

THE CHRONICLE
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Diverse Leadership for a New Era

How to recruit and support
an inclusive administration

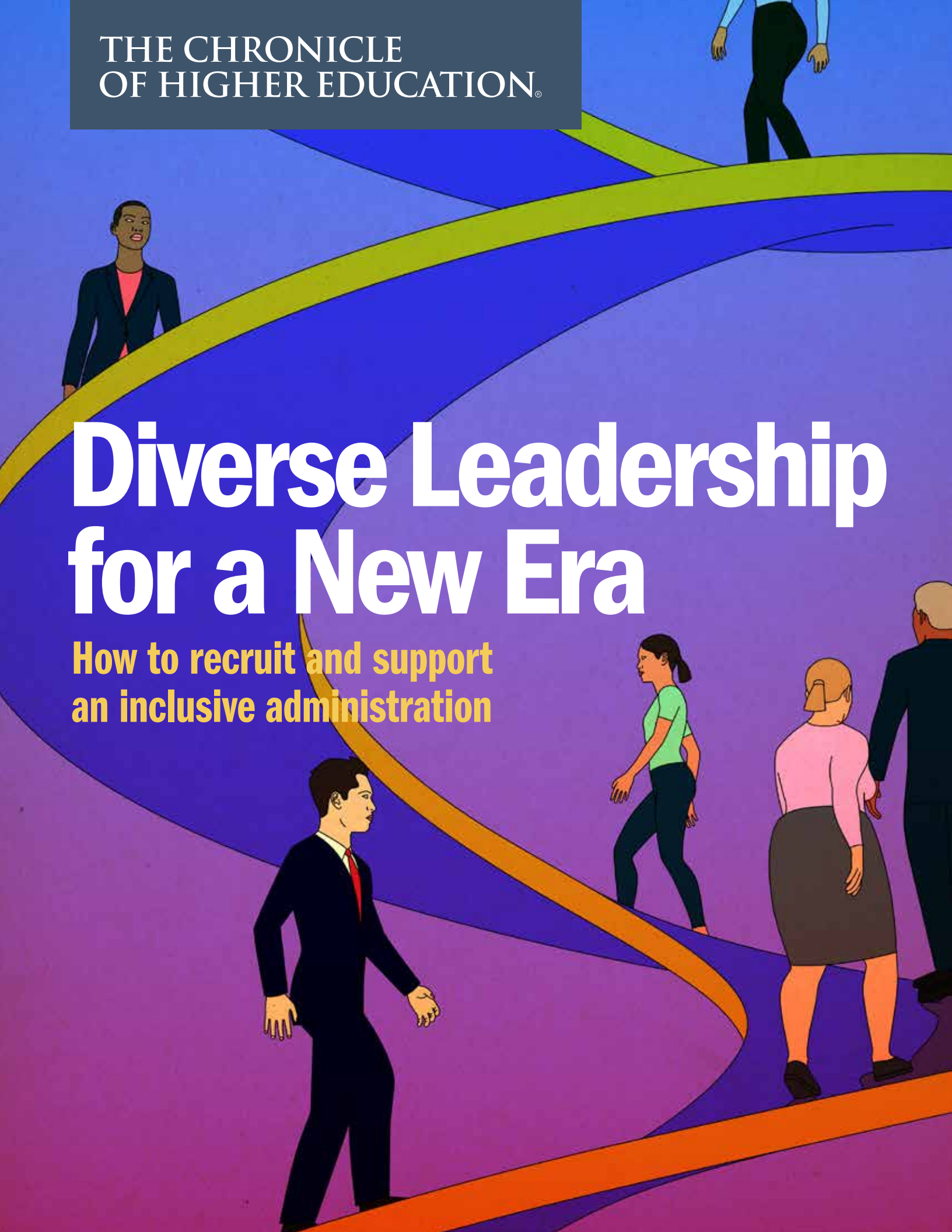


TABLE OF CONTENTS

4 Introduction

It's lonelier at the top for leaders from underrepresented groups, but they can make a huge difference. How can colleges give them the encouragement and opportunities they need to fulfill their potential, and help millions of students achieve theirs?

6 Section 1 Does Administrative Diversity Matter?

Skeptics may disagree, but advocates say more diversity at the top better serves an increasingly diverse student body. There has been progress, proponents say, but they fear momentum is slowing.

11 Data: Diversity in Higher Education's Administrative Ranks, 2013-20

20 Case study, Adelphi U.: Linking Diversity to Student Success

22 Section 2 Emphasize Culture, Not Quotas

Colleges have many tools to create an inclusive campus culture, among them equity audits and job-specific, anti-bias education. Shaming and blaming don't help.

26 Get on Board, Boards
The critical role of trustees

30 Case study, Wheaton College: Weaving Diversity Throughout the Campus

32 Section 3 Attracting and Developing Talent

Diverse leaders need support, mentors, and opportunities to move to the next level. Primarily white colleges can learn from the impressive diversity at minority-serving and two-year institutions.

