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Alternative ladders through the glass ceiling : female college presidents who pursued administrative career paths

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ALTERNATIVE LADDERS THROUGH THE GLASS CEILING:
FEMALE COLLEGE PRESIDENTS WHO PURSUED
ADMINISTRATIVE CAREER PATHS

A Dissertation Presented

to

The Faculty of the School of Education

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by

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Abstract

Only 20% of 4-year colleges and universities in the United States have a female
president. Of those women, only a small handful pursued an administrative career path
rather than following the traditional academic trajectory to the presidency. The majority
of college and university presidents began their careers as tenured faculty members and
progressed through the academic ranks, despite the fact that much of the presidency is not
academic in nature. In a time of increased complexity in higher education, colleges and
universities require skilled leadership. Women who are well grounded in the
administrative disciplines of higher education could be a source of compelling
presidential candidates.

This study investigated the experiences and perceptions of female presidents of 4-
year colleges and universities who had pursed administrative career paths. Specifically,
this research explored how these women viewed their professional journeys,
administrative career paths, and future professional goals. The women also provided their
insights on the role of the president, the glass ceiling in higher education, and their
personal leadership styles.

The concept of career paths through higher education—administrative career
paths in particular—provided the conceptual framework for this study. A qualitative
methodology was employed in which semistructured interviews provided insight into the
five research questions. In reflecting on their professional journeys, the women cited the
importance of seizing opportunities that arose, cultivating academic credibility, and being
surrounded by supportive spouses, mentors, and networks. The participants began their
career in different industries and none had the stated goal of becoming a college

president; upon entering higher education the women followed similar paths. This study identified a more robust model of an administrative career path that emerged from the data. The women believed that their prior administrative experience prepared them well for the presidency, although they reflected that it is difficult to prepare for the all-encompassing nature of the role. The majority of the presidents in the sample stated that there is no longer a glass ceiling in higher education but acknowledged that obstacles remain for women who aspire to leadership roles. Finally, the participants described themselves as collaborative leaders who developed a habit of learning by observing others.

It remains clear that there is no single pathway to the presidency. This study found that diverse administrative experience is good preparation for a college or university president, but it should be combined with academic credentials such as earning a doctorate and teaching. Further, search committees and boards of trustees need to realistically assess the needs of their institution and hire a president who has the skill set to address those challenges. The issue of fit between a president and a college was raised by every participant in this study and it was suggested that fit changes over time. Finally, women who aspire to the presidency through an administrative path might be well-served to seek diverse experiences in higher education, cultivate strong networks and mentors, and be willing to take professional risks.

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Nichole P. Nabasny	May 9, 2011
Candidate	Date

Dissertation Committee

Dr. Patricia Mitchell	May 9, 2011
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Dr. Christopher Thomas	April 19, 2011

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Dedication

To Connie—for knowing I would do this long before I did

and encouraging me along the way.

To Dad—for teaching me the value and importance of education.

To Mom—for being my research assistant, advisor, cheerleader, and friend.

To Mike—for your unconditional support in all things.

Thank you for taking this journey with me.

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CHAPTER I

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem

In October of 2008, the U.S. Census Bureau conducted its current population survey and noted a demographic change in the gender balance on college campuses: 54% of students who were enrolled in undergraduate degree programs were women (United States Census Bureau, 2008). Women had also entered graduate-level programs in greater numbers and were earning more than half of Ph.D. degrees (Froelich & Jacobsen, 2007). Academic leadership, however, remains populated by a male majority; today's college president is still most likely to be a European-American male (June, 2007). In 2006, women accounted for 20% of 4-year college or university presidents and were least likely to be presidents of doctoral-granting institutions (American Council on Education [ACE], 2007).

In order to address the issue of gender inequity in the college presidency, it is necessary to examine the career paths that lead to that position. The traditional path to the college presidency is to ascend through the academic ranks of tenured faculty, department chair, dean, academic vice president or provost, to president (Cohen & March, 1974). Researchers (Damiano-Teixeira, 2006; Fletcher, 2007; Krefting, 2003; Madsen, 2007; Shultz & Easter, 1997) have studied the challenges women encounter on the tenure track and their findings have resonated with the scarcity of female academic leadership. Shultz and Easter (1997) found that women disproportionately occupy the lower-level faculty positions of instructor or assistant professor, whereas men continue to hold the higher positions of associate and full professor. If women do not successfully

ascend the faculty ranks, they are less likely to be promoted to the academic-management positions that traditionally prepare them for a presidential role.

The second most common path to the college presidency is through the route of higher education administration (ACE, 2007). Careers in the administrative disciplines of higher education—such as enrollment management, student life, finance, development and others—can lead to the presidency (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001; King & Gomez, 2008). In light of the obstacles women face in promotion through the academic ranks (Fletcher, 2007; Wilson, 2005; Xu, 2008), it is possible that administration could be a path more easily navigated by women. Birnbaum and Umbach (2001) examined the four most common paths to the presidency and discussed the administrative path, which they labeled *Stewards*. The path of the Stewards, or progression through administrative departments in positions of increasing responsibility, could be a viable route to the presidency for those who desire a career in higher education. There is a lack of research that focuses specifically on female Stewards' experiences, career progression, and leadership styles.

The issue of gender equity in presidential roles will only become more important as more women earn advanced degrees and gain footholds in higher education administration. It is a poignant contradiction that the very institutions charged with educating and providing opportunities to all qualified people lag in promoting women to positions of leadership. Finch (2003) argued that colleges and universities must promote qualified women into positions of leadership precisely because of their impact on future generations. Finch noted that "if serious progress could be made in understanding and changing the gender imbalance in academe, then the fact that so many young people pass

through our hands would create a powerful lever for change elsewhere" (p. 134). Only one in five 4-year colleges and universities have a female serving as president and role model to the student population.

Scholarly literature has not sufficiently explored the experiences of female college and university presidents. In particular, there is a need to understand the perceptions of female presidents who pursued administrative, rather than academic, career paths through higher education to understand how their career experiences shaped them and to investigate the potential of this trajectory for other women who aspire to the presidency. Research in this area, such as this study, could provide insight into alternative career paths for women who aspire to lead higher education institutions.

<div align="center">Background and Need</div>

Higher education in the United States has become a booming industry over the last several decades with more students enrolled in a greater variety of programs and disciplines. The job of leading these academic enterprises has become increasingly challenging. "Presidents have come to find themselves holding the positions of CEO of a corporate enterprise, mayor of a multifarious polity, and academic leader of an intellectual community—all at the same time" (ACE, 2007, p. 1). University presidents balance a multitude of equally important issues including community and government relations, fundraising, academic achievement, financial oversight, and the overall quality of the student experience.

As the complexity of the presidential role increases, it is critical that institutions recruit and hire the best-qualified person for the job. Colleges and universities are preparing for a wave of impending retirements that are going to leave many presidencies

open. A report by ACE (2007) projected significant turnover in higher education leadership as current presidents retire in the next several years. Search committees and boards of trustees will have to widen the scope of presidential candidates to identify the most capable individuals.

A report by Bridges, Eckel, Cordova, and White (2008) reviewed statistics on female presidents. The authors noted that although the proportion of female presidents has doubled over the last 20 years, the rate of change has stagnated since the late 1990s. More women hold senior-level administrative and faculty positions, yet fewer rise to the presidential level (Bridges et al., 2008).

The concept of the *glass ceiling* provided background for the present study. Jackson and O'Callaghan (2009) defined the glass ceiling as "a set of impediments and/or barriers to career advancement for women and people of color" (p. 460). The phenomenon of the glass ceiling has been widely discussed and has commanded the attention of higher education researchers for the past 20 years (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009). Reports have shown that institutions of higher education are not immune to the effects of the glass ceiling (ACE, 2007; Bridges et al., 2008). Only one in five 4-year institutions in the United States has a female president (ACE, 2007) at a time when women are the majority of the student body and hold more high-level administrative positions than ever before (Froelich & Jacobson, 2007; United States Census Bureau, 2008).

For women who travel the primary route to the presidency, through the academic ranks, the impediments and barriers have been well-documented in the literature (Fletcher, 2007; Froelich & Jacobson, 2007; Shultz & Easter, 1997; Wilson, 2005; Xu,

2008). The glass ceiling appears to have a dire effect on female faculty members, and thus on the aspirations of women to achieve the presidency of a college or university by way of an academic career path.

While scholarly research has examined the experiences of female academics and their trajectory to university leadership, the literature that focuses on female presidents who pursued administrative career paths to the presidency is sparse. Studies that explore the different administrative career paths pursued by women and their experiences as presidents is absent from the academic dialogue. Research is needed to examine the administrative career journeys of female university presidents, the impact of the glass ceiling on their career progress, and their leadership styles, to provide a more robust picture of higher education leadership.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of female presidents of 4-year colleges or universities who pursued administrative career paths in higher education rather than traditional academic career paths. This study examined how these women perceived career paths in higher education, their own professional journeys, the glass ceiling in higher education, and their preparation for and views of the role of president. In addition, this study investigated how their professional journeys shaped their leadership styles.

Conceptual Framework

The primary concept that grounded this research study was that of career paths through higher education that lead to the role of president, specifically the administrative career path. The academic career path is the most common path to the presidency, first

identified by Cohen and March (1974). Cohen and March acknowledged that there was some variation in the academic career patterns of presidents, but maintained that the vast majority of presidents had followed the same basic trajectory and began their careers as tenured faculty members.

Wessel and Keim (1994) built on and expanded the work of Cohen and March (1974). The authors collected survey data from 270 sitting presidents of private 4-year institutions. Their analysis revealed two career paths leading to the presidency: the Academic Career Pattern and the Administrative Career Pattern. The Academic Career Pattern identified by Wessel and Keim closely followed the model developed by Cohen and March (1974): it began with a faculty position, followed by department chair, followed by dean, followed by academic vice president or provost, culminating as president.

The major contribution by Wessel and Keim (1994) was the identification of a nonacademic path to the presidency. The second path classified by Wessel and Keim was the Administrative Career Pattern. In this model the president had little or no experience as a faculty member, but had extensive experience as a college administrator. This individual made a career in higher education by attaining administrative positions with increasing responsibility. Wessel and Keim found that approximately 31% of the presidents in their study followed an administrative career path.

The work of Wessel and Keim (1994) was adapted by Birnbaum and Umbach (2001), who identified four possible career paths of university presidents. Birnbaum and Umbach examined survey data collected by ACE from presidents serving in 1986, 1990, and 1995. After analysis of the data, the authors distinguished two categories of career

paths: Traditional and Nontraditional. The Traditional category consisted of the most common academic path, which Birnbaum and Umbach identified as the *Scholar* path, and a population labeled *Stewards*, who had long careers in higher education as administrators. Approximately 20% of Birnbaum and Umbach's sample was Steward presidents. In addition to the Traditional paths, Birnbaum and Umbach added two Nontraditional paths of *Spanners* and *Strangers*. Spanners were individuals who had held jobs both within and outside of higher education; Strangers were recruited directly to the presidency from noneducational careers, such as business, politics, or the military.

The studies conducted by Wessel and Keim (1994) and Birnbaum and Umbach (2001) examined the career paths of presidents in relation to the types of institutions they led. Wessel and Keim did not address the issue of gender in their study and Birnbaum and Umbach only touched on it. There is a dearth of literature exploring the interplay of gender and career paths; this study sought to make a contribution in that area.

The administrative path is the second most common route to reach the position of president, yet researchers have not investigated the effects of the glass ceiling on women who pursue this path to the presidency. The challenges women encounter on the academic path, such as a dominant male culture (Kjeldal, Rindfleish, & Sheridan, 2005), balancing work and family responsibilities (Williams, 2005), and institutional policies that do little to change the culture of academe (Penney, Brown, & Oliveira, 2007), have been well documented by scholars. Research has not yet explored the experiences of women who pursued the administrative career path. The present study sought to address that void in the existing research literature.

This research focused on female presidents who had pursued career paths that Wessel and Keim (1994) identified as Administrative Career Patterns and Birnbaum and Umbach (2001) labeled Stewards. The previous literature about administrative careers paths provided selection criteria by which to identify potential participants for the study. In addition, the research contributed to the development of interview questions for data collection. During data analysis the conceptual framework helped the researcher identify relevant themes that emerged from the data and allowed for comparison of findings with previous studies. Applying the lens of administrative career paths pursued by women enabled this study to address an area that had been largely ignored by other scholarly literature on the topic of higher education leadership.

<div align="center">Research Questions</div>

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What have been the professional journeys of female presidents of 4-year colleges or universities who pursued administrative career paths?

2. What are the perceptions of female presidents of 4-year colleges or universities fn their administrative career paths and their future professional goals?

3. What are the perceptions of female presidents of 4-year colleges or universities on the role of president and how well their administrative career paths prepared them for the presidency?

4. What are the perceptions of female presidents of 4-year colleges or universities who pursued administrative career paths on the glass ceiling in higher education?

5.   What factors influenced the leadership styles of female presidents of 4-

year colleges or universities who pursued administrative career paths?

Limitations

The primary factor that limited this study was the small sample size. Only 20

women serving as college or university presidents who had pursued administrative career

paths could be identified; 9 of those women participated in this study. Although the

sample size was small, this study provided in-depth descriptions of the perceptions and

experiences of these women.

Another potential limitation was collecting data only from the presidents and not

conducting interviews with staff who report to the presidents or members of the boards of

trustees or search committees who hired the presidents. Two of the research questions

focused on the presidents' leadership style and preparation for the role; the data collected

from the presidents might not reflect what others would say about their leadership or

preparation for the role of president. The presidents' responses could have been

confirmed or questioned if others who worked with them or hired them had the

opportunity to provide data.

Finally, a potential limitation of this study is that the researcher's preconceived

notions and biases may have influenced the data collection and analysis. The researcher

made every effort to address that issue in the design of the study. Further, the researcher

confirmed interpretations with participants in an effort to reduce the effect of bias.

Significance

This study explored the experiences and perceptions of female presidents who

pursued a nonacademic career path to the top leadership role in higher education.

Although a minority of college presidents, this group provided valuable insight for women who aspire to the position of president and helped inform search committees on the critical skills to be successful in the role.

During much of the history of higher education in the United States, the role of the college or university president was to guide the academic curriculum of the institution. Today, many institutions of higher education more closely resemble complex corporations than one-room school houses, with annual budgets in the hundreds of millions of dollars, a large and diverse workforce, complicated public-relations issues, and a changing customer population. College presidents spend a majority of their time on activities such as fundraising, external relations, strategic planning, project management, and personnel issues (ACE, 2007).

Many sitting presidents who have learned to navigate this complex role will retire over the coming 5 to 10 years, leaving vacancies in the top leadership position (Hartley & Godin, 2009). As boards of trustees and search committees begin the daunting task of replacing current presidents, they will have to assess which skill sets or experiences are necessary in a successful candidate. Hartley and Godin (2009) discussed the implication of mass retirements of presidents:

> It is highly likely that in the next ten years a significant number of these presidents will retire. At the same time, many executive search consultants have reported that the typical search for a college president attracts fewer candidates— and fewer well-qualified candidates—than was the case a decade ago. (p. 3)

As the presidential role continues to grow in complexity, boards and search committees will need to select from a broad and deep pool of candidates, a pool that includes women who have pursued nontraditional career paths through higher education.

This study made several contributions to the field of higher education by exploring the perceptions and experiences of female presidents who pursued administrative career paths. First, this study highlighted women who have successfully achieved the position of college president. These women bring a nontraditional perspective to bear on higher education leadership and serve as important role models for female students, faculty, and staff. Understanding the experiences and perspectives of female administrative presidents provided insight into how their professional journeys unfolded, how they navigated the complexities of the presidential role, and how they suggested other women follow in their footsteps.

In addition, this study focused on alternative career paths through higher education. As the role of the president changes, perhaps the ideal candidate should change as well. It is possible that the complexities of the CEO role at a college or university are better managed by a president who is familiar with the administrative aspects of the position, such as fundraising, financial management, and strategic planning. This study collected data on the degree to which presidents who pursued a nontraditional career path were prepared to assume the responsibilities of president and how they perceived the role. These findings provide valuable information for search committees and boards of trustees that must identify and hire new presidents.

In summary, this study examined a minority group of presidents: women who pursued an administrative career path. While small in number, this group can provide feedback that can inform the future leaders of institutions of higher education. Previous scholarly literature did not study this population of academic leaders and there was no existing scholarly work that described their perceptions and experiences. This study made

a contribution to the literature on female presidents of colleges and universities by highlighting a group that achieved the presidency through an administrative route.

As the student body becomes increasingly diverse and the challenges facing higher education grow in complexity, the president needs to be the most qualified person for the job. This study helped expand the understanding of the skill sets that are necessary and who some of the most qualified candidates might be.

Definition of Terms

Academic/traditional path: This path has been defined by Cohen and March (1974), Wessel and Keim (1994), and Birnbaum and Umbach (2001). This is the most common path to the college or university presidency whereby individuals begin their career as a tenured faculty member, are promoted to department chair or dean, then serve as academic vice president or provost, and finally become president.

Administrative path: Presidents who purse an administrative path spend their career in nonacademic functions of higher education (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001; Wessel & Keim, 1994). These individuals work in higher education fields, such as enrollment management, student affairs, development, finance, or other administrative functions of a college or university. Their career has consisted of roles of increasing responsibility in administrative disciplines, typically holding a vice-presidential position immediately prior to becoming president.

Career path: A career path is the way in which an individual progresses through a profession. Typically, a career path is comprised of successive jobs of increasing responsibility in a chosen industry or field, leading to the achievement of professional goals.

Glass ceiling: Jackson and O'Callaghan (2009) described the glass ceiling as a "set of impediments and/or barriers to career advancement" (p. 460). The glass ceiling is comprised of persistent obstacles that prevent women from achieving top leadership positions in higher education.

Nontraditional path: In higher education, a nontraditional path is any path outside of academia or a career history that includes roles within and outside of higher education. Birnbaum and Umbach (2001) identified nontraditional paths as those that fall outside the academic or administrative paths, but lead to the position of college or university president. Birnbaum and Umbach stated that presidents who had spent some or their entire career outside of higher education had pursued nontraditional paths.

Tribal College: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching defines tribal colleges as "colleges and universities that are members of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium" (Carnegie Foundation, 2010). These institutions primarily serve Native American students and may be public or private.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

The preceding parts of this chapter have identified the problem of women's underrepresentation in college and university presidencies. Previous scholarly literature has explored the challenges that women face on the academic path, the career paths of university presidents, the experiences of female presidents, and the factors that shape the leadership of presidents. This study addressed a gap in the literature by seeking to understand and articulate the experiences of female presidents who have had careers in educational administration. In addition to illuminating the experiences of these unique female leaders, this study provided data to other women who wish to pursue nonacademic

career paths to top leadership positions in higher education. The following chapter will

outline the relevant literature on college and university leadership, pathways to the

presidency, the glass ceiling, and women leaders in higher education.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Restatement of the Problem

The student population of colleges and universities has become increasingly female; more than half of undergraduate students and doctoral students are women (Froelich & Jacobsen, 2007; United States Census Bureau, 2008). Despite the increase in the number of women enrolled in higher education, the leadership of these institutions remains largely the domain of men. Only one in five colleges or universities has a female president (ACE, 2007). To address the shortage of female presidents it is important to understand the career paths one can take to attain the presidency.

The traditional path to the college presidency is through the academic side of higher education (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001; Cohen & March, 1974; Wessel & Keim, 1994). Scholarly literature has explored and documented the challenges women encounter in academe (Fletcher, 2007; Wilson, 2005; Xu, 2008). In light of the obstacles to progression on the academic path, it is important to explore alternative pathways to the presidency that could be viable for women. Researchers have identified the administrative path to the presidency (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001; Wessel & Keim, 1994), but it has never been explored from the perspective of women who successfully navigated that route. This study made that contribution to the literature and added new knowledge to the existing literature on the topic of women presidents.

Overview

This chapter will review the literature that is relevant to this study. First, it will review the research on leadership in higher education, specifically focusing on the role of

the president and its evolution over time. Literature on the presidential role, specifically the necessary skill sets and primary functions of the president, informed the interview and research questions of the present study. Next, the conceptual framework of career paths through higher education will be presented. These studies provided a framework for selecting participants and analyzing data related to their career paths and professional journeys. Literature related to the glass ceiling and the experiences of women in higher education will then be discussed. Women's continuing underrepresentation in presidencies was an important theme in the interview questions of this study. Finally, the literature on female leaders in higher education will be reviewed.

The Role of University President

Since the beginning of higher education in the United States, college and university presidents have played an important role. Thelin's (2004) historical overview of American higher education provided insight into the college and university presidency and its evolution over the past several hundred years. Thelin suggested that early college presidents were forced to be entrepreneurial to ensure the survival of their fledgling institutions, attending to both daily administrative tasks and garnering support from external audiences. As higher education began to take a firmer hold during the late 1800s, administrative staffs remained small. Typically the college president was also the chief academic officer and primary fundraiser. Thelin noted that during the turn of the century, presidents took on expanded roles including external relations, which created a new image of the college president. Presidents assumed active roles in their local communities to bring visibility and resources to their campuses.

In the early 1900s, leading colleges became an increasingly complex task due to the rise of athletic teams, active alumni associations, and unruly student bodies. Thelin (2004) found that in the middle of the 20th century, nonacademic presidents brought new leadership styles to flourishing state universities. The "new American university" required innovative leadership, which was often found in devoted alumni with strong financial skills rather than career academics. As higher education pursued the research university model, nonacademic presidents brought valuable business acumen to the enterprise. The nonacademic route has been a pathway to the presidency for several hundred years; approximately 20% of current presidents pursued that path (ACE, 2007).

Thelin's (2004) overview provides a historical context to frame the duties and responsibilities of college presidents. Thelin documented the many responsibilities presidents must address and suggested that the qualifications needed to do the job have changed as higher education has changed. Further, Thelin reported that nonacademic presidents led complex institutions during challenging times. Thelin's research, while informative, is based largely on the experiences of men who have historically been the majority of college presidents. The present study built on Thelin's foundation by exploring the views of the presidency from women who pursued administrative career paths.

ACE has collected the most comprehensive survey data on the college presidency. Beginning in 1986, ACE sent surveys to all sitting college presidents approximately every 5 years; the survey, in part, collected data about presidential career paths, the role of the president, and demographic information. To mark the 20th anniversary of their presidential survey, ACE invited long-serving presidents, those who had been presidents

for 10 or more years, to participate in roundtable discussions to reflect on how the role of the president had changed during their tenure. Seventeen presidents participated and were asked to identify issues that had increased in importance over the past decade; the items most commonly cited were fundraising, accountability and assessment of student learning, and budget/financial management. Further, this group identified trends that have changed the role of university president during their tenure. Presidents of public colleges and universities cited the decline in state funding as a critical trend; private college and university presidents suggested that increased competition among schools was a major influence.

Those presidents who had been in office for at least a decade noted that their focus had become increasingly external. More than half of the long-serving presidents (57%) stated that the majority of their time was dedicated to internal stakeholders when they first assumed the presidency; only 14% stated that was the case today (ACE, 2007). A survey of community college presidents revealed a similar trend, with presidents reporting that time devoted to external relations had increased over the past 5 years (Anonymous, 2008). The time and attention of presidents is largely consumed by stakeholders outside the immediate campus community of faculty, staff, and students.

ACE (2007) asked all 2,148 presidential survey respondents how they spent their time and which of their responsibilities they found most challenging and rewarding. Respondents listed their most time-consuming presidential duties as fundraising (cited by 38% of respondents), budget/financial management (35%), community relations, and strategic planning (both cited by 21% of the sample). ACE found that these activities were also listed as presidents' most enjoyable activities. In addition to these tasks,

presidents reported that they regularly wrote for scholarly publications (17%), taught a course (17% of public institution presidents, 24% of private school presidents), and served on at least one external board (87%).

In the roundtable discussion with long-serving presidents, one area was identified that required less time today than when the presidents first took office: academic issues. "It appears that, as the demands on presidents have grown, they have delegated more of the work on academic issues to provosts and other senior officials in academic affairs" (ACE, 2007, p. 45). Presidents reported being less engaged with the academic enterprise than they were 10 years ago. ACE provided rich survey data about the college presidency for over 20 years and many researchers have used those data to further analyze career patterns, demographics, and other characteristics of college presidents. There is, however, a need for qualitative data to supplement and deepen the broad survey data available; the present study sought to make that contribution to the research literature.

Hartley and Godin (2009) used data from ACE's presidential survey; these data were analyzed to reveal patterns in career paths, educational attainment, and demographics of first-time presidents. The authors compared data from all institution types to data for institutions that were members of the Council of Independent Colleges. The authors found that an individual's professional experience prior to becoming president influenced which presidential tasks were most challenging. Hartley and Godin reported that presidents who held academic positions prior to the presidency felt least prepared to manage capital projects, fundraising, risk management and legal issues, entrepreneurial ventures, and athletics; presidents who held nonacademic positions felt

underprepared for budget and financial management, assessing and managing student learning, risk management, and government relations.

Hartley and Godin (2009) found that fewer presidents of independent colleges had pursued academic routes to the presidency and suggested that additional training for administrative presidents in this area would be important. Their report called for increased training of presidents from academic backgrounds in fundraising, financial and risk management, and other administrative tasks; similarly, they suggested that nonacademic presidents and those from outside of higher education needed additional orientation to faculty, curricular, and shared-governance issues.

In addition to survey research, current presidents have commented on the changing landscape of higher education and the new requirements of presidents. Brand (2002), president of Indiana University, reflected on the responsibilities of the "engaged president" in an article he published. The author stated that presidents must drive change and innovation while sustaining the traditional values of the institution. Brand argued that encouraging economic development in local communities and states is a valuable role that institutions of higher education should play; the author further identified the president as the key convener of organizations to stimulate economic growth. Economic development comes from partnerships between government, business, and higher education, and the college president must build those partnerships (Brand, 2002). Brand's vision of a modern "engaged" university president as one closely connected to the community is similar to the role Thelin (2004) described for early colonial college presidents.

Bornstein (2007) also commented on the changes in higher education and reflected that women were particularly well suited to serve as presidents in this climate. Bornstein is president emerita of Rollins College and an author. In an article in *The Presidency,* she stated that "in the new competitive, fast-moving, global economy, institutions must be innovative, entrepreneurial, nimble, and flexible. These characteristics depend on collaborative and consultative leadership, qualities that women bring to the table" (Bornstein, 2007, p. 21). Bornstein argued that women were adept presidents because they often must balance competing and simultaneous demands, build teams, and develop creative solutions to complex problems. Further, Bornstein suggested that women's particular skills of collaboration, active listening, and networking are needed in today's complex higher education environment. This confirms the findings of other researchers (Corcoran, 2008; Madsen, 2008) that women's ability to be empathetic and good listeners helps them to be effective leaders.

