Academic Leadership and Counseling Psychology: Answering the Challenge, Achieving the Promise

Ruth E. Fassinger¹ and Glenn E. Good²

Abstract
In this article, we address the challenge and promise for counseling psychologists (CPs) in leadership in U.S. higher education. We summarize leadership challenges in contemporary higher education, including contextual difficulties and those emanating from within the academy. We contend that CPs offer promise in higher education leadership, as they are well suited to provide leadership in the difficult context of the academy due to their training, values, disciplinary foci, and professional experiences. We attend to diversity as one of counseling psychology’s core strengths, presenting the example of feminist multicultural mentoring as a leadership task that obviates the challenge and enhances the promise for counseling psychology leaders in academic settings. We offer suggestions for CPs considering or moving into higher education leadership, and conclude with a brief examination of future trends in counseling psychology that support our contention that CPs are much needed and can succeed as leaders in the academy.

Keywords
academia, leadership, higher education, professional issues, adults

¹University of Maryland, College Park, MD, USA
²University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, USA

Corresponding Author:
Ruth E. Fassinger, Department of Counseling, Higher Education, and Special Education,
University of Maryland, College Park, USA.
Email: rfassing@umd.edu

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There is a looming “leadership crisis” in contemporary U.S. higher education, exemplified by a substantial rise in the average age of college and university presidents (from 52 to 61 years) over the past two decades, constituting a body of leaders increasingly ready to exit from the workplace (Ebersole, 2014). However, little attention is being given to developing a leadership pipeline to fill the gaps. One national study of 2,000 academic leaders found that only 3% had received any preparation for their roles (Gmelch, 2002, as cited in Bolman & Gallos, 2011), and another study of more than 500 academic leaders reported that participants felt the need for solid leadership preparation (Scott, Coats, & Anderson, 2008). Moreover, it is widely acknowledged that higher education leadership has become increasingly challenging in the contemporary U.S. social, political, and economic climate (Altbach, Gumport, & Berdahl, 2011; Blumenstyk, 2015; Ebersole, 2014; Kerr, 2001) and, at the time of this writing, many experts fear that difficulties facing the U.S. education system (particularly public education) are likely to intensify under the current presidential administration (e.g., Zernike, 2016).

Given the critical need for capable academic leaders, it is relevant to consider how counseling psychologists (CPs) might be positioned to fill such roles. Because the higher education system creates the pipeline of psychologists who will populate the workforce of the future, this sector constitutes a location of considerable potential influence for CPs as they support and promote the larger discipline of psychology. We, the authors, contend that CPs—by collective temperament and values, training and socialization, disciplinary foci and strengths, and professional experiences—possess attitudinal, knowledge, and skill sets that offer considerable promise for success in academic leadership. In this article, we first highlight challenges in contemporary higher education leadership, and we then outline ways in which CPs may be particularly well suited to answer these challenges. We offer suggestions for those individuals considering or moving into academic leadership roles, and conclude with a brief examination of future trends in counseling psychology that support the promise of CPs in higher education leadership.

**Challenges in Contemporary Academic Leadership**

Those currently working in academic institutions cannot have missed the upending impact of shrinking resources, increasingly complicated student issues, and growing pressures related to accountability. Catalyzed by the economic meltdown of 2008 but with social and political roots as well, the difficulties faced by colleges and universities can be summarized in three basic questions (Zusman, 2005): (a) Who pays? (i.e., growing privatization of public institutions, more commercialized and politicized scientific climate); (b)
Who benefits? (i.e., student diversity and educational access, uncertain job market for PhDs); and (c) Who decides? (i.e., institutional accountability). Ebersole (2014) elaborated these questions into several specific contextual challenges facing academic leaders today, briefly summarized here.

**Contextual Challenges**

**Costs.** The public pressure for academic leaders to keep student costs down is exacerbated by reduced state tax support for public institutions, which has forced many leaders to attempt to offset revenue losses through increased tuition and fees. The highest increases have occurred at public institutions (i.e., 42% from 2000–2001 to 2010–2011; Barber, Donnelly, & Rizvi, 2013), where approximately 75% of students are enrolled. Private institutions have fared slightly better in controlling increases in tuition costs and fees (e.g., Barber et al., 2013), although their higher total costs have led to some fluctuating enrollments, and for-profit institutions and community colleges are seeing decreased student enrollments overall (Association of American Colleges & Universities [AAC&U], 2016). Moreover, questions about the cost versus value of higher education (particularly at the doctoral level) have become sharper, and student recruitment is predicted to become more difficult as university costs continue to rise.

**Assessment, competency, quality assurance, and accreditation reform.** Academic units increasingly are required to delineate the competencies that students acquire during their studies, and public and professional bodies now demand accountability for the “return on investment” of public funds invested in education. Institutions may be asked to provide data on students’ course content mastery, graduation rates and timetables, employment rates, and starting salaries. For learning achieved outside the institution (e.g., externships, internships, service learning, study abroad, MOOCs and other distance learning, credit for prior work or life experiences) monitoring of quality is a particularly important issue for programs and institutions that emphasize such opportunities. However, there are large gaps in tools, methods, and skills in implementing effective systems, as well as widespread disagreements about what “learning” and “competency” look like and what the role of accreditation is in producing favorable outcomes.

**Shifts in student demographics.** Increasing access to higher education by diverse populations is resulting in dramatic shifts in student demographics. Less than 20% of the 20 million students currently enrolled in colleges and universities conform to the stereotype of a full-time 18 to 24-year-old young
adult studying on a college campus. The majority of students today include older, part-time, commuter and/or distance-learning students, including large influxes of international students (particularly in scientific fields; Redden, 2014), and increasing numbers of students from underrepresented groups. However, recent data revealed that enrollment and degree attainment rates for low-income students and students of color continue to be outpaced by those of their non-Latino White peers (AAC&U, 2016). Moreover, greater student diversity is accompanied by increased variability in individual factors such as preparation and family resources, and the concomitant need for institutions to provide support services that maximize student success.

In sum, Ebersole’s (2014) list included attending to (a) costs; (b) assessment, competency, quality assurance, and accreditation reform; and (c) shifts in student demographics. To these, we would add two more contextual challenges, noted next.

