High Educ (2008) 55:519–535
DOI 10.1007/s10734-007-9072-6

Building a pipeline for diversity through intersectoral collaboration

David J. Siegel

Published online: 19 June 2007

Abstract Findings are presented from a year-long study of a cross-sector collaboration to prepare underrepresented students for postsecondary education and beyond. The LEAD (Leadership Education and Development) Program in Business is an initiative involving universities, corporations, a federal government agency, and a nonprofit coordinating body in an effort to introduce students to business education and careers in business. This paper analyzes and compares (1) the starting conditions catalyzing the involvement of different sectors, (2) sustainability factors, (3) negotiation of the terms of involvement, (4) the actual experience of partnership, and (5) the difference made by a coordinated approach to pipeline development.

Keywords Diversity · Collaboration · Academic-industry partnership · Pre-college outreach

Introduction

One of the signal lessons to be drawn from the diversity movement of the last decade is that colleges and universities do not pursue their diversity-related interests in a vacuum. Evidence for this claim is amply provided by two recent U.S. Supreme Court cases, *Grutter v. Bollinger* and *Gratz v. Bollinger*, in which numerous amicus briefs filed by a whole spectrum of social actors (including corporations, nonprofits, and the military) outlined the benefits of diversity and the necessity of race-sensitive admissions to promote its presence in higher education and professional life (see, for example, Cantor 2004; 3M et al. 2003). What explains the support provided by so many influential individuals, groups, and

D. J. Siegel (✉)
Department of Educational Leadership, East Carolina University,
229 Ragsdale Hall, Greenville, NC 27858, USA
e-mail: siegeld@ecu.edu

organizations? Arguably, the supra-rationale behind their advocacy is enlightened self-interest; that is, persistent gaps in minority student access to—and success in—postsecondary education (Karen and Dougherty 2005) ultimately pose a threat to organizations whose pragmatic interests are well-served by racial and ethnic diversity. After all, many commercial enterprises now claim that human diversity translates into higher profits (see, for example, Fletcher 2003; Hays-Thomas 2003), and corporate recruiting offices are increasingly targeting minority candidates for employment. Strategic alliances among various sectors are beginning farther back in the education pipeline to develop the appetite, interest, and competencies of underrepresented students in order to prepare them for college and beyond.

The collaborative approach to any complex social problem acknowledges a basic fact of interdependence explicated by Scottish Enlightenment philosopher David Hume in the eighteenth century: "Scarce any human action is entirely complete in itself, or is performed without some reference to the actions of others, which are requisite to make it answer fully the intention of the agent" (1777/1975, p. 89). Today, there is a growing chorus calling for a more comprehensive and coordinated set of strategies—including greater involvement by stakeholders across society—to create opportunity for underserved populations (see, for example, Bowen et al. 2005; Swail and Perna 2002). The shortage of minorities in science, engineering, mathematics, technology, and business has been well-documented, and pre-college programs to develop pipelines into these fields have also received attention (see, for example, Whitla et al. 2005; Commission on the Advancement of Women and Minorities in Science, Engineering, and Technology Development 2000). Pusser (2001) and Timar et al. (2004) have shown how increased commitment to partnership, outreach, and intersectoral coordination became a strategy employed by California's higher education, community college, and K-12 systems—with significant legislative support—following the passage of Proposition 209, which barred the consideration of race as a factor in college admissions. Collaborative activity between universities and business organizations has even been driven into legislatively derived performance measures (see, for example, Zumeta 2001), and additional pressures for collaboration have emanated from professional societies, foundations, state agencies, and accreditors (Kezar 2006).

The project detailed in these pages explores the public-private partnership dynamics in the LEAD (Leadership Education and Development) Program in Business, an inter-organizational initiative to introduce underrepresented minority students to business education and careers in business. Importantly, LEAD is a cross-sector partnership of (1) the Philadelphia-based umbrella organization (LEAD National), which has been operating for approximately 26 years, (2) twelve top American universities[1] that host residential Summer Business Institutes (SBIs) on their campuses for 30–35 students entering their senior year of high school, and (3) nearly forty multinational corporations (and a federal government agency)[2] that take an active role in the overall education experience and provide financial support to underwrite programmatic costs. This academic–industry–government–

[1] Affiliated institutions are the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Michigan, Northwestern University, UCLA, Duke University, the University of Minnesota, the University of Virginia, Dartmouth College, Cornell University, Stanford University, the University of Illinois, and Georgetown University.

[2] Corporate (or other organizational) partners are 3M, Alcoa, American Express, Apple, ArvinMeritor, Bank of America, Campbell Soup, Credit Suisse First Boston, Dell, Deutsche Bank, ExxonMobil, Ford Motor Company, General Mills, General Motors, Goldman Sachs, Hilton Hotels, IBM, Jannsen, Johnson & Johnson, JPMorgan Chase, Lehman Brothers, Marsh/Guy Carpenter, McKinsey, MCI, McNeil, Merrill Lynch, Owens Corning, PepsiCo, Pfizer, Popular, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, Rohm & Haas, SC Johnson, State Street, UBS, U.S. Department of State, and Young & Rubicam.

nonprofit partnership suggests a powerful and distributed arrangement for advancing the cause of diversity in education and business, one that has not been studied in depth. An examination of the partnership model utilized by LEAD may provide theoretical and practical insights in the realms of diversity and institutional collaboration.

