

Higher Education Plays Critical Role in Society: More Women Leaders Can Make a Difference

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Abstract

In the 21st century, institutions of higher education hold one of the most important roles in shaping the future of our society. Research indicates that a strong system of higher education is a significant contributor to the country's ability to compete in the global marketplace and is critical to our economic strength, social well-being, and position as a world leader. Colleges and universities are complex organizations facing difficult and multifaceted challenges. One of those challenges is who will serve as the next generation of leaders. With the significant turn-over in leadership at colleges and universities expected in the coming years, attention must be paid to identifying and developing well-qualified and prepared leaders. Although study after study show the strength of women as innovative, productive, and successful leaders, barriers still exist to their advancement. As a result, the number of women in leadership positions lags greatly behind. The overall percentage of women leading colleges and universities remains disproportionately low at 26% despite the fact that 59% of students served by those colleges and universities are women. This article calls for current senior leadership to be intentional in working to increase the diversity in leadership by establishing inclusive cultures on campus and implementing accountability for its achievement.

Where would the United States be without the work of higher education institutions? While most understand the role of higher education institutions as places where students are educated and prepared for their future vocations, some also understand that universities are base camps for researchers exploring new knowledge that will improve and advance societies. Today, fewer appreciate the role colleges and universities play in educating citizens who will be more engaged in their communities through civic activities and public discourse and in developing leaders who will contribute to the advancement of business, organizations and society. In light of recent times of domestic, economic, and financial crisis, and amid concerns about the waning, global position of the United States, the work of colleges and universities has never been so critically important to the future of the American way of life.

According to Thelin 2013, the challenges faced by modern-day higher education institutions may not be greater than in the past, once put into the appropriate historical, social, political, and economic context. Still, the challenges faced by today's higher education leaders unquestionably are multifaceted and complex. Some argue that the fundamental role of higher education in our society has forever changed in response to the corporatization of higher education (Glenn 2010, Rosow and Kriger, 2010) and the influence of neoliberalism (Saunders, Levi (2011). Unquestionably, as the number of students served by institutions of higher education grows and diversifies, a larger array of services, programming, and extra-curricular experiences are necessary to attract and retain students. Yet, the resources available to many of these institutions have decreased. Increase in costs accompanied by state and national government budget reductions and fewer contributions by donors during difficult economic times results in less money available for the education of our citizens, especially those from less-advantaged backgrounds.

In response to the growing financial pressures, leaders of modern-day institutions are called upon to be the principal fundraiser for their college or university. Today's president must also understand the operational impact of governmental regulations; research and development grant criteria; new technologies; and globalization. The influences of intercollegiate athletics and commercialization of programs cannot be underestimated. Additionally, institutional leaders must be ever mindful of the public's appetite for instant news coverage of all things – large and small – and the media's readiness to pounce and point fingers. With the precarious circumstances facing higher education within this high stakes economic environment, the

Forum on Public Policy

leadership of these institutions is critically important. Identifying future leaders and then adequately preparing them for the multitude of issues related to operating the uniquely complex organizations of higher education is essential to the future of higher education and, consequently, the nation.

Imagine that a senior leader is charged with solving significant issues for the entity but is only allowed to use half his team to do so. Imagine that a leadership team of an unprofitable company within a struggling, but critically important, industry is charged with finding solutions to save the company, and perhaps even the industry, yet the team does not include representation from sixty percent of the consumers and talent within the industry. Numerous studies from the corporate world tout the benefits of diversity for business. (Abreau, 2014, Catalyst 2013, Deloitte 2011). Corporations around the world are learning that the creation of an environment that welcomes and supports a diverse workforce, is more likely to increase an organizations' profitability, productivity, innovation, employee satisfaction, and social responsibility. Those types of benefits are vitally important to higher education.

Leaders with a diverse set of experiences, viewpoints, and backgrounds are crucial to encouraging different perspectives, broadening an institution's world views, and fostering innovation particularly important at colleges and universities responsible for educating and training future leaders, workers, and citizens. Studies show that gender diversity in organizations' top offices and in the boardroom is not just a matter of social justice and advancement but a smart business move as well (Ernst & Young 2009). Yet the percentage of women in senior-level administrators in executive leadership positions has remained low in this country. On average, less than 20% of top executives across 14 sectors of business and industry studies in 2013 were women (Colorado Women's College, 2013).

While the percentage of female presidents in institutions of higher education is greater than other sectors, higher education institutions should do more. With a student population more diverse than ever, the diversity of the leadership lags behind. In 2014, 59% of graduates were women, 51% of doctoral and first professional degrees students were women, but only 26% of higher education presidents were women (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). In the next decade, higher education can expect a turnover in the presidencies of more than 60% (Cook & Young 2012). Institutions of higher education should take the lead and model diversity of thought and experience in its leadership of the next generation. In today's competitive environment in which higher education is accused of being too complacent and too expensive, colleges and universities cannot afford to ignore the benefits that come with creating environments that are more conducive to gender and racial diversity (Supiano, 2014, Laursen, 2014).

This article begins with a discussion of the role of higher education in securing the United States position as a world leader and the challenging issues facing high education leaders. Next, the benefits of diversity in leadership positions are described through numerous recent studies. The next section discusses the reality that still exists for women despite public perception that parity has been accomplished. Finally, recommendations to institutions of higher education are offered to create an environment that welcomes and supports a diverse workforce and leadership. While this article focuses primarily on women, the underrepresentation of people of color within leadership circles is recognized as well. The challenges encountered by women of color are even greater.

