Journal of Higher Education Management

Volume 39, Number 2 (2024)

PUBLISHED BY THE

AAUA

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS

JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION MANAGEMENT

Volume 39, Number 2 (2024) ▪ ISSN 2640-7515

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Journal of Higher Education Management, **39**(2), 4-15 (ISSN 2640-7515).

Exploring The Factors That Have Contributed to Higher Education Leaders' Success

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Abstract

Findings from this descriptive qualitative study suggest that academic leadership development program alumni are transitioning to differentiated leadership views. Peer mentorship was crucial to their leadership development and confidence. Intrapersonal leadership training and more formal opportunities for academic leadership development were identified as unmet needs earlier in their administrative careers.

Keywords: leadership, administration, land-grant institutions, mentorship, training

Introduction

Throughout academia, those with an interest in administrative affairs often refer to a "call to academic leadership." Historically, this manifested as the cyclical accession of various faculty to the role of department head (Bisbee, 2007; Gmelch, 2000; Hoppe, 2003). Essentially, a senior member of faculty within the unit would take their "turn" to serve as the department head for a few years followed by their invariable return to faculty or, in some cases, the ascension to other levels of leadership in academia, such as deanship. Nevertheless, as American higher education finds itself approaching the quarter century mark of the 21st Century, the call to academic leadership is different than it was 30 or 40 years ago. Entry points into academic administration are far more varied than they once were (Bisbee, 2007) with some levels of leadership, even as far as the office of the university president or chancellor, being occupied by persons not from the mold of the archetypal academician but by nontraditional candidates such as business leaders, politicians, policy makers, military leaders, and various other backgrounds outside of the academy (Beardsley, 2017).

In light of this shifting landscape for academic leadership within higher education, the preparation of academicians for leadership roles becomes even more paramount. Sentiment toward what constitutes an emerging academic leader's role preparation is varied. In general, it seems that there is a process of socialization (Gmelch, 2000; 2013). Socialization might be conceived as a simple, straightforward concept, but Tierney (1997) contended that the construct is a bit more multi-faceted in organizational contexts, particularly those within higher education. Simply put, a modernist view would imply that socialization is a prescriptive process while a post-modernist view would dictate that it is a supple process, grounded in the often-fluid states in which people or even organizational values and goals can exist. Whether viewing socialization from a modernist or postmodernist perspective, Tierney felt that socialization was grounded in (new) members of an organizational community seeking to attain an understanding of organizational culture (symbolic/operational activities that create shared meaning). Gmelch (2000; 2013), likely in more of the modernist spirit, believed that there are cases when socialization can stand alone or be combined with other means of job preparation. In both cases, academics have noted there can be informal and/or formal mentorship involved (Raines & Alberg, 2003).

Beyond the external challenges facing academic leaders, internal complexities necessitate acute leadership development in academic administrators. Eddy & Spaulding (1997) posed that a variety of leadership practices would need to be improved upon for academic leaders to better their campus communities and address the matter of rising institutional stature and higher education standards. These leadership areas included ethical leadership, team leadership, accountability leadership, privatization leadership, global thinking leadership, volunteer leadership, distance education leadership, and multicultural leadership. Eddy and Spaulding's contentions are still topical as data collected by the American Council on Education (2018) through a survey of U.S. university presidents indicated that relevant areas for presidential concern, both now and into the future, include budget/financial management, fundraising, enrollment management, diversity/equity issues, and assessment of student learning. The report noted that these areas are likely confounded by more questions raised about the value of institutions of higher learning by the private sector, society, and even the government; a shift in the disposition of the student body; and unreliable funding mechanisms. Given these challenges, it is unsurprising that current administrators advocate for the development of better training for prospective administrators and the realization of more purposive identification and recruitment strategies for those that will constitute higher education's future cadre of leaders (Bisbee, 2007).

Related Literature

Academic Leadership Development Programs

Morris and Laipple (2015) affirmed that limited research has been conducted in the area of preparedness of academic administrators. They also asserted that academic leaders are the institutional bellwethers for articulating the plan and rendering the means for universities to foster quality scholarship and a meaningful student experience to the tune of increased funding, donorship, and ascension in the regional and national rankings. However, Morris and Laipple (2015) stated that "the lack of a systematic approach to training, developing, and coaching academic leaders leaves to chance how they deliver on these results" (p.242). To further explore this research context and issue within higher education administration, they conducted a study and operated under the perception that leadership training was lacking for most administrators prior to beginning their position (Carroll & Wolverton, 2004; Hecht, 2004; Wolverton et al., 2001 as cited in Morris & Laipple, 2015). In a national survey of over 1,500 academic leaders (i.e., department chairs/heads, associate deans, deans, and directors) from 145 Carnegie-ranked U.S. public research universities, Morris and Laipple (2015) found that academic leaders were underprepared for various facets of their jobs, including "developing entrepreneurial revenue, developing metrics to document progress, and handling grievances and appeals" (p. 245). Additionally, roughly 18% of participants reported some degree of burnout ranging from once a week to everyday. Participants also indicated that they are both less interested in (76.4%) and less enthusiastic for (77.2%) their job than when they started. With respect to leadership development strategies, the data indicated that 91.3% of participants seek advice from more experienced colleagues and 67.7% read about administration and leadership. Formal means of leadership development returned lower levels of participation: institutionally mandated seminars/workshops (51.8%), seminars through professional organizations (41.6%), optional institutional seminars (4.6%), and paid professional consulting services (4.2%).

