.

“There is going to be some fatigue,” she says. “There is going to be some discomfort. That’s how you know you’re doing it right.”

No one expects colleges to pursue one capital campaign or one strategic plan and then stop, says Adrianna Kezar, a professor of leadership and higher education at the University of Southern California’s Pullias Center. They don’t say, hey, we reached our \$20 million goal and never have to raise or worry about money again. They don’t say our institution has exactly the kinds of programs and resources it needs so we won’t ever change them.

Why would diversity efforts be any different? Kezar asks. Is your campus exemplary in its diversity, empathy, and belonging? If the answer is no, then you have more work to do.

Even if change is slow, however, it is happening.

“I don’t know any colleges that aren’t trying to improve the diversity of their students, their faculty, and their administration. It’s a priority for everyone,” says Robert G. Atkins, CEO of Gray Associates, an educational consulting firm.

The overall narrative experts offer is that by 2016, with the racial and political tensions surrounding the presidential campaigns, many colleges had come to understand that diversity work couldn’t be the provenance of one senior diversity officer, even at the cabinet level, roving campus and fixing bias and inequity with a magic bureaucratic wand. In the same way that colleges were coming to understand that mental health needed to be a campuswide matter of peer education and support, not just the responsibility of the counseling center, it was sinking in that DEI also needed to be an institutionwide effort.

That entailed a new intensity in detailed planning and transparency. For example, multiple stages of DEI work are woven deeply into the University of Michigan’s five-year [strategic plans](#), with annual progress reports; an annual DEI summit; DEI blueprints for the university’s 50 schools, colleges, and

other units; a DEI planning tool kit; and resources for community and constituency conversations about DEI.

To be clear, if in recent years the rubber has hit the road, that doesn't mean that colleges' senior diversity officers or diversity efforts now have the leadership and financial support they need. They usually don't, and senior diversity officers [burn out](#) and leave the job at an alarming rate.

Nonetheless, there are some encouraging signs.

From 2013 to 2020, according to a *Chronicle* analysis of U.S. Education Department data, the number of Black managers in higher education increased from 9.9 percent to 11.2 percent. For Hispanic managers, that percentage increase was from 5.2 to 7.2. For Asian managers, the increase was 3.6 percent to 4.5 percent.

For American Indian or Alaskan Native managers, however, the percentage remained at 0.5 percent over that period, and for Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander managers, it barely budged, from 0.1 percent to 0.2 percent.

"For the most senior positions, demonstrating to candidates that an institution values their talents above their identities is essential," Suresh Garimella, president of the University of Vermont, writes in an email response to a reporter's queries. "But it's also important to be clear that pluralism is a key value and that an institution isn't hidebound by its leadership history. An openness to change is important for true inclusive excellence."

Some areas of administration are more diverse than others. For example, in 2020, CUPA-HR [reported](#), racial and ethnic minorities made up 28 percent of those in colleges' leadership positions in fiscal affairs and 26 percent in student affairs, but only 13 percent in external affairs and 11 percent in athletics.

Change is afoot at the highest levels, too. An [analysis](#) by *Inside Higher Ed* showed that more colleges had hired minority presidents following George Floyd's death and the BLM protests.

From June 2020 through November 2021, 35.4 percent of the presidents and chancellors hired by American colleges and universities were members of racial-minority groups, *IHE* reported. A quarter were Black — 22.5 percent when excluding historically Black colleges. In contrast, 22 percent of presidential hires from December 2018 through May 2020 were nonwhite, and only 14.6 percent of campus leaders hired in that period before Floyd's death were Black.

The proportion of Latino presidents also grew after that June 2020 dividing line — to

"I don't know any colleges that aren't trying to improve the diversity of their students, their faculty, and their administration."

almost 7 percent, up from 4 percent in the preceding 18 months. There was no increase in the representation of Asian or Native American presidents.

And it remains to be seen, the article notes, whether these presidents would have the autonomy to bring about change.

Indeed, that is yet another argument in favor of concentrating on diversity efforts: If talented leaders don't have institutional support for diversity work, you're going to have trouble attracting, and keeping, them. Section 2 will look at obstacles to recruiting and retention and what some colleges are doing to overcome them.

Linking Diversity to Student Success

The Challenge: To diversify the administration, faculty, and staff to more effectively serve students and help them succeed

The Strategy: Restructure and hire around diversity goals, educate employees, and emphasize accountability

The Results: From the boardroom to the classroom, a markedly more diverse campus

IN 2015, Christine M. Riordan became the first female president of Adelphi University. With a Ph.D. in organizational psychology and an M.B.A., she is an expert on leadership development, team building, and diversity and inclusion. It was no accident, then, that she brought to Adelphi rigorous attention to issues of diversity and equity.

Staying committed to diversity work is crucial to keeping good leaders and effectively serving students, says Kristen Capezza, Adelphi's vice president for enrollment management and communications. From student ambassadors to the president and the board, she says, students and prospective students should see a campus that looks like them and can help students of various populations deal with their trials and tribulations.

Institutional evolution is cyclical, she says, in that a diverse campus culture attracts



ADELPHI U.

Students stroll through a campus building at Adelphi U., which has instituted a far-ranging strategic plan to make the university markedly more diverse.

and helps retain talented leaders, who in turn help to enrich that culture. Particularly in the current challenging labor market, if diverse leaders aren't supported in their work, "you're going to end up losing your talent," she says, because good managers in general, and especially good managers from underrepresented groups, "might have offers coming at them left and right that are very attractive."

That's the why, and here's the how:

In 2016 Adelphi, in New York, created an Office of Diversity and Inclusion and the position of vice president for diversity and inclusion. It instituted new hiring practices — among them diversity training and optional tests "to help gain self-awareness into subtle assumptions that affect judgment" — and began actively recruiting scholars of color. From 2013 to 2016, the number of new scholars of color rose from 27 to 45 percent. Between 2015 and 2021, the share of minority faculty members rose from 23 to 29 percent, university officials say.

A personalized enrollment strategy to welcome more students of color connected applicants to enrollment advisers and faculty members throughout the admissions process. That has contributed, since 2015, to a 76-percent increase in the number of new Black students and a 43-percent increase in the number of Hispanic students. Minority students now account for 43 percent of the university's student body. The Campus Pride Index awarded Adelphi a Premiere Campus ranking for its LGBTQ-plus-friendly counseling, health, safety, recruitment, and retention.

More than 640 faculty and staff members have participated in diversity-certificate programs through 76 workshops. Forty-three percent of President Riordan's team are minority leaders, including the first Black woman and the first Black man to hold leadership positions, and 57 percent of the team are women.

The Board of Trustees has changed, too, electing eight people of color (one-third of trustees) and seven women (40 percent of trustees). It also elected its first Black man as board chair.

Adelphi's strategic plan, called Momentum, includes administrative infrastructure to support these multipronged efforts: An Academic Diversity Implementation Team evaluates ways to incorporate social-justice and race education into curricula. An Office of Community Concerns and Resolution responds immediately to any reports of discrimination and abuse. Students can weigh in on diversity issues through an Equitable Adelphi Action Team. Systemic racism is examined through healing circles as part of the university's designation as a [Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation Campus Center](#). (Dozens of those centers — organized by the American Association of Colleges and Universities and supported by the Kellogg Foundation — are being created "to help communities embrace racial healing and eliminate conscious and unconscious beliefs in a hierarchy of human value.")

Momentum 2, the next phase of the plan, will carry this work through 2027.

Language matters. Asked if Adelphi was getting pushback on these efforts, Capezza says, "The biggest area of pushback we've seen is when we begin to discuss 'mandated DEI training.'" That, she says, is one reason she prefers the term "education" to the word "training."

