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Sydney Freeman Jr.

Frances K. Kochan

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UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS' PERSPECTIVES OF THE KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCIES NEEDED IN 21ST CENTURY HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERSHIP

by Sydney Freeman, Jr. and Frances K. Kochan

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify the core knowledge and competencies needed for executive leadership in higher education administration as perceived by university presidents. Thirteen presidents shared the knowledge and competencies they perceived as being essential for an effective presidency. The respondents identified the important knowledge areas as: foundational; acquisition of cultural knowledge; and complex cognitive. They viewed personal attributes, management, and communications as the essential competency areas. The study found that presidents viewed themselves both as leaders and as managers.

Results of this study should be helpful to organizations seeking to develop and/or implement degree programs to prepare individuals for the presidency. The results may also be helpful to those seeking to provide professional development materials and activities to prepare or develop individuals for this role.

1. Introduction

Listen to Freeman & Kochan discuss the perceptions of university presidents.

Higher education programs prepare potential higher education administrators, faculty, and policymakers (Wright, 2007). There have been attempts to develop and adopt common requirements or core course requirements for the master's degree within some of these programs (ASHE, 2010; CAS, 2006). For example, in 2006, the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) adopted a set of student affairs master's level preparation standards. In 2010, the Association for the Study of Higher Education's Council for the Advancement of Higher Education Programs (ASHE)

adopted a set of guidelines for Higher Education Administration and Leadership Preparation Programs at the Master's Degree Level. However, similar guidelines or standards have not been developed for higher education administration or leadership doctoral programs (ASHE, 2010).

Fifty-eight percent of sitting university presidents in United States are over the age of 61 (ACE, 2012). This has led higher education researchers to predict a surge of retirements resulting in a large number of openings for university presidencies across the country in the years ahead. In the past 10 years, many searches have turned to sitting college presidents as the primary pool of applicants. Due to the age of many sitting presidents, that pool may not be as convenient an option in the future (Farrington, 2008).

Presidents in higher education come from a variety of backgrounds. Some are from the corporate world, some from public service and some from the academic realm. However, academic credentials continue to be important when selecting presidents, particularly in research institutions. The primary way non-higher education employees become president at a research university is that they bring extraordinary accomplishments or notoriety (e.g., scholarly or political or management reputations) to the university. Examining this issue, Burton (2003) found that generally, becoming a president at a research university, especially at a more prestigious institution, is a highly structured process and includes issues such as where the doctorate degree was earned and where academic and administrative experience was obtained.

The combination of the pending retirements of presidents and the fact that it appears that most university presidencies require some form of a terminal degree makes it important to gain information about the knowledge and competencies needed for success from the perspective of those already in the position. Such information will assist institutions preparing future higher education leaders to assure that their programs are well grounded and meet the needs of the presidents of this century.

2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the core knowledge and competencies needed for executive leadership in higher education administration as perceived by university presidents. University presidents involved were those who had earned a doctoral degree with a specialization in higher education administration and who were leading four-year institutions. The research question addressed was, "What are the core knowledge and competencies needed for executive leadership in higher education administration as perceived by university presidents?"

It is hoped that the findings will inform the work of higher education program faculty and curriculum developers as they seek to prepare students for executive leadership positions in higher education. The results should also help administrators, curriculum

developers, and faculty associated with higher education administrations programs and educational leadership institutes to better understand higher education students' needs.

THE UNIVERSITY PRESIDENCY

Since the election of the first American college president in 1640—Henry Dunster of Harvard College—the position of president has been one of extreme responsibility and high visibility. The university presidency is a position that is very complex and important. Luxton (2005) writes,

By being the chief spokesperson for institutional strategy, the chief executive officer gives credibility to agreed (upon) plans. Although other individuals may lead at key points in development and implementation of the process, the chief executive officer is understood to speak for the whole institution. (p. 12)

The role of the president is both substantive and symbolic. McLaughlin and Riesman (1996) put it succinctly when they wrote that presidents serve as the “living logo” of their institutions. Presidents speak and represent multiple constituencies associated with their universities. Although presidents are ultimately accountable to the board, they generally like to chart their own courses. Dubois (2006) notes, “College presidents are an extraordinary group of professionals. They are highly competent and competitive, and basically, they want to be left alone” (p. 96).

The role of the university president may be changing, however. Roach (2000) cites Dr. Michael Lomax, president of the United Negro College Fund, who commented, “I think that college boards are viewing the job of president more as a CEO than as a pure education position” (p. 24). In the same article Roach (2000) cites Dr. George Ayers, president of Ayers and Associates, a northern Virginia-based higher education management consulting and executive search firm, as saying, “Boards are also seeking candidates who have demonstrated that they have fund-raising skills and can win assistance for their school from corporations and foundations” (p. 24). These ideas may be changing the knowledge, competencies, and skills needed by academics as they serve in their presidential roles, making it increasingly important to identify the abilities that will be needed for entry-level administrators in this position to assure their future success (Kuk, Cobb, & Forrest, 2007).

COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS

Although there have been several studies dedicated to the training of leaders through higher education programs (Altach, 2010; Altbach, Bozeman, & Janashia, 2007; Barnett, 2007; Dressel & Mayhew, 1974; Fife & Goodchild, 1991; Kienle & Loyd, 2005; Wang, 2010; Wright & Miller, 2007), there is a lack of literature that addresses the value of higher education doctoral programs in preparing university presidents. One study by Hammons and Miller (2006) investigated community college presidents' perceptions of their preparation programs and sought suggestions for improvement. Findings indicated that although preparation programs were highly regarded by their graduates, they also

stated that these programs needed to do a better job of interacting with the practitioner community and using real-world cases in their instruction.