**Evolving technologies.** The rapidly expanding use of technology, including social media, data access and storage, simulation of real-life events and experiences, and global connective capacities, is changing every aspect of higher education. The “ubiquity of information” (Barber et al., 2013) made possible by increased access to technology raises fundamental questions about the place of the academy and the role of instruction. Although instructional staff compose the largest category of employees in higher education (38%), they are more likely than other employees to be working part-time, signaling a rise in contingent faculty linked to cost containment; this rise is most evident in the for-profit sector, where distance education is common (AAC&U, 2016).

**Push for education reform.** The national concern about K–12 education reform is producing sweeping changes in higher education—particularly in schools of education and other teacher credentialing programs—where institutions are attempting to respond to myriad political, corporate, and public pressures to improve teacher preparation and student learning; expand school choice; and increase private sector involvement (Cochran-Smith, Piazza, & Power, 2013). These movements often affect CPs profoundly, as counseling psychology doctoral programs, often housed in schools of education (see American Psychological Association [APA], 2017, for listing of all accredited programs) experience a growing threat of elimination because they are considered peripheral to the core mission of teacher training.

In sum, contextual challenges in contemporary higher education are rife with contradictions, rendering the decisions that academic leaders face as “hard choices” (Kerr, 2001, p. 184) between competing or conflicting directions, choices that often must be made in relative haste as problems emerge.
unpredictably (e.g., funding is cut or increased class sizes suddenly are mandated). Moreover, the very structure and customs of academic institutions themselves create challenges to effective leadership. Black (2015) pointed to ways in which higher education leadership differs from other kinds of leadership (e.g., the corporate sector), particularly in middle management roles, in which the leader is positioned between the upper administration of the institution on one hand, and faculty, staff, and students on the other. Within higher education, such leadership roles may include the titles of Program Director, Department Chair, and Dean, including Assistant or Associate levels of these positions. The nature of these positions is institution specific and thus highly variable, with similarly-titled positions commanding very different levels of responsibility and power in colleges versus universities, in private versus public institutions, in research versus teaching universities, and in for-profit versus not-for-profit institutions. Department chairs, for example, usually work with a small unit of related academic disciplines, whereas deans typically lead larger units consisting of multiple, often-unrelated disciplines. However, although the actual authority and resources to make and enact decisions tends to increase the further one moves up the leadership hierarchy, different organizational structures and norms produce variable institutional leadership opportunities and obstacles. In addition, there are unique features of the academy itself that present challenges in leadership, regardless of institutional type or hierarchical organization.

**Challenges Emanating From the Academy Itself**

Black (2015) noted that the academic cornerstone of shared governance often results in the transitory and arbitrary nature of a leadership role, which may be short-term, rotated among faculty, based on seniority, restricted to those at a specific academic rank, and often is not even compensated (in salary, time, or assistance). The position may be assigned based on factors other than the interest or ability of an individual to perform the work successfully, thus possibly compromising both the leader and the unit in achieving desirable outcomes.

In addition, academic leadership generally relies on principles of collegiality and voluntary cooperation in accomplishing tasks, rather than the most effective and efficient use of resources or the explicit acknowledgement of one individual as the leader. Even institutionally designated and individually skilled leaders may have little authority or reward contingencies to use in motivating others, and thus may encounter resistance and suboptimal outcomes, especially when tasks are disagreeable or subordinates are at odds with larger institutional policies or directions.
The current rise of “managerialism” in higher education (Black, 2015) represents the imposition of a mindset on academic leaders that resembles those found in business or corporate sectors. However, it creates clashes of values, cultures, and work practices for many midlevel academic leaders, who often have greater investment in the welfare of those in their units (e.g., students, faculty) than in operational efficiencies or the exercise of authoritarian leadership tactics.

The dispersed nature of academic leadership also presents challenges, in that faculty roles of teacher, researcher, and institutional and community citizen often have leadership expectations and activities built into those roles, either explicitly (e.g., through promotion and salary decisions) or implicitly (e.g., through mentoring students; Black, 2015). In addition, academics often have leadership roles within disciplinary peer groups, collaborative research teams, and professional organizations outside of the institution. Thus, a unit may have much leadership being enacted within it, but little of it aimed consciously at the effectiveness of the unit itself or the larger institution in which it is embedded.

Finally, particularly challenging for CPs is their location in units in which their disciplinary fit may be less than optimal. Counseling psychology programs housed in psychology or social science departments, for example, may be viewed as more focused on counseling practices rather than psychological sciences, or may be criticized for lower levels of externally-funded research than are achieved in some other psychological specialties. Counseling psychology programs in departments or schools of education, on the other hand, may be viewed as unessential to their unit’s primary focus on K–12 educator preparation; thus, their affiliation with, and accreditation in, psychology (by APA) further distances them from education-related associations and accrediting bodies (e.g., American Educational Research Association, Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation). Their tenuous position can be exacerbated further by confusion between counseling psychology and counselor education programs and accrediting bodies (e.g., Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs), placing them under threat in lean fiscal times or when those in more centrally-located, clearly-relevant, accreditation-similar, or revenue-generating programs want programs eliminated so that resources can be reallocated.

CPs are most likely to work in midlevel leadership positions due to the predominance of these positions in the academy. Given the difficulties of communicating and advocating effectively both up and down the hierarchy at this level, under the kinds of challenges described here, CPs face considerable challenges. Gallos (2002) described that deans, for example,
...juggle multiple roles and a myriad of expectations from diverse constituents. Squeezed from above and below as well as from inside and outside the university, deans are caught in the jaws of conflicting cultures, pressures and priorities. Constrained by traditions and tensions inherent in the role, they are increasingly accountable for outcomes over which they have little influence and less control. At public universities, all this is compounded by an inordinate amount of paperwork and shrinking state budgets for higher education. (p. 174)

How do leaders survive—and perhaps even thrive—in the challenging leadership environment of contemporary higher education? The answer, of course, is “it depends”—on the leader, the followers, and the context in which leadership is being enacted (Zaccaro, 2007). The scholarly leadership literature has debated for decades which skills and competencies characterize effective leaders, while numerous mass market books dispense leadership advice. Although the literature offers a multitude of taxonomies of characteristics of good leaders (many tied to particular leadership models or approaches), effective leadership increasingly is being recognized as far more complex than a simple amalgam of specific leader behaviors superimposed on a group of subordinates (Avolio, 2007; Zaccaro, 2007). This is particularly the case when gender and gender diversity, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, and other status variables—of both the leader and those being led—are considered in the context of social stigma and marginalization that characterize the lives of many holding these statuses (e.g., Chin, Lott, Rice, & Sanchez-Hucles, 2007; Chin & Trimble, 2015; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Fassinger, Shullman, & Stevenson, 2010).