In light of the varied responsibilities that presidents are asked to assume, particular skill sets may be necessary for those in the role. Corcoran (2008) conducted a qualitative study with 11 female presidents of 4-year universities. She asked them which skills and strengths had helped them to achieve the presidency; many of the women mentioned specific skills, such as planning, budgeting and fundraising, along with having tremendous energy and stamina. In addition, the presidents identified the importance of relating well to various constituents and the critical role of listening (Corcoran, 2008).

The college president has played an important role since the beginning of higher education in the United States. Thelin (2004) discussed how the role has changed since colonial times and observed that nonacademic presidents have always been part of the

leadership landscape. ACE (2007), the most comprehensive source of survey data on the college presidency, provided both a status picture of the role of the president today, and a consideration of how it has changed over the last decade from the perspective of long-serving presidents. Current presidents described the role as both connected to the community (Brand, 2002) and requiring the ability to adapt to change (Bornstein, 2007).

Today, the university presidency is more complex than ever before. Presidents are asked to manage diverse issues ranging from donor cultivation to curriculum development to construction projects. "The presidency has become more complex, more time-consuming, more externally focused, and more driven by the competitive marketplace and reduced government financial support" (ACE, 2007, p. 45). The role of the president is that of CEO and more.

Researchers have conducted extensive surveys and interviews attempting to document and understand the role of the president. Current and past presidents have authored books and articles on the topic. This study will add to the existing body of literature by asking female presidents with administrative backgrounds how they perceive the role of college or university president. The voice of this population of presidents is not present in the existing literature and can inform the conversation about the skills and experience necessary to lead institutions of higher education and meet the challenges therein.

<div align="center">Pathways to the Presidency</div>

There are multiple paths that can lead to the position of college or university president. These career paths, specifically the paths of higher education administrators, serve as the conceptual framework to guide this study. Several authors have explored the

routes by which one can become a university president (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001; Cohen & March, 1974; Wessel & Keim, 1994; Whittier, 2006). Much of the research has focused on the experiences of presidents who have followed the traditional academic route. Few studies have been conducted to understand the experiences of presidents who have followed nontraditional or nonacademic routes; the literature that has explored nonacademic paths has not focused on women's experiences. The present study explored the experiences of women who have become presidents via administrative, rather than academic, careers in higher education.

Cohen and March (1974) articulated one of the earliest models of presidential career paths. The researchers conducted interviews with 42 college presidents and categorized their professional histories. The academic career path articulated by Cohen and March begins with the position of tenured professor, proceeds through the ranks of department chair, dean, and provost and culminates in the position of president. The path identified in 1974 remains the most traveled route to the presidency. The work of Cohen and March has been used as a foundation for subsequent studies.

Wessel and Keim (1994) examined career paths of presidents of private 4-year colleges and universities. The authors developed a survey instrument that was mailed to a random sample of one third of the population of private institution presidents. More than 90% of presidents responded, resulting in a sample of 270 responses. The authors identified two primary career paths leading to the presidency, which they categorized as the Academic Career Pattern and the Administrative Career Pattern. The Academic Career Pattern was the same as that described by Cohen and March (1974), whereby a tenured professor is promoted through the academic ranks. The Administrative Career

Pattern was that of an individual who had minimal or no faculty experience but considerable experience as an administrator in higher education, holding positions with increasing responsibility.

Wessel and Keim's (1994) work served as a foundation for Whittier's (2006) exploration of the career paths of presidents of private colleges in Virginia. Whittier conducted qualitative interviews with 12 of the 15 presidents who led institutions that were members of the Virginia Foundation for Independent Colleges. Whittier obtained a copy of each participant's curriculum vitae and determined whether they fit in Wessel and Keim's (1994) Administrative or Academic Career Pattern. She found that none of the participants had an initial goal of becoming a college president, but as they progressed through successively higher positions in higher education they began to aspire to the presidency. Several of Whittier's participants stated that mentors were an important part of their career progression, particularly in the form of supportive supervisors. Further, 92% of her sample had earned a terminal degree of J.D., Ed.D., or Ph.D.

The presidents in Whittier's (2006) sample had pursued both administrative and academic career paths. The participants debated which type of experience—academic or administrative—was more important in preparing for the presidency. Those who valued administrative experience suggested that it was more relevant to the daily tasks of a president and that much of the academic side of the institution was managed by the provost; those with academic backgrounds believed that it was necessary for the president to have a deep understanding of the primary mission of the institution.

Whittier's (2006) study made a valuable contribution to the literature exploring presidential career paths and differences between academic and administrative

trajectories. Her participants included both men and women in a particular geographic area. Further research, such as the present study, is needed to understand the perceptions of women who pursued the administrative path in particular.

Birnbaum and Umbach (2001) also explored the different routes that lead to a presidential appointment. They suggested that it was important to understand a president's career path because different types of institutions seek candidates with particular experiences and may not consider applicants who have followed different paths. Birnbaum and Umbach used data collected by ACE in their 1986, 1990, and 1995 surveys of college presidents. The researchers operationalized the data and plotted the previous positions held by respondents to identify career paths leading to the presidency. They articulated four pathways to the presidency, which they categorized as Scholar, Steward, Spanner, and Stranger. They identified the traditional career paths as those that have been in the sector of higher education. In the traditional career paths, the authors differentiated between individuals who have pursued an academic career, Scholars, and those who have held nonacademic administrative positions in higher education, Stewards. The authors also defined *nontraditional* career paths, including Spanners, who have worked both within and beyond higher education, and Strangers, who had careers entirely outside of higher education prior to becoming presidents.

Birnbaum and Umbach (2001) reported that women were more likely to pursue the traditional paths rather than the nontraditional paths. They also concluded that between the two branches of the traditional paths, Steward presidents were far less likely to lead doctoral institutions than Scholars. The authors recommended that individuals

who aspire to the presidency should earn a Ph.D. and pursue the traditional Scholar path; they concluded that the academic path is still the "royal road" to the presidency.

Amey and VanDerLinden (2002) explored career trajectories of presidents at community colleges. The authors surveyed current presidents of 2-year colleges using an instrument with 34 questions. The instrument was mailed to a random sample of 1,700 community college administrators and they achieved a 54% response rate. Amey and VanDerLinden found that the majority of presidents in their sample had followed an academic career path, but an increasing number held administrative positions. Amey and VanDerLinden acknowledged that while academic experience is common, "prior presidential or other administrative experience is the norm, such experience including nonacademic positions within higher education institutions" (p. 13).

Hartley and Godin (2009) conducted research to explore the past professional experiences of presidents of independent colleges and universities. The authors leveraged data collected by ACE in their American College President Study in 2007 to identify career paths, education, and other demographic information about presidents of independent colleges and compare that with ACE data from previous surveys. Hartley and Godin found that the traditional career paths described by Birnbaum and Umbach (2001) were most common, with chief academic officer the most common prior position in 2006 (Scholars), and a nonacademic officer position most common in 2001 (Stewards) (Hartley & Godin, 2009).

Several paths to the presidency have been identified and explored in the literature. Cohen and March (1974) first articulated the traditional academic path; their work was expanded by Wessel and Keim (1994) who added the Administrative Career Pattern.

Birnbaum and Umbach (2001) confirmed the traditional pathways reported by Wessel and Keim, and added two nontraditional paths of the Spanner and the Stranger.

These studies provided descriptions of the means by which one can become a college president and the type of institution one is likely to lead. The literature has not explored the experiences of women who have pursued paths other than the traditional academic path. Specifically, there is a dearth of information about women who have pursued the second most common pathway to the presidency. This study will make that contribution to the literature.

An academic career history is not the only preamble to a presidential position, but it is the most common. The next section will review historical and recent research that describes the academic career path in detail.

Academic Career Paths

Historically, most presidents have risen through the academic ranks and this continues to be the case today (ACE, 2007). Presidential candidates tend to be promoted from tenured faculty member to department chair to dean to provost or chief academic officer. In 2007, 40% of sitting presidents had served as chief academic officer or provost in their immediate prior position; 84% of those presidents had served in an academic capacity in their second prior position (Bridges et al., 2008). An additional 21% of sitting presidents had served in some other academic role prior to being appointed president. In total, 61% of presidents came from an academic position (Bridges et al., 2008).

In 1974, Cohen and March conducted interviews at more than 40 4-year colleges and universities in the United States; at each campus the authors interviewed the president, chief academic officer, chief business or financial officer, student leaders,

secretaries, and other college officials chosen by the president. These interviews and other informal discussions with university leaders served as the foundation for the authors' work. Cohen and March documented the career paths and demographics of college presidents, and explored ideas of leadership in complex organizations.

Cohen and March (1974) reviewed the career paths of their participants and concluded that "the most obvious point about presidential career paths is that presidents are academics" (p. 13). The authors detailed the progression of most college presidents: they began as tenured professors then advanced to department chair, dean, a higher administrative position, and then president. Cohen and March reflected on two major implications of this career path: academic presidents are closely aligned with faculty and the role of president is the culmination of their careers.

The book by Cohen and March (1974) was the seminal work examining the role of college presidents, their career paths, and their leadership. Many scholars have used their research as a foundation for exploring the college presidency. In 1974, there were very few female presidents, thus Cohen and March's research was based largely on the experiences and perceptions of men. The authors described their sample, and most college presidents at the time, as "middle-aged, married, male, white, Protestant academics" (p. 7). It can be questioned whether the model suggested by Cohen and March is representative of the experiences of female college presidents. Subsequent research has failed to focus on the career paths and professional journeys of women in the same way, an issue the present study seeks to address.

King and Gomez (2008) authored a report based on survey data collected by ACE (2007). Their research explored the pathways to the presidency and the demographic

profiles of college presidents and senior leaders; their publication was a supplement to the overall report of findings from ACE's presidential survey. King and Gomez confirmed the longevity of Cohen and March's (1974) model and reported that nearly 70% of presidents were faculty members at some point in their career (p. 1). They suggested that the initial position on a presidential career path is that of full-time faculty member.

Hartley and Godin's (2009) analysis of ACE data revealed that independent college presidents who had served 3 or fewer years in their first presidency were twice as likely to have followed an academic career path compared to first-time presidents who had been in their positions for 14 or more years. This finding implied that some colleges and universities that recently completed presidential searches favored traditional academic career experience as preparation for the presidency.

Administrative Career Paths

The administrative career path is the second most common path to the role of president. King and Gomez (2008) noted that 23% of current presidents held nonacademic leadership positions immediately prior to becoming presidents. These positions included chief financial officer, chief human resources officer, general counsel, senior external affairs officer, chief student affairs officer, enrollment management officer, or chief diversity officer (King & Gomez, 2008). The administrative route is the second most common path to the presidency, yet very little research has examined the experiences of presidents who advance through nonacademic positions in higher education. Even less of the literature on presidential career paths specifically discusses the experiences of women. The present study sought to address this gap in the literature

by collecting data from female presidents who have pursued administrative career paths in higher education.

Wessel and Keim (1994) examined career paths of administrative presidents. They identified the Administrative Career Pattern as one in which the president had little or no experience as a faculty member but extensive experience as an administrator. Presidents who have pursued an administrative career path have climbed the ladder in higher education outside of the classroom, beginning with an entry- or middle-level position in administration and progressing to the senior level before becoming president. The authors identified seven variations in the administrative career path.

More than 30% of Wessel and Keim's (1994) sample of 270 private college presidents had pursued an administrative career pattern. Wessel and Keim found that presidents who followed the administrative path were least likely to be president of a doctoral institution; only 17% of the doctoral presidents in their sample were administrators compared to 31% at liberal arts colleges and 34% at comprehensive institutions. The authors concluded that while many universities expect the president to have academic experience, "some colleges bypass the academic experience in favor of successful administrative experience" (p. 223).

Birnbaum and Umbach (2001) examined presidential career paths through the administrative side of higher education; presidents who followed this path were categorized as Stewards. The authors stated that these presidents had devoted their careers to higher education without serving as faculty members. Like Wessel and Keim (1994), Birnbaum and Umbach found that Steward presidents were least likely to attain presidential positions at doctoral institutions; however, they comprised more than 20% of

presidents at all other types of institutions. Stewards were also the most likely group of presidents to have earned an Ed.D. degree; nearly 30% of the sample held that credential.

Hartley and Godin (2009) conducted an analysis of presidents of Council of Independent Colleges member institutions. Their study explored the presidents' career path, demographics, and preparedness for the role. The authors used survey data from the ACE presidential survey from 1986, 1990, 1995, 1998, and 2001. This study also found that the second largest group of presidents in their sample was those who came from nonacademic positions. In fact, administrative presidents were more common in independent schools than other types of institutions; they comprised 33% of presidents compared to 23% across all types of colleges and universities. Hartley and Godin identified the administrative areas in which nonacademic presidents held leadership positions prior to the presidency: development, finance/administration, student affairs, external affairs, unspecified, and the president's office (p. 4). The authors expressed some concern about the number of presidents who lacked direct classroom experience "given the importance of teaching and learning in [Council of Independent College] member colleges and universities, particularly at the undergraduate level" (p. 22), an important finding for universities to consider as they orient new presidents (Hartley & Godin, 2009).

Nontraditional Career Paths

A minority of college or university presidents have followed nontraditional career paths. Birnbaum and Umbach (2001) identified two types of nontraditional presidents: those who have jumped between higher education and other industries and those whose

presidential appointment was their first position in higher education. These presidents were labeled Spanners and Strangers, respectively.

Birnbaum and Umbach (2001) described the career path of Spanner presidents. They stated that "Spanners appear to be boundary spanners who maintain significant commitments both to higher education and to other types of institutions or organizations" (p. 206). Some Spanners began their careers in higher education before transitioning to public- or private-sector roles. Others may have come to the academy by way of previous experience in another field. Regardless of the order in which the positions were held, Spanners have spent significant time in and outside of higher education.

The presidents with the least amount of experience in higher education were the Strangers. Strangers have never worked as faculty members or administrators and their last two positions prior to becoming presidents were outside of higher education. Strangers have had careers in the military, politics, or the private sector, and were recruited to the presidency without prior experience in higher education (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001). Hartley and Godin (2009) found that one third of presidents in their sample of independent colleges came from positions outside academe.

Nontraditional presidents comprise the smallest number of college or university presidents. According to survey data collected by ACE in 2006, 17% of presidents at all types of colleges and universities held positions outside of higher education immediately prior to becoming president (King & Gomez, 2008).

Implications for Women

There are multiple paths that lead to the position of university president, and each has particular advantages and disadvantages. Leatherwood and Williams (2008)

conducted a study examining the career advancement of community college presidents in

North Carolina. Leatherwood and Williams executed a mixed-methods study in which

they distributed a survey instrument to community college presidents in North Carolina

using a Likert-scale format; they achieved a 67% response rate and had 39 usable survey

responses. The survey data were then further explored during in-depth interviews with

two male and two female presidents. Interview questions addressed the general

background of the presidents, educational and professional background, and perceived

institutional barriers. The participants, both male and female, stated that there were

several ways to achieve the position of president and that the needs of the institution at

the time determined which skill sets and previous experiences were the best fit.

     Leatherwood and Williams (2008) found that women tended to reach presidential

positions at an older age than men (48 or older versus 47 or younger). More female

participants than males had earned doctoral degrees and the researchers suggested that a

doctorate was an important credential for women who aspire to the presidency. The male

and female participants had differing views on institutional barriers; the women felt lack

of family support and restricted access to mentors and networks were barriers, whereas

men did not. In light of the obstacles that women perceived, it is important to consider

which paths to the presidency may be most easily accessed by women.

     The majority of female college presidents have pursued academic career paths.

Hartley and Godin (2009) found that female presidents in their sample were more likely

to be hired internally and hired from the academic side of the institution. The authors

noted that two-thirds of female presidents had followed the academic path while only half

of male presidents had done so. The findings by Hartley and Godin, therefore, do not include many women who have followed an administrative path.

King and Gomez (2008) also found that many presidential candidates are promoted internally. The authors suggested that in light of this finding campuses could do more succession planning and intentionally seek out women and minorities to mentor for leadership positions. Similarly, Hartley and Godin (2009) emphasized the importance of preparing existing leaders on campuses for the presidency.

Statistics show that women hold a significant number of the key positions that lead to the presidency. King and Gomez (2008) reported that women held 45% of senior leadership positions, including 38% of provost or chief academic officer roles. The authors noted that a significant percentage of females in senior leadership positions does not automatically equate to a significant percentage of female presidents. In fact, "women are much more likely to serve in senior leadership roles other than the presidency: 45 percent of senior administrators are women, compared with 23 percent of presidents" (p. 3). Women are reaching the positions immediately below the presidency, but not advancing to the presidential level.

Women who aspire to the presidency have several routes from which to choose. Presently, the majority of female presidents have the traditional academic pedigree. It is important to understand the thoughts and experiences of the small number of women who have achieved the presidency through the administrative path and how their professional experiences have shaped their leadership. This is, in part, the purpose of the present study.

The following section will explore literature on the glass ceiling to provide background for the present study. Although more women currently hold the office of college or university president than ever before, females only account for 20% of presidents at 4-year institutions. The glass ceiling provides a useful context from which to examine the career paths and experiences of women in higher education.

The Glass Ceiling

Definition and Evolution of the Metaphor

For more than 20 years, Americans have discussed the glass ceiling. The phrase is used ubiquitously to describe the obstacles that women encounter in the workplace on their journey to leadership positions. Thomas, Bierema, and Landau (2004) defined the glass ceiling as

> …a metaphor for the invisible barrier that prevents women from reaching the upper echelons of management. It is created by invisible forces of culture, habit, and power that serve to keep women "in their place," that is, subordinate to men. (p. 62)

The term was popularized by an article published in the *Wall Street Journal* in 1986 that discussed the invisible barriers women encountered at the upper levels of corporate leadership (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995, p. 3). The glass ceiling persists across different industries, blocking women from achieving critical mass in peak leadership positions.

The metaphors to describe women's experiences in the workforce have evolved over time. Eagly and Carli (2007) chronicled the changing experiences of women in the workplace. When women first sought to obtain full-time employment outside the home, employers were unwilling to hire them. Eagly and Carli described this complete exclusion as the "concrete wall." World War II changed the economic reality in the

United States, as much of the male workforce went overseas to serve in the armed forces.

Businesses and organizations had no choice but to allow women to work. Over time,

women became a significant and stable part of the work force; however, they could not

gain access to top leadership positions. This is when the glass ceiling became the

prevailing metaphor to describe the situation faced by working women.

The glass ceiling metaphor has been part of American society for more than 20

years. At the time it was coined, there were few, if any, female CEOs of major

corporations. Eagly and Carli (2007) observed that the glass ceiling implied a barrier that

was not visible to or penetrable by women. Today there are a handful of female CEOs of

Fortune 500 companies, presidents of prestigious universities, and top government

officials. While these women remain a minority, their success in overcoming barriers and

reaching leadership positions cannot be ignored or discounted. Eagly and Carli argued

that the metaphor of the glass ceiling was no longer an accurate description of the

challenges that women face in the workplace today; because many women have attained

top leadership positions, there is no longer an impenetrable barrier.

Women have often attained leadership positions via nontraditional pathways.

Eagly and Carli (2007) suggested that the challenge for women today is finding

alternative paths around the obstacles they encounter at all stages of their career. They

observed that "women can attain high positions, but finding the pathways demands

considerable skill and some luck" (p. 8). Eagly and Carli suggested that the metaphor of a

labyrinth more accurately described the hidden barriers and circuitous routes to

leadership that women encounter today.

Women serve as presidents at four of the eight Ivy League universities: Harvard University, University of Pennsylvania, Brown University, and Princeton University. Beyond the Ivy League, women comprise 20% of presidents of 4-year colleges and universities. The glass ceiling has been shattered, yet obstacles remain for women who aspire to the presidency.

The present study explored the obstacles that women encountered along their professional journeys and the impact of the glass ceiling or labyrinth on higher education leadership. Specifically, this study examined the experiences of women who had taken a nontraditional path to the top and captured their perceptions regarding the metaphor and reality of the glass ceiling in higher education.

The Glass Ceiling Today

Despite the efforts of the federal government and some organizations, women have yet to achieve leadership positions in equal numbers to men. Women comprise 51.4% of management, professional, and related occupations, yet they account for only 15.2% of Fortune 500 board members and 3% of Fortune 500 CEOs (Catalyst, 2010).

Jackson and O'Callaghan (2009) conducted a taxonomy of glass ceiling literature and explored the findings specific to higher education. The authors sought to identify all the social science literature about the glass ceiling and synthesize the findings. After reviewing more than 60 scholarly articles, the authors identified ways in which the glass ceiling continues to impact women in higher education. The authors concluded that the glass ceiling is manifested in higher education through a disproportionate number of women in tenured faculty and administrative positions, unequal compensation and promotion between men and women, and attempts by institutions to implement policies

aimed at supporting and advancing women and minorities. The authors stated that "the reality is that women and people of color are still denied an equal share of the leadership positions in colleges and universities" (p. 473). These findings call for an examination of why the glass ceiling continues to pervade higher education and how women who have attained presidencies perceive the barriers and opportunities for women in higher education.

Jackson and O'Callaghan (2009) posited that both institutional theories and social theories are at play in the higher educational context. Institutional theories relate to the practices and policies that maintain the status quo; social theories describe cultural biases that equate leadership with masculinity. The authors suggested that social theories influence how people behave in organizations and vice versa; the social perception of leadership as a male quality leads to institutional practices that promote men over women, thus men continue to be the majority of visible leaders.

Cocchio (2009) conducted a literature review of peer-reviewed articles and documents exploring the ways in which women lead and the barriers they encounter in career advancement. She discussed the potential interplay of four theories to explain why women are not reaching the executive level. One powerful factor restricting women's access to leadership positions is biological assumptions, or the belief that women are innately disadvantaged as leaders because they do not think and act like men. Cocchio suggested that social conditioning and the way in which gender roles are perceived in society influences women's upward mobility in organizations; she further posited that these beliefs are grounded in the culture of a society. Additionally, Cocchio found that women often to do not have access to front-line managerial experience and are later

penalized for not having this experience. A further challenge identified by Cocchio was the way in which these factors prevent women from gaining the necessary experience for leadership positions.

Other authors summarized the theories in the literature differently. Le Feuvre (2009) conducted an analysis of the literature and identified four frameworks that are commonly used to discuss the glass ceiling: the patriarchy approach, the feminitude approach, inverted socialism or the third sex, and the idea of gender neutrality. The patriarch approach posited that the gender system of male dominance is stable and in fact enhanced by the presence of more women in the workplace. Le Feuvre asserted that even when more women are part of the faculty, the sex/genders system may not have changed; rather, the status quo has become camouflaged. The feminitude approach suggested that women can achieve success by creating niches in which to leverage their differences from men. The idea of the "third sex" was that successful women are those who act like men, whereas the idea of gender neutrality implied that the workplace had become neutral and accepting of both genders. Le Feuvre suggested that greater numbers of women in higher education may not be enough to change ingrained sex and gender beliefs. Further, Le Feuvre concluded that women face different challenges and obstacles in each framework and that no framework will lead to equal representation of women in academic leadership positions. She stated that even when women have attained critical mass in the academic ranks, the prevailing sociological attitudes will continue to dominate.

Authors have reviewed the literature about the glass ceiling in higher education and reached similar conclusions. Jackson and O'Callaghan (2009) found that both

institutional and social influences prevent women from achieving top leadership positions in higher education. Cocchio (2009) cited four theories in the glass ceiling literature that disadvantage women. Le Feuvre's (2009) literature analysis also concluded that multiple complex theories play a role in the underrepresentation of women leaders in higher education.

In addition to the theories highlighted by these authors, a common theory used to explain the lack of women in college presidencies is the *pipeline theory*. For many years, the lack of women in key leadership positions was explained by a lack of qualified female applicants. The pipeline theory in higher education held that as more women earned graduate degrees and entered the academic ranks, they would create a large candidate pool of female faculty members. Over time, these women would progress through the academic tenure process and eventually there would be a large number of female full professors (White, 2005, p. 22). The lack of female tenured faculty members, deans, provosts, and presidents was attributed to a shallow pool of candidates at the entry point of the career path.

Today, women earn 57% of bachelor's degrees, 59% of master's degrees, and 53% of doctoral degrees (Eagly & Carli, 2007). As the statistical reality began to challenge the pipeline theory, proponents suggested that perhaps women did not aspire to positions of academic leadership. White (2005) noted that supporters of the pipeline theory suggested the pipeline was "leaking" due to women voluntarily exiting. Although there were sufficient numbers of qualified female candidates, it was assumed that these women chose not to pursue tenure-track faculty positions (White, 2005).

The report of the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (1995) offered a different perspective and suggested that there were several barriers in the hierarchy that prevented qualified individuals from reaching top leadership positions. The commission stated that women were not "leaking" from the pipeline; rather, they encountered numerous obstacles in the pipeline that prevented their advancement.

The pipeline theory continues to be explored and discussed by scholars today. To understand how pipeline issues may impact gender diversity in the college presidency, the pipelines or pathways to the presidency and barriers therein must be examined.

The present study explored the perceived barriers or obstacles experienced by women who followed the second most common pathway to the presidency. The next section will review literature exploring the obstacles women encounter in the two most common presidential pipelines as well as possible solutions suggested by the literature.

Effects of the Glass Ceiling in Higher Education.

Administrative Path

The administrative path is the second most common path to the presidency. In this pathway individuals spend their careers in areas such as student affairs, development, finance, human resources, enrollment management, or other administrative functions of higher education. Over time, individuals are promoted through the administrative ranks until they achieve the position of president.

Women who pursue careers in academic administration encounter barriers along their journeys, which have been documented in the literature. Jackson and O'Callaghan (2009) examined salary data from ACE and found that women receive lower compensation than men in senior-level administrative positions. This finding was

consistent across function area and type of institution. The disparity in salary appears to increase over the course of an individual's career trajectory. The authors found that "the effects of gender stratification are additive in nature and disproportionately affect women the longer they persist in their careers. In other words, glass ceiling effect operates throughout a woman's career, and may get worse as her career grows" (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009, p. 469). This finding is particularly distressing for female administrators who aspire to the position of university president, which typically requires many years of prior experience.

Part of the challenge may lie in the fact that women's career paths do not always follow the norm set by males. Unlike men, women are apt to take breaks in their careers, have unplanned career paths, work part-time, and even change careers (Thomas et al., 2004). The male pattern of entering the workforce and working without interruption until retirement is not reflective of many females' experiences. A result of women's different career paths may be that they are more likely to reach leadership positions through nontraditional routes. Thomas et. al. explored how women in academe experience the glass ceiling and how glass ceiling research in the corporate sector could be applied to higher education, particularly in terms of human resource development practices that could benefit women. Thomas et al. found alternative career paths to be particularly common for women of color. Their findings, particularly for women's nontraditional career paths, support Eagly and Carli's (2007) description of the labyrinth that women travel to reach leadership positions.

