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## Keepin' It Real: The Life and Times of a Black Student Affairs Professional

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*Founder and Principal Consultant, Harris Consulting Services*

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## **Keepin' It Real: The Life and Times of a Black Student Affairs Professional**

### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this workshop is to encourage and help those currently serving in or seeking positions in university positions. The presenter, who served as the Special Assistant to the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln for nearly eight years, will facilitate an open discussion based on what he learned in this position. The overall goal of this workshop is to provide the knowledge that will enable any professional at a predominantly white institution to succeed in spite of the opposition, obstacles and oppression.*

### **John Leonard Harris**

Founder and Principal Consultant, Harris Consulting Services

In August of 1991, John L. Harris was hired to serve as the Special Assistant to the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Prior to his hiring, Mr. Harris held positions as a Student Activities Advisor (University of Nebraska at Omaha) and a Media Specialist (Dartmouth College). Little did he know that this new position would change his life forever. Throughout his nearly eight years at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, John experienced the good, the bad and the ugly.

In his first months on the job, John encountered a racial unrest, a request to be fired by Black students, inappropriate behavior by senior administrators and responsibilities to run programs that were still in their infancy. Without any training, and very little guidance, John's challenge was simply to make the best of the situation. He truly believed that he could make a difference and that what he had to offer could impact the university's campus community.

Over the years, John learned quite a bit about how universities work and the challenges of working as an administrator at a predominantly white institution. His story may not be unique, but it is his own and offers some compelling examples of how to survive in spite of the opposition.

There are many Blacks striving to high-level positions at colleges and universities across the country. Many will be successful as they achieve what they set out to accomplish. Many others will be blind-sided by the allure of the position, the illusion of support and facade of cooperation. It does not have to be that way and John offers his experience as a way to learn how to make it.

### **Presenter**

**John Leonard Harris** is a native of St. Louis, Missouri. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Speech and Dramatic Arts from the University of Missouri-Columbia and his Master of Education degree from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He has been married to his wife, Charlene for nineteen years and they have four children. Mr. Harris is the Founder and Principal Consultant for Harris Consulting Services through which he provides cultural education, leadership, organizational effectiveness and motivational programs. He is also Founder and President of Encouragement Unlimited, Inc., a faith-

based nonprofit organization that serve as an active agent of hope and renewal for the forgotten, undervalued, unappreciated, and disadvantaged in our society. Additionally, Mr. Harris partners with churches, community organizations and state agencies whose mission is to serve low-income families and at-risk youth. Mr. Harris is an award-winning writer and local newspaper columnist. He is a popular keynote and conference speaker. His presentation topics range from religion to rap, media to motivation, family to freedom and self-esteem to service.