Gigliotti (2017) noted that complex problems and change within the academe and the external world warrant the need for academic leadership training and development. He carried out a study examining the formal opportunities for leadership development within the Association of American Universities (AAU), finding that every AAU institution provides formal and informal leadership development opportunities for faculty. However, participants in his study indicated that leadership development for administrators could be enriched.

Three themes emerged from Gigliotti's interview data. First, participants indicated that relationships are integral to the success of both the academic leader as well as the members of the organization. From the cultivation of relationships, "rapport and mutual understanding" is developed (Gigliotti, 2017, p. 203). Essentially, leaders can establish trust from which everyone in the organization, and the enterprise itself, can benefit. The second theme coalesced around participant views that issues such as change, budget cuts, and the global marketplace would be crucial areas of concern for administrators in the 21st Century. Confounding these, many participants felt that there was a "pipeline problem" for fostering the next cadre of academic leaders due to resistance from faculty to answer the call to leadership and issues in academic leadership development (Gigliotti, 2017, p. 204). Finally, the third theme could be best articulated as "leadership education initiatives serve an important role in introducing, developing, and nurturing the administrative competencies of academic leaders" (Gigliotti, 2017, p. 204). In the end, Gigliotti (2017) believed that "by marshaling human talent, addressing problems associated with the academic pipeline, and placing a renewed emphasis on formal and informal leadership development, colleges and universities can emerge as stronger institutions" (p. 207).

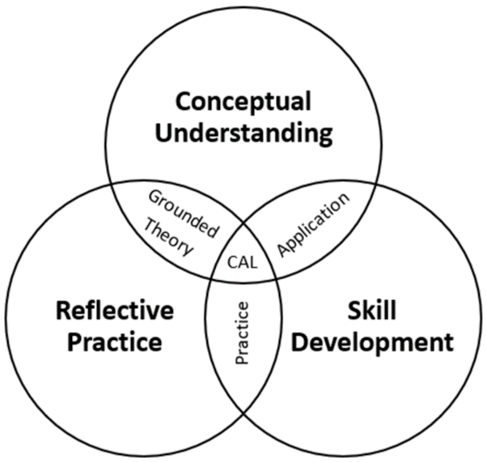
Ruben et al. (2018) also noted that a more systematic approach is needed to the execution of academic leadership development programs, including recruitment, regardless of the type of program: be it institutional, regional, or national. Gigliotti & Ruben, (2017) affirmed that special consideration would need to be given to organizational needs assessments and the articulation of outcome-based knowledge and competencies for the program(s) in-question. In so doing, this should complement the various leadership development philosophies and guiding theories and models employed within extant academic leadership development programming.

Conceptual Framework

Gmelch has contributed a great deal to the scholarship and commentary on academic leadership, particularly from the perspective of preparation for administrative roles such as department chairs, deans, and other leaders within the academe. Of note is an analytical framework (Gmelch, 2013) that has been used to study new department chairs (Gmelch & Miskin, 2004; 2011), new deans (Gmelch et al., 2011), and new school administrators (Ortiz, 1982). This framework (Figure 1) has been formally applied to the Academic Leadership Forum, a pilot program for academic leadership education with the intention of program participants applying their learning longitudinally throughout their careers as administrators (Gmelch & Buller, 2015).

Figure 1

Academic Leadership Forum's Leadership Development Frames



Note. From *Building Academic Leadership Capacity: A Guide for Best Practices* (p. 12), by W. H. Gmelch & J. L. Buller, 2015, Josey-Bass (https://www.wiley.com/en-us/Building+Academic+Leadership+Capacity%3A+A+Guide+to+Best+Practices-p-9781118989302). Copyright 2015 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Reprinted with permission.

Gmelch's (2015) framework has three components: conceptual understanding, skill development, and reflective practice. Conceptual understanding refers to the cognitive interpretation of the roles and responsibilities of the administrative positions they assume. This is inclusive of the unique challenges that arise for academic leaders as well as the perception shift of the job and its responsibilities as faculty transition to administrative roles. Skill development refers to academics refining the skills they need for their jobs. There might be formal opportunities for academic leaders to do this such as workshops or seminars. In addition, on-the-job training, role playing, action planning, and case studies can allow them to practice these newly refined skills, be it through offsite programs or in-house ones. Finally, reflective practice is when an academic leader learns from past experiences through self-knowledge and personal awareness. Corrective feedback is a part of this process as well.

