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Volume 4 • Number 1 • Spring 2002

# Alliance *viewpoint*

## A Decade of Challenging Potential

It is appropriate that the Leadership Alliance approaches its premier decade of service to underrepresented students at this time of reflection on injustice and prejudice engendered by the September 11 tragedy. The Alliance was formed to address a specific need in academe that is directly related to the topics of injustice and prejudice, namely, the disproportionate lack of graduate students, doctoral candidates and, concomitantly, college professors and principal investigators in certain sectors of our society. Injustice and prejudice are at the root of two of the most pressing problems facing our society today. They are the social, economic and political consequences of a widening income gap and the breakdown in intergroup (ethnic, racial and religious) relations in America. In this, the age of the knowledge worker, when higher levels of education are increasingly more important for the civic, social and economic development of this nation than ever before, it is crucial that graduate education be recognized as a driver of economic and social change. In its role as a supporter and encourager of traditionally underrepresented students in the academic pipeline of higher education, the Leadership Alliance can help to address both of these problems.

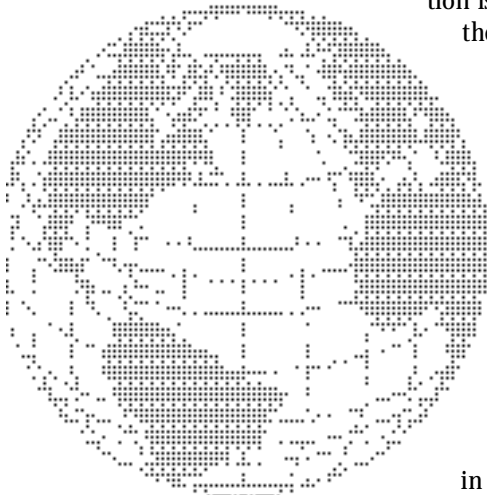
Through efforts like the Summer Research Early Identification Program (SR-EIP), which places undergraduate students in this country's top research labs and with its leading principal investigators in the sciences, social sciences and humanities, the Alliance offers exposure to and fosters confidence in these students' abilities to participate in the world of ideas that drive both technological and social development. This exposure and confidence is multidirectional, affecting the underrepresented students, their summer mentors and their future colleagues in laboratories and at research sites. The SR-EIP

and its culminating research symposium, where students present their work, network with prospective colleagues and review the graduate program offerings of many of the top universities in the nation, have unlimited potential to affect not only the future of intergroup relations, but also the disparity in incomes that crosses group borders. This is the kind of investment in human capital that society must make today if it is to have strong leadership for this nation's tomorrows.

We have all heard of the "digital divide." Like America's widening income gap, it is a gulf between Americans who, in this case, do or do not have Internet access. Unfortunately, if not unsurprisingly, the income gap represents another division in intergroup relations in our society. However, this gap is not just a material condition, but also an information deficit. Research shows that technological illiteracy is a problem for many Americans—from all cultural groups. Part of this problem can be attributed to the public perception that scientific and technological knowledge is something for special people only. This is another area where the Alliance can exert its influence through showcasing the research of its SR-EIP alumni and the proceedings of its annual symposium.

The American ideal of education for all has advanced on the high school and even college levels but has not as yet neared realization on the graduate level and in terminal degrees that lead to research professions. Graduate study leading to a doctoral degree has an elitist connotation that seems to exclude it from the public's conception of necessary higher education. The government feeds this perceived elitism by taxing graduate education tuition exemptions for academic employees as gifts unless it does not prepare that employee for responsibilities beyond his or her current job. Graduate educa-

# Leadership Through Exposure and Encouragement



tion is not only the root of the nation's economic, cultural, scientific and technological progress, but it is also big business—three-quarters of the best universities in the world are a part of the \$250 billion American education enterprise. Yet, as in many businesses in this country, large segments of the population continue to be underrepresented.

This underrepresentation, which the Leadership Alliance was founded to alleviate, presents a danger to our civil freedom and cultural (racial, ethnic, religious) freedoms. The diversity of interests and values in our society provides the very basis for political freedom. The multiplicity of interests and sects that make up this nation prevents conflicts between groups from tearing the fabric of our society apart and yielding enforced order under tyranny. A founding father, James Madison, saw a relationship between civil rights and freedoms and religious rights and freedoms — each drawing its protection from diversity: “In a free government,” he argued, “the security of civil rights must be the same as that of religious rights. It consists in the one case as the multiplicity of interests and in the other as the multiplicity of sects.”

This protection is necessary if academe is to not only remain a powerful engine of intellectual, cultural and scientific innovation but also fulfill its responsibilities to society. Higher learning should be able to:

- inform our past, guard our wholesome traditions and preserve our collective memory;
- harness and translate science and technology for service to and the understanding of society;
- promote equality along with quality, accessibility along with excellence and liberality of thought along with rigor;
- provide opportunities for students to learn many skills, including proficiency in conceptual analysis, and train them in their future professions;
- develop in students responsible attitudes, values, behavior, understanding, judgment and decision making with respect to individual and social ethics and the exercise of citizenship, and
- lift the intellectual and spiritual level of our democracy.

In order to accomplish these tasks, the academy must itself be more diversified in its undergraduate and graduate student populations, as well as in its faculty and staff.

The Alliance is dedicated to the maxim that given opportunity, exposure and encouragement, students from every segment of American society can and must participate in the research community and the communal sphere of discussion that molds society. Only in this way can America remain a strong leader in economic, cultural and political ideals. Our strength, our progress and our collective soul as a nation depend on it.

Alliance viewpoint is a semi-annual policy letter published by the Leadership Alliance, a consortium of twenty-nine institutions of higher education, including leading research and teaching colleges and universities dedicated to improving the participation of underrepresented students in Ph.D. programs. Please direct all comments, questions or requests to the Alliance press office, (212) 854-2968, or executive offices, (401)



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