

# Diversity now a top-level issue



**By Scott D. Miller**  
Guest Essayist

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**By Marylouise Fennell**  
Guest Essayist

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**A**s many political scientists have noted, the election of America's first multi-racial president is neither a coincidence nor a surprise. Pointing to an existing pipeline of African-American governors, mayors and other elected officials built during the last decade, they observe that the ascension to the nation's highest post was just a matter of time. While the plethora of talented African-Americans and other minorities in public life is good news indeed, that trend unfortunately has not carried over into higher education.

That's why we wholeheartedly support NCAA President Myles Brand's call for greater diversity and inclusion, not only in the hiring of African-American football coaches in all divisions, especially in Division I, but also in all higher education administration employment decisions. With so few African-American head coaches leading Division I football programs (nine entering the 2009 season, plus two black coaches "in waiting" as successors who were hired in

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advance), campus leadership must make a tangible commitment to substantially increase that number. Further, we agree that the time is now to go beyond the "Rooney Rule" familiar to so many pro football fans that leveled the playing field for talented minority coaches by requiring teams to interview at least one minority candidate for every coaching vacancy. Until then, the NFL had a poor track record in hiring African-American coaches, but since, it has hired six, three of whom led their teams to Super Bowls – two to victories.

In fact, even those who had initially opposed the Rooney Rule later advocated for it also to be extended to front office slots. However, as President Brand noted, interviews alone have not led to a notable number of coaches of color in NCAA institutions; moreover, with renewed commitment, NCAA institutions ought to be able to exceed the success rate of the NFL.

Finally, let's not stop with the hiring of head coaches. To the detriment of society, both women and minorities are still markedly absent from presidents' suites and other senior management posts relative to their percentage in the total population. As the Chronicle of Higher Education has noted, "Despite recent attention to diversity, the typical college leader is still an older white man."

In the two decades from 1986 to 2006, African-Americans increased their presence in presidential suites by just less than 1 percent; Hispanics fared slightly better, up from 2.2 percent in 1986 to 4.6 percent last year. Despite high-profile presidencies such as that of Drew Gilpin Faust at Harvard, only 23 percent of college presidents in 2006 were female, up from 9.5 percent two decades ago. These numbers are simply unacceptable.

It's not a matter of conscious discrimination, we

## Ethnicity of college presidents

Numbers based on all college presidents

Among men	1986	2006	% Change
White	92.1	88.0	-4.1 ↓
African-American	5.1	5.3	+2 ↑
Asian-American	0.4	0.9	+5 ↑
Hispanic	1.9	3.8	+1.9 ↑
American Indian	0.5	0.5	
Other	*	1.5	
Among women	1986	2006	% Change
White	89.4	81.1	-8.3 ↓
African-American	3.9	8.1	+4.2 ↑
Asian-American	0.8	1.0	+2 ↑
Hispanic	5.1	6.7	+1.6 ↑
American Indian	0.8	1.5	+7 ↑
Other	*	1.7	

\* Category was not available in 1986.  
Source: American Council on Education

believe, but one of supply and demand. Even when governing boards take extraordinary measures to find well-qualified men and women, they find a relatively small pool. One simply can't start at the top, and there are many who could benefit from mentoring and a broader exposure to disciplines crucial to a successful presidency. We're not talking about window dressing here, but about preparing men and women of promise and potential to occupy the top jobs.

Minorities, institutions and society as a whole will benefit from increasing the pipeline and deepening the pool of candidates. We submit, in fact, that higher education leadership today needs to go beyond the Rooney Rule in its vision and mindset. In times such as these, our nation cannot afford to lose the abilities of any of its citizens, regardless of race, color or creed – America needs all the talent available to thrive while meeting the challenges of the 21st century. With its track record of breaking barriers including academic reform and student-athlete well-being, among others, the NCAA has amply demonstrated its ability to lead. Now is the time to seize the initiative in another key area of higher education.