STUDENT AFFAIRS LEADERSHIP

Another body of research that informed this study comes from the area of student affairs. Research related to the efficacy of graduate programs in student affairs has been conducted since the initial academic preparation programs began at Teachers College, Columbia University, in 1913 (Wilson, 2012). During the past 30 years, there has been a debate related to which particular coursework has been the most effective in transferring knowledge, developing skills, and defining characteristics essential to successful practice. One of the studies most pertinent to this research was conducted by Sandeen in 1982. This researcher completed a national survey of 219 chief student affairs officers to assess, review, and update their perceptions of their graduate preparation programs. Sandeen reported that senior student affairs officers thought many programs were too oriented toward counseling, and they suggested that internship opportunities should be expanded and that more courses in legal issues, budgeting, and management needed to be offered.

Another important study dealing with student affairs program curriculum was conducted by Kiem (1991). In a longitudinal study of 47 doctoral, specialist, and master's programs, Kiem found that many programs had fewer faculty and students than their counterparts within the same department, fewer programs requiring the master's thesis, and a lack of courses in student personnel.

The study that most closely aligns with the objectives of this study was conducted by Herdlein (2004). This study reviewed the opinions of chief student affairs officers at 50 colleges/universities regarding the degree to which they believed that student affairs graduate programs adequately prepared new professionals. He focused his study on three primary categories in higher education curriculum, which included foundational studies, professional studies, and supervised practice. He asserted, "Over a period of 36 years, a variety of studies have addressed issues important to changing conditions in the academy including suggestions to move preparation programs from a counseling emphasis to include a more administrative and management focus" (p. 56). He further noted that this change had been a function of the perceived need for higher education programs to develop leaders that master fundamental areas of management such as budgeting, leadership, and fundraising. Herdlein concluded that it was unclear whether graduate programs in student affairs had been satisfactory in preparing student affairs administrators for the rapidly changing environment of higher education.

Herdlein (2004) provided the following implications for the student affairs profession: (1) There is a need for research carefully delineating competencies needed for successful practice; (2) Demonstrating competencies and evaluating learning outcomes may call for additional methodologies including the use of portfolios and competency-based practicum and graduate assistantships; and (3) All of the various knowledge and skill sets perceived to be lacking in new professionals need to be addressed in curricular

offerings, teaching subject matter across the curriculum, and developing ways to encourage professional development and life-long learning as an integral part of the student affairs profession (p. 69).

ACE: PATHWAY TO THE PRESIDENCY STUDY

Although little research has been done on university presidents' perceptions of the important knowledge and competencies required for their jobs and the role of their graduate programs in preparing them for their positions, the American Council of Education (ACE) has been conducting presidential surveys to gather college demographic and other data since 1986. The most recent study was published in 2012 (ACE, 2012). This appears to be the only comprehensive source of demographic data on college and university presidents from all sectors of American higher education (ACE, 2012). Questions have been adapted and refined throughout this 25-year period.

The first survey was administered to describe the backgrounds, career paths, and experiences of college and university presidents (ACE, 2012). The most recent study used *The College President's Survey* to gather information from presidents regarding their education, career paths and length of service, as well as personal characteristics such as age, marital status, and religious affiliation. Over 1600 individuals responded to the survey. Respondents were asked about the importance of 17 competency areas: (1) Academic issues (e.g., curriculum changes), (2) Accountability/assessment of student learning, (3) Athletics, (4) Budget/financial management, (5) Capital improvement projects, (6) Community relations, (7) Crisis management, (8) Enrollment management, (9) Entrepreneurial ventures, (10) Faculty issues, (11) Fund raising, (12) Governing board relations, (13) Government relations, (14) Media/public relations, (15) Personnel issues (excluding faculty), (16) Risk management/legal issues, and (17) Strategic planning. These competencies were developed and refined over 20 years through interviews and feedback from college and university presidents (ACE, 2012; J. King, personal communication, September 4, 2010).

3. Methods

Although this was primarily a qualitative study, the population and the initial interview questions were derived from the 2007 edition of the ACE study of presidents. The data sample selection and data collection and analysis processes used are described in the sections that follow.

PHASE POPULATION AND SAMPLE SELECTION

The population for this study was derived from the 1,647 college and university presidents affiliated with the American Council of Education, as identified on the council's organizational website (American Council of Education, 2010, para. 1). The sample was culled by identifying only presidents who served institutions whose name included the word "university," differentiating them from those whose name contained the word "college," and included only presidents who received a degree in higher

education administration. This selection process was conducted to bring consistency to the study sample. This sample selection resulted in a population of 150 presidents.

These 150 university presidents were solicited via email or phone to participate in the study. Of these 150, thirteen presidents agreed to participate. There were several reasons presidents were unable to participate, including a lack of time, a lack of interest, they were not university presidents, or they did not have a doctoral degree in higher education administration. All presidents were actively serving in their position at the time of their interviews. Of the thirteen participants, three were females and ten were males. Three African American presidents, who serve as the heads of Historically Black Universities, participated in the study. All ten of the other presidents were Caucasian and served in Predominantly White Universities. Five presidents served private religious institutions, and the eight other presidents led public serving institutions. The enrollment size of the institutions the presidents served ranged from less than 2,000 to more than 50,000 students. For purposes of this study, presidents' names and their institutions were replaced with the names of pseudonyms to keep their responses anonymous. Table 1 presents detailed information about the characteristics of participating presidents.

