

TO: All UPCEA 2011 New England Conference Participants Attending the Pre-Conference Workshop on Wednesday, October 26 (9:30 a.m. -- 12:30 p.m.)  
FROM: Joe Zolner

Thanks for your interest in this session. To make discussion as productive as possible, please read the case study below and come to the workshop prepared to offer your thoughts in response to the three study questions posed at the end of the case.

I look forward to an interesting and engaging conversation.

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## Harriman College

Karen Davis, Director of Adult Programs at Harriman College, mumbled to herself as she walked across campus for a meeting with the president. "I *know* this is the right thing for us to be doing. It's right for the community, and it's a great opportunity for the college. And I *am* the right person to be proposing it. That's what they hired me to do."

As she reached the steps of the Administration Building, Karen paused and took a deep breath. "Or am I about to make a major mistake?" she wondered.

## Background

In the spring of 1993, Harriman College was approaching the 125th anniversary of its founding. Located in a southern state, Harriman was an historically black college with a strong Christian tradition. Dr. Frederick Mitchell had been president since 1977. Every year at convocation and commencement ceremonies, President Mitchell reminded Harriman students of the institution's continuing commitment to three ideals:

- education for self-improvement and social progress;
- equity and justice;
- service to family, community, and God.

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*This case was written by Clifford Baden for the Association for Continuing Higher Education (ACHE) with support from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. It is designed as the basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of an administrative situation*

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Karen Davis was hired in 1988 as Harriman's first Director of Adult Programs. At that time, the college's student body of 900 was exclusively undergraduate, ranging in age from 18 to 23. Almost all students lived on campus. Eighty percent were from in-state; almost all others were residents of four neighboring states. Davis' job description called for her to research and develop opportunities for the college to enroll adult students from the surrounding community.

After only a few months on the job, it became clear to Davis that the faculty and administration would be most accepting of small, incremental innovations, rather than dramatic new initiatives. Her first initiative, therefore, was an undergraduate degree completion program that enabled adults to register for Harriman's existing daytime classes. Two years later, she launched an evening degree program to serve working adults. With the assistance of the college's grants officer, Davis wrote a successful proposal for Title III funding to help develop the program. By September of 1992, 40 adults were enrolled.

### **The Seeds of a New Idea**

In October of 1992, Davis attended a statewide adult education conference focusing on issues of the economy and workforce development. She was particularly struck by one presenter who provided statistics on the economic status of single, black, female heads of household. Following the session, she sought out the presenter to ask if his statistics were uniformly true throughout the state. He pulled a chart from his folder with a county-by-county breakdown of data. Davis noted that the statistics for the county in which Harriman was located were either at or slightly below the state average in every instance. She jotted down some facts and figures for her county:

- 45% of all persons over the age of 25 had less than a high school education; for blacks in the county, the figure was just over 50%;
- the 1991 unemployment rate was 11.5%; for blacks, the rate was 18.5%;
- 61% of black female heads of household were below the poverty line (1990 census);
- 21% of all families in the county were on welfare (AFDC); for black female heads of household, the figure was more than 80%;
- there were approximately 11,500 black female heads of household in the county (1990 census).

Davis also highlighted in her notes the speaker's concluding remarks: "The most effective route to breaking the cycle of poverty and dependence is education and training that leads to successful, sustained employment."

As soon as she returned to campus, Davis met with George Pendergast, a member of the Harriman economics faculty. Several of her adult students had said they enjoyed his course on "Race, Poverty, and Economics," and found him to be an accessible, supportive teacher. Davis began by asking Pendergast to confirm the accuracy of the data she had collected.

"Oh, yes, those figures are right," he said. "In fact, you can be pretty sure that for any statistic you look at, it will be worse for blacks, and worse yet for single black mothers."

"Then doesn't this represent an opportunity for Harriman to do something?" Davis replied. "Couldn't we design a program to help get these mothers off welfare? Something that would

## Harriman College

prepare them for a high school equivalency diploma, and give them some training that would lead to a job? I'm sure we could find some state or federal money to support a program like that. And we have the credibility. Who else in this area..."