"You cannot train someone to be antiracist and inclusive," she says. "Training seems to imply you teach them how to do something, but they don't necessarily internalize the transformation of thought. You must educate to truly help one unlearn and correct for past learned and implicit biases. The shift in language and sharing of goals has helped move our campus past the pushback stage."

Jacqueline Jones LaMon, Adelphi's vice president for diversity, equity, and inclusion, fears that even "education" connotes deficiencies for which employees need to go back to school. She uses the word "engagement."

The emphasis of that engagement, LaMon says, is on the specific applications and implications for a job or situation. What does diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging look like "from the purview of your particular unit? ... Everyone has to own their part in the DEI structure."

SECTION 2



Emphasize Culture, Not Quotas

EVEN IF a college persuades most employees that administrative diversity is a worthy goal, where should the institution start and how should it measure success? Should it strive for some regionally based demographic count, aiming to match this percentage of one group and that percentage of another in various offices?

Probably not, DEI experts say. For starters, a numerical approach can lead to [legal questions and quagmires](#). More practically, for most colleges, numerical targets will be difficult if not impossible to achieve quickly because the institutions are up against not just regional but national competition for talent. That competition won't just come from other colleges — academe, after all, is not the only sector putting a premium on diversity. In areas like finance and data science, for example, candidates from underrepresented groups are particularly scarce and sought after.

That doesn't mean a college should throw up its hands and

TAKEAWAYS

An inclusive and equitable campus culture is necessary to recruit and retain talented, diverse employees.

Equity audits are helpful tools for setting priorities.

Effective anti-bias education needs to be sequential, building upon previous training, and specific to a job.

Anti-bias simulations and study groups can be helpful. Shaming and blaming are not.



Christopher Whitt, vice chancellor for diversity, equity, and inclusion at the U. of Denver, calls the difficult, painstaking work of diversity a gift to the next generation.

blame pipeline issues. It does mean that a college, particularly one that doesn't have the resources to pay top salaries in the “[great resignation](#)” or “[great reshuffling](#)” labor climate, should avoid going after unrealistic, short-term demographic

targets. Doing so is a recipe for failure and disillusionment. In higher education, as in the rest of the economy, the labor market has been [tilting heavily](#) toward the applicant. In March 2022, 4.5 million Americans [quit or changed jobs](#) and employers posted



U. OF DENVER

a record 11.5 million job openings. Colleges are having trouble, for example, hiring and keeping CFOs period, let alone CFOs of color.

In that light, progress becomes even more challenging.

Colleges should take more of a triage approach, experts say, by conducting equity audits and identifying the positions and offices that are most lacking in diversity, then working to improve those cultural-climate issues and hiring practices first. That's not a one-time sequence. Additional equity audits that reveal progress made — or not made — need to be built into the diversity plans of a college or individual unit. As with all strategic plans, it's a cycle that should keep repeating.

Why focus on the cultural climate? Because if your culture does not nurture diversity, recruiting will be harder and retaining harder still. "It's one thing to talk about the compositional diversity, but more

“Do not make someone recruitable. Once they become recruitable, it takes a lot to keep them there.”

important is to create a more-inclusive climate,” says Hironao Okahana, assistant vice president for research for the American Council on Education. “This is definitely a leadership moment.”

Even if you can somehow pull off some remarkable short-term hiring goals, if those hires are uncomfortable with the campus culture, if they feel isolated, disrespected, unappreciated, or tokenized, they'll be poached by other institutions. Colleges can get a reputation for attracting diverse top talent, but they can also get a reputation for losing it.

“Do not make someone recruitable,” warns Paulette Granberry Russell, president of the National Association of Diversity Of-

Get on Board, Boards

TWO YEARS AGO, it would have been hard to find boards of trustees consistently talking about diversity, equity, and inclusion, says Raquel M. Rall, an assistant professor in the Graduate School of Education at the University of California at Riverside.

Since George Floyd's murder and the Black Lives Matter protests, that's shifted. "There has been progress," says Rall, who specializes in higher-education leadership and equity. With colleagues, she has studied hundreds of boards at colleges of all kinds and worked with dozens of boards as a consultant.

"Boards have not figured out how to integrate that sort of lens into all of their work," she says. "It's still very much a side item." That's because, while DEI is a fundamental part of budget, tuition, hiring, mission, and fiduciary duties, trustees, for the most part, haven't been trained to think and work from that viewpoint. "We're asking you to do it in a different way, with a different lens."

Boards are a critical part of the process, says Rall, because they hire the college's president — a decision that sets the institution's tone and agenda — and because they control the purse strings. "They have the power to implement policies," she says, "really embed issues of equity into the very fabric of the institution." If they make diversity issues a specific and broad-reaching part of their fiduciary mission and put money where their mouths are — ample resources for searches, training, equity audits, policy reforms, curriculum reviews, and more — that gives diversity work a surge of energy

and also makes clear that it's a priority for employees at every level.

Yet boards themselves tend to be older, white, and male.

Here are some steps Rall recommends to shift boards' representation, their thinking, and their action:

- Make diversity work a central component of presidential succession plans and hiring.
- In working with executive-search firms, take a hard look at those firms' own diversity and the scope of their networks.
- At public colleges, bring transparency to trustee appointments, and examine candidates' commitment and history regarding diversity matters.
- At private colleges, look beyond the usual sources and networks for good potential trustees who bring diverse experiences and insights. If they are wealthy and give big donations, great, but don't be blinded by that concern. Time, effort, and specialized knowledge are valuable in themselves.
- Be active, not passive, and ask a ton of questions. Trustees are sometimes afraid to come across as "activists," Rall says. But, she says, "to be active is not to be activist." Being engaged, being involved, asking questions — those are the primary tools boards have.
- Examine and consider revamping orientation for new trustees. A handshake and a copy of the "board book" are not enough. Especially if new board members represent a gender, racial, ethnic, or some other category of minority group, make clear to them that they are welcome, that you are eager for their thoughts, and that you look forward to working with them to change your college for the better.
- Institute term limits for trustees — not draconian ones, but short and reasonable enough to ensure a perpetual infusion of new energy and insights.
- Appreciate that boards themselves should be subject to study. In the long run, best practices from those studies will benefit trustees everywhere.
- Build in accountability. Boards and presidents hold their administrators, staff members, faculty members, and students to account, and they should also hold themselves to account, publicly setting clear goals for their institutions and their own actions.



COURTESY OF RAQUEL RALL

Raquel M. Rall, an assistant professor at the U. of California at Riverside, says governing boards have the power to "really embed issues of equity into the very fabric of the institution."

ficers in Higher Education. “Once they become recruitable, it takes a lot to keep them there, and sometimes even money won’t be enough of an incentive for someone to stay.”

“How did we get here?” That’s the question that Christopher Whitt, vice chancellor for diversity, equity, and inclusion at the University of Denver and a board member of the diversity-officers association, says colleges need to ask themselves. “What are the areas in which our systems may have produced less-than-desirable outcomes from a DEI perspective?”

He recommends working from a positive, solution-oriented stance, not a blame-casting, finger-pointing one. “We can have nice people in a flawed system,” he says. View this difficult, painstaking work — improving those systems — as a gift, he says. “This is our moment to send something to the next generation.”

“You have to fix your house first” is how Meacie Fairfax, associate director of strategic research with the education and technology firm EAB, puts it. Many colleges, she says, are making a concerted effort to do just that.