DATA COLLECTION PROCESSES

The findings presented are part of a three-part study examining the academic preparation of university presidents. The primary data source for this study was face-to-face interviews with the presidents. The literature review provided information from which ten initial interview questions were developed, piloted, and revised as described in the validity section of this manuscript. The same interview protocol was used during all the face-to-face interviews. Additional information was gathered from interviewees via email correspondence.

The researcher used the Life History Case Studies (LHCS) approach to gather background information about the participants. LHCS is a qualitative approach designed to help researchers gather background information about the study participants in order to understand the in-depth and comprehensive meanings in their lives (Campbell, 1999). The researcher initiated this process by gathering curriculum vitas and biographical sketches of interviewees prior to the interviews to confirm that the interviewers' description of their backgrounds corroborated with the other data sources. The researcher also collected demographic information about gender, ethnicity, institutional type, and home institution's geographic region.

Seven university presidents were interviewed at the 2010 ACE Annual Meeting in Phoenix, AZ on March 6–10, 2010. Interviews took place between the hours of 10:00 a.m. through 5:00 p.m. Participants met the researcher in a meeting boardroom for the interview. The six other interviews were conducted on-site at the participants' home institution presidents' offices. These interviews lasted for approximately one (1) hour. Audio and video equipment were used for data collection purposes. Audiotaping and videotaping the interviews enabled the researcher to concentrate on questions asked

and give his full attention to the interviewee. Copious and detailed notes were also taken during the interview. An interview script was used throughout the process.

Following the initial interview, the researcher reviewed the transcript and tape and constructed follow-up interview questions tailored to the individual president. These questions sought to clarify statements and assertions made by presidents in the initial interview. Follow-up interviews were conducted via email. Both rounds of interviews took place over a 5-month period.

Summary notes were recorded in a journal directly following each interview. The presidents' reactions and comments and preliminary thoughts on the emerging themes were recorded in a log as recommended by Miles and Huberman (1984) and Gasman (2003). Both what the presidents said (i.e., their words and language) and what was unsaid (i.e., body language and long pauses) were considered when logging notes.

DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher used multiple data sources to confirm the data results (Yin, 2003). Using multiple sources enhanced the study by allowing for structural corroboration. Eisner (1998) describes structural corroboration as "the confluence of multiple sources of evidence or the recurrence of instances that support a conclusion" (p. 55). The sources the researcher used were field notes taken during participant interviews, memoing (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Trochim, 2006) ideas developed during the research process, the audio and videotapes used during the interviews, and the email responses gathered from the follow-up interviews.

CONCERNS FOR INTERNAL/EXTERNAL VALIDITY

The researcher enlisted the expertise of an expert panel of three senior academic administrators and faculty to review pilot interview questions in order to gather evidence of content validity (Ross & Shannon, 2008). After making revisions based on the expert panel's responses, the researcher conducted field interviews with six academic administrators to further refine the questions. The researcher also conducted two focus-group interviews, which included both higher and adult education faculty and higher education administration students who were considered at "ABD" status. Information from both of these endeavors was used to finalize the interview questions.

After concluding the actual interviews with the presidential participants, follow-up email interviews were conducted for purposes of member checking and data validation. Member checking permitted the presidents to review the notations from the previous interview to ensure that they correctly reflected their feelings and responses (Creswell, 1998; Wolfe, 2010). The second interview process, conducted via email, allowed the researcher to conduct additional questioning related to the responses from the initial interview.

CONCERNS FOR RELIABILITY AND GENERALIZABILITY OF RESULTS

Theory/perspective triangulation is described by Patton (2002) as using multiple lenses or theories to interpret the data. This process was completed during the data collection stage when the researcher used several conceptual frameworks to inform the data collection process, which included Stuver's (2006) student expectations, Fink's (2005) curriculum design, Hammon and Miller's (2006) presidential perceptions, and Herdlein's (2004) graduate preparation of new professionals. Those frameworks were used to provide a priori codes to inform the analysis process.

CODING PROCESS

The researcher compiled a start list of codes to look for in the data from the literature review on curriculum development and presidential leadership. There were a total of 80 a priori codes that were found to be applicable to the study. These codes were numbered using recommendations of Miles and Huberman (1994). The start list included: skills, knowledge, competency, program characteristics, development, curriculum, and professional development. As data were coded, recurring themes not included on the start list or in the relevant literature were coded as emerging codes. Codes that did not have data attached to them were dropped.

During the analysis process, the "coding incident to incident" approach advocated by Charmaz (2006) was implemented. This process allowed the researcher to compare like incidents experienced by different participants, helping to further corroborate ideas developed earlier in the coding process. These "axial" codes, which are codes that emerge out of the data, helped to solidify the identity of emergent properties. Emergent codes were compared to one another to further narrow down the amount of redundant codes and create substantive codes. The results of this process allowed for theoretical coding, which Charmaz (2006) describes as substantive codes being integrated together creating a theory.

4. Findings

Presidents identified three primary knowledge areas as essential for success in their position. They also identified three competency areas as critical: These are described in the sections that follow.

ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE

In this study knowledge is defined as (1) higher education expertise acquired by a person through experience or education; the theoretical and or practical understanding of a subject in higher education; (2) what is known in a particular field or in total; or (3) facts and information needed for executive leadership in higher education administration (Oxford, 2011). Core knowledge areas presidents identified as essential for the presidency were: Foundational Knowledge (History of Higher Education and Finance);

Knowledge Acquisition of Cultural Knowledge (Context and Public Image); and Complex Cognitive Knowledge. These are displayed in Table 2.

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

The first knowledge area presidents described as being a part of the core knowledge needed for executive leadership was foundational knowledge. Foundational knowledge is defined in this study as information that enabled presidents to have a basic understanding of higher education as a field. The foundational knowledge area was comprised of two elements (1) history of higher education, (2) and budgeting/finance.

History of Higher Education. More than half of the presidents believe that those who aspire to senior leadership should have a strong grasp of the history of higher education. Emelia Lily, a president of a small public university in the Northeastern region of the United States, shared that it is important for those seeking to move into senior leadership to be able to understand the history of higher education. She and other presidents believe that understanding the history of higher education helps senior leaders understand how higher education institutions operate and how they can be improved. Among the topics she identified as vital were:

the history of higher education; understanding how higher education is organized; how it works; sometimes how it doesn't work; and also understanding that you don't work in isolation. in particular, when you work in a system.

President Levi Carter seconded her sentiments, as he reflected on the importance of this knowledge. He shared:

I have more of a sense of the history of higher education because of my study, more of a sense of the people who have come before me in the industry in the history of higher education and the contributions that we could all make, but I don't think I would have that perspective without the study of higher education.

These statements reinforce the findings of Nelson (2008) who posited that presidents should understand the foundational concepts of the academy. He wrote:

Such a duty requires presidents to embrace the creed of the academy and its time-honored beliefs: freedom of thought and inquiry, freedom of academic expression, respect for diverse opinions, commitment to civility, and belief in human equality, progress and the tenets of meritocracy. Fundamentally, that means that the creed and those beliefs must be understood as the foundation of what it means to be in the university (p. A37).

FINANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In addition to being in agreement about the value of gaining knowledge of the history of higher education, eleven of the respondents shared that being exposed to information

on budgeting and finance is extremely important. President Peter Johns of Ethanville University expressed it best when he shared:

Certainly there is I think a greater requirement for understanding fiscal management. If a person coming into a presidency truly does not understand accounting or how to read a balance sheet or understand cash flow they better figure it out pretty fast. There is extraordinary pressure to be able to understand and monitor that and you know it's, I mean we've got great people here in finance, but my name is on the line, on making sure that the financial house is in order. It's not enough just to be able to say well, I know how to hire great people; you've got to understand it yourself.

President Johns also said it well. He shared:

It is very important that higher education executives, especially presidents, have a working knowledge of budgeting and finance in higher education. If presidents do not understand finance in higher education they may find themselves in unwanted situations.

President Elijah Alexander emphasized that finance and budgeting are among the most important areas a president needs to master. He stated:

Knowledge of finance and budgeting, I didn't say the skills, but now just the knowledge of finance and budgeting. Those would be skills that I would put high on the list.

Lucus Jacob, president of Landon State University, remarked that presidents who show that they have a good understanding of financial matters within the university demonstrate and signal to their administrative colleagues that they are competent leaders. He shared:

You've got to have a basic understanding of budgeting and finance so that you can have conversations with your business people to make sure that you are in control of your resources.

This emphasis on understanding finance and budgeting for presidents is supported by the results of the most recent ACE (2012) study, which found that budgeting was one of the top four responsibilities that occupy most of the presidents' time (Cook, 2012).

KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION OF THE CULTURE

The second knowledge area derived from this study was knowledge acquisition to operate properly in the culture of higher education. Knowledge acquisition of the culture involves two aspects: the context and public image.

Knowledge acquisition of culture is defined in this study as higher education leaders gaining information that enables them to have a basic understanding of the historical and modern context of the field of higher education. President Lucus Jacob provided an

excellent example of knowledge acquisition when he explained that presidents need to have a sharp grasp of the politics that affect higher education. He noted:

You've got to have a basic understanding of the academy and what it's about and how it functions. And you've got to have an understanding of politics, because all politics are local, and you don't get away no matter where you go, there's going to be politics.

This statement reflects the sentiments of Nelson (2008) in which he posited that it is the responsibility of the president to understand the culture of his or her campus community. He suggested that not only does a president need to understand the campus climate and culture, he or she also has the responsibility for protecting the campus from unnecessary fragmentation. He suggested that one approach to avoiding this fragmentation is for a president to foster a culture of accountability and transparency. President Ryan Wyatt's thoughts captured this notion when he stated:

If you are going to be a successful administrator, you need to understand the issues of accountability and transparency, how to help people understand the objectives and whether or not the objectives have been met and how the objectives are measured and I think one would need to have a pretty good understanding of that.

President Emelia Lily also mentioned this when she said:

Some of the things I learned in my doctoral program that are helping me to be able to see the connections and to see how things may be different, but how things may be the same....I enjoy being a learner and that's part of the way I've approached this opportunity.

UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC IMAGE

Another area in the cultural arena that presidents believed future higher education leaders must be knowledgeable about is the role that their presidencies will play in their professional identity. Presidents shared that the presidency is a unique position. The president is seen by many as the primary spokesperson and symbol of the university. Understanding public image means that you think about this and find ways to deal with it. If presidents take this expectation too far they run the risk of believing that they are their position. President Nolan Cooper expressed it this way:

My job, this is my job, this is not who I am. And when you get presidents who forget who they are and assume that they are their job or they are the university, they are in trouble.

