

NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Richard A. Skinner, Ph.D.

Senior Consultant, Harris Search Associates
614-798-8500; rick@harrisandassociates.com

U.S. engineering deans follow no 'blueprint' to the top, study shows

The absence of a single, dominant pathway leaves diversity advocates wondering where to focus efforts

The decades-long scramble to identify a path that can lead more women and minorities to the highest ranks of academic engineering has yet to turn the corner, a new study suggests.

Despite the concerted efforts of universities, industry groups and government agencies, the deanships of the nation's 300-plus accredited engineering schools remain largely the province of white males, the analysis shows.

Moreover, although the deans now in place share certain traits — the vast majority, for example, hold doctorates, and most cut their teeth as classroom instructors — no *single*, dominant route to the dean's office has emerged, leaving advocates of greater diversity wondering where to focus their attention and resources.

The study, which appears in the winter issue of *The Bridge*, the quarterly journal of the National Academy of Engineering (NAE), traces the ascents of 186 deans, all signatories to a major diversity initiative announced three years ago by the American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE).

The study's author, Richard A. Skinner, Ph.D., a two-time former university president who now serves as senior consultant with Harris Search Associates, says he hopes the analysis will "suggest areas for improvement to expand access and enhance representation so that the people in these important positions better reflect the vibrant diversity of their students and the population."

It's possible, Skinner says, that those seeking to attract more women and minorities to academic engineering will need to target children in even earlier stages of the K-12 continuum.

Among the study's key findings:

- Nearly one-third of the deans in the sample were born and/or educated overseas. Skinner maintains that the cosmopolitan flavor of academic engineering's C-suite can be attributed in large part to the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, which set the stage for influxes of aspiring engineers from India, South Korea, and Iran — and, over time, their similarly inclined (and equally talented) relatives.
- Although a plurality of the deans (12) hold doctorates from MIT, the group as a whole obtained Ph.D.'s from no fewer than 83 universities — a hodgepodge of institutional heavyweights and academic up-and-comers. Skinner's take: "Attending the 'right school' — especially the right doctoral-granting university — strengthens one's candidacy for a deanship in engineering, but the circle of the elite institutions from which to begin one's career is neither especially small nor fixed in its membership."
- Fifty-seven percent of the deans worked outside academia — in industry, government, or the nonprofit sector — at some point in their engineering careers. "Given recent discussions in the academic-engineering community about the relevance and 'real world' applicability of curricula, pedagogy, and learning formats, as well as the workplace readiness of engineering graduates, a stint as a practicing engineer outside academia may add to advancement prospects as an academic engineer," Skinner writes.
- The deans in the study held a variety of academic positions immediately before assuming their current posts. The most common stepping stones, in descending order: department chair, 39 percent; faculty member, 16 percent; associate or assistant dean, 13 percent; interim dean, 12 percent; and, tied at 10 percent, dean at another institution and project or laboratory director.
- Close to two-thirds of the deans were "outside" hires, meaning they weren't employed at their current schools immediately prior to their appointments. More precisely, 44 percent moved from less prestigious institutions, as defined by *U.S. News & World Report's* closely watched annual collegiate rankings. Forty-one percent relocated from peer institutions, 12 percent came from higher-ranked schools, and 3 percent came from nonacademic entities. ➡ **CONTINUED ON OTHER SIDE**



REROUTING ...

The absence of a prescribed – or even preferred – pathway to the leadership ranks of academic engineering is examined in a study appearing in the winter issue of *The Bridge*, the quarterly journal of the National Academy of Engineering. The study traces the professional advancement of 186 deans, signatories to a major diversity initiative announced three years ago by the American Society for Engineering Education.



NATIONAL ACADEMY
OF ENGINEERING

Skinner speculates that the absence of a prescribed — or even preferred — route to the leadership ranks of academic engineering is attributable in part to significant disparities in where the nation's deans began their respective journeys.

"Some are products of K-12 schools that remained characterized by racial segregation and unequal funding and resources well after *Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka*," writes Skinner, who before joining Harris Search Associates in 2010 served as president of Clayton State University in suburban Atlanta, president and vice chancellor of Royal Roads University in Victoria, British Columbia, and senior vice president of the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB).

"More often than not, most of them were the only, or one of very few, women of color in engineering programs, both as students and as professors."

Not surprisingly, therefore, the leadership ranks of academic engineering lack the gender and racial diversity seen in the top tiers of some other disciplines, including, most notably, teacher education and the arts and sciences. Eighty-two percent of the deans featured in the engineering study are male, and 74 percent are white.

The percentage of engineering deanships held by women is virtually identical to the corresponding figure in academic medicine, which in recent years has earned generally high marks for its pursuit of gender diversity.

However, women are joining med-school faculties at a rate that far surpasses the rate at which their engineering counterparts are entering academia. From 2001 to 2015, the number of female faculty members at U.S. med schools jumped by more than 34 percent. In comparison, from 2006 to 2014, the nation's engineering schools saw an increase of only 4 percent.

As for academic engineering's racial diversity, African Americans and Hispanics constitute just 2.3 percent and 3.7 percent, respectively, of U.S. faculty positions — and those numbers have barely budged in the past decade.

The data are sobering, Skinner says.

"Professional advancement for women in general and African American women in particular has been slow in academic engineering, notwithstanding the good-faith efforts of individuals and organizations to improve that condition."

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About Harris Search Associates

Harris Search Associates, founded in 1997 by Jeffrey G. Harris, is an executive search consultancy specializing in engineering, technology, and health sciences. The firm has conducted more than 875 searches, 34 percent of which have resulted in the placement of candidates from traditionally underrepresented populations. Based in Dublin, Ohio, in suburban Columbus, Harris Search Associates maintains satellite offices in Dallas and San Francisco. The firm is affiliated with IIC Partners, a global search consortium with 50 offices in 33 countries.

About Richard A. Skinner, Ph.D.

Richard A. Skinner, Ph.D., is senior consultant at Harris Search Associates. He formerly served as president of Clayton State University in metropolitan Atlanta and later as president and vice chancellor of Royal Roads University in Victoria, British Columbia. In the interim, he worked with the University System of Georgia, serving as president and chief executive officer of a pioneering unit charged with marketing and coordinating the distance learning offerings of 34 colleges and universities. Before joining Harris Search Associates in 2010, Dr. Skinner was senior vice president for programs at the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges. Dr. Skinner earned a doctorate and a master's degree in Government and International Studies at the University of South Carolina, and he completed additional studies at the University of Michigan and the University of Strathclyde in Scotland. His undergraduate alma mater, Georgia Southern University, recognized him as its 1997 Distinguished Alumnus.

CORPORATE OFFICE

4236 Tuller Road
Dublin, OH 43017
Phone: 614-798-8500
info@harrisandassociates.com

SOUTHERN REGION OFFICE

13155 Noel Road
Dallas, TX 75240
Phone: 972-686-0030
dallas@harrisandassociates.com

WESTERN REGION OFFICE

388 Market Street
San Francisco, CA 94111
Phone: 415-817-9000
sf@harrisandassociates.com

harrisandassociates.com