The interplay between these three frames is best explained by application, practice, and grounded theory. Namely, academic leaders should be able to apply their conceptual understanding of academic leadership and their skill development on the job. As they develop their skills and reflect on these improvements, they can strategize on new practices to apply in their jobs, resulting in comprehensive academic leadership (CAL). Furthermore, Gmelch and Buller (2015) noted, "by reflecting on the insights gained from their development of conceptual understanding, they would find new ways to ground leadership theory in application" (p. 12).

Leader Identity Development Model

Leadership can be defined in a variety of ways depending on its research context or practical application. For this study, leadership can be conceived as a relational process. Specifically, Komives et al. (1998, p. 21) defined leadership as "a relational process of people together attempting to accomplish change or make a difference to benefit the common good." Grounded in this perspective, Komives et al. were able to frame leader identity as "the cumulative confidence in one's ability to intentionally engage with others to accomplish group objectives" (p. 608). Likewise, a relational leadership identity is conceived as "a sense of self as one who believes that groups are comprised of interdependent members who do leadership together" (p.608).

These sentiments constitute the basis for the Leader Identity Development (LID) Model (Komives et al., 2005; 2006; 2009). The model proposes that leadership identity develops over six stages: awareness, exploration/engagement, leader identified, leadership differentiated, generativity, and integration/synthesis. Awareness encompasses an individual objectively perceiving leaders in the external environment or in an organizational context (Komives et al., 2005). Exploration/Engagement is where a person becomes involved with groups to take on new responsibilities and socialize in the process (Komives et al, 2009). This stage tends to address the initial assumption of responsibilities more so than the garnering of positional authority. Leader Identified is where a person, by virtue of new roles and responsibilities, accomplishes tasks and begins meeting goals, while managing others and practicing different leadership styles/approaches (Komives et al., 2009). This is a leader-centric stage where one is generally considered the leader by virtue of holding a formal position (Komives et al., 2005). Furthermore, there is a clear distinction between leaders and followers: i.e., leaders are responsible for group outcomes. Leadership Differentiated refers to the point where tasks and goals become shared and are taken on by the leader or by other members of the group, facilitating an effective group process (Komives et al., 2006). Generativity is where a leader takes on the responsibility of developing others as a function of organizational sustainment and to a specific passion for themself or the group (Komives et al., 2005; 2006). This is often manifested through mentorship to new peers who are a part of the group/organization and committing to the capacity development and leadership pipeline for the group/organization moving forward (Komives et al., 2009). Finally, Integration/Synthesis refers to the point where a person recognizes and embraces their own capacity for leadership in multiple contexts and takes on leadership roles regardless of whether they are grounded in positional authority or in group membership. Most notably, this is the point where a person demonstrates confidence in their identification as a leader (Komives et al., 2005; 2006; 2009).

Though conceived as a linear progression, the LID Model does see participants oscillating between various stages, and it can be difficult to discern in which of the latter stages leaders might find themselves (Komives et al., 2005). These authors provide a graphical representation illustrating the cycle of leadership development, interdependencies, and influencers in figure 2, *Developing a Leadership Identity: Illustrating the Cycle*, p. 599. Though originally intended for an emerging adult population in collegiate leadership roles, Komives et al. (2005) felt that the model should be explored among other populations including adults. Subsequent research with the LID Model has been grounded in a variety of settings in recent years. Some of these include society identities such as race, gender, and sexual orientation (see Baughman & Bruce, 2011; Chugh, 2019; Haber-Curan & Tapia-Fuselier, 2020; McKenzie, 2018; Olive, 2015; Shetty, 2020) as well as involvement experience like athletics, Greek life, and student government (see Cannon, 2017; Lawhead, 2013; Parish, 2021; Poole, 2017; Stevens, 2021). Additionally, there has even been some scholarship produced looking at the institutional contexts of leaders such as community colleges, HBCUs, medical education, and military education (see Alizadeh, 2017; Beazley, 2013; Campbell et al., 2010; Molock, 2019; Shepherd & Horner, 2010).

Methods

The purpose of this descriptive qualitative study was to explore the factors that have contributed to the success of academic leaders serving in higher education administration. The objectives were

1. To ascertain what facets of preparation were most helpful to established higher education leaders (program alumni),
2. To determine how established higher education leaders' (program alumni) preparation could have been improved or how it might improve, and
3. To explore how established higher education leaders (program alumni) have applied their leadership in contexts in conjunction with and/or outside of the administrative roles.

