



# Mission: Change the Face of U.S. Business Schools

*Jeffrey Cattel - 8/1/12*

KPMG Foundation President Bernie Milano has embarked on a mission to increase minorities in business schools throughout the U.S.



In the early 1990s, before diversity was a buzz word in the workplace, Bernie Milano noticed a major problem among U.S. business schools: just 1 percent of professors and 2 percent of doctoral candidates were minorities.

As president of the KPMG Foundation, the charitable arm of accounting firm KPMG LLP, Milano started The PhD Project to increase the number of African American, Hispanic American and Native American doctoral students — and eventually professors — at business schools throughout the U.S.

In the two decades since the project started, Milano said the number of minority professors at American business schools has nearly quadrupled. Diversity Executive spoke with Milano about the project.

The following are edited excerpts from the interview.

## **What led you to begin The PhD Project?**

I was in charge of recruiting at KPMG and we were very interested in attracting diverse candidates. Finding such candidates who were business majors in the disciplines we hired was frustrating and virtually impossible. We decided to take a bold and systemic approach, believing that a diverse faculty would attract diverse students and better prepare all students for the diversity they would experience in the workplace.

## **What has The PhD Project accomplished since it was founded?**

In 1994, when we founded the project, we were able to identify only 294 business faculty who were African American, Hispanic American or Native American. We estimated there were fewer than 175 in doctoral programs. Today, there are 1,146 faculty and 346 doctoral students with another 50-55 scheduled to start in September 2012.

We recognized that these doctoral students are very often the only minority doctoral student in their cohort and created a network of peer support in the form of five minority doctoral student associations in the major business disciplines — accounting, finance, information systems, management and marketing. These associations have led to a 90 percent completion rate

among our members. And 97 percent of those who have earned the doctorate are teaching in colleges and universities.

**You've devoted much of your life to diversifying the business world. What was the impetus for this?**

We are the result of our life experiences, and mine were rich with both positives and negatives regarding respect for others, social justice and bigotry. My lens, combined with the genuine need to have diversity in KPMG, set the stage for aggressive actions toward diversity and inclusion.

**What challenges have you faced when working to diversify the business world?**

The business world is huge, which is why KPMG Foundation focuses strictly on business schools and not the myriad disciplines that make up all of business. We've [received] great support from the academic community and companies that understand the systemic nature of The PhD Project and are willing to invest in the future. The only frustration has been dealing with companies that understand and applaud our efforts, but want an immediate return on their investment in philanthropy.

**What aspect of diversity do you think we should be talking about that we aren't already?**

There are some who define diversity in such broad terms that they can cite great success but that masks where there is underrepresentation. I don't favor quotas, but research has demonstrated that decisions, products and results are improved [with] the more perspectives you bring to the table.

**What do you most enjoy about your role as president of the foundation?**

I am fortunate to represent a firm that, for decades, has had the courage and generosity that has enabled the foundation to attack important issues with a long term, sustained commitment, and to do so in a way that benefits all of business, not just the accounting profession and certainly not just KPMG. I am also able to work hand in hand with business school deans, foundation executives, heads of scholarship programs and others to improve the effectiveness of our combined efforts.