



ENGAGING

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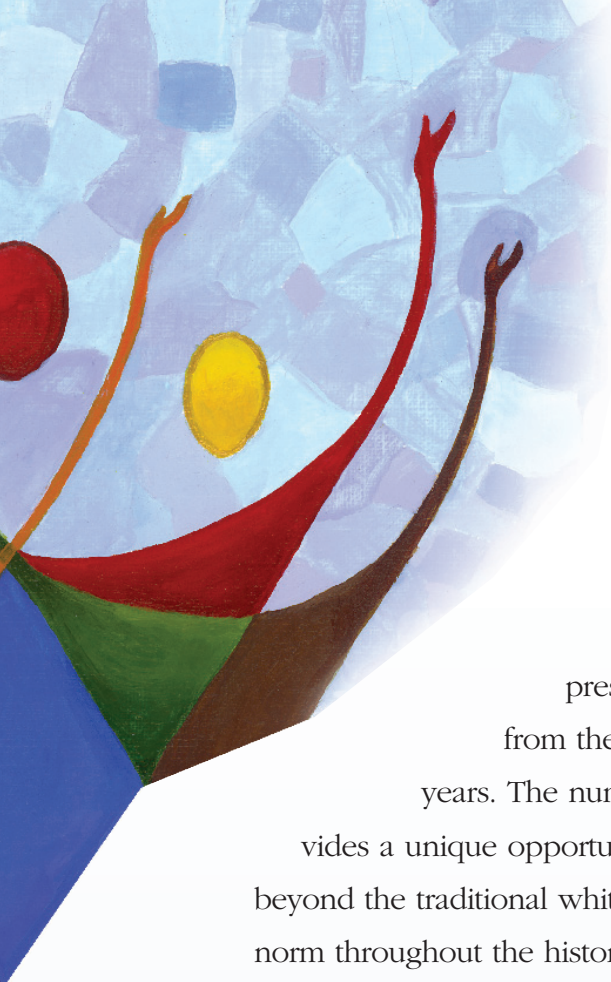
Restless Professor:

Building The Pipeline To The Presidency With Campus Talent

By Beverly Daniel Tatum



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As the demographics of the American college presidency indicate, there will be a significant number of college and university

presidents across the country retiring from their leadership roles in the next few years. The number of anticipated vacancies provides a unique opportunity to expand the presidential ranks beyond the traditional white male profile that has been the norm throughout the history of higher education. It seems particularly appropriate to do so when we consider that the college-going student population has never been more diverse. The millennial generation now attending college is the most racially and ethnically diverse in U.S. history. Many would agree that it is time for the leadership of American higher education to begin to reflect the populations we serve. Yet where will these new leaders come from?

The traditional route from the professoriate to the department chair to the dean to the provost (or other vice presidential role) to the president is one that holds few prospective candidates of color. According to the American Council on Education's *22nd Annual Minority Status Report*, only 11.8 percent of full professors are women or men of color. The number who have advanced from that privileged position to the ranks of senior administrators is even smaller still. Clearly, if we are going to expand the diversity of the college presidency we must vigorously address this pipeline issue on multiple fronts.



We have to increase the number of students of color pursuing academic careers by offering undergraduate research experiences and mentoring talented students with an interest in college teaching. Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) have certainly done more than their share in this arena. According to a 2004 report by the National Center for Education Statistics, HBCUs represent just 3 percent of the nation's more than 4,000 colleges and universities, but award 22 percent of the undergraduate degrees earned by African Americans.¹ Further, the 2006 National Science Foundation report *U.S. Doctorates in the 20th Century* notes that approximately one-third of all PhDs completed by African Americans are earned by scholars who received their undergraduate education at an HBCU.² Similarly, Hispanic-serving institutions represent a small percentage of colleges and universities (10 percent) but, according to the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, they educate more than two-thirds of all Hispanic college students.³ While the number of Hispanic PhDs is still small, a pattern similar to that of HBCUs is evident, in that there are relatively few institutions contributing to the pipeline of Hispanic PhDs. It seems clear that faculty and administrators at historically white institutions need to take action to improve their own record of achievement in mentoring and encouraging young men and women of color to consider academic careers.

Moving Through the Ranks

If we look beyond career mentoring, which is obviously needed to help new members of the academy successfully navigate the process of tenure and promotion, the question is how to bring a new generation of professors into the ranks of administration. My answer is simple: Ask them. I speak from personal experience.

I am a clinical psychologist by training. I was inspired to pursue psychology as a career field because of a book about a child psychologist that I read when I was still in high school. My plan was to become a therapist and work with troubled children and their families. My academic success in college put me on a sure path to graduate school but it was my graduate teaching assistantship at the University of Michigan that put me on the path to the professoriate.