Seidman (2006) noted, "The range of topics adaptable to this interviewing approach is wide, covering almost any issue involving the experience of contemporary people" (p. 15). From the thematic analysis perspective, interviews are a good tool to explore experiences, thoughts, and behaviors regarding a research phenomenon (Clarke & Braun, 2006; Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Accordingly, semi-structured interviews were carried out to meet the study objectives. Interview questions based on the LID Model and Gmelch's framework consisted of three segments (Galleta & Cross, 2013). The first allowed for participant narrative that related to the relevant context for the interview. The second segment employed questions that were more specific. The final segment harkened back to the first segment, preliminary narrative points, and guided the interview toward conclusion.

Members of past cohorts of the LEAD21 and FSLI programs were sampled for this study. In total, 22 individuals were recruited via e-mail to participate in the study with 10 consenting to participate: seven from FSLI and three from LEAD21. Participants (Table 1) represented eight different 1862 land-grant institutions and were administrators across all three land-grant mission areas: teaching (college), research (experiment station), and extension (cooperative extension service). Participants were then scheduled to interview via Zoom. Interviews were audio recorded with consent, and the transcripts were generated with the Otter.ai transcription service.

For the first cycle of coding, two elemental coding procedures were used to organize the data. These were descriptive coding and *in vivo* coding. Descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2021) involved the application of individual words or short phrases to larger sets of data transcripts that encapsulate the general topic or sentiment of said datasets (e.g., a paragraph or transcript segment). *In vivo* coding (Saldaña, 2021) involved the extraction of participant uttered words or short phrases that encapsulated the topic or general meaning of a larger segment of data. For the second coding cycle, a cumulative coding method known as pattern coding (Saldaña, 2021) was used to condense interview transcripts into smaller datasets and allow for the emergence of themes. In accordance with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) best practices for trustworthiness in qualitative research, member checking and peer debriefings were carried out to ensure study credibility and to ensure both participant voice and external expertise enriched this study's methods. Finally, this study's methods and procedures garnered expedited approval of the authors' institutional review board (study number: IRB202201863).

Table 1

Study Three Participant Demographics

Name	Title	Gender
Participant A	Senior Associate Dean of College	Male
Participant B	Associate Dean for Research	Female
Participant C	Associate Director for Extension and State 4-H Leader	Male
Participant D	Department Head	Male
Participant E	Director of Learning and Organizational Development	Female
Participant F	Department Head	Male
Participant G	Associate Dean of Operations for College	Male
Participant H	Dean of the College	Female
Participant I	Associate Dean and Director of Extension	Male
Participant J	Associate Dean for Research and Interim Dean of the College	Male

In some cases, certain titles such as associate dean/dean are distinguished by their mission area of teaching, research, or Extension to provide further context.

Results

Objective One

This study's first objective was to ascertain what facets of preparation were most helpful to established higher education leaders (program alumni). A variety of themes (Table 2) emerged when asked questions about the people or things that have been most helpful to them in their careers, their current leadership roles, and the means by which they reflect on their leadership.

Table 2

Objective One Emergent Themes Summary

Question Subject	Theme	Sub-Theme
The people or programs that have been most helpful so far	Formal leadership training programs	National/regional programs
	Mentorship	Formal Informal Peer-based
Reflecting on academic leadership and what works best	Regularity with varied methods	Solo trips away from work/social environment "Wind shield time" Journaling Applying for other leadership positions Leadership trainings: personality assessments/indicators
When they felt they were the leader	It's up to others	Others' encouragement to take on a leadership role
	Varied timing for the self	Taking note of people's satisfaction Positional: starting the job
The easier facets associated with the current role	Cultivating people	Allowing them to do their jobs well Celebrating successes
	Positive work culture	
	Exciting unit mission	
The challenges associated with the current role	Personnel issues	Climate issues Discipline Equitable treatment Evaluations Recruitment and retention
	Imposter syndrome	
	Balancing time	
	Speaking on behalf of the institution	

The People or Things That Have Been Most Helpful While Serving as Academic Administrators

With respect to the people or things that have been most helpful to participant as they have served as administrators, in general, two major themes emerged from participants responses: *formal leadership training programs* as well as *mentorship* have been the most helpful to participants in their careers to this point. With respect to the training programs, most of those discussed were at the national or regional level. For example, given the sample, it comes as no surprise that FSLI and LEAD21 were mentioned frequently. Nevertheless, a few participants talked about other programs.

For example, Participant A noted that his own institution, and particularly the BIG 10 Alliance, were very helpful to him in his preparation toward serving as a department chair and eventual interim dean:

> So, I think the [Institution] – the Big 10 Alliance, does a good job also – to have a couple of programs that are for developing young or not young, but in the sense of early administrators. I took advantage of that, and I got to meet a lot of really good people that helped me quite a bit.