"Whoa, Karen! You're going much too fast! This is Harriman College you're talking about. Are you planning to set up a separate high school somewhere? Or do you think you're going to have these single mothers come to the college and sit in class alongside our undergraduates? That doesn't seem very likely to me."

"But you do agree there's a need, don't you?" Davis responded. "If Harriman doesn't try to do something about it, then who will?"

Davis left the meeting with Pendergast convinced that her idea was still worth exploring. Her next conversation was three days later with Martha Vickers, the college's grants officer, who had helped her with funding in the past. Davis inquired about the possibility of developing a proposal for Title III funds to support a new program for black female heads of household. She learned that such a program might well be fundable under Title III, but Vickers was not enthusiastic about the likelihood of college support for such a proposal. Vickers explained that this area was not an institutional priority. Financial aid for undergraduate students and renovation of Harriman's physical plant were much higher on the president's list right now, so those were the areas to which she was devoting her time.

## Further Explorations

In early December, Davis attended a local Rotary Club luncheon. She had joined the organization soon after arriving at Harriman, believing that this group represented an important link to the local community and a chance to spread the word about Harriman's programs for adults among some influential townspeople. At the December lunch, Davis was seated at the same table as the executive director of the local Chamber of Commerce and the assistant to the mayor. When the conversation turned to the local economy, she mentioned that she was investigating the possibility of a Harriman program to get single black mothers in the county off welfare and into jobs. The response around the table was uniformly enthusiastic. "If you do it well and demonstrate that you're really making a difference, you'd certainly generate lots of good will for Harriman," the assistant to the mayor commented.

"Do you want me to put in a good word with Fred Mitchell?" asked the head of the Chamber of Commerce.

"Oh, no," laughed Davis. "It's much too premature to take anything to the president. I'm just thinking out loud. I don't really have a specific plan to propose just yet."

But the Rotary conversation encouraged Davis to pursue the idea further with other Harriman colleagues. She met with Terry Wright, Vice President for Academic Affairs and her immediate supervisor. Davis had always felt comfortable in her relationship with Wright, and their meeting began cordially with a review of enrollment statistics in the evening degree program. Davis spoke of a few students who were experiencing particular success in the program. She then mentioned her interest in developing an initiative to serve a new group of adult learners. She presented some of the statistics she had gathered, and she described the extent of the county's problem and the

large pool of potential candidates for such a program in the area immediately surrounding the campus. She asked Wright if she could count on the college's support in creating such a program.

"I'll be candid with you, Karen," Wright said. "It sounds to me like you're trying to push the college well beyond anywhere it's ready to go. You're talking about a very traditional four-year undergraduate school here. Even if you could get the funding, you can't expect to bring a group of very under-educated women to this campus and expect that to work."

Davis reflected for a moment, then answered. "I do know this is not something that Harriman has done traditionally. Convincing the school to accept adults into courses was a big thing for a lot of folks to swallow. And I do appreciate your support in all of that. But I can't help thinking that there's a real need in our community that no one is addressing. I agree that we're not really set up now to offer a program for these women, but apparently no one else is either -- or perhaps they don't have the will to do it.

She continued, "I see this as a chance for the college to make a real difference. In the short term, this would demonstrate our commitment to the local community. It would enhance the college's image among local business leaders. And over the long term, who knows? We may be incubating a new population of students, some of whom may enroll at Harriman. Or at least, a generation from now, their kids may be ready to enroll here.

"You know how Dr. Mitchell is always talking about the college's threefold mission? Well, a part of that mission is service to the community. Here's a way for us to be true to our ideals and make a difference at the same time."

Wright answered, "This is a small college, Karen, and there's a limited number of things we can do. You know as well as I do that the president has his hands full just trying to balance the budget each year for existing programs. But I don't want to prejudge what his reaction will be. And I'm not going to stand in your way if you want to talk to him about it. My own focus has to be on our undergraduates. You were hired to think about adult students and community outreach, so you should be the one to talk with the president about this idea. It's your case to make."

Study Questions:

1. If you were evaluating Karen Davis' performance as Director of Adult Programs, what grade ("A" through "F") would you give her? Why?
2. What seem to be the expectations of Davis as a leader? Based on her actions in the case, what do you infer about how she thinks leadership is exercised most effectively?
3. Should Karen meet with the president? Why or why not?