Research, for example, suggests that women surpass men in effectiveness in midlevel leadership positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007), and both women and people of color tend to enact transformational leadership approaches more frequently than do their White male counterparts (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eagly & Chin, 2010). Transformational leadership (which relies on shared responsibility, collaboration, open communication, and leader authenticity, empathy, inspiration, and vision) also demonstrates greater effectiveness than other approaches across contexts (Eagly & Carli, 2007), and is thought to be particularly applicable to the learner-centered, rapidly-changing, globalized environment of higher education, where collaborative, creative problem-solving is critical (Black, 2015). It might be assumed, therefore, that women and people of color (found in considerable numbers in counseling psychology relative to other areas of psychology) may be well-suited to the kinds of leadership roles needed in higher education; thus, the field of counseling psychology might be a fertile recruitment ground for effective future leaders. In the following sections of this article, we explore how CP’s training, values,
disciplinary foci and strengths, and professional experiences might contribute to the development of effective leadership capabilities, with a particular emphasis on the feminist multicultural aspects of CP’s core strengths.

The Promise of CPs in Academic Leadership

We begin an examination of counseling psychology leadership suitability by considering student predispositions. Applicants admitted into counseling psychology doctoral programs tend to display a combination of leadership-relevant characteristics, including high intellectual ability; strong interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence; respect for both science and practice; and values and personal commitments that include serving and supporting others, enacting social justice, and identifying and working to ameliorate social ills. Selected for these characteristics, counseling psychology students are prepared to serve individuals, groups, and organizations. They are able to assess complex dynamics and situations, employ evidence-based practices to reach desired outcomes, and communicate effectively with diverse constituencies. In short, counseling psychology graduate students are excellent candidates for subsequent training in institutional and professional leadership (Good, 2014).

As these students proceed through graduate training, they are socialized into a set of values, skills, and emphases specific to counseling psychology that map well to the competencies and attitudes needed by contemporary academic leaders. As described by the Society of Counseling Psychology (SCP; 2016):

Counseling Psychology is a specialty . . . that maintains a focus on facilitating personal and interpersonal functioning across the life span. The specialty pays particular attention to . . . educational, developmental, and organizational concerns. The practice of Counseling Psychology encompasses a broad range of culturally-sensitive practices that help people improve their well-being . . . and increase their ability to function better in their lives. (para. 1)

The five “unifying themes” (Gelso & Fretz, 2011; Gelso, Williams, & Fretz, 2014) of counseling psychology further elaborate these commitments as disciplinary foci on intact personalities, assets and strengths, brief interventions, person-environment interactions, and educational and career development. CPs also seek to enhance multicultural competence and to promote social justice (Vera & Speight, 2003).

We contend that these values and roles are precisely the kinds of characteristics that can maximize success in academic leadership: focusing on
strengths and positive aspects of people and places; effecting rapid amelioration of immediate difficulties while also addressing the long-term needs of people and places; understanding people, places, and problems in context and addressing diversity issues competently and consciously; and retaining the big picture of higher education as a primarily educational, developmental, and vocational endeavor. These strengths are particularly important in the challenging context of contemporary higher education, and we believe that the strong diversity focus of counseling psychology provides a critically important, multilevel answer to these challenges.

Diversity and Academic Leadership by CPs

The exceptional diversity focus in counseling psychology is often noted. Indeed, Gelso and Fretz (2001) asserted that CPs have emerged as the strongest leaders in psychology in multicultural research and practice, a natural outgrowth of the counseling psychology foci on assets and strengths in individual differences and on person-environment interactions. CPs have been some of the leading scholars in the field of psychology in gender (Enns, Williams, & Fassinger, 2013), sexual orientation and gender diversity (DeBord, Fischer, Bieschke, & Perez, 2017), and race, ethnicity, and culture (Fouad, 2009), especially as identity intersects with educational and career development (Blustein, 2006). CPs also have been primary creators (APA 2003; 2015; 2016) or principal collaborators (APA 2007; 2012) in the development of professional practice guidelines for diverse populations. Moreover, the strong diversity focus of counseling psychology extends well beyond attention to specific populations with marginalized statuses to the broader framework of social justice (Toporek, Gerstein, Fouad, Roysircar, & Israel, 2006) with its goals of collective empowerment and systemic change. Thus, the field of counseling psychology would appear to be highly amenable to transformational leadership, both in its active inclusion of women, people of color, and members of other marginalized groups, as well as its firm commitment to social justice goals.

In particular, the intersection of race and ethnicity with gender has been so strong in counseling psychology that Gelso et al. (2014) identified feminist multicultural counseling as one of the four dominant theoretical and therapeutic approaches in the field, and a recently published handbook on feminist multicultural counseling psychology (Enns & Williams, 2013) was devoted entirely to this arena. Given the importance of the feminist multicultural stance in contemporary counseling psychology, it can be assumed to be in the behavioral repertoire of most CPs. In addition, the transformational leadership elements inherent in the feminist multicultural (FM) approach render
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this stance especially useful to consider in relation to leadership in higher education. In the following section, we explore the challenge and promise that a feminist multicultural approach may bring to bear for a CP in academic leadership.

FM mentoring as an example. To provide an example of how a FM stance might affect leadership, we offer a brief discussion of mentoring, a common leadership task that we, the authors, consider highly important. For many midlevel academic leaders (e.g., department chairs, deans), a substantial portion of the administrative portfolio involves mentoring (although it may be described as personnel management rather than mentoring), typically of faculty and staff, but also often enacted with students and perhaps even peers throughout the institution. Using the foundational feminist mentoring model of Fassinger (1997, with its multicultural aspects further elaborated by Benishek, Bieschke, Park & Slattery, 2004; also see Fassinger & Hensler-McGinnis, 2005; Gormley, 2013), we explore possible challenges in enacting FM mentoring in higher education environments, and we postulate that the FM and social justice mindsets of CPs may enable them to answer those challenges effectively.

The overall goal of the FM mentoring model is the empowerment of mentees, accomplished along six dimensions that reflect core feminist principles: (a) shared power (emphasizing power with, not power over; egalitarianism; dismantling of hierarchy); (b) relational emphasis (including open communication, transparency, authenticity); (c) collaboration (joint problem-solving and networking); (d) commitment to diversity (giving voice, moving mentees from the margins to the center, understanding one’s own privilege, modeling and practicing cultural humility); (e) integration of dichotomies (valuing both brain and heart, and both facts and feelings); and (f) political analysis (obviating the power and privilege embedded in the existing system, challenging the status quo, encouraging change) (Fassinger, 1997).

