AASCU’s Millennium Leadership Initiative (MLI) removes the myth and mystique surrounding how to become an effective senior level administrator. By doing so, the program endeavors to increase the number of qualified candidates from traditionally underrepresented groups.

“It’s not just out of the casual goodness of our hearts that AASCU started and supports this initiative,” states Frank Pogue, steering committee chair and president of Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. “It is essential to create a pool of individuals who are capable of leading and addressing the changing needs of people who reflect the diverse populations our institutions will serve.”

While MLI was created in 1997 to address the lack of senior level administrators, especially African-Americans and women, in higher education, Pogue stresses that the initiative represents all AASCU institutions and participants from all groups, including Hispanic and Latin, Asian-American, and Pacific Islander.

“What they have in common is a need to continue to grow the pool of up-and-coming leaders in a formal, structured way,” he says.

Muriel Howard, chair of the AASCU board of directors, refers to a 2006 American Council on Education study demonstrating the need and showing that a dearth of minorities, especially African-American, remains in higher education administration. From 1986 to 2006, the percentage of women college presidents doubled from 10 to 23 percent, but the number of presidents from racial/ethnic minorities only increased from 8 to 14 percent.

“And when you delete the presidents at minority or historically black colleges,” Howard adds, “the number of the presidents who represent minority groups drops to 10 percent. MLI is ensuring that diverse leadership in higher education continues.”

Pogue and Howard both cite the changing student population as a reason to encourage and support MLI and its graduates. The fastest growing population of students are Hispanic, African-American, new immigrants, and people in poverty, Pogue says. “We can use the diversity of our campuses, including among presidents, to educate all students and have our universities become laboratories where students learn from each other. I believe diversity among university leaders is more likely to send a strong message about the importance of diversity in general.”

James Rosser, president, California State University (CSU) Los Angeles, echoes the growing importance of diversity, especially as the demographics of the nations’ college-age population continue to change. Yet, he says, “higher education, at large, is struggling to address this. AASCU foresaw this need and is on the forefront through MLI. CSU Los Angeles will continue to be an active partner and supporter of this important higher education initiative.”

To participate in this leadership development program, presidents or chancellors nominate senior level administrators. A presidential selection subcommittee then designates candidates from education, government, and the
private sector. The participants attend a four-day professional development institute in June followed by a year or more of mentoring. To date, MLI boasts 251 graduates with 27 accepted for the 2007 class.

The strong mentoring component makes MLI different from other leadership initiatives, says Pogue. “It is one of the most effective and important pieces of this leadership initiative. Each MLI graduate is placed with a sitting president from anywhere in the country and interacts with that president on a continuing basis,” Pogue explains.

“For instance, my protégé has been to Edinboro twice this year and we communicate often by phone. When the person has a problem in his/her job, a call to the mentor can help. Plus the linkage continues even when the MLI grad becomes a president.” To date, 32 MLI graduates have become presidents.

John Hilpert, president of Delta State University (Miss.), says the three MLI participants he’s recommended highlight their new opportunities for networking. “They all returned with a positive assessment of MLI’s quality. One of those I recommended is now a university president,” he says. “Both the sessions in Washington and the mentor visits to other institutions contribute to the creative thinking that we expect of staff on our campus.”

Howard, president at the State University of New York (SUNY), College of Buffalo, has mentored several MLI participants. She says, “I’ve mentored individuals more at the deans level who have been moving up but need to gain institution-wide experience.” She explains. One of her mentees moved from a dean’s position and now works in a chancellor’s office. “That’s what you

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—Frank Pogue
want—planned ascendancy,” Howard explains of the process. “It takes time to move through the academy and MLI continues to mentor participants during this time.

She sites two people on her staff who have gone through MLI and she’s now giving them experiences inside of SUNY College of Buffalo and outside of the institution to serve on boards in the community and learn the external relations role of a president. “Most presidents are unprepared for that part – how to work with alumni, the legislature, how to deal with business leaders, parents, foundations, national organizations, the media. Many have never had to talk to the media.”

Howard also serves on the MLI curriculum committee that determines the institute program content. Curriculum highlights include working with governing boards, financial management, governmental relations, effective communication techniques for media interviews, advancement and fundraising.

Those skills are discussed in MLI workshops and followed up through mentoring experiences. “One thing the MLI participants always say to us after going through the institute and having 25-30 presidents of color provide leadership and training is ‘I can do this. I’ve always known I had talents and skills and now I believe it’s possible,’” Howard relates. MLI participants hear presidents of color answer some of the questions that no one had been there to ask. “All administrators who go through the institute see that there is no mystique or myth about becoming a president,” she says.

Sidney Ribeau, president at Bowling Green State University (Ohio), nominated several individuals from his management team who were accepted. “They always find MLI a valuable experience,” he says. Ribeau explains that the participants learn the wide variety of duties expected in senior management positions at a university and also have the opportunity to meet great leaders who may later be external mentors and part of an informal network built through MLI. “Some of our MLI attendees have been recommended for senior positions by people they met at MLI,” he notes. Bowling Green State University (BGSU), like other MLI supporters, pays annual dues. Ribeau says he willingly supports the initiative because it helps give those who have been historically underrepresented in higher education administration an opportunity to experience the actual challenges and rewards of senior leadership.