Colleges and universities are beginning to consider presidential candidates who have taken alternative routes. Penney, Brown, and Oliveira (2007) noted that more

nonacademic presidents are being hired, but suggested that does not equate to more women being hired. The authors observed that although the number of women in academic and administrative positions had increased, there was still not parity with men. The article explored steps that institutions are taking, such as implementing family-friendly policies that are aimed at helping women advance in academe.

Again, the authors noted that an increasing number of presidents who have pursued nontraditional paths will not necessarily provide more opportunity for women; this finding could present challenges for female administrators who aspire to the presidency (Penney et al., 2007). Typically, the president of a university is selected and hired by the board of trustees. Penney et al. (2007) found that boards often suffer from a dearth of women. The authors suggested that more gender-balanced boards could help women achieve the presidency because more women would be involved in the selection and hiring process.

The above studies provide a useful context in which to understand the challenges that female administrators may face in their professional journeys. Challenges such as inequality in compensation, career paths that do not follow the norm set by men, lack of nontraditional presidential role models, and male-dominated search committees all play a role in slowing the advancement of women on the administrative path. No research has yet been done that examines the obstacles encountered on an administrative path from the perspective of current female presidents who traveled that route; the voices of women who have overcome the documented barriers and other challenges is absent from the literature. The present study makes that contribution to the dialogue.

Academic Path

The traditional academic path, first articulated by Cohen and March (1974), continues to be the most prevalent route to the presidency. The majority of presidents began their careers as professors, then advanced though academic leadership positions. Several authors have explored the obstacles that women encounter in the academic pathway.

More women than men earn doctorate degrees, yet they remain underrepresented at the top levels in academia (Guth & Wright, 2009). Like women in administrative careers, female faculty encounter barriers at each stage of their career and these challenges have a cumulative effect. Thomas et al. (2004) noted that male faculty members earn more than female faculty members and the disparity increases at the higher ranks.

Kjeldal, Rindfleish, and Sheridan (2005) explored the experiences of female academics in Australia and identified several concerning issues. The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with two junior academics and one midlevel academic, and used social-identity theory and leader-member-exchange theory as frameworks for the personal histories of the participants. Kjeldal et al. posited that the culture of the academy continues to be male-oriented and rewards behavior that sustains the culture. Academic promotion is often focused on publications and research rather than working with students or serving on committees; this reality can disadvantage women (Kjeldal et al., 2005).

Guth and Wright (2009) reached similar conclusions in their research. Data were collected from 30 semistructured interviews with male and female academics across

different disciplines and seniority levels at a university. In addition, statistical

information provided by the university was reviewed and an analysis of laws and policies

at the institutional and national level was conducted. Guth and Wright found that policies

aimed at equality were not sufficient and that many of the barriers identified by the

participants were not addressed by the various policies. Guth and Wright echoed that the

promotion process tends to reward "typically male" accomplishments, such as publishing

research and securing funding, and undervalue "typically female" contributions, such as

working with students and focusing on quality teaching.

    Many authors (Guth & Wright, 2009; Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009; White,

2005) noted the difficulty for mothers to advance in an academic career, and suggested

that many choose to opt out of the tenure track. White (2005) reviewed research that

explored women's experiences in higher education tenure-track positions and reported

that "women with a child in the household within five years of the Ph.D. are far less

likely to achieve a tenured faculty position than are men with a child within the same

timeframe" (p. 24). Further, White noted that women who delayed having children

achieved tenure at the same rate as women without children, but neither group earned

tenure at a rate equal to men. White commented that female academics currently occupy

fewer tenure-track positions and more nontenure-track positions than they did 30 years

ago. The lack of female professors and academic leaders can have a negative effect on

female students, staff, and faculty, according to White.

    In addition to White (2005), Damiano-Teixeira (2006) explored the time-of-life

conflict that female academics encounter due to the overlap in time between pursuing

tenure and the primary childbearing and child-raising years. The author conducted

interviews with 18 female academics who worked for large, medium, or small institutions in the state of Michigan. Damiano-Teixeira found that issues related to work–life balance early in the participants' careers influenced what type of institution the women worked for and whether they pursued tenure or term faculty positions. Women with children were more likely to work at smaller institutions and not pursue a tenured faculty position; women without children or women who delayed having children were more likely to hold tenured positions at larger universities.

Fletcher (2007) conducted interviews with 22 female academics and found that academic managers were "effectively passing the buck, putting the onus on the women academics to change and refusing to take ownership of the issue of gender equity" (p. 273). Her study found that academic managers expected women to compete on traditional male terms for research resources, and if they did not they were perceived as lacking ambition.

Despite the challenge of creating and sustaining change, some institutions have recognized the need to alter the academic culture and have begun to implement policies aimed at leveling the playing field for women. Stopping the tenure clock after a child is born, allowing faculty with family responsibilities to teach a lighter load, and extending the number of years in which tenure must be earned are some of the ideas that have been implemented at campuses across the country. Penney et al. (2007) noted that good policies are not enough, however, because faculty must believe there will not be negative repercussions for using the policies and benefits available to them.

Guth and Wright (2009) found that women academics did not automatically achieve equality due to institutional policies with that intent. Respondents in Guth and

Wright's study felt that equality was more likely to occur as the result of a supportive and fair culture than from institutional policies. Official policies and mandates have a role to play in advancing women and people of color but do not appear to be a solution in themselves.

The preceding authors identified several barriers that women encounter on the academic path to the presidency. Lack of access to leadership positions (Guth & Wright, 2009), pay inequity (Thomas et al., 2004), an academic culture based on a male tradition (Fletcher, 2007; Guth & Wright, 2009; Kjeldal et al., 2005), and balancing work and family commitments (Damiano-Teixeira, 2006; White, 2005) create challenges for female academics. In light of these abundant barriers, it is important to explore other pathways by which women can attain the position of college or university president. The current study explored the barriers encountered by women on the administrative path to understand if that may be a more viable route for women who aspire to the presidency.

One in five 4-year colleges and universities have a woman serving as president; some women have overcome barriers and challenges to reach the top position in higher education. It is important to explore the perceptions of current female presidents to understand their experiences and lessons that may be applicable for women who desire to follow in their footsteps. The following section reviews scholarly literature about female presidents.

Women Leaders in Higher Education

Women have risen to presidential positions at institutions of higher education. Their journeys and successes have been studied by researchers to provide insight for

women who aspire to similar positions and to understand how these women overcame the obstacles they encountered.

Madsen (2008) conducted in-depth interviews with 10 women who were serving as presidents or chancellors of universities or who had recently retired from those roles. The women served at different types of public and private institutions and all were in their 50s or 60s at the time of the interviews. The author examined how these women developed the knowledge and skills that assisted them in their careers and identified major influences in their lives.

Madsen (2008) stated that there was a dearth of literature that specifically explored the leadership of female college and university presidents, inspiring her to conduct her research. The interview questions in her study spanned the lifetime of the presidents, exploring their childhoods, early educational experiences, and professional, personal, and academic experiences as adults. Through the data she gathered, Madsen drew several conclusions about the leadership practices of the women. Madsen identified nine motivations that the female presidents shared: to accomplish and achieve, to make a difference, to be involved in meaningful work, to have challenges and complexity, to have fun and enjoyment, to do work that they knew they could do, to enable others, to have power and influence, and to serve.

In addition to leadership motivation, Madsen (2008) explored the presidents' leadership styles. Her findings supported the literature that suggested that women tend to have flexible, collaborative leadership styles. Specifically, Madsen described the presidents as "participatory, flexible, ethical, authentic, connective, and team-oriented" (p. 246). Further, Madsen categorized the presidents' leadership styles as androgynous.

The author reflected that the presidents were skilled in using both traditionally male and traditionally female leadership qualities to achieve their goals. Madsen noted that the presidents believed that situational leadership was a necessary leadership style in higher education. Given the complexity of higher education and the multiple responsibilities a president must manage, the ability to lead in the most appropriate manner for each situation was an asset.

Madsen (2008) identified four key themes that emerged from the interviews. She found that the women in her study dedicated time and energy to knowing and understanding themselves. This self-awareness allowed them to make choices that complemented their strengths. Second, Madsen observed that the women to be reflective in nature. The presidents all discussed the importance of reflecting on and learning from their failures. Madsen reported that the presidents believed that challenges they encountered gave them opportunities to grow as people and as leaders. Finally, the participants in Madsen's study had a deep love of learning and a willingness to learn from all experiences. This quality was essential to their personal and professional journeys and contributed to their success as presidents.

Madsen's (2008) study did not focus on presidents who had followed one particular career path. Also, her findings did not discuss the potential influence of career paths on the women's leadership. The present study builds on the work of Madsen and expands it by focusing on female presidents who have followed an administrative career path and exploring how their professional experience has influenced their leadership and perceptions of higher education leadership.

Corcoran (2008) conducted a qualitative study with 11 female presidents of 4-year colleges and universities in the western United States. The author explored the perceptions of her participants on the underrepresentation of women in college presidencies, the skills and strengths the women used to attain presidencies, the challenges and barriers they encountered, and the work or life experiences that contributed to their authentic leadership. The presidents in her study described specific skill sets as important to achieving the presidency, such as fundraising, budget management, and strategic-planning skills. Further, all the participants suggested strong interpersonal skills were critical to the success of any university president, regardless of gender.

Corcoran (2008) posited that a variety of past professional experiences can provide the experience necessary to be an effective university president. She suggested that a background in an area such as student affairs, while typically overlooked by search committees, provided valuable insight into some of the greatest challenges that college leaders face. Corcoran further argued that women may not be able to gain the skills they need on the traditional academic path. This finding implied that alternative career paths may better prepare women to fulfill the role of president.

Steinke (2006) explored the experiences of women who were the first female presidents at small, private colleges. She explored the career paths, orientation experiences on campus, and insights of these women pioneers. Steinke used a constructivist or hermeneutic paradigm as the framework for her study and conducted interviews with 8 women. Her sample included women who had pursued administrative and academic career paths.

The presidents in Steinke's (2006) sample reported somewhat unplanned career paths and did not set initial goals to become college presidents. Although they had pursued different paths, all had teaching experience and had earned Ph.D.s, including those who were never full-time faculty members. The women reported that issues related to gender were largely peripheral despite being the first woman to hold the presidency at their institution. They acknowledged that there were some adjustments that had to be made on their campuses as a result of their gender, including redefining the role of the presidential spouse and acclimating their leadership teams to different styles of leadership and interaction.

Madsen (2008), Corcoran (2008), and Steinke (2006) did not use the path by which their participants advanced to the presidency as a criterion for inclusion in their studies. The majority of presidents in their research had pursued the traditional academic path; as such, their findings may not be representative of the population of female presidents who had not been academics. This study expanded the existing literature by focusing on the population of female presidents who historically had not been included in research studies.

Bornstein (2007) reflected upon the difficulties that female presidents encounter, particularly those pioneers who were the first female presidents in their institution's history. She suggested that female presidents, particularly the first at an institution, are subject to internal and external scrutiny. The first president who does not fit in the traditional male mold is carefully watched to make sure that she has the capability to be a successful president.

Turner (2007) studied the biographical histories of women-of-color presidents by conducting in-depth interviews with 3 presidents and comparing data across cases. The participants in Turner's study reported being aware of bias, stereotyping, and discrimination during their candidacies for presidential roles. They further described dealing with challenges as soon as they assumed the role of president and reported that they felt pressure to not make any mistakes and perceived that they were being carefully watched.

Penney et al. (2007) reflected on the advancement of women in higher education and the importance of equality in the professorial and administrative ranks. The authors discussed the stereotype that female leaders are unable or unwilling to make difficult decisions. They posited that while female presidents are decisive and have strong leadership skill sets, they still do not reflect the dominant image of a university president.

Scholarly literature has examined the leadership styles, motivation, perceptions and challenges faced by female presidents. These books, dissertations, and articles provide a rich source of data about women in the presidential role; however, the majority of participants in these research studies came from an academic background. The academic route is the most common path to the presidency, but it is not the only one. The perceptions and experiences of women in the above studies may not be applicable to or reflective of those women who have been administrators in higher education. There is a need to address this gap in the literature and to collect data from female presidents who have pursued an administrative path to the presidency.

Summary

This chapter has reviewed the literature that provided the context, framework, and need for the present study. First, literature that discussed leadership in higher education and the role of the college or university president was explored. Thelin's (2004) overview provided a historical context to the presidential role and highlighted how the role has changed over time. Survey data collected by ACE (2007) was discussed, particularly the finding that only in one in five institutions has a female president. Further, the perspectives of long-serving presidents were presented by ACE (2007) which suggested that the role has become more externally-focused. Current presidents shared their thoughts on the role as both engaged with the community (Brand, 2002) and requiring adaptability (Bornstein, 2007).

Next, the conceptual framework was presented. This study is grounded in literature that explores the different career paths that lead to the presidency, particularly research about the administrative path through higher education. Cohen and March (1974) identified the most common path to the presidency as one which begins with the position of tenured professor and advances through the academic ranks. Wessel and Keim (1994) expanded that research and identified a secondary path, one which proceeds through the administrative side of higher education. Birnbaum and Umbach (2001) confirmed the findings of Wessel and Keim (1994) and added two additional nontraditional paths that lead to the presidency. The pathways to the presidency, particularly the administrative path, served as the conceptual framework for this study and guided the selection of participants, development of interview questions and analysis of data.

Relevant literature reviewing the historical context and present research on the glass ceiling was reviewed as background for the study. Eagly and Carli (2007) documented the evolution of the metaphor and suggested that today women encounter a labyrinth rather than a glass ceiling in their quest for leadership positions. Jackson and O'Callaghan (2009) confirmed that challenges remain for women and highlighted both institutional and social theories that negatively impact women's advancement. Cocchio (2009) and Le Feuvre (2009) each conducted a survey of literature about women in higher education and identified different theories that explain the obstacles women encounter. Literature that explored specific challenges on the academic path—lack of access to leadership positions (Guth & Wright, 2009), unequal compensation (Thomas et al., 2004), male-dominated academic culture (Fletcher, 2007; Kjeldal et al., 2005) and challenges with balancing family commitments (Damiano-Teixeira, 2006; White, 2005)—supported the need for the present study to explore alternative paths.

Finally, literature that documented the experiences of women who had successfully reached the position of college president was reviewed. Madsen (2008), Corcoran (2008), and Steinke (2006) conducted qualitative studies with female presidents and explored different aspects of their professional and personal lives; the majority of the participants in these studies had pursued academic career paths. These studies, while informative, suggest the need to understand the experiences of women who followed alternative paths in higher education.

The following chapter will detail the methodology that was used to conduct the present study. Rationale and specific methods are explained and a detailed description of the target population is provided.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Restatement of the Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of

female presidents of 4-year colleges or universities who pursued administrative career

paths in higher education rather than traditional academic career paths. This study

examined how these women perceived career paths in higher education, the glass ceiling

in higher education, and their preparation for and views of the role of president. In

addition, this study investigated how their administrative experience informed their

leadership styles.

Research Design

The intent of this study was to gain knew knowledge and a deep understanding of

the lived experiences of a specific population. Creswell (2003) suggested that a study that

seeks to understand a phenomenon about which there is little existing research should

employ a qualitative approach. To that end, the researcher elected to use a qualitative

methodology of semistructured interviews to address the research questions. In-depth

interviews allowed the researcher to explore how the presidents perceived and understood

the situations, events, and interactions that occurred in their daily lives (Bogdan &

Biklen, 2003). This study focused on understanding the "lived experiences" (Creswell,

2003, p. 15) of the participants; specifically, the researcher explored how the female

presidents perceived their professional journeys, the glass ceiling in higher education,

their current presidential roles, and their leadership. In accord with the qualitative

tradition, this study sought to investigate and report the perceptions and interpretations of the participants.

Supporting documents were collected to verify and enhance the data collected through the interviews; the researcher used documents to gain additional insights and corroborate data from the interviews (Patton, 2002). Online biographies of the presidents were obtained by the researcher in advance of the interviews. In addition, the researcher collected the curriculum vitae or resume of each president, which addressed Research Question 1 about the presidents' professional journeys and Research Question 2 about their career paths. Press releases issued by the colleges or universities when the presidents were appointed were gathered as well. The press releases provided additional insight into the participants' professional journeys, career paths, and preparation for the role of president (Research Questions 1, 2, and 3). Additionally, public messages authored by the presidents featured on the institutional websites were collected and analyzed as examples of the presidents' leadership styles in relation to Research Question 5. Samples of the public messages included presidential welcome messages, transcripts of public remarks, and publications for alumni and donors; these documents provided insight into how the women led their institutions and how they interacted with different audiences as leaders.

All the data were analyzed and interpreted by the researcher. The researcher first explored the individual stories of the presidents, then identified experiences or perceptions that were common to all participants. The research questions provided a framework in which to organize the data and identify themes that emerged from the data.

Population and Sample

Female presidents of 4-year colleges and universities who had pursued career paths through the administrative side of higher education rather than the academic side were the focus of this study. These presidents had backgrounds in development, student affairs, admissions, finance, human resources, operations, or other administrative departments in higher education. This population was selected for study because the administrative career path is the second most common route to the presidency, yet there is a lack of literature that explores the experiences of women who achieved presidential positions via that path.

To identify the specific sample, the researcher acquired a list from a Department of Education website that included the web addresses of all nonprofit 4-year colleges and universities and the names of the presidents. The researcher visited 503 institutional websites of colleges and universities from that list whose presidents had female names; names that were gender neutral or unknown to the researcher were included for review. Photographs, biographies, and resumes of presidents on institutional websites enabled the researcher to identify female presidents with administrative backgrounds. After eliminating male presidents, interim presidents, presidents who had held tenured faculty positions, and presidents for whom there were no online biographies or resumes, 20 presidents remained.

A letter (see Appendix A) was sent by mail to the population of 20 presidents who met the selection criteria to invite their participation. The letter explained the purpose of the study and asked the president to consent to an in-person interview. Twelve presidents

responded to the request and agreed to participate. Due to scheduling and travel limitations, the researcher conducted in-person interviews with 9 presidents.

The participants led diverse institutions. There were 6 presidents of private colleges and 3 oversaw public universities, including one tribal college. One president's institution conferred doctoral degrees; the remaining 8 were split evenly between bachelor's and master's as the highest degree awarded. Student populations ranged from more than 20,000 to less than 100 and three colleges were women's colleges. Participants' campuses were located in seven different states across the continental United States.

<center>Human-Subjects Approval</center>

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco approved the methodology described in this chapter, including the letter to participants referenced above (see Appendix A). Further, the IRBPHS approved the questions that were used on the interview guide to facilitate each interview (see Appendix B). Each participant signed a consent form (see Appendix C) and received a copy of the Participant's Bill of Rights (see Appendix D). A copy of the approval letter from the IRBPHS is included (see Appendix E) and is retained in the School of Education Dean's Office.

<center>Research Settings</center>

The interviews were conducted in person and took place on the campus where each president serves, in the environment she inhabits daily. Visiting the presidents in their offices allowed the researcher to observe their surroundings and gain additional

insight into the daily lives of the participants. The researcher sought to immerse herself in the environments of the participants (Creswell, 2003).

The first campus the researcher visited was located in a medium-sized mountain town in the Western United States. The school was part of a state university system and served more than 20,000 students in a variety of undergraduate and graduate degree programs. Next, the researcher went to the Northeast where 3 of the presidents were located. One campus was a private school located approximately 25 miles outside a major metropolitan center; the college served nearly 10,000 students including many nontraditional students and students who were the first in their family to attend college. The researcher next visited a technical university that was part of a state system. This campus was located in a very rural community, enrolled just over 3,000 students, and had a large number of 2-year degree programs. The next campus was located 20 miles away, in a larger town but still in a fairly rural community. That institution was a small, private, liberal arts college with fewer than 2,000 students and a focus on undergraduate education.

The researcher next traveled to the Midwestern United States to conduct two interviews. The fifth campus visited by the researcher was located in a major city center; the president's office was located in a building that was constructed in the late 1800s. This private school offered robust undergraduate and graduate programs, including a doctorate in education. The next school was also located in a major city and was the smallest in the sample, with fewer than 100 students. This institution only admitted female students in professionally-focused 2-year and 4-year degree programs.

The seventh campus visited by the researcher was located in the Western United States in a city of approximately 80,000. This institution is designated as a tribal college and primarily served members of local Native American tribes. They had recently added their first master's program and serve around 600 students. The last two campuses were located in the Southeast. The eighth campus was located in a town of just under 100,000 people and only enrolled women in the undergraduate degree programs. This private school had a total enrollment of slightly more than 1,000. Finally, the ninth campus was located in a major Southern city and had a student population of 2,200. This institution was also private and women-only at the undergraduate level.

<div align="center">Interviews</div>

The researcher conducted nine semistructured interviews (Patton, 2002) using open-ended questions to gain insight into the participants' perceptions of issues indicated in the research questions. Each president participated in one interview which lasted approximately 90 minutes. The interviews were audiorecorded to provide a detailed record of the conversation, for which participants gave their permission. Participants were assured that their confidentiality would be protected through the use of pseudonyms in all written accounts of the interviews and by password-protecting all files related to the interview.

A general interview guide (Patton, 2002) was developed that contained open-ended questions (see Appendix B). The questions sought information related to how the presidents perceived their career paths and professional journeys, the glass ceiling in higher education, their preparation for the role of president, and how various factors influenced their leadership. The interview guide listed the questions to be asked in each

interview, but was flexible to allow for appropriate follow-up or clarifying questions and new questions that arose during each conversation.

Through the interviews, the researcher explored how participants "make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning" (Patton, 2002, p. 104). The interviews allowed participants to share their experiences and perceptions with the researcher to address each of the five research questions. In addition, the women shared insights or comments that they felt were germane to the study that were not specifically solicited by the interview questions.

<div align="center">Supporting Documents</div>

Data from documents supported and enhanced the data collected in the interviews. Documents provided information that might not be readily obvious to the researcher and also helped guide the line of inquiry (Patton, 2002). In this research study, documents provided information about the participants' career paths, preparedness to assume their presidential roles, and leadership styles.

A biographical sketch of each president was obtained from the institutional website. The online biographies provided information on the past professional experience of the participants, which directly addressed Research Question 2. In addition to the online biographies, the presidents were asked to provide their resume or curriculum vitae to the researcher to outline their professional career histories in detail. This allowed the researcher to look for similarities and differences in the administrative career paths pursued by the participants, further addressing Research Question 2. Information from the resumes and online biographies enabled the researcher to identify an administrative

career-path model and to compare that with other models in the literature (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001; Wessel & Keim, 1994).

The researcher requested that each participant provide the press release or formal announcement that was issued by the institution at the time of her appointment. These documents contributed further information about the professional background of the participants and their qualifications for the presidency. Research Question 3 explored the preparedness of the presidents to assume the role; the press releases revealed why the institution felt the president was the best qualified person to assume the responsibility of leadership. Data from the press releases were compared with interview responses of the presidents to provide information for Research Question 3.

Finally, documents that addressed the presidents' leadership styles (Research Question 5) were collected. A document authored by the president and available on the website, such as a welcome message or transcript of public remarks, was analyzed by the researcher to understand how the presidents communicated with public audiences.

<center>Validity and Reliability</center>

Qualitative studies, such as the present one, must address the issue of validity and reliability. Several authors have discussed the importance of validity in qualitative work and suggested steps that can be taken to ensure findings are accurate and reflective of what occurred in the research setting (Creswell, 2003; Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 2002). The researcher took several steps to ensure validity and reliability in this study.

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) defined reliability in qualitative research as a fit between what the researcher described and what actually transpired in the research setting. All dialogue during the interviews was audiorecorded and transcribed. Each

participant was sent an electronic copy of the transcript to review and check for accuracy. In instances where there were mistakes or errors, participants informed the researcher and provided corrections. The researcher listened to the audiorecording of that section of the interview and adjusted the transcript as necessary. Participants then had another opportunity to review the transcripts and confirm that all mistakes were corrected and the record was accurate.

Creswell suggested that researchers should "triangulate different data sources of information" (p. 196). In this study, the primary source of data was from the participants during the interviews; however, the researcher also collected supporting documents that were used to confirm or contradict themes that emerged in the interviews. The presidential biographies and resumes confirmed the data collected in the interviews about the participants' career paths and professional journeys. The external messages authored by the presidents served as a sample of their leadership and allowed the researcher to look for data that confirmed or contradicted how the women described themselves as leaders. The press releases issued from the institutions were analyzed to provide further data about the presidents' career paths, preparation for the role of president and leadership styles.

Patton (2002) and Creswell (2003) discussed the need for detailed and "thick" description. The researcher included many direct quotations from interviews and collected documents to enable readers to assess the legitimacy of the researcher's conclusions. The readers are better equipped to assess the accuracy of the researcher's findings when they are exposed to the primary source data that was collected during the study.

Maxwell (2005) identified a main validity threat in qualitative research as reactivity. Reactivity can be the result of the researcher coming into the research setting and causing the participants to alter their natural behavior. The researcher attempted to mitigate this validity threat by providing the participants with the interview questions at least one week in advance of the interviews so they had an opportunity to consider the questions and their responses when the researcher was not present.

Finally, participants engaged in "member-checking" (Creswell, 2003, p. 196) and had the opportunity to review the researcher's findings and provide feedback. Once the researcher developed initial responses to the research questions, participants received these early findings via e-mail. The female presidents were given time to review the findings, respond directly to the researcher with their thoughts about the conclusions, and offer contradictory opinions if they disagreed. This process helped ensure that the initial findings were accurate representations of the participants' perceptions and experiences.

Data Collection

The primary data were collected through the interviews with female presidents. The researcher used a general interview guide which consisted of open-ended questions. The same guide was used for each interview, although follow-up and probing questions differed slightly. With the permission of the participants, all interviews were audiorecorded and the recordings were transcribed.

Specific interview questions solicited the data needed to answer the research questions. The conceptual framework of career paths through higher education and literature about the experiences of women in the academy provided the background from which the researcher developed the interview questions. The questions were provided to

participants 1 week in advance of the interview to allow the participants adequate time to reflect on the questions and their responses. The interview questions that were employed to address the research questions are detailed below.

Research Question 1

What have been the professional journeys of female presidents of 4-year colleges or universities who pursued administrative career paths?

The interview questions related to this question were as follows:

- Would you describe your career path and progression?

- What barriers or obstacles have you experienced in your career progression?

- Who or what has been most helpful to you throughout your professional journey?

- What experiences, either personal or professional, were most important in your journey to the presidency?

Research Question 2

What are the perceptions of female presidents of 4-year colleges or universities of their administrative career paths and their future professional goals?

The interview questions related to this question are listed below:

- At what point in your career did you begin to think about being a university president?

