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FROM MARGIN TO CENTER: RETHINKING THE CANNON IN HIGHER EDUCATION GRADUATE PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present special series is to move conversations about people we treat as “other” within our field from the margins of higher education as a field of study to the center. For this special series we invited established scholars within the field of higher education to illuminate issues confronting the field that are often left to the margins.

BACKGROUND

In the now feminist classic, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984/ 2015) sociologist, feminist, and human rights activist bell hooks makes the argument that in advancing an agenda that was white/Eurocentric and middle-class centered, second wave feminists missed an opportunity to speak to unite women and men across racial/ ethnic, class, sexual orientation, and other divides. In fact, hooks refers to “the women who are most victimized by sexist oppression; women who are daily beaten down, mentally, physically, and spiritually – women who are powerless to change their condition in life” as “the silent majority” (p. 1). Whereas white, middle-class, heterosexual feminists were able to access bully pulpits across societal milieus (news media, books and other publications, social organizations, and academe, to name but a few) to articulate feminist theories and inquiries, women who identified as other were sidelined from discussions except to speak to matters of race, class, orientation, and the like. Within feminist and women’s studies, hooks assessed a tendency for feminist scholars to uphold the “party line” when it came to theory, activism, and research while “women who feel a need for a different strategy, a different foundation, often find themselves ostracized and silenced. Criticisms of our alternatives to established feminist ideas are not encouraged” (p. 9).

Similarly, within higher education as a field of study, majority research and viewpoints are expressed in our curriculum and texts as THE higher education cannon. For example, Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) three stage model of college choice, even as modified to five stages by Toutkoushian & Paulsen (2016), remains the dominant one through which we evaluate student college going decisions, although we know that these processes vary by race/ethnicity and class. Yet, these considerations are modifications to the dominant model (e.g., Freeman, 2005; Hillman, 2016; McGrath, Swisher, Glen, & Conger, 2001), rather than subsumed within it. Similarly, coursework on strategic planning and institutional research is centered on processes within predominantly/historically white re-

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search institutions, the diverse array of institutional types notwithstanding (Middaugh, 2011; Peterson, Mets, Trice, & Dill, 1999; Strike, 2017). And this is what we teach our students.

The purpose of the present special series is to move conversations about people we treat as “other” within our field from the margins of higher education as a field of study to the center. In so doing, our hope is that we begin to rethink what we consider as dominant theoretical and research approaches to our field as well as the canon we convey to our students. This is especially important as we consider that the majority of college students attend community colleges, the majority racial/ethnic composition of Gen Z is non-white, majority of higher education institutions are not in the United States, and our understandings of gender have moved well beyond the binary.

OVERVIEW OF THE SERIES

For this special series we invited established scholars within the field of higher education to illuminate issues confronting the field that are often left to the margins. To start the series, Caroline Sotello Viernes Turner, in her essay titled, “*Remaining at the Margin and in the Center*,” she recounts her experience as both a first generation college student and scholar and the ways in which that has shaped her professional experiences. She goes on to trace her experiences moving from the margins as an emerging female scholar of color to advancing to the center as a distinguished professor and previous service in roles such as interim dean and president of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE). However, she challenges scholars at the margins to incorporate their life experiences and backgrounds in their work. Recognizing, as Harper (2017) did in a keynote address, that White supremacy impacts the editorial decisions that are made in the academy as White scholars hold the top positions at most academic publishing houses and lead most editorial boards which determine what is deemed relevant and rigorous and what is ultimately published. She advocates that scholars in the field bring themselves, their experiences, and their questions to their work. Turner challenges academic gatekeepers such as journal editors and senior faculty to support the innovation of scholars who are producing high quality research. She ultimately suggests that those who are at the margins, those at the center, and those who are both simultaneously at the center and at the margins should work together to create a new center that is diverse and inclusive.

