

ADD WOMEN, TRANSFORM ACADEME

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The current article suggests that universities in the southeastern region suffer from a lack of inclusivity, particularly regarding women in leadership positions, that undermines their efforts to be as progressive and relevant as they should be. Since women make up less than a critical mass of academic leadership, they are absent from decision-making arenas, their contributions are undervalued, and their participation in policy-making conversations continues to be stalled.

How Can We Break the Cycles of the Mad Men-Era Gender Representation in the Administrations of 21st Century Academic Institutions?

Universities persist in hierarchical, status-conscious cycles of leadership that seriously undermine their capacities to become the useful, inclusive, and desirable environments that they must be in order to thrive. While universities are typically considered bastions of progressive thought, many women experience stagnant and regressive situations in their academic lives. For these academic women, particularly those working in institutions in the southeastern United States, the policies that affect their day-to-day working lives are largely mandated by a homogeneous group that primarily shares characteristics of gender (male) and race (non-African American). Power is shared among a homogeneous voice that, in some cases inadvertently, devalues, minimizes, and dismisses the contributions of women. As universities struggle to transform themselves into relevant, contemporary, well-functioning organizations, they must embrace a broad inclusivity that welcomes women into the highest echelons of policy-making arenas.

Women have been underrepresented in administrative positions and in the ranks of full professor for decades. In the past, this underrepresentation was attributed to

factors such as the relatively small number of women obtaining the terminal degree or the need for women faculty members to focus on their families as opposed to their research agendas. Now, however, countless studies have appeared to debunk these excuses. The number of women holding the terminal degree equals and, in some disciplines, exceeds those of their male counterparts. Other factors are surfacing, such as imbalance between men and women when it comes to family obligations, child care, and elder care. More germane to the question about how best to break the cycles of underrepresentation of women in administrations, however, are studies that call into question the make-up of tenure and promotion committees and the subtle and unspoken processes by which academic women's contributions are diminished.

Many women's participation in real decision-making conversations is limited by their lack of numbers in upper administrations. A recent study exploring the potential relationship between the gender composition of the institutions' upper administrations and the pay trends and hiring practices as they differ between men and women at doctoral granting land grant universities in the Southeastern Conference found that none of these universities have reached parity between men and women in upper administrative appointments nor have they reached parity in pay, hiring, and promo-

tion among their faculty members. Academic women may not garner the authority and influence necessary to affect policy that reflects the values of both men and women until a critical mass of academic leadership is made up of women. Until one third of decision-making authority is held beyond the bounds of the historic, cultural, and traditional male majority, women's voices will continue to be muted, and participation in policy-making conversations will be stalled (Baker, Bobrowski, Brauss, Gramberg, & Lin, 2015).

The homogeneity in leadership leads to a likeness of thought that gravitates to like-mindedness in hiring and in the construction of committees that make the decisions. The effects are quantifiable and frequently debilitating for those who strive for their acceptance, recognition, promotion, and a sense of satisfaction against or outside of the like-minded center. When fewer women are hired, fewer women are promoted, and fewer women achieve the highest administrative appointments. The result is cyclical because so few women reach the highest echelons of authority, respect, and decision-making power, and fewer women are chosen for committees or advanced into administrative positions regardless of their dossiers. If women do not have the same potential to follow prescribed venues into decision-making positions, then even fewer women academics can experience the comradery and like-minded comfort necessary to be considered seriously as an academic leader. This creates a sense of powerlessness among women that can not only cripple careers but also has an extremely negative effect on the progress of the university as well as the community in which the university is located.

The stale transactional leadership styles perpetuated by the gender imbalance in academe leave many universities unable to break the patterns of the past that have left them bloated and broke instead of forward-thinking and creative. Much needed transformational leadership qualities that are often associated with women are increasingly desirable among all leaders. "The core of what women bring to leadership—a tendency toward greater inclusiveness, empathy, communication up and down hierarchies, [and] focus on broader issues" (Wilson, 2007, p. 6) are qualities that will well-serve all leaders in their efforts to transform academe.

References

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