- What was your ultimate professional goal when you began your career?

- What is your ultimate professional goal today?

- At what point in your career did you decide to pursue a path in higher education administration?

- Do you aspire to a position beside the one you currently hold?

- Would you encourage other women to seek a university or college presidency? Why or why not?

Research Question 3

What are the perceptions of female presidents of 4-year colleges or universities on the role of president and how well their administrative career paths prepared them to assume the presidency?

The interview questions related to this research question were as follows:

- What did you expect the role of president would be like? In what ways has your experience differed from your expectations?

- What aspects of the role of president do you find most challenging?

- What aspects of the role of president do you most enjoy?

- For what parts of the presidential job were you most prepared?

- For what parts of the presidential job were you least prepared?

- What do you believe to be the most important skill or skill set a president should possess?

- The majority of college presidents pursue an academic career path. In what ways was your administrative/nontraditional career path a benefit or a liability in your candidacy for president?

Research Question 4

What are the perceptions of female presidents of 4-year colleges or universities who pursued administrative career paths of the glass ceiling in higher education?

The interview questions related to this question follow:

- Reports have shown that only 20% of 4-year universities have a female president. Why do you think women continue to be underrepresented as university presidents?

- Do you perceive a glass ceiling in higher education?

- What do you perceive to be the barriers or obstacles women face in advancing in higher education?

- What, if anything, do you believe institutions should do to have more women in leadership positions?

- Can you describe an instance when you faced discrimination in your professional life because of your gender?

- Researchers have identified barriers that women face in pursuing academic careers in higher education. What do you perceive to be the barriers for women in higher- education administration?

Research Question 5

What factors influenced the leadership styles of female presidents of 4-year colleges or universities who pursued administrative career paths?

The interview questions related to this research question are listed below:

- How would you describe your leadership style?

- In what ways has your leadership style changed over the years?

- In what ways have you had to adapt your leadership style since assuming the presidency?

- How has your past professional experience influenced your leadership?

- What do you believe to be your strengths as a leader? How did you develop those strengths?

- What do you believe to be your weaknesses as a leader?

- What is the best professional decision you have made as president? Why was it the best?

- What is the worst professional decision you have made as president? Why was it the worst?

Prior to the interview, additional data were collected that were relevant to the research questions, specifically the resume of each participant and press releases from the university regarding the appointment of the presidents. The researcher also obtained online presidential biographies and public external messages or remarks. These data were used to verify primary data collected from the interviews and to triangulate findings.

Immediately following each interview, the researcher wrote an analytic memo (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) to capture thoughts and impressions of the interview, themes that emerged during the conversation, and initial insights on the research questions. In addition, the memos highlighted words or ideas that were repeated by participants during the interview or in multiple interviews; the researcher included some initial speculation as to the meaning and significance of these elements. These memos served to capture emerging ideas and assisted in the initial analysis of the data.

Data Analysis

The researcher followed the data analysis procedures described by Creswell (2003). First, the data were organized and prepared for analysis. After the interviews were completed, the researcher transcribed the interviews, electronically scanned the supporting documents, and organized all the data (transcripts, online presidential biographies, presidential resumes, press releases or announcements, and presidential welcome messages or speeches). The data were created as or transferred to Microsoft Word documents when possible. All data files were printed in hard copy, and a file was created for each participant.

The researcher sought to obtain a general sense of the data. The researcher conducted an initial reading of each participant's file in its entirety. During this initial reading, the researcher began to develop a list of "coding categories" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) from the text. The authors described coding categories as "words and phrases [that] represent topics and patterns" that emerge from the data (p. 161). Coding categories were derived from the contextual framework, research questions, and data collected in the interviews. The initial list of coding categories was extensive and included all comments or ideas that seem important or appeared in multiple sources; more than 330 coding categories were identified.

Next, the researcher identified relevant themes. This was accomplished by reviewing the coding categories to identify commonalities and areas of overlap, and from the literature on career paths in higher education and women in higher education. This process led the researcher to develop a list 25 themes that emerged from the coding categories and were present or absent in the extant literature. For example, the researcher

identified the theme of "fit," that was supported by the coding categories "both" (meaning fit depends on both an institution and a president), "culture" (meaning fit between the culture of a campus and the president's personality), and "skill" (meaning fit between presidential skill sets and institutional needs). The researcher developed a shorthand code for each theme and coding category, for example "fit-skill."

The third step in data analysis was the process of coding. The researcher again read the interview transcripts and supporting documents and used the highlighting function in Microsoft Word to apply colored highlights to sections of the text that corresponded with themes. For example, all data related to the theme of "career path" were coded yellow. In addition to applying a color highlight to relevant sections of the text, the researcher inserted the shorthand code that specified which theme and coding category the datum referenced.

After the data were highlighted with the appropriate color codes it was transferred to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The data analysis spreadsheet contained direct quotes from interview transcripts, the source of the text, participant, and shorthand code for the theme and coding category the data addressed. This allowed the researcher to review all the data connected to a theme and look for commonalities and similar experiences shared by participants (Creswell, 2003).

<div align="center">Background of the Researcher</div>

Qualitative research relies heavily on the researcher. According to Patton (2002), the researcher is the instrument in qualitative research. It is important to share with the reader the background and interests of the researcher that may have affected the gathering and interpretation of data.

The researcher has spent her career in higher education administration. As an undergraduate student, the researcher worked in the development department of her alma mater and upon graduation attained a position in the development office of another university. During her time in higher education administration, the researcher has gained insight into how universities function, how important decisions are made, and some of the tasks that occupy the president's time. She has also had the opportunity to work directly with the president of her institution on certain development activities.

The researcher earned a master's degree at the University of San Francisco in Nonprofit Administration. This program provided the researcher with an overview of the areas that an executive director of a nonprofit organization, including educational institutions, must be prepared to manage. It also afforded her the opportunity to more deeply explore her own institution and investigate such areas as human resources, financial management, legal issues, and board governance.

The academic and professional background of the researcher has given her insight into the administration of institutions of higher education. Throughout her doctoral studies in organization and leadership, the researcher has explored how issues of leadership intersect with gender. As a female who works in higher education administration, the researcher's interests in this study are professional, personal, and academic.

The following chapter will introduce the major findings of the study. Demographic data about the participants will be reviewed and specific findings related to the research questions will be presented.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

This study examined the perceptions of female presidents of 4-year colleges and universities who pursued administrative career paths in education. Specifically, the study explored their understanding of and reflections on their professional journeys, their administrative career paths and future goals, the role of the university president and their preparation for the role, the glass ceiling in higher education, and their leadership styles. Data were gathered from interviews and supporting documents, as detailed in the preceding chapter.

This chapter will provide a description of the participants in the study on both an aggregate and individual level. All participants have been assigned pseudonyms by the researcher. Following the profiles of the participants, findings from the study will be presented by research question. Major themes that emerged for each research question will provide a framework for discussion of the findings.

Participant Profile and Description

Nine women participated in this study. They currently serve as presidents of diverse colleges and universities located throughout the continental United States. At the time of the interviews, the women had been in their current presidency for 3 to 13 years, and 1 participant announced that she would retire at the end of this academic year. Two participants had previously served as presidents at other institutions and the remaining 7 women were in their first presidencies.

Table 1 provides an overview of the type of institution led by each president. The campuses were located in seven different states in the continental United States. Two campuses were in the Western United States, two were in the Midwest, three were located in the Northeast, and two campuses were in the South.

Table 1

Overview of Participants' Institutions

Participant	Basic classification	Control	Student population	Undergraduate student gender
President 1: Elizabeth	Master's colleges (medium programs)	Public	23,001	Male and Female
President 2: Kelly	Master's colleges & universities (larger programs)	Private	9,673	Male and Female
President 3: Leslie	Baccalaureate/ associate's colleges	Public	3,183	Male and Female
President 4: Ramona	Baccalaureate colleges—Arts & Sciences	Private	1,470	Male and Female
President 5: Mary	Master's colleges & universities (larger programs)	Private	5,166	Male and Female
President 6: Cathy	Special focus institutions—Business & management	Private	54	Female
President 7: Emma	Tribal colleges	Public	609	Male and Female
President 8: Laura	Baccalaureate colleges—Arts & Sciences	Private	1,057	Female
President 9: Lisa	Baccalaureate colleges—Diverse Fields	Private	2,262	Female

Note: Data obtained from *The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education,* by Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2011, retrieved from http://classifications .carnegiefoundation.org/

Although there was some diversity among the institutions in highest degree offered, none of the participants led a major research institution that offered a large number of doctoral degrees. The literature suggested that women are least likely to be

presidents of doctoral institutions (ACE, 2007; King & Gomez, 2008), and the sample of this study reflected that finding. The following section provides a more detailed description of each participant, her career path, and her insights on her role.

Overview of Participants

The 9 presidents who participated in the study were selected because they led a 4-year nonprofit college or university and had pursued an administrative career path to the presidency. None of the participants had ever held a tenured faculty position, which was a criterion for inclusion in the study. A detailed profile of each participant follows, presented in the order in which they were interviewed. The names of the participants used in this study are pseudonyms.

President 1: Elizabeth

> I do this job because I have a real commitment to this institution and to what it can do, to the impact it has for our students and their lives. I'm watching this institution just continue to grow in its ability to provide an excellent educational experience for students. … So for me, it's about the experience of the campus and the students and what we do here. (Elizabeth)

Elizabeth spent nearly 30 years at the institution she now leads, a public state university that serves more than 20,000 students. Elizabeth earned her bachelor's degree in education with the intention of becoming a secondary school teacher. She earned a master's shortly thereafter and began working as an education coordinator for a specialized program at a university. On beginning her career in higher education she aspired to the role of dean of continuing education. Elizabeth moved to her present institution in the early 1980s as director of outreach education. In that role she was charged with building community partnerships, which ultimately became a vice-presidential role. During a time of budget reductions, Elizabeth's role was merged with

the vice president of university relations and she began to oversee alumni relations, development, communications, and government and community relations.

Elizabeth attributed her success to her approach of always "trying to do a really good job of whatever I was doing at that point in time. And then opportunities would open up for the next step. That's served me well." She believed her attitude is shared by many women who view their career path as part of a larger journey, rather than a series of steps aimed at achieving an ultimate position or title. Elizabeth repeatedly used the word "journey" to describe her professional advancement and suggested that was how many women viewed their careers.

Elizabeth is married and has children. She commented that women need to be "thoughtful about what's important for them and what the balance is" between career and other priorities, such as family. Elizabeth reflected that throughout her career she has intentionally prioritized family or career, and that balance has shifted at different points.

President 2: Kelly

> You want people to look at your resume and say, well, they have it all. I would think about that as I was doing things. If you look at my resume you'll see I've done enrollment, you'll see that I've taught business law, you'll see that I've been on the faculty senate, you'll see that I've helped raise money. The areas where they might have questions about it, I've actually done some of those things. And I think that's important. (Kelly)

Kelly was the only participant who set the goal of becoming a university president early in her career. She entered the pharmaceutical industry after completing her undergraduate education, and then went on to earn a master's of business administration doctor of jurisprudence. Following law school, the university from which she earned her degree asked her to take the role of university attorney. From that time, Kelly set her

sights on the position of president. She described an intense desire to "achieve as much as I can achieve" that began early in her childhood.

When asked about the existence of a glass ceiling in higher education, Kelly was quick to say she did not perceive such a barrier. She explored the concept of the glass ceiling in her doctoral dissertation and found that participants in her study felt the glass ceiling had been shattered. In reference to her own career progression, Kelly commented that "sometimes I find that people that think there's a glass ceiling are people that haven't gotten to the level they want to be. Maybe they have experienced a glass ceiling and I have been lucky." She also reflected that her preparation, willingness to work long hours, and ability to balance multiple priorities have attributed to her success.

Kelly is a mother of three children and has a husband who is a partner in a law firm. She commented repeatedly during the interview that her husband was a "really good partner" who shared equally in the responsibilities of raising their children. She acknowledged it was challenging to have both spouses work full time when their children were young, but stated that "my family has always been the most important thing to me."

President 3: Leslie

> I have the best job in the world. Where else do you work only with smart people? Because it's a college community, they're well-educated, they're smart people. Where else are you around young people where you get energized? They just crack me up. Where do you spend your career where you make a difference in people's lives? I mean, how cool. It's an important thing you do and it's fun. So it's a pretty cool job. (Leslie)

Leslie was the president of a public technical college which was part of a state-university system. She had been in the role for nearly 12 years and expressed passion for her institution and her job. Both of Leslie's parents earned Ph.D.s and worked in education, so the value of higher education was instilled in Leslie from childhood.

Leslie completed her master's degree immediately after finishing her

baccalaureate degree, both in the field of speech. She began working in higher education

as a part-time faculty member at a 2-year college and was asked by the president to move

into faculty development and coaching. A short time later, she was asked to oversee the

admissions office. While she had no training or experience in admissions, she took the

opportunity and had great success. From that time her administrative career was focused

in enrollment management, including working part-time for a national enrollment

management consulting firm. Later in her career Leslie earned a Ph.D.

Leslie commented on the importance of fit between an institution and a president,

and suggested that part of why she was hired was that she had a skill set the college

needed. Leslie commented, "They were having terrible enrollment problems. And I make

the joke that they could not afford to hire me as a consultant, so they hired me as

president because they knew that they were getting that expertise."

Leslie is married and has three adult children. Several times during the interview

she mentioned how supportive her husband has been throughout her career and since she

became president. He was a tenured faculty member and retired when Leslie accepted the

presidency.

President 4: Ramona

> I like to take things apart and rebuild them in a better way. And I have an ample
> opportunity to do that here, so it's kind of the best career I could have chosen. I
> like problem solving and this is a great job if you like to solve problems, if you
> like to make it better, so many chances, you know, so many opportunities to do
> that. (Ramona)

Ramona's career began as a researcher in a medical and healthcare center that was

part of a university campus. Her first position in higher education was in institutional

research, which she soon found to be "as boring as it could possibly be." Shortly

thereafter, the president of that university recognized Ramona's talent and gave her additional responsibilities, culminating in the position of assistant to the president. Ramona is in her third year as president of a private liberal arts college. She expressed deep concern about the current state of higher education in the United States, particularly around the issue of affordability. She reflected,

> I think there are a lot of institutions that are not going to make it this time around. It's the double whammy of this economic downturn and deflated values of endowments and the decrease in number of kids that are able to pay. It's a devastating blow to colleges that are built on the [financial] models that many [colleges] are. (Ramona)

Ramona suggested that higher education had been slow to view itself as a business and apply business skills, such as marketing, and developing a sustainable cost structure. She suggested that the dire economic situation faced by many institutions may open the door for nontraditional presidents who come from the business side of higher education.

Ramona and her spouse have two children, one in college and one still in high school. Ramona felt that spending enough time with her family was one of the greatest challenges for her as president.

President 5: Mary

> At heart I describe myself as a teacher. I'm an educator, and I've always stayed on that path. I've just done it in a rather nontraditional way and it's never been a factor. No one has ever questioned my academic credentials, which is interesting. (Mary)

Mary planned to be a high school English teacher when she completed her undergraduate education. She taught for several years, and then was asked by the principal of the school to implement a program in public relations and development. Beginning with that experience, her teaching career transitioned to a fundraising and

external-relations trajectory. Mary served as the executive director for several arts

organizations in different parts of the country, using her development experience and

gaining important management and financial skills.

After relocating for her husband's job, Mary took a position at a local university

in their advancement department. She served as vice president for advancement at two

institutions, and went back to earn her master's and doctoral degrees in education. Mary

is currently in her second presidency.

Mary is married to a husband she describes as "incredibly supportive" and they

have a son. She was clear in stating that she did not believe barriers or obstacles

encountered by people in their career are gender related. In reflecting on the barriers

often cited by women, she stated "I can match them barrier for barrier, and I just didn't

let it stop me because I really wanted it" (Mary).

President 6: Cathy

> You want to do meaningful work. It's you and a whole bunch of people who have
> been hugely supportive. You know, at the end of the day you want to know you're
> doing something that's honest, something that you truly believe is worth it. That's
> a huge gift to be able to have. (Cathy)

Cathy was the only participant who came directly into higher education as a

president. Her administrative career experience was at the secondary-education level. She

was recruited from a position as dean of students at a private high school to her current

presidency, where she had served for 13 years.

Cathy majored in art history as an undergraduate student and planned to work for

a museum or art gallery. She was hired at a museum and quickly "found out that was

boring for me" and transitioned to director of admissions for a high school. She was

promoted through the administrative ranks at two private high schools and earned her master's degree. She completed her Ph.D. after becoming a college president.

During the interview, Cathy reflected on the tendency of women to say they "fell into" careers. Cathy observed that there is a tremendous amount of preparation required for leadership roles. She reflected, "Women tend to say, 'Oh, I just fell into it.' Well, you just fell into it with a Ph.D. and prepared … so you didn't really just fall into it" (Cathy). Cathy's career path, although different from the majority of college presidents, prepared her to lead her college. Cathy is the only participant who never married or had children.

President 7: Emma

> I am a person who believes the creator guides your path, the creator guides your path and I am very grateful that the creator took me down this path of education and working in education. (Emma)

Emma was the president of a tribal college and a member of a Native American tribe. She was the only minority participant in this study. Her professional work had always focused on tribal people and mostly on the education of tribal people. She began her career as a teacher at the 2-year college located on the reservation where she grew up. She worked in tribal secondary schools and colleges and built a broad portfolio of administrative roles. Emma never earned a doctoral degree, although she considered it at different points in her career.

Emma expressed a commitment to regularly engaging in scholarly activity including teaching, publishing, and giving presentations. She felt it was important for college presidents to teach, "because how can you really know what a teacher experiences if you don't ever teach?" Emma described her understanding of teaching as an "advantage" in being a president.

Emma is married to her second husband and has adult children and grandchildren. She described her extended family as a tremendous source of support for her and one of her main priorities.

<p style="text-align: center;">*President 8: Laura*</p>

> I love the people I've met that I probably would not have met if I wasn't in this role, including other college presidents, including trustees, including community leaders, including faculty, students. I love the different constituencies. I love interacting with all of them. (Laura)

Laura was in her second presidency when she participated in the interview. She became involved in higher education administration immediately after completing her undergraduate degree when her alma mater asked her to serve on the board of trustees as the young alumni representative. That experience exposed her to the issues associated with running an institution and sparked her interest in student affairs. As soon as she completed her term, she sought a position as dean of students. There was not an opening at that time, so the president asked her to consider a role in fundraising.

Laura's career in higher education administration spanned both development and student affairs. She served as associate dean of students and held the position of vice president for advancement at two institutions prior to becoming a president. She reflected that her extensive administrative experience helped her to be an effective president, but noted that "There is no best president; it's an effective president at that institution at that time" (Laura).

Laura never earned a doctorate, although she has received two honorary doctorates. She cited not earning a doctorate as her "greatest regret" and acknowledged that it limited the institutions that would consider her for the presidency. Laura is married and has three adult children.

President 9: Lisa

> Part of the pluses about being a president in a smaller institution is I didn't have to get away from dealing with students, which you would have done at a big institution. Here I can be involved with students as much as I want to be, which is fun. I enjoy that. (Lisa)

Lisa spent much of her career in the student affairs area of higher education. Early in her career she taught at a community college and realized that she preferred interacting with students outside of the classroom over teaching them in the classroom. As president, Lisa continued to teach as her schedule permitted, including teaching a freshman seminar.

Lisa began as the director of counseling and student services and worked up to the position of vice president for student affairs. Prior to being recruited for the presidency she oversaw the student affairs division at a major research university in the Midwest.

Lisa had served as president for 12 years and this year announced she would retire at the close of the academic year. She reflected that "it's always good to leave when you feel like there are people who still want you to stay. You don't want to leave in anger or disappointment or in tension with your board, with your colleagues" (Lisa). After a sabbatical, Lisa intends to return and teach at her college. Lisa is married and has children.

The participants were a diverse group in types of institution they led, years in the presidency, and age. They were similar in that none had ever held a tenured faculty role at a college or university, although many of them had taught at some point and 7 of the 9 had earned doctorates. Each participant was open and thoughtful during the interview and provided rich data related to the research questions. The following sections will summarize the major findings for each research question, organized by themes that emerged from the data.

Findings: Research Question 1

The first research question in the study was: *What have been the professional journeys of female presidents of 4-year colleges or universities who pursued administrative career paths?* This question sought to understand the major decision points the presidents faced along their path, the personal and professional considerations that influenced their career progression, and who or what supported their advancement. The major themes the emerged from the collected data were Seizing Opportunities, Academic Credibility, and Important People: Spouses, Mentors, and Networks.

Seizing Opportunities

When reflecting on their career progression, all participants identified opportunities they had been given that they believed were critical to gaining the necessary experience to become a president. The participants felt that opportunities arose as a result of their hard work. Ramona commented, "I guess the best way to describe it is I took the work that I had accepted and I did it as well as I possibly could, and that always led to another opportunity." Elizabeth expressed a similar sentiment:

> What I've always done is focus on trying to do a really good job of whatever I was doing at that point in time. And then feeling like opportunities would open up for the next step I would make in my career. And that's served me well. And clearly the opportunities I've had along the way are just amazing. (Elizabeth)

In several instances, the opportunities that were offered to the women allowed them to broaden their skill set. Six participants identified a time in their career when they had the occasion to move to an area of responsibility in which they had no prior experience. Leslie recalled two instances when she was able to broaden her portfolio: when she was teaching in a 2-year college she was asked to take over faculty development, and perhaps more importantly to her career progression, she was later

asked by the president to oversee admissions. She recalled, "I said, 'Well, geeze, I don't know anything about admissions and I don't know anything about doing that.' And he said, 'Well, I think you'd be really good'" (Leslie). Leslie's immediate prior role before the presidency was vice president of enrollment services.

Mary also had the opportunity to broaden her skill set by accepting new assignments. When she was working as a high school teacher…

> the head master came and said "we need a program of public relations for the school because we want to grow." I said, "I don't know anything about PR, why are you talking to me?" And he said, "I think you can do it." (Mary)

From that point her career transitioned from teaching to public relations and fundraising; her first role in higher education was vice president of advancement.

Ramona was working as the associate director of institutional research when the president recognized her talent. She recalled that

> I worked for a president who saw what I had to offer. When I started to get restless he moved me from that space and invited me to do some other things, and ultimately I ended up being his executive assistant. (Ramona)

Ramona accepted different roles in the institution when opportunities arose and, through those experiences, gained insight into different aspects of higher education.

Laura also was given the chance to explore different administrative arms of higher education early in her career. She approached the president of her alma mater to seek a job in student affairs. He informed her that there were no openings in that department, but said he could hire her for a development role. "So, I didn't know what development was or fundraising was. But I ended up starting as assistant director of corporate relations" (Laura). Laura held several fundraising positions of increasing responsibility, and later worked in student affairs.

Kelly and Emma were recruited internally to pursue diverse opportunities. Kelly was serving as university attorney when she was asked by the president "to put together this one stop shopping, which is bursar, registrar, and financial aid." Emma was teaching full time when "the college offered me a job in strategic planning."

In each instance, the women were given opportunities to move within the organization to an administrative area where they had not previously worked. These experiences were important in helping the women build the broad and diverse portfolios that made them viable presidential candidates and equipped them with an understanding of multiple aspects of institutional management.

An important element of their career progression was that these women were not afraid to try something new and seize the opportunities presented to them. Leslie reflected that "people kept pushing me through doors that opened. And at the time they didn't seem to be huge risks to me, so why wouldn't I jump through?" Other participants described having a "high tolerance for risk" (Mary) and not being "afraid to try something new" (Ramona). This personality trait of comfort with risk allowed the presidents to take advantage of opportunities in their careers and ultimately helped them to achieve presidencies.

Academic Credibility

The presidents in this sample were chosen because the majority of their careers had been spent in higher education administration and they had never served as tenured faculty members. Although they did not pursue the traditional academic path, all of the women discussed the importance of understanding the academic enterprise and having

credibility with faculty. The role of president, although not necessarily academic in nature, seemed to require familiarity with teaching and learning.

Each president in the sample touched on the importance of having academic credibility to be an effective president. Elizabeth suggested that women who have pursued administrative career paths should engage in the academic mission of the college or university.

> I think it's important if you are a nontraditional candidate to have kind of reached over and done some things that, you know, teach, try to take opportunities to teach a class. Work on some things in the institution that have an academic orientation so you're able to talk about how you worked with academics and helped move some kind of academic agenda forward in the institution. (Elizabeth)

Emma stated that "to be a president of a college, you have to have some academic understanding. Especially today, because it's all about public accountability, assessment, student learning. … You have to be able to speak to those kinds of issues."

Cathy also commented on the importance of presidents being very familiar with the core mission of colleges and universities; further, she suggested that administrative presidents should know where they fit in the academic picture. "I think you really have to understand and respect how higher education works traditionally in order to be able to recognize where you are and where you're not in that" (Cathy). Cathy opined that it was important for administrative presidents to have an understanding of academe but recognize that they were not the primary academics on campus.

Although many presidents rely on the provost or chief academic officer to manage the details of the academic arm, participants suggested that it is important for all presidents to be grounded in the primary work of higher education. Leslie stated, "I think the two minimum credentials for a college president, regardless of their discipline, are teaching and an earned doctorate." The other participants shared Leslie's interpretation of

the importance of those two academic experiences, and the majority of the women had

done one or both. The academic experience of the administrative presidents is

summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Academic Experience and Credentials of Participants

Participant	Earned doctorate	Discipline	Honorary doctorate	Teaching experience
President 1: Elizabeth	Ed.D.	Education administration	No	Yes
President 2: Kelly	Ed.D.	Education administration	No	Yes
President 3: Leslie	Ph.D.	Higher education administration	No	Yes
President 4: Ramona	D.M.	Management	No	Yes
President 5: Mary	Ed.D.	Educational leadership	Yes	Yes
President 6: Cathy	Ph.D.	Educational policy	No	No
President 7: Emma	n/a	n/a	Yes	Yes
President 8: Laura	n/a	n/a	Yes (2)	No
President 9: Lisa	Ed.D.	Higher education administration	No	Yes

Six participants suggested that teaching was a valuable way to understand the

academic aspect of higher education. Leslie felt that her experience teaching in a 2-year

college made her a more effective president. She stated, "I think that you have to have

credibility with the faculty. And even though I don't manage the academics day to day, I

understand what they do, I respect what they do, I know what hard work it is" (Leslie).

Lisa also made it a priority to teach. She recalled, "I struggled to [teach], to make time to

do that but I thought it was good for me to be in the classroom" (Lisa).

The other critical academic credential identified by the participants was a doctoral degree. Mary recognized that earning a terminal degree would be important to her career advancement; when she accepted a position as vice president of university advancement she included in her negotiations the understanding that she would enroll in the doctoral program. Cathy reflected that she "felt like I had to get [a doctorate]" even though she was a president prior to completing her Ph.D.