Ian Flynn added to the notion that those in a presidency must take themselves seriously, but not too seriously because a leader's flaws are obvious to many, and a leader can be blind to them. President Flynn used this analogy to make this point: "I think (you need to have) the ability to be able to say, 'The emperor has no clothes.'"

Ryan Wyatt expressed the opinion that there is a marked difference between serving as a vice president and serving in a presidency in terms of the role and public image. Although he had served over fourteen years in three diverse vice presidencies, he found that being a president required him to be viewed as a president at all times in public. He expressed it this way:

I suppose that it is also a very public life and I knew that, and I have lived a public life at another time in life, but this is one where particularly in my setting where I am at a small school in a relatively small town, I am never not the president of the university and it is always the case. I talked about that with people, but I don't think I really understood it until I had experienced it.

Researchers of the college and university presidency recognize that presidents are not the only individuals that are impacted by their public image (Siegel, 2011; Pierce, 2011). Presidents' families also live in a "fishbowl." Siegel (2011) describes the fishbowl effect as occurring when "members of the campus community bestow the presidency with symbolic attributes, and as a result they keep an observant watch over the behaviors and words of the president and ascribe meaning to many of the things the president does and says" (p. 85).

COMPLEX COGNITIVE THINKING

The third knowledge area derived from this study is complex cognitive thinking. Complex cognitive thinking is defined in this study as the ability of leaders in higher education to find the interconnection between divergent ideas and to reflect and synthesize that information while being open to emergent ideas. President Lily, along with seven other presidents, emphasized the importance of senior leaders in higher education developing the ability to reflect after completing a project. This honing of knowledge enables presidents to learn from mistakes and integrate their successes in future endeavors. Lily shared this insight:

It is really a skill and ability at wrapping up the knowledge that you have, ok. Taking the time to reflect on what it is that you really have accomplished, somebody setting the goal, how you implemented the goal or how you achieved the goal, and being able to talk about how you did that. Why do I say that, well I think it demonstrates leadership, you have to be able to demonstrate that. It also demonstrates perseverance.

President William James shared that making cognitive connections is important because it helps presidents solve complex problems. He stated:

One thing I learned though is the leader has to look at a problem from multiple lenses and if you don't understand the problem, you're going to apply perhaps the wrong solution to the problem and so that's what I found most helpful is to be able to develop a skill set to analyze critically and effectively what the problem is and then define, through consultation with others, the right solution for the right problem.

Nelson (2009) found that developing cognitive thinking is very important for presidents as they are interacting with highly sophisticated and intelligent constituencies. He shared, "Presidents have to manage highly politicized environments populated by tremendously bright people including faculty, but also trustees, alumni, friends and, not least, students (p. 26)."

ESSENTIAL COMPETENCIES

In addition to knowledge areas, the presidents identified three essential competencies needed to succeed in their positions. In this study, competencies are defined as special non-generic skills that apply to a particular sector, job, or field. Areas the presidents identified as needed for success in the university presidency are displayed in Table 3. The primary core competency areas that presidents identified included: (Personal Attributes), Management (Assessment and Accountability, Enrollment Management, Fundraising, and Strategic Planning), and Communications (Interpersonal Development, Writing to Diverse Audiences and Speaking to Diverse Audiences).

PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES

President Ryan Wyatt, along with ten other presidents, expressed their belief that it is vitally important that aspiring presidents have a strong sense of who they are. In addition, Wyatt shared that one must understand his or her own "gifts and graces" before going into a presidency. There are several attributes that presidents in this study identified as important. They included (1) developing their own sense of vision, (2) humility, (3) empathy, (4) the ability to understand and connect with people, (5) team building, (6) the ability to express concepts in everyday language, and (7) work hard. Wyatt expressed the importance of these attributes below.

I think a president has to have the capacity to be a (1) visionary leader and to develop a vision that grows organically out of the institution that is a shared vision in which all of the constituents feel that they have a stake. It needs to be seen as the university's vision, not as the president's vision, but the president has to be the person who leads the charge in the development of the vision and then in the implementation of the vision.

Every president brings a unique set of attributes to a presidency. It is therefore important for aspiring presidents to strengthen their most positive attributes, including the attributes just mentioned. In addition, presidents like Gavin Benjamin believe that personal attributes such as teamwork are imperative in the 21st century university presidency. He said:

No one person can be successful by himself. A university president doesn't do it by himself. you have to build the team. So, working with others to put it in the colloquial frame is extremely important. Be able to realize that it's going to take hard work, it's not just a 9 to 5 job and that's important.

The personal attributes that presidents demonstrate helps them to navigate what Siegel (2011) describes as “multiple, and often competing, interpretations of any number of cultural phenomena that exist in the institutional environment. Negotiating the cultural environment and bringing together constituent groups that have disparate views, beliefs, and behavioral norms are critical” (p. 79).

MANAGEMENT

These findings included a diverse cadre of management areas that presidents viewed as vital. Presidents identified assessment and accountability of student learning, enrollment management, fundraising, and strategic planning as essential competencies that aspiring senior leaders should master.

ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF STUDENT LEARNING.

Close to half of the presidents believe that aspiring presidents need to be prepared in the area of student assessment. Dr. Ryan Wyatt expressed it this way:

If you are going to be a successful administrator, you need to understand the issues of accountability and transparency, how to help people understand the objectives and whether or not the objectives have been met and how the objectives are measured and I think one would need to have pretty good understanding of that.

