INCREASING DIVERSITY OF SENIOR ADMINISTRATORS
IN PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

May 27, 2022

ULEAD 2022 – Team 3
Brandy Barnes
Jason Martin
Jessie Nash
Rondall Rice
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The issue of diversity on American campuses—from students up through the administration and governing boards—has been discussed, debated, and occasionally acted upon for decades, with most of the action occurring within the past decade. An American Council on Education (ACE) paper in 2005 started, “During the last three decades, few topics in higher education have fueled more explosive rhetoric than the issue of diversity,” and that paper concluded that “the most compelling indicator of progress in advancing diversity on our campuses is the presence of strong and committed leaders at the top.”¹ Seventeen years later, and with entire administrative units dedicated to expanding diversity and stacks of papers, books, and studies on the topic, American academia has not yet made any significant progress toward diversity in its top levels of administration.

Recent studies of higher education (HE) academic administration have shown that while the number of underrepresented populations within executive leadership roles have increased, disparities remain. A 2020 report, surveying 1,160 institutions by the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR) looked at three key areas of HE’s top leaders: CEOs-presidents/chancellors, provosts/chief academic officers (CAOs), and chief human resource officers (CHROs). The seniority gap remains large for people of color; more than 80 percent of HE administrators are white, and people of color in the top executive positions account for only 13%.²

Several studies have attempted to find out the causes of this lack of diversity. At one point, it seemed the issue was the “pipeline” to academic executive leadership positions. American higher education institutions tended to populate their senior ranks from a structure up through the campus. After minor changes in the middle and end of the twentieth century, the last two decades saw the executive administration, and especially presidents/chancellors, become more of

a profession sought by some former academics, who “switched jobs every few years and navigated through campus bureaucracies to better learn to run complex institutions.” The traditional route to the highest office usually ran through what was seen as the institution’s second chair, the provost (or chief academic officer). In its first study of college presidents and campus leaders, ACE found that most came through the provost’s office, usually in their early fifties or late forties, and were white males. Although in the twenty-first century, as the size and complexity of colleges and universities increased, some institutions have sought alternative (non-academic) leaders. Still, the primary path to the highest seat usually travels through the academic side, though smaller colleges sometimes skip the provost step and promote deans. Thus, a focus became to fix the pipeline, increasing diversity among the faculty, promoting that faculty up through the traditional routes of department chair, to deans, and then to the executive positions of provosts and/or chancellors/presidents.

According to a 2017 study, the doctoral pipeline to professorships and up through the ranks, is no longer the problem. Enough people of color are earning doctorates, but challenges remain in getting them represented enough in the tenure pipeline and, thus, into future executive leadership roles. With an adequate pipeline, the keys are getting minorities into the market for the jobs, ensuring proper support, including mentorship, and intentionality in hiring minorities into these areas.

---


5 “Pathways to the University Presidency,” pp. 5-8. As of 2016, 31% of college presidents/chancellors’ immediate prior job had been as chief academic officer (CAO)/provosts. Another 24% had been previous chancellor/president or interim, and most of those had also came through the provost office.


7 Extrapolated for leadership roles, from conclusions of Flaherty.
Why are we not seeing more diversity at our institutions (nationally and within the University of North Carolina (UNC) system? What can be done at our flagship institution and within our System to increase the diversity of our executive leadership?

**APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY**

In the short time available to complete this study, the group decided to focus on executive leadership positions, which are the institutional Chief Executive Officer (CEO, usually titled chancellor or president) and Chief Academic Officer (CAO, usually provost or titled vice chancellor/president for academic affairs) and investigate University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-Chapel Hill) recognized peer institutions.