Pamela Eddy and Regina Garza Mitchell in their article titled, *Preparing Community College Leaders to meet Tomorrow's Challenges*, review the leadership development literature and posit that a learning centered approach will best support the development of community college leaders. Although the discussion regarding the role of the community college sector has increased amongst scholars in recent decades, there has still been marginal focus placed on the importance of leadership development for this sector (Forthun & Freeman, 2017). In this paper, Eddy and Garza Mitchell discuss the significance of leadership development in this sector and the importance of taking into account the differing institutional needs of each community college given their size, location, and the communities they serve. They found in this study that graduate doctoral programs targeting community college leadership and national training programs are uniquely positioned to prepare leaders for this sector, but they need curricular and program alignment targeting development of authentic leadership and ways to bridge theory with practice. They also conclude that succession planning is a vital part of developing a strong leadership pipeline.

Continuing on the theme of community colleges, Jennifer Lebrón and Jaime Lester in their manuscript titled, “*No Longer Junior Colleges: Integrating Institutional Diversity into Graduate Higher Education Programs*,” argue that graduate programs in the field of higher education should integrate an understanding of community colleges and institutional diversity in meaningful ways throughout their curriculum. Currently issues pertaining to both community colleges and institutional diversity are located at the margins of program curriculum. Most programs center on issues that impact four-year institutions. Lebrón and Lester provide detailed suggestions on the ways in which these areas can be infused throughout the curriculum from textbook and activity choices to the theories and conceptual frameworks introduced within courses. They advocate that lessons can be learned from the commu-

nity college sector that can enhance the work that is conducted in the four-year sector and students should learn best practices from both sectors.

Another area that the field of higher education has historically marginalized and not given voice to are issues impacting the Transgender community. Kathryn Jaekel and Z Nicolazzo in their article titled, “*Teaching Trans*: Strategies and Tensions of Teaching Gender in Student Affairs Preparation Programs,*” outline a pedagogical framework that trans* educators utilize to center trans* identities and epistemologies in classrooms alongside graduate students. This scholarship is desperately needed as there is a dearth of literature that addresses the experiences of trans* educators in classroom spaces, in particular, how gender mediates pedagogical approaches. This seminal essay encourages members of our field to be aware of how gender is always present in all spaces, including in classrooms. They argue that both faculty and practitioners incorporate expansive notions of gender through pedagogical strategies, materials, and praxis, given that most higher education and student affairs programs still engage in gender binary thinking.

Although issues related to students with disabilities have been well documented at the undergraduate level, very few studies have centered the challenges, needs, and experiences of doctoral students with disabilities. Michelle Lizotte and Stacy Clifford Simplican conducted a systemic literature review (SLR) in order to describe the current state of both the research and the practice of doctoral students with disabilities in their article titled, “*Doctoral Students with Disabilities: Challenges in Graduate Programs and Research Methodology.*” They found that it is important for the field to advance a research agenda and methodological approaches that circumvent limitations that adversely impact this population by utilizing strategies such as incorporating universal design to measure a graduate program’s awareness of disability, experimental methods to minimize response bias, and identifying ways to re-define disability to improve recruitment of potential research subjects. This topic is timely as the field continues to prepare the next generation of faculty and leaders serving within our colleges and universities.

Crystal Chambers rounds out our articles for the special series with a reexamination of the historical canon of the field of higher education in her manuscript titled, “*Discovering Nalanda and Other Institutions of Higher Education Before Salerno.*” Her article explains that historians of higher education have historically written and taught that the first scholars and institutions of higher learning were developed in the global west in places such as Western Europe – Salerno, Bologna, and Paris. However, she aptly challenges this traditional western-centered approach, which does not acknowledge and discounts the histories of higher education, particularly of institutions in the global east, which pre-date European models such as institutions that were formed in Africa that pre-dated the histories of the global west. In her historical overview she argues that history of higher education coursework in the global west should be adjusted to include acknowledgement as well as greater exploration of ancient higher education institutions as part of our collective global understanding of the history of higher education. Scholarship such as this is important. Chambers challenges the reader to engage and learn more about higher education history in the global east, develop research to contribute to the literature in this area, and invites them to be a part of a movement to move the history of higher education in the global east from the margin to the center.