In diversity work, don’t dawdle, but also take the long view, says Fairfax. Educational inequities and biases stemming from centuries of colonialist history aren’t reversed overnight. And since the George Floyd murder and subsequent Black Lives Matter protests, she says, colleges have realized “that this is a perpetual journey.”

To better prepare for that journey, a number of colleges in the two years since Floyd’s death have elevated senior diversity officers from dean level to vice-presidential level and created task forces across campus units. Those task forces are methodically outlining goals and strategies through 2030 and even 2050. The level of detail and transparency with which they are sharing those goals and holding themselves accountable, she says, is “absolutely new.”

Equity audits — collecting data on barriers to participation, access, and opportunity — gained momentum in K-12 but

are increasingly part of the conversation in higher education, too. Although they began mostly in connection with student needs, they are also becoming more linked to faculty, staff, administrative, and leadership needs as colleges come to better appreciate the ties between the student experience and the employee experience.

For example, Portland Community College, in Oregon, as explained in a recent [commentary](#) from the American Association of Community Colleges, is examining leadership training and professional development, as well as employee hiring and human resources alongside student success; planning, policies, and proce-

View this difficult, painstaking work as a gift: “This is our moment to send something to the next generation.”

dures; culturally responsive pedagogy; student-support services; and student retention and enrollment. They are all vertebrae along the same institutional spine, and for the college to function well, they must be aligned and sturdy.

A college must determine not just where it is lacking in diversity but also how to prioritize closing gaps. Fairfax says that EAB recommends what it calls an “institutional strategy index” that entails 33 activities to improve vision and strategy, student experience, faculty and staff experience, and other factors.

Such multipronged efforts sound nice, but what do they actually look like? The Adelphi University case study in Section One (*Page*

20) offers one example, and Wheaton College provides another (Page 30).

EFFECTIVE ANTI-BIAS TRAINING

Anti-bias training sits poorly with some people, who get increasingly bored and resentful each time they are compelled to participate. Because colleges are coming to view diversity efforts as perpetual, employees might be compelled to go through such training quite a few times.

Are the naysayers disgruntled because they're bigots oblivious to their societal privilege? In rare cases, maybe. But it could well be, experts say, that the objectionable instruction just isn't very good.

For Mark Bauerlein, the emeritus Emory University English professor, it's a patronizing, Maoist-tinged assumption of original racist sin that feels outlandish.

"If someone came in and told me to confess my inherent biases, first I want you to confess yours and say what qualifies you to talk to me about mine." He compares the

A college must determine not just where it is lacking in diversity but also how to prioritize closing gaps.

situation to Orwell's antagonist and protagonist in *1984*. "Before I let you probe into my head like O'Brien working on Winston Smith, I think we should put you on the hot seat. Is that a deal?" That kind of training strips away one's dignity, he says, but college employees don't object more strenuously because "people will put up with so much just to get a decent job."

Yet, while diversity advocates might

insist on the importance of anti-bias training, they agree with Bauerlein that if that work feels like a dystopian novel or the Spanish Inquisition, and if multiple trainings are redundant harangues, something is very wrong. If employees' primary takeaways are that all white people are evil and male white people are particularly satanic, you've probably hired the wrong anti-bias consultant.

Adrianna Kezar, director of the Pullias Center for Higher Education at the University of Southern California, says that while the details can become complicated, the underlying goal for anti-bias training is simple: Create a culture in which students, faculty and staff members, and administrators from diverse backgrounds can thrive. The key to good training is to make it specific to a job, build each element on what's gone before, and emphasize knowledge and introspection, not shame and blame.

In practical terms, that means college-wide trainings (or as some would rather call them, education or engagement) probably aren't the way to go, she says, at least not past the most basic level. Instead, tailor the training to the setting — undergraduate liberal arts, medical school, law school, registrar's office, admissions team. Tailor the work further to the trainee's role: professor, department head, coach, food-service officer interacting with outside vendors.

The first level of training for new employees might include some general principles about inherent bias, stereotyping, harassment, and office etiquette. But subsequent levels should get quickly into particulars, like how to determine what credentials are really necessary for a position being filled, how to word job ads, where to place job ads to attract more diverse candidates, and how (and where and when) to conduct interviews.

Subsequent training for managers might include best practices in conducting yearly evaluations, tenure and post-tenure reviews, or how to handle harassment complaints or bias incidents. At top administrative levels, training might entail

labor-market analysis, the legal landscape and risk-management principles, and expert-guest analysis of sociological and political trends that will affect your college several years out.

The best training might not look like training at all, Kezar says, but rather study and peer-support groups within and across institutions, with colleagues or counterparts elsewhere. Critique a book, discuss hiring or promotion dilemmas, scrutinize an awkward situation and how it might have been better handled.

Fairfax, of EAB, advocates increasingly sophisticated software [simulations](#) of hiring, tenure and promotion, and other interviews that administrators can participate in on their own time and in private. The programs point out possibly inappropriate assumptions or potentially offensive wording. Hey, so maybe you mess up — but in private with only a simulated applicant affected — and now you know better for when you're in that delicate hiring situation for real.

Whatever form anti-bias training takes, says Granberry Russell of the diversity-officers' association, one crucial point that anyone involved in hiring should come

“If someone came in and told me to confess my inherent biases, first I want you to confess yours and say what qualifies you to talk to me about mine.”

away with is the need to question “this ambiguous thing called ‘fit.’” If you can't picture the job candidate melding with your department or division, is that good or bad? Maybe there is a homogeneity, a staleness, an insularity, or, yes, even a downright prejudice of whatever kind that needs to be recognized and disrupted, and maybe this candidate is the perfect person to help you and your colleagues begin that process.

Weaving Diversity Throughout the Campus

The Challenge: To weave diversity, equity, inclusion, and a general climate of belonging throughout college programs to boost student recruitment and success

The Strategy: Adopt a strategic plan, create a leadership unit accountable for overseeing its progress, and be transparent in redressing historical biases

The Results: A more diverse leadership and staff, curricular changes, and new resources for underserved students

WHEATON COLLEGE was founded in 1834 as a female seminary to help rectify the exclusion of women from higher education. The Massachusetts liberal-arts college has been coed since 1988.

In 2017, to intensify its social-justice efforts and better serve students, Wheaton adopted a [strategic plan](#) for diversity and inclusion. The main administrative instrument to achieve the plan's goals is called Diversity,

Equity, and Access Leadership, or DEAL, which was created in 2018.

[DEAL](#) weaves diversity-related priorities throughout the college and offers programs to help students, employees, and alumni alike understand the importance of an inclusive mind-set. DEAL is collaborative in itself, with three co-chairs — a staff member, a faculty member, and the associate vice president for institutional equity and belonging. They lead committees focusing on educational programming, community engagement, and assessment, among other topics.

Among Wheaton's DEI achievements since 2016, it has:

- secured a \$1 million grant from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute to support inclusive excellence in STEM education.
- administered a campus-climate survey with subsequent discussion of results.
- surveyed staff compensation to make pay more equitable.
- offered implicit-bias training sessions for faculty search committees.

“People have questions on what it means to do this work well and how to do it while still honoring academic freedom and a plurality of political and personal beliefs.”



Shaya Gregory Poku, associate vice president for institutional equity and belonging at Wheaton College, in Massachusetts, attends a teaching event focused on innovative approaches to inclusive learning.

KEITH NORDSTROM

- updated the college’s bias-incident reporting and response protocols.
- launched the college’s “Compass Curriculum,” which reflects “Wheaton’s core principles of intellectual curiosity, global citizenship, experiential learning, social justice, diversity and inclusion, and collaborative community.”
- formulated — in direct response to the outcry after George Floyd’s murder — “[10 Action Steps Toward Racial Justice](#)” to avoid producing or reproducing systemic inequality and exclusion.
- issued public guidelines to support gender inclusion.