It is likely that enacting FM principles in mentoring activities might pose difficulties for a counseling psychology leader in some academic institutions. Many leadership scholars have noted the masculinized environments of most contemporary workplaces (including academe) (Chin & Trimble, 2015; Chin, et al., 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007), deeply embedded in historical command-and-control leadership styles and interpersonal competitiveness, with prototypic leadership expectations rooted in being White and male. Even in academe—where such ideals as intellectual freedom, shared governance, collegiality, and knowledge production hold sway—institutional histories and the on-going underrepresentation of women, people of color, and members of other marginalized groups result in the lingering presence of a masculine
culture reflected in present-day habits and norms (particularly in scientific fields; Fouad, Singh, Fitzpatrick, & Liu, 2011; Hill, Corbett, & St. Rose, 2010; Settles, Cortina, Malley, & Stewart, 2006). As the FM mentoring model suggests, its successful implementation leads to dismantling the very edifice upon which many academic institutions (or pockets of those institutions) still rest, such as tightly protected hierarchies; opaque and oblique communications; secrets and special interests; divide-and-conquer management strategies; reward systems based on status and conformity to norms; focus on data and facts, with repression of affect; denial of politics and privilege; and preservation of the status quo (i.e., the manifestations of White male power and privilege; Fassinger, 2014).

For midlevel leaders, who often navigate conflicting agendas, the features of FM mentoring may bring those conflicts into sharp focus in highly masculinized environments. That is, from the point of view of upper administration, the chief task of a midlevel academic leader may be to ensure that those in the leader’s unit (i.e., faculty, staff, and students) understand and adhere to the institution’s explicit and implicit norms, practices, and rules. The leader is expected to protect the upper administration and the institution from difficulties, embarrassments, and negative events. Nonetheless, the leader also has an obligation to the welfare of those in the unit, including protecting them from adverse policies, helping them to develop professionally, and/or guiding them in enacting changes they desire, such as new policies or increased resources (Fassinger, 2014).

If counseling psychology leaders, presumably versed in FM approaches, try to implement the mentoring principles noted above, they will work transparently and unabashedly to empower those in their units to work toward desired changes in effective ways. They likely will share power, characterize leadership as relational and collaborative (vs. top down), communicate openly and transparently, connect people in problem-solving and ensure their access to information, give voice to those usually silenced, validate feelings as well as facts, name institutional politics and privilege, and generally challenge the status quo. However, in the masculinized environments that characterize many institutions, shared power and egalitarian, collaborative styles are likely to be viewed as weak, indecisive leadership that wastes time and avoids decisions. The eschewal of hierarchies may be perceived as abdicating legitimate power and responsibility to enforce policies and practices. Communicating openly and authentically, and giving voice to the marginalized may be judged as pandering to special groups or peripheral interests, exhibiting poor self-control, and violating the (presumed) confidentiality of institutional information. Allowing room in dialogues for personal and cultural responses (vs. just facts and figures) may be viewed as “soft” and non-data-driven, lacking objectivity,
or allowing emotions to cloud judgment. Attempts to connect people may be feared as disruptive, distracting, and counterproductive because their shared knowledge empowers them to agitate for change collectively (Fassinger, 2014). Moreover, subordinates may mirror the negative perceptions of feminist leaders by those higher up in the hierarchy (who rarely appreciate the baring of politics and power networks from which they gain and maintain their authority), and wonder whether the leader is capable of the kind of “strong” leadership generally expected in the institution, or may fear that the leader will fail and adverse consequences will result to the unit (Fassinger, 2014).

How does a counseling psychology leader, adhering to FM principles, effectively mentor the people in the unit within the realities of their present context? VERY CAREFULLY! Possible strategies include: (a) helping the people in the unit (e.g., faculty) to think strategically, using knowledge of the institution and the administration to help them anticipate resistance and address that proactively in their request; (b) encouraging diverse subgroups in the unit to work together collaboratively and align their (perhaps orthogonal) agendas, rather than working at cross purposes; (c) helping them demonstrate to the upper administration what their most important and relevant contributions to the institution are, and that their request is consistent with using their strengths to advance administrative agendas or initiatives (and if they disdain institutional strategic plans, helping them understand how mapping their requests to those plans can advance their interests and promote responsiveness from above); (d) helping mentees to frame their request positively and proactively (rather than negatively and reactively), and to generate concrete possibilities for improvement of the problematic situation, not just complaints (however credible) about the current state; (e) ensuring that they gain access to available, credible data to support their request; (f) helping them decide which individuals/groups will best represent them in negotiations; and (g) preparing supervisor(s) to hear the request by emphasizing the importance of the issue and by assuring reliable data and professional demeanor from subordinates (Fassinger, 2014).

These strategies allow a counseling psychology leader to empower mentees, thus adhering to the spirit and principles of FM mentoring, but also to hold the larger institutional vision intact. The counseling psychology leader is indeed laying bare the institutional politics, but in ways that provide members of the unit with individual and collective power to engage around those politics. The counseling psychology leader is connecting mentees and encouraging them to collaborate and work together toward a common goal, and doing it by communicating as openly and transparently as possible (naming the places where this is not possible, and explaining why). The counseling psychology leader is validating feelings and personal experiences but also is encouraging the
strategic use of data, both of which help subordinates to find, use, and hone an effective on-going voice in the institution. In short, the counseling psychology leader, collaboratively with those in the unit, is challenging the status quo of hierarchy, power, and privilege at every turn, but also is engaging authentically as a bridge builder who holds the interests of the administration, the people in the unit, and the institution itself simultaneously in capable hands (Fassinger, 2014). As a bonus, this feminist multicultural counseling psychology leader probably will have a job at the end of the day!

