

# Chapter 49

## Promoting Diversity Leadership: Strategies and Tools to Improve Equity and Access

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter focuses on the difference between the diversity of community college students and community college administrators. While many community college students are poor, minority, and female, the vast majority of community college administrators, particularly chief executive officers, are affluent, White, and male. This inequity may have an impact on how administrators relate to students and the policies these administrators enact, resulting in concerns about equity and access to educational opportunities. The history of U.S. community colleges is discussed. A profile of the typical community college student is also presented. Definitions of leadership are provided, and diversity leadership research is examined. A strategy for increasing diversity at the administrative level in the community college setting is shared. Kotter's (1996) eight-stage model of change management is presented as a means of altering a college's culture to promote greater diversity leadership. The role of technology in increasing diversity is discussed, and directions for further research are shared.*

### INTRODUCTION

Community colleges have provided more avenues of access to students who have traditionally been underserved and underrepresented at institutions of higher education (IHEs) (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014a). First-generation college students, members of racial and ethnic minority groups, academically underprepared students, and students from a lower socioeconomic status enroll in community colleges at much higher rates than students who do not share these characteristics (Achieving the Dream, 2015). In addition, 57% of the 12.8 million community college students in the United States are female, 49% are non-White, and 12% have a disability (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014a).

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In stark contrast to these figures, 81% of community college chief executive officers (chancellors and presidents) are White and 72% are male (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014b). Therefore, while community college students come from relatively diverse populations, the leaders at these IHEs are much more homogeneous (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014b). These data are not unique to the community college. In fact, even though ethnic minorities account for about 35% of all students at American colleges and universities, only 19% of educational administrators, and only 14% of CEOs, are ethnic minorities (American Council on Education, 2012; Betts, et al., 2009). The profile of a typical president at an American IHE is a heterosexual, married White male, aged 61, who has served as president for an average of seven years (American Council on Education, 2012). This portrait as not changed considerably for the past 25 years (American Council on Education, 2012). In this way, the leaders at community colleges are vastly different demographically than the populations they serve. This disparity is particularly troubling because, at its core, the mission of the community college is to promote opportunity and open doors for historically disenfranchised students. These opportunities must begin within the institutions themselves. In light of the issue, many educational leaders across the country are employing new methods to encourage inclusivity and diversity among their ranks (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014d).

## **COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN THE UNITED STATES**

The first public, two-year college in the United States, Joliet Junior College, was founded in 1901 in Joliet, Illinois (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014c). Over the past century, more than 1100 community colleges have been founded; they include public, private, and tribal institutions (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014a). For those students who traditionally have been excluded from the university due to a lack of academic preparedness or a lack of sufficient financial assistance, community colleges offered a way to obtain a post-secondary education or technical and vocational training (Barnes & Piland, 2010). Many community colleges have open admissions, lower tuition, and more courses of study, which are attractive for students seeking two-year degrees or certificates (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014c). Once referred to as junior colleges, since the 1970s, the term *community colleges* has become the preferred designation for two-year vocational, technical, and academic institutions (Dunning, 2008; Robinson-Neal, 2009). This shift highlights the mission and purpose of these IHEs, to provide educational access to all sectors of the communities they serve (Robinson-Neal, 2009).

As stated above, a typical community college student in the U.S. is a female, a member of an ethnic minority group, a person who has a lower socioeconomic status, and a learner who is academically underprepared (Achieving the Dream, 2015; American Association of Community Colleges, 2014a; Crews & Aragon, 2007; Sterling, 2011). Consequently, community college students often face more obstacles to graduation than university students (Achieving the Dream, 2015; American Association of Community Colleges, 2014a). Factors such as attending college part-time, having to work a full-time job, and needing to take developmental coursework make graduation an uphill climb for community college students (Achieving the Dream, 2015; American Association of Community Colleges, 2014a). Minority students and low-income students are less likely to graduate from any IHE (Robinson-Neal, 2009). This means that fewer students from these populations have the experience and education to teach at IHEs, much less serve as leaders, as most administrators are selected from the faculty ranks (Robinson-Neal,

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