

Michelle Asha Cooper, Ph.D.

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Executive career with 20+ years of postsecondary expertise and leadership ♦ Results-oriented decisive leader with proven success in leadership, innovation, strategic planning, and people management ♦ Passionate advocate for racial and economic justice ♦ Skilled in managing complex, high-visibility national and international initiatives ♦ Excels in building strong teams and organizational culture ♦ Adept at forging strong coalitions with diverse partners and stakeholders ♦ Analytic thinker, with excellent written and oral communication skills

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

President / Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

2008 - Present

Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP)

1825 K Street NW, Suite 720, Washington, DC

A non-partisan research, policy, and advocacy organization committed to the equitable reform of postsecondary education, specifically for low-income, Black, Latinx, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and Indigenous students.

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Duties and Related Skills

- Oversee a research and advocacy portfolio designed to identify solutions to educational challenges and shape policy reform.
- Provide expert advice to policy, institutional, and philanthropic leaders on postsecondary reform issues, including access and completion, affordability, data and transparency, accountability, and equity.
- Maintain relationships with over 15 partner organizations - representing hundreds of leaders in education, government, business, philanthropy, and others committed to improving higher education outcomes.
- Serve as organizational spokesperson and commentator to the media: *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Al Jazeera*, *C-Span*, *National Public Radio*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, and others.
- Manage internal operations for approximately 30 staff and core consultants; \$8 million annual budget; \$14 million in net assets.

Key Accomplishments

- Implemented national initiatives – impacting more than 1,000 colleges and universities - focused on college affordability; equity; institutional quality and value (e.g., [Postsecondary Value Commission](#)); college transfer and completion (e.g., [Degrees When Due](#), [#CollegeNotPrison](#)), and data transparency and accountability (e.g. [Postsecondary Data Collaborative](#)).
- Led an annual institute – the *IHEP Summer Academy* – that provided coaching, seminars, and professional development for leaders advancing student success, particularly for first-generation, low-income, adults, and Black, Latinx, Asian Pacific Islander, and Indigenous students. Participation targeted to Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and community colleges.
- Advanced for policy change on need-based aid (e.g., state-based free college proposals); data privacy and security (e.g., College Transparency Act); and access for incarcerated students (e.g., REAL Act).
- Advanced innovative ideas that generated over \$70 million in philanthropic support to reform college practices and advance equitable policy solutions for college students.
- Co-authored *Becoming a Student Ready College* which outlines specific strategies for institutional change.

- Navigated an organizational turnaround that led to greater policy impact, stronger staff and organizational culture, modernized and aligned internal systems, and a 300% increase in unrestricted revenue.
- Substantially improved productivity, morale, and organization-wide embodiment of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Recognized for meritorious leadership by Center for Nonprofit Advancement, *Excellence in Chief Executive Leadership (EXCEL) Award* (2014) and Association for the Study of Higher Education, *Special Merit Organization Award* (2010, awarded to IHEP).

Deputy Director (promoted from Director of Policy Research)

2004 - 2008

Advisory Committee for Student Financial Assistance (ACSFA)

U.S. Department of Education

80 F Street NW, Suite 400, Washington DC

ACSFA was an independent and bipartisan source of advice and counsel on student financial aid policy to both the U.S. Congress and U.S. Secretary of Education.

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Duties and Related Skills

- Conducted congressionally mandated research and staff briefings; developed legislative proposals on policies to support low- and moderate-income students that influenced the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (2008) and budget reconciliation (2006, 2007, 2008).
- Provided regular briefings to congressional staff of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee (U.S. Senate) and Education and Workforce Committee (U.S. House of Representatives) on trends associated with federal and state financial aid for low- and moderate-income students.
- Managed all office operations: budget (\$1 million) and 10 staff.

Key Accomplishments

- Advanced bipartisan support – specifically related to financial aid simplification - through the keen ability to discern people’s interests and motivations, ability to translate complex ideas and research in digestible ways, and deep understanding of the policy process and systems change.
- Advanced policy proposals that positively impacted millions of low- and moderate-income students (i.e., financial aid simplification, Pell Grant increases, increase to automatic-zero EFC).
- Developed trusted, long-lasting relationships with congressional staff and advocacy leaders across the political spectrum.

Data and Information Specialist (part-time)

2003 – 2004

Council of Independent Colleges (CIC), Washington DC

A membership association for all small and mid-sized private liberal arts institutions.

Supervisor: Michelle Gillard, Vice President for Research and Evaluation

Duties & Accomplishments

- Led *Making the Case* Initiative – resources that demonstrate the impact of private colleges.
- Laid foundation upon which CIC expanded its research capacity.
- Assisted with development of the first Key Indicators Report & Toolkit, provided to all 600 CIC presidents, a customizable benchmarking tool with 20 indicators of institutional performance in four key areas: (1) student enrollment and progression, (2) faculty, (3) tuition revenue and financial aid, and (4) financial resources and expenditures.

Program Associate (part-time 2003-2004)

2001 – 2004

Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), Washington DC

A membership association concerned with the quality of student learning in undergraduate education.