Indeed, several questions flow from a venture of this type. For example, what are the different configurations of forces that impinge on each sector and advise a collaborative response like LEAD? What are the different expectations that partners bring to the enterprise? How do these get negotiated and satisfied by other partners? Do the competing aims of organizational participants (business schools, corporations, government agencies, and the nonprofit entity) outweigh or neutralize the cooperative spirit? How do the different organizations experience the process of working together in pursuit of a common objective? As the initiative is a shifting alliance, what explains the process of entry and exit by organizations?

Methodology and framework

With generous financial support from Lumina Foundation for Education, I spent a year in the field studying the LEAD partnership model in an effort to answer these and additional questions. Data sources for this comparative (academic–corporate–government–nonprofit) case study analysis included (1) extensive semi-structured interviews with 77 individuals, (2) field-based observations of the education experiences in action, and (3) analysis of documentation (including required deliverables produced by students). Informants included deans, faculty, admissions directors, corporate and foundation relations officers, workforce development specialists, heads of diversity recruiting, vice presidents of human resources, corporate foundation directors, and the president and program director of LEAD.

The conceptual framework guiding the study incorporates ideas found in the “triple helix” model of academic–industry–government relations developed by Etzkowitz and Leyesdorff (1997), which holds that networked relationships among sectors can produce new discourses, new inter-institutional forms (growing out of integrated activities), and even a version of hybridization in which participants assume the roles of their partners (a notion supported by institutional theorists like DiMaggio and Powell [1983], who use the term “mimetic isomorphism” to denote this process.) The triple-helix heuristic supplied by Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff is concerned chiefly with technological innovation, whereas the present study is concerned with an innovation in the social sphere. For a supplementary perspective on social partnering, the work of Austin et al. (2004) is especially useful. Austin and his colleagues have identified key elements of cross-sector collaborations; these include motivational factors guiding organizations to form alliances, the process of value creation, and alliance management. Of particular interest is a motivational spectrum that pits partnership formation and development as primarily altruistic or utilitarian. Together, the conceptual streams of triple–helix relations and social partnering assisted in shaping an understanding of the data.

Analysis and interpretation of the data proceeded along the following dimensions of interest: (1) variation in the starting conditions (motivations, rationales, and internal and external forces) catalyzing the involvement of the different sectors, (2) sustainability factors (including relevant evolutionary dynamics and challenges to sustainability), (3) negotiation of the terms of involvement (the articulation of objectives and expectations by participant organizations, as well as any conditions imposed), (4) the actual experience of partnership as revealed by members of the network (including role differentiation and the division of labor, the extent of coordination, the design and delivery of the education experience, and conflict management), and (5) the difference made by partnership, including evidence that membership contributed to the organizational learning of participating entities or was utilized as an experiment that supplied new innovations for uploading into the organizations of interest. The significance of sequencing the dimensions in this particular manner is that it approximates an input-throughput-output model of relationship development and thereby captures the collaborative process in various stages of performance and progress. A central assumption of this scheme is that each phase bears directly or indirectly on the ultimate task of creating a new pathway of access and success for underrepresented students. A brief overview of the program, with an emphasis on relevant student characteristics, will set the stage for the presentation of findings.

Background of the program

Through aggressive marketing and outreach, LEAD National annually identifies, evaluates, and recruits high-potential students based on test scores (average SAT: 1220), grade point average, and demonstrated leadership. Roughly one-third of all applicants are selected each year, and some years have featured as many as 2000 applications for 330 seats in the program. Student participants are rising high school seniors. According to internal documents, the LEAD class of 2004 was 55% African American, 39% Hispanic, 4% Native American, and 2% Multi-Racial.

There are over 7,000 LEAD alumni, 68% of whom are (as of 2005) engaged in business careers. Thirty percent of alumni have obtained or are pursuing an MBA from a Top 25 graduate business school, according to LEAD's 2005 annual report.

Sixty-six percent of LEAD's class of 2004[3] enrolled at a Top 50 national university or Top 50 national liberal arts college in the United States (per annual rankings released by U.S. News & World Report) in the 2005–2006 academic year. Fifty percent of the 2004 class attended one of the universities hosting a LEAD Summer Business Institute, and 23% indicated that they were attending the institution that hosted their SBI. Universities garnering the most LEAD participants were the University of Pennsylvania (18), Cornell University (16), the University of Minnesota (11), and the University of Virginia (8). For the class of 2003,[4] 68% of students subsequently enrolled at a Top 50 national university or Top 50 national liberal arts college. Thirty-six percent attended one of the universities hosting a LEAD SBI, and 17% of students matriculated at the university that hosted the Institute they attended. Universities claiming the most LEAD participants were Penn (18), Cornell (15), Duke (14), and Northwestern (13).

The top majors chosen by LEAD alumni once they are on campus are business, economics, engineering, finance, management, and marketing. LEAD alumni typically pursue careers in financial services (banking, finance, or accounting), engineering, or marketing and sales; top corporate employers of LEAD alumni include Goldman Sachs, IBM, JP Morgan Chase, Merrill Lynch, Merck & Co., Motorola, and Intel.

[3] Data is based on information received from 156 (48%) of the 326 students who participated in 2004 LEAD Summer Business Institutes.

[4] Data is based on information received from 266 (82%) of the 326 students who participated in 2003 LEAD Summer Business Institutes.

Findings

The analysis that follows is of a macroscopic quality; that is, it takes a wide-angle lens to the phenomenon in an effort to chart a broad landscape. The emphasis on breadth at the expense of depth may be counted an obvious limitation, but it must fall to subsequent analyses to drill down microscopically into some of the issues of interest.