The last update of the UNC-Chapel Hill recognized peer institutions occurred in 2021, and the list includes 11 public and 5 private peers. Peer institutions are selected among Association of American Universities (AAU) based upon the following criteria: overall similarity in mission, overall quality of faculty, students, and programs, and research productivity. Among the 11 public peers, we selected the following institutions to examine (one per team member): the University of Virginia, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the University of Michigan, and University of Texas at Austin. Due to the differences in public and private institutions, and available information, as well as closer similarities in size of the institutions, we wanted to focus on the public institutions. However, as a check to see if there were any applicable diversity programs at the private peers, we also contacted Northwestern University, Duke University, and Vanderbilt University.

We researched these peer institutions to assess their diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives and programs. We tried to contact them as well, beyond just perusing of websites and gathering information and published data. We hoped to find practices and programs—with data showing

---

8 See full UNC-Chapel Hill peer list at: https://oira.unc.edu/strategic-planning/unc-system-defined-peer-group/.
9 One team member left the group during the research phase, and we were unable to fully investigate Texas at Austin.
success in increasing CEO and CAO diversity--from which we could recommend these best practices for adaptation and adoption at UNC-Chapel Hill and/or applicable for the other institutions in the UNC System, with the requisite scaling needed for the institutions of different size.

**PEER INSTITUTIONAL FINDINGS**

**The University of Virginia**

The data on the Diversity Dashboard at the University of Virginia (UVA) does not go back far enough to assess the efficacy of their initiatives, but the institution has been very focused in its efforts to increase diversity within the UVA community since at least 1987, with the publishing of “An Audacious Faith” by the Task Force on Afro-American Affairs. In recent years, the fervor seems to have increased significantly since the Martese Johnson incident near Grounds in 2015 and the Unite the Right rally that turned violent in 2016. Their efforts have shown some success, as the racial make-up of staff has increased *slightly* in terms of diversity with the percentage of staff identifying as white dropping from 76.77% in 2016 to 74.22% in 2020.

Since 2020, efforts to increase diversity in the community and a commitment to Inclusive Excellence seem to have flourished. Within UVa’s Division for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) are the Office for Equal Opportunity & Civil Rights; the Office for Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion; and the Center for Community Partnerships. Each of these units has committed verbally and with actions to DEI. Additionally, the University has a Racial Equity Task Force, a D&I Vision statement, and conducted multiple studies to assess the level of Inclusive Excellence at each level within the university. Unfortunately, 2020 is the most recent year for which the University has published data, therefore this project cannot fully attribute additional successes.

Overarching themes at UVA suggest accountability at every level is crucial and, in order for recruitment efforts to be fruitful, a focus on retention is equally important. In addition to
resources for affinity groups, creating a place that exudes and reflects the values of the institution is critical. As such, there have been several committees established by the president to help the community reconcile the complex history of a Southern university--most notably the legacy of a place built and operated by enslaved individuals. One such committee is the President’s Commission on the University in the Age of Segregation. Specifically, this group published a paper, “Memorialization and Mission at UVA,” in which they attempt the mammoth task of tackling building names and monuments on Grounds.

Although lacking hard data on the success of recent efforts, we believe UVA does best of institutions we examined in unflinchingly acknowledging their complicity and participation in white supremacy, in UVA’s case its participation in slavery and segregation well into the twentieth century. The leaders then work to ensure the future of UVA is representative of the institution they are and wish to become. UVA has included DEI as an ongoing priority, and built commitments into their updated guiding documents, including their strategic plan and vision. Specific evidence of their ongoing commitment are the continuing climate and Inclusive Excellence assessments to evaluate the efficacy of their efforts over time.

UVA ensures their commitment to DEI is present at every level within the institution. In addition to their D&I Vision statement and commitment to Inclusive Excellence, each school has their own versions, which specifically addresses the issues within their field. Furthermore, UVA has provided a road map for Effective and Inclusive Recruitment Plans, including checklists and resources so every hiring manager is readily equipped to run an inclusive search. Their leaders have also recommended that all search committees evaluate candidates’ commitment to Inclusive Excellence during the hiring process, preferably in a written format, for which they have provided an assessment rubric. Various groups within UVA have recommended DEI efforts be included in every hiring manager’s performance evaluations. Similarly, all units should include D&I metrics in their annual reports.

