

## Urban Universities and Urban Leadership

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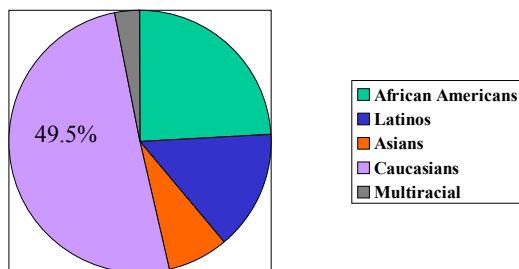
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## Urban Universities and Urban Leadership

At any particular time there are always significant challenges, old and new, facing a city – staying ahead of demands related to housing, employment, infrastructure, schools, taxes and revenues seem to be inevitably at, or near, the top of the list of challenges. While the parameters for decision making on such matters are likely to involve many factors, collaboration across diverse groups is a heralded component in civic decision making because it helps to assure buy-in with the process, and ultimately the decision.

The impact and importance of the changing demographics on decision making cannot be minimized. For example, the 2002 census indicates that Boston is now 49.5% white with people of color in the majority. However, the leadership profile of the City Council, for example, does not reflect the population trend. Although there now is Latino and African American representation on the Council, the majority of its members are white. If we look to the leadership of our major corporate and non-profit organizations, again we see that the leadership profile has become more inclusive with women and people of color in positions previously occupied by whites, but the overall picture does not reflect the new demographics.

### Racial Makeup in the City of Boston



Leaders in the future must reflect the diversity of their populations, and we believe that the best way to bring about the desired change is to look to the “emerging leaders” in the city. There are dedicated young professionals in our region who have not yet reached senior leadership positions and who would likely have limited experience in working across sectors. All cities have developed de facto networks of established leaders who make crucial decisions, and by opening up this network to a more inclusive group of individuals, the interests of all citizens is likely to be better served.

This paper provides a perspective and case report on “growing” a new, more inclusive cadre of future leaders in Boston and a perspective on the role of the urban university in meeting this leadership challenge. Specifically, it describes our work with the *Emerging Leaders Program*, an initiative that stresses collaboration and fosters a leadership style that is visionary, civic oriented and inclusive.

#### A LEADERSHIP MODEL

We define collaborative leadership as leadership that resides more in a network than in any one individual; it is visionary, service or civic oriented, and inclusive. It stands in contrast to a top down leadership style in which decisions are made by one person for others to follow. A collaborative approach is particularly useful in cities where large projects involving many constituencies are the norm. The definition has evolved based on discussions, site visits and interviews with leaders in our city, including the Mayor, and leaders from both the corporate and non-profit sectors individuals in the community who cared about leadership and whose voices make a difference. Their responses indicated there was a need for a new program to help individuals learn how to collaborate and to work in teams, and they also saw the need for more

diversity in the workforce. (See “New Leaders for the New Century” in Building Leadership Bridges, International Leadership Association, 2002, for an analysis of the survey).

We also spent time researching other leadership programs in the country including those cities which have community based leadership programs (often sponsored by the local Chamber of Commerce or a similar group), met with individuals from the American Leadership Forum to learn about their program in several US cities, and visited other Universities which offered leadership programs (the James MacGreor Burns Center at the University of Maryland, the Kennedy School at Harvard). These meetings and discussions helped to clarify our goals since we wanted to develop a new model that would combine elements of community programs with a university base.

Based on the results of this work, the curriculum and the associated activities that we developed for the Program were designed to meet the following four program goals. We would:

1. Select emerging leaders who are diverse by race, gender, and profession who will enhance their networking skills with other emerging leaders.
2. Expose the emerging leaders to a variety of Boston’s current leaders in order that they understand the current leadership profile and experience a variety of leadership styles.
3. Enhance the leadership skills of the emerging leaders in communication, negotiation, teamwork, and project development and completion.
4. Increase the understanding and practice of inclusive and collaborative leadership.

#### Recruitment

Organizations in the Greater Boston area were asked to nominate individuals for the new program that was to begin in January 2002; Boston’s current leaders were also invited to a lunch to kick-off the program and were “required” to bring with them an emerging leader.

Subsequently, nominees were contacted and asked to complete applications outlining some of their leadership experiences and agreeing to the time commitments of the program.