Many of the presidents shared that understanding of assessment and accountability need not be just relegated to student learning. They shared that the 21st century university president will be responsible for making sure that assessment and accountability are a part of the culture of every unit within an institution. President Joshua Dillan explained it well when he said:

I think it is critical to assess everything that you are doing....I think it will be a part of a president's job more than it used to be. And (it is important that) we (presidents) compare this to assessing the effectiveness of administrative and operational and business things. Faculty are very much not used to doing this on their side and struggling to do it and having this requirement mandated all of a sudden does not necessarily make it very effective.

With the rise of tuition by institutions on an almost yearly basis, the expectations of regional accrediting agencies, parents, and students have increased, particularly in the area of student learning outcomes (Pierce, 2011). Thus, the importance of the president having competency in this area, as expressed by the respondents in this study, is understandable.

ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

More than half of the presidents responded that aspiring presidents need to have a strong understanding of issues related to enrollment management. Many, such as

President Joshua Dillan, mentioned that senior leaders who are learning about enrollment management must first understand the relationship between “mission and market.”

The biggest piece is understanding. I think how connected missions in market are and how you have to have a mission that is both rooted in tradition, but also understand its role in a tentative market. So enrollment management systems science has developed out of that, you know once you are sort of clear about who you are and how your brand is and what you are selling as a whole.

It appears that presidents need to have a strong understanding of how to tie the mission of their universities to their particular markets (i.e. students). If presidents don't have a strong understanding of the role that enrollment plays in managing the university, they may place themselves in a bad position. President Lucus Jacob explained:

At so many places, your prosperity as an institution is depending on your student population, particularly in your private institutions where you don't have state funding. I think it's a very important thing that a president has to put his arms around pretty quickly.

President Levi Carter said most succinctly when he shared: “I would say you have to have knowledge of enrollment.” Bryan J. Cook (2012), director of ACE's Center for Policy Analysis, has suggested that presidents must be able to manage ballooning enrollments. This is a phenomenon that has been precipitated because of the decision of state and federal governments to draw back on financial support, which has had a harmful effect on public higher education institutions in particular (Wooton, 2009; Mortenson, 2012).

FUNDRAISING

More than half of the presidents shared that an aspiring president needs to be competent in the area of fundraising. This corresponds with the 2012 ACE study, which listed fundraising as one of the most important competency areas. Nelson (2009) stated, “College presidents must raise money and conduct major capital campaigns (p. 26).” Likewise, Ekman (2010) found that “most presidents will say—having the chance to engage influential outsiders in the college and to persuade those outsiders to become equally committed to the cause is usually a rewarding experience (p. 63).” President Gavin Benjamin of Connor State discussed this issue by saying:

I think anyone that along the line that knows that they're going to be in a vice presidential or top executive position in a college or university, they are also going to have to raise money, even the deans and others.

Presidents such as Jessica Elliott expressed the importance of presidents retaining a strong fundraising staff to assist with cultivating fundraising opportunities:

It is a specialty (fundraising). I think if you have a very good staff in the fundraising area that really can help you. If you have the structure set up, you're brought in at a unique time, when you have to, you know, do "the ask."

The data suggested that it is important that the president be the person to ask for the larger sums of money from major donors. Several presidents noted that the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education's (CASE) fundraising and philanthropy workshops do a great job of exposing presidents to various techniques used to attract financial donations from a diverse set of donors.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Six of the presidents expressed the belief that aspiring university presidents needed to be prepared in the area of strategic planning. In this study, strategic planning is defined as the process in which a higher education institution engages to define its course of action to prepare for the future of the institution. William James summed up the general response of the respondents by sharing that presidents must understand strategic planning because they will be expected to lead in strategizing the future of their institution when he said, "the president needs to be the lead visionary and strategist." Ekman (2010) believes that being the chief strategist of the university is one of the best perks of the job. He shared, "presidents do have the opportunity to craft, then to act on the basis of an idealized vision for the institution—to weave personal values into one's work to an unusual degree." (p.63)

President Ryan Wyatt shared that a president needs to know how to put the strategic plan into action. This is important because presidents are expected to produce results. As Wyatt noted: "You really ought to have an understanding of how to approach strategic planning in a college or university setting and how to convert a strategic plan into action."

COMMUNICATIONS

Communications was one of the most talked about competency areas discussed by presidents in this study. Communication as a competency in this study is defined as the effective execution of written or oral communication and the ability to effectively engage in interpersonal development. President Elijah Alexander remarked, "communication ... skills that I would put high on the list of competencies a president must master." President Cooper also emphasized that communicating is central to the work that university presidents do. He stated: "I think writing and communicating are skills...all those come back to, a central thing, communication. They all come back to the ability to communicate effectively."

WRITING TO DIVERSE AUDIENCES

One of the areas of general consensus within the communication competency between all participants was the role that writing plays in the career of a president. Presidents

shared that aspiring presidents need to be prepared to write to multiple audiences, such as to an academic audience and to the general public. Several presidents, such as Lucus Jacob, shared that presidents should have a grasp of the rudiments of good writing. President Jacob expressed it this way:

In writing, you've got to have the ability to be clear, to be concise, to make your point, and to do so in a way that engages the person that's receiving the communication.

President Nolan Cooper noted that strong writing skills were important because writing is one of the primary vehicles by which president's competence is judged. This is in line with Siegel's (2011) finding that presidents are often expected to communicate through written strategic plans and other means to foster cordial and open communication between their office and campus constituencies.

