

Millennium Leadership Initiative *Celebrates 20 Years* of Preparing Diverse Candidates for College Presidencies

Colleges and universities are tradition-bound, and change in higher education has never been easy to effect or fast to take hold. Any reform that has occurred in the academy has typically been championed by thought leaders who recognized a problem and moved to address it. That has been true in the case of demographic disparities in the college presidency.

Beyond just “doing the right thing,” diversity in campus leadership—including leaders of color and from the LGBTQ community and other underrepresented groups—means more perspectives to solve difficult issues, a better ability to shape inclusive learning environments, and strong role models for diverse student populations.

In the late 1990s, a group of African-American college and university presidents who met informally at various national AASCU annual meetings had grown increasingly frustrated with the slow pace of progress that people of color and women had made in being appointed to college presidencies. They came together in 1998 to form AASCU’s Millennium Leadership Initiative (MLI).

They envisioned MLI as “the premier leadership development program in higher education with an emphasis on preparation of minority candidates for college and university presidencies.” MLI attendees, called protégés, take part in an intensive four-day conference, the MLI Institute, and receive active guidance in year-long mentorships with experienced college and university presidents. Recently, the program added experienced coaches who continue to nurture protégés after their MLI mentorship ends.

The MLI class of 2018 poses in front of the U.S. Capitol during their visit to the Hill.



While there have been some strides in diversifying higher education leadership, more work needs to be done. The “2017 American College President Study,” conducted by the American Council on Education with support from the TIAA Institute, found that between 1986 and 2016, the percentage of university presidencies held by women increased from 9.5 to 30.1 percent, and representation of racial and ethnic minority groups in college presidencies rose from 8 percent to 17 percent of all college leaders. However, the study found women—who constitute more than half the general population—are the majority of college students, and that students of color are projected to constitute 44 percent of all college students by 2024.

MLI celebrates the progress it has made during the past 20 years in creating a pipeline of qualified and diverse candidates for the highest levels of academic leadership and looks forward to the future leaders that will benefit from the program. Read on to learn more about MLI’s past and the effect it’s had on the higher education landscape. **P**

This article includes excerpts from a forthcoming monograph written by Stephen Pelletier that celebrates the 20th anniversary of MLI. Based in Rockville, Md., Stephen Pelletier writes regularly about higher education.

Photos from MLI Institutes





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1998

America's promise is about providing higher education for everyone, regardless of race, creed, national origin or socio-economic background. It is important that our presidents represent that student body and those types of students. If we truly want to deliver America's promise, now is not the time to let our guard down. Now is the time where we have to be ever more vigilant.”

— Dr. Mary Evans Sias, current MLI director and past president of Kentucky State University

1999

2000

2016

On July 18, 1998, during a meeting at AASCU's Summer Council of Presidents, **leaders took the first steps toward forming MLI to address the deficit in talent of color reaching top positions of leadership in academe.**

Following two more meetings, **the first MLI Institute launched in June 1999.**

In 2000, MLI **garnered AASCU's official support** and formally became part of the association's programming.

While the program was originally founded to advance African-Americans, **it soon grew to include all who had a commitment to equity, including Hispanics, women, Asian-Americans, and Caucasian men.** Later the circle would intentionally widen further to also include members of the **LBGTQ community.**

In 2016, MLI added its coaching component—which **helps guide protégés after their yearlong MLI mentorship has ended**—and an assessment that offers protégés insight into their communication and management style.

throughout the years.



MLI's Founders

AASCU commends and honors MLI Founders who conceived the vision of MLI, designed the program and moved it from concept to reality. Here are the original founders with their affiliated institutions at the time of MLI's founding:

- * Former President **David G. Carter**, Eastern Connecticut State University (Deceased)
- * President **Hazo W. Carter Jr.**, West Virginia State University (Deceased)
- * President **Marvalene Hughes**, California State University, Stanislaus
- * Chancellor Emeritus **Edward B. Fort**, North Carolina A&T University
- * Former President **David B. Henson**, Lincoln University (Pa.) (Deceased)
- * Chancellor Emerita **Gladys Styles Johnston**, University of Nebraska at Kearney (Deceased)
- * Chancellor **Charlie Nelms**, University of Michigan-Flint
- * Former President **Wendell Rayburn**, Lincoln University (AASCU Staff Liaison, Deceased)
- * Former Chancellor **James C. Renick**, University of Michigan-Dearborn
- * Chancellor Emeritus **F.C. Richardson**, Indiana University Southeast



“What I like about MLI is that it not only talks about the skills and traits you need to become a college or university president, but it also helps you to understand who you are and understand what it means to be an ‘other,’ whatever that may be in a predominantly majority institution as well, and understand how to navigate that journey throughout your career.”

—Former MLI protégé and mentor, Dr. Mildred García, who served in three university presidencies and is now president of AASCU

SINCE THE FIRST MLI CLASS OF 1999, NEARLY

512 INDIVIDUALS

HAVE GRADUATED FROM THE PROGRAM.

128 GRADUATES

HAVE BECOME FIRST-TIME PRESIDENTS OR CHANCELLORS.

26 OF THOSE

HAVE GONE ON TO THEIR SECOND OR THIRD PRESIDENCIES.