A Strong System of Higher Education is Essential to the United States' Role as a World Power

In the 21st century, institutions of higher education hold one of the most important roles in shaping the future of our society. As higher education continues to establish its value beyond the private benefits that inure to individual citizens, research indicates that a strong system of higher education is a significant contributor to the country's ability to compete in the global marketplace and is critical to our economic strength, social well-being, and position as a world leader.

Forum on Public Policy

College graduates enjoy higher standard of living

To individual students, post-secondary education creates a path to financial security, economic mobility, personal growth, professional development, leadership opportunities, and the promise of a brighter tomorrow. As Alexis de Tocqueville pointed out in the 19th century, a benefit of living in a democracy is the advantage that higher education offers its citizens. Students are not restricted by class or guilds. In the United States, higher education is readily available regardless of the family to which one is born. New research shows that college students who have come from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with marginal abilities, benefit the most from their education. Hout (2012).

Opportunities for improving one's position in society are assisted, and sometimes greatly assisted, by a person's degree and alma mater. "College graduates find better jobs, earn more money, and suffer less unemployment than high school graduates do." (Hout, 2012, pg 380) "People with more education also had more desirable jobs." (Hout, 2012, pg 381). "They also live more stable family lives, enjoy better health, and live longer." (Hout, 2012, pg 380) According to Hout (2012), "college graduates are significantly more likely than high school graduates to say they are 'very happy.'"

For those who seek the benefits of a college degree, the investment is proven to be a wise one. "Evidence confirms that earning a college degree will pay back the cost of obtaining it several times over." (Hout 2012, pg 387) Over a work life of 40 years, a college degree can mean as much as an additional \$1.1 million in earnings over a high school graduate. That difference applies only to white men. The difference is slightly less for Hispanic, Asian and Black men. Women earn substantially less than men at each level of education. The lifetime earning difference for female college graduates is only \$636,000 more than high school graduates. The studies found that nontraditional students had a higher return on their college experience. (Houte 2012 pg 384–385).

Communities benefit from more informed and engage citizens

Higher education not only benefits the individual student, but also their communities. "Billions of dollars in public money are invested in institutions and individuals on the theory that society benefits from having an educated populace. A higher level of education within a community is less of a strain on the resources of a community. This basic relationship has been replicated hundreds of times by researchers (Mirowski & Ross 2003)."

Moretti (2004a, 2012) found that "high school graduates' wages increased where the proportion of college graduates in the labor market increased and that high school dropouts' wages increased even more in those places. One percentage point increase in the number of college graduates in a community raised high school dropouts' wages by 1.9%, high school graduates' wages by 1.6%, and college graduates' wages by 0.4%. Everyone gained from the educated workforce but the least educated gained the most (Moretti 2004).

More college graduates earning more money in their community means its citizens are living more stable family lives and enjoying better health (Houte 2012). College graduates commit fewer crimes (Houte 2012). "College graduates participate more fully in civic activities and politics (Verbs at al. 1995, Nie at al. 1996, Putnam 2000). "Education has consistently been found to increase political participation, electoral turnout, civic engagement, political knowledge, and democratic attitudes and opinions." (Hillygus 2005). In fact, the estimated social returns to education exceed private returns (Lange & Topel 2006). To that economic evidence, political sociologists add the observation that education also reduces prejudice and intolerance while increasing support for civil liberties. This subject of social return is also valuable, although no dollar sign is attached" (Hout 2012).

Forum on Public Policy

Higher education critical to United States' position as world power

Research indicates a direct relationship between a country's world standing and its education system. A strong system of higher education is critical to its economic strength, social well-being, and position as a world leader. A nation's educational attainment – most importantly, the proportion of the workforce with secondary credentials – is a significant contributor to the country's ability to compete in the global marketplace" (Skaggs 2014).

The ability of the United States to protect itself and its interest around the world – our national security, broadly defined – is effected by our economic strength. Through economic sanctions and aid, and a well-funded military power, we influence world behavior and deter undesirable actions. Many observers agree that American high culture also produces significant “soft power” for the United States. For example, Secretary of State Colin Powell said: "I can think of no more valuable asset to our country than the friendship of future world leaders who have been educated here." International students usually return home with a greater appreciation of American values and institutions. As expressed in a report by an international education group, "the millions of people who have studied in the United States over the years constitute a remarkable reserve of goodwill for our country."

Significant Challenges in Higher Education Call for Prepared Leaders

The challenges faced by today's higher education leaders unquestionably are numerous and difficult. As the number of students served by institutions of higher education grows and diversifies, a larger array of services, programming, and extra-curricular experiences must be provided. Modern-day institutions are subject to more regulation and scrutiny which also increase the cost of operation. The resources available to many of these institutions are never enough. With the precarious circumstances facing higher education within this high stakes economic environment, the leadership of these institutions is critically important as institutions must cope with a multitude of complex issues.

Number of students increase as governmental support decreases

IBIS Capital, a London-based investment bank, estimated the global market for education was \$4.4 trillion in 2013 and is poised to grow at a rate of about 7.5% per year. Post-secondary education accounts for 34% of the global education market (Ibis Capital 2013). In 2011 the number of students enrolled in institutions of higher education in the United States was 20.99 million, up from 14.8 million in 2000 and almost double since 1980 when 11.57 million students were enrolled (National Center, 2012, Table 301.20). The number of institutions of higher education grew from 3,152 in 1980 to 4,706 in 2012. Between 1999 and 2011, the number of faculty and staff grew from 2.88 million to 3.72 million (National Center, 2011, Table 256).