Starting conditions

The story of LEAD begins with corporate interest in a more racially diverse workforce. In 1979, executives from McNeil Pharmaceuticals (a Johnson & Johnson company) approached the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School with an offer to underwrite a rigorous summer business program targeting underrepresented youth. Theirs was a practical and visionary solution to a problem that the McNeil executives had encountered on their recruiting trips to the nation's top business schools: a pronounced shortage of minority MBA students to fill the growing demand for greater diversity in corporate management. Fierce competition for the relatively few minority candidates, and an ensuing "wage bidding" war that was destroying the company's salary structure, highlighted the need for a broader and longer-term strategy. Their agenda was to "create an innovative and intensive summer education program to serve as the foundation for a lifelong partnership amongst outstanding diverse students, the nation's leading corporations, and the top business schools" (LEAD Annual Report 2005). Following a successful inaugural year at Wharton in 1980, the decision was made to expand the program to include four other top business schools. The dean of one of those schools recalled that "it made a lot of sense for us to be involved, just simply because we believed that there was a problem with underrepresented Americans in...graduate schools of management of all types and stripes, not just us." Starting conditions for the other members of the network were analyzed in terms of the larger environmental forces and factors impelling organizations toward a collaborative strategy (what may be described as background or *ultimate* sources of interest) and the more specific rationales used by organizations to frame their involvement (*proximate* sources of interest), understanding that these two sets of conditions tend to be highly interactive.

Environmental forces

Among the environmental forces cited most often by corporate informants were an overall climate of business interest in a diverse and more inclusive workforce, changing demographics and an increasingly multicultural customer base, lack of exposure in minority communities to role models in business, the proliferation of initiatives (many of them operating under the aegis of the Diversity Pipeline Alliance) that are working on various segments of the pipeline and are partnering with corporations and universities to create greater access and opportunity, and public expectations for global corporate citizenship. The general tenor of discussions with corporate informants was that the value of diversity has been established and is now taken for granted. One corporate informant, in a manner characteristic of most corporate informants' thinking on the matter, was led to ask, "Where would the argument be?"

Business school informants referenced the educational benefits of diversity, the legacy of exclusionary policies and practices that have historically inhibited minority access to higher education and professional opportunities, and corporate desire for diverse students educated in a diverse academic environment. One graduate business dean explained that diversity has become "this necessity as important as understanding finance or marketing." Another indicated that corporate expectations for student diversity and the ability to work in diverse teams have become "absolutely essential mandates today, and if we didn't do that, we actually would risk our effectiveness as well as some of the support that we would get from corporations, be it monetary or otherwise." It is noteworthy that three schools were approached by corporate entities to join LEAD.

Rationales for involvement

The single most consistent rationale cited by business school informants was that membership in LEAD was the "right thing to do," "the best thing to do," or "a good thing to do." Every school in the network subscribed to this moral imperative, and informants across the schools used remarkably similar language to convey the idea. A conceptually related rationale was that participation in LEAD was a social obligation—something undertaken for "the greater good," "the common good," or in the "public interest." One informant put it this way:

> We didn't buy into the partnership saying we need to be a part of this because we felt like we are going to get something out of it...I believe we bought into this and wanted to be a part of this because we believe we can be the good stewards of the education and the good stewards of the talented faculty members we have here in providing some insight and eye opening experiences to rising high school seniors. The expected return is hope.

An assistant dean for admissions explained his school's interest in the program as ultimately derived from a "concern about how this is going to help our community big picture-wise," with *community* in this case referring to graduate business education. It was generally understood and accepted that LEAD would not confer a direct or immediate benefit to many of the schools—particularly the exclusively graduate schools (of which there were seven)—in the network, but the benefits of being "a good steward" or being "socially responsible" would ultimately "filter down" to all. A former dean noted in almost spiritual tones that "we would get our share...in the hereafter" by enlarging the pool and feeding the pipeline of talented minority students. The former dean's comment compactly describes a combination of altruistic and utilitarian thinking that permeated most of the accounts of business school informants. Attracting students to their schools or campuses was a stated goal of all twelve institutions, even if (as in the case of the graduate schools of business) those benefits would not be delivered for several years. LEAD's potential to help with diversification efforts and generate awareness of the schools among minority communities was cited as advantageous; indeed, three schools saw themselves as geographically challenged in being able to attract minority candidates, and they viewed the association with LEAD as a boost to their visibility.

Nearly all of the corporate informants indicated that the primary reason for participation in LEAD was to create access to talented underrepresented students. Informants emphasized that all commercial enterprises are thinking differently about how they "grow talent." Representatives uniformly identified the need to start earlier in the pipeline to begin the process of developing awareness, interest, understanding, and ambition among underrepresented students. LEAD offered an appropriate entry point in a segmented pipeline, an entry point that corporate informants explained is moving steadily backward in an attempt at early identification and relationship building. The fact that LEAD appeared to maintain strong relationships with its alumni throughout the life-course was an attractive selling point for corporate partners. A number of informants mentioned that LEAD effectively extended the recruitment capabilities of member firms, essentially functioning as an additional college relations apparatus that was highly valued for its role in screening top students for internships or permanent employment.