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Duties & Accomplishments

- Provided editorial support to *On Campus with Women, Diversity & Democracy*, and *DiversityWeb*.
- Created materials for faculty development initiatives focused on strategies for institutionalizing diversity efforts and diversifying the curriculum.
- Managed *DiversityWeb* – first-of-its-kind web-based compendium of promising educational practices to promote diversity, equity, civic engagement, and global learning in higher education.
- Researched and contributed to *Diversifying the Faculty*, an essential resource for search committees seeking to recruit and retain faculty of color.

Director of Multicultural and International Affairs

1997 - 2001

King's College, Wilkes-Barre PA

A Catholic college providing students with a liberal arts education.

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Duties & Accomplishments

- Supported enrollment management and retention efforts for minority and international students; worked closely with admissions, financial aid, athletics, faculty, and support services.
- Served on campus-wide strategic planning committee and led diversity planning efforts.
- Developed partnerships with local K-12 schools, area colleges, and community-based organizations; efforts led to the creation of the Sherrer House for Diversity and Civic Engagement.
- Led study abroad program and created affiliate programs in Ireland, Thailand, and Switzerland.

EDUCATION

University of Maryland, College Park, Ph.D., 2006, Educational Policy and Leadership

Cornell University, M.P.S., 1997, Africana Studies

College of Charleston, B.A., 1995, English

HONORS & AWARDS

College of Charleston, *Honorary Doctorate Degree* (2017)

College of Charleston, *Distinguished Alumna Award* (2016)

The Aspen Institute, *Presidential Leadership Fellowship, College Excellence Program* (2016)

Center for Nonprofit Advancement, *Excellence in Chief Executive Leadership (EXCEL) Award* (2014)

Politic365, *Game Changer Award* (2012, 2013)

Black Women's Agenda, *Recognition for Economic Development of Black Women* (2012)

Diverse Issues in Higher Education, *Top 25 Women Leaders in Higher Education* (2012)

ESSENCE Magazine, *Under 40 Visionary Leader* (2010)

University of Maryland College of Education, *Outstanding New Professional Alumni Award* (2010)

Association for the Study of Higher Education, *Special Merit Organization Award* (2010, awarded to IHEP)

Diverse Issues in Higher Education, *25 to Watch: Up and Coming Leaders* (2009)

National Education Association (NEA), *Excellence in the Academy New Scholar Award* (2003)

PROFESSIONAL & BOARD SERVICE

California Higher Education Recovery and Equity Task Force*
College of Charleston Foundation Board, investment and executive subcommittees*
Gates Foundation Postsecondary Value Commission, managing partner and member*
California Community Colleges, Chancellor's External Advisory Board member*
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Scaling Partners*
The Washington Center for Internships and Academic Seminars, board member*
Bipartisan Policy Center, Task Force on Higher Education Financing and Student Outcomes, member
American Council on Education, advisory board Alliance for Global Innovation in Tertiary Education
Strada Foundation & Gallup, Education Consumer Pulse Advisory Committee
Founding Board Member, International Rankings Expert Group
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on College, Advisory Board
College of Charleston Alumni Association, Board Member
AAC&U Liberal Education and America's Promise, Leadership Council member
Commission on Asian American & Pacific Islander Research, member
International Rankings Expert Group, Executive Committee
Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE), Member
National College Access Network, board member
uAspire, board member
(*reflects current service)

SELECT PUBLICATIONS & PRESENTATIONS

Legislative Testimony

Cooper, M.A. April 30, 2015. *Improving College Access and Completion for Low-Income Students*. U.S. House of Representatives Education and Workforce Subcommittee. Washington DC.

Cooper, M.A. March 27, 2014. *Strengthening the Federal Student Loan Program for Borrowers*. U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Labor, and Pensions. Washington DC.

Cooper, M.A. February, 26, 2013. *Keeping Maryland Colleges Affordable and Accessible*. Maryland General Assembly, Senate Subcommittee on Education, Business, and Administration and the House of Delegates' Subcommittee on Education and Economic Development. Annapolis MD.

Cooper, M.A. February 19, 2013. *Major Issues in Higher Education and What We Can Learn From Other Efforts*. California Legislature, Subcommittee on Higher Education. Sacramento CA.

Cooper, M. A. January 2004. *Equity & Excellence: Achieving Cultural Diversity in Virginia's Colleges and Universities*. Testified before the VA Senate Sub-Committee on Health & Education, Richmond, VA.

Books & Compilations

McNair, T., Albertine, S., Cooper, M.A., McDonald, N., & Major, T. 2016. *Becoming a Student Ready College: A New Culture of Leadership of Student Success*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass

Cooper, M.A. 2010. *Student Support Services at Community Colleges: A Strategy for Increasing Student Persistence and Attainment*. *The White House Summit on Community Colleges Conference Papers*. Washington, DC: The White House.