Although the number of students served by institutions of higher education grows, the resources available to many of these institutions in recent years has not increased and in most states is less than state support received prior to the recent recession. Support received from state and federal governments is responsible for a substantial part of funding for higher education but it is administered in different forms. Two percent (\$3.5 trillion) of the United States federal budget is spent on higher education, mainly for financial assistance (such as Pell Grants) to individual students and specific research projects. Higher education is the third largest category in state budgets, primarily funding general operations of public institutions. (PEW 2015). Overall appropriations for higher education are still less than they were before the recession, and well below in many states (Kelderman 2014). In 2014 only Alaska and North Dakota were spending more on higher education (after adjustment for inflation) than before the recession (Johnson 2014). Even as states have started to restore some funding for public colleges and universities as the economy recovers, after adjustment for inflation, “state spending on higher education nationwide is down \$2,026 per student, or 23 percent” (Mitchell, M., Palacios, V. & Leachman, M. 2014). Since state funding to public colleges and

Forum on Public Policy

universities amounts to 53% of their revenue, reduced state support generally forces schools to raise tuition, cut services to students, or both. (Johnson 2014).

Reduced resources cause tuition increases and cuts to programs and services

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (Mitchell, M., Palacios, V. & Leachman, M. 2014) reported that tuition nationwide rose 28% from school years 2007-2008 to 2013-2014. Steep tuition increases have occurred across the nation. The average tuition at public four-year institutions, adjusted for inflation, increased “more than 60 percent in six states; more than 40 percent in ten states; and more than 20 percent in 29 states.” The state with the greatest tuition increase is Arizona, where the tuition has risen 80.6 percent or \$4,493 per student after inflation since the recession (Mitchell, M., Palacios, V. & Leachman, M. 2014). As college affordability decreases, more students are forced to take on more educational debt. “Over the last 20 years, the price of attending a four-year public college or university has grown significantly faster than the median income. Federal student aid and tax credits have risen, but on average they have fallen short of covering the tuition increases (Mitchell, M., Palacios, V. & Leachman, M. 2014).”

Revenue loss from state funding cuts has been only partially covered by tuition increases. “Public colleges and universities have cut faculty positions, eliminated course offerings, closed campuses, shut computer labs, and reduced library services, among other cuts (Mitchell, M., Palacios, V. & Leachman, M. 2014).” As an example, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill reported a \$231 million reduction in state funding from 2008 to 2011. According to a report on the Impact of Budget Reductions, the university first “focused on administrative cuts and measures to improve efficiency” but the cuts also included eliminating 493 positions, cutting 16,232 course seats, increasing class sizes, closing clinical departments within the medical school, cutting funds for students to learn as teaching assistants, closing computer labs, and eliminating two distance education centers (UNC-Chapel Hill 2011).

Increased support from donations more likely for larger institutions

With reduced aid from governmental sources and limits on the amount of tuition increases that can be absorbed by the market, colleges and universities must rely more on donations from loyal alumni and friends of the institution. There is good news for some universities. Charitable donations to colleges reached an all-time high of nearly \$38 billion in 2014, according to an annual survey conducted by the Council for Aid to Education (Mulhere 2015). Contributions from foundations account for 29.9% and alumni gave 26.3% of the 2014 giving. However, most of the donations went to a small group of elite American institutions. According to the Council’s Voluntary Support of Education survey, the top 2% of colleges received 28.6 percent (more than \$10 billion) of the total contributions (Mulhere 2015). At the top of the list was Harvard with \$1.16 billion. Three of the top twenty fund-raisers are within the University of California System.

Leaders face other pressing challenges

The debate about affordability of a college degree and whether the cost outweighs the value are not the only pressing issues that leaders of higher education institutions must address. The type and amount of services that institutions must provide to support and retain students has increased and a simulation study showed that the increased services enhanced graduation and persistence rates, especially at schools with lower entrance exams (Webber & Ehrenberg 2010). In addition to its traditional mission of educating and training students, the nature of research and development and the structure of participation is increasingly more complex, politicized, and regulated – not to mention exceedingly more expensive due to less public support. Universities find themselves faced with a growing need to partner with other organizations and collaborate in the commercial marketing of research discoveries (Zusman 2005). Keeping pace with technological advances places strains on resources while inducing pedagogical changes. (Kirshstein and Wellman 2012). Changing and increasing federal and state regulations requires constant monitoring, implementation, and

Forum on Public Policy

reporting. The world of academe looks and is very different from what it once was (Wu 2015). The leaders of higher education institutions of today and tomorrow face increasingly complex challenges with ever-limited resources. Instant media access when a tragedy occurs, means college and university leaders need media training in addition to crisis management strategies.

High turnover in leadership call for success planning and leadership development

As of 2011, almost 6 in 10 college presidents (58 percent) were over the age of 61 (Cook & Young, 2012). Turnover of leadership at institutions has become more common and is expected to continue. According to the American Council on Education, the average tenure of college and university presidents decreased from 8.5 years in 2006 to 7 years in 2012. Labeled a “turnover crisis,” the pipeline for presidential candidates “is grossly inadequate for the number of positions that will become available and lacks a sufficient number of women and minorities.” (Bornstein 2010)

The need for well-qualified, innovative leaders in higher education has never been greater and yet insufficient attention is paid to leadership development and succession planning. Qualified internal candidates have the advantage of understanding the culture but are often overlooked in favor of bringing someone in from the outside, in part because of the shared governance concept that is unique to higher education (Bornstein 2010). The lack of attention to preparing the next generation of higher education leaders is especially ironic considering the emphasis now placed on leadership development for students. Leadership theories and case studies are taught to students through college course material. Leadership development opportunities are increasingly viewed as a fundamental college experience. Higher education administrations, on the other hand, are deficient in their own leadership development and succession planning, especially in reference to the academic side of the house.