46 COMMENTARY: What Black Women Need to Succeed at the Top
Narketta M. Sparkman-Key learned the hard way.

49 A Final Word

About the Author



CHRONICLE PHOTO

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What Black Women Need to Succeed at the Top

It's time to create a culture that values leaders of color.

BY NARKETTA M. SPARKMAN-KEY



AS A NEW administrator in higher education, I was welcomed with multiple responsibilities and limited support. After my institution named me director of faculty diversity and retention, a senior leader sent me a three-page email on how I should communicate (via email) in the future. His email, riddled with microaggressions, reinforced the lack of power and support I had.

I took that leadership role believing I could make a real impact and create a more inclusive environment for individuals like myself. But my journey in administration was not different from what the literature describes. Researchers have documented the challenges Black women face, among them the compounding effects of [ageism](#), [racism](#), and [sexism](#); stereotypes; limited role models; concrete ceilings; tokenism; [racial microaggressions](#); and undervalued work, leading to personal trauma.

I, too, endured constant instances of racism and sexism. I operated in the spaces between being overworked, overwhelmed, and isolated, and I struggled with extremely high expectations from my leadership as well as the academic community.

Black women often assume leadership roles that have been newly created or that require so much work that no one else wants them. In my case, everyone had defined my role for me while ignoring the job description and the fact that I had no support. I call these types of positions “title-only roles.” They come with a title and responsibility but no real power to change the culture or institution, as well as with limited support and minimal pay.

Black women leaders — who are at the forefront of change, often advocating on social-justice issues — need and deserve more. So do other leaders of color. Colleges must do a better job cultivating and nurturing them once they take the position.

SO WHAT CAN COLLEGES DO?

They must adopt a comprehensive strategy underpinned by a series of action-driven practices to diminish the challenges faced by leaders of color, and they must commit to curating a culture of inclusivity, success, and value. Colleges should also concentrate on such problems as inadequate pay; too little focus on human growth, learning, and equity; and the complexities of evaluations. While Black women in academe face extraordinary challenges, the following tactics could be helpful in supporting administrators from other minority and underserved groups. Here are 12 steps colleges can take:

1. Demonstrate commitment. Institutions must commit to hiring Black women and people of color for administrative roles and creating a pipeline to promote them into leadership.

2. Acknowledge that there must be mutual benefits. Often Black women enter roles that provide no upward mobility and limited professional-development opportunities. These positions should be structured to provide benefits to the women as well as to the institution.

3. Offer equitable pay. Institutions must

do the research and pay the industry standard.

4. Provide stronger support networks. Black women are too often placed in administrative roles where they are required to be “Superwomen.” They need to operate with adequate support and resources and reasonable expectations. Colleges must combat the feeling of isolation by supporting safe spaces for Black women administrators. Those spaces can be cultivated within insti-

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tutions as well as through organizations like the Faculty Women of Color in the Academy conference, [HERS](#) leadership events, and ACE Women’s Network.

5. Emphasize value and respect. Create a culture that values leaders of color. This includes advocating for them, addressing microaggressive behaviors, and modeling and prioritizing respect for them.

6. Embrace a broad agenda of well-being. Institutionalizing [workplace well-being](#) to support leaders of color can help them strike a healthy work-life balance and improve chances of success. This should include as-

sistance in setting boundaries and providing a space for their concerns to be heard.

7. Pay special attention to onboarding and transitions. Moving into a new role can be daunting. Colleges should create leadership-support teams to foster a culture of inclusion and help the administrator navigate the new role and environment.

8. Help secure professional mentors and coaches. This will promote success and help leaders of color thrive.

9. Respond to microaggressions quickly and forcefully. Train campus leaders to recognize and respond to them and to identify and document the actors behind them.

10. Make evaluation criteria fairer and more transparent. Black women administrators must be evaluated on all of their contributions to the institution, including diversity and social-justice work and mentoring efforts. Many Black women are overburdened with service demands and high expectations.

11. Make promotion a priority. Colleges need to create an environment where leaders can grow into new roles. They should

consider the full careers of Black women and other leaders of color by documenting all their contributions to their institutions and reward those efforts during promotion and annual review periods.

12. Challenge stereotypes. Educate leaders to work more effectively with administrators of color and to combat common stereotypes.

Black women and other leaders of color need support. I was often left to advocate for myself. I remember forwarding to a senior administrator the three-page email on how to write an email, just to prove that the incident happened. The response? I was told I should be used to those types of experiences. I had hoped the senior administrator to whom I reached out would act as an advocate and reinforce my value and place within the institution. Instead, I only felt more disrespected and oppressed.

To truly support leaders of color, colleges must ensure that everyone in a position of power is on board to help them succeed. If they don't, the academy will continue to fail to take full advantage of the innovation, leadership, and growth potential that these leaders bring.

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