Commencement Address

Pennsylvania State College, College of Education. State College, PA. May 2018.
College of Charleston. Charleston, SC. December 2017.
Miami Dade College (Wolfson and Hialeah Campuses). Miami FL. April 2011.
Spring Arbor University. Spring Arbor, MI. May 2010.

Opinions and Editorials

Cooper, M.A. (2018, January). In Overhauling the Federal Higher-Education Law, Congress Must Make Sure all Students Count. *Washington Post*.

Cooper, M.A. & Ajinkya, J. (2015, August). Expanding Postsecondary Opportunities for Incarcerated Americans. *Diverse*.

Cooper, M.A. (2016, June). Affirmative Action is About the Economic Bottom Line. *Washington Post*.

Cooper, M.A. (2015, June). Ending Racism is Still a Civil Rights Issue. *Inside Higher Ed*.

Cooper, M.A. (2014, April). Measuring the Value of Higher Education. *Huffington Post*.

Cooper, M.A. (2013, December). Foreword. *National Report on the Needs and Experiences of Low-Income Asian American and Pacific Islander Scholarship Recipients*. p. 5. Washington, DC: APIASF.

Cooper, M.A. (2013, August). Making the Dream a Reality: The Education Community's Next Chapter. *Huffington Post*.

Cooper, M.A. (2013, May). Invest in the Success of Low-Income Students. *Huffington Post*.

Cooper, M.A. (2012, May). What's That Degree Really Worth? *National Journal*.

Cooper, M.A. (2012, April). A Compromise Needed for Student Loans. *National Journal*.

Cooper, M.A. (2011, September). Education is a Viable Solution to the Jobs Crisis. *Huffington Post*.

Cooper, M.A. (2011, March). The Future of Pell Grants. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

Cooper, M.A. (2011, February). Reaching Educational Goals Means Evaluating Every Cut. *The Hill's Congress Blog*.

Cooper, M.A. (2011, February). State Lines are the Enemy of Educational Reform. *Forbes.com*

Cooper, M.A. (2011). At Issue: Would the Gainful Employment Rule Harm Low-Income Students? *CQ Researcher*, 21(1), p. 17.

Cooper, M.A. (2011, September). Education is a Viable Solution to the Jobs Crisis. *Huffington Post*.

Cooper, M.A. (2010, September). Investing in Education and Equity: Our Nation's Best Future. *Diversity & Democracy*.

Cooper, M.A. (2010, October). A Closer Look at Gainful Employment. *Forbes.com*.

- Cooper, M.A. (2010, September). Investing in Education and Equity: Our Nation's Best Future. *Diversity & Democracy*.
- Cooper, M.A. (2010, September). The Global Achievement Gap. *OECD Education Today*.
- Cooper, M.A. (2010, August). Reducing Poverty through Higher Education. *Spotlight on Poverty*.
- Cooper, M.A. & Teranishi, R. (2010, August). The Truth about Model Minorities. *Forbes.com*.
- Cooper, M.A. & Coleman, A. (2010, June). The Scientific Imperative of Achieving Diversity. *Forbes.com*.
- Cooper, M.A. & Coleman, A. (2010, April). The Economic Imperative of Achieving Diversity. *Forbes.com*.
- Cooper, M.A. (2010, March). Recommitting to Educational Opportunity. *Forbes.com*.
- Cooper, M.A. (2010, February). Preparing Students for College and Beyond. *Forbes.com*.
- Cooper, M.A. (2009, December). STEM Education Paves Way for Global Competitiveness. *Forbes.com*.
- Cooper, M.A. (2009, November). Are US College Students Financially Literate? *Forbes.com*.
- Cooper, M.A. & Longanecker, D. (2009, September). Race Still Matters. *Inside Higher Ed*.
- Cooper, M.A. (2008). Dreams Deferred? - The Relationship between Early and Later Postsecondary Educational Aspirations among Racial/Ethnic Groups. *Educational Policy*.
- Perna, L.W., Cooper, M.A., Li, C. (2007). Improving Educational Opportunities for College Students who Work. In E. St. John (Ed.), *Readings on Equal Education, Confronting Educational Inequality: Reframing, Building Understanding, and Making Change*, 22. New York: AMS Press.
- Perna, L.W. & Cooper, M.A. (2006). Intervening Early and Successfully: The Role of Early Intervention in Promoting Access and Persistence. *Symposium on Access and Persistence proceedings*. Washington, DC: Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance.
- Cooper, M. A. (2005). *College Access & Tax Credits*. Washington, DC: National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators.
- Perna, L.W. & Cooper, M.A. (2005). Transforming the First Year of College for Students of Color. [book review]. *Journal of Higher Education*, 76(4), p. 479-482.
- Cooper, M. A. (2004). The Impact of TANF on Women's Life Choices. *Connections*, 11(3).
- Cooper, M. A. (2003). Academic Freedom and the Challenges of September 11: Strengthening Democracy Through Dissent and Debate. *Thought & Action*, 19(1), 75-86. Washington, DC: National Education Association.
- Cooper, M. A. (2001). Borrowing to Learn: The Impact of Debt on Women's Choices. *On Campus with Women*, 31(1).