Lessons can be learned from the corporate sector when they experienced increased turnover in chief executive officer positions in the mid 2000’s. Succession planning became a priority for corporate boards concerned about the success and stability of its leadership (Charan 2005). As Witt/Kieffer reported in 2008, college and university presidents and board members recognize the need for succession planning, but added, “Colleges and universities have been slow to embrace corporate America’s approach to formal succession planning for their executive leadership.”

Comprehensive succession planning will prepare leaders for increasingly complex organizations. Formalizing the processes for identification and development of leaders through assignment of administrative and leadership duties, will insure institutions are prepared for a change in leadership. Leadership development will also be required for an understanding of the challenges facing higher education and the development of skill sets necessary to address the issues (Bornstein 2010). Even if the institution plans to hire its next president from outside the institution, leadership development and succession planning will prepare interim leadership in the case of an unexpected departure.

Diversified Leadership Offers Significant Benefits

As recognized by Rick Legon, president of the Association of Governing Boards, “selecting new institution leadership is among higher education’s most sacred and traditional processes” (Bornstein 2010). Colleges and universities are complex organizations requiring well-qualified leaders who are tough enough to withstand the pressure and scrutiny, astute enough to anticipate and plan for the foreseeable issues, agile enough to manage a barrage of multi-faceted issues all at once, nimble enough to navigate through the various constituents, and likeable enough to be respected and followed.

Again – learning from studies of corporations – entities can benefit when women are in leadership positions and when diversity and inclusion are embraced. Corporate studies have shown that entities with more women in leadership positions not only are more profitable but also more productive and innovative. As

Forum on Public Policy

colleges and universities prepare for the replacement of its leaders, lessons learned the business world should be considered (Madsen 2015).

Women in senior leadership improve financial performance

In the corporate realm, many studies have shown that companies with the highest representation of women in leadership positions financially outperform those with few women in their senior management. In 2004, Catalyst published results of a groundbreaking study exploring the link between gender diversity in corporate leadership and the financial performance of the corporation. Prior studies suggested a positive impact on the bottom line but without hard data to measure the impact. Catalyst used publicly-available data for 353 Fortune 500 companies during the second half of the 1990s and found that companies with the highest representation of women on their top management teams experienced a Return on Equity (ROE) which was 35.1 percent higher and Total Return to Shareholders (TRS) which was 34.0 percent higher than companies with the lowest women's representation (Catalyst 2004). Catalyst continued its work and expanded its studies of the positive impact of women when active in organizational leadership positions. Among the finding in Catalyst's latest study is that, "[c]ompanies with sustained high representation of WBD [women board directors], defined as those with three or more WBD in at least four of five years, outperformed those with sustained low representation" (Catalyst 2011).

Catalyst is not the only organization finding the benefits. In 2007, McKinsey studied companies in the Stoxx Europe 600 and found that the 89 European-listed companies with the highest proportions of women in senior leadership positions and at least two women on their boards experienced a 10 percent higher than average ROE (return on equity), 48 percent higher than average EBIT (earnings before income tax) and 1.7 times the average stock growth (Catalyst 2011). In 2012, Bloomberg published a study conducted by the Credit Suisse Research Institute that examined all the companies in the MSCI ACWI Index (over 2300) and found that "shares of companies with a market capitalization of more than \$10 billion and with women board members outperformed comparable businesses with all-male boards by 26 percent worldwide" (Perlberg 2012). Seed-stage venture capital firm First Round Capital analyzed their 10 years of investing billions of dollars in over 300 hundred companies and found that "companies with at least one female founder performed a full 63 percent better than companies with all-male team" (First Round 2015).

Other recent studies in Canada, Europe, Asia, and Australia also found positive correlations between gender diversity on boards and improvements in corporate governance and financial performance – including more sales, better operating margins, higher stock prices, more economic growth, greater productivity, higher market-to-book value, enhanced corporate governance and oversight, improved corporate sustainability, and overall increased profitability (Catalyst 2013). However, it is important to note that these studies show a positive benefit especially when they include a critical mass of women. In several studies, "critical mass" was defined as 30 percent women on the board, which translates to about three women on an average board of nine (Catalyst 2013).

Women's leadership characteristics proven to be strong

An INSEAD study of nearly 3,000 executives from 149 countries, subordinates, peers, supervisors, suppliers, and customers, scored the women executives higher than the men on seven or more competencies, including "energizing," "designing and aligning," "outside orientation," and "tenacity" (Catalyst 2013). In another study of 7,000 leaders, women outperformed men on twelve of sixteen measures of outstanding leadership competencies and scored the same on four others. "While women outscored men on 'nurturing' competencies such as relationship building and developing others, women outscored men most significantly on 'take initiatives,' 'practices self-development,' 'displays high integrity and honesty,' and 'drives for results'" (Catalyst 2013).

Forum on Public Policy

Diverse teams lead to more innovation and creativity

Reported in the McKinsey Quarterly, a 2014 study of multinational company Sodexo serves as an example of many studies documenting widespread organization benefits when inclusive diversity is embraced. CEO, Michael Landel explains they set out to “explore the correlation between gender-balanced management teams and key performance indicators such as employee engagement, brand awareness, client retention,” and financial metrics as previously discussed. Data from 50,000 managers across 90 entities around the world was compiled and the results were compelling. “They clearly show that teams with a male–female ratio between 40 and 60 percent produce results that are more sustained and predictable than those of unbalanced teams” (Landel 2015). The research showed, for example, that the employee engagement rate of gender-balanced teams around the world was an average of four percentage points higher than that of unbalanced teams. Other correlations between gender diversity and other business metrics were also found, including consumer satisfaction and operating profit (Landel 2015).