Since 2016, Wheaton has created scholarships focused on first-generation, low-income, and refugee students; a first-generation theme house for junior and senior students; and a task force to improve the campus experience for first-generation and low-income students.

The college provides updates on its progress. For instance, like many institutions, it is examining its history with regard to “any potential complicity with Indigenous land grabbing, slavery, or racism.” One result was a course called “Wrestling with History: Whea-

ton College and Black Lives Matter,” offered in Spring 2021 in partnership with the theater and alumni-relations departments and the archives of Wheaton’s Wallace Library.

One of the 10 Action Steps Toward Racial Justice was establishment of a senior-level position focused on inclusion and equity. Shaya Gregory Poku, associate vice president for institutional equity and belonging, joined a cabinet whose members are now 50 percent female-identifying and 40 percent minority. Since 2017, Wheaton has also hired an LGBTQ-plus engagement coordinator, an interfaith-engagement coordinator, and a director for its Center for Social Justice and Community Impact.

The percentage of Bipoc faculty members — those who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color — increased from 18 percent in 2016 to 21 percent in 2020. The share of minority staff members also increased, from 8.3 percent in 2016 to 10.6 percent in 2020. Poku says there has been no employee pushback of note, although “people have questions on what it means to do this work well and how to do it while still honoring academic freedom and a plurality of political and personal beliefs.”

In a recent interview with Wheaton’s magazine, she says: “This will be a long journey, and I have to help the campus keep that in mind.”

SECTION 3



Attracting and Developing Talent

YOU MAY have the right diversity programs on paper, but if your institution isn't fully committed to them, your colleagues and potential job candidates will know. They'll feel it. And if they can, they'll walk away. That's why diversity experts talk more about culture than about numbers.

Top college administrators and presidents from underrepresented groups wouldn't be where they are if they weren't strong, resilient, often charismatic personalities. They tell stories about higher-ups who saw in them what they did not necessarily, at least at first, see in themselves.

But they're also human. They are — even in this era — pioneers, and sometimes they get tired, discouraged, sad.

Mari Fuentes-Martin, vice president for student success and engagement at Texas A&M University at San Antonio, has spent most of her career as a college administrator at Hispanic-serving institutions, or HSIs. There was one

TAKEAWAYS

Recruiting and promoting diverse leaders is one thing. Supporting them is another.

Offer faculty and staff members chances to learn administrative skills and get a taste of leadership.

One mentor is good. Many mentors are better. They should come from inside and outside a rising leader's institution.

Primarily white colleges can learn from the impressive employee diversity at minority-serving and two-year institutions.

In a challenging labor market, colleges should put more energy into promoting from within their own talented ranks.



TEXAS A&M U. AT SAN ANTONIO

Mari Fuentes-Martin (left), vice president for student success and engagement at Texas A&M U. at San Antonio, says she personally identifies with the mission of a minority-serving institution. Here, she helps out with a food project.

exception: For four-and-a-half years, she worked at a primarily white institution (PWI) in a neighboring state. She would have left there sooner if she could.

Many but not all of the students at that university, Fuentes-Martin says, were steeped in a culture of privilege, social segregation, racist perspectives, and binge-drinking around a cult of big-time football. Those students acted entitled, in contrast to the resilient students she had worked with previously at HSIs and compared with her own family, from the Rio Grande Valley. Fuentes-Martin's parents understood that hard work — in their case, earning master's degrees — was their way out of migrant farming. Ironically, she says,

she and her siblings all earned degrees from primarily white colleges and universities, where they had positive learning and social experiences.

She describes the job she held at the primarily white university as “professionally draining, with great personal sacrifices,” and she says, “Nobody in the administration had my back.” She found refuge among Black colleagues who took her under their wings, she says, but the administration as a whole did not.

“Why did I go to a PWI?” she asked herself. “I thought it was too good to pass up, but I should have known better.”

Now, back in Texas, she works under a Latina president and with a student popu-

lation that includes low-income, first-generation students, 80 percent of whom are Black or Latino/a. “It’s a very different purpose and mission that I identify closely with,” she says. “I’ll never go to a PWI again.”

RECKONING WITH RACISM

Cheryl Moore-Thomas is interim provost and vice president for academic affairs and a professor of counselor education at Loyola University Maryland. She has worked there for 21 years in a variety of roles, including department chair, associate dean, associate vice president, and inaugural DEI officer. She has a glowing CV, has had some wonderful mentors, and cherishes the university’s mission-driven atmosphere.

For all that, she says, being a Black woman at a primarily white university means “there are many days when I have wondered if I was up to the task.”

“Microaggressions,” she says, “are real and they are hurtful and it doesn’t matter whether you’re a provost or an incoming assistant professor.”

Often it’s a matter of inappropriate tone in a request, a question, a conversation.

“Colleagues have attempted to work around me to get a different answer or response,” she says. “Colleagues or direct reports openly questioned a decision that was made with reference to ‘this isn’t how it was done by so-and-so.’ All of those, I believe, are issues where my position, my authority were being questioned, even my right to make the decision in my job description. It wasn’t over-the-top mean. It was a consistent phrasing that I believe was aimed at questioning my ability to be in the job.”

Maybe they were just razzing the up-and-comer? Was it racism and sexism or just cantankerous university politics as usual?

“As a person of color, you know pretty clearly when you hear a racist comment,”

she says. “You know when it’s the kind of comment offered because you’re new in a position or embedded in a belief set that you shouldn’t even be here.”

What carries her through those moments and those days? Her mentors, she says. Those mentors provide frameworks “to help me see whether I’m understanding this for what it is, helping me refocus, examine the situation,” and find an appropriate response.

Presidents are by no means immune to such antagonism. In fact, they consider a certain amount of it inevitable. The time to ask whether they’ll be left to fight those battles alone is *before* they take the job.

When Kirk A. Nooks was approached in 2017 about becoming president of Gordon State College in Georgia, he wanted to know whether the campus community was

“Why did I go to a PWI? I thought it was too good to pass up, but I should have known better.”

really ready to have the first Black president in its history. (The college was founded in 1852.)

“I had to struggle internally and say, ‘Is this institution ready for that? Is the community ready for that?’” Nooks remembers. He decided that they were, in part because they recognized the college’s changing demographics — its minority enrollment had grown, and Black and Hispanic students now make up 40 percent of Gordon State’s student body.

Beyond individual mentorships, Nooks had been readied for the presidential gantlet by his previous leadership of Metropolitan Community College-Longview, in Missouri, and before that, as part of the

“Microaggressions are real and they are hurtful and it doesn’t matter whether you’re a provost or an incoming assistant professor.”

first cohort of the American Council of Education’s Spectrum Executive Leadership program, designed to prepare senior administrators from underrepresented groups to become college presidents. For three years, he also led the Lakin Institute for Mentored Leadership, which trains

Black higher-education leaders for presidencies at community colleges.