Corporate representatives also spoke of the necessity of early education and exposure, capturing "mindshare" within youth markets, and the importance of building brand awareness (particularly in areas with low "sex appeal" like risk management and accounting). Competition with other firms was the rationale most in evidence on Wall Street, where one executive stated, "*Our* view on diversity and why we engage in things that we do really stems more from a war-for-talent perspective then anything else." Only two companies got involved in the network from a purely philanthropic or charitable perspective, although the community relations benefits of membership in LEAD were identified by a number of firms. In contrast to business school representatives, all of whom couched their interest in LEAD according to some variation on the theme of doing the right thing, corporate officials were more likely to explain their involvement in terms of a "business case" for diversity. One emphasized, "We need to be inclusive. We need to understand what our consumers are wanting today and tomorrow. And the best way to do that is to have representatives from those communities as part of your workforce." He continued, though, by offering, "And then you can underscore all that twice with just the moral argument that you want to do the right thing." A willingness to take a long-term approach to workforce development was evident in several interviews. As one representative put it, "We just knew we had to plant a lot of seeds to start seeing some results." Assuming a leadership role in solving the problem of underrepresentation in business was important to corporate representatives and university informants alike. One corporate informant said simply, "Somebody has to take the lead."

Sustainability factors

Given that several of the universities and corporations have been in the LEAD network since its inception, what compels them to remain active members? How has the initiative evolved over time to accommodate the changing interests of members? What are the principal challenges to the sustainability of the program in the various member organizations?

Evolutionary dynamics

One of the prominent themes to emerge from the data was that, for many organizations, involvement in LEAD has migrated over time from an altruistic to a utilitarian consideration. This philosophical and strategic shift was noticeable at the national nonprofit level and within the particular partnering organizations that comprise the LEAD network. The president of LEAD stated that the initiative is increasingly being justified on the grounds that it provides a "solid return on investment" to universities, corporations, and participating government agencies. This shifting emphasis has had the effect of encouraging a more robust form of involvement for many organizations, one that is more engaged at the level of content development, more high-touch, and more aggressive in following up with students. According to one executive, "To sustain the current level of funding, we have a short window to really show this is truly the right piece for us in the midst of all the change that's going on."

Challenges to sustainability

An inability to demonstrate high enough returns on invested funds represented the gravest overall threat to program sustainability in the participating firms. Additional threats included the departure of key program champions, leadership transitions, and other organizational changes that subjected LEAD to a new level of scrutiny. There was no distinct pattern in evidence in the university sector—some graduate schools questioned the commitment to LEAD, while others never did. At one graduate school of business, a new dean's persistent questioning of LEAD's value mobilized supportive faculty and staff to make a strong case for its continued existence. Informants at two business schools indicated that the departure of SBI curriculum directors in recent years had placed their programs in some jeopardy. A faculty member who inherited the program at one of the schools stated plainly, "Had I not taken it over, it would have died." The new curriculum director at the other school resolved to do a better job of promoting the initiative internally and securing more involvement by a wider distribution of school officials so that "it would have a life beyond me." A dean said that even when corporate support and the general economy were weak, he continued the fund the program out of the operating budget "to make sure that we carried on the program." According to another graduate business dean, internal collaboration—building partnerships with other areas within the university—was one tool for sustaining involvement in LEAD, because the school's first-year experience was "too rich" in terms of its labor intensiveness and level of quality. Distributing responsibility across the campus, in other words, contributed to sustainability. Two schools indicated a desire and plans to endow their programs in an effort to institutionalize LEAD.

Nearly all of the corporate partners evaluated LEAD annually for continued funding and involvement. Stability of the enterprise within these firms depended on the advocacy of program champions, the ability to withstand disruptions caused by mergers and acquisitions, and the diffusion of interest and commitment throughout the organizations of interest. LEAD's positioning within complex multinational corporations emerged as a key variable in program sustainability. Several program champions explained that they were actively "selling" the initiative internally in an effort to widen the sense of ownership felt for it. Representatives at one long-time member corporation, for example, were trying to raise LEAD's profile and direct more funding toward it, but there was an acknowledgement that this could actually be a mixed blessing and put the program in a vulnerable position: "Because we're putting so much more in the pot, the expectations are so much higher." Still, the informants noted that the firm would never totally disengage from LEAD; at most, it would scale back its investment to prior levels if the relatively short-term returns (measured as a function of the recruitment yield) did not materialize. According to another corporate representative, continued involvement in LEAD would hang on the question, "How is our partnership influencing what we're doing from a recruitment standpoint?" Executives at one multinational company suggested that their firm's continued presence in the network would be based on the national nonprofit's willingness and ability to respond to concerns about consistently disappointing yields of students at the locally supported Summer Business Institute. Another mentioned that as long as LEAD and his firm exhibited an understanding of each other's missions, the partnership would be sustainable.

The national nonprofit is careful to manage the expectations of prospective partners by, for example, emphasizing that new entrants should be able to compete with the existing stable of Fortune 500 companies for student interest. Other organizations, such as government agencies, that approach LEAD are evaluated for the value they add or the gaps they help fill in the education and experience of students. LEAD is strategic about the new member universities it seeks or will entertain. Universities must be able to compete with the existing roster for the attention of students, so only elite peer schools are approached. LEAD's goal is to increase the number of participating schools from 12 to 25 by 2008, and it intends to build a presence on the campuses of the top 50 business schools by 2010 (LEAD Annual Report 2005).

Negotiation of terms of involvement

How was the involvement of participating organizations determined and negotiated? How did members even know what others in the network expected? Was it because objectives, desires, and expectations were clearly articulated? Or was it because organizations had a highly developed sense of what it meant to be a good partner in the abstract (perhaps conditioned by years of doing it), so that general understandings were substituted for specific ones? What were the conditions, if any, that were imposed on partners? These were among the questions addressed.