This example illustrates the complicated intersection of leader and leadership approach within a specific kind of organizational context (traditional, masculinized), with a specific task (mentoring), and with a specific group of subordinates (faculty, staff, and students). Imagine now an overlay of gender, race, ethnicity, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability, religious orientation and other status variables on the part of the leader, the subordinates, and the higher administration. Engaging the principles of FM mentoring is likely to look very different, for instance, if the leader is a young African American gay man, an older Asian American heterosexual woman, or a middle-aged White woman in a wheelchair. Not only will the worldviews of each of these leaders differ, but the responses and perceptions of their subordinates and supervisors also will vary, both to them and to their deliberate use of a FM leadership approach. CPs, by values and training, have the potential to bring strong interpersonal skills and deep, nuanced understanding of diversity and social justice to leadership tasks such as this, and it is for this reason that CPs offer promise in assuming academic leadership roles. In the following section, we offer direct suggestions to CPs considering or moving into leadership roles in higher education.

**Obtaining an Academic Leadership Position**

Although the transition in roles, responsibilities, and content may seem daunting in a new leadership role, many of the characteristics and skills that allow CPs to be successful in other roles (e.g. practitioner, faculty member) translate well into leadership; the humility with which many CPs prefer to operate is especially well-suited for success as a servant leader (Good, 2014). Here we provide advice for considering academic leadership, obtaining a position, negotiating terms of employment, and transitioning into the new position in ways that maximize the likelihood of success (Fassinger, 2015). We use counseling skills to demonstrate parallels between being a good therapist and serving as a successful academic leader (Good & Beitman, 2006).

Many in academic leadership come to an awareness of their skills and interests in this arena relatively late in their career trajectories, only after they
have been thrust or cajoled into leadership roles (a phenomenon that the first author refers to as “accidental” leadership; Fassinger, 2015). However, it is useful to consider the possibility of eventual leadership earlier in your career. Such preparation could include: (a) seeking formal leadership preparation via graduate coursework or continuing education; (b) professional development in areas outside of counseling psychology (e.g., student development, higher education administration, policy studies); and (c) leadership training offered within psychology for graduate students or early career professionals (e.g., by American Psychological Association of Graduate Students or SCP’s Leadership Academy; see forthcoming articles by Phillips et al. [in press] and Hewitt et al. [in press] in the next issue) or in midcareer (e.g., APA’s Leadership Institute for Women in Psychology). Thoughtful planning allows you to position yourself in roles where you can acquire currently underdeveloped skills (typically budget and personnel management, technology, and fundraising) or ensure that your institutional service allows you maximum visibility, impact, and capacity to claim ownership of future outcomes. Examples of such roles might include promotion and tenure committees, budget committees, technology initiatives, faculty development and evaluation activities, and university development campaigns.

A large and time-consuming leadership role should be avoided until tenure is achieved and your position and reputation in the institution are secured (Mintz, 1992), because faculty accustomed to flexible schedules and considerable autonomy may grossly underestimate the time, constraints, and upward accountability that they will experience in most administrative positions. When ready to pursue leadership, you should ensure that an opportunity aligns with your professional goals and offers a path to meeting those goals. Possible benefits might include skills you want to acquire, entry to other desirable positions to which you aspire, the capacity to pursue your passions, or experiences you wish to reflect on your vita. A position may be a stretch for you, with interim and temporary positions providing opportunities to gain experience in new roles.

However, you must assess realistically the actual opportunities associated with the position (Fassinger, 2015). Many academic leadership positions offer much administrative responsibility but little or no power; hence, assess the extent to which the position that you are considering offers some degree of autonomy and authority over personnel (i.e., hiring and terminating), budget and resources, space assignments, and overall decision-making. Ensure that expectations about the position are reasonable, and be cautious about positions with structural difficulties that may compromise your leadership. For example, half-time or split positions may leave you repeatedly torn between competing demands for your time. To maximize your chances for
success in a split position, ensure that you have bilocated offices; clear days, times, and goals for your work in each position; superiors who support you in both roles; and a replacement in your home unit (to prevent your colleagues from resenting your absence and to maintain the recognition that your job normally requires a full work week). Also merit caution are associate or assistant administrative titles, which may exist to off-load aversive tasks that superiors do not want to do (but for which they may get credit), or result from institutional reorganizations that eliminated positions by compounding workloads. Before you assume such a position, ensure adequate staffing, obtain written assurance of retreat rights back to your faculty position, and assess the trajectories of predecessors to ensure that the position is not a professional dead end.

Most CPs know a great deal about the job application and interviewing process, because they teach those vocational skills to others. However, there are several aspects of academic leadership searches that are distinct from those aimed at hiring faculty. First, if you are applying for a high-level position in a college or university, you may have moved out of your academic home, and individuals who have little knowledge of the norms and strengths of your profession are judging your record. Search committees generally are concerned more about your ability to accomplish the tasks listed in the job description than your scholarly reputation (beyond the baseline of excelling in your academic discipline), and members may come from fields with different expectations in assessing performance. In addition, many upper-level academic leadership searches employ outside search firms (who do much of the initial screening and vetting of candidates) and you may be interacting with people who know nothing about your profession.

A second issue is the mindset to adopt regarding a search—that it is a process of mutual assessment of fit. Many CPs (by temperament or training) exhibit a level of personal and cultural humility that assumes that good character and professional accomplishments speak for themselves. However, this is rarely an optimal stance in most academic leadership searches, where you are expected to present your qualities, skills, and experiences explicitly, succinctly, and frequently during the search process. Moreover, your focus must be on the specific job requirements, effectively conveying a message about the excellence of your fit for the position and articulating your unique leadership strengths, bolstered by concrete examples from your experiences. It is critically important to do your homework about the institution (even if it is your own and you think you know it well). Awareness of national conversations about key issues and how the institution is positioned regarding those issues will help you develop a tentative picture to refine in the interview. It also is important to take credit for your (legitimate) successes and, if you are
leaving your current institution, to be ready to explain why without rancor. Additionally, as you are assessing fit as well, give considerable thought to your match with the leader(s) who you would be supporting in your work. Your likelihood of work satisfaction and future success increases greatly when you trust and respect your supervisors, and support what they are seeking to accomplish at the institution. Conversely, when personal styles or institutional objectives differ significantly, question strongly whether this is the right opportunity for you.