Regardless of program, it seems that one of the key takeaways beyond leadership skills and competencies development was the networking opportunities and community building among fellow academic leaders. The value of this takeaway might best be articulated by Participant G:

> I've been a participant in NELD, which was the North Central Extension Leadership Development Program, and that was a long time ago now. I participated in LEAD21, that's one of our land-grant leadership development systems – The Food Systems Leadership Institute. So, each of those was a chance to connect with colleagues, develop some friendships and relationships with people that are doing similar work. That's been really helpful. There are some people that were really, really valuable during that process.

This notion of networking and community building is somewhat complementary to the importance that mentorship has played in participants' preparation. Interestingly, mentorship as it emerged from the data was somewhat multifaceted. Specifically, mentorship manifested for participants as either formal, informal, or peer based. Formal mentorship was generally described as a process whereby participants were assigned mentors as a part of a leadership development program. Informal mentorship was conceived as a process in which participants gained a mentor through individuals who were not necessarily assigned to them but gradually took on a mentoring role in their life (e.g., a supervisor). Peer-based mentorship could be thought of as a process in which participants connected within an individual, either on their campus or at another university, who served in a similar role as the participant (e.g., a fellow department chair mentoring another department chair). Though formal mentorship was present in the data, informal mentorship and peer-based mentorship were spoken about at greater lengths by the participants and, consequently, recurred throughout the data with more consistency. For example, in referencing the in-service training available to her when she was an early career Extension administrator, Participant E noted the impact that informal mentors had on her development as an administrator:

> You were also mentored, although we didn't have formal mentoring programs at that time. I remember there were some Extension specialists – who looked back and really took me under their wing – Saying, 'Gosh, we think you have potential, and we're going to help you on this journey.' I look back and realize now what great mentors they were. They taught me about Extension. They took me to two sessions on how to be a facilitator. I had an opportunity to go through leadership development programs, and really invested in people.

Informal mentors can certainly arise in a multitude of settings and manifest through a variety of people. Nevertheless, participants often talked about how their senior faculty connections, particularly as they were either graduate students or young faculty members, mentored them even though mentoring was not formally a part of their job description. For example, Participant F discussed how his informal senior faculty mentor was largely responsible for his path to serving as a department chair:

> Definitely there are several people who really have been important in my career and in this whole journey. One of those was a faculty member – he still is a faculty member, although he's retiring here in a few months – at [University]. When I was an assistant professor, he was a full professor, and we started working together. Certainly, he mentored me through, and then he became an administrator. In fact, he's the one that put me in as an associate. So, in many ways, having [Name] there as a mentor, that was hugely successful.

In a similar vein, Participant I noted the importance of his major professor as a graduate student in laying the foundation for his pathway toward returning to academia and serving as an administrator within Extension:

> I think probably my major professor when I was working – who actually was my boss when I was a work study student at [Institution] – and I ended up doing my master's with him. He's the one that kind of changed the path to me about just going and getting a degree and going back to the farm. So, he's probably the most helpful person …

For Participant G, his first Extension supervisor was impactful to him as a mentor. In many ways, this individual helped him with the harder facets of the job and how he would eventually need to navigate problems on his own. Participant G also made references to how certain friends and colleagues have been helpful to him over the years, and this really complements the other facet of mentorship that participants referred to as peer-based mentorship.

For most participants, peer mentors served as sounding boards for their roles, responsibilities, and challenges they might face. This was especially evident in cases where peer mentors served in similar leadership roles as the participants. For example, Participant D noted the importance of peer mentors early in his career while serving as a department head:

> I would say also other department heads were very helpful. I could reach out to other senior department heads. When I started, I was the youngest department head. I'm currently the second longest serving department head of the college.

Participant J shared a similar sentiment, but he also alluded to the importance of having peer mentors with whom to have candid conversations about their related roles and challenges:

> I have to say that one of the things I enjoyed the most was when I first became the department head, the department heads in [Interviewee's Current Institution], they meet for lunch every other week. We are seven department heads … When I came,

> first time, was a rookie, there were several department heads with many years of experience, many battles on different fronts. This is a great tradition here. You have lunch every other week. The door is closed. No one takes notes, and what people say in there stays in there. I was lucky to have the kind of mentors like that.

This sentiment was further underscored by Participant B who connected with many of her peer mentors through leadership development trainings or in other areas of her campus:

> Then I guess the last thing I'll mention is having friends that are themselves in academic leadership positions to go to. Some of those have been people that I've managed to make relationships with through some different leadership development training. Some of them have been people that I just made friends with on campus as a faculty member, and they have progressed up the ranks and continued. It has been about having people that you can trust and have honest conversations with. That has been huge.

Participant A noted that honest conversations are critical as an academic leader particularly when managing challenges, and that it is important to have a variety of peer mentors both on- and off-campus:

> Really having a set of peer networks either on campus or with off campus has really been probably the most helpful thing. I have one or two other associate deans that I will run things by. I also then have people on campus .... If I can't have them here, there's people off campus I can have them with. That's probably been really an important thing to be able to manage some of the challenges we face.