SPEAKING TO DIVERSE AUDIENCES.

In addition to learning how to write to diverse audiences, six presidents talked about the need for aspiring presidents to hone their speaking ability. Nelson (2009) suggests that "they must be leaders that...speak eloquently (p. 26)." Dr. Lucus Jacob, president of Landon State University, talked of the need to be able to speak in a variety of settings and being capable of giving an impromptu speech. He shared:

If you are going to be an upper level executive administrator, then public speaking is going to be a part of what you do on a regular basis. Whether it's to the rotary club or the Kiwanis, I've done sermons, you know, I've spoken at faculty meetings, you end up doing impromptu things from time to time and school presentations. I mean it just becomes, it has to become a second nature to what you do.

President Jessica Elliott emphasized that this competency is not learned overnight. She improved her speaking skills over time.

I think I had developed that to a certain degree because I had leadership responsibilities, but, uh, I think because of the responsibilities on this level and I improved in that area because sometimes you have to go from one group to the next. You have to go through faculty to administrators to a social group and you have to adjust your message and I think that's a technique that I have learned and I have improved in over the years.

President Evelyn Aurora explained that aspiring presidents must not only be prepared to give positive, inspiring speeches, they need to be prepared to give tough ones as well. She stated,

You are going to give a lot of speeches, persuasive speeches and informational speeches, speeches where you are telling people you are getting ready to cut their budgets, and there are so many different ways.

INTERPERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

The final communication competency area derived from this study is interpersonal development. Interpersonal development is defined in this study as the ability to relate and work with diverse individuals. Eleven presidents expressed the belief that interpersonal development is an important part of being successful as a leader within the academy. Some presidents, such as President Evelyn Aurora, believed that participation within professional meetings could assist with the development of this competency. President Aurora expressed her experience this way:

I remember going to these big conferences and you think you would develop these skills at parties, but it is almost like a party skill. You come in the room and everybody is in a little circle talking and you have to figure out how to get in the circle so you can talk with the people, and also how to move from circle to circle and that is an absolute essential skill if you go into higher education administration, because when you go to chamber meetings, or when you are going to these big business meetings, you have to figure out how to get in the circle, because people tend to talk in circles.

Elijah Alexander added to this conversation by sharing how in practice, presidents need to be able to interact with diverse constituencies, because their success and legacy is dependent on it.

I do think in interacting, one of the things that a president has to do is to be able to interact, you've got to be a person who's almost on the verge of ministering, you've got to be persuasive, you've got to convince people, you've got to, you know, engage and be able to convince them and this is the direction that we need to go.

The president is seen as the "living logo" of the university (Siegel, 2011). Therefore, it is important that a president is able to represent the institution favorably among various constituencies. Siegel (2011) expresses the importance of presidential interactions in this statement: "Whether attending faculty or committee meetings, visiting campus functions or athletic events, speaking to student groups, initiating town hall discussions, or participating in ceremonies such as graduation or convocation, the presidents felt their daily interactions in the campus environment were replete with symbolic gestures" (p.85).

5. Discussion and Implications

The findings suggest that it is important to those aspiring to a university presidency to have foundational knowledge in higher education and to have a mastery of information related to the history and finance in higher education. This is an important finding. Although most higher education doctoral programs offer courses on topics related to these content areas, the results of this study validate their importance, especially as it relates to preparation for presidential leadership.

Results of this study also indicate that the presidents view themselves as both leaders and managers. Management skills (assessment/accountability, enrollment management, fundraising, strategic planning) were quite clearly identified. Examining the findings as a whole, the leadership skills are also present. They appear inherent in the language used to describe them. Among these skills and competencies are: Knowledge Acquisition of Culture, Complex Cognitive Knowledge, and Communications. McLaughlin (2004) shares,

In a university presidency, leadership is characterized by a focus on the values, purposes, and meaning of the institution, both as an affirmation of its *raison d'être* and as a mandate for change. Presidents are expected to connect individuals to the mission of the enterprise, to raise sights, and to encourage hopefulness in the future.

Although leadership and management in the context of a university are closely related they are not interchangeable. McLaughlin (2004) shares,

In their leadership role, college and university presidents are called on to attend to the ideas, ideals, and individuals of their institutions. As managers, presidents serve as their institution's chief executive officer...working to align institutional resources—money, technology, and personnel—to solve problems or forge new institutional directions.

As verified in the literature above, both leadership and management are important in the role of presidents.

The results also suggest that aspiring presidents should be able to integrate information, especially complex concepts. In addition, prospective presidents should be able to acquire knowledge and understand that serving as a university president places them as a public figure in the eyes of the academic and larger community.

Results of the study also suggest that presidents should develop strong interpersonal competencies. Thus, presidents should be able to speak to diverse constituencies such as local and national media as well as students. The study also alludes to the notion that presidents should enhance their personal attributes such as humility and empathy. It also appears that they must develop competencies in oral and written communication formats to ensure that they are prepared to communicate effectively with diverse audiences.

6. Application of Findings

While the findings of this study may not be generalizable to all presidents or organizational settings, they do provide a perspective that might be helpful to a variety of constituencies and groups. In addition to providing meaningful information for standing presidents, the insights gleaned might be of value to those in academic senior leadership roles who aspire to the presidency, such as provost, other vice presidents,

and special assistants. They may be able to use the results of this study to identify the areas that they need to hone to strengthen a future bid for a university presidential position. The identified knowledge and competencies might also be used by boards of trustees as a list of areas that they can use to rank the fitness of a presidential candidate for their institution.

