

# LOOKING BACK

A Review of the ACE Fellows Program

# LOOKING FORWARD

**ACE**<sup>®</sup> American  
Council on  
Education<sup>®</sup>  
*Leadership and Advocacy*

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## **Looking Back and Looking Forward: A Review of the ACE Fellows Program**

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Fulfilling higher education's twenty-first century mission depends upon a visionary, bold, and diverse global community of institutional leaders. ACE Leadership serves individuals and institutions that are eager to seize opportunity and embrace the challenge of serving and leading complex institutions. Through a distinctive suite of programs and services, ACE Leadership shares knowledge and insights with participants from all sectors, empowering higher education leaders, institutions, and stakeholders to anticipate critical leadership issues and imperatives.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Historically, leadership development in higher education has been seen as an individual endeavor, typically exercised through positionality and progressing to senior levels in the organization. The scholarship and practice of leadership in higher education, however, is evolving. We at the American Council on Education (ACE) are in the process of rethinking this entrenched approach to higher education leadership development.

In a positional approach to leadership, individuals develop and utilize knowledge and skills that address technical challenges specific for a given rank. Today's landscape, however, requires leaders who are adept at navigating not only problems with conventional solutions, but also the demographic, economic, and cultural transitions taking place. These qualitatively different issues and their subsequent influences on higher education present adaptive challenges that do not have clear solutions. Given the undue burden of expecting an individual to possess the comprehensive expertise required to tackle technical and adaptive challenges, leadership and leadership development needs to be an inclusive proposition whereby individuals operate from a positional *and* collective approach that benefits the individual, institutions, *and* the enterprise.

The following report explores this proposition through the sharing of select findings from our comprehensive review of the ACE Fellows Program, one of the longest-running higher education leadership development programs in the United States. Our review involved three national surveys, focus groups, and interviews of Program alumni. In introducing perennial and emerging leadership and leadership development challenges as opportunities, we came to understand that the charge for higher education leadership development programs, especially for ACE Leadership, is to invest in leadership that intersects individuals with their institution and ultimately the higher education enterprise at large. This includes leadership that is exercised by diverse individuals and teams within a multi-sector approach that promotes internal succession planning and the strategic deployment of human resources.

**The Fellows Program has identified and prepared aspiring senior leaders for over 50 years.** Its distinctive and intensive nominator-driven, cohort-based mentorship model delivers on its commitment to develop knowledge and skills for aspiring senior leaders in higher education by facilitating breadth of opportunity and perspective. Fellows gain an understanding of institution types, roles within an institution, and institutional politics and decision making. This squares with the Program's aim to create learning opportunities that impart knowledge about, and appreciation for, the diversity and intensity of issues that arise at the highest levels within institutions. When Fellows immerse themselves in the day-to-day leadership of colleges and universities, they witness a multitude of perspectives, solutions, and leadership styles that, if internalized, can serve as a baseline for evaluating and appreciating their own leadership capacity. Additionally, this experience can move them

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Leadership development should benefit the individual, the institution, and the enterprise of higher education.
- The enterprise should promote internal succession planning and the strategic deployment of human resources.
- Leadership development work should include diverse individuals and institutions.
- Higher education institutions must invest in individual and team leadership development.

## KEY FINDINGS

- Over 90 percent of Fellows, mentors, and nominators surveyed reported that the Program's reputation is either outstanding or good.
- Over 92 percent of Fellows, mentors, and nominators would recommend the Program to aspiring senior leaders.
- Fellows, mentors, and nominators alike ranked "one-on-one conversations with mentors" as the most significant aspect of the placement experience that prepared Fellows for senior leadership positions.
- 95 percent of Fellows agreed that the Program's placement selection process resulted in a placement tailored to their learning goals.
- 98 percent of Fellows agreed that Program participation prepared them for a senior leadership position.
- Over 85 percent of Fellows and nominators agreed that the placement experience resulted in skills and knowledge that benefited the nominating institution upon the Fellows' return.
- Over 85 percent of mentors and nominators agreed that the Program is worth the cost.

beyond the unique context and culture of their institution to understand the enterprise and its various internal and external functions more holistically.

**Fellows Program mentors and nominators overwhelmingly consider the Program a worthy investment.** The underlying value for participating institutions stems from the need to invest in professionals with demonstrated leadership potential who are committed to shaping the effectiveness and future direction of institutions and the field at large. This investment is further fueled by the application and continued development of skills upon the Fellows' return to their home institution. A strong transition back to the home institution is facilitated by open communication and clear expectations, but it can be punctuated by uncertainty and dissatisfaction if there are changes in institutional leadership or if there is no clear plan for making use of the Fellow's new skills and expertise.

**Dilemmas underpinning the value derived from the ACE Fellows Program present opportunities for leadership development programs.** One dilemma that surfaced from our review was how best to manage the variability inherent in an extended individualized approach to leadership development. While intentional and integrated pedagogy that sets programmatic expectations for all stakeholders needs to be ensured, programs also need to be able to accommodate shifts in institutions' ability to support aspiring leaders alongside individual constraints that could preclude both from optimal participation. Another central dilemma was how leadership is defined and who leads. Scholarship and

conventional wisdom tell us that professionals up and down the line must have the leadership skills and expert knowledge necessary to flex to any challenge. Nevertheless, leadership development programs tend to be designed around the very real hierarchies that exist on college and university campuses.

Our self-study of the ACE Fellows Program has reinforced that the needs of contemporary institutions require diverse leadership development offerings. At ACE, given the diversity of our member institutions, we have appealed and will continue to appeal to those who seek to speak the language of twenty-first century leadership—leadership that is exercised by individuals and teams with a recognition that the multi-sector approach to higher education leadership is incredibly powerful and necessary. As the jewel in the crown of ACE Leadership, the Fellows Program will continue to evolve and lead the way for our own work and the work of others in the leadership development arena.

# INTRODUCTION

In a shifting and increasingly complex landscape, it is imperative that the higher education enterprise invest in its current and future leaders—professionals who will shape an evolving industry that is at once timeless and contemporary in its utility, and embattled yet emboldened to make good on the promise of education for a healthy, democratic citizenry. The enterprise needs leaders who are adept at navigating the demographic, economic, and cultural transitions taking place, all of which have significant implications for how individuals understand their institution's mission, market, and management (McGee 2015).

Historically, leadership development in higher education has been seen as an individual endeavor, typically exercised through positionality and progressing to senior levels in the organization. It has been neither collaborative nor pervasive. Leadership solely as an individual endeavor needs to change. The adaptive challenges leaders face today require a collective approach that combines individual talents and expertise into a cohesive common effort. Unlike technical challenges, defined by problems with known remedies, adaptive challenges do not have conventional or clear solutions (Lane, Finsel, and Owens 2015).

Leaders will have to ensure that education meets students where they are and takes them to where they need to be to live satisfying and productive lives. They will work under increased and ongoing scrutiny by constituents, accreditors, and governments. Leaders will have to develop sustainable business models that respond to the trying financial environment of declining government support, rising income inequality, and rising costs of operations. They will need to make sense of an extraordinary amount of data, value many different perspectives, and understand how to translate information into action. Finally, they will have to work together across sectors, regions, and ranks to ensure the variety in mission, scope, and delivery that can serve the needs of individuals, communities, and employers.

Because no individual can alone develop the comprehensive expertise that is required in these and other situations that surface, higher education needs leaders across the ranks who can build and function in teams, valuing a variety of perspectives and approaches. In order to thrive, these various leaders will need to have a stronger capacity to learn and adapt to the many changes occurring inside higher education and in the broader societal context. This includes having the knowledge, insight, skills, and wisdom to take informed, thoughtful, and decisive action. At best, such action will promote learning; support students, faculty, and staff; and meet the needs of surrounding communities. Leadership becomes an inclusive proposition where value is derived from leaders working within *and* across their positions to address both technical and adaptive challenges facing higher education today.

With the ground underneath them and the surrounding backdrop changing constantly, effective higher education leaders are like yoga masters—able to find their center and maintain their balance. Having this focus means articulating a clear institutional mission that maintains relevance across time and context. It means connecting with and serving their communities; finding strength in relationships with partners and collectives with shared vision, purpose, and resources; and taking pride in collective accomplishments. It means developing curricula that promote complex problem solving and foster emotional intelligence in order to serve both lifelong learning and employability. Finally, it means understanding and embracing the different leadership actions and philosophies needed to solve different problems;

accomplish different tasks; and fulfill different initiatives, from curriculum revision to student protests and from fundraising to accreditation.