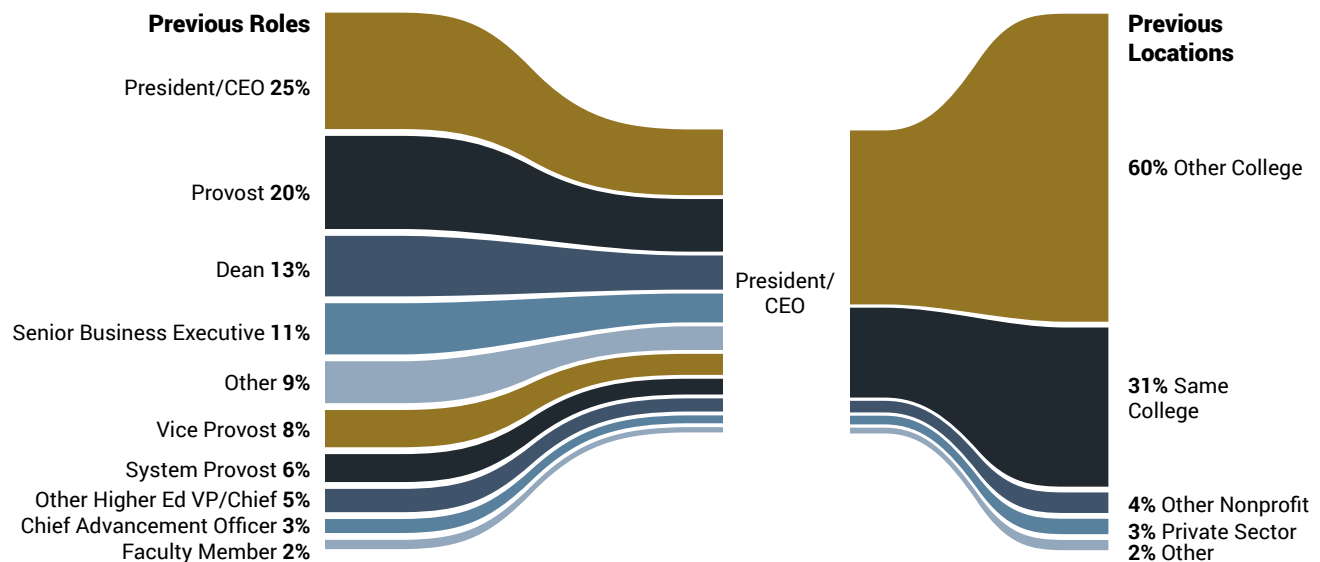
Whatever the preparation, however, it really *is* often lonely at the top, and even lonelier for presidents from underrepresented groups. Sean M. Decatur, president of Kenyon College, in a recent *Chronicle* commentary, describes voice-mail messages his office received during the controversy surrounding an undergraduate worker-unionization effort.

“‘Tell your n***** president to recognize the union, or go back to the plantation where his grandma is from.’ Other messages invoked collard greens and fried chicken (I should put these down and recognize the union). And rap music (once I recognize the union, I can go back to playing it).”

The incident was not atypical, Decatur writes.

“At a meeting of African American college and university presidents last year, someone asked for a show of hands

Paths to the Presidency



Note: Based on 584 responses.

Note: Based on 631 responses.

Source: Pritchard, Adam; Nadel-Hawthorne, Sarah; Schmidt, Anthony; Fuesting, Melissa; and Bichsel, Jacqueline (April 2020). “Administrators in Higher Education Annual Report: Key Findings, Trends, and Comprehensive Tables for the 2019-20 Academic Year” (Research Report). CUPA-HR. Available from <https://www.cupahr.org/surveys/results/>

from those who had received harassing or threatening messages. Nearly every hand went up. In America, being called the N-word at moments of controversy is part of the cost of leading while Black.”

A TASTE OF LEADERSHIP

For some in academe, the opportunity to change students’ lives, reach one’s potential, serve as a role model, and steer an institution in a visionary way makes the administrative route attractive despite the headaches and heartaches. For others, it doesn’t. And it serves neither the employee nor the institution to push someone into a job that person is going to dislike.

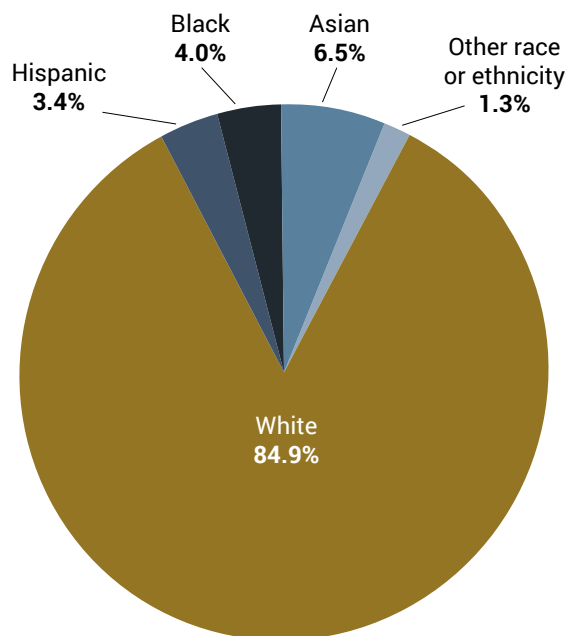
You can’t know until you try, though, so some colleges are offering prospective administrators a chance to dip their toes into the leadership waters. If they like the temperature, they can dive in. If they don’t, they can return to their faculty or staff positions that much wiser about themselves and about parts of the institution they had not known much about.

Clearly, however, the hope in these programs is that colleges can diversify the pipeline of professors and midlevel nonacademic staff members who want to ascend the leadership ladder. An added benefit, especially during a tumultuous job market, is the development of homegrown talent.

For decades, opportunities like the National Science Foundation’s *ADVANCE* program have helped women and academics from underrepresented minority groups climb the ranks in STEM fields. Women in the humanities have had fewer such avenues.

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation is trying to change that with programs like *Breaking the M.O.L.D.* (Mellon/Maryland Opportunities for Leadership Development). With \$3.1 million in Mellon support, each of two cohorts of associate and full professors in the arts and humanities from the University of Maryland-Baltimore County, Morgan State University, and the University of Maryland will engage in a year of leadership skill-building. Women

Academic Department Heads by Race and Ethnicity, 2018-19



Note: Totals may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

Source: Bichsel, Jacqueline; Li, Jingyun; McChesney, Jasper; and Pritchard, Adam (2019, March). “Faculty in Higher Education Annual Report: Key Findings, Trends, and Comprehensive Tables for Tenure-Track, Non-Tenure Teaching, and Non-Tenure Research Faculty; Academic Department Heads; and Adjunct Faculty for the 2018-19 Academic Year” (Research Report). CUPA-HR. Available from <https://www.cupahr.org/surveys/results/>.

and faculty of color often lag at the associate-professor level and are leery about pursuing leadership roles; organizers hope that members of those groups will be strongly represented among the 30 to 40 scholars who pursue the opportunity.

The participants will be guided by six women leaders — five of whom are Black — at the universities and will learn about leadership paths at a primarily white institution (University of Maryland), a historically Black university (Morgan State), and a minority-serving institution (UMBC).

Kimberly R. Moffitt, dean of UMBC’s college of arts, humanities, and social sciences, is one of the program’s creators.

58%

of academic department heads are
male

85%

of academic department heads are
white

Source: "Faculty in Higher Education Annual Report," 2018-19, CUPA-HR

She says it's important to bring underrepresented voices into leadership, especially voices from the humanities. Academe has had a bias toward leaders coming up through the ranks of STEM fields, she says, but the humanities offer insights into what history says about the complicated present moment, as well as the importance of empathy and imagination in solving societal problems. The more teaching-centered focus of the humanities is also crucial in guiding students who became disengaged and isolated during pandemic remote

"I consider all leadership to be the ultimate service."

learning. Those students crave and need the human in the humanities.

Faculty members of color, Moffitt says, particularly women, tend to get stuck at the associate-professor level because they get mired in service responsibilities and the oft-cited "invisible labor" of guiding students from underrepresented minority groups.