We admitted 32 individuals in 2001 and 39 in 2002. Those admitted to the Program were selected based on their expressed interest in and commitment to a more inclusive style of leadership; had five to ten years of professional experience; and, were recognized as potential leaders by their organizations. The groups were diverse in race, gender, and ethnicity, and there was a mix from business and government and the non-profit sector: over half were people of color and over half were from the corporate sector with the others from the governmental and non-profit sectors. All participants continue to be employed by their organizations while in the program but receive release time to attend the meetings.

#### Curriculum

The curriculum was designed to be practical and hands on. It consists of discussions with current leaders, readings on leadership, group activities and team projects. Seminars focus on leadership styles research and experiences, provide skill development, and emphasize team-building. We focus on the model described by James E. Austin in his book The Collaborative Challenge in which he states that twenty-first century will be the age of alliances. In our study of Boston's leaders cited above, we found that encouraging teamwork was a high priority for current leaders. The need to foster collaborative leadership must be high on the list of any leadership program that focuses on the future. Urban problems and issues are much too complex for any one individual to solve.

There are three main components to our ten-month program. It begins with a weeklong intensive seminar in January, followed by monthly forums February through September, and team projects that run concurrently through September. These sessions (approximately 90 hours)

provide opportunities to learn about various leadership styles as the fellows meet with many of Boston's current leaders who join us as guest speakers. The speakers have included the Mayor of Boston, the Presidents and CEO's of the major banks and other leading corporations in the city, the Speaker of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, individuals from the media, from the leading health care agencies, as well as from non-profit organizations. The leaders whom they met in 2002 and 2003 are diverse by race, gender, and profession and represent a variety of leadership styles. Each has also achieved his/her leadership position in a different way so the "fellows" had an opportunity to learn about the various approaches to a leadership position as well as some of the major challenges faced by leaders.

Another major feature of the program is that the fellows form into teams during the first week seminar and select issues for study and action for the next several months. In the team project phase of the program the participants receive experience in selecting issues for action, in creating and working in effective teams, and in communicating their findings to stakeholders. In 2002 they selected the following issues: access to economic opportunity, affordability of/access to health care, affordable housing, corporate citizenship, improving financial literacy, and life after the (completion of the) central artery.

This teamwork exercise was essential to learning about collaborative leadership, but working in real teams on real issues was more difficult than we had anticipated. Selecting the topics from the many, many issues of concern to our city was a challenge as was deciding how to focus on a broad topic like affordable housing. Moreover, most of the individuals had not worked in leaderless teams before and needed to develop skills in setting agendas, in identifying stakeholders, and in deciding on a plan of action. We provided extensive coaching to the teams throughout the process as the teams worked on their city issues from February through

September 2002. We found that teamwork does improve with practice and that it was important to have a coach to work with the groups. A former faculty member in the College of Management with extensive experience in creating successful teams was that coach. In September 2002, the teams presented their findings to Boston's Mayor, and they will do so again in September 2003. Two of the 2002 teams continued to meet after the program had concluded in order to finish their projects.

In addition to the speakers and the team projects, we also scheduled monthly forums for the fellows. At these sessions, they continued to meet current leaders and focused on specific skills. For example, in February we stressed the political process and how to "sell your point of view." In March 2002, we had a forum on the media. Later sessions covered negotiation skills, leading from the middle, work/life decisions, as well as managing a diverse workforce. The forums in 2003 are similar with more emphasis on specific skills such as stakeholder analysis and communication. This combination of interpersonal, technical and political skills is important to leaders for the future.

In addition to the monthly forums, we also take groups of the fellows to community events such as breakfasts dealing with current issues sponsored by the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce. Moreover, we have added special sessions dealing with how to get on a board and then how to be an effective board member.

The program is supported by fees paid by the sponsoring organizations and by grants from corporations and foundations. The non-profit organizations cannot pay the full fee so these grants have been crucial. The core program faculty come primarily from the College of Management with some others from the College of Liberal Arts and from the College of Public and Community Service at UMass Boston.