At a company in Germany, “researchers measured 28 teams on a wide variety of diversity characteristics at and found that highly diverse teams performed better on highly complex tasks than homogeneous teams. The authors posit that this result was related to the diverse teams’ wider range of thinking processes and increased creativity” (Catalyst 2013).

A study co-authored by researchers from MIT, Carnegie Mellon University, and Union College documented the existence of collective intelligence when people worked well together in a group. The collective intelligence of the group surpassed the cognitive abilities of the individual members of the group. A major factor in creating a group with the right internal dynamics for collective intelligence to emerge was the number of women. The most effective and cooperative groups exhibited high levels of “social sensitivity.” Because women tend to have higher levels of social sensitivity, the tendency to cooperate effectively was linked to the number of women in the group (Woolley, Chabris, et al 2010).

In most industries, having a diversified teams that resembles its customer base is beneficial for the development of the products for its diverse customers. For example, Pinterest engineer acknowledged the need of tech companies to hire diverse employees who can better relate to the hundreds of millions or billions of customers who will use the products they build (Rodriquez 2015).

Inclusion increases employee satisfaction and engagement

Annual Global CEO Survey in 2014 and 2015 reported that hiring and retaining top talent is serious concern. A diverse and inclusive workforce is crucial to attract and retain top talent. (Forbes 2011). Another study found that positive perceptions of an organization's commitment to creating a diverse climate were related to fewer employees’ intentions to leave. In addition, the study “determined that the benefits of a positive diversity climate may extend to all employees, including White men” (Kaplan, Wiley & Maertz, 2011).

Corporate engagement enhanced by women on boards

Reviewing board performance from Standard & Poor’s firms, researchers found that gender-diverse boards have higher levels of boardroom involvement and corporate oversight. A study of the boards of 201 Norwegian firms found the presence of women directors seemed to positively impact board effectiveness by increasing board development activities and decreasing the level of conflict on the board.” (Nielson & Huse 2010) Not only did the women directors have higher attendance, the presence of women on boards improved attendance of male directors as well. Board meeting attendance is critical for proper performance of directors’ fiduciary duties. The study found that women directors were more often assigned to monitoring-related committees, except for compensation committees, and the results suggested “that female directors appear to be tougher monitors than male directors.” (Adams & Ferreira 2009).

Forum on Public Policy

In a 2011 study by Catalyst and Harvard Business School researchers, found significantly higher annual charitable contribution from Fortune 500 companies with three or more women board members and 25% or more women corporate officers. They also found that gender-inclusive leadership was linked to the quantity and quality of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). “Companies with both women and men leaders in the boardroom and at the executive table are poised to achieve sustainable big wins for the company and society.” (Soares, Marquis & Lee 2011) In another study of nearly 100 Standard & Poor’s companies, 43 different social performance indicators were reviewed and found that gender diversity within the board had a significant and positive effect on corporate social performance (Hafsi & Turgut 2013). A company committed to CSR acts as a good corporate citizen and takes a longer-term and broader view of success beyond profit maximization by considering the organization’s impact on the world. (Marquis, Glynn & Davis 2007).

Some customers and clients are even weighing in on the need for companies to include women on their board. Thomas Sager described bold moves made by DuPont Co. during his time as general counsel: "We severed relations where there are egregious acts of discrimination, and have rewarded firms that have taken action in hiring, retention and giving people opportunities." (Chen 2015) Don Liu, general counsel of Xerox Corp., reported putting pressure on firms they hired by conducting “biannual evaluations of firms' diversity records and informs them of the ranking.” (Chen 2015)

Public Perception of Parity Does Not Match Reality

In the United States, an interesting paradox has evolved. On one hand, the large majority of Americans are comfortable with women serving in top leadership positions. In fact, “much of the general public believes that women’s fight for parity in the workplace has already been won” (The White House Report, 2009, p. 5). The reality, however, is much different from public perception.

According to a 2014 Pew Research Center survey on women and leadership the majority of Americans find “women are every bit as capable of being good political leaders as men.” The Pew survey also found that most Americans find women are “indistinguishable from men on key leadership traits such as intelligence and capacity for innovation, with many saying they’re stronger than men in terms of being compassionate and organized leaders.” Women were given the edge in terms of being better at working out compromises and when it comes to being honest and ethical. Women were found to have a clear advantage over men in providing fair pay and benefits, and being willing to mentor young employees. Men were found to be more willing to take risks and negotiate. The similarity of these findings to a 2007 GfK/Roper Public Opinion Poll cited as a basis for the White House Report in 2009 indicate that the public’s opinion that “women and men would make equally good leaders” (The White House Report, 2009, p. 8) has existed for some time now.

During 360-degree evaluations of 2,816 executives from 149 countries enrolled in executive education courses in 2009, 22,244 subordinates, peers, supervisors, suppliers, and customers were asked to evaluate the leaders on a set of leadership dimensions. Female leaders received higher ratings than male leaders by both male and female observers in the categories of energizing; designing and aligning; rewarding and feedback; team building; outside orientation; tenacity; and emotional intelligence. Men and women were rated equally for empowering and global mind-set. In the category of envisioning, the male leaders were rated higher by male observers while the female observers rated the women leaders higher (Ibarra & Obodaru 2009).