Lastly, this special series includes two book reviews, the first being a review of Crystal Chambers text titled, “*Law and Social Justice in Higher Education,*” by James D. Anderson, the Edward William and Jane Marr Gutsell Professor and Dean of the College of Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana. The second book review was provided by Dr. Mary F. Howard-Hamilton, Distinguished Research Professor and Chair of the Department of Educational Leadership in the Bayh College of Education at Indiana State University of the book titled, “*Advancing Higher Education as a Field of Study: In Quest of Doctoral Degree Guidelines – Commemorating 120 Years of Excellence,*” which was edited by Sydney Freeman, Jr., Linda Serra Hagedorn, Lester F. Goodchild, and Dianne A. Wright.

We, as the editors of this special series, believe that each article presented in the special series makes a critical and seminal contribution to higher education as a field of study. The topics addressed in these articles are seldom addressed in the mainstream outlets of our field. We believe it is time that the field of education look at itself and ask some critical questions such as: What scholarship is currently being centered? Why are those topics deemed relevant? What is the role of external funding and mandates in determining what scholarship is supported? Who determines if they are relevant? Is it time for new topics, scholarly voices and research to be centered in the field? And if so, how should the field attempt to do this?

In recent years, one of the editors of this special series has heard from prominent scholars in the field that studying issues impacting the field is no more than “navel gazing.” However, we reject the notion that examining issues impacting the field and its graduate programs is unnecessary. We have found that who determines the architecture of the field – what is the field, what its culture should be, and how it is arranged and governed – is decided primarily by those associated with (graduated from and/or work for) ranked (elite) higher education programs (Harper, 2017), which we have found has created a recycling of ideas and produced confirmation bias that weeds out some of the innovative scholarship, methodologies, approaches of scholars in the field that do not conform to the status quo.

As hooks (1984/2015) prefaces the new edition to her classic work:

one of the most affirming aspects of feminist movement has been the formation of an intellectual environment where there has been sustained dialectal critique and exchange. Hearing the voices of radical thinkers... the face of feminist theory and practice changed. ... Feminist willingness to change direction when needed has been a major source of strength and vitality in feminist struggle. ... Just as our lives are not fixed or static but always changing, our theory must remain fluid, open, responsive to new information. (p. xiv)

While higher education as a field of study remains at center conservative, if not reactionary politically speaking (Bensimon & Bishop, 2012), there is hope that as a field we will continue to evolve to not only allow a space for divergent speech within our conferences and publications, but actively seek the viewpoints of the “other,” bringing them in from the margin of our field to the center.

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BIOGRAPHIES



Dr. Crystal Renée Chambers is an Associate Professor of Educational Leadership at East Carolina University. She is the Editor-in-Chief of *The Journal for the Study of Postsecondary and Tertiary Education*, editor/ co-editor of 3 edited book volumes on the education of African American women and is the sole author of *Law and Social Justice in Higher Education*, part of the *Core Concepts in Higher Education* series (Routledge).



Sydney Freeman, Jr., Ph.D., is an associate professor of Adult, Organizational Learning and Leadership at the University of Idaho. He is a former National Holmes Scholar, a certified faculty developer through the Learning Resources Network and an affiliate of the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Minority Serving Institutions. His research investigates the challenges facing higher education administration programs, specifically, higher education as a field of study and the university presidency. Freeman has published numerous journal articles and is the lead editor (with Linda Serra Hagedorn, Lester F. Goodchild, and Dianne A. Wright) of *Advancing Higher Education as a Field of Study: In Quest of Doctoral Degree Guidelines* (Stylus Publishing, 2014) which received the 2015 Auburn University Graduate School "Book of the Year" Award. He also serves on the Board of Directors of the American Association of University Administrators and was honored with the "2015 Emergent Leader of the Year" award by the same professional society. He serves on multiple academic journal editorial and review boards, including serving as managing editor of the *Journal of HBCU Research + Culture*. He also is the founder and Senior Editor-in-Chief of *The Journal for the Study of Postsecondary and Tertiary Education (JSPTTE)*.