As noted in various studies and comments, the shortcomings of these programs are inadequate intra-institutional communications, a lack of accountability for not meeting goals, and inconsistency in implementing the policies across the university. Different areas perceive a lack
of standardization with the different hiring committees in implementing DEI-related policies and practices.

**The University of Wisconsin-Madison**

The University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison) launched their Madison Plan in 1988 under Chancellor Donna Shalala, who set affirmative action hiring as her top priority. She made funds available for university-wide hiring and announced that the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs implement the plan. One of the plan’s goals focused on “filling the pipeline” by hiring seventy minority faculty within three years, with an initial focus of blacks, Hispanics, American Indians, and Asian Americans. By October of the first year, the university successfully hired twenty-eight diverse faculty members. Prior to the Madison Plan, some schools had already made efforts to recruit minority faculty, including the University of Wisconsin Law School where Frank J. Remington, Professor of Law, chaired an appointments committee to attract minority candidates. To reach further into the pipeline, the Madison Plan also targeted underrepresented minorities with an increase in fellowships for graduate and professional schools, with the goal of securing 475 minority and professional students by 1992.

Akin to the University of Virginia, the UW-Madison recognized complicity in the treatment of minorities, particularly that of Indigenous Peoples in their geographic region. The University acknowledges, “The US, as a settler colonial society, focused on the dissolution of Indigenous languages, cultures, and nations for almost 100 years, until the passage of the 1975 Indian Self-Determination and Educational Assistance Act.” Through the First Nations Partnerships, UW-Madison created resources for teaching resources in American Indian Studies and is focused on recruiting Native Nations students to the university.

Like many modern universities, diversity, equity, and inclusion language has become a mainstay in every mission and directive at UW-Madison, and these are posted on university

---

11 [https://scholars.law.unlv.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1058&context=salt](https://scholars.law.unlv.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1058&context=salt)
12 See “Revitalization” section under “Office of Tribal Relations Priorities,” [https://tribalrelations.wisc.edu/](https://tribalrelations.wisc.edu/).
websites. UW-Madison touts a Diversity Inventory, an interactive site to view real-time data on self-reported initiatives. Perhaps the most actionable item targeted toward faculty recruitment is the Target of Opportunity Program (TOP). TOP allows departments to hire faculty who would greatly enhance the quality and diversity of the department. TOP candidates can be recruited without a posting and/or where their research may not be aligned with the research qualifications required in a posting. Central Administration will provide salary support for a set amount and time.

As with the other identified peer institutions, UW-Madison’s DEI initiatives have not directly targeted filling the two top administrative positions. However, through the Target of Opportunity Program, they have demonstrated a commitment to filling faculty positions, which could potentially lead to division chair and dean positions and creates the pool for the next steps up. It will take years to discover if this strategy is effective or not, but their TOP program is perhaps the best example of a directed initiative toward filling the pipeline that perhaps has applicability for UNC institutions. TOP represents an intentional, actionable, and measurable administrative program demonstrating a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The University of Michigan

Michigan believes that DEI has been intertwined in the fabric of the university throughout its history. As one of the first universities in the nation to admit women (in 1870), to its historic defense of race conscious admission policies at the U.S. Supreme Court (2003), Michigan believes that it continues to make strides in making higher education accessible to all.