Articulation of expectations and objectives

Expectations and objectives varied by partner, as did the explicitness of them. Corporate objectives ranged from "face time" with students to "expanding the capacity of young people" to "being able to hire one to ten LEAD alums." In one case, a graduate school SBI curriculum director indicated that one key corporate partner was "happy" with a limited form of engagement and had not responded to offers to become more involved, while a series of frank discussions with another partner (about what it wanted to get out of its involvement in the program) revealed that the firm wished to have a minimum of three contact points with students during the 3-week summer experience. Another SBI curriculum director said that his school's corporate sponsors did not specify or dictate the terms of their involvement "because they recognize that we are the educational institution." Another informant at a graduate school of business referred to corporate partners as clients to be catered to:

> We would start early in the year calling and saying, 'When do we want the visit? Where will the visit be? How will we do it? How did we do?' They never called *us* to say, 'Gee, here's what we would like to do.' All the initiative was on our part, and they were the customer.

The negotiation of terms of involvement emerged as an ongoing concern, not one relegated to the start-up phase. Members indicated that they were continuously evaluating their experience and retooling their expectations and objectives to align with evolving organizational priorities. Moreover, the turnover rate and the repositioning of LEAD within organizations (especially corporations) meant that there were opportunities for negotiation long past the decision to enter the network. New corporate entrants signed on with the understanding and agreement that their first year (or first few years) would be a trial run or pilot test of the partnership. One corporate recruiter explained that, following this experimental period, "We would come back and revisit whether or not we would want to continue the partnership. And [LEAD's president] was great about it. He made a lot of concessions."

Program changes or innovations were welcomed and encouraged from year to year, and all members of the network made suggestions along these lines based on data from student evaluations or their own feedback loops. Informants at several firms, ranging from Wall Street investment banks to consumer products companies, mentioned that their counterparts on campus were very receptive to new ideas for deeper involvement in the classroom. One investment banker suggested that his firm was given a great deal of latitude to design the experience according to its preferences: "For the most part, it's our call on what we want to do that day." Another firm representative said of his campus-based partners, "They're very open. They'd like obviously more of our time and more of our input. More than we're willing to give." The expectations, objectives, and "pictures of success" brought to the enterprise by the different partners were generally deemed by informants to be highly compatible and cohesive.

One of the key themes to emerge from the accounts of informants was that there was excess capacity or bandwidth in LEAD; members were not leveraging, maximizing, or optimizing the full range of the experience. This was due to a number of factors, but the most commonly cited ones were that there simply was not the infrastructure to support it and managing the LEAD relationship was no one's full-time job. According to one SBI operations director,

> You're going to get out of it what you put into it. And it can be as successful as you want it to be. And if the corporation is donating $50,000.00 and they just have lunch with the kids, well, then they're paying for a $50,000.00 lunch. They could get a heck of a lot more out of it.

This sentiment was echoed across the interviews, and the responsibility for achieving desired objectives and satisfying expectations fell to all parties evenly, according to informants.

Conditions

What sorts of conditions were imposed on member institutions (chiefly universities) by other members (predominantly corporations) in exchange for various forms of support? Did universities feel pressured to bend to corporate preferences or requirements? Business school informants emphasized that there was no quid pro quo. One informant said succinctly that dealings with corporations involved absolutely "no genuflection." The curriculum director at another institution stressed that corporate partners "never ask for anything back," and any follow-up by companies was done with LEAD National. At the other end of the spectrum, though, was a program that had an unusually high degree of partnership, and it was said of these corporate partners that "they want a say in the curriculum; they want equal representation at the table so that each LEAD student has an equal opportunity to see each of their companies." This form of involvement was viewed by the school as entirely appropriate. Indeed, informants across the twelve universities recalled few instances in which business partners had made inappropriate demands or offered financial support with "a few too many strings attached." One organization (no longer in the network) had provided a large grant to LEAD requiring all of the Summer Business Institutes to use its proprietary instructional program. This attempt to standardize the curriculum was resisted by almost all of the SBIs on the grounds that it was an affront to their autonomy and expertise. A curriculum director at a graduate school of business put it bluntly: “I would never have the temerity or the stupidity to go down the hall and tell my esteemed colleagues...how to manage their classes.”

Maintaining the academic integrity of the program was a key consideration voiced by several academic informants; they were thoughtful about corporate involvement and careful to “not let the tail wag the dog.” Informants at two schools shared instances of corporate partners in the early days wanting too much involvement of an unspecified nature, and the schools had to “put the brakes on.”

Partnership experience

Key elements of the partnership experience as shared by informants related to role differentiation and the division of labor, the extent of coordination (including the nature and frequency of interactions), design of the education experience, and conflict management. These are detailed below.

Role differentiation and division of labor

Informants articulated the view that each sector in the network had a special role to play, and they generally described the differentiation of roles in the following way: (1) LEAD (the nonprofit) was responsible for student recruitment and admissions, marketing, national fundraising, database maintenance and management, alumni affairs, and operating as the center of gravity for the whole enterprise; (2) universities were responsible for the overall content and quality of the on-campus experience; and (3) corporations and other sponsoring organizations provided funding and supplied the richest possible practical component to the student learning experience. There was notable evidence of role-switching, though, and this was to be found especially in examples of corporate entities serving as educators.

