

# *Turnaround Leadership*

DEANS OF COLOR  
AS CHANGE AGENTS

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# PREFACE

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*Turnaround Leadership: Deans of Color as Change Agents* is a case-study analysis of six men and women of color who have served or are serving as leaders of schools of education throughout the United States. Being an educational leader is a challenging, demanding responsibility at all times, but especially during this period of transformation within our education system.

For almost half a century, America's education system has been undergoing significant change at all levels. Initially, most efforts to reform our education system focused on elementary and secondary schools. However, increasingly within the last two decades, more and more emphasis has been placed on schools, colleges, and departments of education (SCDE) to be more accountable for the quality of education American students receive.

These reform efforts in turn have placed the spotlight on the leaders of higher education institutions, especially those within schools of education, to be more accountable in their roles for preparing citizens for the future and the challenges they will face. Those leaders are increasingly being called upon to more clearly define the vision and mission they believe will transform how educators (i.e., teachers, counselors, and administrators) are prepared to respond to questions about the future, such as why and how we should educate in the United States. In other words, how can colleges of education more effectively assure that Americans have the educational foundation they need to ensure our country's leadership role in the world? That vision must help our nation address challenges, including the following:

- The continued growth and diversification of student enrollments within our K–12 schools; enrollments are expected to reach 59 million by 2015—80% of the new students will be minorities and/or poor.
- Enrollments at the higher education level are expected to reach 19 million by 2015, but it is projected that the United States will need 40 million college graduates by 2025 if the United States, as a nation, is to remain competitive in this increasingly global society (ibid). Again, 80% of those new college students will come from minority or poor families.
- Eighty-five percent of the fastest growing jobs will require workers to have some post-secondary education (Inside Higher Education, 2008). A high school diploma is no longer sufficient.
- By 2020, over half of all high school courses will be taught online. Today, two-thirds of all states have at least one virtual school (Christensen, Horn, & Johnson, 2008), and more will be established every year, thus redefining what is meant by schooling and education.
- Within the next five to seven years, it is projected that 55% of all K–12 teachers will be eligible for retirement. If these teachers do decide to retire, it will amount to approximately 1.7 million teachers leaving the classroom—all of whom will need to be replaced. Further, even more teachers will have to be prepared to teach the projected increased student enrollment (National Education Association, 2010).

- Simultaneously, there is already an education staffing dilemma which urgently needs to be addressed. While our student enrollments are diversifying rapidly (projected that by 2020, 40% of all students will come from racial or ethnic minority families), the number of teachers who are identified as being minorities is declining precipitously (National Education Association, 2010). Currently, only 5% of all teachers are minorities, and fewer minorities are entering and remaining in the teaching profession (U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education statistics, 2006–2007).

The success of our education system today and in the future will be contingent upon the ability of our schools of education to better recruit and prepare the educators who will staff our schools and meet the needs of our changing society. Concomitantly, as America's primary provider of educators, schools of education will need leaders who understand these seismic changes and have the intellectual and philosophical capacity and experiential ability to help define the vision that will ensure that we not only have a national but a world-class system of education. We need leaders who have the capacity to help Americans understand the need to develop citizens for our nation-state as well as participate more fully in our global society.

To ensure that we do have the capacity of leadership to achieve these goals, America must be prepared and willing to open the door of leadership at all levels of education, especially within schools of education to more women and minorities, as well as traditional educational leaders. Although some progress has been made, most educational leadership positions are still predominantly occupied by males, reflecting the continuing serious gender imbalance within the profession. This, however, is not a new issue; rather, it is a "wicked problem" that has continually plagued our education system since its inception as well as our society in general. Unfortunately, this incongruence between how leadership positions have traditionally been filled and the vacuum of women leaders continues as we begin the 21st century. Higher education is heavily dominated by males, including "institutions of color."

Further, where there are female leaders, particularly women of color, their ability to fulfill duties and responsibilities are still challenged on the grounds of gender and whether they are simultaneously "capable" of providing the leadership required and enduring the personal and professional pressures of leadership. For instance, when I first began to move into leadership roles, I recall being told that "women leaders have to be twice as good as their male counterparts to persuade people that they are capable of getting the job done." That is no less true now than it was for previous generations of women seeking to become leaders. Unfortunately, even today, women leaders have to prove they are effective, visionary leaders.

While a few have successfully walked through the door of opportunity to be leaders in higher education, that door is still only slightly open. For example, there are approximately 1,450 schools of education in America, and yet, minority women serve as the dean at only a handful of those schools.

Therefore, in addition to the experiences of male deans of color, this book shares the stories of four women and their experiences as deans—women who have successfully led their schools during this intense period of academic, organizational, and economic transformation. These women—Fayneese Miller, Leslie Fenwick, Renee Middleton, and Olga Welch—led the transformative process which has resulted in their schools being more responsive to the demographic and knowledge-based global challenges we face as a nation. Hopefully, sharing their experiences—whether as the dean at a predominantly white institution or a Historically Black University, whether at a single or multi-campus university, or whether or not at Research Intensive university—will help other women better understand the complexity of the roles and responsibilities of being a leader within higher education. The four deans have demonstrated their ability to effectively manage their schools as well as lead them in more clearly defining their vision of the future. Equally important, each demonstrated her ability to successfully persuade faculty and university administrators to support (financially and otherwise) efforts to implement the vision, and thus, to reform their schools. Their vision was not designed simply to change but to transform their schools, and thus, enhance the quality of knowledge, skills, and experiences that will define their graduates.

As deans, each has forged their leadership wisdom, skills, and experiences over the years; each has also successfully maintained a strong sense of who they are as individuals (Isaac, 2007). While perhaps tending to be more collaborative in working with their colleagues, these women demonstrated that they could also make the tough decisions to keep their institutions moving forward. At the same time, each has reached out to other women, especially women of color, to serve as their mentors and role models to strive to be leaders, especially within the higher education community. By sharing their expertise and experiences, including the battles and challenges each has endured, these women are helping to create a new, stronger genre of women leaders in education and all other professional areas. Their experiences transforming the decanal position and the image of women as leaders will encourage more minority women in particular to seek leadership roles. They will also educate their male counterparts in the reality that women, as well as men, have the capacity and capability to be outstanding leaders.

That said, the stories shared by both the male and female deans in this book reflect efforts to continue the struggle for educational rights, but they also reflect the ongoing struggle for the equal rights of women to open wider the doors of opportunity and to walk through them as they climb the leadership ladder. If we, as a nation, are to maximize our intellectual and human capacity to maintain successfully our position as a global leader, we will need to utilize the talents, expertise, experiences, and ideas of all of our citizens, especially women. Thus, the message is very clear. Just as transforming our schools of education to prepare more effective educators and human development specialists for the 21st century is critical, transformation of the composition, structure, and power of the current leadership paradigm within higher education must also be paramount to effect reform. Our mission should be to recruit and retain the best leaders, not based upon past traditions, but based upon demonstrated forward thinking leadership ability—whether female or male. Our students, the teaching profession, and the nation need of colleges and schools of education leaders who can envision the future and have the audacity to be on the front line, leading efforts to ensure that the system of education, including the teaching profession, is transformed so that every American is educationally prepared for the challenges of the future.

### References

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