The University of Michigan renewed its commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in 2015 with DEI integrated into their strategic plan. Their “DEI 1.0” initiative included 2,000 campus-wide action items for implementation during the five-year strategic plan framework using three strategies: create an inclusive and equitable campus climate; recruit, retain, and develop a diverse community; and support innovative and inclusive scholarship and teaching.14

---

13 https://facstaff.provost.wisc.edu/faculty-diversity-initiative/
14 https://diversity.umich.edu/about/
Each year had specific stepping-stone goals and the administration thoroughly documented and published annual reports.¹⁵

Creating an inclusive and equitable campus climate became even more challenging in the second year. As the national conversations around DEI became a heated topic, several incidents on-campus and the resulting national reporting raised the heat on the administration.¹⁶ Michigan administrators noted these cases demonstrated the need for continued progress and pressed forward to implement their programs. In year two, Michigan created a Faculty Leadership Development Fellowships to “increase the university’s pool of leadership candidates who are prepared to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion” for a “select number of faculty.”¹⁷ At the end of the year, they noted six funded fellows in the year-long “New Leadership Academy” and thirteen total Fellows to-date. However, the program does not seem specifically targeted to the highest levels of leadership. As described in the year five strategic plan report, the program emphasizes “cutting-edge and next-generation scholarship” that “seeks to recruit and support faculty across campus and beyond whose research addresses DEI issues.”¹⁸

The University of Michigan programs are widespread, detailed, and tracked. The Faculty Leadership Development Fellowships continued and the name updated, as they added nine “University Diversity & Social Transformational Professors” (UDSTPs) in the fourth year, and a third cohort of four faculty members for the fifth year. As noted, these are additive and important programs, but they don’t seem specifically designed to develop leaders for the highest levels at the institution, and it is too early to see if they are successful in filling a pipeline. Michigan’s reports do not specifically note any of these Fellows ascending to specific leadership positions to-date, although it is possible some may eventually become department chairs or

---

deans, and perhaps move up higher. It may be useful for UNC institutions to examine these programs and look for potential adaptation and modification into existing or new leadership programs.

The current academic year will mark the end of the initial DEI 1.0 five-year strategic plan, but Michigan is not ending their initiatives. At their annual DEI Summit in the fall of 2022, they will evaluate DEI 1.0 and faculty and staff will begin a year-long planning phase for the next strategic plan and DEI 2.0, which will launch in fall 2023.

**Private Peers**

The attempt to collect data and discuss initiatives with peer private institutions proved fruitless and unusable. Multiple requests via phone and email to offices at Northwestern, Duke, and Vanderbilt were met with silence or no call-back from the leaders at their DEI offices. The Vice President and Associate Provost for Diversity and Inclusion at Northwestern did reply, summarized by “Mercy, those are huge inquiries.” She expressed a willingness to help, but noted the topic was too big and the timeline too short for her to assist at this time via email or Zoom, and she provided links to various websites at Northwestern.\(^{19}\)

Much like UVA’s commitment to recognize their association with slavery, Northwestern does the same for indigenous peoples and Native Americans. The institution declares that the “campus sits on the traditional homelands of the people of the Council of Three Fires, the Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Odawa. It was also a site of trade, travel, gathering, and healing for more than a dozen other Native tribes and is still home to over 100,000 tribal members in the state of Illinois.”\(^{20}\) The [Native American and Indigenous Initiatives](https://www.northwestern.edu/native-american-and-indigenous-peoples/) website includes a [Land Acknowledgment Statement](https://www.northwestern.edu/native-american-and-indigenous-peoples/about/Land%20Acknowledgement.html), which is also read at all official ceremonies.\(^{21}\)

---

\(^{19}\) Email from Robin R. Means Coleman to Rondall Rice, March 15, 2022.


\(^{21}\) See [https://www.northwestern.edu/native-american-and-indigenous-peoples/about/Land%20Acknowledgement.html](https://www.northwestern.edu/native-american-and-indigenous-peoples/about/Land%20Acknowledgement.html).
We found no other initiatives related to encouraging DEI in the leadership processes, although it must be noted they did have a variety of initiatives for students and faculty, to include matching funds (up to $2,500) for underrepresented minority faculty professional development programs. As noted with the other institutions, these efforts may help ensure diversity in the “pipeline” that leads to executive leadership, but it will take years to assess their effectiveness, and none of the initiatives were specifically and intentionally designed to address diversity in the ranks of the highest administrative positions.