It is often said that challenges make individuals stronger and that urgency prompts innovation. The challenges facing higher education provide an opportunity for transformations that will help more students learn; provide meaningful work for faculty, staff, and administrators; and nurture communities. More specifically, these challenges could compel us as an enterprise to break down the siloes of discipline or function so that leadership reflects the complexity of how knowledge is created, products are designed, and services are rendered. They could promote a shared sense of purpose among institutions in a region regardless of sector, mission, or ranking so that communities feel the full benefit of their expertise to solve important problems.

Challenges reinvigorate the commitment to honoring diverse perspectives and ensuring that all voices are heard so that we are inclusive and affirming rather than divisive and suspicious. They lead us to promote opportunities for leadership and varied pathways to achieve them—opportunities that do not always require individuals to leave their institutions, taking essential institutional knowledge and experience with them; and pathways that do not always require a tenured faculty appointment or a progression through key positions such as department chair, dean, and provost. It follows that higher education leadership development must appeal to individuals at many levels and prepare them not only to move up, but also to lead from where they are; to hold positions of authority; and to embrace and enact shared responsibility for navigating in a changing landscape.

## **ABOUT THIS REPORT**

The aim of this report is to promote dialogue on—and ultimately, action for—a collective investment in the future of college and university leadership. We do this by sharing select findings from our review of the American Council on Education’s (ACE) Fellows Program, one of the longest-running higher education leadership development programs in the United States.

We began our review of the Program around its 50th anniversary in an effort to examine its evolution and contributions to the field. Along the way, through speaking with both Program stakeholders and leadership scholars—as well as revisiting programmatic efforts within ACE—we found ourselves uncovering a larger imperative as it relates to preparing higher education leaders. This is a more compelling and complicated task. Throughout the endeavor, we have been reminded of the dangers of holding onto traditional approaches to leadership development that could result in eventual disservice to the enterprise. We have been engaged in fine tuning not only the ACE Fellows Program, but also our suite of established leadership development offerings, in order to preserve and build their appeal to forward-thinking individuals and institutions.

As such, this report serves several purposes—first, to share what we learned from our review of the Fellows Program; second, to initiate dialogue around challenges and opportunities facing leadership development programs; and third, to underscore perspectival shifts around investments in current and aspiring higher education leaders.

In our goal of self-study, we asked the following questions:

- How do program stakeholders characterize the national reputation of the ACE Fellows Program?
- How does the ACE Fellows Program contribute to Fellows' professional growth and career success?
- What are the primary benefits of the ACE Fellows Program as experienced by mentors and nominators?
- What are the barriers to nominating and hosting, and how can those be overcome?

Although our review of the Program has informed this opportunity to step back and take stock of where we are, we emphasize that this is not an evaluation of the Program or a research report, *per se*. It is a collection of themes that emerged from stakeholder perceptions gathered during our review of the Program that culminate in reflections we have chosen to share with the higher education community. In doing so, we underscore Fellows' voices while situating them within the fellowship experience and the field. We further draw from the perspectives of mentors and nominators as key stakeholders who have a vested interest in this and other leadership development programs.

As previously mentioned, findings presented in this report derive from data collected for our 2014–15 review of the Fellows Program, the aim of which was to ensure the Program's vitality and continuous improvement. Data collected for the review included the following:

- Three respective surveys to Fellows alumni (409 responses), mentors (161 responses), and nominators (93 responses)
- Focus groups with Fellows and the Program's presidential advisors
- Interviews with Program mentors and nominators
- Interviews with five of the Program's past directors

Findings in this report are drawn from these survey data (see Appendix on p. 26 for respondent profile data), as well as from interviews with 21 mentors and nominators; all other data collected for the review are being used for internal programming purposes.

## **ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT**

The report begins with an overview of the ACE Fellows Program. We then present select findings, organized by themes related to significant questions guiding the Program's comprehensive review that speak to its reputation and perceived value for individuals and institutions. The findings, situated within the shifting higher education landscape, suggest that leadership development requires an investment that honors shared leadership from whatever space one occupies within an institution. With this in mind, we explore in our final two sections implications for higher education leadership development programming—including the Fellows Program and ACE's suite of leadership development programs—in our effort to serve the higher education enterprise and its current and future leadership.

# ACE FELLOWS PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Founded in 1965, the ACE Fellows Program is an experiential leadership development cohort program for those who aspire to senior-level leadership and are committed to shaping the effectiveness and future direction of higher education. The model is one of an intensive, experiential method of learning. Figure 1 illustrates the primary components of the ACE Fellows Program: the placement experience, retreats, campus visits, and networking.

**FIGURE 1**

## CURRICULAR COMPONENTS



The first step in the Program's selection process is the nomination of prospective Fellows by an officer of their respective college or university, typically the president. Candidates go through a rigorous review that consists of an application and interview process. If selected, Fellows identify potential "host" institutions and mentors best positioned to advance the Fellows' leadership capacity and learning goals. College and university senior leaders subsequently mentor visiting Fellows placed at their institution for a year-long, semester-long, or periodic placement.

Fellows also develop and sign a learning contract—a document created with input from respective nominators and mentors—that maps out the Fellows' plans for the year, reflecting the strengths and ongoing activities of their host institution during their Program tenure. During the course of the Fellow's placement at a host institution—or occasionally the Fellow's nominating or home institution<sup>1</sup>—the Fellow defines and completes an agreed upon project (typically designed to serve the nominating institution, but could also be involved with host institution-related projects), participates in retreats with his or her cohort, and has the option to visit other college and university campuses.

The opportunities for networking and engagement with col-

## PARTICIPATING STAKEHOLDERS

Prospective **Fellows** are put forth by a **nominator**, most often the college/university president of the individual's home institution, for a period of intense study with a **mentor(s)**, typically another college/university president and/or cabinet-level leader, and a **cohort** they meet with periodically throughout their fellowship.

<sup>1</sup> "Nominating institution" and "home institution" are used interchangeably throughout this report.

leagues, past presidents, experts in the field, and leaders from other institutions are a hallmark of the Program, embedded in the curriculum through the cohort experience, retreats, and campus visits, and continued through the Program's alumni group. This group, the Council of Fellows, is an autonomous network established in the mid-1980s and managed by Program alumni. This network provides an ongoing source of shared expertise and support for alumni as they navigate challenges facing their institutions and strive to move the enterprise forward.

## PROGRAM COSTS

- Program fee: \$18,000\*
- Professional development budget: \$8,000\*
- Salary and benefits\*\*
- Other (office space and equipment, administrative support)

\* Home/host institution obligation varies by placement type; financial aid opportunities exist to defray Program costs.

\*\* Salary and benefits are paid by the nominating institution.

## PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

Since its inception, almost 1,900 Fellows have participated in the Program (see Table 1 for historical demographic information). Fellows are nominated from the ranks of faculty, academic affairs leadership, campus or system leadership, and other executive campus positions and serve in doctoral, master's, baccalaureate, and associate-degree granting public and private institutions.

ACE's commitment to recruit diverse individuals into the Program is further reflected in the number of minority and women participants. Representation, most notably in its early years, was consistent with demographic trends in higher education leadership in that participants were largely white males (Smith and Ross 2005). Though the Program has advanced in both its gender and racial/ethnic minority representation, it will continue to recruit diverse individuals into the fellowship in addition to all sectors of higher education.

**TABLE 1**  
ACE FELLOWS HISTORICAL DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

	SINCE INCEPTION [1965–66 to 2015–16]	LAST DECADE [2005–06 to 2015–16]	50TH COHORT [2015–16]
<b>Program Participants</b>	<b>1,888</b>	<b>448</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Gender<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>N=1,877</b>	<b>N=445</b>	<b>N=41</b>
Women	41%	51%	59%
Men	59%	49%	41%
<b>Race/Ethnicity<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>N=1,847</b>	<b>N=441</b>	<b>N=41</b>
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1%	1%	2%
Asian or Asian American	3%	6%	7%
Black or African American	19%	20%	20%
Hispanic or Latino/a	6%	11%	12%
White	70%	58%	59%
Other <sup>3</sup>	1%	4%	0%

Note: Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding and/or missing data.

<sup>1</sup> Gender totals reflect the number of participants for which the Program has such data.

<sup>2</sup> Race/ethnicity totals reflect the number of participants for which the Program has such data.

<sup>3</sup> Denotes multiple race and other.

## WHAT WE KNOW

This section presents findings organized by themes related to select questions guiding the Program's comprehensive review. After a section summary, we first frame the findings around the Program's reputation before unpacking its perceived value for both individuals and institutions. Given the dynamic relationship between Program strengths and limitations, we embed challenges where appropriate to underscore nuanced perspectives that inform subsequent sections. We round out the findings section with what we believe are salient issues for the Program and the field to consider in light of our interpretation of the data. The report concludes with reflections on some of these issues as perennial and emerging challenges to leadership development and consequent opportunities for ACE's leadership development programs—including the Fellows Program—and the enterprise.