BGSU and 41 other institutions support MLI with annual dues for numerous reasons. At Lamar University (Texas) three senior administrators are MLI graduates, according to President James Simmons. “Providing professional development for all members of our community expands their ability to make stronger contributions in their present positions and to grow into others that they seek,” he believes. Lamar University was recently recognized by the New York Times as one of the 100 most diverse institutions in the country. Although Lamar, like many other mid-sized universities, has a long way to go in having the faculty and leadership team reflect more closely the diversity of the student body, Simmons says MLI plays a significant role by preparing able administrators at the institution to also assume more senior leadership positions at Lamar. “It is clearly easier to promote from within than to attract people with no ties to our region,” he says.

Eastern Connecticut State University, another dues-paying MLI supporter, has also had administrators participate in the program. President Elsa Nunez sees the program as vital to
“Participating in MLI allows institutions in one small way to contribute to diversity throughout higher education. It’s critical for all of us to realize we have some ownership and responsibility to the whole enterprise.”

—Bruce Bergland

Eastern’s development. “MLI will, over time, provide badly needed role models for students in colleges and universities. We are committed to diversity for our students, faculty and staff,” she says. Nunez believes MLI enhances the executive skills of administrators with potential and helps to ensure a viable future for the institution.

Indiana University Northwest (IU Northwest) Chancellor Bruce Bergland recently discovered that his institution directly benefits from the AASCU leadership initiative. “We hired a new academic vice chancellor and when I was in his office the other day I noticed a plaque on his wall saying he was a graduate of MLI.” Bergland believes hiring MLI graduates and nominating IU Northwest staff to the institute is part of the campus vision to make diversity a cornerstone of excellence in higher education.

Pogue also would like to find ways to help integrate diversity planning into university-wide planning. He believes that individuals who attend MLI are sensitive to diversity and will be in positions to help their campuses develop plans to hire persons who have traditionally been underrepresented.

Howard says institutions involved are making a critical investment in the future and society. “The fact that they can help support, strengthen diversity of leadership in this country is so important. University presidents need to interact with diverse leaders to find out how to approach an idea or find a different strategy to use. If we want Latino, African-American, or other students to be successful, it is our job to make sure those students see themselves in the curriculum and in leadership roles.”

Hilpert agrees that MLI is expanding the talent pool of outstanding administrators and enhancing the careers of many qualified people. “Those are exceptional benefits for the small sponsorship fee that is requested,” he states. “In my view, the program has lived up to its expectations.”

Carole Shelley Yates is a writer who lives in Cedar Falls, Iowa.
AASCU selects participants for the 2007 MLI

AASCU congratulates the 27 administrators selected as protégés for the 2007 Millennium Leadership Institute that will be held June 9-12 in Washington, D.C. For more information, visit aascu.org/ mli.

Juliette Bell, Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Fayetteville State University, North Carolina
Melody Carter, Vice President for External Affairs and Executive Director for the FVSU Foundation, Inc., Fort Valley State University, Georgia
Carmen I. Coballes-Vega, Dean of the College of Professional Studies, Metropolitan State University, Minnesota
Kenneth Coopwood Sr., Vice Chancellor for Student Services, Indiana University Northwest
Glen Cope, Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, University of Missouri-St. Louis
Marvin Curtis, Assistant Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Fayetteville State University, North Carolina
Beverly Edmond, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Alabama A&M University
Oney Fitzpatrick, Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, Lamar University, Texas
Ronald Forsythe Jr., Vice President, University of Maryland Eastern Shore
Emmanuel Gonsalves, Vice President of Institutional Advancement, Medgar Evers College, City University of New York
Saad A. Hassan, Assistant Dean for Research & Development, Winston-Salem State University, North Carolina
Eurmon Hervey, Chief Academic Officer and Director of Higher Education Programs, State Education Office, District of Columbia
Alma Hobbis, Dean, Virginia State University
Joyce Jones, Vice President for Student Services, Augusta State University, Georgia
Raynard Kington, Principal Deputy Director, National Institutes of Health
Andrew Lawlor, Associate Vice President for Technology and Communications, Edinboro University of Pennsylvania
Yvette Melendez-Thiesfield, Chief of Staff, Connecticut State University System
Peter Millet, Dean, College of Education, Tennessee State University
Wanda Mitchell, Vice Provost for Diversity, University of New Hampshire
Billy C. Moore, Dean, College of Business, Delta State University, Mississippi
Michael D. Parsons, Dean, College of Education and Human Services, Minnesota State University Moorhead
Alan D. Robertson, Vice President Administration and Financial Affairs, Chicago State University, Illinois
Victoria Sanders, Assistant to the President & Associate Vice President for Special Projects Diversity & Equity, East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania
Robert Turner, Vice President for Development and University Relations, Virginia State University
Ashish Vaidya, Dean of the Faculty, California State University Channel Islands
Thomas Wallace, Vice Chancellor for Student Life, University of Mississippi
Joseph Youngblood, II, Associate Vice President for Public Affairs and Dean, Thomas Edison State College, New Jersey

Continuing the Investment

Eurmon Hervey is benefiting from the spirit of generosity personified by the MLI Class of 2006. Hervey, chief academic officer and director of Higher Education Programs at the State Education Office, District of Columbia, is the recipient of a scholarship to attend the Millennium Leadership Institute (MLI).

The scholarship came from personal contributions made by the 2006 MLI class members who felt strongly that the investment others had made in them was a model they wanted to emulate.

Hervey was selected to participate in the 2007 Institute by a selection committee of state college and university presidents. The scholarship covers the cost of attending the Institute.