Becoming The Leader

The sense of finding one's center as a leader is evocative of the responses generated when participants were asked to describe when they first felt like a leader. The question was intended to relate specifically to their current role, and several participants responded as such. Nevertheless, several participants also spoke about their identity as a leader in the broader scheme of their life. Additionally, some participants noted that their role and their leadership therein was not so much a product of their own determination; rather, *it was up to others*. For those that spoke about their self-identification as a leader in their current role, the timing varied. For Participant D, it was positional: as soon as he took the job as department head. For Participants B and C, it took some time. In Participant B's case, it was roughly 3-4 months of having been on the job because she felt that was when she started to take note of people's satisfaction with her work in that space. She remarked:

> When I first started to feel like I belonged in this role, it probably took probably three, four months – something like that. What it really took was hearing from other people how delighted they were by the work I was doing, and from my boss, that what it was that I was doing was useful. So, it really was the assessment of others

> that made it clear that – not that I needed to become what I had seen other people be in these roles – but that I needed to be myself and do the thing.

For other participants, self-perception as a leader was not tied to their current position with many reflecting on their experiences earlier in their lives. For example, Participant G always saw himself as a leader. He believes that much of this is derived from his time serving as an officer in his 4-H program in both middle and high school. This was further reinforced by his college involvement opportunities to serve as a leader within the Greek system and the chances that he had to study leadership in an academic context as an undergraduate student.

In Participant H's case, while she had leadership responsibilities as far back as high school, perceiving herself as a leader back then and carrying that self-perception to academia was not automatic:

> I think it probably goes back to even when I was in high school. I ran track and cross country. I ended up being the captain of the team. I ended up being in class president those kinds of things. I think that's probably when I felt most like I was a leader – a leader in a true space. I look at leadership: everybody's a leader in some way, shape, or form. In whatever they're doing in whatever space they're in whether you have a title or not. So, I think that the recognition of being a leader probably happened early on, but I also think when I became a faculty member, I didn't perceive myself as a leader in a named leadership role for a very long time.

For those participants who felt their status as the leader was a product of others' perceptions, these individuals encouraged participants to engage in different leadership roles throughout their lives and careers. In Participant J's case, whether it was early in his career being asked to serve as the graduate coordinator or his current position of interim dean, other people thought he ought to serve in those roles: "I think that sometimes others recognize that you could be helpful for the organization, or you could have leadership characteristics."

Objective Two

This study's second objective was to determine how established higher education leaders' (program alumni) preparation could have been improved or how it might be improved moving forward. Several themes (Table 3) emerged from the data that participants provided when asked questions about what they wish they had had to prepare them to be an academic leader prior to their current role and what kind of support they still need as an administrator. With respect to the preparation they wish they had received, four major themes emerged: more formal leadership training is desired; intrapersonal leadership training should be of emphasis; operational training is a need; and no additional preparation is needed.

Table 3
Objective Two Emergent Themes Summary

Question Subject	Theme	Sub-Theme
That which could have been helpful	More formal leadership training is desired	
	Intrapersonal leadership should be of emphasis	Personality assessments
	Operational training is a need	Budget management Grant writing
	No additional preparation is needed	A product of previous leadership education as an undergraduate The triumphs and challenges help one grow: would not change a thing
That which is needed moving forward	Support from above	General supervisory support Dean-level support
	Thought partnership	Peer support
	Operational support	Knowledgeable and trustworthy support teams
	Mentorship	Mentors are harder to find as one rises in rank

That Which Could Have Been Helpful in Becoming an Academic Leader

For those participants who spoke about formal leadership training, the types of training they would have wanted or believe would be helpful to other leaders all manifested differently, but they were bound by the common sentiment that preparation should be formal and structured with specific designs to successfully transition participants to an administrative post. For Participant J, not only does this include having more honest and intentional conversations with young faculty about pathways to administration, but it also means that faculty should be afforded opportunities to engage in fellowships within the provost's office. In Participant I's case, he had a somewhat less traditional pathway to administration, having served in the private sector for several years before returning to academia to serve as an Extension administrator. Nevertheless, he recognizes the value of formal leadership training having participated in FSLI later in his career. Despite having been successful in his current administrative post, he believes that earlier exposure to formal leadership programs, similar to FSLI, would have been helpful. Thinking less about himself and more about others, Participant A talked about how serving as an associate department chair was helpful in onboarding him for a period of roughly six years. He feels that onboarding is an area that needs more attention moving forward. Additionally, he recognizes the value of formal leadership trainings:

> Then also maybe some more localized shorter term leadership training opportunities for promising faculty. It's something that isn't extensive or far away or costs a lot of money, but actually starts to prepare people for the skills they're going to need – even if you are an assistant professor, who ends up leading a large research group as an associate professor with 15 people: How do you manage that? How do you lead it? So, those are the areas I think about where I think about people needing most help.

