

The PhD Project Panel Focuses on Building the Pipeline

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The PhD Project — a non-profit organization, working to increase the diversity of business school faculty, since 1994 — held its annual conference virtually and hosted its second annual talk titled “Wonder Women Diversity Discussion” to strategize about how best to build the talent pipeline in diversity for unrepresented students pursuing business degrees and Ph.D.’s.

Panelists included Dr. Erika James, the first woman and first person of color to serve as dean of the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania; Dr. Jennifer Joe, a professor and chief diversity advocate at the Alfred Lerner College of Business & Economics at the University of Delaware; and Dr. Sandra Richtermeyer, dean of the Manning School of Business at The University of Massachusetts Lowell (UMass Lowell).

Dr. Jamal Watson, a professor of Communications at Trinity Washington University and editor and contributor to *Diverse: Issues In Higher Education*, moderated the panel.

“Whether you’re in a corporate sector or academia, we’re all trying to attract, to yield, to retain the best diverse talent as possible,” said James. “So, at the core that’s the work to be done and that exists across both communities.”



Dr. Erika James

Where the differences lie, she said, “is in *how* we do that work and the power and influence that can be leveraged in different ways across the institutions.”

The corporate sector can play a role in helping to build corporate hiring, staffing and the economy, noted Watson.

“Corporations should recognize that they are key stakeholders and can be significant partners with universities to enhance and retain diverse talent,” said Joe.

Joe noted that partnerships with colleges and universities could — and should — be reciprocal. For example, using corporate donor dollars could help to further develop diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) efforts on campus. Similarly, utilizing academia to help train corporate employees in DEI at their own companies could also be an asset.

Oftentimes, minoritized faculty are asked to contribute to conversations and projects in addition to their loads of teaching and service, said Richtermeyer.

“Academic leaders need to set faculty up for success, look at those opportunities and also find ways to help them creatively, too,” said Richtermeyer.

Panelists noted that corporate leaders can ask faculty what they’re conducting research on and determine how the corporation can help, she said.

Just getting access to data, or the subject pool from corporate leaders can be a game changer and lessen the load on academia’s stressors, Richtermeyer added.

Another challenge in diversifying the talent pool lies in the students feeling welcomed.

“The bottom line is about creating community, where everyone normalizes the idea of a professor of color and students of color in the halls of the academy,” said Joe. “That people can be open to hearing ideas from everyone regardless of the color of their skin or the texture of their hair.”

To that point, Richtermeyer said diverse students and all students need to share information and have conversations about their experiences on campuses and within corporate America in order to better shape DEI efforts that include them.

For James and other panelists, exposing students earlier to MBAs and Ph.D. programs is critical. As early as high school, students can learn about the potential outcomes and career trajectory they may have if they go down this road in academia — a privilege James did not have.

“The most important thing you can do is to normalize the presence of diverse talent everywhere,” added Joe.

Panelists agreed that The PhD Project has had a significant role in their careers and in moving the needle for underrepresented students. For James, it meant having professors that look like her in her professional network. For Joe, it meant being able to find co-authors to work on other projects. For Richtermeyer, it meant helping her students and colleagues find mentorship.

Semantic Tags: [DEI](#) • [Dr. Erika James](#) • [Dr. Jennifer Joe](#) • [Dr. Sandra Richtermeyer](#) • [MBA](#) • [PhD](#) • [The PhD Project](#)