One former SBI curriculum director explained that the role of a prominent corporate sponsor crossed over into more of an educator role when he could not recruit finance faculty to teach in the SBI: “So we did video conferences with (a Wall Street firm) and had (the firm) do our finance course for us, and it was much more of a real world ‘how does the stock market work’ kind of thing.” Another curriculum director said of corporate partners, “It’s almost like dealing with another faculty member.” A business school informant said of her school’s LEAD partnerships, “I feel like we have a really collaborative program. We all know what parts we are bringing, so we can all work on what we do bring to make sure it all meshes together.” According to the dean of a graduate school of business,

> When it comes to the education and knowledge of business, nobody can do it better than we (business schools) do. When it comes to what they (corporations) do, nobody can do it better than they do. It’s a good combination. It’s just like any other joint venture – you try to put two people together, the sum of the parts is greater.

The dean continued by saying that “the real heroes” of the whole initiative are at the national nonprofit: “*They’re* the ones who do the heavy lifting—*they’re* the ones who have the vision.”

Extent of coordination

The data revealed that coordination among the sectors was variable and idiosyncratic. It tended to be conditioned by factors such as the strength of pre-existing relationships, the level of familiarity (usually grounded in past experience) with partnering organizations, the perceived successes or effectiveness of previous engagements, and the extent to which rationales for involvement were modified over time. Not surprisingly, coordination and communication tended to be more frequent when new partners entered the fold. In the start-up phase for universities, LEAD National was helpful in facilitating introductions to corporate partners, sharing ideas and best practices from the network, and navigating issues around funding, operations, and logistics. New corporate partners typically reached out to their campus counterparts to discuss mutual expectations, examine the activities of other business partners, and begin developing a framework for involvement.

Many of the relationships in LEAD, though, had achieved the status of "auto pilot" and required little substantive care and feeding. A business school informant, commenting on the lack of formal communication between her institution and LEAD National, surmised that the arrangement was "more of a family thing where you don't need to have so many formal interactions, or maybe it's like we've worked together this long on this project [that] you just know when certain things are happening." Another informant whose school was one of LEAD's early members said, "We don't need a lot of hand holding." Coordination in such cases was oriented to the logistics of pre-planned or recurring activities.

Across the interviews, informants indicated that coordination was more frequent and more intense in the immediate "run-up" to the Summer Business Institutes. A curriculum director commented,

> It takes work. In fact, you know, one of the funny things is it always takes more work than doing it yourself. It would have been easier to just do the class. Whenever you bring in outsiders and invite them and then give them an education component, you understand it's not less work, it's more work. But, I think that the power of the experience is enough that you say, 'Yes, it's worth it.'

It was observed that coordination typically happened in dyads, rather than in triads. That is, interactions between business schools and corporations, or between corporations and LEAD National, were far more common than three-way interactions. LEAD National, owing to its centrality in the network, reported the greatest number of intersectoral interactions.

Design and delivery of the education experience

During their 3–4 week Summer Business Institutes, students learn the basics of business—accounting, finance, marketing, strategy, operations, ethics, leadership, entrepreneurship, and others—from senior business faculty and corporate presenters. Much of the learning is applied and takes place in the manufacturing plants, research and development labs, and executive offices of partnering firms.

Although LEAD claims nearly forty corporate partnerships, several of these are more accurately described as sponsorships in which corporate entities provide dollars to support the operations of LEAD but are not actively engaged in designing or delivering key aspects of the learning experience. One SBI curriculum director said, "We appreciate the financial support, but we hope that it goes deeper than that." If financial sponsorship constitutes minimal (though certainly valuable) involvement by corporations, maximal involvement entails a co-created and co-delivered program in which the corporation is recognized as a full partner with the university. One Summer Business Institute could claim such an extensive level of engagement by its corporate partners. In this case, corporate representatives participated in designing the curriculum, helped in planning the overall agenda in a series of four or five face-to-face meetings with their academic counterparts, taught in the classroom, hosted site visits, and stayed connected with the students after their summer experience concluded. An informant at the business school was led to conclude, “We have incredible corporate partners who devote as much time and energy as I do to this program.” A recently established SBI was in the process of meeting with a local multinational to talk about creative ideas for its involvement in future years, with the expectation that a significant component of the curriculum and extended curriculum would be built around the company’s business. The task ahead, indicated a university-based informant, was to “make sure that the kids don’t feel like they’re living in (the firm’s) commercial.”

Elsewhere in the network, informants reported that decisions about the curriculum (beyond the basic content required by LEAD National) were typically left to the universities, while corporate and government partners were responsible for the extra-curriculum. While the process was often a collaborative “back and forth” involving face-to-face meetings or telephone calls to pin down the itinerary and tailor presentations to fit within an overarching theme, corporate informants suggested that they were largely given “free reign” to design the kind of program they felt would best benefit themselves and the students. According to a Wall Street executive, “We have always developed and driven the content when the students are here.” Still, business schools typically registered a preference for highly interactive sessions that would keep students engaged, and this often took the form of a simulation, case analysis, panel discussion, or tour of facilities.

Evidence from the interviews suggested that the education experiences of students were planned with sensitivity to the information, exposure, and skills development they would need to make informed decisions about their collegiate and career futures. A curriculum director explained that, in his interactions with corporate partners, “They always ask us what we want the students to experience.” According to one corporate informant, “The number one question is, What level of sophistication is appropriate for high school students?” Business school members indicated that LEAD acted as a relationship broker on occasion in an effort to fill any gaps in the curriculum. One SBI curriculum director explained that he might receive a phone call from LEAD offering, “If you are interested in going to DC, would you consider working out a relationship with X, because X has just worked out a relationship with us, and they’d like to see someone on the ground.”