For the participants who discussed intrapersonal leadership training, particular emphasis was placed on the value of personality assessments. For Participant C, he was exposed to these through formal leadership training later in life, but he wishes he had had them earlier and that it would be beneficial if his current institution were to offer such opportunities to its student body:

> The other thing that really helped was I'm a fellow in the Food Systems Leadership Institute. In that, we took, I think it was nine different character leadership assessments. That's something I also wish we could do for our incoming freshmen here at [Interviewee's Current Institution], because you learn a lot about yourself, and you learn the things that you really need to focus on to be successful in future. I just wish I had taken those assessments earlier. I know that there are universities that do that for their students, we're not one of them … To me, that would probably have made a bigger difference.

Participant F's perspective was very similar, and he also highlighted the importance of external feedback, understanding the self through personality assessments, and the interplay of working better with others therein:

> One of the other things that's really important – and I thought about this too – was getting to know yourself from a personality point of view and how you interact with others – because you often don't see everything; and you don't see everything from the interior yourself, you got to get external feedback to understand all that – that would have been obviously a tool that would have been useful earlier than I did it.

For those who mentioned operational training, these sentiments principally encompassed budget training and preparation for grant writing. Participant E also mentioned that it would have been helpful to have had someone give him perspective on work-life balance. In addition, Participant D believes that having an outside perspective on the operational pieces to administration, be it in the form of an expert confidant or management consultant, would have been helpful earlier on in his career.

The Kinds of Support Needed Moving Forward

With respect to the kind of support participants still need in the administrative careers, four themes emerged: support from above; thought partnership; strong support teams; and mentorship. For those that referenced the need for support from above, this was generally in the context of their immediate supervisor such as dean-level support. While Participant F noted the importance of support from direct reports as well, he underscored the transcendent nature of supervisory support for his own career remarking:

> This is something that I continue to need. I've needed in the past. I'll need it in the future until I retire. That is support from the leadership above me. Those relationships ... you're creating shared vision, not only with the people you're working with in your unit, but you're creating shared vision with the people that you're reporting to ... to those deans.

Participant C felt similarly and noted the permanence that supervisory support plays in the role of an academic administrator, stating:

> Yeah, what you find in these roles is that, no matter how high you go, you're always answering to someone. You're also trying to make the people who work – I don't want to say under you – but work in that next level, you're trying to make them happy too and lead them in a direction that's good for the organization. For me, you have to have the support of whoever your supervisor is, whether it's a director or a dean, it doesn't matter.

Nevertheless, Participant C also talked about how peer support is also integral to his success moving forward, which is also reflective of the thought partnership theme. Both Participant A and D discussed the importance of having people to talk with, particularly in the capacity of having a sounding board. This is especially relevant when the thought partners serve in similar roles as the participants themselves.

Somewhat related to thought partnership, support teams who are knowledgeable and trustworthy would also present themselves as important for participants moving forward. Participant H remarked:

> I absolutely need to have a strong team that I work with people that I can trust. Because there's a lot of stuff that we do in the academy that can be very confidential. I think the ability to make sure that I prioritize relationship building and maintaining those connections, in particular to our external stakeholders. It's so critical in what we do within the Ag and Natural Resources fields that if you fail on the relationship, maintenance and building, you're not in a good space as a leader, and you will definitely know it in short order.

More so from the perspective of operational support, Participant E feels that such individuals would be invaluable to her moving forward, particularly with respect to the challenges that sometimes precipitate from university or system-level changes. She noted:

> The frustrating supports of my job are the systems that the university puts in place that we have to use. Those systems sometimes feel like they're all about making things harder for us to do. So, it sounds petty and little at this point, but if I had some more administrative help to get me through some of that – you know, that's another loss we've had is whatever you call the positions ... office associates, admins, whatever – it seems to me like we're off awfully thin a lot of times in that regard. Maybe especially at the state level because you don't want to be seen as being top-heavy … Maybe that kind of operational help is really the support I need these days.

Finally, mentorship emerged as a theme. Unlike previous iterations of this theme, mentorship was referred to in a context of something that is hard to come by. For example, Participant B discussed that finding mentors becomes harder as you move up the ladder within academia:

> Finding people to serve as mentors gets harder over time because there are fewer of them, and they're in different places. So, taking the time to find somebody to be a mentor is something that I need to continue to do.

For Participant I, his former supervisor and mentors has long since moved on to a presidential post at another university, so he does not have his mentor from a supervisory level anymore. While he feels that this is something that is missing to him, he did note that he is able to rely on his peers as a support group – somewhat similar to the sentiments behind peer mentorship mentioned previously.