Kelly, who already held an M.B.A. and a J.D., went back to earn a doctorate in education "because I felt like wherever I went I always felt that I wanted to be in the position to run the company." Kelly viewed a doctoral degree as a necessary prerequisite to becoming a president. Elizabeth shared Kelly's feelings and recalled, "I wanted to stay in higher education. That's when I went and got my doctorate, because I knew in order to stay in higher education that I had to do that."

Laura, one of two presidents in the sample who did not have a doctorate, agreed it was important. "The liability is that most search committees and most faculties expect the president to have a Ph.D. And that's an appropriate expectation. I wish I had finished mine. That's my greatest regret" (Laura). Laura received two honorary doctorates. Emma, the other president without a doctorate, reported that she encourages her staff to earn a doctorate:

> I've encouraged [my staff] to pursue their doctorates in the event that they eventually want to be a candidate for this job. Not because they have to have it to be qualified, but because I think other people think they have to have it to be qualified. (Emma)

All 9 participants commented on the importance of earning a doctoral degree for all presidents, including those who pursue administrative career paths. It was acknowledged that going back to school for a doctorate can be a challenge, particularly

for women. Leslie recalled, "I was working full-time, I had three young children, and going to school full-time" and shared a story of falling asleep while hosting a dinner party because she was so exhausted. Lisa acknowledged,

> If you don't go straight through for a doctorate, making that call to go back is a hard one. And getting back into that rhythm of poverty and subservience, which I think is problematic in and of itself, and that probably limits the women on the administrative side. (Lisa)

All of the women who held doctorates earned them in part-time programs while working full-time.

There was consensus across all interviews about the need to establish academic credibility when a president has spent his or her career on the administrative side of higher education. Teaching and earning a doctorate were perceived to be the two most important elements in establishing academic credibility.

<center>Important People: Spouses, Mentors, and Networks</center>

The participants were asked to reflect on which individuals or experiences had been most helpful to them during their professional journeys. The women credited several people with helping them achieve the presidency and enabling them to be effective in the role. The women identified their spouses, mentors, and networks as important influences in their professional journeys.

Eight of the 9 women in this study were married and had children. The president who was unmarried, Cathy, had never been married nor had children. Five presidents listed the supportiveness of their spouses as one of the most important elements of their professional journey.

The presidents observed that the decision to take on a presidency is often a family decision. Cathy observed that "I think for it to work, to take on a job like this you and

your husband would have to agree that this will work." Lisa expressed a similar notion and commented that "for most people, moving into a presidency is a family choice. It's not just an impact on the presidents; the spouse and if there are kids at home, they're under the microscope."

Five of the women shared that their husbands had been incredibly supportive of their careers and they stated that the support provided by their spouses had been important to their success. Mary commented that "everyone needs someone, whoever that is, who will stick with you through all of it" and said her husband has been that person for her. Kelly advised that "you have to make sure if you have a partner, you have a really good partner." Her husband is a partner in a law firm and shared equally in helping raise their three children.

The majority of the presidents commented that it is still relatively uncommon in American society for the male spouse to be the "trailing spouse" (Lisa) and for the female to hold a job with higher authority and pay. They acknowledged that their husbands' comfort with their presidential role was unusual. Mary stated that female presidents need "someone who isn't threatened by it. I can't tell you how many times we've been in receiving lines and people didn't know who was the president and they think it is [my husband] every time."

Emma is married to her second husband and described him as "a guy who is not at all threatened by a woman in power, which is nice. I know that lots of women struggle with that. I've been lucky that I haven't had to struggle with that." The married presidents mentioned their spouse's support and willingness to not be the one in the spotlight as being important in their career advancement.

Lisa's husband retired when she accepted the presidency and now manages much of their domestic life. Lisa noted that people will make comments about their arrangement:

> I think that people still look puzzled when they hear the husband is more the caregiver to the children or does the shopping and the cooking and things like that. And people say, "Oh, aren't you lucky?" Instead of saying, "Isn't he lucky to have a wife bringing in the big bucks?" (Lisa)

Lisa commented that people often joke with her husband and ask how they can get a job like his. She reported that her husband is "fairly comfortable with that by now" but that it "is still a major issue" for married women who aspire to the presidency.

Leslie's husband also retired when she became president. She stated that although her husband "is as supportive and helpful as they come" he is not like a "wife." While her husband manages most of the daily domestic tasks, she still does things a male president with a spouse at home might not.

> When we hold events at the house, who goes home and gets the house ready? It's me. Now I cannot believe that a male president would do that. I just can't believe he'd be arranging the tablecloth and moving chairs and making sure there was room in the refrigerator for the caterer. And I wouldn't dream of asking my husband to do that because he doesn't work for the university. … I just can't imagine my saying, "Well, honey, the guests are going to be here at 4:00 so have everything ready." (Leslie)

The presidents were grateful for the support their spouses provided. They acknowledged that their husbands were true partners who shared in domestic responsibilities. Further, the women believed that their husbands were not stereotypical males and were comfortable being married to women with high-powered jobs.

The other people that the presidents identified as playing an important role in their professional journeys were mentors. Seven presidents discussed specific individuals who had provided advice or opportunities during their careers. Elizabeth stated, "I've been

fortunate to have people who I think were mentors and sponsors and that's made a real difference for me." Ramona reflected that "I was very open to mentoring and I was fortunate to have people who saw who I was and what I could offer, and try to leverage that for the good of the institution."

In many cases, those mentors were people, typically men, to whom the women reported at one point during their careers. Six women described having male bosses as mentors. Laura stated, "I've worked for some great people who've cared about me and been supportive, let me do things, encouraged me to do things, let me take chances, let me fail." Leslie echoed that sentiment and described the president she reported to at her previous institution as someone who was "visionary and provided me with enormous experiences and opportunities." Mary described her previous boss as "a wonderful role model, very supportive, and allowed me to take on these new responsibilities and encouraged me."

Elizabeth made a connection between the importance of mentors and preparing for a presidency. "The president that I worked for was a very inclusive president. He really worked with the management team. … That experience was extremely important in preparing me for this role" (Elizabeth). Mary stated that she tried to work with her team in that way and help prepare them for future leadership roles.

Cathy noted that it is important to have mentors while in a presidency. "Mentors, I think, are something that is really important for people when they're … taking on a job that has a lot of responsibility that can become all-encompassing" (Cathy). She described being introduced to a mentor soon after becoming president and felt that experience was helpful for her.

In addition to mentors, the presidents suggested that building a broad network was important to career success and progression. "It's really very important to build relationships with a wide group of people. Because people can help you solve problems, find ways to get things done, bring together the right people that can help you advance an agenda" (Elizabeth). Cathy commented on the importance of having "that intellectual kitchen cabinet" of people to call on to brainstorm or advise.

Lisa also stated that her network has included helpful advisors:

> I have a core group of colleagues that I've been through a lot with and they have been advisors. Some of them moved about the same time I did into presidencies, so we've been dealing with the same set of issues. (Lisa)

The presidents shared that their networks included other presidents who understood the challenges they faced and helped develop solutions.

In addition to serving as advisors, people in the presidents' networks also helped their career advancement. Three of the presidents were recruited or referred to their current roles by someone in their network. Laura was approached by a personnel recruiter she had known for many years for her first presidency; she reflected that "the network, the people whom you know, really matters." Cathy and Kelly were both approached by someone they knew and asked to apply for the presidency. Kelly stated, "I didn't go through an interview process or anything; they just named me. That's very unusual." The value of personal networks, both for advising and professional advancement, was cited by 6 participants.

Summary of Research Question 1 Findings

The first research question explored the professional journeys of the participants. The first theme that emerged in this area was the importance of opportunities that were presented to the women that allowed them to oversee different parts of the institution and

broaden their experience. Their willingness to take risks and try new things made the opportunities meaningful. The women believed those experiences of working in a variety of areas helped them reach the position of president and be effective in the role.

The need for academic credibility, specifically through teaching experience and earning a doctorate, was clearly articulated by every participant. Although these women were selected for the study because they had not pursued the traditional academic path, they all felt it was critical to have a deep understanding of and respect for the academic enterprise.

Finally, the important role played by spouses, mentors, and networks in the participants' career progression was explored. The women credited their spouses as valuable sources of personal support. Mentors and networks were cited by participants as playing a role in their career progression and effectiveness as presidents.

<div align="center">Findings: Research Question 2</div>

The second research question that guided this study was: *What are the perceptions of female presidents of 4-year colleges or universities of their administrative career paths and their future professional goals?* This question explored the specific positions held by the participants to determine if a model of an administrative career path could be developed. It also probed the professional goals the women had throughout their careers as well as future career aspirations. The themes that emerged that will organize this section are Early Career Path and Goals, Administrative Experience and Strategic Career Building, and Future Career Goals.

Early Career Path and Goals

The presidents reflected on their career aspirations and intentions when they first entered the workforce after completing their undergraduate degrees. Several participants suggested that they did not have a clear goal or career plan when they were young; rather, it was by taking advantage of opportunities that they were able to reach the level of president. "A lot of the women I know that are college presidents never said at the beginning of their career they wanted to be a college president" (Lisa). Lisa's observation was echoed by other participants. Leslie noted that she did not "have a formal career plan" and that her goal was always "to do the job I was doing."

Four of the 9 participants began their careers as teachers or had the goal of becoming a teacher. Mary recalled, "I wanted to teach high school English; that was my stated goal." Elizabeth also intended to teach at the secondary level; there were no jobs available at that time so she pursued a master's degree. Lisa and Leslie both taught at the college level at 2-year institutions. Lisa taught for a semester and realized, "I loved being on a college campus. I really liked dealing with the students out of the classroom instead of in the classroom."

The other 4 participants began their careers outside the realm of education. Cathy, an art-history major, planned to manage a museum or art gallery. Emma grew up on a Native American reservation and intended to work with tribal people in economic development. Kelly was hired at a pharmaceutical company after graduating from college and then went to law school. Ramona studied experimental psychology and worked as a research assistant in a medical research center at a university; her master's degree was in medical sociology and she considered pursing a doctorate in the medical field.

Laura was the only participant who pursued an administrative career in higher education from the beginning. She served as the young alumni representative on her alma mater's board of trustees and that experience "confirmed and cemented my own commitment to my choice of career, which is a career in higher education administration." She considered teaching, but realized "pretty early on that I was a practical person who likes to 'do,' and I was more interested in doing higher education than studying higher education."

The participants held different entry positions in higher education, but over time followed similar paths. Figure 1 illustrates the administrative career path traveled by 7 of the 9 participants. Elizabeth's first position in higher education was as an education coordinator, she then advanced to associate dean of continuing education and assistant vice president for community partnerships, followed by vice president for advancement immediately prior to becoming president. Kelly entered the university setting as a university attorney, advanced to vice president and chief operating officer, followed by vice chancellor and chief financial officer before the presidency. Leslie's career in higher education began as an adjunct faculty member from which she was promoted to dean of admissions, and then served as vice president of enrollment services before becoming president. Ramona's first role in higher education was as associate director of institutional research; her two prior roles before president were vice president for admission and financial aid and vice president for enrollment and communications. Emma progressed from part-time faculty member to dean of instructional programs to vice president of administration to president. Laura entered higher education as associate director in development, was promoted to assistant vice president and then vice president

for advancement prior to the presidency. Lisa's career path began as director of counseling and student services, followed by vice provost of student affairs and then vice president of student affairs. The career paths of these 7 women are captured in Figure 1.

Two participants had career paths that did not exactly fit the model outlined in Figure 1. Cathy's first role in higher education was the presidency. She was recruited from a career in secondary school administration directly into a college presidency; however, her administrative career path in secondary education follows the illustration in Figure 1. She entered the field of education as a director of admissions, followed by assistant head of school and then dean of students. Mary's career spanned secondary education, higher education and the arts. She began her career as a high school teacher and then transitioned to do development and public relations work for arts organizations. Mary's first position in higher education was vice president of advancement, a role she held at two institutions before becoming president.

The majority of participants first held entry or midlevel positions in various administrative disciplines in higher education with the title of coordinator, adjunct or part-time faculty, assistant or associate director, or director. Over time, the women were promoted to assistant vice president or dean roles, and all participants except 1 held the position of vice president immediately prior to becoming a president. The woman who did not come from a vice presidency, Cathy, held the title of dean of students immediately prior to the presidency.

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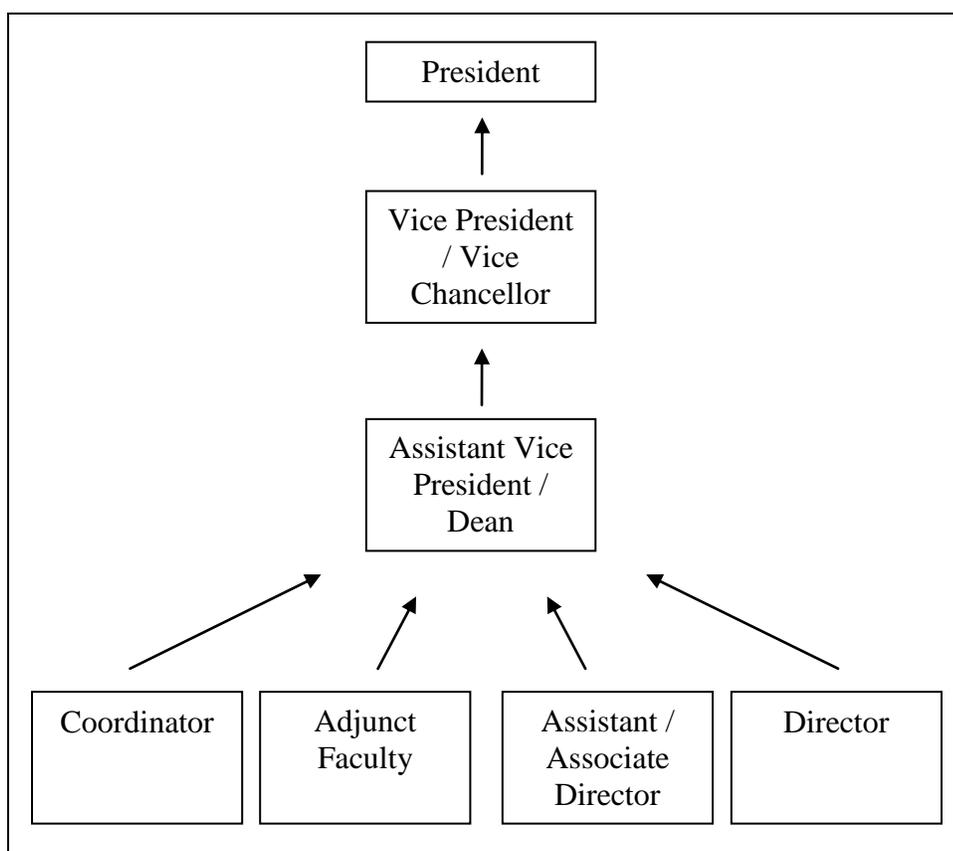
Figure 1. Administrative career path to the presidency pursued by participants.
The bottom level is the first position held in higher education. The model applies to 7 of
the 9 participants; one came into higher education as president and one as vice president.

As they advanced in their careers, the participants achieved their early leadership

goals. "My goal in my 30s was to become a vice president for university relations. …

Once I got the job, it was to be that same job at a better place" (Laura). Lisa also

achieved her goal position early in her career:

> My great goal in my doctoral program was to be a dean of students and I was a
> dean of students when I was 31, and I said, "Oh God, what am I going to do now?
> This job for the next 30 years?" (Lisa)

Mary suggested that the vice presidency is an important step in the career path of

a president:

> I think being a vice president is a very important launching pad for a presidency,
> no matter what the vice presidency is in. Could be in finance, could be in student

affairs, could be academic. More likely than not, it will be the academic path, but more and more you're seeing people coming out of development, fundraising, because they have the people skills. (Mary)

The women began their careers largely without a clear path in mind, in different industries, and with varying goals. As they moved into higher education they aspired to administrative deanships and vice presidencies. Many of the women reached those goals early in their careers and then began broadening their experience.

Administrative Experience and Strategic Career Development

The participants began to see themselves as presidential candidates at different points in their careers. Four participants began to think of themselves in presidential roles once they were in positions that worked closely with the president. The women served as vice presidents and had an opportunity to observe presidents, and realized they had the necessary skill sets and experiences. Emma recalled, "In the middle of the VP of administration I thought I could do a president's role." Ramona also began to consider a presidency after serving as a vice president. "I really re-visited the idea [of being a president] after I had been a vice president for about 8 years. It was about my 8th year I started to think about, well, what was I going to do next?" (Ramona).

Mary benefited from the opportunity to observe multiple presidents when she worked for a consortium of independent colleges. "I had worked with 10 college and university presidents at the time. So I was able not only to see … I had 10 examples and they were all different, and they all had different styles" (Mary). Her role with the consortia was valuable in helping her to envision herself as a president.

In addition to serving as a vice president, Leslie also worked part-time for a national education consulting firm. The experience of working with many presidents led her to consider taking on the role.

In consulting I had an opportunity to be around presidents a lot and I was kind of cataloguing [how they handled the role] in my mind. … When I look back on it, I realize that all of a sudden I went into sort of assessing their presidency. (Leslie)

For 4 of the participants, proximity to the presidency was an important factor in their ability to see themselves in the role. For others, they did not consider themselves presidential candidates until someone else suggested it to them. Cathy stated that she never thought about the presidency until she was contacted by a search committee.

I remember saying, "What's the position?" And they said, "Well, it's the president." And I was like, "Oh." I didn't even do student council or anything. You know, it was one of those things. So basically, yeah, [I considered becoming a president for the first time] when I got into the search process. (Cathy)

Lisa thought she would retire from the position she held as vice president for student affairs until she was contacted by a personnel recruiter about a presidential position. Laura reflected that "I didn't think of myself in the role of president until other people told me they saw me in that role."

Only 1 participant, Kelly, set a goal of becoming a president as soon as she began working in higher education. She described herself as someone who has always wanted to "achieve as much as I can achieve." She reflected that "I never felt it was good enough if I didn't get to a level that was the top. And that was, that was just self-imposed pressure. It really wasn't parental pressure or anything, just self-imposed" (Kelly). Kelly was the second-youngest female president in the sample.

The women held leadership roles in a variety of administrative disciplines prior to becoming presidents. Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of areas of administrative experience of the participants.
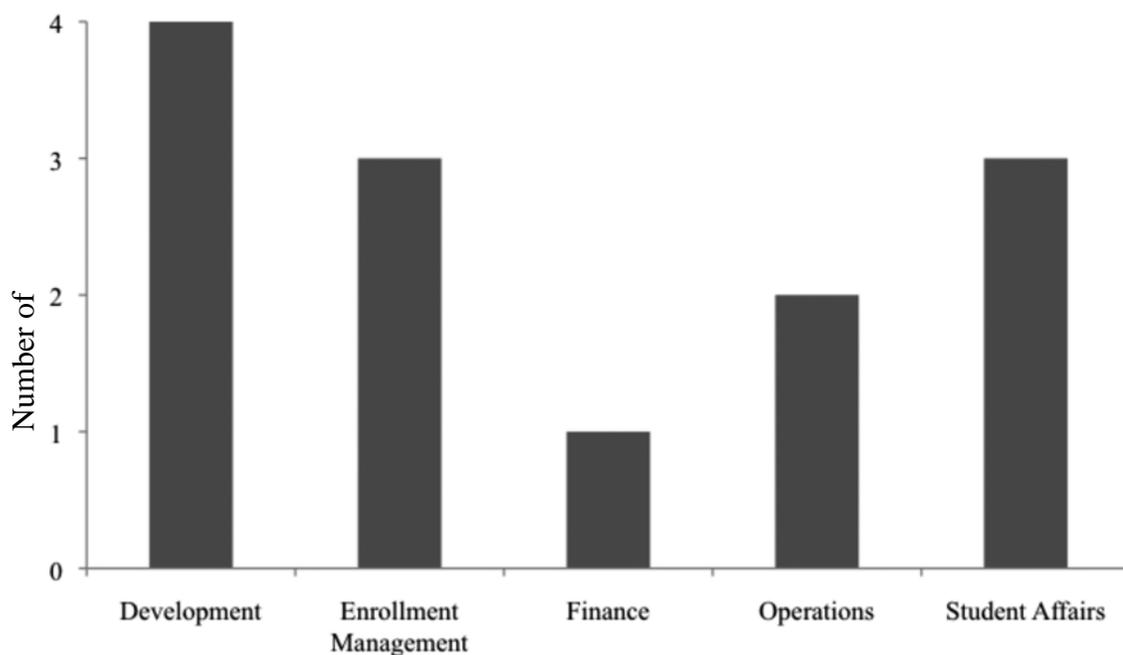
Figure 2. Distribution of administrative disciplines of participants. Some participants had experience in more than one administrative area.

Four of the participants held positions in more than one administrative discipline. Kelly had experience in finance and operations, Cathy had overseen student affairs and enrollment management, Emma had worked in operations and advancement, and Laura held positions in both advancement and student affairs.

Several of the participants intentionally sought experiences that would broaden their skill set and understanding of different aspects of higher education. Mary recalled, "I was like a hungry dog with a bone. Every time that a new project came up that no one wanted, I'd say, 'Oh, can I have that please?'" Volunteering to manage projects that involved multiple areas of the campus helped her build a diverse resume. Mary focused on gaining broad administrative experiences, as well as academic experiences:

> But the big hole in my resume, which I recognized early on, was that I had not come up through the [academic] ranks. … So, I taught master level courses in public administration and education. I lectured anytime I could get myself in a

classroom. I did my whole dissertation topic on faculty governance; I did my master's thesis on academic program review. So, I was very strategic in doing the things that would burnish the academic side of my resume. (Mary)

Mary stated that she had always evaluated her skill set against her goals and identified areas that she needed to strengthen.

Ramona realized that it would be easier for her to broaden her expertise and take on new responsibilities at the institution where she worked rather than moving to a new institution. She reflected, "There are silos and those silos exist at institution after institution after institution. And you can't ever get a broad enough view to be able to lead effectively if you don't get other experiences" (Ramona). Ramona intentionally "accepted new assignments that broadened my portfolio in place and then I moved."

Kelly was also thoughtful about building her resume with diverse experiences. She sought experiences that would strengthen her administrative portfolio and allow her to gain insight into different aspects of higher education.

> You sort of want people to look at your resume and say, "Well, they have it all." I would think about that as I was doing things. … The areas where they might have questions about it I've actually done some of those things. And I think that's important. (Kelly)

Both Lisa and Emma had broad responsibilities in their immediate prior positions. Lisa was vice president for student affairs and recalled, "A lot of strange things [were] added on to what I supervised, including academic advising and registrar's office and all these strange programs." Emma reported that her last position was "VP of admin, but it was kind of like the provost position. I did academic, as well as the development—lots of diverse kinds of stuff."

The presidents developed deep experience in one or two administrative areas, but several of them intentionally sought opportunities to broaden their skills. The women

recalled identifying areas in which they did not have strong experience and actively

pursuing opportunities to engage with that part of the campus. They felt the breadth of

experiences was important in a presidential position.

Future Career Goals

During the interviews each participant was asked about her future career goals.

Eight of the 9 women responded that they did not currently aspire to a position other than

the one that they currently held. Two presidents, Leslie and Lisa, stated that they planned

to retire from their current presidency. Leslie said that "I've been very happy here. And I

will retire from this job. And I don't know when that will be. I'm beginning to think

about it, and it's a little scary." Lisa had already given notice to her campus that she

would retire at the end of the academic year. She intended to "take a year sabbatical and

come back and teach … very much part-time teaching, still having that opportunity to

interact with students" (Lisa).

Seven women who were not yet considering retirement did not have a desire to

seek another presidency or do something else in the near future. Ramona stated, "I'm

going to stay here as long as I can do something good, you know, that makes a

difference." Mary also expressed a commitment to her current institution. "As you go

through your professional life at some point you have to say, okay, where do I really want

to settle in and make a difference?" (Mary). Kelly stated, "My goal is to be here at least

10 years, and then after that I'll decide does it make sense to stay another 5 years or do I

want to teach and write a book?"

Emma suggested that she still had specific projects that she would like to

accomplish before she considered leaving the presidency. "I think I've identified that

there is certain work to be done here, building the campus, helping the college move. I came here with some goals" (Emma). Cathy also cited goals "to grow different areas of the college" that provided motivation to stay and "continue doing it for a while longer."

Summary of Research Question 2 Findings

The second research question in this study explored the specific career paths and goals of the presidents. Several presidents stated that they did not have a clear long-term goal when they began their careers. Nearly half the presidents in the sample initially worked outside the field of education; those that started in education primarily focused on teaching. Only 1 president immediately began working in higher education administration.

The presidents had diverse career paths, but the paths of 7 of the 9 fit the administrative model described in this section, in which entry-level positions led to assistant vice president/dean, followed by vice president, then president. Half of the women began to see themselves as presidential candidates once they were in a role with proximity to presidents; the other half did not consider it until it was suggested to them. The women worked in different administrative areas, including development, enrollment management, finance, operations, and student affairs. Additionally, the women discussed strategically managing their careers to broaden their experiences among different areas of higher education. With the exception of 1 president, who had already announced her retirement, none of the women aspired to a position other than their current presidency.

Findings: Research Question 3

Research question 3 was: *What are the perceptions of female presidents of 4-year colleges or universities on how well their administrative career paths prepared them to*

assume the role of president? Participants shared insights on their readiness to execute the responsibilities of the presidency, what they perceived to be the most important skill sets or experiences for presidents to have, the challenges they experienced in the role, and their general reflections on the presidency. The themes that frame the discussion of findings are Preparation for the Role, Reflections on the Presidency, and Importance of Fit.

Preparation for the Role

The presidents believed that their administrative experience prepared them well for the presidency. Participants expressed that it was important that administrative experience be diverse. Emma stated that "in my case [an administrative background] was an advantage because it was a diverse administrative experience. I think it can be a disadvantage if you don't have any diversity in it." Ramona suggested that if individuals spend their entire career in one "administrative silo," they may not be well prepared for the presidency. Ramona further reflected, "I think I was better prepared in the route that I took than most presidents are for the real challenges that they face here."

Other women also expressed that their administrative experience had provided good training for the presidency. Lisa discussed the variety of institutional needs she had to address in her vice presidency and suggested that "most academics wouldn't come in with that kind of sets of experiences." Elizabeth also believed that administrative roles are good experiences for presidents. "I think for people who come through the provost role, for them it's an even greater shift in terms of rethinking role" (Elizabeth).