## EVALUATION

We have done extensive evaluations of the program from day one. We generated feedback in many ways: questionnaires from the fellows, as well as frequent conversations with them and questionnaires and conversations with their nominators. In addition, the first year of the program was evaluated by a doctoral student at UMass Boston and is the topic of a PhD dissertation. Currently another doctoral student is developing a template for annual evaluations. We are particularly interested to see what changes occur over the next 3-5 years and these evaluations are an essential part of our process. One of the most significant findings from the first year cohort was that the participants did improve their leadership skills as evidenced by the Leadership Practices Inventory.

For the future, we will look at several broad indicators: Have their networks expanded and continued to be diverse? Have they been asked to join community and/or business related boards? Have individuals from the cohorts advanced their own career goals? Have they stayed in contact with some of the current leaders whom they met? We will have answers to these questions over the next 3-5 years. In the meantime, we also use the immediate feedback to make program changes where appropriate. For example, based on data from the questionnaires and other related feedback, we did modify the program for 2003 to include more skill development throughout and to assist the fellows early on in selecting doable topics for their teamwork. In year two, we collaborated with an established statewide non-partisan think-tank that researches and develops policy papers on a variety of current topics related to our region. We used its research as the basis for the projects. This strategy of working with one organization and deciding on the overall theme of workforce development improved the functioning of the teams and led to more focused results.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Overall the evaluations have been very positive and can be summarized as follows:

1. The fellows benefited a great deal from meeting many of Boston's current leaders—one of our initial goals. They consistently ranked this activity very high on their surveys and commented that they had great exposure to the city's leaders and the issues faced by the city and region. The chance to learn different styles was invaluable. In order to enhance their understanding of leadership, however, we now spend more time on an analysis of what kinds of leadership styles they are observing and how variable is the path to leadership. We discuss the various styles after each speaker finishes and analyze what we learned about leadership.

2. The fellows benefited from working in and getting to know a diverse group of their peers—another of our goals. Many of them had not had such contacts and networks prior to the program. We increased the opportunities for the 2003 fellows to get to know each other by using the lunch breaks in a more structured way for this purpose. We also added some events so that the 2002 fellows could meet the 2003 fellows. We will continue to take groups of fellows to community events such as Chamber of Commerce breakfasts where they meet other leaders in the community and enhance their networks. Our networking goal also has been strengthened with the formation of an active alumni group. We have scheduled six alumni events for 2002-03 starting with a group of 15 who met with us recently to review the program changes we plan to make for next year and to provide feedback. Other events will include special dinners and speakers and the special session with the current 2003 cohort on how to get on a board and how to be an effective board member.

3. The teams and teamwork proved to be beneficial and very effective as a way to learn about collaborative leadership, but the teamwork component was more time consuming than we

had anticipated. As mentioned above, in 2003 we modified the process for the selection of topics by collaborating with the think tank MassINC. The fellows continue to have a choice of topics, but they do not need to do the initial research. They work primarily on implementation strategies with the final product consisting of set of recommendations or implementation strategies. Going forward, we added additional work on skill development in the second year. One particular area of focus is communication, especially oral presentations since the fellows make oral presentations to the Mayor and other interested parties. These presentations and the conversation with the Mayor were a very important part of the learning process.

4. We stressed collaborative and inclusive leadership throughout, and we learned, as did they, that collaborative leadership and teamwork improve when you practice in real situations on real issues. Reading about these issues as background is useful but is no substitute for practice. The overall conclusion from a variety of evaluation techniques is that the program has worked well and that the basic structure of formal sessions and speakers combined with practice and on going teamwork is the right model. Again the comments from participants are informative.

In conclusion, we were able to find emerging leaders who are diverse and to develop their leadership and networking skills. And our active alumni group already shows that many of these leaders are poised to take on greater civic responsibilities in our region. Although only one cohort has finished, two of them have already been asked to join significant boards, and another has been appointed to the internal advisory board of her company which offers assistance to the company foundation. For several others, such appointments are a strong possibility. The emerging leaders themselves are a diverse and new and involved pool of talent for the city and one that will work hard to made civic leadership in Greater Boston even stronger.

If we are to have new leadership models in our cities, universities have a significant role to play. We are the places where such programs can develop and flourish and, as we sponsor them, we expand the role of the urban university to help meet the leadership challenges that all our cities face. Our urban universities have always been serious about diversity and inclusiveness, and our experience here is invaluable because organizations to be successful in the future must be inclusive and stress collaboration and teamwork. After all, it is the role of urban universities to help prepare our cities for a better future.