The teaching opportunities I had early in my career sealed the deal as I quickly came to understand that I could impact many more people in a helpful way as a professor than I could as a therapist. When I was a professor, I taught a number of psychology courses I enjoyed, but my favorite was a course I developed on the psychology of racism. What I liked most about it

was the fact that my students really seemed to be changed by what they learned. The course was designed to encourage reflection through experiential learning (in-class dialogue as well as outside, hands-on assignments) and integration and application of ideas (through the development of action plans). It was a powerful combination. My passion for the subject matter not only kept me happy in the undergraduate classroom, but also fueled my research and professional writing.

Later at Mount Holyoke College, I progressed steadily through the ranks, serving on a number of campus committees along with my other responsibilities. In 1996, I was promoted and became one of those still too few black female full professors. A year later, my colleagues agreed that it was my turn to serve as department chair and I reluctantly accepted, prepared to endure my three-year term as

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chair with a reduced teaching load. I loved teaching and would not have readily given any of it up. I had never considered college administration as a desirable career choice, and my experience as department chair, while benign, did not change my mind.

In 1997, my book *“Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?” And Other Conversations About Race*, was published to considerable acclaim and I began to be actively courted for graduate-level teaching opportunities. I did not want to disrupt my family situation by moving to another

institution, but I recognized within myself a certain restlessness characteristic of 40-somethings who have been teaching for a long time and are looking for new challenges. Being department chair was not what I had in mind.

I sought out a senior colleague in my department for some career advice and she suggested that I consider applying for the position of dean of the college at Mount Holyoke, the chief student affairs position, which included responsibility for undergraduate studies as well as all co-curricular areas of student life. “Who in her right mind would want that job?” was my immediate response. I imagined endless days of boring meetings. She said, “You are not using your imagination—if you were the dean, you could take the ideas that you have been writing about and put them into practice. You could really impact the student experience here.” From that vantage point, campus leadership began to have new appeal.

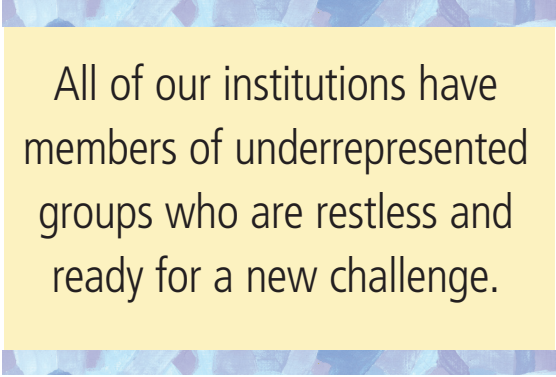
And indeed she was right. A year later, in 1998, I assumed the role of dean, cautiously agreeing to an initial three-year term. I immediately found it to be a job full of creative possibility and opportunity for positive impact, both on campus and off. The learning curve was just the challenge I needed. My days were indeed full of meetings, but I discovered quickly that meetings are much more interesting when you can set the agenda. I held on to teaching as long as I could—first, one class a semester, but then more realistically, one class a year. The supervision and mentoring of staff and the frequent public presentations I did as dean became teaching of a different kind, and tremendous satisfaction came from watching the campus environment change for the better. When my first three-year term ended, I eagerly agreed to another.

Explore, Encourage, and Enable

While serving as dean, with the encouragement of the president, I attended the Harvard Institute for Educational Management, an important learning experience, and began attending professional meetings designed for administrators, such as those sponsored by the Association of American Colleges and Universities and the American Council on Education. My reading list expanded from my disciplinary interests to include books on leadership and team building.

Did I want to be a president? That was not my goal, but becoming a dean and a member of the president’s senior cabinet allowed me to observe and learn more about the executive role than I ever had as a faculty member and clearly placed me in the line of sight of executive search firms. When the right opportunity arose, I knew I was ready. In 2002 I assumed the presidency of Spelman College, a wonderful role I never, *ever* imagined while in college or graduate school or even as a tenured professor.

I would not be president of this or any institution if someone had not said to me, when I was a restless professor, “You should think about being a dean.” All of our institutions have members of underrepresented groups who are restless and ready for a new challenge, faculty who reveal their administrative talent through effective leadership of campus committees or departmental assignments. If we want to increase the



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pipeline to the presidency, we need to be intentional in seeking out such campus talent, encouraging leadership development, and offering the chance to pursue administrative roles on a term-limited basis. If the match is not good, the faculty member has the opportunity to make a graceful exit back to his or her role as professor. When the match is good, everyone wins.

While not every successful college president comes from the ranks of the professoriate, it is a tremendous advantage to know and understand the complexities of academic culture as an insider. Actively building the diverse talent pool within the classroom and then intentionally creating opportunities for leadership outside it is one effective way that sitting presidents can help build a broader pipeline to the presidency. ■

Notes:

1. Provasnik, S. & Shafer, L. L. (2004). *Historically black colleges and universities, 1976 to 2001* (NCES 2004-062). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
2. Thurgood, L., Golladay, M. J., & Hill, S. T. (2006). *U.S. doctorates in the 20th century*. Arlington, VA: National Science Foundation.
3. The Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities. *HACU 101*. Retrieved from http://www.hacu.net/hacu/HACU_101_EN.asp?SnID=276713774.