### SUMMARY

The Fellows Program has for over 50 years identified and prepared aspiring leaders. Its distinctive and intensive cohort-based mentorship model delivers on its commitment to develop knowledge and skills for aspiring senior leaders in higher education by facilitating breadth of opportunity and perspective. During their fellowship, Fellows report having gained an understanding of institution types, roles within an institution, and institutional politics and decision making. This squares with the Program's aim to create learning opportunities that impart knowledge about, and appreciation for, the diversity and intensity of issues that arise at the highest levels within institutions. When Fellows immerse themselves in the day-to-day leadership of colleges and universities, they witness a multitude of perspectives, solutions, and leadership styles that, if internalized, can serve as a baseline for evaluating and appreciating their own leadership capacity in addition to understanding how seemingly disparate pieces fit together.

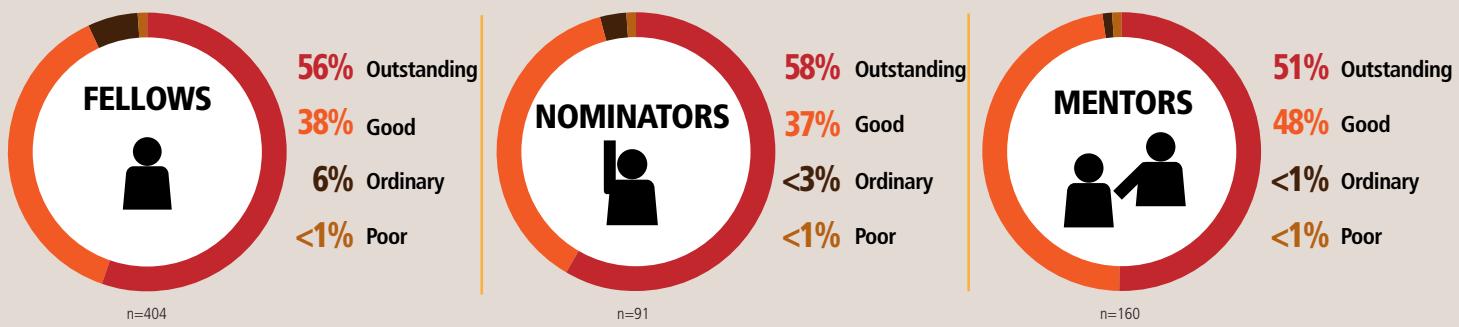
Despite the resource-intensive investment Program participation requires, mentors and nominators consider the Program a worthy investment. The underlying value for participating institutions stems from the need to invest in professionals with demonstrated leadership potential who are committed to shaping the effectiveness and future direction of institutions and the field at large. This investment is further fueled by the application and continued development of skills upon the Fellows' return to their home institutions. A strong transition back to the home institution is facilitated by open communication and clear expectations, but it can be punctuated by uncertainty and dissatisfaction if there are changes in institutional leadership or if no clear plan exists for making use of the Fellow's new skills and expertise. It is incumbent upon institutions and Program staff first to identify and select qualified candidates who are committed to shaping the effectiveness and future direction of higher education and, as the fellowship year proceeds, to plan for how both the individual and the nominating institution can maximize the return on this investment.

## THE ACE FELLOWS PROGRAM AS THE GOLD STANDARD

The ACE Fellows Program is a highly regarded higher education leadership development program known for its longstanding reputation as a developer of senior leaders. The majority of Fellows, mentors, and nominators (over 90 percent) indicated that the Program's reputation is either outstanding or good. Fifty-six percent of Fellows found the Program outstanding, while 58 and 51 percent of nominators and mentors, respectively, reported the Program's reputation as outstanding (see Figure 2).

**FIGURE 2**

### REPUTATION OF THE FELLOWS PROGRAM AS A LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY FOR CURRENT AND ASPIRING SENIOR LEADERS



*Note: Percentages have been rounded.*

Accounts from Program alumni reinforce this sense of the Program's reputation. One Fellow reported that its strength is “recognition as the premier leadership program in higher education.” Another expanded on this sentiment: “I can think of no other administrative process or program that encourages [aspiring] leaders to spend such time examining institutions, structures, people, and themselves, all with a goal toward attaining new leadership skills.” Similarly, a recent nominator attributed Program participation to its reputation as the gold standard:

We [prospective Fellow and nominator] both felt the ACE fellowship was the gold standard.... In terms of taking somebody who really has potential for top-level leadership—the notion of getting them into an ACE program is very appealing because they're going to get quality time at a quality institution, going to be put into interesting and compelling positions, and learn a lot.

The extent to which alumni would recommend the Program further speaks to its reputation. Figure 3 shows that 95 percent of Fellows would recommend the Program to aspiring senior leaders. Similarly, over 90 percent of nominators and mentors would recommend the Program as a leadership development program to junior colleagues pursuing senior leadership positions (see Figure 3).

The Program’s “gold standard” characterization is supported by its perpetual currency in the field of higher education as a quality leadership development program that delivers. Its history of producing Fellows with enhanced knowledge of higher education issues and leadership skills began with its first cohort in 1965. As one mentor shared, “The ACE Fellows Program has been for 50 years the premier such program in the nation.”

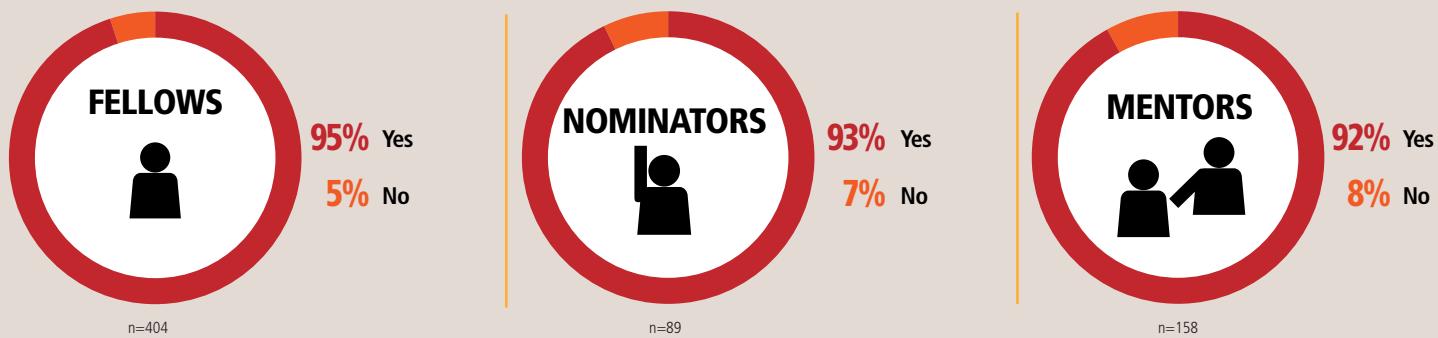
One Fellow from the inaugural cohort commented on the Program as a seal of administrative preparation or approval:

In 1965–66, as a first-of-its-kind, the stature of each Fellow was elevated. There was a curiosity about who we were, what we learned, if the methodology was transferable. We became a cadre of individuals that institutions sought, which was an institutional endorsement that it is possible to educate and train subsequent generations of leadership.

Another credited the Program's currency to alumni contributions to the field: "The ACE Fellows Program has provided outstanding, ethical, service-oriented leaders to higher education for decades. I am proud to be part of this living tradition of excellence."

**FIGURE 3**

**WOULD RECOMMEND FELLOWS PROGRAM TO COLLEAGUES PURSUING SENIOR LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION**



*Note: Percentages have been rounded.*

Interest in the Program in its early years can be partially attributed to an innovative idea taking root amidst uncertain times—that cadres of individuals could be trained in higher education leadership. ACE had established what was then called the Academic Administration Internship Program to identify and groom groups of aspiring leaders during a time of civil unrest, coupled with a higher education landscape that was dominated by homogeneity and on the verge of exponential growth. It heeded a market demanding attention, thus serving a critical role for leadership development prior to the creation of higher education doctoral and other programs.

While today's climate differs from yesteryear's, the need to identify and prepare adept leaders endures. The Fellows Program has been sustained over the past five decades due to the perception that it is accomplishing this task. Although other organizations have adopted parts of its structure (Smith and Ross 2005), it is still the only national higher education leadership development program with the option for a year-long experiential component; likewise, few institutions have leadership development or "grow your own" programs. (See Chibucos and Green 1989; Smith and Ross 2005 for additional reading on the Program.)

