

BEST PRACTICES FOR BUSINESS SCHOOLS TO LEAD IN EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN BUSINESS AND TO ADAPT TO THE 21ST-CENTURY WORKFORCE

In order to identify strategies and best practices to better prepare students to lead the 21st-century workforce, the White House convened a meeting between senior Administration officials and a group of business school deans in April 2014. In the discussion, participants described the challenges business schools face in expanding opportunities and adapting to the changing workforce, as well as the many ways they are successfully addressing these challenges.

Recognizing that our schools can play a critical role in helping workers, companies, and leaders adapt to meet the needs of the changing American workforce, we, the undersigned, commit to the following set of best practices:

ENSURING ACCESS TO BUSINESS SCHOOLS AND BUSINESS CAREERS

Business schools have identified that the timing of enrollment impacts women's interest in pursuing graduate education in business. Strategies to add flexibility in the timing of enrollment can therefore expand women's access to graduate business education. However, there are a number of other factors that influence women's enrollment, and thus a number of possible steps that business schools can take to shore up the pipeline of women into MBA programs. Business schools should consider:

- **Pursuing targeted outreach and engagement with faculty, students, and programming efforts to help high school and college women envision a career in business.** Direct engagement with business schools in activities targeted at high school and college students, including mentoring, inviting girls to women's conferences, and other efforts at pre-engagement can help build the pipeline of young women interested in pursuing graduate education and careers in business.
- **Recognizing the life-cycle challenges that students face in trying to pursue both an MBA career and a family, and considering approaches to add flexibility to the timing of education to better meet these students' needs.** For example, increasing access among students who have appropriate backgrounds, yet who may have gaps in work experience, can both increase the pool of female applicants and serve as a pipeline to bring talented women into business careers. Another example would be to consider younger students who are adequately prepared.
- **Offering alternative programs that attract a wider range of students when a traditional MBA program is a poor fit for students.** For instance, this may include a Master's of Management degree for students with fewer years of work experience.
- **Working with companies to develop programs that will help women trying to get back on the fast track.** For example, schools can bring women who have taken time out of the labor

force into executive MBAs, or develop robust relaunch programs that allow women to reintegrate into career pathways.

- **Targeting financial support in order to ensure that business school is a viable investment for a range of students, especially those with a lower earnings profile.**

BUILDING A BUSINESS SCHOOL EXPERIENCE THAT PREPARES STUDENTS FOR THE WORKFORCE OF TOMORROW

Future business leaders must be prepared to lead in a workplace with changing demographics. To that end, discussants acknowledged that curricula and business school experiences should reflect the diversity of workers and leaders, the challenges that leaders face today and in the future, and the organizational challenges of the modern economy. Best practices for creating a curriculum and business school experience to educate leaders in the 21st century include:

- **Modernizing the curriculum to educate students on how to lead an organization that best utilizes the diverse talents of employees, including those who are trying to balance work and caregiving responsibilities.** For example, curricula should highlight the role of workplace flexibility in recruitment, retention, and productivity, as well as the relationship between such policies and business profitability and success.
- **Including all students in the conversation surrounding work, caregiving, and family issues.** By actively encouraging or requiring men to participate, it is easier both to ensure that these issues and conversations do not create unintended gender gaps and to reap the benefits to the community and the students of having all students engaged in the conversation.
- **Identifying how inequalities in students' backgrounds and learning styles may impact the culture and identify potential solutions.** For example, the balance of required courses in the first term may impact the norms and culture in ways that schools may want to explicitly consider. Similarly, implicit biases may mean that subtle changes in how material is presented may impact who succeeds at it.
- **Ensuring that a diverse group of leaders and leadership styles are brought into the classroom.** For example, providing a single place for faculty and students to identify speakers invited to campus may make it easier to know whether a wide range of styles are being brought into the community.
- **Making case studies more representative and ensuring that they reflect modern workplaces.** For example, showing diversity in leaders solving a wide range of problems is important to illustrate the wide range of diversity in the business community. This includes showing women and minorities in more significant line management roles and/or as the main protagonist in the case.

- **Making students aware of gender-based differences in negotiation strategy, communication, and assertiveness that can arise in certain contexts and circumstances.** Schools should also make students aware of and create legitimacy for different styles across both men and women, in addition to creating space for different approaches to succeed.
- **Facilitating mentorship and sponsorship opportunities, especially for those who may have a more difficult time finding mentors or sponsors.**
- **Ensuring that activities outside of the classroom, such as clubs, trips, and events, are inclusive and provide leadership opportunities for a diverse group of students.**

ENSURING CAREER SERVICES THAT GO BEYOND THE NEEDS OF TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

Business schools offer excellent career services for traditional students. The future workplace requires a holistic view of recruiting, and business schools can play a vital role in supporting individuals throughout their careers, especially those taking a nonlinear career path. To that end, business schools should consider:

- **Encouraging employers to discuss workplace flexibility options during the recruiting process.** For example, students should be informed of their options, since there may be more flexibility than they assume.
- **Expanding career services to recent graduates and alumni, potentially at the same level of quality and effectiveness as those provided to current students.** Business schools provide a natural link between students, alumni, and the business community, and can help students trying to make career changes or recharge or relaunch their career in much the same way that they help students transition to their first job following business school.
- **Providing opportunities to learn at all life stages, to keep essential competencies current, and to accelerate career growth, including through refresher courses.** For example, schools can provide a vital source of current industry knowledge for older alumni seeking to recharge or relaunch their careers after taking time off due to family or other obligations. More generally, alumni may wish to step on and off the fast track and may turn to their alma mater to get up to speed on needed competencies.
- **Helping to facilitate the reentry of those who have taken time out of the labor force.** For example, business schools, through relationships with businesses interested in hiring those who have left the labor force, can help make students aware of and facilitate the development of returnship programs and other effective relaunch programs.

EXEMPLIFYING HOW ORGANIZATIONS SHOULD BE RUN

Finally, business schools have a responsibility to set a good example by ensuring an equitable workplace that supports a diverse faculty and staff, and so should consider:

- **Investigating and addressing the gender gap in faculty hiring, promotion, and pay.**
- **Ensuring diversity in leadership positions within the school, including on advisory boards.**
- **Actively encouraging and rewarding research and discussion on women in the workplace, workplace flexibility, and working families.**
- **Considering adopting right-to-request policies that let workers know that they may request the accommodations and flexibility they need.** While such policies do not guarantee workers that they will get flexibility, they require managers to consider such requests and encourage employees to make the requests that they believe will help them succeed.
- **Engendering explicit discussions on climate and tone.**
- **Providing adequate supports for students, faculty, and staff with caregiving responsibilities.**
- **Recognizing the importance of value, tone, and a culture of inclusiveness in creating a campus where a diverse set of students and faculty and staff can thrive.** A community that recognizes the values of all members of the community and fosters open dialogue to encourage the community to be more inclusive can better support the success of all members of the community.
- **Recognizing the challenges presented by implicit discrimination and identify solutions to address it.**