Even though research shows women are recognized for their leadership abilities, and the number of women in the workforce exceeds the number of men, only 39% of females sixteen and older work in management or professional occupations (United States Census, 2010). Across the fourteen business and industry sectors studied in 2013 as part of Benchmarking Women Report, women held an average of 20% of the top leadership positions within each sector. Overall, women are still paid less for their work than their male

Forum on Public Policy

counterparts. The median annual earnings for women 15 and older working full-time is \$36,278, which is only 77 percent of median annual earnings for men (United States Census, 2010). Across the sectors, women equal or outnumber men in entry-level jobs, yet they fall substantially behind in moving up into management and leadership positions.

Today, more women than men attend college and graduate. Women hold a larger share of high school diplomas, associate, bachelor's and master's degrees (United States Census, 2010). While more total men than women hold professional and doctoral degrees, enrollments in recent years in professional and doctoral-degree-granting programs indicate that as many or more women are now seeking and completing those degrees which means women are well represented in entry-level positions in most sectors (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). The number of women faculty drops significantly, however, from instructor and lecturers (55%), and assistant professors (49%) to full professors (29%). As a result, the pool from which many senior administrators are chosen—tenured faculty—is disproportionately small (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Women are most likely to head associate colleges (33%), followed by baccalaureate colleges (23%), master's colleges and universities (23%), and lastly, doctorate-granting (22%) institutions (American Council on Education, 2012). Women presidents have not yet reached parity nor have women achieved the one-third representation in leadership roles that is necessary, according to researchers (The White House Project, 2009; Tarr-Whelan, 2009), to bring about substantive change for them and the organizations they serve.

Barriers to women's advancement still exist

The reasons behind the lack of progress in areas of leadership are nuanced and multi-faceted. The focus of discussions about discrimination during the 1950's, 1960's, and 1970's centered on acts of blatant and overt sexism and prejudice. Those actions are easily identifiable today and generally understood to be unacceptable. Behaviors and actions serving as barriers today are less obvious but no less limiting. In the 2014 Pew Research Center survey, topping the list of key barrier for women seeking leadership roles was “a double standard for women seeking to climb to the highest levels of either politics or business, where they have to do more than their male counterparts to prove themselves.”

Today's barriers are more likely to result from gender-based preferences in recruitment, hiring decisions and work assignments, lack of effective mentorships, and lack of leadership development and experience. With men holding the overwhelming majority of positions on governing boards of higher education, preconceived notions about weaknesses and inexperience negatively impact the consideration of women candidates (Baltodano, Carlson, Jackson, & Mitchell, 2012).

Often gender-based preferences are not intentional but are the result of unconscious biases – preferences that result from one's previous experiences and natural tendencies and comfort level that one person has when in the presence of someone who is more like them. We all have such preferences. For example, those who grow up in a neighborhood or family that loves American football are more likely to prefer to watch football as an adult just as a person who grew up playing tennis or hockey may prefer to watch their sport as an adult. People are more comfortable with people with similar interests and life experiences. (Rhode & Kellerman 2007) These preferences can cause a job offer or a work assignment to be offered to those with whom the decision maker has more in common or believes he or she would prefer to spend time working. “Even in experimental situations where male and female performance is objectively equal, women are held to higher standards, and their competence is rated lower. (Rhode & Kellerman 2007).

For some women, their self-doubts and past treatment cause them to believe they are less deserving than men for recognition or promotion and they see themselves as less qualified for key leadership positions (Rhode & Kellerman 2007). Accepting a subservient role may be believed to be in the best interest of the organization. “Some women allow small deficits in skills, real or perceived, to make them unsure about their leadership abilities and whether a presidency is within their reach” (June 2015). Based on a 2011

Forum on Public Policy

Princeton study young women leaders may not aspire to top leadership roles because their perception is that women leaders do not enjoy satisfying, fulfilling careers. To address this concern, “the American Council on Education produced a video depicting the extent to which currently sitting women presidents viewed their roles as very fulfilling” (Jackson Teague, & Bobby, 2014).

Still, “family issues remain a big barrier for women all the way through the pipeline...The academic work culture doesn’t match up with the flexibility that women say they need to take care of children or aging parents, among other responsibilities” (June 2015). Women are more likely to be unwilling to relocate because of their family obligations. Mobility is more challenging for women with professional spouses and children. Women are also more likely to make decisions to place the professional aspiration of her spouse above her own. (Jackson Teague, & Bobby, 2014).

Results of a 2015 survey of 25,000 Harvard MBA alumni indicate that high-achieving women have the same career aspirations and the similar expectation to be able to balance fulfilling professional and personal lives. The realization “played out very differently according to gender.” The study revealed that expectation regarding child-rearing responsibilities “may contribute to women’s stymied goals.” The report noted that a key barrier to career advancement for a woman with children is still “deep-rooted attitudes that a woman should be the primary caregiver, so it is ‘understood’ that her career may have to take a backseat for a while as similar male colleagues move ahead at a more rapid pace.” The report found that the belief that women would “opt out” to care for children is not true. Only 11% of Gen X and Baby Boomer women left the work force to care for children. This is roughly the same percentage found in a study done by Deloitte & Touche more than 20 years ago. As Ely, Stone & Ammerman (2014) delved deeper into the survey results and controlled for “variables such as age, industry, sector, and organization size, analyzing a range of factors related to family status and parenting,” they could not find any causal connection to women’s lesser representation in top management.

Other changes have also affected opportunities for women in higher education. In tough budgetary times, efforts to correct inequities in hiring have taken a back seat. “The business case for diversity doesn’t hold much water presently,” said a diversity director at large law firm. Law firms are more focused on immediate bottom-line issues in the aftermath of the recent recessionary times (Chen 2015).