**Summary and Recommendations**

An examination of 7 of 16 recognized peers of UNC-Chapel Hill revealed no proven, specific, and/or targeted programs for increasing diversity in the executive leadership roles. All institutions have well-staffed offices, multiple staff and leaders devoted to DEI, and a multitude of DEI programs—to include targeted initiatives for students, faculty, and staff. Although some institutions had faculty or “leadership development” programs—with some related to specific DEI initiatives--none of these initiatives were designed specifically and intentionally to promote diversity for the senior/executive leadership ranks. These programs may eventually bear fruit, but they are all too early in their implementation to provide data and positive proof.

First, let us quickly examine the statistics at the two highest executive levels, chancellor and provost, at UNC institutions. Not counting the minority serving institutions (HBCUs and UNC Pembroke), there are 10 universities. Of those ten, eight chancellors are white, and two are non-white, six are male and four are female. Of note, one of the two non-white chancellors has announced his retirement (Dr. Jose V. Sartarelli), and the search for his replacement is in the final stages. All UNC HBCUs are led by African Americans, and UNC Pembroke’s chancellor (Dr. Robin Gary Cummings) is Native American and a member of the Lumbee tribe.

The CAO ranks are very similar, with seven white, three non-white, and six male and four female. Until recently those numbers matched the chancellors, with eight white provosts, but ECU replaced Dr. Ron Mitchelson with Dr. Robin Coger, an African American female and Dean
of the College of Engineering at North Carolina A&T State University (joining ECU in July 2022; the interim provost was Dr. Grant Hayes, an African American male). As with the CEOs, the MSI CAOs are persons of color; all HBCU provosts are African American, and Dr. Marsha Pollard, recently selected as the new UNC-Pembroke provost, descended from the Arawak tribe and immigrated with her parents from Guyana at four years old.22

However, if we look at the four largest institutions (UNC-Chapel Hill, NC State, ECU, and UNC Charlotte), all four chancellors are white, and only one female. The CAOs are all white, and three of four are male; only Dr. Sharon Gaber is female, and she recently replaced a white male (Dr. Philip Dubois, who retired in 2020). Of the CAOs at the “Big Four,” whites account for three of the four, and they are evenly split between male and female. Comparable to the chancellor ranks, the one non-white CAO is a recent selection, noted above with ECU welcoming Dr. Coger in July 2022.23

We propose that UNC-Chapel Hill specifically, and the UNC System and its primary white institutions, take clear and intentional steps to foster diversity at the highest leadership ranks. Therefore, we propose UNC-Chapel Hill and other UNC System schools could lead the way nationally by developing such programs. We suggest a three-leveled approach, which we believe may help foment diversity in the executive levels.

**Recommendation 1: Immediate Impact by System Intentionality**

We recommend UNC institutions show intentionality when openings arise in the senior administrative ranks--and especially the top two (CEO and CAO) positions. UNC System Office Human Resources assists the institutions and their Board of Trustees with chancellor searches, and all involved should be reminded of the advantages of a diverse organization and encourage diverse applicants. Additionally, we would encourage the UNC System’s HR Leadership

---


Development and Talent Acquisition team cultivate and encourage a “cross-pollination” system. UNC should strive to foster and retain leadership talent—especially diverse personnel rising into higher-level positions—within the System while allowing growth and multiple opportunities. Specific positions may benefit by urging “preference” for diverse, highly qualified candidates within the System. It may also be beneficial to encourage them to apply for CAO and chancellor positions, as most of the administrators at our MSIs are from underrepresented populations.

**Recommendation 2: Build the Bench**

UNC institutions should focus strongly on diversity in selecting department chairs and especially deans. Doing so “builds the bench” for the CAO position (and subsequently the CEO positions), as provosts typically arise through the faculty ranks and up through department chairs and then college/school deans. At smaller and mid-sized institutions, it is becoming more normal to see a chancellor/president selected from among the dean ranks as well. As with the first recommendation, the focus should not be at just one of our institutions. For dean and department chair openings, the System HR should highlight the opportunity within the System and recruit from among the System’s aspiring leaders.

