

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Gloria Billingsley, Ph.D. | Chair, Conference of Minority Public Administrators

Gloria Billingsley is associate professor and program director for the masters of public policy and administration program at Jackson State University in Jackson, Mississippi. The 2015-2016 president of the Conference of Minority Public Administrators (COMPA), Billingsley shares her vision for this ASPA Section and her insights on incorporating social equity into the recruitment of the next generation of public servants.

How long have you been a member of ASPA? How has it been instrumental in your professional development?

I first became an ASPA member in 1996 as a doctoral student. Students were encouraged to join to build professional networks that could assist us with career opportunities. At the time, we had a very strong and engaged Mississippi ASPA Chapter, which provided me my first opportunity to present at a professional conference. Although my educational background was in business administration, I was always a public servant at heart. ASPA's most significant professional development contribution to my life was to affirm that being a public servant, while not as financially lucrative as working in the private sector, is indeed a noble profession.

How long have you been a member of the Conference of Minority Public Administrators (COMPA)? What inspired you to join it?

As with ASPA, I joined COMPA as a student. As a graduate of a Historically Black College and University, the importance of being involved in organizations that address the needs of minorities is deeply ingrained. Leadership and faculty in Jackson State University's Department of Public Policy and Administration have been involved with COMPA since 1980; this served to strengthen our appreciation of the organization as its leaders provided workshops and presentations to students. It became clear to me that being a member of COMPA was a worthwhile investment.

What does social equity mean to you and how is it integrated into COMPA's work?

Social equity is about affirming the value of all people and their right to enjoy the fullness of life unrestricted by ideological, structural or institutional barriers. Social equity is a core value of COMPA, whose mission is "to advance the science, processes, technology, art and image of public administration by providing leadership in the elimination of discriminatory practices against all minorities." Our primary vehicle to address issues of social equity is our annual conference and meetings. Each year, we provide an opportunity for scholars, practitioners and students to come together to share research findings and best practices to address issues that impact disadvantaged and underserved individuals and communities.



How can social equity be more prominently and meaningfully incorporated into the recruitment and retention of the next generation of leaders, regardless of level of government or sector?

First, it is important for leaders to understand that there are policies and practices in their organizations—whether intentional or not—that create excess burdens on minority populations. Unjust practices have negative consequences not only for those directly impacted, but for those who observe injustices.

Second, we cannot fall for the media hype that young people do not care. I have learned from my daughter that even when it appears she is not paying attention to my words or actions, she is. When there is dissonance between what I say I believe and what I do, she brings it to my attention. Our youth want to be involved in authentic opportunities to make a difference. If we want them to have faith in our institutions, we must engage in ethical leadership grounded in principles of social equity.

Finally, social equity in recruitment and retention requires courage. We have to be committed to all facets of diversity—not just in policy, but in practice, too. Diversity begets diversity.

continued on page 24

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BILLINGSLEY continued from page 18

As COMPA's current president, what is your vision for the Section?

As I stated in my inaugural comments, my vision for COMPA is that it becomes the Section of choice for minorities. Obviously, this is something that will take more than a year. COMPA was founded in 1971 and became an ASPA Section in 1977 when there were few opportunities for minority professional organizations. However, there is a new generation of public servants and academicians who are unfamiliar with COMPA and the benefits of membership.

During my tenure as president, my goal is to develop a marketing and rebranding strategy for COMPA. It is important to have a good mix of members at various stages in their career. I believe we can achieve this if we increase and actively engage the number of students and young career professionals. A committee will be organized to rebrand or update our public relations materials. The goal also is to bring back former members, recruit new ones and retain the ones we have. I want people to know that the "M" in COMPA stands for all minorities, not just racial minorities.

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