## PROGRAM VALUE: INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE

The Fellows Program delivers on its commitment to impart knowledge and skills to aspiring higher education leaders. Fellows overwhelmingly agree (98 percent) that Program participation prepared them for senior leadership positions (see Figure 4).

The fellowship, one Fellow responded, provided “depth and breadth of opportunity to develop as a leader. I cannot say enough how extraordinarily beneficial it was to me on so many levels.”

Similarly, a mentor/nominator<sup>2</sup> shared that the overall value manifests in Fellows “[coming] back uniformly as more self-confident professionals and more able to do advanced-level tasks than they would have had they not gone on the fellowship. That’s really a powerful thing.”

Preparedness is facilitated by curricular components that create a comprehensive experiential leadership development opportunity designed for learning, reflection, and engagement. Fellows, nominators, and mentors alike agree that the Program’s structure serves as scaffolding designed to promote an impactful experience for those exploring senior leadership roles in higher education. One longstanding nominator summed it up this way:

[Fellows] have direct exposure to leaders in action . . . provided by the onsite placement at a host campus. Whatever the placement is—whether it is the full year or a semester or periodic visit—[Fellows] have direct exposure to what leaders are doing. The second [component] is the opportunity to listen to important trends and to what experts have to say through the different retreats and workshops. . . . Third, [Fellows] interact with others who are learning in the process and also have experience in the field of higher education. . . . Fourth, in the process [Fellows] get to know a lot of people . . . and experts.

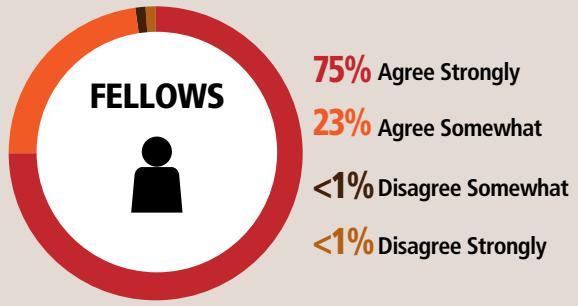
### EXPOSURE TO LEADERS IN ACTION

A hallmark of the Program is mentorship by senior leaders at another institution. Once selected, many Fellows found the placement experience to be the centerpiece of the Program, given the opportunity to work closely with senior leadership. When asked to rank the top three aspects of the placement experience that best prepared Fellows for senior leadership positions, Fellows, mentors, and nominators all ranked “one-on-one conversations with mentors” as the most significant aspect.

Specifically, one Fellow shared, “the ability to work closely with a mentor on the [h]ost campus . . . was a priceless opportunity that helped me grow in ways that I did not think would be possible.” For another, the value translated simply to “see[ing] the good, bad, and ugly of senior administrative leadership.” As

FIGURE 4

#### FELLOWS PROGRAM PREPARED ME FOR SENIOR LEADERSHIP POSITIONS



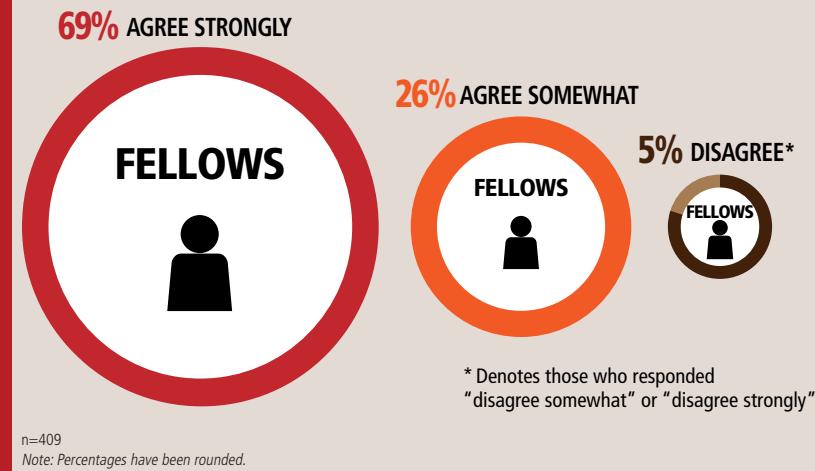
*Note: Percentages have been rounded.*

<sup>2</sup> Mentor/nominator denotes those who have served as both a mentor and a nominator. If mentor is listed first, the participant was interviewed as a mentor; if nominator is listed first, the participant was interviewed as a nominator.

## ALIGNMENT OF PLACEMENT SELECTION PROCESS AND LEARNING GOALS

The individualized nature of the program allows Fellows to craft a placement experience tailored to their professional development goals. The placement process, informed by the learning contract, sets the stage for personalized experiential learning whereby Fellows set their own priorities for placement selection.

**FIGURE 5**  
FELLOWS PROGRAM'S PLACEMENT SELECTION PROCESS RESULTED IN A PLACEMENT TAILORED TO MY LEARNING GOALS



described, Fellows learn firsthand of the politics of higher education leadership and how leaders solve issues and challenges within a given context. According to one Fellow:

[I] learned, [through] shadowing the president, his challenges with the faculty and his own team. The culture was very different [from] what I was used to. It was refreshing to see that we all experience the same problems and issues. But the tactics and strategies to deal with the political aspects of the office of the president were fascinating and revealing of the different practical options available.

Value is expressly derived from exposure to leaders on campuses where Fellows do not have a stake in the outcome of its affairs. One Fellow wrote that the value of the placement experience was “seeing the workings of the senior academic administration of a campus where I had no ongoing role, no history, no axe to grind.” For another Fellow, this opportunity was the most effective aspect of the Program:

The ACE Fellows Program gave me an opportunity to grow in ways that I could not imagine possible within my home institution. The Program allowed the freedom to explore and study higher education in a way I could not while doing my full-time job.

Similarly, one nominator shared:

We could provide opportunities within the college for each of them to experience the more global aspects of what it means to be a leader in a community college setting, [but] it is very, very difficult to experience the kind of growth you need on your own home turf.

It is important to note that many mentors viewed the mentor-mentee relationship as one of reciprocity. For some, mentoring a Fellow was a chance for the host institution to learn from the observations of others external to the institution. As one mentor/nominator shared:

It's a chance to see how someone else thinks, to hear how that person has been viewing problems of the same type (e.g., graduation or retention rates or issues involving diversity or issues involving the budget). The person has expertise in that area, and it is interesting to see how that area of expertise

can fit with what happens on the campus of the receiving institution. . . . You’re getting an infusion of freshness, which is something I think more institutions really need.

For others, the Program has both professional and personal significance. As one mentor/nominator stated, “[the Program] has given me opportunities to meet a remarkable array of talented women and men who have become, over the years, personal and professional friends.” This gratitude of being part of a Fellow’s life and career training was a common response, captured by another long-serving mentor who shared, “I am better—as a person and as a leader—as a result of my mentees for knowing those individuals really well.”

Immersion with senior leaders at another institution is a powerful learning tool, providing some Fellows with a neutral space that engendered open and honest communication, reflection, and insight that otherwise can be hard to come by.

## ORIENTATION TO INSTITUTION-WIDE ISSUES

A corollary to connection with administrative leadership is an entrée into the complex reality of managing an institution. Many Fellows enter the Program from specialty areas with limited institution-wide exposure or responsibilities. It has been observed that Fellows often lack institutional perspective given the nature of their professional trajectory and experience, which may reinforce siloed thinking and behavior. As observed by one longstanding mentor/nominator:

Both the people I sent and the people I worked with . . . matured professionally, noticeably, over the course of the year. They were entirely broader. They were much more engaged in a broader array of issues. They learned how to make connections among issues that even if they knew they were there, they didn’t necessarily always see the connectivity of everything to everything else.

Likewise, Fellows recognized the value of broad engagement. As one Fellow wrote in response to the greatest aspect of their placement experience:

Seeing and experiencing a broad view of higher education. Experiencing the cabinet meetings and how they went about solving problems and creating a vision. Visiting other campuses helped me see a wide variety of leadership styles and gave me confidence that I could be a strong leader in higher education. . . . I think developing a broader vision of what can be and how to go about making things happen in relation to the mission of the college.

In tandem with expanding their institutional perspective, Fellows become sensitized to the demands and expectations placed on senior leaders. While insight into these realities for some Fellows validated their desire to continue along the administrative path, for others it culminated in a return to faculty and a desire to serve in that space as a leader having a direct impact on students and colleagues. This is notable because the breadth of learning Fellows gain during their fellowship, as Fellows, nominators, and mentors acknowledged, adds value regardless of their trajectory. If Fellows walk away with a more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of leadership and management issues in higher education, institutions can engage them in powerful ways they might not have been able to before. These findings both inform and reinforce the Program’s call for leaders at all levels of the organization.