Laura explained that her career in advancement had been a strong preparation for the role of president. She reflected,

Because of the demands associated with advancement jobs, I think I developed very strong abilities to manage multiple projects simultaneously, to deal with ambiguity, to deal with a wide range of human beings. And I think those have helped me be an effective professional, and have made me comfortable in being collaborative, open, and transparent. (Laura)

Laura credited her administrative background with helping her be an effective president.

In addition to the presidents stating that their administrative experience was good preparation, five of the press releases issued by the institutions announcing the appointment of the presidents cited their administrative background as a strength. Phrases, such as "variety of roles and responsibilities in higher education" (Elizabeth), "academic management experience" (Leslie), and "extensive background in higher education administration" (Mary) reflected that the participants' diverse administrative experience was viewed positively by the search committees that hired them.

Participants were asked what specific aspects of the presidential role they felt most prepared them when they initially began the job. Their responses mirrored the areas in which they had previous administrative experience. Emma and Lisa reported that they were prepared to handle crises; they had previous experience in student affairs and operations. Ramona, Leslie, and Kelly were prepared to address enrollment challenges that their colleges were facing and they had all overseen that department in previous roles. Kelly reflected that she was prepared for the financial piece and she had previously been a chief financial officer. Ramona, Mary, Cathy, Laura, and Lisa reported feeling ready for fundraising and 3 of them had fundraising responsibilities in their previous roles. Finally, Cathy, Mary, and Ramona stated that they were ready for strategic planning.

In contrast, participants were asked which aspects of the role of president they felt least prepared for initially. Only 2 women stated that they felt unprepared to manage the

academic piece. Laura affirmed, "I knew the problem area for me was going to be dealing with the faculty. That's not been as hard as I thought." Ramona commented that "there are some things that happen on the academic side that because I did not experience them and had no access to that, I was much less prepared" (Ramona).

The area most participants reported being least prepared to manage was that of finances. Five women commented on the complex financial decisions that presidents must make, such as bond issuances, investment management, and issues around financial aid. Lisa reflected,

> I had never been involved in a decision to issue tax-exempt bonds before. That was a real learning experience. … But our board was pretty much in the same position, too, so all of us were learning about those pieces.

Ramona reflected that understanding investment management "was a pretty steep climb for me and I'm still learning that." The women commented that it was critical to have a good chief financial officer and strong board committees in finance.

Beyond discrete skills and competencies, some of the women mentioned that they felt unprepared for the overwhelming and all-encompassing nature of the role of president.

> The one thing you can't understand about a presidency, even though you know it is going to happen, you can't really understand how personally you're going to respond to it until you sit in the chair. It's this dynamic of how many decisions you have to make a day. (Ramona)

Elizabeth also shared that she was "least prepared for understanding how consuming this job can be." Leslie described being president as being "on duty 24/7;" she had been stopped at the grocery store and called in the middle of the night to address university issues. Mary reflected that she "did not realize the weight of responsibility that settles on

you." The presidents believed that there was no way to prepare for the all-encompassing nature of the presidency prior to accepting the role.

Overall, the women felt well-prepared for the presidency. In particular, they were equipped to manage the areas in which they had previous administrative experience. Several of the women felt finance was the area in which they were least prepared and all commented on the overwhelming nature of the presidency.

Reflections on the Presidency

The presidents offered several thoughts on how they perceived the role of president. One common theme, cited by 4 participants, was that the presidency is not primarily academic in nature. Leslie stated,

> Most of what I do as a president doesn't have much to do with academics. I mean, I'm informed about it, I'm consulted if there's a question, but I don't manage that day to day. I don't second guess [the provost] on that; actually I don't have a lot of interest in doing that. (Leslie)

Leslie's assessment was shared by Ramona, who said the work of a president "for most of the day doesn't have a whole lot to do with the academic program." Elizabeth advised, "Presidents have to hire really good provosts or vice presidents for academic affairs. … You're not going to be the provost." Although each of these presidents believed that it was important to have experience with the academic side of higher education, they reported that they had limited direct involvement with academics on a daily basis. In contrast, Mary stated that she was "really involved in the academic life at the university. I don't just go out and fundraise. People think presidents just go raise money. I don't. I spend a lot of time internally."

Six presidents commented on the positive impact a president can have on students and the joy that comes from interacting with students and witnessing student success. Elizabeth suggested that

> [The role of president] really is your chance to have an impact on higher education and the college or university. [Presidents] get a chance to really shape it and to help make a difference. At the end of the day, I think that's what people want to do. They want to know that they can help make a difference, and for us, we make a difference in the lives of students. (Elizabeth)

Emma, also, cited "making a difference with students" as the greatest source of satisfaction for her. Leslie reflected on the joy of interacting with students, stating, "I love hearing what they have to say and what they're thinking." Lisa reported that the best aspect of the presidency for her was "being with students. I love having them up to the house for pizza and just listening to what's going on in their lives." Kelly identified "the students and their stories" as what she enjoyed most.

In contrast, the greatest challenge identified by the women was managing the tension between a desire for transparency in decision-making and the need to sometimes make decisions quickly without much consultation. "That's the hardest thing for me, because I'm very much into shared governance when it's possible. But sometimes it's not possible" (Mary). Mary shared an example of a budget issue that arose during the summer and had to be solved before the academic year commenced; when faculty returned to campus in the fall there was "uproar" over the fact that they had not been consulted in the decision-making process. Cathy commented that "when you have a small growing institution where you need to make tactical decisions, sometimes the collaborativeness you can't afford to do."

Emma reflected that there were times when presidents need to make decisions without consultation. "I have to remind myself and my staff of that frequently, that there

are some decisions that are the president's prerogative and you can't consult with everybody all the time. But there's a desire for that" (Emma). Emma felt that women, in particular, struggle with that tension.

Laura suggested that the economic and sustainability challenges in higher education may require that presidents favor quick decision making and execution over collaboration.

> I'm feeling right now that while my open collaborative transparent style has worked so well for me my whole career, this is a time where I need to be decisive, forward-moving, take risks. And recognize not everybody is going to agree. (Laura)

Laura wondered if the challenges faced by higher education called for a different type of leader, someone who is more "entrepreneurial" and less collaborative. Laura stated that she was challenging herself to be more entrepreneurial without losing her collaborative nature.

The presidents shared their insights on the most important skills a president should possess; a passion for higher education was listed as being important by all 9 participants. The women talked about the need for people to love what they do and suggested that was particularly true for presidents. "A lot of it comes down to the passion for it. Do you have the drive and the fire, the old-fashioned way of talking about the 'fire in the belly' to really do it?" (Mary). Other presidents reflected, "You need a real love for education" (Cathy), "You have to do what you love" (Kelly), and "You need to be passionate about your institution" (Leslie). Two of the press releases issued by the colleges announcing the presidents' hire cited the candidates' passion as a necessary and valuable skill that was recognized in the interview process.

Seven presidents also cited the need for strong interpersonal and communication skills. "Whether a president is a natural extrovert or whether an introvert has to put it on, you have to be really good at communicating with lots of different constituencies" (Lisa). Mary commented that the presidential role requires "a lot of glad-handing, a lot of socializing; you have to really like people to do these jobs." Leslie also stated that "being a president who really genuinely likes people is important. I think it's just hard to fake it. … Your enthusiasm and warmth go a long way."

One final skill that was identified by 5 of the women was the ability to develop a vision for the college or university. Laura stated, "I think the president does have to be a strategic thinker and able to develop a strategic vision." Emma commented that, "A real sense of vision" was important for presidents, coupled with "the ability to be a broad thinker." Mary opined that "an essential skill set is being able to think strategically not tactically."

In reflecting on the presidential role, most participants felt it was primarily not academic in nature. The women derived great satisfaction from interacting with students and seeing students succeed. They cited one of the greatest challenges of the presidency as navigating the balance between transparency and the need the make decisions in a timely manner. Finally, they felt that presidents should have a passion for higher education, good people skills, and vision.

<center>*Importance of Fit*</center>

The idea of "fit" between an institution and a president was raised by every participant. The women believed that fit depended on the culture and needs of the college and the skills and personality of the president. While fit transcended discreet skill sets,

the participants stated that it was an important element. Emma reflected, "I think I was

hired because I have strong financial skills, good experience with accreditation …

strategic planning." Her institution needed leadership in those areas and her skills were a

good match for the needs. Leslie highlighted that her college was having enrollment

challenges and her experience as a national enrollment consultant was attractive to the

college.

> The presidents articulated that fit transcended practical skill sets. Leslie reflected,

> I think that not only do my experience and skills fit, but I think the personality, the kind of person I am, has been a good fit with what the college needed. I would congratulate them on their good pick, but I also think I could have gone other places and not felt nearly as satisfied with the outcome. (Leslie)

Mary also expressed the importance of fit, stating, "I would not be the right fit for many,

many other institutions. But I'm a very good fit for this one." Several presidents

commented on the need for a match between the campus culture and the personality of

the president.

> The presidents acknowledged that "fit" was somewhat dependent on timing and

that someone who was an effective president may not continue to be so as circumstances

change and the institution evolves. Laura reflected that "there is no best president; it's an

effective president at that institution at that time." Ramona expressed a similar sentiment:

> Will I continue to be the right person for this job? I don't know. I do believe that there is a leader for a time. There are good leaders but they're not all good leaders for changing times. So, I may end up being exactly the right leader for this place right now, but in 10 years I might not be the right leader anymore. (Ramona)

> The importance of fit was raised by each participant and emerged in some of the

public statements issued by the colleges and universities as well, further confirming that

fit is valued from the institutional perspective as well as the individual perspective. One

press release noted that the "search committee wanted a president who 'would understand

this college, its students, its people'" (Ramona). Other presidents were described as an "outstanding match" (Leslie) and a "perfect fit" (Mary) for their institutions by the college or university. Fit in skills and culture was a strong theme that emerged from the data.

Summary of Research Question 3 Findings

Research Question 3 explored the presidents' perceptions about their preparation to assume the presidency. The participants largely felt well prepared by their administrative career path; some participants emphasized that it was important to have diverse administrative experiences. The specific tasks for which presidents were most prepared mirrored their administrative backgrounds. Participants reported being least prepared to oversee the financial piece of their institutions and, more broadly, the all-encompassing nature of the presidency.

The women shared their perspectives on the role of the president, which they felt was not necessarily academic in nature. Participants cited interaction with students as the greatest source of joy in the role and highlighted the tension between transparency and efficient decision making as the greatest challenge. They also suggested that presidents should have a passion for education, excellent communication skills, and vision.

Every participant discussed the importance of fit between a president and an institution. The idea of fit applied to the alignment of institutional needs with presidential skill sets, as well as a match between the campus culture and presidential personality. Participants suggested that fit changes over time.

Findings: Research Question 4

The fourth research question of the study was: *What are the perceptions of female presidents of 4-year colleges or universities who pursed administrative career paths of the glass ceiling in higher education?* This question explored whether the presidents perceived or encountered barriers on their route to leadership positions, the factors they believed contribute to the underrepresentation of female college presidents, and what could be done to advance more women to leadership positions. The findings for this question are organized into three themes: The Glass Ceiling Is Shattered, Remaining Challenges, and Advancing Women.

The Glass Ceiling Is Shattered

> I think when you've got 20% of your presidents are women I think it's harder to say there's a glass ceiling, because 20% of the people have made it. On the other hand, that's not reflective of the demographics of the academy. … So I think there's still more work to be done in terms of supporting more women. (Elizabeth)

Elizabeth's remarks are representative of the views of the majority of women in the study. Eight of the 9 female presidents did not feel there was a glass ceiling in higher education today. Although several of the participants acknowledged that women had experienced a glass ceiling in the past, 8 women did not feel it was accurate to describe a glass ceiling today. "I think it's really been cracked now, especially with the appointment of women at the Ivy League institutions. I think women are now being seen more easily in this role, and that is a pretty recent change" (Laura). Laura suggested that the high-profile appointment of women to presidencies at elite universities illustrated that there was no longer a glass ceiling. Leslie, when asked if she perceived a glass ceiling in higher education, replied "I don't, really. I don't think that's the case." Several of the women

pointed to the fact that one in five college presidents is a woman and that number had increased over the past several years.

Four participants suggested that the glass ceiling was no longer the right metaphor to describe the experiences of women advancing in higher education or any other industry. Ramona reflected, "I would call it a more semipermeable barrier. I am not willing to call it a glass ceiling anymore. … Because people do get through it, but I don't think it is easy." Lisa reflected that "I'm not sure that there is a glass ceiling, but there are still a lot of very sharp shards. … There are still a fair number of obstacles that get in people's way." Some participants were not comfortable with the metaphor of the glass ceiling but felt that women still had to overcome challenges along their career paths.

In contrast, Mary stated that she did not believe barriers to advancement "are gender related." She reflected on her career and observed that when she encountered barriers or challenges "I just didn't let it stop me because I really wanted it." Kelly also suggested that women could overcome barriers. "I don't really think there are barriers. I try to believe that everyone can get to a level that they want to be if they keep trying" (Kelly).

One participant, Emma, perceived that the glass ceiling still existed, both "an institutionalized glass ceiling and a societal one." Emma felt that "society often falls back on their old position about who can be in that sort of role." She implied that traditional societal gender roles and stereotypes disadvantage women who aspire to leadership positions. "[Men] are used to being the captain of the team and they move into leadership roles, I think, often as a result of that. They have a different experience than women do; women tend to be more facilitative" (Emma).

Although only 1 woman perceived a glass ceiling in higher education today, 5 participants could recall a specific instance in their careers in which they experienced gender discrimination or sexual harassment. Several women discussed the idea that organizational norms play an important role in discrimination. Ramona stated,

> It's very difficult for women to rise to the top, because if you believe, as I do, that men have been in the control of this system for many years, many, many years, most years throughout the history of higher education and they think its okay and you don't, then, yes, you are going to be discriminated against. There is no way—you'd be naive to think that you wouldn't be. (Ramona)

Lisa recounted an instance in which she applied for a position in a university. "Someone actually said to me, 'Well, we couldn't hire a woman for a job like this.' And I was rather taken aback, not only that they felt that way but they were very comfortable saying it" (Lisa).

Laura recalled an instance early in her career in which she told her boss that she was pregnant. "I told my boss and he looked and me and said, 'You're just like the rest of them.' The rest of *them* being women who worked until they get pregnant" (Laura). Leslie recounted being hired to teach at a 2-year college in the 1970s for a very low salary.

> A couple years later I had a phone call and I was told that they'd hired a man the same day for the same job as me and that his salary had been higher than mine, and they'd discovered it in some audit, and they gave me a check for the balance. I was really taken aback by the fact that they had lowballed me, because, presumably because I was a woman. (Leslie)

Emma recalled previous positions in which "people would state that they didn't want to work for me because I was a woman."

The specific examples cited by the women largely took place early in their careers; no participant had a recent example of a time when they felt harassed or

discriminated against. Four participants could not recall a specific instance of gender

discrimination at any point in their professional lives.

Overwhelmingly, the women did not feel that the glass ceiling was an accurate

description of women's experiences in higher education today. Two women perceived

there were not gender-related barriers and 6 women felt that some barriers remained but

not at sufficient levels to suggest that a glass ceiling still existed. One participant

maintained that the glass ceiling was still a relevant description.

Remaining Challenges

The women acknowledged that challenges still exist for women who pursue top

leadership positions. The challenges cited most frequently by the participants were work-

life balance, residual gender bias, a shortage of women in the pipeline, and women

electing not to pursue leadership roles.

All of the participants articulated the difficulty that women face in establishing a

balance between their professional and personal lives. One president, Ramona, identified

this as the single greatest challenge she has faced as president:

> I go home, I have dinner, maybe with my kids, maybe not, and then you know I
> work because there is not enough time in my day to get everything done. Who am
> I cheating? Them? Me? It's hard, it's hard to do and its one of the biggest, from a
> humanistic point of view, it's one of the biggest challenges of the job. (Ramona)

Each participant reflected on how the challenge of balancing family priorities and

work priorities impacted her career. Cathy observed that "women have often more family

responsibilities than men do on the front end of their career and on the back end, because

they're often responsible for aging parents." She described the difficulty of trying to be

with an ill parent while she was a president. Laura reflected that "despite the many

advancements made for women, there are still difficulties associated with the issue of work-life balance."

Two participants commented on the challenge of balancing professional and personal time commitments on an administrative career path. Leslie suggested,

> And perhaps it's not as formalized or as visible, but I think if you want to be an administrator and you're working your way up there's certainly expectations that you're going to work long hours and work really hard. So while the tenure clock and the tenure track is clearly a barrier in terms of mixed priorities, the administrative track comes with really the same criteria. (Leslie)

Elizabeth also suggested that women on administrative paths do not encounter the specific time crunch associated with earning tenure, but felt "the challenge for women of balancing family and career is always going to be there. And I think that's true in a university setting, if I think about the administrative side." Lisa suggested it could be particularly challenging for women with young children to be in presidential roles because that "creates a different set of pressures on you that are really hard to build in."

Another challenge cited by 4 of the women was persistent bias against women. Ramona commented that "we carry it around with us. I think we try to intellectualize and we try to believe and convince ourselves that just being a woman isn't a disadvantage, but I don't know if any of us believe it." Other presidents stated that they believed that bias against women still influences some hiring decisions. "I think there is still probably some unstated bias against women presidents held by some trustees that are doing the hiring" (Laura). Emma also observed that some people "struggle with women in leadership roles." Cathy suggested that any initial bias is often mitigated "once I've developed rapport."

Perhaps due to the challenges of work-life balance and pockets of residual bias, several participants felt that there was a shortage of female presidential candidates. Five

of the women believed that the pipeline of qualified female candidates was slowly filling

as women earned more doctoral degrees and gained the experience necessary to qualify

them for presidencies. One interviewee observed that "some of it is just history moving

through" (Kelly). Laura also suggested that a critical mass of women had not yet met the

requisite benchmarks to be presidential candidates. She observed that there were few

women earning Ph.D.s and entering the tenure track 20 or 30 years ago, "so when you

look at the pool of people today who could be presidents, there are just less women in the

pool. I think over time that will begin to change" (Laura).

Elizabeth observed that often in presidential searches there may not be many

female candidates.

> It kind of starts with being able to build a strong pool of candidates. I think that's
> still true in presidential searches that you don't see … you probably don't see
> proportionately anything higher than maybe 20% of the candidates. (Elizabeth)

Until a significant number of women have earned doctorates and successfully navigated

administrative or academic career paths, there will be fewer women considered for

presidencies.

The participants suggested another reason there may be fewer women in the

pipeline: it may be that qualified women are not aspiring to the presidency and are

"opting out" at some point along their career paths. Six of the women thought that this

was a major factor in the relatively small number of female presidents. Lisa offered this

insight:

> Lily Tomlin had a great quote, and I think I used it in my dissertation. "Even if
> you win the rat race you're still a rat." And there are women who have been close
> enough to these jobs to look at them to make a conscious choice that they don't
> want to do them. (Lisa)

Lisa's perception was shared by Cathy as well. She suggested that if women sense that the next job ahead of them "is unattractive based on what they see, they're not going to want to take that next step or that following step, so they opt out and they do something else" (Cathy). Laura also felt that "women choose not to be promoted because they see the more hours it takes" and women "opt out" rather than continue to seek promotion. Mary suggested that men also were not electing to pursue demanding leadership roles. She cautioned,

> The more and more that becomes a trend line, for males and females, this is as far as I want to go and I'm happy here, then I think it's going to be more difficult to find people who are willing to take on these administrative roles. (Mary)

The presidents felt that the challenges of balancing professional and personal responsibilities and an undercurrent of bias against women may contribute to the lack of female presidents. They identified that the pipeline of qualified women needed to be filled and suggested that many women were intentionally not seeking presidencies.

Advancing Women

The presidents made a number of suggestions of steps that institutions and individuals could take to help more women attain leadership roles. Elizabeth and Leslie suggested educating search committees about considering nontraditional and diverse candidates. Emma, Cathy, and Elizabeth cited the importance of actively recruiting women for leadership roles on their campuses.

Cathy, Mary, Elizabeth, and Lisa recommended that women avail themselves of professional development opportunities, particularly through national organizations that focus on advancing women. Mary stated that women should "take advantage of some of these programs and institutes that are available; those are things that I think are very valuable."

The most common theme that emerged from the participants was the need to provide mentoring and to help women establish broad networks. Cathy commented that "I think developing social networks is very important so that people are known." Elizabeth also suggested that the current female presidents need to "help people get out and network."

Leslie felt that it was important for presidents to mentor and empower women with leadership potential. "I have a cabinet consisting of a number of women and men and I certainly try to provide mentoring." Emma stated that "when I talk to women I work with here and in the other tribal colleges, I tell them its okay to give yourself permission to aspire to a leadership role. Because nobody gave me that." Lisa echoed the need for mentoring, asserting "it is really important for those of us who are women CEO's to be mentoring as many women as possible."

Summary of Research Question 4 Findings

The women were almost unanimous in their belief that the glass ceiling had been shattered in higher education. Most participants acknowledged that women still face challenges in career advancement and 5 of the women cited specific examples of discrimination in their professional lives; however, 8 of the 9 felt that the "glass ceiling" was no longer an appropriate metaphor to describe the leadership journeys of women in colleges and universities.

Challenges that women face in their career advancement were identified by the presidents. Establishing a healthy work-life balance and overcoming residual gender bias were cited as common impediments for women. The presidents also reflected on the shortage of women in the presidential pipeline and shared the belief that many women

choose not to pursue top leadership roles. The women suggested that mentoring and building a strong network was important for women who strive to become college presidents and suggested that current female presidents should assist in those efforts.

Findings: Research Question 5

The final research question explored in this study was: *What factors influenced the leadership styles of female presidents of 4-year colleges or universities who pursued administrative career paths?* The participants were asked to reflect on their leadership styles and characteristics and to consider how their leadership evolved over time. The findings for this question are organized by the themes of Leadership Styles and Leadership Strengths and Weaknesses.

Leadership Styles

The women reflected on their leadership styles and how they interacted with their campus and external communities. The women described themselves as leaders who valued seeking input and building consensus, set a vision, empowered their team, and gave credit to others.

Kelly described her leadership style as the "helicopter" approach. "I really try to be sort of a cheerleader and mentor up here, but I also can get on the ground if I need to" (Kelly). Leslie described her style in working with her team as "high responsibility, low oversight." Lisa stated, "I am very committed to hiring really good people, setting up a set of expectations for them, and then getting out of their way." The participants expressed the importance of presidents maintaining their focus on the big picture and empowering talented people to execute the vision. Laura reflected that she was "happy

agreeing on a direction and going to it, and I only get in the weeds if I feel like it's not going well or I'm getting complaints or things aren't getting done" (Laura).

The presidents discussed the importance of soliciting feedback from their key staff and engaging in group decision-making. "I think engaging people and facilitating conversations and involvement is an important piece of what we do. I see myself as that kind of leader" (Elizabeth). Elizabeth reflected that not every person may agree with the final decision, but participants in the conversation feel as though they "had a stake in it," which helps people "agree to support that and move ahead." Leslie also spoke about engaging her team in decision making so that "everyone feels included in the decision making at that level. And I know we make way better decisions as a result."

Emma concurred with the other participants on the importance of soliciting input, but stated that there are times when the president has to make the decision. She reflected,

> Because I hold a vision and that's what I was hired for, was that vision and those certain skills, that sometimes I have to make a decision and move people down a path that they are challenged by. So I'm interested in what they have to say, but I'm still often, especially with the big decisions, going to make that decision myself. (Emma)

Each of the presidents sought to give recognition and credit to members of their campus community. In external and internal messages authored by the presidents, they highlighted achievements by faculty, students and staff. Elizabeth reflected that "none of us does this alone."

The presidents were asked to reflect on changes in their leadership over the course of their careers and since becoming presidents. The first theme that emerged was that presidents have become more comfortable making difficult decisions. "I would say that I'm more willing to make a difficult decision. I'm less influenced by whether people will like it or not," Leslie commented. Mary also reflected on the challenge of making

decisions that will be unpopular and commented, "It's not important if they hate you or like you, what is important is did you do the right thing and did you do it for the common good?" Laura observed that there was a need sometimes "just to make a decision, even if everybody doesn't agree and doesn't like it."

Ramona observed that developing greater self-confidence in decision making has been important:

> If there was one thing that sort of was key, I think, was being able to develop that sense of confidence and making mistakes along the way, but for the most part making decisions, learning from my mistakes, and making better decisions and better decisions. (Ramona)

In addition to increased confidence and comfort with making difficult decisions, the presidents expressed that their ability to work with people who think differently from themselves and to value that diversity has increased over time. Kelly commented that she has "become a lot more tolerant and flexible" and this has enabled her to work more effectively with diverse constituencies on campus.

Lisa also reflected on becoming more tolerant of differences in people and appreciating the contributions of diverse perspectives. "I've probably become more aware of how important it is to have people who think and problem solve in different ways around the table." She suggested that engaging a diverse group in finding solutions means that "you're much less likely to suffer from group-think or all go off in the same wrong direction" (Lisa).

Cathy perceived that she has increased her skill at communicating effectively with different people. She has learned the value of communicating "the way that people can understand rather than just communicating and figuring, well, they're just going to have

to deal with it." She observed that this has been part of her maturation process as a leader to realize that "people all come at things differently."

The presidents' reflections on their leadership styles and their evolution as leaders over time revealed some common themes. The women all placed importance on having a good leadership team, engaging them in decision making, and empowering them to lead their specific areas. As they have grown as leaders, many have become more confident in making difficult decisions and engaging with people who think differently than they do.

Leadership Strengths and Weaknesses

Participants identified a variety of qualities or characteristics that they perceived to be leadership strengths. Lisa and Emma mentioned their willingness to change and be flexible; Leslie, Laura, and Mary cited strong communication and interpersonal skills; Leslie and Kelly mentioned their ability to hire good people; Mary, Emma, and Elizabeth highlighted their ability to create a strategic vision for their campuses.

One strength that was cited by multiple presidents was learning from others. Four presidents stated that they had made a habit of observing people around them, particularly other leaders, and learning from their actions. The women stated that they had observed good leadership models and examples of what not to do when in a position of authority. Kelly reflected that "during my career, I've really tried to learn from everyone." Elizabeth commented:

> I watch everybody and when I see people doing things that I think are very
> effective I think, I kind of then evaluate whether I do that as well and what I could
> learn from that. Then [I] try to incorporate this. So I see this as a journey in
> learning. I'm still doing that. I still know that I can continue to grow and be better
> in the future. (Elizabeth)

The most common weakness cited by the women was moving too quickly to enact new ideas or being impatient. Leslie reflected that "patience is not my strength. And so I

had to temper my own enthusiasm for moving forward so that I wouldn't be out there all by myself. … That was a hard lesson personally." Mary also cited that she liked to "move very fast," which required having "really understanding human beings all around me."