The results of this study may also provide executive higher education programs and standard higher education doctoral programs with a list of knowledge and competency areas to incorporate into their curriculum. They may also want to consider some personal skills such as communication and reflective skills as part of the admission process.

One constituency this study may provide particular insights for are non-degree granting higher education training agencies. These agencies include organizations such as the American Council of Education, Harvard Institute for Educational Management, and Kellogg Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) Leadership Fellows Program. The suggestions by these presidents can provide insight into knowledge and competency mastery areas that programs can cover during their leadership development sessions.

Although this study included only university presidents, it would be relevant in the future to explore the perspectives of presidents of other types of institutions such as community colleges and liberal arts institutions. It might also be meaningful to conduct research with university presidents who earned their doctorate in a discipline other than education. Likewise, it might be of value to initiate similar studies with a group of presidents from a single type of university such as HBCU, Hispanic, for profit, or religious. Other studies might address whether differences exist based on the gender or ethnicity of the president. A quantitative study, developed using the findings of this study, would allow data collection from a larger group of presidents.

Such studies could confirm or refute whether the perceptions of the knowledge and competencies identified by these presidents are viewed in the same manner across a wide variety of institutions and groups. This would provide the public with data that could be compared with the results of this study and further refine our understanding of this important area.

Another area for future research includes surveying the perspectives of other graduates of higher education administration doctoral programs such as those preparing chief academic officers, diversity officers, and higher education faculty. Such studies would enable these populations an opportunity to provide their perspectives and could provide higher education faculty and curriculum developers with data that could assist them in enhancing the quality of higher education administration doctoral programs.

Surprisingly, in this study there was little to no mention by any of the presidents of working with or communicating with ethnically diverse constituencies as being of importance. Likewise, there was no mention of understanding and using technology as an essential knowledge or competency area in the presidency. With the increased

growth of an ethnically diverse student and alumni base at predominantly White and minority serving institutions (Gasman, 2011) and the growing use of technology in this global age, it may be advantageous for higher education researchers to engage in research to investigate why these two areas, so prominent in our world today, were not addressed by these presidents.

7. Conclusion

The expectations for university presidents by internal and external constituencies are increasing across the United States. These constituencies expect their presidents to ensure that issues such as student learning and fundraising are managed. Many presidents might find these issues daunting and overwhelming if they were not trained and prepared to deal with them. It is vital that potential or aspiring university presidents in higher education develop the knowledge and competencies that are needed for their success prior to assuming a university presidency. Clearly, more research is needed to find out whether the knowledge and competencies identified in this study will adequately prepare presidents from other institutional types, but this study provides a useful starting point and provides direction for future research on this important topic.

Table 1
Study Participants

	President (Pseudonym)	University (Pseudonym)	Gender	Ethnicity	Region	Historical Designation	Control	Carnegie Classification	Enrollment Size
1	Peter Johns	Ethansville	Male	White	Southeast	PWI	Private/ Religious	Master's/M	< 5,000
2	Lucas Jacob	Landon State	Male	White	Southeast	PWI	Public	Bac/Diverse	< 3,000
3	Gavin Benjamin	Connor State	Male	White	Southeast	PWI	Public	Master's/L	< 10,000
4	Elijah Alexander	Owen A&M	Male	Black	Southeast	HBCU	Public	Master's/L	< 7,000
5	Nolan Cooper	Maddox Central	Male	Black	Southeast	HBCU	Public	Master's/L	< 8,000
6	Emelia Lily	Ava-Asher	Female	White	Northwest	PWI	Public	Bac/AS	< 5,000
7	William James	St. Nathan	Male	White	Northeast	PWI	Private/ Religious	Master's/L	< 8,000
8	Jessica Elliott	Madison	Female	White	Northeast	PWI	Private/ Religious	Master's L	< 4,000
9	Joshua Dillan	Grayson	Male	White	Southeast	PWI	Private/ Religious	Bac/AS	< 2,000
10	Levi Carter	Xavierville	Male	White	Northeast	PWI	Private	Bac/Diverse	< 3,000
11	Ian Fynn	Dominic State	Male	White	Midwest	PWI	Public	RU/VH	< 51,000
12	Evelyn Aurora	Alexis	Female	Black	Northeast	HBCU	Public	Master's/M	< 2,000
13	Ryan Wyatt	Micah-Henry	Male	White	Midwest	PWI	Private/ Religious	Bac/AS	< 2,000

Historical Designation: PWI – Predominately White Institution; HBCU – Historically Black College or University

Carnegie Classification: DRU – Doctoral Research University; Bac/Diverse – Baccalaureate College – Diverse Fields; Master's/L – Master's College and University (Larger Programs); Bac/AS – Baccalaureate College-Arts & Sciences; RU/VH – Research University (very high research activity); Master's/M – Master's College and University (medium programs)

Table 2
Knowledge Areas

Knowledge
Foundational Knowledge
• History of Higher Education
• Finance in Higher Education
Knowledge Acquisition of Context
• Understanding Public Image
Complex Cognitive Knowledge

Table 3
Competency Areas

Competencies
Personal Attributes
Management
• Assessment/Accountability
• Enrollment Management
• Fundraising
• Strategic Planning
Communications
• Writing to diverse audiences
• Speaking to diverse audiences
• Interpersonal Development

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