Leadership & Listening: Learning from Presidential Colleagues

AASCU has long demonstrated its commitment to ensuring that our members—the presidents and chancellors of America's great state colleges and universities and their teams—have the resources they need to be successful leaders. From our leadership development programs, such as the New Presidents Academy and the Millennium Leadership Initiative, to the myriad professional development opportunities we offer, including programming at our conferences, webinars and publications, we're committed to providing the guidance and tools our members need to excel in their roles.

We know strong leaders learn and grow by listening to other leaders. So in each issue of this magazine, we make sure to include a host of presidential voices—be it in our feature articles or in our best practices section. At the heart of this publication is the presidential voice, and we always seek to share ideas, advice and wisdom from your presidential colleagues.

In this issue, author Kenya McCullum asked former presidents of AASCU institutions to share their experiences on what leadership means to them. This article, "The Anatomy of Leadership," starts on page 11, and is a great read for leaders in any stage of the presidency.

We are pleased to share several commentaries by our member presidents in this issue. Walter V. Wendler, president of West Texas A&M University, discusses "Regionally Responsive Universities" beginning on page 24. And starting on page 29, you'll find our Presidents and Practices section with columns from Winthrop University (S.C.) President Daniel F. Mahony and Paul Beran, executive director of the South Dakota Higher Education Board of Regents.

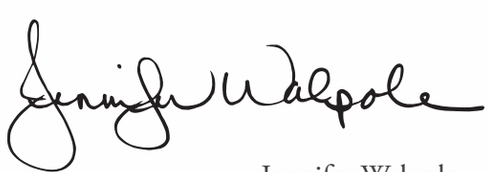
Finally, I'd be remiss to not draw your attention to a critical commentary on diversity in higher education, written by Katricia G. Pierson, president of Oklahoma's East Central University. Pierson writes, "The university president … can be a touchstone for influencing an institution's focus on diversity," and that when we diversify our employees, we help students and the communities we serve.

If you look where AASCU's 400 members are on a map, you'll see our institutions can be found from suburban Los Angeles to rural upstate New York and everywhere in between. For this issue's cover story, however, we wanted to look at rural institutions specifically and how the communities they serve are fundamentally changing. In her article, "A Heart for Rural America," writer Karen Doss Bowman notes, "Rural colleges and universities across the United States have a critical role to play in today's higher education landscape. These institutions, many of them AASCU schools, have long-established reputations for serving their communities—both in terms of educating students from the surrounding regions and by enhancing opportunities for economic growth and development." This story, which begins on page 2, is a must read for all presidents in our sector, as it highlights how these institutions embrace the work of being "stewards of place" for the communities and students they serve.

BETWEEN THE LINES

We're pleased to highlight in this issue of *Public Purpose* scenes from our 2018 Annual Meeting, which was held October 28-30 in Washington, D.C. With over 280 presidents in attendance, the meeting explored issues of leadership, our sector's steadfast commitment to Delivering America's Promise, and how we can ensure opportunities for all students.

To those who joined us for the meeting, you no doubt remember the moving President-to-Presidents lecture from David L. Eisler, president of Ferris State University (Mich.). In his remarks, President Eisler offered key leadership advice learned over his four decades in higher education and his nearly two decades serving as president of Ferris State. He reminds his colleagues to find opportunities to make an important difference, help people dream, seek guidance, and take care of yourself, among other important lessons. We've published an abridged version of this remarkable speech starting on page 14.



Jennifer Walpole