"I am speaking from personal experience," Moffitt says.

She wants to help elevate participants in the program the way a department chair helped inspire her to pursue full professorship. "If we can get them across the line," Moffitt says, "we can show them just how many opportunities lie on the other side."

Wheaton College in Massachusetts has two associate-provost positions in which administrators from the faculty ranks can experience several years of leadership, then pursue it further or return to their faculty work.

The University of California at Irvine offers a [Provost's Leadership Academy](#) to help a cohort of a couple dozen faculty members learn about and possibly pursue the positions of department chair, research-center director, associate dean, dean, and vice provost. In a one-day workshop followed by six two-hour sessions, participants examine matters such as the trade-offs in moving from faculty to leadership positions; contrasting leadership styles; skills in finance, conflict management, fund raising and other areas; and strategies for identifying professional networks and potential mentors. A substantial number of participants, including women and members of minority groups, have gone on to leadership positions at Irvine,

such as dean of the School of Physical Sciences and executive director of the Susan Samueli Integrative Health Institute.

The University of California system as a whole has a broader executive-training program called the [UC-Coro Systemwide Leadership Collaborative](#), which also emphasizes diversity in its cohorts. Its participants come from both academic and nonacademic units. Deep dives into training and group projects require a commitment of more than 120 hours, and [participants](#) go on to leadership roles in academic departments as well as in finance, human resources, procurement, medical-center management, financial aid, and many other parts of the system.

LESSONS FROM MINORITY-SERVING INSTITUTIONS

More than 700 minority-serving institutions enroll almost 30 percent of America's undergraduates. Other colleges might learn from their track record in hiring administrators from diverse backgrounds.

CUPA-HR [statistics](#) from 2020 show greater representation of racial and ethnic

minorities than do non-MSIs across six administrative areas, with historically Black colleges performing the best. At HBCUs, for instance, 32 percent of top executive officers are women of color, compared with 5.4 percent at non-MSIs. And at HBCUs, 36 percent of administrators overall are women of color.

Why is that? After all, MSIs don't generally have oversized endowments and compensation packages. Yet these institutions are obviously doing a lot of things right.

Fuentes-Martin says MSIs attract talented personnel because of "this need to lift other people like themselves in their aspirations."

President Nooks of Gordon State says MSIs and community colleges excel in attracting diverse talent because of what he calls the four I's:

They are more intentional in spreading the word through publications and networks that serve diverse educators.

They are more inclusive. "There is something about feeling like you belong," says Nooks. That's partly because of mission, and at community colleges and MSIs, that mission — a focus on changing students' lives — is "baked in," he says. It feels good to work at a place that conceives of it-

0.5%

The share of Native administrators at
**non-minority-serving
institutions**

22.7%

The share of Native administrators at
**Native-serving
institutions**

Note: Data are from CUPA-HR 2020 faculty survey. Native-serving institutions include tribal colleges, those that enroll at least 20% Alaska Native or 10% Native Hawaiian students, and other institutions that enroll at least 10% Native American students.

Source: Schmidt, Anthony (2022, February). "The Representation of Women and Racial/Ethnic Minorities in the Workforce of Minority-Serving Higher Education Institutions" (Research Report). CUPA-HR.

self as transformational, where “not just mind, but mind, body, soul, everything is wrapped up into one. It’s the notion of the whole student.”

They commit to investment. The institution will invest in professional development and mentoring — for everyone. At a primarily white institution, Nooks says, “you always feel like you are one step behind and there are not enough resources to get you to the next level. But at a community college or HBCU, employees don’t have to worry about being ‘enough,’” says Nooks. “You are enough, so now let’s get you to the next level.”

They offer inspiration. At an HBCU, a same-gender institution, or a community

At a community college or HBCU, employees don’t have to worry about being “enough,” says one president. “You are enough, so now let’s get you to the next level.”

college, Nooks says, “there is this notion of when I see you, I see myself. You could be my daughter, aunt, father. I am so proud of you and your accomplishments.” At a primarily white institution, that’s not necessarily always the case.

Yves Salomon-Fernández is senior vice president for operations planning at Southern New Hampshire University and former president of Greenfield Community College in Massachusetts. Community colleges, she says, attract employees who believe in the mission and want to make a difference “not just for students who live charmed lives but

for students who look like them” and are seeking a pathway to the American dream.

To help diversify their faculties and administrations, she says, colleges over all can learn from community colleges to question credentialism: Does this position really require a candidate with a doctorate? Just as colleges during the pandemic came to more widely question the need for applicants to take standardized tests, she says, they should question the credential hoops they’re asking applicants to jump through.

Like community colleges, Salomon-Fernández says, colleges over all should also promote more from within. In higher education, she says, “we are enamored of shiny things from the outside” and too often miss the glow emanating from the person standing right next to us.

PROMOTING FROM WITHIN

At Widener University, in Chester, Pa., President Julie E. Wollman perceived that kind of glow emanating from a desk in the accounts-payable office. In seeking a fiscal-operations manager, she needed to look no further than Audrey Strickland, who had been director of accounts payable for a decade and a half.

Strickland had previously had jobs at Dun and Bradstreet and Mercer HR Consulting, but she wanted to work for a university because “I want to give back what was given to me,” she says. Her parents, who had four other children, couldn’t afford to send her to college, then she married and had children when she was young. Later, when she was in her 30s and her husband could look after the kids, Strickland went back to school and earned her bachelor’s and an M.B.A., with a concentration in management. It was difficult and it was slow. She was well into her 40s by the time she finished.

Fast forward to 2017, when Strickland was on Widener’s staff council and President Wollman asked her if she’d be interested in receiving executive coaching. “In some ways,” Strickland says, “maybe she could see I was being overlooked a little bit.”



WIDENER U.

Audrey Strickland, who had been director of accounts payable at Widener U., was promoted to the job of fiscal-operations manager after she received executive coaching.

The executive coaching included surveys of Strickland's colleagues and interviews with the CIO, CDO, CFO, provost, and a dean. She started to learn how to get a better feel for a room, and venturing in and out of all those C-suites, she and her coach focused on another C — confidence. She discovered that colleagues thought the world of her, found her supercompetent but “not wanting to come across as too boisterous or aggressive ... kind of burying myself.”

Strickland became fiscal-operations manager in December 2021. She says that it is important to be “intentional about advocating for people of color.”

“Inclusion and equity are important in the workplace as we have so far to go in that area,” she says. “I look forward to the

day that I can be there for a Bipoc individual like President Wollman and others have been there for me.”

WHAT DEI MISSES

Also on the Widener campus these days is a visiting American Council on Education fellow named Caroline Kobek Pezzarossi. DEI leaders concede that the holy trinity of diversity discussions — race, class, gender — too often leaves out talents like Pezzarossi, who represents another facet of diversity: physical differences. She is Deaf.

“The pursuit of education, especially higher education, was instilled in me from a very young age,” she says. “My father

bleeds blue and gold as he is from South Bend, Ind., and members of my family have advanced degrees.” School, she says, “has always been a source of confidence and comfort for me.” (Pezzarossi answered a reporter’s questions by email and also in a Zoom interview with a sign-language interpreter.)

A professor of psychology at Gallaudet University who became its director of institutional effectiveness and certification in 2021, Pezzarossi chose Widener for her

Faculty of color, one dean says, particularly women, tend to get stuck at the associate-professor level because they get mired in service responsibilities.

fellowship because she liked its commitment to social justice, citizenship, diversity, and the local community. She has focused on issues of shared governance; assessing crises in higher education; supporting work in antiracism and diversity, equity, and inclusion within the institution; expanding online and remote-learning programs; and marketing strategies.