## **EXPERT ANALYSIS OF TOPICS**

In addition to their placement, Fellows valued complementary exposure to expert analysis of seminal and “hot topics” in higher education at retreats. When asked what they liked most about the retreats, access to leading experts and exposure to issues in higher education rose to the surface, captured this way by one Fellow:

I liked to hear from national experts on a wide range of highly relevant topics: budgeting, strategic planning, philanthropy and fundraising, athletics, community college relations, presidential responsibilities and experiences, board management, enrollment management, marketing, and tuition price points! I use it all, all the time.

Fellows appreciated the focus on perennial and timely topics, yet stressed the necessity for curricula and mode of delivery that keep pace with the changing higher education landscape and advances in learning science, respectively. Likewise, one long-serving mentor stressed, “the needs today, the pressures on higher-level administrators are quite different than they were 20 years ago. There’s a whole lot to be aware of that didn’t matter as much as it did in the past.”

Although the Program’s core components (highlighted in Figure 1) have changed little over time, the Program’s curriculum and its delivery have evolved throughout its history, usually in tandem with shifts in Program leadership and/or in response to changes in the field. Top of mind for the Program is striking a balance between designing curricula that impart conventional administrative skills and knowledge while preparing leaders for tomorrow.

## **INTERACTION WITH DIVERSE PEER COHORT**

The Program’s cohort structure emerged as another powerful component for Fellows’ learning and development. Fellows generally commented on the impact cohort members had on their learning. As described by one Fellow, a program asset was “interacting with my fellow Fellows, whose knowledge, experience, and sensibilities were critical for my own professional growth.” Similarly, another shared:

The opportunities to interact with other Fellows were also essential to the growth I experienced during the year. I realized later that a great deal of reflection and processing of what I was seeing and learning occurred when I talked to other Fellows during retreats about their experiences and my experiences.

Cohort diversity further bolstered this community of practice or coming together of like-minded higher education professionals. According to observations of one long-serving mentor/nominator:

One of the great things I love about the program is the fact that it is a diverse group of people every year—year in, year out—in terms of race, religious background, institutional type, gender, sexual orientation. If there is a variable in higher education, it is always in every fellowship group. The ability to interact with each other is a really great strength across these . . . differences. Understanding the real impact on people’s lives is really an important part of the learning experience.

Fellows agree and perceive cohort diversity as a major program asset. One Fellow stated that it was “great to be with/work with/learn from other Fellows who represented diversity at its best—gender, ethnicity,

educational background, geographic diversity, work experience diversity, etc.” This diversity, one Fellow stated, “helped round out my understanding of the field as a whole.”

A strong cohort model provides participants with experience working as a team of leaders who share the work with and learn from those around them, increasing their comfort level with and aptitude for collaboration and engagement. Firsthand experience with a diverse cohort can additionally equip Fellows with an applied understanding of cross-institutional and cross-sector collaboration and a unique perspective for advancing institutions’ diversity and equity agendas.

## GROWTH OF PROFESSIONAL NETWORK

Tied to peer cohort interaction, Fellows identified the network they built and have access to as one of the Program’s greatest strengths. Fellows identified the network as a core component for providing support and continuing professional development. As one Fellow shared, “[the Program] creates a network that one will use for a lifetime,” the likes of which fell into the broad categories of the network of Fellows and the broader network of colleagues and advisors Fellows interact with throughout their fellowship.

The Fellows network, one Fellow shared, “[is] a group of peers that I still reach out to for advice.” Similarly, another Fellow commented that the Program’s strength is the “development of a supportive collegial network among other Fellows that an individual can use and draw from for the remainder of their career.”

In the same way, exposure to a broader network representing all walks of academia—current and past institutional leaders, including mentors and nominators; former Fellows; retreat leaders; and others—that, according to one Fellow, “I never would have encountered on my own,” has proven for many as beneficial during the fellowship as it has been post-fellowship. According to another Fellow:

I have to say the [Program’s] strength is the interaction with high quality and diverse people from across the country (and globe), who take the time to work with the Fellows, not only in the program’s seminars, but [also] at national conferences, the host institution, and institutions we visited. This leads to the network of people that former Fellows interact with in subsequent years.

Similar to their cohort of peers, the expansive network the fellowship connects and engages Fellows with provides a web of resources they can tap into as they confront future challenges and opportunities. As the scope and complexity of higher education issues increase, leaders will need to draw not only on their own ranks but also on the wisdom and expertise of those far and wide. Program participation sets the stage for moving beyond traditional assumptions of networking as a means for job advancement to requesting and offering support, expertise, and varied perspectives.

# TRANSITION STRATEGIES

The fellowship as an individualized professional development opportunity rests to some degree on the nature of mentor-mentee and nominator-nominee relationships. The boxes below highlight strategies that mentors and nominators can employ for optimizing the fellowship experience for themselves, their institutions, and their Fellows.



**MENTOR STRATEGIES.** Our findings have established the role of mentoring in the Fellows Program, the value of which is likely to increase for individuals and institutions when mentoring is intentional. A handful of both seasoned and novice mentors spoke at length on how they facilitated a productive relationship or crafted opportunities to create a transformational experience for Fellows. The box below outlines strategies that mentors touched on for engaging Fellows in preparation for and during their placement.



## MENTOR STRATEGIES for Determining Fit and Optimizing Placement Experience

- Conduct on-campus/in-person interview prior to placement.
- Speak with nominating president prior to Fellow's arrival.
- Set expectations early and often.
- Define goals and outcomes up front.
- Establish direct, open, honest, yet confidential communication.
- Regularly schedule face time with Fellow.
- Have Fellow accompany you on trips, commutes, etc.
- Approach the placement as a team effort.
- Capitalize on a Fellow's strengths and fill in gaps in his or her experience.
- Draw Fellow into your executive team.
- Orient executive team and staff to Program prior to Fellow's arrival.

# TRANSITION STRATEGIES

**NOMINATOR STRATEGIES.** Although both Fellows and nominators overwhelmingly agree that the home institution benefited from Fellows' training (see Figure 6), perceptions differed on the extent to which nominators provided additional responsibilities to capitalize on Fellows' newly gained knowledge and skills upon return to their home campus. Seventy percent of Fellows agreed that nominators provided additional responsibilities, while 86 percent of nominators agreed. Similarly, 30 percent of Fellows disagreed, compared to only 13 percent for nominators.

These findings, coupled with accounts from Fellows, suggest that reintegration to the home institution created tension for some individuals. Of the Fellows who highlighted challenges in the transition back to their home institution, reintegration was the most often cited challenge. Reasons for this varied and included insufficient opportunities for advancement, mismatch between skills and position, and leadership turnover. Some acknowledged it was not until after their first post-fellowship year before they assumed a new position or were given additional responsibilities that utilized their acquired knowledge and skills.

While the Program provides stakeholders with guidelines for Fellows' return to their home institution, the box below outlines strategies nominators identified to assist with this transition, presumably to derive the most value out of their investment as possible.

## TRANSITION OUT



### NOMINATOR STRATEGIES for Optimizing Placement Experience and Return to Home Institution

- Communicate with Fellow regularly during placement at host institution.
- Have Fellow conduct check-ins with colleagues on home campus to share experience and/or plan return to institution.
- Plan with Fellow in advance his or her transition to home institution.
- Keep cabinet and other relevant staff comprised of Fellow's experience and return to home institution.
- Set expectations early and revisit if necessary.
- Engage with mentor throughout Fellow's placement or upon his or her return to keep interests of both institutions top of mind.

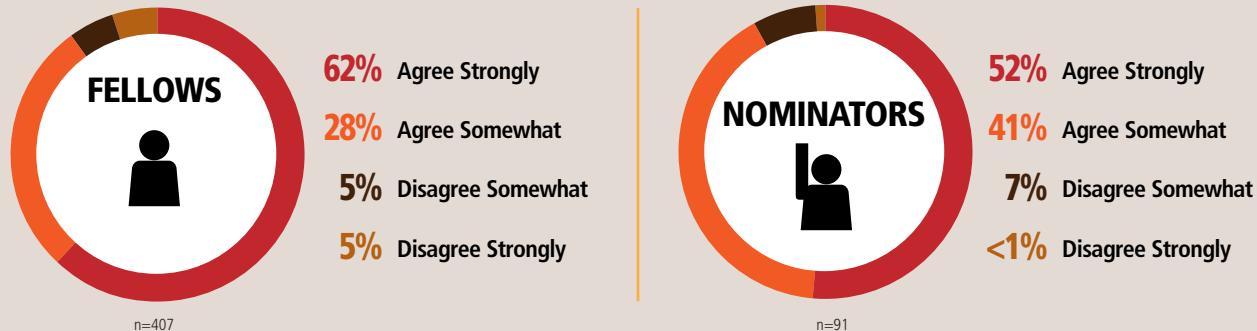
## PROGRAM VALUE: INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

As illustrated above, the Program's design presents opportunities for Fellows to develop institution-level perspectives, which are essential to the growth and development of aspiring senior leaders who may have worked in narrow silos. Such perspective taking also has potential to move Fellows beyond the unique context and culture of their institution to understand the enterprise and its various internal and external functions more holistically.

