

TITLE: Real and Ideal Leadership Practices of Women in Mid-Level Administrative Positions in Student Affairs

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OBJECTIVE: To investigate the leadership practices of women in different ethnic groups and contribute to an understanding of leadership development issues for women in student affairs positions.

METHODOLOGY: The sample consisted of 88 African-American and 93 Caucasian women in mid-level administrative positions in student affairs units at four-year public institutions enrolling 10,000 or more students (85% response rate), along with 686 of their constituents (including graduate students; 64% response rate). Respondents completed a modified version of the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) to reflect both “how leaders actually lead and again in reference to how they should lead.” Nearly two-thirds of the respondents had been in their current positions less than four years (average 4.3 years), although only 11 percent had been in student affairs for less than four years. Approximately one-fourth each of the respondents had been in student affairs for 5-9 years and 10-14 years (average 12.6 years). More than one third of the respondents each were either in the age group of 30-39 or 40-49. Most held master’s degrees (63.5%). The typical constituent was a female (69%), Caucasian (70%), about 36 years old, with a master’s degree (50%), who had been in her current position just over four years and in student affairs between 8-9 years. Fifty-seven percent reported directly to the leader, 22.5% were coworkers and 5.9% were supervisors. Cronbach’s alpha reliabilities in this study for the actual and ideal versions of the LPI (both Self and Observer versions) generally ranged at .70 and above (with reliabilities generally higher for the actual than the ideal version).

KEY FINDINGS: The main effect of leader ethnicity and all interaction effects involving leader ethnicity were not statistically significant. There were no significant differences between raters (self versus observer scores) on Challenging, Inspiring, Modeling and Encouraging (scores were higher for Enabling for self scores). There were significant differences for all five leadership practices between times (actual vs. ideal scores), as well as an interaction effect of raters and times. Rather unremarkably, ideal scores were consistently rated higher than actual scores by both leaders and their constituents. The ideal scores of leaders were also consistently higher than the ideal scores of constituents. The relative rank order of the five practices (Enabling, Modeling, Encouraging, Challenging, and Inspiring) did not vary by rater or by time.

For women administrators the differences between actual and ideal leadership practices were greatest for Inspiring and Encouraging, which is also true for their observers. The two groups also agreed that the actual practice of Enabling was closest to

their perception of the ideal practice. Neither the actual or ideal leadership practices varied as a result of the ethnicity of the respondent (self or observer).