She had been vice chair of the faculty at Gallaudet and on the faculty there for 11-and-a-half years when she moved into her current administrative job.

“Diversity in bodies does not have a prominent-enough role in conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion,” Pezzarossi says. It’s not in competition with other kinds of DEI efforts, she says.

Rather, it is inspired by that work. It is because of people of color and their fight for civil rights “that the disability-rights movement gained traction,” she says.

Pezzarossi says Widener’s President Wollman “truly is a model of what it means to be inclusive.” In meetings, Wollman will acknowledge Pezzarossi’s presence, quickly note the attendance and name of the interpreter, “then move on instead of drawing all kinds of attention.” Board meetings are “flipped,” with video presentations available ahead of time and meetings spent in discussion of points raised. “Without having to ask and to explain the importance of captions, they were available for me to review,” says Pezzarossi.

Pezzarossi likes the candor and transparency of Wollman’s leadership — the way Wollman explains, This is how I’m leaning on this issue, now let me get your take on it. That style, says Pezzarossi, “is something that I want to emulate — have, in fact, been emulating.”

Asked if she might one day want to be a college president, Pezzarossi answers that President Wollman “has been very clear that I could work upward.”

“That’s why I took this ACE fellowship. I would like to expand my journey.”

EFFECTIVE MENTORSHIP

Getting a taste of administration is important, says Valerie Sheares Ashby, dean of the college of arts and sciences at Duke University, because leadership positions entail leaving one’s comfort zone, then imagining and creating a new professional self.

“I loved that career,” she said of her teaching, research, and service while a professor of chemistry at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. “I’m a teacher at heart, and research is just the exchange of ideas and teaching in a very different way. ... I had found my favorite job, and my goal was to keep it.”

But eventually she felt compelled to

leave that comfort zone and venture into leadership roles, among them director of undergraduate studies in chemistry, chair of a faculty-diversity task force, and director of an NSF program in support of graduate students. Under her leadership, doctoral-completion rates of STEM graduate students from underrepresented minority groups rose from roughly 60 to 85 percent.

What drew her away from the comfort of her faculty position? The ability to positively affect the lives of a lot more students, she says. “I consider all leadership to be the ultimate service.”

But there was more to it than that. Academics tend to want to satisfy their voracious curiosity, and leadership positions are a great vantage point from which to learn. In a faculty-diversity initiative, Ashby the chemist came to understand better the worlds of the humanities and social sciences. As a conflict-of-interest officer, she came to know the workings of the medical center. “You learn some parts of the university that are invisible to you as a faculty member,” she says.

She learned, too, perhaps the hardest lesson of all for rising faculty members, especially ones from minority groups who shoulder extra expectations — including expectations of themselves. That lesson is when to say no.

Helping her to understand that was a team of mentors. A mentor is good, she explains, but a team of mentors is better, and she started assembling hers when she was 17, during a summer research program at UNC. That first mentor was running a program (one Ashby herself would later run) to increase the number of underrepresented minorities in doctoral programs, especially in the social and natural sciences. That was when Ashby, who is Black, first seriously envisioned a doctorate and a life in academe and research.

Other mentors have included Freeman A. Hrabowski III, president of UMBC. They met almost a decade ago, when she was modeling a UNC program after the UMBC



WIDENER U.

Caroline Kobek Pezzarossi, a visiting American Council on Education fellow at Widener U. and director of institutional effectiveness and certification at Gallaudet U., is exploring further leadership options for the future. She represents another facet of diversity: She is Deaf.

Meyerhoff Scholars program for minority STEM students. Holden Thorp, a chemist like Ashby who served as chancellor of UNC-Chapel Hill and is now editor in chief at *Science*, also became a mentor. She also has a leadership coach.

“I can do that,” used to be Ashby’s reflexive response to an ask — this committee, that task force. Then colleagues looking out for her made her realize that that was the wrong answer to the wrong question, especially until she became a full professor. The right question, Ashby found, was, “Is this a great thing for me now?”

She parses every element of that short question. Is *this* something to pursue? Will it be not just *great* but great for *me* in pursuing the most important things I can in my career to have the most impact? And is *now* the time to do it? Is it too early? Too late?

Cristina Alcalde, vice president for Insti-

**As an administrator,
“you learn some parts
of the university that
are invisible to you as
a faculty member.”**

tutional Diversity and Inclusion and professor of global and intercultural studies at Miami University, notes that people of color are often the first from their demographic group to fill some high-ranking positions. Colleges often think about pipeline issues but not peer-support issues, so those administrators may need to look for it not only within their colleges but also in counterparts at other colleges. Bearing in mind the potential isolation of those administrators’ situations, their colleges might want to make a concerted effort to help connect

them with mentors and networks beyond the campus gates.

Christopher M. Whitt, vice chancellor for diversity, equity, and inclusion at the University of Denver, says affinity-focused academic organizations can also be great sources of support for administrators who might feel isolated on their way to, and later in, administrative jobs.

“My years of positive experiences as a longstanding member of the National Conference of Black Political Scientists played a major role in my rising through senior administrative ranks in higher education,” Whitt says. “The networks, support, and lessons learned were invaluable.” The number of colleagues he knows from that conference “who are now senior diversity officers, deans, provosts, and in other senior leadership roles is impressive. I would assume the same might be said for similar groups in other areas of scholarship.”

Higher-education leaders find some mentors of the same racial, ethnic, or gender identities as theirs, but also outside those categories.

Fuentes-Martin, the vice president at Texas A&M at San Antonio, estimates that more than half of her mentors have been Hispanic, but they have also included a Black man. He was executive assistant to a university president. He changed Fuentes-Martin’s life, telling her, when she was an undergraduate, that “higher education needs you, but you need a master’s and a doctorate.”

A white female provost at another job aided Fuentes-Martin in a much different way — with the hard truth that the administrative “forces are not in your favor” because Fuentes-Martin had objected on principle to some privatization plans she thought would serve students poorly. The warning was timely, and Fuentes-Martin started eyeing jobs elsewhere.

The Latina president at her current institution is giving her administrative responsibilities to help prepare Fuentes-Martin for a presidency, if that’s the route she chooses.

Mentoring can’t just be casually looking

out for a talented young colleague, says Wollman, president of Widener University. “It requires real commitment from the mentor,” she says, “and it needs to be long term, not meeting a couple times over a couple months.” The mentee needs regular access to that mentor, and conversations need to be focused on outlined goals.

Highly structured leadership programs like the ACE fellowships and the Lakin Institute that Nooks, the Gordon State leader, describes are also invaluable, college leaders say.

Fuentes-Martin remembers a 2005 fellowship organized by the Kellogg Foundation and the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities that brought 10 Black, 10 Latino, and 10 Native American participants to Washington to learn the capital’s alphabet soup of higher-ed agencies and nonprofits. That helped her in practical ways, but she also learned larger lessons from the experience about higher education’s niches and hierarchies. It was a big step in her gradual understanding that while the limelight often goes to wealthy, elite colleges, “every institution has a purpose and a need for whom we train, whom we educate, whom we graduate, and how we transform their lives.”

Rising college leaders might be lucky

enough to have potential mentors approach them, but you can’t count on that. Those with experience suggest seeking out mentors — better yet, teams of mentors, like

Mentoring “requires real commitment from the mentor, and it needs to be long term, not meeting a couple times over a couple months.”

Ashby’s, who can advise on different facets of your work and your choices.

Beyond mentors, says UMBC’s President Hrabowski, there are champions.