Perceptions of Fellows and nominators suggest that the application and continued development of such knowledge and skills upon the Fellows' return to their home institution is relatively consistent. Over 85 percent of Fellows and nominators indicated that the placement experience resulted in skills and knowledge that benefited the nominating institution upon the Fellows' return (see Figure 6).

**FIGURE 6**

### PLACEMENT EXPERIENCE PROVIDED SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE THAT BENEFITED NOMINATING INSTITUTION



*Note: Percentages have been rounded.*

Perhaps the most immediately applicable aspect of the Program is its potential to broaden one's thinking, an asset for any position within an institution. Similar to Fellows offering an "infusion of freshness" to host institutions, they can serve the same function upon returning to their home institution. As one nominator explained:

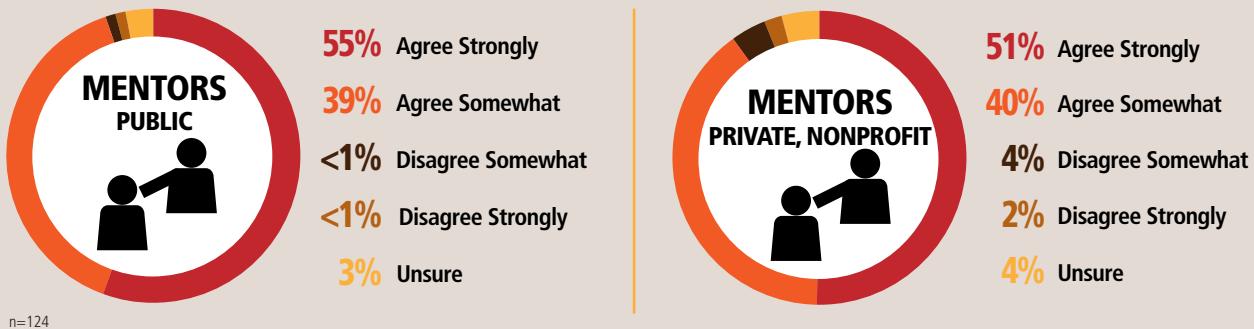
[The Program] does give a talented person a chance to see another view of seeing the world, another way of attacking problems, another way of envisioning the possibilities. That adds to the value that person brings to the table when that person goes back to the sending institution. One of the challenges in higher education is that people often become so provincial that they tend to think their way is the only way.

## RETURN ON INVESTMENT

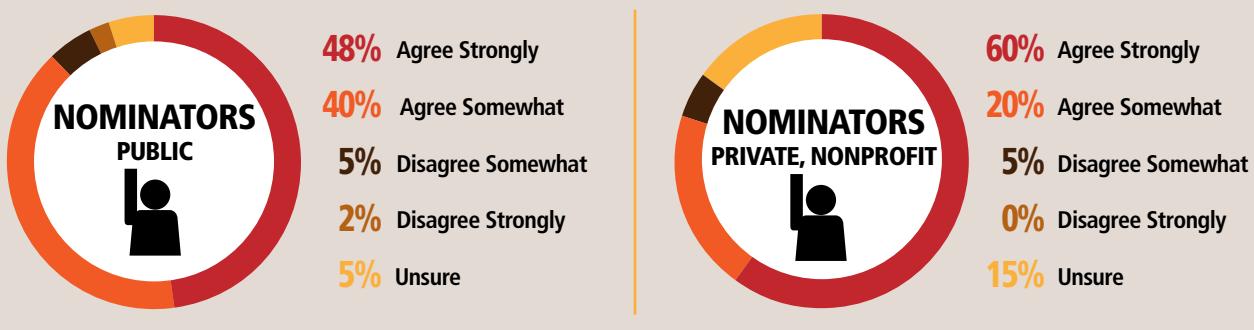
Despite its resource-intensive obligation, participating institutions perceive the Program as a worthwhile investment. Mentors and nominators overwhelmingly agree that the value of the Program is worth the cost absorbed by host and nominating institutions, with over 90 percent agreement for mentors and over 85 percent agreement for nominators. Public institutions were more likely than private ones to agree with the statement, a finding perhaps explained by the fact that participating private institutions are mostly small to medium-sized institutions while participating public institutions tend to be larger and possibly better equipped to absorb Program costs (see Figure 7).

**FIGURE 7**

### THE VALUE OF THE FELLOWS PROGRAM FOR ADVANCING FELLOWS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IS WORTH THE COST ABSORBED BY THE HOST INSTITUTION



### THE VALUE OF THE FELLOWS PROGRAM FOR ADVANCING FELLOWS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IS WORTH THE COST ABSORBED BY THE NOMINATING INSTITUTION



*Note: Percentages have been rounded.*

For nominators and mentors who identified cost as a challenge, a handful correspondingly commented on the Program's value. One mentor expressed, "while the value of the program is excellent, the cost is difficult for many institutions." When asked to recall the institutional resources for hosting a Fellow, one mentor who has been mentoring since the mid-1990s responded, "there are costs associated with [the Program], but I tended to think of them more as investments than expenditures only."

While cost is a factor for institutions weighing whether or not to participate in such a program, it might be a secondary consideration for certain institutions. Nominators, for example, reported staffing as a

challenge for community colleges and small institutions. One community college nominator shared that because “the bench is not real deep, it’s harder for [community] colleges to spare somebody for a year.” For some mentors, on the other hand, the time needed to effectively mentor was their primary resource challenge. This included carving out time for regular meetings with Fellows as well as adequate time to familiarize them with context and background information necessary to understand institutional culture or the dynamics of a given decision or situation.

Perceptions largely indicate that institutions can overcome these resource challenges in light of the perceived value-add of the returning Fellow for the home institution or the field. What we are beginning to see is evidence of trade-offs that institutions make to participate in reputable resource-intensive leadership development programs.

Identifying prospective talent goes hand-in-hand with weighing investments in talent management to advance higher education leadership, the importance of which cannot be understated. When asked if the Program is worth the cost, one nominator responded, “Yeah! For the right people. It is an intensive investment of time and money, but for the right people, certainly.” Another nominator/mentor responded, similarly, “that’s an awful lot of resources and an extraordinary opportunity that you want to make sure you’re focusing on those who are most likely to then move forward into leadership.”

Common characteristics of potential Fellows believed by mentors and nominators to complement the objectives of the Program included, but were not limited to, candidates who 1) believe in the public good, 2) have demonstrated leadership potential, 3) are authentic, and 4) are highly engaged and committed (see Table 2 for illustrative excerpts). It is important to note that these interpretations are time- and program-specific. As higher education leadership adjusts to the shifting higher education landscape, so too might these characteristics or traditionally held attributes of leadership.

**TABLE 2**  
**SELECT CHARACTERISTICS OF POTENTIAL FELLOWS**

CHARACTERISTIC	IN THE WORDS OF NOMINATORS AND MENTORS
<b>Believes in greater public good</b>	“The Fellow has to be the kind of person who . . . wants to be a higher-level administrator for the right reasons. Once in a while, I certainly had one . . . who wanted to be in higher-level positions for the perks and prestige and so forth. [S/he is] not really committed to making things work better. To me, that’s what an administrator is all about, about making things work better.”
<b>Demonstrated capacity</b>	“When I have nominated and accepted people, it was with the understanding that [they] have leadership potential and have already shown some talent and . . . are interested in understanding more about other levels of leadership at different types of institutions.”
<b>Authenticity</b>	“The interaction with the Fellow has to do with the Fellow him/herself as well. When there is sincere, real desire to improve, it is a true joy [to work with and mentor a Fellow].”
<b>Highly engaged and committed</b>	“The Fellow has to be a self-starter and come with [his/her] own personal goals and learning objectives and find a way to match those quickly with institutional needs and capacity.”

## **SERVICE TO THE ENTERPRISE**

A principal aspect of institutional investment is the lens through which it is viewed by mentors and nominators. A handful of nominators spoke of professional development as the driving force behind their nomination, which one nominator summed up with, “one of the most important things that a leader of any organization can do is to make sure he/she is looking out for the professional development of [his/her] key people.”