A second part of building the bench should be a System leadership development program, specifically focused at the dean level to expose them to the top leadership positions and encourage the development of their skills, knowledge, and network in order to successfully compete for these positions. We recommend modeling this program on the highly successful and respected American Council on Education (ACE) Fellows program, and perhaps examine the success of the ongoing diversity fellowship programs at Michigan. The ACE Fellows program “encourages candidates from diverse personal and profession backgrounds” to apply and states that Fellows will:

---

24 “Pathways to the University Presidency,” pp. 7-8.
25 ACE Fellows Program, [https://www.acenet.edu/Programs-Services/Pages/Professional-Learning/ACE-Fellows-Program.aspx](https://www.acenet.edu/Programs-Services/Pages/Professional-Learning/ACE-Fellows-Program.aspx).
- Observe and participate in key meetings and events and take on special projects and assignments while under the mentorship of a team of experienced campus or system leaders.
- Participate in three multiday seminars, engage in team-based projects and case studies, visit other campuses, and attend national meetings.
- Develop a network of higher education leaders across the U.S. and abroad

Every ACE Fellow is expected to:
- Engage in a Mentor/Fellow relationship with a college or university president and/or other senior administrators.
- Participate in senior-level decision-making meetings at the placement institution.
- Study organizational structure and governance patterns.
- Observe how decisions are made, who makes them, and how leaders communicate their decisions.
- Observe the leadership styles of the individuals in each major administrative division, their effectiveness, and how they interact with one another.26

Like the ACE program, the UNC System program should last an entire academic year. It should assign a mentor (CAO or chancellor) to each cohort member, and the Fellow should have an “inside look” at all processes at major units at different institutions: chancellor’s and CAO’s office, student affairs, enrollment/registrars, athletics, and development/advancement activities. There should be a “shadow” program where the Fellow follows the chancellor/CAO for a week and at multiple institutions (their own and at least one other). They should attend all sessions of Board of Trustees and UNC Board of Governors meetings.

At the end of the year, the Fellow will know if they want to pursue future opportunities, and they will be much better prepared to assume the duties. The Fellow would also have built a network of senior administrators to advise them and help them ascend to these positions. The

26 Not a complete listing of the expectations; highlighted specific ones. Full list available at: https://www.acenet.edu/Programs-Services/Pages/Professional-Learning/Fellows-Apply-and-Participate.aspx.
UNC System could track the Fellows, have them work with future Fellows, and, most importantly, recruit them to apply for the top two positions at our institutions.

**Recommendation 3: Fill the Pipeline**

Starting a level lower to ensure we have a diverse number of deans, similar to some of the institutions noted in our study, we should begin “filling the pipeline” with as much diversity as possible. Begin with our graduate student population; encourage underrepresented populations with additional scholarships/grants/travel stipends. Follow those efforts with programs, perhaps modeled from the Northwestern program, to increase faculty diversity by using grants and CAO-allocated monies to fund faculty development programs and provide travel funds for external programs and conferences for underrepresented faculty.

All of these programs should begin in parallel--helping to boost diversity immediately while establishing a pipeline from faculty (if not students) up through administration. They should be tracked and reported on annually at each institution and the System Office. We should establish, expand, and/or update diversity-related websites to advertise the programs and to show the commitment to diversity in our efforts--examining some of the in-depth websites of our peer institutions, but streamlining them and linking them to the efforts. To avoid issues we noted at different peer institutions, these efforts need to be synchronized, and not just stove-piped within academic affairs or human resources. One of these two should take the lead, but there must be close coordination, follow-up, reporting, and corrections (if under goals) for them to succeed in the long term. We believe by doing so, UNC will become the national model for diversity in higher education senior administration.