Conflict management

Informants across the sectors reported a high degree of overall satisfaction with the program. The only conflicts or frustrations of note had to do with budgetary issues, coordination on the fundraising front, and an instance in which one of the SBIs felt that LEAD National had assigned it students of lower academic quality than was expected. Some corporate partners expressed concern over their draw of students from the LEAD network, but they accepted responsibility for improving those numbers through more aggressive recruiting. As a general assessment of the partnership model, one of the deans offered, “All of our agreements have been understood and fulfilled. I think it’s a good working relationship.”

Difference made by partnership

How did organizations in the LEAD network conceive of the difference made by their partnership? This effect was difficult to isolate. Informants were united in their view that collaboration was critical to the effectiveness of the initiative, and they felt strongly that the program would have ceased to function without the full participation of all sectors. From a technical or procedural standpoint, the expertise resident in the different organizations was viewed as rounding out a whole portfolio of essential assets, and there was recognition that no organization or sector by itself could pull off an initiative as rich, complex, and multifaceted as a LEAD SBI. The capabilities, resources, and "goodwill" of partners were necessary to make it happen.

While the actual *practice* of partnership in the network varied, there was no question that the *concept* of collaboration (collaboration in principle) made a meaningful difference in the overall experience, at least in the estimation of informants. Two broad categories of benefits were suggested in the interviews. These had to do with the relationship-enhancing qualities of the program and the opportunities it presented for organizational learning.

Relationship enhancement

Informants noted that the LEAD experience strengthened or enhanced relationships with corporations on a broader scale. This notion was encapsulated most forcefully in a statement by a business school informant:

> We've always had a close relationship with (company #1). I think this made it a closer relationship. One of the interesting things is that this is a very good issue for (the school) to work with its corporate partners around. It is also a big issue in the corporate community, of course, and so when we approach (company #1) and say we're interested in doing this with you, that's a different way to build that relationship. I think it puts us in a very nice light with them, and I think it puts them in a very nice light with us. I think it has built a stronger partnership. I would say exactly the same thing about (company #2). I don't think we had a particularly close relationship with (company #2). (Company #2) is not one of the big recruiters. Doing this has built a real relationship. I think (company #3) is a third example of that. The CEO is (our) grad, we have a relationship, but again I think it really furthered that relationship."

Other informants commented that LEAD had helped their organizations establish thriving relationships with partners. The positive feeling of enrollment in a larger mission—of participating with other well-intentioned organizations in a common cause—was underscored by an SBI director at a graduate school of business, who speculated that in operating independently, "You wouldn't feel like you were part of a greater mission, and I don't mean that in an evangelical way." Other informants across the sites sounded a similar theme.

Organizational learning

Informants provided evidence that involvement in LEAD had been useful to their organizations in unforeseen or unintended ways. For example, three business schools used their partnership experience in LEAD to spawn new outreach programs or strengthen existing ones. In each of these cases, the LEAD model of multilateral collaboration figured prominently as a basic framework of organization. Business school informants also reported that periodic meetings of all of the directors in the network served as a conduit for sharing best practices, benchmarking against peers, and gathering intelligence that could improve their institutions' programs or galvanize a renewed commitment to diversity.

These benefits were also realized through the many informal conversations across the network. According to one dean, who spoke about the transformation that occurs in LEAD,

> You learn from *everybody*. This is informal. There's really no program for sharing this, it just happens when you work with people. And when you accommodate yourself to really good causes like this, it just changes you. When you're associated with people that have that kind of pride and passion and expertise in a certain area, it sort of lifts your game.

Discussion

What is revealed by the LEAD model of collaboration? What significance should we attach to it? Several possibilities are suggested by the study's findings.

First, it captures a coordinated strategy to move the needle of progress in minority student access and opportunity in higher education and business. Its identity as a partnership among key societal sectors suggests that the project of college access, student success, and social change is far beyond the scope of any one sector on its own. The tool of collaboration is, in other words (and in the most generic sense), an acknowledgement that many powerful social agents must actively participate in narrowing the gaps in information, access, and ambition. It is also the case, though, that partnership, collaboration, alliance, and joint venturing (terms used somewhat interchangeably) are too often viewed as panaceas, as naturally advantageous over other forms of organizing, or as inherently more virtuous than going it alone. This way of framing collaboration glances past many of the difficulties and frustrations involved in the process and ignores circumstances in which a solitary stance is preferable to a unified one (see Hardy and Phillips 1998, for a critique of inter-organizational collaboration).

Second, LEAD stands as a model of inter-agency cooperation that may be especially useful in an era of increased cooperative venturing with the private sector. Many recent critiques have pointed out the corruptive effects of corporate influence on higher education policies and practices (see, for example, Engell and Dangerfield 2005; Washburn 2005). LEAD (and other similar outreach or pipeline development initiatives) provides an example of cross-sector partnership that potentially reinforces—rather than undermines—core academic interests. The central academic and enrichment objectives of the LEAD program were buttressed—not compromised or diluted—by the coexistence of so many organizational interests to be satisfied, because student learning in the fullest sense was facilitated by each organization's efforts to secure for itself the advantages of participation. Participation in the program was made to *matter* to the member organizations on terms that were relevant to them. In a word, there was *instrumental* value in the collaboration for diversity, and students were arguably the ultimate beneficiaries of the arrangement.

Third, research and theory dealing with cross-sector collaborations have focused almost exclusively on commercialization, technology transfer, and joint scientific research (see, for example, Powell and Owen-Smith 2002). Far less attention has been given to inter-organizational outreach programs that have student preparation—rather than profits—as their main objective. Evidence from this domain could prove useful to extensions of theory and research.