Professional development—which, in the area of leadership development in higher education has traditionally meant investing in an individual, for an individual—is indeed a consideration for mentors and nominators investing in the Program. The majority of mentors and nominators, however, situated their participation within a broader commitment to higher education leadership. The motivating force behind mentoring a Fellow, for many mentors, was the opportunity to contribute to the field. As illustrated by sentiments from two such mentors:

Mentor 1: My primary reasons [for mentoring] were because I thought it was our obligation as more senior people to provide the context in which that work can be done by people who in the end, in the collective sense, come along and succeed us in our responsibilities. We owed it to our own institutions, perhaps, but definitely to the broader purposes of higher education to do everything we could in our power to see to it that the pipelines were full with people with talent and promise and growing experience to provide leadership to the next generations.

Mentor 2: I've been in public higher education all my life and really believe in its importance not only to individuals but to communities and our nation as a whole. And if you believe in that you also, I think, need to be invested in the future leadership of public higher education.

So strong was this commitment to the enterprise that several nominators cautioned against the fear of “institutional flight.” One nominator summed up this concern with, “the old concern ‘What if I train them and they leave’ ought to be ‘What if I don’t train them and they stay?’”

These findings suggest the need for collective investment in the future leadership of higher education—investments that intersect and benefit the individual, institution, and enterprise. We must recognize, however, the tensions inherent in such investments. On one hand, leadership does seek to identify, develop, and retain key faculty, staff, and administrators; on the other hand, leadership can be apprehensive to invest in a potential “flight risk.”

## **SUCCESSION PLANNING**

Service to the enterprise is of paramount importance because, according to mentors and nominators alike, the field itself falls woefully short in succession planning, especially when compared to other industries. As expressed by two nominators:

Nominator 1: I'm baffled by the whole business of leadership development in higher education. We must be the only industry in America that does not engage actively in succession planning, but we also disdain it. This is at the presidential level anyway. I guess there is such a great belief in the search, and everybody feels like there is some combination of Buddha and Jesus over the horizon.

Nominator 2: I think one of the things we do not do well in higher education, and we'll never be able to do it as well as in the corporate world, is succession planning. We haven't, generally speaking, done enough as an entire industry in preparing the next generation of leaders. We have assumed that a person that has experience as a professor, teaching and conducting research, can be prepared to step into a leadership or administrative position. And that very often is just not true.

Even with constrained budgets and increased pressure to do more with less, leadership development—whatever the motivation—remains a priority for some institutions. According to one nominator, the Fellows Program is an investment “we were willing to make either for our own institution or for somebody else's.”

Institutions are making strategic investments in individuals with leadership potential, yet great concern exists that the field is at a low point in preparing higher education leaders. This is happening when, as previously stated, some administrators are reluctant to invest in individuals if they are unable to reap the rewards of their investment, while higher education is trending toward hiring individuals external to the enterprise with non-academic backgrounds for senior leadership positions.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

Underlying the nature of an experiential approach to professional development is variability, a high degree of which exists across fellowship experiences and is inherent in extended experiential programs built on a mentorship model. Although such variability does not mean any given experience is more or less valuable than others, such higher education leadership development programs still need to tend to quality control and assurance. While the box on p. 14 illustrates strategies mentors have used in their own attempt to do so, programs need to ensure intentional and integrated pedagogy that sets programmatic expectations for all stakeholders.

By way of example, the ACE Fellows Program leans toward yearlong placements at a host institution, a practice largely supported by perceptions of Fellows, mentors, and nominators who indicated yearlong placements as the most impactful placement type for aspiring senior leaders. Conversely, alternative placement types such as semester or periodic expand the pool of participating individuals and institutions by providing an entrée, for example, to individuals from smaller and/or less-resourced institutions. Program participation can be a catch-22 for already stretched nominating institutions unable to provide funding and release time for extended leadership development. Balancing a yearlong placement with personal obligations can be challenging for Fellows as well. If we push ourselves a step further, we must acknowledge gender dynamics and the differential impact of a long-term placement on some women. Findings from our review indicate that a higher percentage of men participate in year-long placements compared to their female counterparts. Participation in extended leadership development programs may be challenging if not impractical for some women, given that they often continue to serve as the primary parent and/or caretaker for aging parents (American Council on Education 2012; National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP Public Policy Institute 2015; Parker 2015). A challenge for maintaining the integrity of any long-term residential leadership development program is how best to accommodate shifts in institutions' ability to support aspiring leaders alongside participants' personal commitments.

Another dilemma underpinning the value derived from leadership development programs—and one higher education will need to address given that senior college and university leaders are stretched in ways previously unknown and leadership is becoming increasingly distributed—is how leadership is defined and who leads. According to one long-standing mentor, “[l]eadership can be observed and found and grown and thrive anywhere in the institution, across the institution.” If we are to move beyond a shared governance model, professionals up and down the line must have the skills and knowledge necessary to flex to any challenge. It is a need throughout an institution and across different roles and functions.

With this in mind, one challenge to leadership development programs is managing expectations and measuring value or impact. Program participation provides Fellows, for example, with valuable experience and exposure before pursuing a senior leadership role. At the end of the day, however, some might not want to elevate themselves into a senior leadership role, while those who do might not advance as quickly as they would like. Either circumstance does not, nor should it, undermine the impact Fellows can make leading from where they are. Fellows eager for career advancement, however, are compelled to look

elsewhere if opportunities—which nominators are not required to coordinate—do not open up at their home institution. This concern, as previously mentioned, could serve as a deterrent for nominators who recognize that as much as they want to invest in individuals, opportunities for advancement might be limited at their institution.

We need to think carefully about the implications for leadership development programs and scholarship purporting that institutions need leaders at every level who are capable of realizing strategic plans and completing key initiatives when at the same time, these programs tend to be designed around the very real hierarchies that exist on college and university campuses.

As we step back and consider these findings and observations in relation to the perennial and new leadership challenges outlined in the introduction, we are obligated to look inward and ask ourselves hard yet fundamental questions: How are we—as an organization and an enterprise—defining leaders? How are we defining leadership? How do these understandings manifest in Fellows and other program alumni? In complementary programming? What do we retain, and what should we reconsider?

# LOOKING FORWARD

Lynn M. Gangone

Historically, leadership in every sector, including higher education, has been seen as an individual endeavor. Additionally, leadership has been seen as typically exercised through positionality—the president, or the vice president, for example—and not exercised from wherever one sits inside an organization. Through shared governance, there is some level of diffusion of positional leadership on college and university campuses. That exception notwithstanding, however, leadership is seen typically through the positional lens, and individuals “leading the charge” from a very senior position inside the organization are likely Caucasian males (American Council on Education 2012; American Council on Education, forthcoming). This has become the norm upon which leadership—and the choices of leaders—is predicated.

Like our historical view of leadership, so too have our leadership development programs in higher education focused on the individual, on the position, and with the individual reflecting a particular paradigm of leadership. ACE has been no exception to the “leadership development as primarily benefiting the individual” approach. To ACE’s credit, our historic commitment to the advancement of women and other underrepresented groups, such as leaders of color, has helped expand the pool of who leads. Though ACE continues to actively diversify the pool of women and men who participate in our leadership development work, that work has still focused on the individual. Certainly, the lore of the ACE Fellows Program has been that the individual identified and nominated, who completes the fellowship, goes on *as an individual* to serve higher education as a senior leader at an institution typically different from where he or she served during the fellowship.

As the scholarship and practice of leadership in higher education has evolved, moving from a focus on the individual to broader views—leadership exercised without positional power, leadership exercised by teams, leadership that intersects the individual with the institution she or he serves—ACE, too, is looking to broaden its leadership development work to benefit the individual, the institution, and the enterprise of higher education. This is especially pertinent for the Fellows Program, which has been rightly viewed as a significant pathway for aspiring administrators into senior leadership in higher education. With so many Fellows alumni in senior leadership positions, the proof of the Program’s impact is incontrovertible. That success notwithstanding, the fellowship has traditionally been seen as an investment in an individual who will likely *leave* the institution at some point in time to pursue a more senior leadership role—the formula being “investment in the individual = advancement that requires an institutional departure.”

## STRATEGIC DEPLOYMENT OF HUMAN CAPITAL

What if, instead of the individual leaving, we encourage the colleges and universities that nominate Fellows to see the need for internal succession planning and the strategic deployment of human resources? Fellows could advance and stay at their home institutions. Institutional leaders could look at a strategic plan, for example, and see that its implementation will require an investment in leadership development offered by ACE that yields people well-equipped to make that institutional vision and plan a reality. This notion of staying at one’s home institution may come into direct conflict with the enterprise’s expectations for national searches for key positions and an inclination to hire from the outside. Certainly we are

not suggesting that bringing in candidates from other institutions should cease. However, a return on investment for leadership development cannot only be described in the number of Fellows who have left home institutions and now hold senior leadership positions elsewhere; we believe it can also be described in the quality of the Fellows' leadership upon returning to their home institutions, and of the educated way in which they can affect their campuses as a result of the Fellows Program experience.

