

NEWS RELEASE

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‘Cradle of U.S. engineering deans’?

No school has a monopoly on molding academic engineering’s C-suite, but some programs enjoy outsized influence, a new study reveals

Although no university promotes itself — formally, at least — as the “cradle of U.S. engineering deans,” a new study shows that a handful of doctoral programs trained a disproportionately large share of the individuals in academic engineering’s C-suite.

Twenty-one high-profile universities (**see chart on second page of news release**) account for more than half of the Ph.D.’s held by the 186 deans included in the study, which, among other things, sought to identify career paths that women and people of color might travel to reach top leadership positions.

“Those 21 universities have familiar names, but they are not the only pathways by which to become a dean,” said the study’s author, Richard A. Skinner, a former university president who now serves as senior consultant for Harris Search Associates.

The study is published in the winter issue of *The Bridge*, the quarterly journal of the National Academy of Engineering (NAE), and featured in *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*.

The 186 deans in the study were chosen because they were signatories to a major diversity initiative announced four years ago by the American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE). In all, the United States has about 360 accredited engineering schools.

According to the study, the top producer of U.S. engineering deans is MIT, which awarded doctorates to 13 of the administrators included in the study’s sample. The University of California-Berkeley and Stanford University tied for No. 2 on the list, each having awarded eight such doctorates.

Other schools on the list included the University of Michigan, with seven Ph.D.’s; Caltech, with six; and Georgia Tech, NC State University, Penn State, Rice University, and Virginia Tech, with five apiece.

Next came Carnegie Mellon University, the University of Minnesota, and Ohio State University, each of which awarded four Ph.D.’s to deans in the study. Eight schools — the University of Cambridge, the University of Cincinnati, Cornell University, the University of Colorado Boulder, the University of Notre Dame, Purdue University, Texas Tech University, and the University of Texas at Austin — contributed three doctorates apiece.

In all, the 186 deans in the study hold terminal degrees from no fewer than 83 universities — a wide assortment of institutional heavyweights and academic up-and-comers.

“Attending the ‘right school’ — especially the right doctoral-granting university — strengthens one’s candidacy for a deanship in engineering,” Skinner said, “but the circle of the elite institutions from which to begin one’s career is neither especially small nor fixed in its membership.”

Perhaps not surprisingly, the institutions that rose to the top in the study were also prominent in *U.S. News & World Report’s* most recent ranking (March 2018) of best engineering graduate schools, an analysis that weighs factors such as matriculant GRE scores, acceptance rates, peer and recruiter assessments, student-faculty ratios, research expenditures, and doctoral completion rates.



NATIONAL ACADEMY
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The study – *Paths to the Deanship in American Academic Engineering: A Snapshot of Who, Where, and How* – appears in the winter issue of *The Bridge*, the journal of the National Academy of Engineering. It also is featured in *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*.

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MIT's graduate engineering program was No. 1 on *U.S. News & World Report's* latest scorecard, thereby extending a streak that dates back to 1990, when the magazine began ranking schools in that category. Stanford and California-Berkeley ranked second and third, respectively, on the magazine's most recent list.

Despite the concerted efforts of numerous universities, industry groups, and government agencies, the deanships of the nation's accredited engineering schools remain largely the province of white males, the study suggests. Eighty-two percent of the deans included in the study are male, and 74 percent are white.

What's more, although the nation's current deans have a good deal in common — the vast majority, for example, hold doctorates, and most cut their teeth as classroom instructors — no *single*, dominant route to the dean's office has emerged, leaving advocates of greater diversity wondering where to focus their attention and resources.

One thing, Skinner said, is clear: Those who want academic engineering's leadership ranks to better reflect the U.S. population will have to do more than simply point promising female and minority students toward the graduate programs that produced the nation's current engineering deans.

"The institution from which a dean earned a doctorate is not a unilateral decision on the part of the individual," Skinner said, adding that enrolling in the "right" school — whatever that might be — requires "aspiration, application, and some element of luck."

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Where did U.S. engineering deans earn their doctorates?

University	Ph.D.'s
MIT	13
California-Berkeley, Stanford	8 each
Michigan	7
Caltech	6
Georgia Tech, NC State, Penn State, Rice, Virginia Tech	5 each
Carnegie Mellon, Minnesota, Ohio State	4 each
Cambridge, Cincinnati, Cornell, Colorado-Boulder, Notre Dame, Purdue, Texas Tech, Texas-Austin	3 each
17 universities	2 each
45 universities	1 each
Unable to determine	3
M.B.A. rather than Ph.D.	1

Source: Websites of the deans' institutions

About Harris Search Associates

Harris Search Associates, founded in 1997 by Jeffrey G. Harris, is an executive search consultancy specializing in engineering, technology, and health sciences. The firm has conducted more than 875 searches, 34 percent of which have resulted in the placement of candidates from traditionally underrepresented populations. Based in Dublin, Ohio, in suburban Columbus, Harris Search Associates maintains satellite offices in Dallas and San Francisco. The firm is affiliated with IIC Partners, a global search consortium with 50 offices in 33 countries.

About Richard A. Skinner, Ph.D.

Richard A. Skinner, Ph.D., is senior consultant at Harris Search Associates. He formerly served as president of Clayton State University in metropolitan Atlanta and later as president and vice chancellor of Royal Roads University in Victoria, British Columbia. In the interim, he worked with the University System of Georgia, serving as president and chief executive officer of a pioneering unit charged with marketing and coordinating the distance learning offerings of 34 colleges and universities. Before joining Harris Search Associates in 2010, Dr. Skinner was senior vice president for programs at the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges. Dr. Skinner earned a doctorate and a master's degree in Government and International Studies at the University of South Carolina, and he completed additional studies at the University of Michigan and the University of Strathclyde in Scotland. His undergraduate alma mater, Georgia Southern University, recognized him as its 1997 Distinguished Alumnus.