The women identified that their desire to move quickly could be a detriment to engaging stakeholders and gaining the necessary commitment from the campus community. Participants shared that they have tried to cultivate patience. Lisa admitted,

> It's very difficult for me when I hear what I think are really good ideas not to want to pursue them and do them. So that's probably the piece I've learned, to slow down. Although I'm sure there are still faculty members who say that I'm too fast. (Lisa)

Summary of Research Question 5 Findings

The presidents described themselves primarily as collaborative leaders who sought broad participation in decision-making. They highlighted the importance of building a team of people, charging them with a mission, and empowering them to lead their areas. Over the course of their careers, the women developed their ability to make difficult decisions and work with people who had different styles. One strength cited by several participants was the habit of observing and learning from others. Several presidents mentioned that their greatest weakness was being impatient and tempering their enthusiasm to quickly enact good ideas.

Summary

Chapter 4 presented the findings of the five research questions that guided the study. Data from interview transcripts were analyzed to identify key themes and were supported by presidential resumes and biographies, external messages authored by the presidents, and public announcements from the colleges and universities. Chapter 4 also provided an overview of each of the 9 participants.

The first research question explored the professional journeys of the participants and revealed major themes of seizing opportunities, the need to establish academic credibility, and important people who influenced the career path of the presidents. The importance of seizing opportunities was cited throughout the interviews. Several of the women reflected that they had always tried to do a good job in their current role and that led to additional opportunities. Six of the women were given opportunities to expand their skill set and oversee a part of the institution with which they had no previous experience. The women suggested that those experiences were critical in preparing them for the role of president. Each participant expressing a comfort with or willingness to take professional risks which allowed them to capitalize on the opportunities that arose.

The women were selected for this study because they had pursued careers on the administrative side of higher education, yet each participant emphasized the need for academic credibility and a strong grounding in the academic mission of higher education. Seven of the 9 participants had earned a doctorate and 7 or the 9 had taught at the college level. These credentials were perceived to be critical for presidents.

The participants reflected on the individuals who had been important in their career progression. Eight of the 9 women were married and reported that their spouses had been supportive of their careers and a positive influence on their professional advancement. Mentors were cited as critical elements of the women's career progression. In many instances, it was a male who directly supervised the participant who provided career counseling and meaningful opportunities. Finally, the women reflected on the important role of networks in their professional advancement. Networks were identified

as good sounding boards for the presidents in their current roles and, in some cases, the way in which they were recruited or referred to a presidential role.

The second research question investigated the career paths and professional goals of the presidents. The findings were presented according to the themes of early career path and goals, administrative experience and strategic career building, and future goals. There was great diversity in the participants' early career paths. Four of the women entered fields other than education after completing their undergraduate degree. Of the women who went directly into education, 4 of the 5 participants began as secondary school teachers. Only 1 participant, Laura, immediately began her career in higher education administration. None of the women set an initial goal of becoming a college president.

As the women entered higher education, a career pattern emerged from the data that fit 7 of the 9 participants exactly. Seven participants entered higher education as coordinators, adjunct faculty, assistant or associate directors, or directors and advanced to assistant vice presidents or deans, then became vice presidents before achieving presidencies. One participant entered higher education as a vice president and then became a president; one participant came to higher education as a president after a following a career path similar to the model in secondary education.

The women sought opportunities to broaden their knowledge base and oversee different aspects of higher education as their careers progressed. The women recalled accepting projects or assignments that no one else wanted and strategically seeking experiences that would address perceived shortcomings in their resumes. This also included pursuing academic credentials and teaching experience for the majority of the

women. The participants were divided on when they began to see themselves as presidential candidates. One woman stated that she aspired to the role as soon as she began working in higher education. Four participants recalled that they began to think about a presidency when they were in positions that worked directly with the president. The remaining four presidents did not see themselves as presidential candidates until others suggested it to them.

When asked about their future career goals, only one participant mentioned leaving her current position. Lisa had announced her retirement to the campus community; she planned to take a year sabbatical and then return to her campus and teach. The other 8 participants stated that they did not aspire to a role other than the one they currently held. Several women expressed the sense that there was still work to be done at their campus, and others suggested that a president was best served to stay in the role for several years to truly enact their vision.

Research Question 3 asked the participants about their preparation for and perception of the role of president. The themes of preparation for the role, reflections on the presidency, and the importance of fit emerged from the data. The women believed that their administrative backgrounds had prepared them well for the presidency. Several participants cited that it was important to have a diverse administrative background and suggested that an individual who has only been in one administrative discipline may not be a good presidential candidate. The women reported that they were prepared for the areas in which they had previous administrative experience, such as enrollment management or development. The majority of the women identified finances as the area in which they were least prepared. Beyond discrete skills sets, the women reported being

unprepared for the overwhelming nature of the presidential role; they acknowledged that there was no way to prepare for the all-encompassing position prior assuming the responsibility.

Four participants believed that the presidency was not primarily academic in nature. They reported that the majority of their time is spent on issues outside the academic mission, while others stated it was important for presidents to have a strong connection to the academic work of the institution. A majority of presidents stated that their greatest joy in the role was interacting with students and witnessing student successes.

An unanticipated finding of this study was the importance of fit between a president and a campus. Each participant touched on this idea during the interview without being prompted by a specific interview question. Fit was described by participants as existing on two dimensions: a fit between presidential skills and institutional needs and a fit between presidential personality and campus culture. Several women suggested that they were a good fit with their college or university and may not have been equally successful at another institution. Further, the women acknowledged that fit changes with time and they may not be the best person to lead their campuses at some point in the future.

Question 4 probed the participants' thoughts and understanding of the glass ceiling in higher education. The findings presented were organized by the themes of the shattered glass ceiling, remaining challenges, and advancing women. Eight of the nine women believed that the glass ceiling in higher education had been shattered. They suggested that challenges still remain for women but believed that enough women had

achieved presidencies that the metaphor of the glass ceiling was no longer accurate. Interestingly, four women felt this way despite experiencing a specific instance of gender discrimination or sexual harassment at some point in their careers.

All of the participants acknowledged that women still face obstacles in advancing their careers. The primary challenge cited by the participants was the difficulty of maintaining a work-life balance. Four women also suggested that some residual bias against women persists in search committees and senior leaders. The presidents reflected that many women may "opt out" and choose not to pursue presidencies or other leadership positions because they perceive the roles to be undesirable.

The presidents offered suggestions on what could be done to help women advance in higher education. The most common recommendation was that women and men currently in leadership roles in higher education should mentor promising women and help them develop broad professional networks. Another suggestion was for women who aspire to leadership positions to take advantage of professional development opportunities.

Finally, the fifth research question explored the leadership styles of the presidents. Thematic organization of the findings focused on leadership styles and leadership strengths and weaknesses. The women described their leadership style as follows: hire talented people, set a clear vision, and empower them to do their jobs. Several participants were explicit in their desire to provide high-level leadership rather than close day-to-day oversight of their senior staffs. Another common theme for the women was a desire to seek input, build consensus, and engage in group decision-making. The

presidents believed that both empowering staff and engaging them in important decisions were critical elements of retaining talented people on their teams.

Many of the women reflected that they had developed a habit of watching other leaders and learning from them. The presidents observed both good leadership skills and practices that they did not want to incorporate in their leadership. The most commonly cited leadership weakness was that the women tended to be impatient to implement what they perceived to be good ideas. Several participants described the difficulty of slowing down to develop consensus and buy in from others before moving forward with a new idea.

The following final chapter will provide further discussion of these findings, including conclusions and implications. Recommendations for future research and recommendations for practice will be offered, along with concluding thoughts.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of female presidents of 4-year colleges and universities who had pursued administrative career paths through higher education administration rather than traditional academic paths. The study sought to understand their views on their professional journeys, their career paths and goals, and their preparation for the presidency. Further, this study investigated the participants' thoughts about the glass ceiling in higher education and their leadership styles. Scholarly literature on the career paths through higher education, particularly the administrative path, served as the conceptual framework for the study. This framework informed the interview questions employed by the researcher and facilitated the identification of themes that emerged from the data.

Nine presidents participated in interviews and candidly shared their thoughts on the aforementioned topics. From data collected in interviews and supporting documents, important themes emerged related to each of the five research questions. The preceding chapter detailed the themes and the findings; this chapter will provide discussion of the findings, conclusions and implications, and recommendations for future practice and future research. Finally, the researcher will provide concluding thoughts.

Discussion

Data collected from interviews and documents were presented in Chapter Four. The perceptions and beliefs shared by participants in relation to the five research questions that framed the study provides the basis of the following discussion. The three

major themes for each of the five research questions that emerged from the data will be discussed.

<p style="text-align: center;">*Research Question 1: Professional Journeys*</p>

The first research question was: *What have been the professional journeys of female presidents of 4-year colleges and universities who pursued administrative career paths?* The participants reflected on their journeys to the presidency and the factors that influenced them along the way; three themes emerged from the data. First, the participants discussed opportunities that arose, allowing them to broaden their areas of expertise. Second, the presidents discussed the importance of establishing academic credibility. Finally, they commented on individuals who had been important to them in achieving the presidency.

Seizing Opportunities

The presidents described their professional philosophy of working hard and taking advantage of opportunities that arose from their success. In the majority of cases, the women were not actively seeking the opportunities that came to them. Steinke (2006) had a similar finding in her study of female presidents and observed that "several presidents expressed surprise by the opportunities that came their way" (p. 67). Multiple women in the present study focused on excelling in the role they had at the time without focusing on advancing their career. Madsen (2008) reported that opportunities arise when women are high performers, which was true for the participants. Leslie recalled that "people kept kind of pushing me through doors that opened. And at the time they didn't seem to be huge risks to me, so why wouldn't I jump through? There were opportunities."

In several instances, the women were given opportunities to stretch into a part of the institution in which they had no prior experience. Leslie was asked to move from teaching and faculty development to admissions, Mary transitioned from teaching into fundraising and public relations, Ramona became assistant to the president from her role in institutional research, and Laura entered a fundraising role with no prior experience and later transferred to student affairs. Other participants were asked to oversee projects or areas that did not naturally fit in their job description. In each of these instances, the women had the opportunity to lead a new part of the college or university and diversify their skill sets.

The women believed that their diverse administrative experience prepared them well for the presidency. The opportunities they received throughout their professional journey were important developmental opportunities and helped expand their understanding of higher education and gain the broad view required by the presidency.

An important finding related to the concept of opportunities was that the women were willing to take professional risks. Several of the women commented on having a high tolerance for risk and being willing to try something new. It is possible that if the women had elected to stay in their current roles or not accepted additional responsibilities, they would not have reached the presidency. The women in Madsen's (2008) study suggested that women benefit from new challenges and opportunities and suggested that credible experiences would be important in enabling women to achieve their leadership goals.

Academic Credibility

It is worth noting that, although the women in this study were chosen because they were not career academics, the majority of the sample had earned a doctorate and taught at the college level. The women discussed the importance of engaging in these scholarly activities as a way of developing academic credibility and an appreciation for the work of higher education. Leslie stated that "the two minimum credentials for a college president, regardless of their discipline, are teaching and an earned doctorate." All the participants believed that it was important for presidents to have some academic qualifications and noted that it is still an expectation of search committees.

Other studies have reached similar conclusions regarding the importance of academic credibility. Leatherwood and Williams (2008) found that the women in their sample of community college presidents believed strongly that it was important to earn a doctorate; interestingly, the men in their sample did not perceive that to be a critical step to becoming a president. The female presidents in Steinke's (2006) study discussed the need to obtain a terminal degree and also suggested that it was likely more important for women than men. It appears that women, who remain a minority of college presidents, are more sensitive to the need for academic credentials.

In addition to earning a doctorate, several participants commented on the importance of teaching. Madsen (2008) found that presidents believed an academic pedigree was necessary to understand the important role that faculty play in academic institutions. Further, Madsen's participants suggested that teaching is a way to interact with the most important constituency on campus, the students. The presidents in the

present study affirmed the importance of being in the classroom and gaining teaching experience.

Important People: Spouses, Mentors, and Networks

The participants credited certain individuals as being sources of support, advice, and professional advancement throughout the course of their careers. Eight of the 9 women in the sample were married (89%), far more than the national average of 65% for female presidents (ACE, 2007). The presidents with spouses discussed the importance of balancing two careers in a family and being willing to relocate for one another. Kelly commented that "I'm very lucky because my husband helps. He's an attorney but we balance whatever we do." The presidents further acknowledged that their spouses were unusual in that they were comfortable being married to women in positions of power. Two participants' husbands retired from their positions as faculty members to relocate for their wives' presidencies. Steinke (2006) also found that female presidents cited supportive spouses as an important element in their ability to attain the presidency.

The women were grateful for the high level of support from their husbands, but commented that it was still somewhat unusual for men to be the "first husband" on a campus. The husbands were described as supportive, but one president made the comment that she still wished she had "a wife" to take care of some of the event and entertaining details, in which even a supportive husband did not serve.

In addition to their spouses, the presidents reflected that mentors had been valuable in helping them gain the necessary experience to prepare for the presidency. All the women had supervisors, usually men, who identified their talent and gave them additional responsibilities and opportunities. Ramona reported that "I had mentors who

invested in me, in ways that I appreciated and left myself open to." Whittier (2006) and Steinke (2006) also found that mentors played an important role in the career progression of their participants. Several of the presidents underscored the importance of working for individuals who allowed them to develop professionally and manage different areas of the institution. This finding should be considered by current leaders in academe as a possible means to prepare more women to become presidents.

Beyond mentors, the presidents discussed the need to have broad professional networks. Participants perceived networks as valuable advisors and sounding boards; several women mentioned having other presidents in their networks who helped them solve problems or think through issues on their campuses. The presidents perceived that networking was helpful in being effective in their current roles.

Networks were also mentioned as being an important element in career advancement. Three of the women were recruited or referred to their current presidencies by someone who knew them and thought they would be a good fit with the institution. In two cases, the women did not have to go through an extensive interview process to attain the presidency. Several participants believed that being known and having professional relationships with a variety of people helped advance their careers; they recommended that those who aspire to the presidency develop strong networks.

Research Question 2: Career Path

The second research question that guided this study explored the previous professional experiences of the women and sought to understand the early career goals and future professional ambitions of the presidents. The question was: *What are the*

perceptions of female presidents of 4-year colleges or universities of their administrative career paths and their future professional goals?

Early Career Path and Goals

None of the participants in the study began their professional careers with the goal of becoming a college or university president. This finding is consistent with other studies of female presidents (Madsen, 2008; Steinke, 2006; Whittier, 2006). Nearly half of the sample, 4 of 9, began their careers outside the realm of education; those whose first work experiences were in education were teachers, typically at the secondary level. Lisa commented that "a lot of the women I know that area college presidents never said at the beginning of their career they wanted to be a college president."

Much of the literature that explored career paths pursued by women describes their trajectories as not linear and as somewhat unplanned (Madsen, 2008; Thomas et al., 2004). The women in this study did not begin their career with the goal of becoming a college president; rather, they pursued opportunities that emerged as their careers progressed. In many cases, their career decisions were driven by factors other than advancement, such as family. Steinke (2006) also found that women consider multiple factors when making career decisions. Elizabeth echoed the literature and observed that

> Some people set these goals early in life and kind of charge towards them. Others kind of work on what you're doing, try to be successful, try to make good things happen, and then opportunities open up and you find … that it's a journey. (Elizabeth)

Once the participants entered higher education, 7 of the 9 women followed the same trajectory. The majority of the women entered higher education as coordinators, adjunct faculty, assistant/associate directors, or directors of various administrative areas. From those roles they progressed to assistant vice president or nonacademic deans,

followed by vice president and then president. The two participants who did not fit this model entered higher education as a vice president and a president.

The model developed in this study provides more specificity than the Administrative Career Pattern articulated by Wessel and Keim (1994). The authors indicated that the path of administrative presidents began with "entry/middle level administrative staff," progressed to "senior administrative staff" and concluded as president (p. 221). The present study delineated four rungs on the administrative ladder to the presidency compared to three described by Wessel and Keim and identified more specific positions.

Administrative Experience and Strategic Career Development

The women came to the presidency from different administrative disciplines. The women had served as vice presidents in development, enrollment management, finance, operations, and student affairs. Four of the 9 participants had worked in more than one administrative area. In some cases, the women moved to different administrative areas at the suggestion or request of their supervisor or college president; other women intentionally sought opportunities that allowed them to gain experience in different parts of the institution precisely so that they would be compelling presidential candidates.

As the women gained relevant experience and progressed through administrative positions, they began to consider themselves as presidential candidates or were told by others that they would be strong candidates. Four of the 9 women aspired to the presidency once they were serving in roles that reported directly to the president; 4 other women who were in similar roles did not consider a presidency until it was suggested to them. Laura recalled that "I didn't think of myself in the role of President until other

people told me they saw me in that role, to be really honest." Only 1 woman set a goal of becoming a president as soon as she began working in higher education. This finding suggests that some women may not see themselves as institutional leaders without the idea being planted by someone else.

The literature cautions that presidents who have administrative backgrounds rather than traditional academic backgrounds may be limited in the type of institutions they lead. Birnbaum and Umbach (2001), King and Gomez (2008), Steinke (2006) and Wessel and Keim (1994) all observed that presidents who pursued the administrative path were less likely to lead doctoral institutions than their counterparts who had ascended the traditional academic route. This conclusion was verified by the present study; none of the participants led an institution that was classified as a doctoral institution according to the Carnegie classification system.

Future Career Goals

The majority of presidents in this study did not express a desire to leave their current presidency or pursue other professional goals. Only one president, Lisa, stated that she would leave the presidency to retire at the end of the academic year; she had been in the role for 12 years. Every other president believed that she had remaining work to do with her institution and would stay until such time that she felt the majority of that work had been completed or she was no longer the most effective leader for her campus.

The presidents articulated a strong commitment to their campuses and the initiatives that they wished to enact. There was a sense that each woman wanted to stay in her current role long enough to help shape the future direction of the institution. The participants were also very pragmatic and acknowledged that the time would come when

they would no longer be the best person to lead the campus. This realistic perspective indicated that the women were cognizant of their strengths and abilities and how those aligned with the needs of their institutions. The presidents' commitment to their schools was grounded in realism.

<div align="center">*Research Question 3: Role of President*</div>

The third research question of this study was: *What are the perceptions of female presidents of 4-year colleges or universities on the role of president and how well their administrative career paths prepared them for the presidency?* Research Question 3 explored how prepared the participants felt to assume the office of president, the skill sets they perceived as necessary to be a successful president, and their reflections on the presidency.

Preparation for the Role

Several participants commented on the importance of overseeing different parts of a college or university prior to becoming presidents. Whittier (2006) noted that the presidents in her study who had administrative backgrounds felt strongly that their experience was the best preparation for the presidency; the majority of participants in this study expressed the same sentiment. The presidents cited skills that they had learned in previous positions, particularly in development or student affairs, that had equipped them to succeed at critical presidential tasks, such as engaging stakeholders, raising funds, and handling crises. Lisa reflected that "I was ready for fundraising, because I had done an awful lot of it."

Recent studies of presidents have produced similar findings on the value of administrative experience. Corcoran (2008) found that, given the nature of the

presidency, a traditional academic route may not be the best preparation for successfully managing the responsibilities of the role. Steinke (2006) reported that financial and fundraising skills, rather than a canon of scholarly work, were important for presidents. Whittier (2006) suggested that an administrative preparation provides an easier transition to the presidency than does a traditional academic trajectory.

Hartley and Godin (2009) found that prior experience determines which presidential tasks were perceived to be the most challenging by presidents. The presidents in this study felt well-prepared by their administrative experience, particularly in regard to fundraising, communication skills, and strategic planning. For the majority of women, managing the finances of their institution was cited as most challenging. The woman for whom finances were not a challenge had been a chief financial officer in higher education prior to the presidency.

Beyond specific areas of responsibility, several participants described feeling unprepared for the overwhelming and all-consuming nature of the presidency. "I didn't expect how much of my personal time, thinking time, family time, weekends, when you're supposed to be down time is still consumed by the work. It's always there" (Mary). Other studies have reported similar challenges with the role (Corcoran, 2008; Steinke, 2006). The presidents suggested that it is not possible to understand the high level of responsibility and relentless nature of the role prior to assuming the position.

Reflections on the Presidency

The majority of participants believed that the presidential role was one in which an individual can have a positive impact on the lives of students. Madsen (2008) found that the desire to make a difference was a strong motivator for female presidents.

Presidents who participated in the ACE (2007) survey identified students as a constituency with whom they enjoyed interacting. Participants in this study articulated a great sense of satisfaction from working with students and enabling them to achieve success.

A challenge cited by many participants, and not often referenced in the literature, was managing the tension between transparency and efficient decision making. It was noted that in the challenging economic situation faced by many colleges and universities it may not be possible to engage all interested stakeholders in decision making, given the need to respond swiftly to opportunities and challenges. Emma stated that "I have to remind myself and my staff of that frequently, that there are some decisions that are the president's prerogative and you can't consult with everybody all the time. But there's a desire for that." The presidents expressed a desire to have collaborative or shared governance when possible, but felt that there were instances in which decisions were too complex or too time-sensitive to allow for broad input.

The presidents identified certain skills or attributes that they believed were essential to being successful in the role; their perceptions largely corresponded with previous findings in the literature. Corcoran (2008) suggested that an individual who aspires to the presidency should have passion for the role; the participants in this study echoed that sentiment. The presidents asserted that a true love of higher education and their particular college or university was an essential element in being an effective institutional leader. Passion was seen as necessary in engaging internal and external stakeholders and a source of intrinsic motivation to take on such a public and demanding role.

Additionally, the presidents reflected that it was important to have well-developed interpersonal skills. The need for presidents to possess strong communication skills and an ability to relate well to diverse constituencies has been well-documented in the literature (ACE, 2007; Brand, 2002; Corcoran, 2008; Madsen, 2008; Thelin, 2004). This study further confirmed that the presidency is a public role that requires an individual who is comfortable with and, ideally, enjoys communicating with a variety of audiences.

This study also identified a skill set that has not been widely discussed in the literature, which is the ability to develop a strategic vision. Laura commented that "the president does have to be a strategic thinker and able to develop a strategic vision." Presidents are charged with setting the future direction and strategy for their campuses, yet not every presidential candidate is inclined to think in a strategic and long-term manner. The participants believed that the ability to anticipate change and develop creative ideas for the future was an important presidential skill set.

Importance of Fit

The participants were not specifically asked about the issue of fit between a president and an institution; this theme emerged from the presidents' comments and reflections. The participants discussed fit on multiple levels, such as fit between institutional needs and presidential skill sets, fit between campus culture and presidential personality, and the idea that fit changes with time.

Leatherwood and Williams (2008) discussed the importance of fit between skills and experiences of presidential candidates and the needs of the institution. Several participants in the present study believed that one of the reasons they were hired was because they had experience addressing a significant issue or problem the campus was

facing. For example, women with experience in enrollment management were hired at colleges that had experienced a decline in their student population. Some of the women reflected that as the needs of the institution changed, they may not continue to be the most qualified leader.

The presidents expressed that fit with an institution went beyond a match between skills and needs. Several participants discussed fit in personality, with one president stating that she would not be a good fit for other colleges but that she was an excellent fit for her campus. Likewise, some of the press releases issued by the colleges and universities stated that the woman hired was a good fit for the school, indicating that fit is important to institutions as well as to individuals. Laura commented that

> There is no best president; it's an effective president at that institution at that time. I've been effective at two institutions; that doesn't mean that I would be necessarily at a third. It may not mean that I'll continue to be effective here because the skill set I came in was what they needed at the time, but things change. (Laura)

It was acknowledged that fit was related to time and that at some future date the presidents may no longer be the best persons to lead their campuses. As presidential skill sets evolve and institutional needs shift, the goodness of fit can change. The women recognized that fit had an element of time sensitivity that would eventually impact their ability to be effective leaders.

Research Question 4: Glass Ceiling

This study intentionally focused on female presidents in order to understand the experiences of women who have pursued alternative career paths in higher education. There is abundant literature that documents the barriers and obstacles encountered by women (Damiano-Teixeira, 2006; Fletcher, 2007; Krefting, 2003; Madsen, 2007; Shultz

& Easter, 1997), and this study explored how those issues affected the experiences of female presidents. The fourth research question of this study was: *What are the perceptions of female presidents of 4-year colleges or universities who pursued administrative career paths of the glass ceiling in higher education?* The participants were almost unanimous in expressing the belief that while challenges remain and more can be done to advance women, the glass ceiling in higher education had been shattered.

The Glass Ceiling Is Shattered

Participants were asked during the interviews whether they perceived a glass ceiling in higher education; 8 of the 9 women reported that they did not. Elizabeth posited that

> I think when you've got 20% of your presidents are women presidents I think it's harder to say there's a glass ceiling. Because 20% of the people have made it. On the other hand, that's not reflective of the demographics of the academy, in terms of the mix of men and women who are engaged. So, I think there's still more work to be done in terms of supporting more women. (Elizabeth)

While the presidents acknowledged that 20% was neither reflective of the number of women in leadership roles in academe, nor an equitable distribution with men, they felt it was substantial enough to suggest the glass ceiling had been shattered.

The women largely perceived the glass ceiling to be a metaphor that described the status of women in previous decades but was no longer applicable today. This finding resonates with the theory advanced by Eagly and Carli (2007), who theorized that a labyrinth was a more accurate description of women's professional advancement in the 21st century. The authors noted that women are able to achieve CEO or presidential positions, but that the routes they take are often circuitous and obstacles arise in unexpected places.

The shattering of the glass ceiling was perceived to be a relatively recent phenomenon by the participants. Five of the women recalled specific instances early in their careers in which they experienced gender discrimination or sexual harassment; 4 of these women maintained that despite their past experiences there was no longer a glass ceiling today. Two women believed that barriers or obstacles were not related to gender and that women who were talented and worked hard were promoted and given opportunities.

Only 1 participant believed that the glass ceiling still existed. Emma believed that "both an institutionalized glass ceiling and a societal one" still existed for women. Her beliefs were similar to findings by Le Feuvre (2009), who identified multiple factors that disadvantage women. Le Feuvre posited that social conventions, organizational norms, and the interplay between the two prevent qualified women from attaining leadership positions.

Interestingly, some participants suggested that to better understand the phenomenon of the glass ceiling it would be important to interview women who did not reach presidential positions. The women in this sample had reached the top level of institutional leadership and, thus, may have been less inclined to perceive barriers; women who sought presidencies but were unsuccessful in attaining them may bring a different perspective to bear on the research question. The presidents acknowledged that the population of women who did not become presidents could provide a viewpoint that would be a valuable contribution to the discussion of challenges that women encounter on the pathways to the presidency.