A third aspect of academic leadership searches is a heightened effort to make the process more confidential than is typical of faculty searches. In general, the more advanced the position, the greater the likelihood that attempts will be made to enshroud the process in secrecy. This is because of your current employer’s potential backlash if you are perceived to be dissatisfied, disloyal, or not fully committed to your current position. Moreover, your employer’s discovery of your job search activities can catalyze employment termination and other difficulties. You can seek to protect yourself by conveying clearly your expectation of confidentiality until your candidacy advances to a certain level or until a contract is signed, and by questioning the institution or search firm closely about how your campus visit(s) will be communicated within the institution and local community. Nonetheless, it is common for current employers to learn of candidates’ job search activities. Members of your prospective institution may contact colleagues at your current institution, or people on your campus may notice your interview at another campus via web postings. Additionally, some states have disclosure (“sunshine”) laws requiring that searches be conducted publicly. Hence, it is wise to consider the advantages and disadvantages of informing your current supervisor about your job search to avoid unpleasant revelations.

A final (perhaps surprising) aspect of academic leadership searches is the large number of terms to be negotiated with a job offer. These can include: (a) the status of your tenure or promotion; (b) retreat rights to a secure faculty position if or when your leadership term ends; (c) salary and benefits; (d) leave from your current position/institution (e.g., if a safety net is needed); (e) fiscal support (budget, personnel, space, and one-time funds commonly given to new leaders); (f) housing (temporary and/or assistance with purchasing); (g) tuition for dependents; (h) assistance with a position for a partner or spouse; (i) relocation expenses; (j) professional travel; and (k) “perks” (e.g., health club membership, transportation support) that may be available. You may wish to consider a counteroffer from your home institution, but doing so warrants caution and advice from experienced colleagues, as perceived game-playing to better your position (in either institution) can result in negative outcomes.
In our own experiences, helping an academic unit and its constituent members to advance and become more effective is highly gratifying. However, we would be remiss if we neglected to mention some of the downsides of academic leadership. Doing it well typically is very time and energy demanding, with tremendous accountability pressure both up and down the administrative hierarchy. Assuming a leadership role often decreases time for scholarship, may alter longstanding relationships with colleagues, and can interfere with personal and family time. In addition, there are emotional costs; it is axiomatic among leaders that “if you haven’t made somebody angry, you probably aren’t doing your job,” a nod to the difficulties of managing conflicting agendas and the need for a calm, strong internal compass to steer the course despite negative affect appearing from all directions. An academic leader must hold constant the reality of a specific role and relationship to others in the institution; thus, the transition into such a role bears brief examination.

Transitioning Into an Academic Leadership Role

Because it is a public event, affects many people simultaneously, and occurs often within a context that is completely novel for the academic leader, the transition to a new role involves many opportunities for missteps that can leave lasting imprints on the leader’s tenure and success (Fassinger, 2015). This is why new leaders often are given the sage advice to refrain from immediately redecorating their offices, an extravagance that conveys an undesirable signal about the new leader’s priorities. We again note the humble servant-leader stance that perhaps characterizes the approach of many CPs, who may be unaware that they have shifted from being viewed as “us” to “them” in the academic hierarchy (S. McDaniel, personal communication, February, 2015), and they possess new power and status that must be integrated into their professional identities. They no longer are viewed as neutral, but have become projections of the fears, anxieties, hopes, agendas, and authority issues of the various individuals and groups whose fates now are intricately linked to the leader’s actions. Here we discuss transition issues within the framework of therapy (Good & Beitman, 2006), which has been likened to the process of transformational leadership (Gabel, 2013), supporting our contention that CPs can move into academic leadership roles comfortably and effectively using their existing skills.

Listen and understand. The hallmark of effective therapeutic work (Norcross, 2010), deep listening builds trust, good will, positive engagement, and a successful working alliance. As a CP, you know that listening is active, and your
training and practice in effective listening help you to understand what is expected of you by your new subordinates, peers, supervisor(s), and additional constituents (e.g., community leaders). This includes knowing the history, culture, dynamics, and people of your unit, from both internal and external points of view. Just as you understand therapy clients in interaction with their environments (Gelso et al., 2014), you will seek to understand the larger external cultures and pressures that affect your unit in the institution, in the local community, and in the national conversations about disciplines under your stewardship. What are the priorities of each of your constituencies, and how do they complement one another (or not)? As a new leader, it is important to maintain both welcoming interest (keeping a notebook with you to record conversations and enable follow-up) and initial skepticism about what you are hearing (avoiding opinions or promises until you have sufficient evidence). You should not assume enthusiasm about your hire from everyone in your unit, nor should you encourage blaming or bashing your predecessor for current problems in the unit. Rather, focus on making your unit “leader-proof” (Fassinger, 2015)—that is, so strong and well-functioning that leader competence becomes a minor aspect of the unit’s adhering to, and fulfilling, its mission.

Assess the situation. For midlevel leaders, there often is imperfect alignment between the desires of subordinates and supervisors. To use an example that we, the authors, both have encountered, members of your unit may want a leader who aggressively demands more resources for the unit and who shields them from perceived ill-informed directives of higher administrators. Conversely, your supervisor(s) may view your most pressing task as reining in troublesome faculty or overhauling (even eliminating) a unit perceived as underperforming. In our experience, such situations often reflect some degree of truth on both sides, and your counseling psychology skills in both formal and informal assessment (Gelso et al., 2014) are of considerable advantage in formulating interventions. Institutional quantitative data, for example, can help you identify noteworthy patterns in resource use and outcomes, whereas meetings with unit members and institutional personnel can provide you with supplemental qualitative information to clarify needs.

Moreover, the counseling psychology focus on strengths-based conceptualizations of problems and emphasis on healthy, positive aspects of individual functioning allow you to assess opportunities for growth and improvement in your unit and its members. Instead of becoming mired down in seemingly intractable problems, you can ask optimistic, forward-looking questions such as: What unique individual and unit strengths can be enhanced? (e.g., How can I support and utilize Jane Doe’s strengths as a faculty member, or how
can I minimize the detrimental impact of John Doe’s limitations as a staff member? How can the knowledge of testing that my faculty uniquely possesses be used for institutional enhancement?). Are there professional advancement opportunities for staff and faculty, and are available rewards aligned with desired outcomes? A unit is only as strong and healthy as the individuals in it, which is why mentoring is a critically important aspect of an academic leader’s portfolio (and why we used a mentoring example above).