“A champion will knock down doors for you,” he says. “When people tell you no, the champion will say, ‘We don’t accept no.’ When you want to quit, it takes a champion to say, ‘No, you won’t.’”

What Black Women Need to Succeed at the Top

It's time to create a culture that values leaders of color.

BY NARKETTA M. SPARKMAN-KEY



AS A NEW administrator in higher education, I was welcomed with multiple responsibilities and limited support. After my institution named me director of faculty diversity and retention, a senior leader sent me a three-page email on how I should communicate (via email) in the future. His email, riddled with microaggressions, reinforced the lack of power and support I had.

I took that leadership role believing I could make a real impact and create a more inclusive environment for individuals like myself. But my journey in administration was not different from what the literature describes. Researchers have documented the challenges Black women face, among them the compounding effects of [ageism](#), [racism](#), and [sexism](#); stereotypes; limited role models; concrete ceilings; tokenism; [racial microaggressions](#); and undervalued work, leading to personal trauma.

I, too, endured constant instances of racism and sexism. I operated in the spaces between being overworked, overwhelmed, and isolated, and I struggled with extremely high expectations from my leadership as well as the academic community.

Black women often assume leadership roles that have been newly created or that require so much work that no one else wants them. In my case, everyone had defined my role for me while ignoring the job description and the fact that I had no support. I call these types of positions “title-only roles.” They come with a title and responsibility but no real power to change the culture or institution, as well as with limited support and minimal pay.

Black women leaders — who are at the forefront of change, often advocating on social-justice issues — need and deserve more. So do other leaders of color. Colleges must do a better job cultivating and nurturing them once they take the position.

SO WHAT CAN COLLEGES DO?

They must adopt a comprehensive strategy underpinned by a series of action-driven practices to diminish the challenges faced by leaders of color, and they must commit to curating a culture of inclusivity, success, and value. Colleges should also concentrate on such problems as inadequate pay; too little focus on human growth, learning, and equity; and the complexities of evaluations. While Black women in academe face extraordinary challenges, the following tactics could be helpful in supporting administrators from other minority and underserved groups. Here are 12 steps colleges can take:

1. Demonstrate commitment. Institutions must commit to hiring Black women and people of color for administrative roles and creating a pipeline to promote them into leadership.

2. Acknowledge that there must be mutual benefits. Often Black women enter roles that provide no upward mobility and limited professional-development opportunities. These positions should be structured to provide benefits to the women as well as to the institution.

3. Offer equitable pay. Institutions must

do the research and pay the industry standard.

4. Provide stronger support networks.

Black women are too often placed in administrative roles where they are required to be “Superwomen.” They need to operate with adequate support and resources and reasonable expectations. Colleges must combat the feeling of isolation by supporting safe spaces for Black women administrators. Those spaces can be cultivated within insti-

I operated in the spaces between being overworked, overwhelmed, and isolated, and I struggled with extremely high expectations from my leadership as well as the academic community.

tutions as well as through organizations like the Faculty Women of Color in the Academy conference, [HERS](#) leadership events, and ACE Women’s Network.

5. Emphasize value and respect. Create a culture that values leaders of color. This includes advocating for them, addressing microaggressive behaviors, and modeling and prioritizing respect for them.

6. Embrace a broad agenda of well-being. Institutionalizing [workplace well-being](#) to support leaders of color can help them strike a healthy work-life balance and improve chances of success. This should include as-

sistance in setting boundaries and providing a space for their concerns to be heard.

7. Pay special attention to onboarding and transitions. Moving into a new role can be daunting. Colleges should create leadership-support teams to foster a culture of inclusion and help the administrator navigate the new role and environment.

8. Help secure professional mentors and coaches. This will promote success and help leaders of color thrive.

9. Respond to microaggressions quickly and forcefully. Train campus leaders to recognize and respond to them and to identify and document the actors behind them.

10. Make evaluation criteria fairer and more transparent. Black women administrators must be evaluated on all of their contributions to the institution, including diversity and social-justice work and mentoring efforts. Many Black women are overburdened with service demands and high expectations.

11. Make promotion a priority. Colleges need to create an environment where leaders can grow into new roles. They should

consider the full careers of Black women and other leaders of color by documenting all their contributions to their institutions and reward those efforts during promotion and annual review periods.

12. Challenge stereotypes. Educate leaders to work more effectively with administrators of color and to combat common stereotypes.

Black women and other leaders of color need support. I was often left to advocate for myself. I remember forwarding to a senior administrator the three-page email on how to write an email, just to prove that the incident happened. The response? I was told I should be used to those types of experiences. I had hoped the senior administrator to whom I reached out would act as an advocate and reinforce my value and place within the institution. Instead, I only felt more disrespected and oppressed.

To truly support leaders of color, colleges must ensure that everyone in a position of power is on board to help them succeed. If they don't, the academy will continue to fail to take full advantage of the innovation, leadership, and growth potential that these leaders bring.

*Narketta M. Sparkman-Key is director of faculty diversity and retention and associate professor of counseling and human services at Old Dominion University. She was named associate provost for diversity, equity, and inclusion at James Madison University, and a professor there, effective July 2022. [Her essay](#) about taking ownership of her career, "How to 'Boss Up' as a Black Woman in Academe," was published in *The Chronicle* in 2021.*

A FINAL WORD

WHEN Valerie Sheares Ashby met Freeman A. Hrabowski III years ago, he told her the same thing his presidential predecessor had told him. “The first time I met him,” Ashby says, “he said, ‘You’re going to be a president.’” She called that “foolish talk ... dreaming.”

Each one of her mentors had a key message that stood out. When Ashby was an assistant professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Henry Frierson, who was then a professor there, told her, “You do not have a job.”

Huh? she thought. What do you mean? I’m an assistant professor of chemistry. Frierson, now dean emeritus of the graduate school and a professor of research and evaluation methods in the College of Education at the University of Florida, meant that until you have tenure, until you have a full professorship, you don’t have a job, not the kind of job you want — the kind with stability, influence, impact.

Her former UNC chancellor Holden Thorp’s key message, Ashby says, was that every job is about “values, principles, character.” If a job doesn’t carry all of those, steer clear.

And from Hrabowski? “The sky is the limit. That’s what I learned from Freeman,” she says. An opportunity would come up, and she’d say, “I can’t even do that.” He’d wave that off as obviously silly. Of course she could. “That’s not even the question,” he’d say. “The question is what do you *want* to do?”

“Am I pushing too hard?” she’d wonder out loud to him about a program or a principle. He offered her “the courage to do the right thing no matter what.”

Courage alone doesn’t cut it. But courage

atop mentorship, good career advice, principles, boldness — that’s courage that carries a punch. If colleges are serious about administrative diversity, they need to be intentional about offering the kind of support that builds both morale and leadership skills.

When Hrabowski announced that he planned to retire, “my first response,” says Ashby, “was, ‘Who follows Freeman Hrabowski?’”

Her Duke years fresh in mind, Ashby said the question was akin to who would succeed the basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski after his legendary 42 years on the job.

“Then,” Ashby says, “I checked in with myself” — *and* with her mentors. As she mulled over the idea, the former conflict-of-interest officer suspended all communications with Hrabowski. By the time the executive-search firm Isaacson, Miller approached her about UMBC’s top job, the chemist who had grown up the daughter of schoolteachers in rural North Carolina had asked herself that key question, the one that has guided her for so long:

Is this a great thing for me now?

On August 1, 2022, Ashby will become UMBC’s sixth president.



SHAUN KING

Valerie Sheares Ashby

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