Remaining Challenges

Although the majority of participants believed that women in higher education had moved beyond the glass ceiling, they perceived that there were still challenges that women must overcome to reach the presidency. One of the greatest challenges cited by the presidents was the difficulty in maintaining a balance between personal and professional priorities. The all-consuming nature of the presidency and the expectation of extensive prior experience required women to devote significant time to their careers. The participants suggested that administrative leadership roles often demanded more than 40 hours per week. Leslie reflected that "I could not have done this job 20 years ago when we had young children. Or if I had the job, I wouldn't have done as good a job either as a mom or as a wife or as a president. This is a 24/7 job." The work-life balance challenges for female academics, particularly around the issue of tenure, have been well documented; participants believed that women in administrative roles faced similar conflicts in balancing career and family. The challenges can be even greater once women have reached the presidential level, due to the demanding character of the presidency.

Another challenge identified by participants was a sense of residual bias against women. Some participants suggested that this underlying belief can still influence search committee recommendations, hiring decisions, and the ability of women to gain necessary experience along their career paths. One president suggested that this initial bias is often mitigated as one works with and gets to know individuals, but it could be problematic for women's professional advancement.

Perhaps due to these challenges and others, several presidents perceived that women were not choosing to pursue presidencies and were "opting out" of the pipeline.

Other authors have discussed the pipeline theory and suggested that women are electing not to pursue roles of increasing responsibility (Corcoran, 2008; Eagly & Carli, 2007; White, 2005). Cathy opined that "if women are looking at the [job] immediately ahead of them … if the job is unattractive based on what they see they're not going to want to take that next step or that following step, so they opt out and they do something else." The presidents in this sample believed that there was a shortage of women in the pipeline, both as a result of decades of history in which women did not pursue Ph.D.s and advance through the academic ranks in equal numbers to men, and because qualified female candidates were not seeking presidential roles. In either case, it will be difficult to achieve an equitable number of female presidents without more qualified women in the candidate pool.

Advancing Women

The presidents provided several suggestions on steps that could be taken to help more women to achieve top leadership roles. The most frequent suggestions were to provide mentoring and networking opportunities for women who aspire to presidencies. Some of the women described their efforts to mentor women on their campuses and to help prepare them for future leadership roles. The suggestions of mentoring and networking have been identified in previous research studies (Fletcher, 2007; Xu, 2008) as valuable tools in advancing women to leadership positions in higher education.

<div align="center">Research Question 5: Leadership</div>

The final research question of this study sought to understand the participants' leadership styles, including their strengths and weaknesses as leaders, and how their leadership changed over the course of their careers. Research Question 5 was: *What*

factors influenced the leadership styles of female presidents of 4-year colleges or

universities who pursued administrative career paths?

Leadership Styles

The majority of the women described their leadership as collaborative. Research literature has often suggested that female leaders tend to have a collaborative style (Bornstein, 2007; Madden, 2005; Madsen, 2008). Leadership that involves stakeholders in decision-making and seeks broad input is often perceived as desirable in higher education, but it can create challenges for women. Specifically, there is a perception that women, in their desire to be collaborative, may struggle to make difficult or unpopular decisions (Corcoran, 2008; Penney et al., 2007). The women in this study discussed that issue and stated that their confidence in decision-making and comfort in making difficult decisions had increased over the course of their careers. Mary stated, "Well, it's not important if they hate you or like you, what is important is did you do the right thing and did you do it for the common good?"

Another leadership trait identified by the participants was empowering others, particularly the vice presidents and deans on their senior leadership teams. Several of the women discussed the importance of recruiting qualified individuals for leadership roles on their campuses, working with them to develop a vision, and then allowing them to do their jobs. Steinke (2006) found that women in her study believed it was necessary to trust and empower individuals to succeed. Many presidents in this study described their management style as largely "hands-off;" they trusted their senior staffs and did not want to micromanage them.

The presidents also reported that they had become more effective at working with diverse people over the course of their careers. The women articulated variants on this theme, such as improving the way they communicate with people who think differently, becoming more tolerant of differences, intentionally recruiting senior-level staff members who think differently, and being more willing to compromise. The women perceived their increased flexibility and tolerance to be a result of maturing as leaders.

Leadership Strengths and Weaknesses

Several presidents had purposefully observed other leaders throughout their careers and that practice helped them hone their leadership skills. Elizabeth reflected, "I've been somebody who kind of always watches other people, particularly people who are successful." They witnessed good leadership practices, which they sought to incorporate in their own leadership, as well as observing situations that were handled poorly and from which they learned what not to do. The women's habit of watching and learning from others was indicative of a desire to continuously improve their skills and abilities as leaders. In addition, the presidents demonstrated self-awareness, enabling them to realize when they needed to incorporate something they had observed because it would make them more effective leaders.

The participants also cited specific areas or attributes they felt were leadership strengths. The women believed themselves to be good communicators and to have strong people skills. The presidents with development experience indicated that they honed those interpersonal skills in previous fundraising roles. Additionally, the women noted that their ability to develop a strategic vision for their institutions was a strength.

The weakness most often cited by the presidents was lack of patience in enacting good ideas that advanced their institutions. Steinke's (2006) female presidents identified the same challenge. The women were eager to put their vision into action and advance their college or university. Leslie observed, "Patience is not my strength. And so I had to temper my own enthusiasm for moving forward so that I wouldn't be out there all by myself." At times, it was difficult for them to wait until there was sufficient debate, discussion, and agreement from the campus community before moving forward; however, they had learned it was important to allow that process to take place so they were not moving forward alone.

<div align="center">Conclusions</div>

The findings of this study led to conclusions in two primary areas: the experiences of women achieving roles as institutional leaders, and career paths through higher education. Both sets of conclusions will be addressed in this section.

Most of the women in this study attested that the glass ceiling in higher education had been shattered. The metaphor of the glass ceiling, which implies an invisible and absolute barrier, may no longer accurately describe the landscape for women in higher education. There are approximately 500 women leading 4-year colleges and universities in the United States, which indicates that the barrier is not absolute. In addition, scholarly and popular literature identified many challenges that women encounter in their careers, giving visibility to the issue of women's professional advancement The glass ceiling metaphor was no longer accurate, according to the majority of participants.

Although the women rejected the description of the glass ceiling, they largely believed that women still encounter different challenges than men. Perhaps the images of

a labyrinth (Eagly & Carli, 2007) or semipermeable membrane are more appropriate metaphors for women who aspire to the presidency. Women do achieve presidential positions, but often by way of circuitous and nontraditional paths. Many pitfalls and unexpected detours continue to influence women's career progression.

Mentoring and networking were identified as effective tools to help women advance to the presidency. Current presidents, male and female, might consider identifying talented women on their campuses who demonstrate leadership potential. In addition, women who aspire to the presidency could benefit from actively seeking and participating in networking opportunities.

It remains clear that there is no single prescribed pathway to the college or university presidency. Many authors have explored the succession of positions held by individuals who ultimately became presidents, and several pathways have been catalogued (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001, Cohen & March, 1974, Wessel & Keim, 1994; Whittier, 2006). This study identified an administrative pathway that had been successfully navigated by women to the presidency and provided more detail to the administrative models that have previously been set forth (Wessel & Keim, 1994). In addition to mapping an administrative pathway, this study found that the best administrative experience appears to be diverse administrative experience. Several of the participants had overseen more than one administrative area along their career paths and believed that the diversity of their experience enabled them to be more effective presidents.

The findings of this study suggest that academic experience remains critically important for presidents, even for those who pursue administrative career paths. The

women in this study were selected to participate because they had never been tenured

faculty and had spent the majority of their careers in educational administration. Even

with those criteria, 7 of the 9 women had earned doctoral degrees and 7 of the 9 women

had taught college-level courses. All of these administrative presidents discussed the

importance of gaining experience that was deeply connected to the primary mission of

colleges and universities: teaching and learning. Hartley and Godin (2009) voiced

concern about the number of presidents without classroom experience, given the mission

of higher education. Women who aspire to the presidency would be well served to

cultivate academic credibility by earning a doctorate and gaining teaching experience.

Previous research suggested that nonacademic presidents seldom lead doctoral

institutions, and that was true in this study (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001; Steinke, 2006).

The women in this study tended to lead smaller, primarily undergraduate institutions;

none of the women in this study led land-grant institutions or research-intensive

institutions. These types of universities, often perceived as the most prestigious, continue

to be led primarily by men who pursued traditional academic career paths. Women who

aspire to lead those types of institutions may be more successful if they earn Ph.D.s and

progress through the academic ranks.

The careers of the women in this sample were somewhat unplanned and

opportunistic, as has been found in previous studies (Madsen, 2008; Steinke, 2006;

Whittier, 2006). The women discussed the importance of opportunities that emerged

during the course of their careers which allowed them to gain the necessary experience to

become presidents. This suggests that it is important for senior administrators and

presidents to identify talented women and give them opportunities to expand their skill sets and experiences.

Further, it seems important that current presidents and senior administrators inform talented women that they could be presidents one day. Nearly half of this sample of presidents did not visualize themselves in a presidential role until it was suggested to them, even though they had already reached a senior level at their campuses. It appears that many women do not naturally see themselves as leaders and many pursue presidencies only after it is suggested to them.

It is ironic that women may not see themselves as presidents when they may be the best candidates for the role. Bornstein (2007) argued that women were well-suited to lead in the challenging environment facing higher education today because they tend to be collaborative leaders. Many of the issues that presidents have to address will require building consensus with many diverse constituencies. Corcoran (2008) and Madsen (2008) also suggested that women's empathy, listening skills, and collaborative nature make them excellent presidential candidates.

The women in this study did not view the presidency merely as a rung on a ladder to another job. None of the women expressed a desire to leave their campus to pursue other professional goals. The presidents sought to have a transformational relationship with their campuses rather than leverage their experience to move to a larger or more prestigious institution. Several of the women articulated a sense of being settled in their current roles and discussed the fact that it takes several years for a president to have a meaningful impact on an institution.

It is likely that the desire to make a substantive difference is partly a result of finding a college or university for which the women were a good fit. The women perceived that they were equipped with the right skill sets to address the primary issues and challenges that their schools faced. Further, they believed that they had the ability to set forth a vision for the college that would allow it to advance and improve. The women articulated a commitment to their campus communities and a desire to help them achieve success. The importance of fit, clearly articulated by every participant, was further confirmed by their expressed commitment to their institutions.

<div align="center">Implications</div>

Several implications can be drawn from the findings and conclusions of this study. First, there is a need for more women to achieve presidencies and serve as role models and mentors for other women in higher education. It is possible that more women would pursue the presidency if they saw a female president on their campuses or in greater numbers nationwide. Increasing the number of women in the presidency will likely require current presidents and senior administrators to proactively identify talented women with leadership potential and provide them with opportunities to gain the necessary experience, resulting in more qualified female candidates in the pipeline.

Merely increasing the number of qualified female candidates may not result in more female presidents. The role of president is widely reported to be all-encompassing and demanding, which may lead women to not pursue it. Qualified candidates may elect to remain in other positions that provide a better balance between work and home life. Successful female presidents could serve as role models and demonstrate that it is possible to have a presidency and a meaningful home life.

Another consideration for increasing the number of women in presidencies is the need to educate governing boards and search committees on the merits of nontraditional career paths. While the presidency may not be particularly academic in nature, search committees and boards of trustees still seem to prefer the academic pedigree. Women remain underrepresented in the top levels of tenured faculty, which suggests that the academic path may not be a fertile pipeline for female presidential candidates.

Women who have had successful careers as higher education administrators could broaden the candidate pool, but only if their experience is appreciated by those making hiring decisions. Until search committees value administrative experience differently, it is unlikely there will be a significant increase in administrative presidents at research universities.

As higher education continues to confront major challenges, such as diminished government funding, reduced endowment income, and the declining ability of students to afford college, there may be greater opportunity for women with administrative backgrounds to achieve presidencies. The ACE (2007) review of the presidency with long-serving presidents found that administrative issues have increased in importance. Specifically, fundraising and financial management were cited by the presidents as two of the issues that require more presidential time and attention today. Presidential candidates with administrative backgrounds possess the skill sets to address the challenges identified in this survey.

Governing boards of colleges and universities are becoming more aware of the need to reexamine the financial models and cost structures of higher education, and presidential candidates who possess the skills to address these institutional needs could

become more attractive. Presidential candidates who come from the "business" side of

higher education may be viewed as a good fit for campuses that are facing major

challenges.

<div align="center">Recommendations for Future Practice</div>

Based on the findings of this study, recommendations for those who aspire to the

presidency, current leaders in higher education, and governing boards of institutions are

presented:

1. Women who aspire to the presidency by way of an administrative path

   might consider how to attain academic credibility, develop a portfolio of

   diverse administrative experience, seek mentors, and cultivate broad

   networks. Although the presidential role may not be particularly academic

   in nature, it is the CEO of an academic enterprise. As such, it is important

   for presidents to understand the academic culture and to gain academic

   experience. Earning a doctorate and teaching at the college level will

   likely continue to be important qualifications for presidential candidates

   and an expectation of search committees and campus communities.

   Women who have pursued administrative paths and aspire to the

   presidency would be well served to earn a terminal degree and teach.

   Further, women may benefit from seeking opportunities to broaden their

   experience by managing more than one administrative discipline, which

   will likely require a willingness to take professional risks. Finally, women

   could identify successful presidents and senior administrators within and

beyond their institutions and strive to create mentoring and networking relationships with those individuals.

2. Institutional leaders need to identify talented women and give them opportunities to gain broad experience. If having more women in presidencies is important, it is incumbent on current presidents and senior administrators to recognize women with leadership potential and help them gain the diverse experience they will need to become compelling presidential candidates. Further, senior administrators should consider communicating with talented women who work for them and encouraging them to aspire to presidencies.

3. Search committees would be well served to evaluate the needs of their institutions and hire presidents with the skill sets to address those needs. This would require governing boards and senior leaders to conduct a realistic assessment of the current state of the institution, identify immediate and long-term challenges, and articulate the specific skill sets that will be required to solve those problems and advance the institution. An assessment of this nature will enable search committees to distinguish the candidate who will be a good fit in skill set and personality. In addition, search committees need to seek out diverse candidates, including diversity of gender and previous professional experiences.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study, like all scholarly research, uncovered many new questions during the research process. There are several ways in which further exploration of this topic could contribute to a more robust scholarly conversation about higher education leadership.

1. This study of presidents who pursued administrative career paths could be replicated with male participants. It is possible that men would have different perceptions and understandings of their role as president, career paths and professional goals, leadership styles, and the glass ceiling in higher education. Several participants in this study suggested that men approach careers differently than women; it would be beneficial if scholarly research was done to corroborate or refute their theory.

2. Future research could explore the idea of women in higher education "opting out" or not seeking presidencies. It is important to understand whether women who reached the level of senior administrators but did not continue to presidencies chose not to pursue the role of president or whether they perceived specific factors that caused them not to advance. Higher education would benefit from an identification and understanding of perceived barriers that prevent women from aspiring to presidential roles. By collecting data from women who did not pursue or achieve presidencies, practitioners could consider changes that might make the role more desirable or attainable.

3. There is a need for a comprehensive exploration of the role of the president. A large-scale qualitative study could serve as a supplement to

the quantitative survey data collected and analyzed by ACE (2007).
Search committees, governing boards, and individuals who aspire to the
presidency could all benefit from a more robust understanding of what the
position of president actually entails and which skills are required to be
successful.

Concluding Thoughts

Higher education in the United States appears to be at a crossroads. Private school tuition has become unaffordable for the vast majority of American families and public institutions are challenged by ever-decreasing levels of government support. The economic recession and stock market crash in 2008 dramatically reduced the endowments of many colleges and universities at a time when costs have reached all-time highs. Presidents are facing greater challenges today than perhaps at any point in the history of higher education.

The report by ACE (2007) stated that "the presidency has become more complex, more time-consuming, more externally focused, and more driven by the competitive marketplace and reduced government financial support" (p. 45). The evolution in the role of president, combined with the changing landscape of higher education, requires leaders with different skill sets than have traditionally been selected as presidents.

> It might be why, out of necessity for survival; it might be why institutions are more willing to consider people outside of the academic arm now because they see the writing is clearly on the wall. These are not hieroglyphics that need to be dissected and understood and interpreted by someone who knows ancient history; this is real-time contextual cultural pressure that's being put on these institutions, and I think it's the survival of these institutions that is really hanging in the balance. (Ramona)

Today's colleges and universities need innovative leaders who have a firm grasp of the business side of higher education and an appreciation for academics.

The presidents in this study reflected on the challenges that they see facing the next generation of leaders. All the presidents who commented on future challenges identified the unsustainable cost structure of higher education as an issue that will have to be addressed quickly. They further suggested that the solutions will likely include changes to fundamental aspects of higher education, possibly including eliminating tenure, changing to more technology-driven delivery methods, and establishing partnerships with for-profit entities.

Even without drastic changes, colleges and universities need to adapt how they view themselves. Many institutions still prefer not to think in terms of competing for consumers or positioning their brand in the marketplace. There has been a tendency in the academy to diminish traditional business concepts as too base to be relevant to the ivory tower. A shift is occurring as more institutions realize that they need to operate both as high-quality academic institutions and successful businesses.

Women who have pursued administrative careers could be uniquely positioned to make a positive contribution to higher education at this critical time. Presidential candidates with diverse administrative backgrounds bring the tactical skills that institutions need to solve the challenges they face. Specifically, presidents who are experiences in securing financial resources, creating and implementing a strategic vision, responding to crises that arise, and managing complex finances are well-positioned to become leaders at this challenging time. In many ways, presidents with these administrative skills are needed by campuses today more than leading scholars.

Women can bring other important characteristics to the presidency beyond finite administrative skills. Colleges and universities will require leaders who can bring

together diverse constituencies, facilitate dialogue about complex problems, and empower people to implement solutions. Women are often considered to have collaborative or transformational leadership styles. That type of inclusive and inspiring leadership is in great demand as higher education grapples with difficult and multi-pronged challenges.

Perhaps most importantly, colleges and universities need presidents who are passionate. The women in this study and in other literature discussed their deep love for the mission of higher education and the transformative effect it can have. Higher education, with all the challenges it faces, is still one of the best vehicles for individuals to better themselves and their lives. Women who are passionate about preserving and advancing these institutions—who bring diverse administrative skill sets and a collaborative orientation—may be the best candidates for college and university presidencies.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INVITATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

President Doe
College or University
1234 Street
City, State, Zip

Dear President Doe,

You are part of a very small group. I have identified 20 women who currently serve as presidents of four-year colleges and universities who reached this position through an administrative, rather than academic, career path in higher education. This small population is the topic of my dissertation, and I hope you will participate.

My name is Nicki Nabasny and I am in my third year of a doctoral program at the University of San Francisco. I am about to begin the dissertation journey during which time I will conduct qualitative research exploring the perceptions and experiences of female presidents who have pursued a career path in higher education administration. This topic is of personal and professional interest to me, as I have spent my career to date in higher education development.

Many scholars have examined the experiences of female presidents, and others have dissected the different career paths that can lead to the college or university presidency. To date, no study has brought these two ideas together to understand the experiences of female college and university presidents who did not travel the traditional path through academia.

I will conduct in-person interviews during the summer of 2010. It is my hope to be able to speak with you and have your participation in my study. I would be happy to come to your campus to conduct the interview, which would take approximately one hour.

I understand there are many demands on your schedule. I would be incredibly grateful if you could make time to see me; I am happy to come on a date and time that is most convenient for you.

Thank you for your consideration of this invitation. Please contact me at your convenience to let me know if you can participate. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Kind regards,

Nicki Nabasny
Ed.D. Candidate

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Reports have shown that only 20% of four-year universities have a female president. Why do you think women continue to be underrepresented as university presidents?

- What do you perceive to be the barriers or obstacles women face in advancing in higher education?

- What, if anything, do you believe institutions should do to have more women in leadership positions?

- Do you perceive a glass ceiling in higher education? What do you believe to be some of the symptoms of the glass ceiling?

- Can you describe an instance where you faced discrimination in your professional life because of your gender?

- Researchers have identified barriers that women face in pursuing academic careers in higher education. What do you perceive to be the barriers for women in higher education administration?

- Describe your career path and progression.

- What barriers or obstacles have you experienced in your career progression?

- Who or what has been most helpful to you throughout your professional journey?

- What experiences, either personal or professional, were most important in your journey to the presidency?

- At what point in your career did you begin to think about being a university president?

- What was your ultimate professional goal when you began your career?

- What is your ultimate professional goal today?

- At what point in your career did you decide to pursue a path in higher education administration?

- Do you aspire to a position beside the one you currently hold?

- Would you encourage other women to seek a university or college presidency? Why or why not?

- What did you expect the role of president would be like? In what ways has your experience differed from your expectations?

- What aspects of the role of president do you find most challenging?

- What aspects of the role of president do you most enjoy?

- What parts of the presidential job were you most prepared for?

- What parts of the presidential job were you least prepared for?

- What do you believe to be the most important skill or skill set a president should possess?

- The majority of college presidents pursue an academic career path. In what ways was your administrative/nontraditional career path a benefit or a liability in your candidacy for president?

- How would you describe your leadership style?

- In what ways has your leadership style changed over the years?

- In what ways have you had to adapt your leadership style since assuming the presidency?

- What do you believe to be the most important leadership skill for a university president to possess? Why is that the most important?

- How has your past professional experience influenced your leadership?

- What do you believe to be your strengths as a leader? How did you develop those strengths?

- What do you believe to be your weaknesses as a leader?

- What is the best professional decision you have made as president? Why was it the best?

- What is the worst professional decision you have made as president? Why was it the worst?

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT

Purpose and Background

Ms. Nichole Nabasny, a graduate student in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco, is doing a study on female presidents of four-year colleges and universities. Her study explores the perceptions and experiences of female presidents who pursued an administrative, rather than academic, career path in higher education. The researcher is interested in understanding the participants' perceptions about the glass ceiling in higher education, their professional journey, their career path and future professional goals, how well they were prepared for the role of president, and what factors have influenced their leadership style.

I am being asked to participate because I am a president of a four-year college or university who pursed an administrative career path in higher education.

Procedures

If I agree to be a participant in this study, the following will happen:

1. I will work with Ms. Nabasny to schedule a mutually convenient time to conduct an interview.

2. I will participate in an interview with Ms. Nabasny, during which I will be asked about my career path, the glass ceiling in higher education, my future goals, my current role and my leadership. I will give my permission for the interview to be audio recorded.

3. I will review the transcript from the interview and identify and errors or inaccuracies.

4. I will confirm the accuracy of the transcript after any necessary edits are made.

Risks and/or Discomforts

1. It is possible that some of the questions during the interview may make me feel uncomfortable, but I am free to decline to answer any questions I do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time.

2. Participation in research may mean a loss of confidentiality. Study records will be kept as confidential as is possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. Study information will be coded and kept in locked files at all times. Only the researcher will have access to the files.

3. Because the time required for my participation may be up to 2 hours, I may become tired or bored.

Benefits

There will be no direct benefit to me from participating in this study. The anticipated benefit of this study is a better understanding the experiences of women who have achieved the college presidency through alternate routes.

Costs/Financial Considerations

There will be no financial costs to me as a result of taking part in this study.

Payment/Reimbursement

I will not receive any financial payment or reimbursement for my participation in this study. The researcher may purchase coffee, lunch or other similar items if the interview is scheduled at a time when a meal or beverage would be appropriate.
Questions

I have talked to Ms. Nabasny about this study and have had my questions answered. If I have further questions about the study, I may call her at (415) 422-XXXX or Dr. Patricia Mitchell (415) 422-XXXX.

If I have any questions or comments about participation in this study, I should first talk with the researchers. If for some reason I do not wish to do this, I may contact   the IRBPHS, which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may

reach the IRBPHS office by calling (415) 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by e-mailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to the IRBPHS, Department of Psychology, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080.

Consent

I have been given a copy of the "Research Subject's Bill of Rights" and I have been given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. I am free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. My decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on my present or future status as a student or employee at USF.

My signature below indicates that I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature	Date of Signature

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent	Date of Signature

APPENDIX D

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

University of San Francisco
School of Education

Research participants can expect:

- To be told the extent to which confidentiality of records identifying the subject will be maintained and of the possibility that specified individuals, internal and external regulatory agencies, or study sponsors may inspect information in the medical record specifically related to participation in the clinical trial.

- To be told of any benefits that may reasonably be expected from the research.

- To be told of any reasonably foreseeable discomforts or risks.

- To be told of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment that might be of benefit to the subject.

- To be told of the procedures to be followed during the course of participation, especially those that are experimental in nature.

- To be told that they may refuse to participate (participation is voluntary), and that declining to participate will not compromise access to services and will not result in penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled.

- To be told about compensation and medical treatment if research related injury occurs and where further information may be obtained when participating in research involving more than minimal risk.

- To be told whom to contact for answers to pertinent questions about the research, about the research subjects' rights and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury to the subject.

- To be told of anticipated circumstances under which the investigator without regard to the subject's consent may terminate the subject's participation.

- To be told of any additional costs to the subject that may result from participation in the research.

- To be told of the consequences of a subjects' decision to withdraw from the research and procedures for orderly termination of participation by the subject.

- To be told that significant new findings developed during the course of the research that may relate to the subject's willingness to continue participation will be provided to the subject.

- To be told the approximate number of subjects involved in the study.

- To be told what the study is trying to find out.

- To be told what will happen to me and whether any of the procedures, drugs, or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.

- To be told about the frequent and/or important risks, side effects, or discomforts of the things that will happen to me for research purposes.

- To be told if I can expect any benefit from participating, and, if so, what the benefit might be.

- To be told of the other choices I have and how they may be better or worse than being in the study; To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.

- To be told what sort of medical or psychological treatment is available if any complications arise.

- To refuse to participate at all or to change my mind about participation after the study is started; if I were to make such a decision, it will not affect my right to receive the care or privileges I would receive if I were not in the study.

- To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.

- To be free of pressure when considering whether I wish to agree to be in the study.

If I have other questions, I should ask the researcher. In addition, I may contact the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS by calling (415) 422-6091, by electronic mail at IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to USF IRBPHS, Department of Counseling Psychology, Education Building, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080.

APPENDIX E

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN

SUBJECTS APPROVAL

April 30, 2010

Dear Ms. Nabasny:

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco (USF) has reviewed your request for human subjects approval regarding your study.

Your application has been approved by the committee (IRBPHS #10-044).

Please note the following:

1. Approval expires twelve (12) months from the dated noted above. At that time, if you are still in collecting data from human subjects, you must file a renewal application.

2. Any modifications to the research protocol or changes in instrumentation (including wording of items) must be communicated to the IRBPHS.

Re-submission of an application may be required at that time.

3. Any adverse reactions or complications on the part of participants must be reported (in writing) to the IRBPHS within ten (10) working days.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRBPHS at (415) 422-6091.
On behalf of the IRBPHS committee, I wish you much success in your research.

Sincerely,

Terence Patterson, EdD, ABPP
Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
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