**Develop plans for intervention and implementation.** Just as in planning therapeutic interventions, your academic leadership as a CP seeks not only immediate amelioration of discomfort and strategies for resolving existing problems, but also longer-term plans to prevent future difficulties (Gelso et al., 2014). Considering your assessment of your unit in context, what are the most important goals to accomplish initially and longer term, and how can these goals be sequenced to build upon one another and generate positive momentum? What are possible early successes that can build support for your leadership and infuse a spirit of optimism about the future? Consider what specific mechanisms (e.g., committees, task forces, individual assignments) are optimal for implementation, and what key strategies (e.g., garnering early support from thought leaders and positive communicators in the unit and the larger institution) will foster participation and build an environment conducive to positive change. As when setting therapeutic goals, together with your constituents you will identify timeframes and benchmarks for progress, anticipated barriers and how they will be addressed, and criteria for judging your effectiveness as a leader. Whether or not your institution provides a means of regular (i.e., at least yearly) leader evaluation, consider implementing your own system for continuous feedback within your unit. You can use leader evaluations formatively to develop and flexibly adjust your direction and plans, summatively to provide detailed information about your performance to your supervisors, and motivationally to set an example of openness to feedback to the people in your unit and to establish a culture of continual professional growth and life-long learning.

**Facilitate progress and change.** As with clients in counseling, academic units vary in their capacity and readiness to embrace change. Ambivalence is common, as is the reasonable desire of most people to have a say in their futures—especially in academe, where shared governance and faculty autonomy are long-standing traditions. It is critically important to obtain input and support regarding new directions from key stakeholders both inside and outside the unit, to remember that shared leadership is most effective in bringing about change in most contexts (Eagly & Carli, 2007), and to proceed collaboratively
at a pace that reflects the culture of the unit. Where poor prior leadership or negative contextual factors (such as university reorganizations) have left a legacy of egregious disregard for people in a unit, the distrust may be so strong that any effort to enact change will be roundly rebuffed, raising the threshold for later attempts. In such situations, where morale is low and people are disempowered, it might seem impossible to gain support and delegate work, and you may be tempted to plunge forward self-sufficiently (whether due to a supervisor’s directive or your own desire to make change or prove your leadership abilities), and hope that others will follow your lead.

However, just as therapists should not push for change prematurely in therapy (Miller & Rose, 2009), too much independent effort to move your unit forward is likely to backfire. Not only will delegating tasks become impossible later and personal burnout surely ensue, but if you attempt a too rapid transformation, you risk losing the support of people in the unit. Indeed, leaders viewed as pushing fast, drastic changes (particularly changes associated with loss, such as eliminating programs) often are not the leaders who receive support (from above or below) for remaining in the leadership role after such changes have been enacted. Understandably, faculty who have invested their professional identities and careers in a program typically fight outside threats with unfettered vengeance. Leaders viewed as responsible for the loss of a program often are despised not only by the directly-affected faculty, but by others who worry that they, too, may face decisions made in perceived haste and without faculty support. Thus, leaders assuming positions involving program consolidation or elimination as future possibilities might plan for a relatively short tenure and prepare themselves for the negative aspects of being change agents. As a CP well versed in assessment, you can use data to demonstrate the positive aspects of downsizing in one area to free up resources for investment in new initiatives and opportunities. In addition, as a CP who focuses on tapping people’s strengths and positive functioning, you can help displaced personnel position themselves in new initiatives as appropriate, and you can use your career knowledge and skills to help some move out of the unit into positions of better fit.

As you motivate your constituents into participating in initiatives being undertaken, it is important to ensure the protection of vulnerable groups in your unit. For example, the academy typically shapes junior faculty toward focusing strongly on their research and avoiding distracting service demands that may derail them from the production of scholarship (necessary for promotion). However, as a CP well versed in diversity concerns, you know that faculty members who are from underrepresented groups often are disproportionately called upon (relative to their majority colleagues) to serve in a multitude of unit, campus, and community capacities (e.g., campus diversity
initiatives, recruitment and retention initiatives, mentorship programs, and student disputes) because of their minority status (Turner & Myers, 1999). Although it might be within your authority and resources to reward faculty for exceptional service demands, doing so may not mitigate lost time on scholarship, and if done, it should occur only within parameters developed collectively by the members of the unit.

Communicate. Even the strong interpersonal skills honed by most CPs may not fully prepare a new leader for the complex communication demands of the leadership position, and we cannot emphasize enough the importance of open, continuous, careful communication both down and up the administrative hierarchy. Consider multiple channels of communication appropriate to various constituents, including e-mail, social media (e.g., blogs), handwritten notes and cards, periodic unit publications (e.g., quarterly reports, newsletters), and regular face-to-face meetings. Keeping your supervisor informed is particularly important, and it is wise to provide early warning when particularly bad news may be coming their way (e.g., complaints or inquiries from students, faculty, parents, alumni, donors, attorneys, politicians, or the media). Similarly, when good news occurs (e.g., improved enrollment numbers, positive student satisfaction ratings, receipt of external funding, or favorable program rankings), this news should be shared promptly and widely.

Finally, we offer a strong word of caution about e-mail, often favored for its convenience, rapidity, and easy sharing of information. However, in a leadership role, e-mail can be your undoing (as national events demonstrate repeatedly). You must always remember (and ensure that members of your unit know) that e-mail is not private or confidential. Any kind of disputes common in academic institutions (e.g., student complaints about grades or disability accommodations, employee complaints about hiring, promotion, salary, or performance evaluations) can result in e-mail accounts being probed for relevant evidence, and messages can be disclosed to others (e.g., your supervisors, attorneys, a litigant, the media). The challenge is that you rarely know in advance what is likely to escalate into a major problem, and even seemingly innocuous e-mail attempts to placate or explain may place you and others at risk later. We recommend that you determine, for every e-mail you send, whether you would be willing for your unit, the institution and community, or even national media to see it. Complicated policy, hiring, conduct, and complaint communications should occur via phone or face-to-face meetings (formally documented in follow-up written communications as appropriate), and personal e-mail accounts can be used for private communication.
Conclusion and Future Directions

Five emerging trends in contemporary counseling psychology that are likely to affect the future of the profession were offered by Hansen (2012). These include: (a) a broadened emphasis on individual differences to include increased focus on underrepresented populations and multicultural issues; (b) globalization and internationalization of the field; (c) development of translational research to bridge the seemingly intractable gap between science and practice; (d) technological advances, which will affect education and therapy in particular, but also research; and (e) knowledge about neural mechanisms and genotypes, which will transform understandings of individual differences, cognition and learning, development, and the like. Viewing these directions against some of the contemporary challenges in higher education noted previously—increasing diversity of the student body (including international students) and expanded service needs, demand for assessment and evaluation of learning outcomes and professional competencies, influence of stakeholders outside the institution (e.g., community members, legislators, funders) on institutional priorities and practices, and technological and fiscal pressures—it seems clear that CPs may be poised to provide the kind of effective academic leadership needed in the future. The attitudinal sets, knowledge, and skills of CPs prepare them uniquely to address most of the major challenges in contemporary higher education, and Hansen’s predicted trends will serve to further enhance their readiness in the future.