Even for organizations with a declared commitment to diversity, many are finding it difficult to deliver. A 2015 McKinsey report notes: “[a]lthough a majority of organizations we studied have tried to implement measures aimed at increasing gender diversity among senior executives, few have achieved notable improvements.” In a survey of global executives, “corporate culture and a lack of convinced engagement by male executives” were cited as critical barriers for women’s advancement (Devillard, S., Sancier-Sultan, S. & Werner, C. 2014). The former general counsel for DuPont Co. who won awards for pushing diversity said there is little momentum for diversity today: “It takes leadership at the top, collaboration and accountability—and those things haven’t existed to date.” (Chen 2015)

Actions that will make a difference

Recognizing the value of inclusivity in leadership positions is critical and timely. Successfully navigating the current waves of increased scrutiny and limited resources calls for institutions of higher education to increasingly establish goals, and implement protocols, to increase effectiveness, efficiency, productivity, and overall organizational performance. Mobilizing and engaging women in leadership positions will move institutions closer to these goals. Recognizing that diversity is a key driver of innovation and a critical component of success on a global scale will help create a more inclusive workforce that will attract and retain top talent.

Forum on Public Policy

Efforts to Raise Awareness

National efforts, such as the American Council on Education (ACE) Moving the Needle Initiative, are gaining momentum as they seek to increase awareness of the continued lack of parity in higher education leadership and to draw attention to the many benefits to organizations that embrace inclusive diversity. Moving the Needle Initiative proclaim a bold vision of increasing the percentage of women in the senior-most leadership positions at higher education institutions to at least 50% by the year 2030. The announced mission is “to create parity for women holding, or aspiring to hold, leadership positions in the academy through collaborative partnerships.” Recognizing the ambition of the vision, the Moving the Needle value statement acknowledged the necessity of collaboration:

Today, 26% of college and university presidencies are held by women. Progress has been at best incremental and taken a decade to move the needle three percentage points. The vision of parity necessitates creating a national imperative for advancing women’s leadership and a carefully crafted national agenda to guide its implementation. In short, there must be a renewed effort to achieve in two decades what amounts to doubling the progress realized over many decades. No single organization can accomplish this alone; collaboration among like-minded organizations can and will make the difference (WNEC, 2014).

Accompanying the aforementioned statements of vision, mission, and value, the following four goals define the work of the collaboration:

1. Generate a national sense of urgency elevating the need for advancing women in higher education.
2. Encourage governing boards and other higher education decision- and policy-making bodies to adopt recommended practices for recruiting and hiring women to chief executive offices.
3. Achieve women’s advancement to mid-level and senior-level positions in higher education administration by building capacities in women and in institutions.
4. Create aspirational principles and/or standards that define and recognize success in advancing women in higher education.

Other efforts around the country and world are aimed at raising awareness of continuing gender inequality. The Women and Leadership Affinity Group of the International Leadership Association issued a call to action to build on the efforts of the United Nations work related to women. The Asilomar Declaration and Call to Action identified five areas for emphasis “a) increasing equality in power and decision making, b) expanding leadership development worldwide, c) helping girls and young women become leaders, d) advancing women in leadership, and e) identifying critical areas of future research.” (WLAG 2013).

Another example was the Not There Yet campaign which used the occasion of International Women’s Day on March 8, 2015 to involve high profile women, such as Hilary Clinton, Serena Williams and Cameron Diaz, in a media campaign by blacking out their images. The Dove commercials and the 2015 throw-like-a-girl Super Bowl commercial also raised our consciousness about gender and cultural biases.

Other industries also are trying to raise awareness and spur action. For example, at the annual South by Southwest gathering of the tech industry in Austin, Texas, an effort was made in 2014 to raise awareness about the tech industry’s lack of diversity and gender equality. Building on the 2014

Forum on Public Policy

awareness campaign, the 2015 schedule was filled with events for leaders to hear about action steps that can lead to diversified hiring (Rodriguez 2015).

Change in institutional culture needed to increase diversity

Institutions of higher education are not known for their quickness or agility to change. Often mired with policies, procedures, and protocols steeped in long-standing tradition, change at colleges and universities is slow at best. Perhaps the sentiments of Michel Landel, chief executive of global-services company Sodexo, the employer of 425,000 employees around the world, are applicable. “I’ll be honest with you: this cultural transformation is not easy. It takes rigor and determination.” Landel continues, “greater diversity and inclusiveness are part of a cultural transformation that requires time and humility” (Landel 2015). Commitment to an organization’s diversity and inclusion efforts must begin and end with senior management.

1. Commitment from Senior Leadership

Senior leaders of higher education institutions – boards of regents, presidents, chief academic officers, vice presidents and deans – must engage in efforts to create and sustain a genuine commitment to the goal of diversity. A sincere intent to create a culture of inclusive diversity requires the leadership to demonstrate a purposeful institutional commitment to increasing diversity by setting goals and modeling practices. Dialogue across campuses should regularly extoll the benefits to an organization when a diverse group of individuals bring their unique experiences and understandings together to address the complex, multi-faceted challenges of our contemporary global society.

2. Set Institutional Goals

Institutions need a set of clear, measurable, and attainable long-term objectives for achieving an environment of inclusive engagement. Short-term or interim goals can be beneficial by establishing benchmarks along the way to encourage ongoing efforts. Deliberate succession planning will assist in the identification and development of candidates within the university. Organizations, including many institutions of higher education, are often too quick to overlook talented employees with leadership potential in favor of hiring an unknown with a resume with which they are comfortable. Implementing a leadership development program can assist with identifying potential leaders and preparing them for consideration as positions become available.

