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Falling Diversity of Provosts Signals Challenge for Presidential Pipeline, Study Finds

By Jack Stripling

Minority provosts are less represented in higher education than they were five years ago, a pattern that may signal greater challenges for diversifying college presidencies in the future, a [new study](#) has found.

A report on the study, released on Monday by the American Council on Education, shows that the percentages of black, Asian, and Hispanic provosts all declined from 2008 to 2013. The shrinking diversity in the position is particularly notable because most presidents serve as provosts before ascending to the top job.

The American Council on Education and the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources collaborated on the study, titled "On the Pathway to the College Presidency." The study, which the TIAA-CREF Institute also supported, was based on responses from 149 four-year institutions.

The share of black provosts fell from 3.7 percent to 2.3 percent over the past five years, while the proportion of Asian provosts declined from 3.7 percent to 2.4 percent during the same period. Hispanic provosts now make up less than 1 percent of chief academic officers, down from 1.5 percent five years ago.

Across all senior administrative positions, which include deans and associate provosts, the percentage of women increased from 40 percent in 2008 to 43 percent this year, according to the study.

The latest findings come a year after the American Council on Education [released data](#) that showed a slight decline in the percentage of minority presidents from 2006 to 2012. The sharpest racial and ethnic decline in the presidency was among Hispanics, who represented 3.8 percent of college leaders in 2012, down 0.7 percent from 2006.

Stephanie Bell-Rose, senior managing director of the TIAA-CREF Institute, said in a news release that the new study represented a call to action.

"This study underscores the importance of developing a diverse higher-education leadership pipeline," she said, "which is essential to meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse student population."

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22261984 1 week ago

This is a problem only if the reason for the decline is increasing discrimination -- I don't think we need any particular racial mix of provosts, or presidents -- and given the political correctness of the decisionmakers involved, this seems unlikely. A more likely explanation is that the blacks, Latinos, and Asians applying are not as well qualified as the whites applying. And one reason this might be true, by the way, is not because no blacks, Latinos, and Asians are as qualified, but because those that are as or better qualified have better job opportunities now than being a provost, either inside or outside academia.

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ksb2141 1 week ago in reply to 22261984

I'm curious as to why your explanations are 'more likely'.

A voluminous body of research exists highlighting the obstacles that persist among scholars of color who aspire to become faculty, the pathway to senior administration. (Caroline Turner, Octavio Villalpando, Anthony Lising Antonio, and others have done extensive work in this area.) The current conditions among underrepresented faculty are hardly the result of a lack of qualified candidates; that is a troublesome myth.

As universities become more diverse (80% of undergraduates will be of color by 2015, according to Census data), presidents and provosts need to better reflect their student bodies. An institution without administrators and faculty who share the cultural backgrounds of the predominant student body (which has profound effects on minority students' college experiences) will be doing a gross disservice to its students as well as our country, as retention rates will remain disproportionately low among students of color. Despite the common belief that attrition among students of color is solely due to financial difficulties or academic underpreparedness, a great number exit (especially at PWIs) because the climate is not at all conducive to their success. (See Sylvia Hurtado's work.) Whether or not one cares about students of color being retained, we ALL will be affected by the economic and social disadvantages (i.e., more crime, less taxes, civic disengagement, etc.) of a major portion of society not reaping the benefits of higher education.

Also, presidents and provosts should represent the diversity of their student bodies in ways in addition to race/ethnicity (e.g., sexual orientation, gender, ability status, religious beliefs, generation status, veteran status, etc.). Through representation at the senior level, those at the fringes of the campus community (and society) will have a greater voice and experience greater success at the institution.

15 people liked this. Like



aaroncj 1 week ago in reply to ksb2141

"(80% of undergraduates will be of color by 2015, according to Census data)"

While our student populations are becoming less white over time, the projection you cite would be a remarkable shift in only two years. According to the NCES, the percentage of non-white students is closer to 40% (<http://nces.ed.gov/programs/co...>)

Can you please cite a specific source for the 80% in 2015?

6 people liked this. [Like](#)



fossa777 1 week ago in reply to aaroncj

My thoughts exactly! I don't know where this fanciful data comes from but even if that figure took into account online graduates it wouldn't come close to 80%!

4 people liked this. [Like](#)



ksb2141 1 week ago in reply to fossa777

That was an oversight. Eighty percent of the projected growth in enrollment will be students of color. Thanks for pointing that out.

<http://www.asha.org/practice/m...>

1 person liked this. [Like](#)



rjbornstein 1 week ago

In my 2010 AGB book, Succession Planning for the Higher Education President, I wrote that "...the number of qualified and diverse candidates for the presidency must be expanded. Potential presidential candidates must be identified, encouraged, mentored, offered opportunities for growth and experience, and given regular feedback. Only aggressive initiatives and consistent support by boards, presidents, and engaged faculty can increase the pool of qualified presidential candidates."

7 people liked this. [Like](#)



22286504 1 week ago

Should we be rethinking the idea that the pathway to presidencies is through provosts' offices? Where the provost service, in effect, as executive vice president, this career path makes sense. But where provost serves as chief academic office, maybe not. The work of deans--managing large numbers of staff staff as well working with faculty, engaging in student affairs activities within their college, handling budgets, and especially raising money from alumni and other donors--may often make deans more likely presidents than are provosts. Moreover, as the Chronicle has reported, the burnout rates among provosts has increased over time and the desirability of the jobs has decreased. Just a couple of years ago the Chronicle had a substantial story saying that most provosts do wish to consider presidencies because of the very heavy load of non-academic work presidents now do. While it is not a good thing that diversity among provosts is decreasing, it may also have little impact on the potential for diversity at the presidential level.

3 people liked this. [Like](#)



22260556 1 week ago

If the declining number of minority provosts is evidence of continuing racial discrimination ... let's look at that issue and do something about it. The presidential "pipeline" is a different issue altogether. Other candidates are entering that pipeline, from foundations, government, business, advancement, and from deanships at major institutions.

1 person liked this. [Like](#)



laoshi 1 week ago

Diversity is perversity anyway.

Like

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