More specifically, the core values and training of CPs in diversity and multiculturalism position them well to lead their units and their institutions in responding appropriately to increased student diversity, and they bring a nuanced awareness of the ways in which diverse cultural locations affect students’ individual developmental experiences and shape their educational and vocational needs. Relatedly, the position of counseling psychology as a specialty area of psychology ensures that the growing knowledge emerging from cognitive and neuropsychology will be integrated into counseling psychology training in individual differences. Moreover, CPs’ knowledge of developmental processes in educational and vocational matters and their deep experience with college students position them to collaborate effectively with student affairs professionals in optimizing the academic and interpersonal climate for diverse students in higher education. If there is a place in the academy where counseling psychology training and values offer the most promising and immediate contributions, it is perhaps in this leadership arena.

CPs’ broad training in assessment and in both quantitative and qualitative research methods also positions them well to develop and implement systems of effective assessment, evaluation, and continuous improvement of faculty
instruction and student learning and competency. Given that CPs are accustomed to working with graduate students who will require licensure, they understand the pressure to build and demonstrate clinical competency of students in decreasing windows of time and with increasing curricular demands. They also accept being accountable to external bodies (e.g., accreditation processes) for the training they provide. Practicum and internship training, in particular, provide CPs with much practice in assessing and monitoring student progress in developing highly complex skill sets across diverse external settings. These skills in producing competency-based learning outcome assessments and translating them successfully to accountability bodies outside the institution represent a tremendous potential asset of counseling psychology leaders to the institution in advancing its evaluative capacities.

Moreover, the strong counseling psychology emphasis on social justice produces an awareness of sociocultural context that enables leaders to enter and serve communities outside the academy with accurate knowledge, cultural humility, and clear goals to empower. As academic leadership demands ever-increasing involvement in, and responsiveness to local, state, and even national communities, CPs are positioned well to catalyze conversations and initiatives, conduct research that informs the academy and benefits the community, train students for meaningful roles in serving their communities, and partner with community leaders to identify local vocational needs and develop education and training to meet those needs. In addition, although most CPs are not trained in marketing or fundraising, their potential for effective research, practice, education, and advocacy in communities outside the institution may position them to make contributions to institutional advancement activities, as well as to obtain external funding for their community involvements.

Because CPs understand the reciprocal relationship between science and practice, they should be adept at helping their institutions to utilize and translate existing research into best practices, to build educational programs and assessment systems grounded thoroughly in sound theory and research, and to use data to effect change at a systemic level. Moreover, the counseling psychology focus on maximizing individual strengths and assets positions them well to strategically manage contributions from people in the institution who manifest diverse levels of knowledge, skill and commitment, and (combined with their expertise in career development) to lead efforts to build individual and unit capacity through relevant, vocationally appropriate professional development and life-long learning opportunities for faculty and staff.

Finally, counseling psychology’s emphasis on short-term intervention and amelioration of difficulties paired with long-term prevention means that
counseling psychology leaders should be able to create and maintain a long-term vision of institutional direction even as immediate issues are addressed. This perspective is especially important where technological evolution is concerned, in that new technology availability and use typically outpace institutional capacity to adopt and support them (Barber et al., 2013), and leaders must simultaneously meet immediate demands for technology but also ensure capacity building for future technology acquisition that is not already obsolete by the time institutional resources are allocated. CPs already have faced the rising use of technology in research (e.g., online data collection), practice (e.g., telepractice), and training (e.g., online instruction), and although APA has declined to accredit fully-online professional psychology programs so far (citing quality issues and the need for professional enculturation), it has embraced selective online teaching (Clay, 2012). Counseling psychology leaders thus might respond knowledgeably to technological innovation, as they have access to standards and guidelines developed by APA (e.g., APA, 2013), they understand the contextual issues in educational and vocational access that are central to online education, and they have strong ethical training that allows them to focus on the welfare of those served by the institution.

Given the great promise of counseling psychology leadership in higher education, it is critical that training programs incorporate systematic attention to building leadership awareness, knowledge, and skills in students, and the SCP continue to expand its current leadership training for early career psychologists (Hewitt et al., in press; Phillips et al., in press). In addition, fruitful collaboration between SCP and the Council of Counseling Psychology Training Programs could provide leadership training to midcareer CPs, as many may be entering significant institutional leadership roles for the first time, after having served successfully in Program Director roles in their units. The Council of Counseling Psychology Training Programs also could actively support inclusion of leadership in counseling psychology programs’ curricular offerings and clinical training, with the ultimate goal of making leadership foundational to and expected in professional science, practice, education, and advocacy for all CPs.

In sum, the presence of CPs in academic leadership may offer institutions potent support in answering key challenges in contemporary higher education, particularly around student diversity and vocational development, assessment and competency-based education, external accountability, community partnerships, and ongoing professional development of faculty and staff. The current need for learner-centered, collaborative, transformational leadership approaches in the academy fits especially well with the counseling psychology grounding in a feminist multicultural foundation aimed at
collective empowerment (especially members of marginalized groups) and enacting social justice at institutional and community levels. More deliberate training in leadership can help counseling psychology as a field to achieve its promise of powerful influence in shaping the academy of the future.

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Author Biographies

Ruth E. Fassinger, PhD, is professor emerita at the University of Maryland, College Park, and former dean of both the College of Graduate and Professional Studies at John F. Kennedy University and the College of Education at California State University, Stanislaus. She is a Fellow in the Society of Counseling Psychology as well as Divisions 35 and 44 of the American Psychological Association (APA). She is a founding faculty and executive committee member of the APA Leadership Institute for Women in Psychology, and she is president-elect of the Society of Counseling Psychology.

Glenn E. Good is dean of the College of Education and Professor in the School of Human Development and Organizational Studies in Education at the University of Florida. He is a fellow of the Society of Counseling Psychology, and three additional divisions (29, 35, and 51) of the American Psychological Association (APA). He has served in national leadership positions in Division 51 of APA, the Consortium of University and Research Institutions of AERA, the AAU College of Education Deans Network, and the Learning and Education Academic Research Network.