When filling vacancies or new positions, senior leaders must proactively take the lead in establishing search committee practice and procedures that will foster additional diversity. Commitment to diversity should be an explicit criterion for search committee service. The membership of search committees should purposefully reflect the desired level of diversity. Search committees and those making the hiring decisions, should be in full agreement about the need for, and benefit of, a commitment to diversity. Absent complete agreement before a process commences, subjective judgments and other influences will likely result in little to no progress.

3. Raise Awareness – Make the business case

Diversity training, including education on methods to decrease unconscious bias, should be required for all individuals holding supervisory roles. “It takes time to convince all those, including some women, who do not understand why this issue is a strategic one.” “Men don’t always realize that the rise of gender balance has been beneficial to them. Many requests from women (for flexible hours, parental leave, and other initiatives to improve work/life balance) have directly improved the quality of life for men” (Landel).

All search committee members should be required to participate in diversity training. “Implicit bias outside of our awareness” is a real phenomenon that influences even the best hiring processes. Part of this well-

Forum on Public Policy

documented bias, which is not unique to academic hiring processes, are the “gender schemas” that most often present in “small, barely visible ways . . . [that] accumulate over time to provide men with more advantages than women.” (Valian 2005)

4. Accountability through a system of measurement and evaluation

Departments and schools should regularly be evaluated on their success in establishing an environment of inclusion in which individuals feel valued and encouraged to fully contribute to the processes and goals of the organization. Supply-side or pipeline factors are most often cited as the principal culprit in the comparative lack of women and minorities in the academic workplace. However, a significant body of research suggests “that biased evaluations of women and minorities contribute to their under representation among American faculty.” Institutions need “a set of clear, measurable, and attainable long-term objectives for management. Teams must be held accountable and accountability cascaded through the organization. We all know that without targets, nothing gets measured and nothing changes” (Landel 2015).

Creating concomitant accountability for diversity in hiring is critical as well. All searches should begin with developing a diverse prospect pool. An intentional focus on watching for and guarding against biases, conscious and unconscious or inadvertent, during each step of the search process must become a priority and that intentionality must continue through each step of the hiring process. Search committees and hiring decision-makers must have a purposeful commitment throughout the hiring process.

Build & Develop Women within the system

Insuring that women are increasingly represented in mid-level administrative positions is essential to the goal of increasing the diversity among senior leaders. As of 2011, women accounted for 55% of instructors and lecturers, 49% of assistant professors, and only 29% of full professors. The pool from which many senior administrators are chosen—tenured faculty—is disproportionately small (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). This drop-off has significant consequences, as many senior administrators are chosen from the ranks of tenured faculty – exactly where the numbers of women are smallest, especially at the more selective institutions. Decreases, albeit less substantial, also occur as women move through the administrative services leadership pipeline which also supplies candidates for more senior positions in the academy.

Increasing the number of women advancing into leadership positions requires recognition that barriers and obstacles still exist, hampering women’s advancement. Implementing practices and procedures to removing barriers and improve flexibility in higher education workplaces will result in an increase in the number of women advancing into more senior leadership positions. Among other institutional policies and practices that should be examined, insuring workplace flexibility not only will result in the retention of talented women desiring to work part-time, but also affords organizations significant additional benefits, including reduced work/life conflict for men and women, enhanced productivity for managers (male or female, with children or without), and improved well-being and reduced absenteeism for all employees (Deloitte, 2011).

Higher education institutions need to create more robust leadership identification and development programs to prepare future leaders. In addition to creating in-house programs, a number of leadership development programs already exist. Organizations such as American Council on Education (ACE) provides advisory support to a network of low cost annual women’s leadership development programs in most of the states. Many other leadership programs exist across the nation (Madsen, Longman & Daniels 2012).

Forum on Public Policy

Conclusion

Our country's continued prosperity depends on our educational system to produce an educated community that understands and values our system of government; appreciates the complexity of world cultures, economies and relationships; and recognizes the importance of being at the forefront of innovation and research. The conversations around the nation, including those among our state and federal legislators, should focus more on the public benefits of a strong system of higher education. An educated and engaged citizenry is critical to our economic strength and our position as a world leader.

On campuses around the world, college and university leaders make daily decisions that have life-altering impacts on a growing number of students – students who will populate our businesses, organizations, and governments as workers and leaders. With the significant turn over in leadership at colleges and universities expected in the coming years, boards and senior leadership should devote time and energy to ensure they are identifying and preparing leaders who have the skill sets and characteristics to best lead their institutions through the challenging times at hand and ahead. Study after study show the strength of women as innovative, productive, and successful leaders. Indeed, diversity brings many benefits to a university, its faculty, and its student body. A culture of inclusivity helps to drive innovation and creativity, widen the institution's worldview, and increase retention and productivity.

Although women are proven to be successful leaders, barriers still exist to their advancement. As a result, the number of women in leadership positions lags greatly behind. In higher education, where 59% of the students are women, having only 26% of the presidents as women is not only wrong from a social policy stand point, but also the innovation, productivity, and financial security of higher education institutions will suffer as well.

Establishing an inclusive culture must be a priority of the senior leadership. Specific goals are needed and measurable targets must be adopted. All department heads of the institution must be held accountable if universities and colleges hope to reap the benefits of a diversified workforce and leadership. Strong, successful, and innovative colleges and universities bolster our economy and shore up our position as a world power. As colleges and universities go, so goes the country.

Forum on Public Policy

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