Finally, LEAD serves as a model of alignment between an education objective (one that is multifaceted) and a form of organizing to accomplish it. That is, to create the pipeline of underrepresented students into the fields of education, business, and public service, organizations have themselves created a pipeline—an interesting instance of matching or fit.

At base, this study has attempted to shine a light on the dynamics at play when partners work together on a matter of social policy. In focusing on the lived experiences of organizational members, the voices of the students themselves have been neglected. Future research might explore student perceptions of their experience in LEAD and the difference made by the program in their educational and professional lives.

It is important to remember that this initiative grew out of—and is sustained by—the self-organizing social activism of institutions banding together to encourage a set of outcomes; it was, and continues to be, a voluntary grass-roots response, one that is not mandated by federal or state policy or by the courts. Notions of collective obligation and systemic change animate the enterprise. There is a sense that education is finally, in Zumeta's (2001) phrasing, "too important to be left to educators" (p. 163). Or perhaps the evidence from this study suggests that we should just extend our notion of what it means to be an educator and think more magnanimously about who qualifies for the title. With apologies to Glazer (1997), it would seem that we are all educators (as well as multiculturalists) now. In LEAD, with its expansive conception of what is being taught and learned, many agents—educators—share in the task, and they share equally in the rewards produced by their efforts.

References

3M et al. (2003, February 18). *Brief for Amici Curiae 65 leading American businesses in support of respondents* (Nos 02-241and 02-516). Retrieved October 13, 2005, from http://www.umich.edu/~urel/admissions/legal/gru_amicus-ussc/um/Fortune500-both.pdf.

Austin, J., Reficco, E., Berger, G., Fischer, R. M., Gutierrez, R., Koljatic, M. et al. (2004). *Social partnering in Latin America: Lessons drawn from collaborations of businesses and civil society organizations*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bowen W. G., Kurzweil M. A., & Tobin E. M. (2005). *Equity and excellence in Ameican higher education*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.

Cantor, N. (2004). Introduction. In P. Gurin, J. S. Lehman, & E. Lewis (Eds.), *Defending diversity: Affirmative action at the University of Michigan* (pp. 1–16). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Commission on the Advancement of Women and Minorities in Science, Engineering, and Technology Development (2000). *Land of plenty: Diversity as America's competitive edge in science, engineering and technology* (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 449963).

DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review, 48*(2), 147–160.

Engell, J., & Dangerfield, A. (2005), *Saving higher education in the age of money*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.

Etzkowitz, H., & Leyesdorff, L. (1997). Introduction: Universities in the global knowledge economy. In H. Etzkowitz & L. Leyesdorff (Eds.), *Universities and the global knowledge economy: A triple helix of university–industry–government relations* (pp. 1–8). London: Pinter.

Fletcher, B. R. (2003). Diversity: A strategy for organizational change and success. In D. L. Plummer (Ed.), *Handbook of diversity management: Beyond awareness to competency based learning* (pp. 223–241). Lanham, MD: Universality Press of America.

Glazer, N. (1997). *We are all multiculturalists now*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hardy, C., & Phillips, N. (1998). Strategies of engagement: Lessons from the critical examination of collaboration and conflict in an inter-organizational domain. *Organization Science, 9*(2), 217–230.

Hays-Thomas, R. (2003). Why now? The contemporary focus on managing diversity. In M. S. Stockdale & F. J. Crosby (Eds.), *The psychology and management of workplace diversity* (pp. 3–30). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Hume, D. (1975). *Enquiries concerning human understanding and concerning the principles of morals* (Reprinted from the 1777 edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Karen, D., & Dougherty, K. J. (2005). Necessary but not sufficient: Higher education as a strategy of social mobility. In G. Orfield, P. Marin & C.L. Horn (Eds.), *Higher education and the color line: College access, racial equality, and social change* (pp. 33–57). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Kezar, A. (2006). Redesigning for collaboration in learning initiatives: An examination of four highly collaborative campuses. *The Journal of Higher Education, 77*(5), 804–838. .

LEAD (2005). *LEAD Annual Report*. Philadelphia, PA.

Powell, W. W., & Owen-Smith, J. (2002). The new world of knowledge production in the life sciences. In S. Brint (Ed.), *The future of the city of intellect: The changing American university* (pp. 107–130). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Pusser, B. (2001). The contemporary politics of access policy: California after Proposition 209. In D. E. Heller (Ed.), *The states and public higher education policy: Affordability, access, and accountability* (pp. 121–152). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Swail, W. S., & Perna, L. W. (2002). Pre-college outreach programs: A national perspective. In W. G. Tierney & L. S. Hagedorn (Eds.), *Increasing college access: Extending possibilities for all students* (pp. 15–34). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Timar, T. B., Ogawa, R., & Orillion, M. (2004). Expanding the University of California's outreach mission. *The Review of Higher Education, 27*(2), 187–209.

Washburn, J. (2005), *University, Inc.: The corporate corruption of American higher education*. New York: Basic Books.

Whitla, D. K., Howard, C., Tuitt, F., Reddick, R. J., & Flanagan, E. (2005). Diversity on campus: Exemplary programs for retaining and supporting students of color, In G. Orfield, P. Marin, & C. L. Horn (Eds.), *Higher education and the color line: College access, racial equity, and social change* (pp. 131–151). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Zumeta, W. (2001). Public policy and accountability in higher education: Lessons from the past, present for the new millennium. In D. E. Heller (Eds.), *The states and public higher education policy: Affordability, access, and accountability* (pp. 155–197). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.