## **DIVERSE INDIVIDUALS AND INSTITUTIONS**

Earlier we referenced ACE's historic commitment to the advancement of women, men and women of color, and other underrepresented groups more recently identified, such as LGBTQ individuals. In this century, we need to continue to ensure the success of a diverse cadre of leaders and a diverse set of institutions. Senior leadership today, at most institutions, is not representative of constituents or the pipeline of leaders who have been prepared. In short, there is a pipeline of qualified, diverse candidates in higher education, and it is growing. Additionally, when women, people of color, and other underrepresented groups are in senior leadership roles, they are often disproportionately leading institutions with the greatest challenges and the most precarious situations. While these challenges often manifest as ultimately financial, some examples of their root causes are in enrollments, aging physical infrastructures, or inability to effectively deploy new learning technologies. Instead of coming together to face these challenges, we in higher education have in many cases taken a protectionist approach and left smaller, niche institutions vulnerable.

An important value of the ACE Fellows Program, in addition to its commitment to recruiting diverse individuals into the fellowship, is to be an experience in which Fellows explore all types of institutions—their missions, their contributions, their strengths, and their vulnerabilities. As well, the fellowship can assist in creating opportunities and refueling the pipeline of diverse leaders across the higher education enterprise.

## **INDIVIDUAL AND TEAM LEADERSHIP**

As stated in the introduction, the likelihood that any one person can develop the comprehensive expertise that is required to lead the twenty-first century higher education institution diminishes on a daily basis as complexity in our sector grows. One could argue that there has never been a time more challenging to higher education leaders than today. We at ACE believe that contemporary higher education leaders will need to learn how to build and work collaboratively in leadership teams—teams that will address institutional challenges from multiple perspectives, seize unexpected opportunities, and propose creative solutions. ACE Fellows, who are encouraged to do significant team-based work, can learn much from their fellowship in this regard. This emphasis on institutional team leadership is also re-forming and reshaping the curricula of all ACE Leadership programs, services, and projects as we move through our own in-depth strategic planning process with the realization that the complexity of our sector requires more than sound presidential leadership—it requires sound presidential cabinet leadership.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR ACE LEADERSHIP AND OTHER LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS**

To carry forward the metaphor of the yoga master presented in the introduction, the ground beneath and the environment surrounding higher education leaders and their teams is changing constantly; as such,

twenty-first century leaders must be able to find their center and maintain their balance as individuals who practice their craft in connection with many others. Today's leaders must have access to curricula and content that empower them to respond to current trends and, more importantly, anticipate and even get ahead of the future needs in higher education. This includes access to leadership development that balances content, mentoring, and active learning, and the opportunity to learn with pedagogies and platforms that promote engagement. Leadership development in higher education, led by ACE and its leadership development experts, must provide such opportunities for leaders in addition to supporting continuous learning as individuals move through their careers, changing roles and institutions and navigating shifting contexts.

Now, more than ever, higher education institutions must invest in individual and team leadership development. It is true that budgets are constrained and expenditures are being watched more carefully than ever. Institutions feel increased pressure to do more with less, making it difficult for them to provide funding and release time to make room for extended leadership development. And it is increasingly challenging for individuals to balance the needs of their families with the need for them to take a deep dive into higher education at a different institution. However, we at ACE would argue that there's never been a more pressing time to invest in the development of our leaders, from wherever they are inside the institution. We see primacy in the fellowship experience. Using the results of our review, ACE Leadership will continue to tinker with curricula, placements, the breadth and depth of experiences inside the fellowship, and the unique opportunity the fellowship provides to higher education.

This study—and our environmental scans and curricular mapping work—are already changing the curriculum for the current class of Fellows as well as our other leadership development offerings. Our ACE Leadership team is considering the challenges of cost, timing, and scale as we move to embrace new delivery models and a larger array of programs, products, and services for individuals and teams. Our latest offerings are in collaboration with other higher education associations, from the team-based ACE/National Association of System Heads (NASH) Leadership Academy to the CAO-CBO-CIO collaboration between ACE, the National Association of College and University Business Officers, and EDUCAUSE. As higher education leadership changes and transforms, so must ACE Leadership's programs, products, and services.

Finally, it is our hope that this self-study of the ACE Fellows Program will also inform other higher education leadership development programs. For while many seek to create competition in the higher education leadership development space, ACE believes that the needs of contemporary institutions require many of us to offer leadership development opportunities. While some leadership development may be institution-based, and others sector-based, at ACE, given the diversity of our member institutions, we have appealed and will continue to appeal to those who seek to speak the language of twenty-first century leadership—leadership that is exercised by individuals and teams with a recognition that the multi-sector approach to higher education leadership is incredibly powerful and necessary. As the jewel in the crown of ACE Leadership's work, the ACE Fellows Program will continue to evolve and lead the way for our work in the leadership development arena.

# APPENDIX: FELLOWS RESPONDENT PROFILE DATA

**TABLE A1. YEAR OF PARTICIPATION IN THE ACE FELLOWS PROGRAM**

CLASS YEARS	PERCENT
Class of 2010–11 to 2013–14	27
Class of 2000–01 to 2009–10	33
Class of 1990–91 to 1999–2000	19
Class of 1980–81 to 1989–90	10
Class of 1970–71 to 1979–80	8
Class of 1965–66 to 1969–70	2
n=405	
<i>Note: Percentages have been rounded.</i>	

**TABLE A2. PLACEMENT TYPE**

PLACEMENT TYPE	PERCENT
Year	64
Semester	17
Periodic	14
Other*	6
*Denotes year placement on nominating campus, multiple placements, or a combination of placement types	
n=406	
<i>Note: Percentages have been rounded.</i>	

**TABLE A3. CURRENT PROFESSIONAL STATUS**

PROFESSIONAL STATUS	PERCENT
Work for an institution or system of higher education	77
Work in the higher education field, but not an institution or system	5
Do not currently work in the field of higher education	<2
Retired	15
Not currently employed	<1
n=409	
<i>Note: Percentages have been rounded.</i>	

**TABLE A4. INSTITUTIONAL SECTOR FOR THOSE WHO WORK FOR AN INSTITUTION OR SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

INSTITUTIONAL SECTOR	DEGREE	PERCENT
Public	Doctoral	41
	Master's	16
	Bachelor's	3
	Associate	6
Private*	Doctoral	12
	Master's	12
	Bachelor's	11
* Private, nonprofit, and for-profit collapsed; for-profit <1%		
n=310		
<i>Note: Percentages have been rounded.</i>		

**TABLE A5. CURRENT POSITION FOR THOSE WHO WORK FOR AN INSTITUTION OR SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

AREA	PERCENT	POSITION	PERCENT
Campus/system leadership	10	Campus president, chancellor, or CEO	8
		System executive	2
Academic affairs leadership	73	Chief academic officer or provost of a campus	12
		Dean of an academic college (e.g., arts and sciences, business, etc.)	14
		Senior academic officer with campus-wide responsibility (e.g., vice president of research)	6
		Other campus executive in academic affairs (e.g., associate or assistant provost)	23
		Department chair	18
Other campus leadership	17	Other campus executive outside academic affairs (e.g., development, student affairs)	8
		Special assistant to the president/chief of staff	3
		Faculty	6

n=314

Note: Percentages have been rounded.

**TABLE A6. INSTITUTION THAT REPRESENTS THE HIGHER EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT FELLOWS PRIMARILY WORKED IN AFTER FELLOWSHIP YEAR**

INSTITUTIONAL SECTOR	DEGREE	PERCENT
Public	Doctoral	45
	Master's	15
	Bachelor's	3
	Associate	6
Private*	Doctoral	12
	Master's	9
	Bachelor's	12

\* Private, nonprofit, and for-profit collapsed; for-profit <2%

n=297

Note: Percentages have been rounded.

**TABLE A7. GENDER**

GENDER	PERCENT
Male	51
Female	49
n=405	

**TABLE A8. RACE/ETHNICITY**

RACE/ETHNICITY	PERCENT
White	75
Black or African American	14
Hispanic or Latino/a	7
Asian or Asian American	3
American Indian or Alaskan Native	<1
Other*	<1

\* Denotes multiple race and other.

n=399

Note: Percentages have been rounded.

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