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Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) Announces Additional Ford Foundation Grant to Launch Institute on Equity and Critical Policy Analysis

Institute to Expand Research and Impact on Racial-Ethnic Inequities in Student Outcomes

November 2, 2008 (Lansing, MI) – The Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) announced the receipt of a new two-year, nearly \$1.4 million Ford Foundation grant for its Institute on Equity and Critical Policy Analysis. Building on its earlier planning grant, the Institute will work to influence higher education policies and improve student outcomes by creating networks of scholars and policy makers whose work is rooted in and committed to racial and ethnic underserved communities.

The Institute is an ongoing collaboration between the Center for Urban Education (CUE) at the University of Southern California’s Rossier School of Education, the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California Los Angeles, the Institute for Higher Education Law and Governance (IHELG) at the University of Houston Law Center, Teachers College at Columbia University, the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) and ASHE. The idea for the Institute arose from a 2004-2005 ASHE Equity Task Force that sought to identify the reasons for and implications of the “racial gap” in scholarship.

“The impetus for the Institute came in examining the lack of urgency around the potential policy impact of research on the growing educational gaps among increasingly diverse populations”, said Dr. Sylvia Hurtado, director of the Higher Education Research Institute. “We want to expand the body of empirical and policy-oriented knowledge,” said Dr. Estela Bensimon, director of CUE, “to ensure that race, ethnicity and language are critically examined rather than misused to interpret different outcomes as minority ‘characteristics’.” Both Directors are former ASHE Presidents.

The Institute seeks to address four critical needs in higher education: (1) to expand emerging scholars’ research capacities to study racial and ethnic equity, (2) to add critical perspectives informed by expanded and diversified research methods and analytical frames, (3) to develop greater responsiveness to the problems of racial-ethnic inequality in higher education, and (4) to diversify and expand the network of professionals who are called upon to shape state and federal policy agendas.

“The Ford Foundation support is a clear recognition,” said Linda Eisenmann, current president of ASHE, “that solving the inequities in higher education requires new approaches, greater understanding and increased collaboration and commitment.”

The Institute will seek out emerging scholars, doctoral students and policy analysts to identify and develop resources and talent through research, publishing and analytical workshops and networks. Senior researchers, analysts and leaders will serve as the Institute’s Advisory Board.

“If we are to hold our colleges and universities accountable for student success,” added David Longanecker, president of WICHE, “then we must have a clear – and complete – understanding of the issues and the inequities. The Institute can and will help address those gaps.”

The Institute will be housed and administered at CUE, under the leadership of its co-directors Estela Mara Bensimon and Alicia Dowd.

“We want to engage those scholars and analysts at the beginning of their careers,” said Bensimon, “and reinvigorate those with established paths. By bringing them together, we can seek to understand – and to rectify – the persistent racial-ethnic inequities in higher education.”

Established at USC in 1999 as part of its nationally renowned urban initiative, the Center for Urban Education leads socially conscious research and develops tools that advance institutional effectiveness in producing equity in student outcomes. CUE’s team of faculty, researchers and graduate students pioneered the multi-disciplined approach and tools that are helping higher education institutions across the country move from a focus on diversity to a commitment to equitable outcomes for students from underserved racial and ethnic communities. In addition to working directly with these institutions, CUE publishes reports and papers on a range of topics related to equity-mindedness, the appropriate use of inquiry methods to transform data into actionable knowledge and the role of faculty and administrators in improving outcomes. CUE is dedicated to taking its research and results into collaborative endeavors that make a difference.

The Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) is composed of 1700 scholars in the field of higher education, including 659 graduate students. Founded in 1976, ASHE has sponsored the ASHE Reader Series, the ASHE Monograph Series and a journal, the Review of Higher Education to promote scholarship in the field.