Objective Three

This study's third objective was to explore how established higher education leaders (program alumni) have applied their leadership in contexts in conjunction with and/or outside of their administrative roles. Several themes (Table 4) emerged from answers to questions asked about how participants have been able to apply their leadership to other contexts in higher education and whether they have served as a mentor to aspiring leaders in higher education.

Interdisciplinary Applications of Leadership

With respect to leadership applied in other contexts in higher education, there were three primary themes: in-house committee work, professional society service, and governmental committee participation. For those participants who discussed their in-house committee work (in-house referring to their home institution), this type of leadership generally referred to formal standing or *ad hoc* committees at the university level or through campus partners such as the admissions office. In addition, Participant H talked about his work as a chair for the search committee for one of his institution's associate provost positions. While Participant D noted that he has engaged in committee work, he did also talk about how his department was able to serve as a pilot unit for the university's new database system for capturing faculty data. While the opportunity was less individual and more collective – albeit in a grassroots sort of way – the unit did lead the way for encouraging the adoption of the system across the college.

Table 4
Objective Three Emergent Themes Summary

Question Subject	Theme	Sub-Theme
Applying leadership in interdisciplinary contexts	In-house committee work	University committees: ad hoc, standing, and campus partners (e.g., admissions)
	Professional society service	Discipline-specific work
	Governmental committee participation	
Whether having served as a mentor to an aspiring academic leader	Enthusiastic service	Formal mentorship: as a part of a leadership program
		Informal mentorship: as a part of an advisory/supervisory role
The next step in their careers as leaders within higher education administration	Continuance	Actively considering/pursuing a higher rank
	Place-bound	Uncertainty
		Family
		Non-careerist mentality
	Retirement	Satisfaction and fatigue
Expectations of the role and experience so far	Expectations met	Helping people grow and succeed
		The challenges of the job are worth it in the end

Regarding professional society service, overwhelmingly, participants engaged in service that benefited societies related to their academic discipline and field of study. In addition, participants generally committed to serving in these capacities longitudinally as a complement to their work at their home institution. In addition, all of the participants that spoke about these opportunities for professional society leadership indicated their involvement in multiple organizations rather than a single entity. Broadly speaking, some of these organizations included the North Central Regional Association (NCRA) of State Agricultural Experiment Station Directors, the Crop Science Society, Agronomy Society of America, Plant's Growth Regulation Society of America, American Society of Horticultural Science, National Association of Extension Professionals, American Evaluation Association, and Epsilon Sigma Phi.

Finally, with respect to governmental committee participation, participants that spoke about these opportunities noted that this type of work is not necessarily typical of the standard academic leader's pedigree and training. Nevertheless, they both underscored its helpfulness to their own pathways to academic administration. For Participant B, even though these experiences were early in her career, and she might have felt a bit out-of-place at time, she believes that these opportunities have contributed to her validation as an academic and a leader in that space, particularly as she continues to serve in these capacities as they arise:

> So, to take that knowledge of how to act in those spaces, and to apply that to being in academia, and then to continue working on boards like that, I have felt pretty comfortable in situations that I think sometimes others might not have had the experience to feel comfortable as early.

Participant I felt that his background in city pesticide boards, environmental affairs, and the science policy council gave him excellent experience and perspective to be a successful contributor through his service with the APLU and the various policy committee of which he is a member therein.

Serving as Mentors to Aspiring Leaders in Higher Education

Regarding whether or not participants have served as mentors to aspiring leaders in higher education, a theme of enthusiastic service emerged. Indeed, all but one participant indicated that they serve in this capacity. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the type of mentorship was a mostly an even split between informal and formal opportunities (i.e., through a program). In the case of informal mentorship, most participants talked about how the mentorship in which they engage is built into the position in which they currently serve. For example, Participant D, himself a department head, talked about how he serves as an informal mentor when onboarding department heads at his institution. Participant G, an associate dean, does the same for new department chairs within his college. For Participant F, as department head, he would informally mentor faculty, particularly as they attained full professorial status in their unit. Regarding formal mentorship, typically these opportunities were carried out in the capacity of a program such as FSLI (in the case of Participant I) and in-house faculty preparation or postdoc-type programs (as in the case of Participant B). By and large, participants indicated that serving as a mentor was a positive experience for them, but they understood that it is a process through which the mentee must be allowed to learn and grow. This might be best articulated by Participant C:

> It's a great experience, but I'll tell you what I have to watch out for is saying too much. You have to let people ask questions and be sure you just answer the questions and don't offer too much information because you want them to process information and come up with their own ideas on how they should respond in a given situation. So, mentoring can be a highly positive thing, but what you don't want to do is build up any biases in that individual, so that they can continue to make up their own mind and move forward.

Discussion & Conclusion

This study sought to explore the factors that have contributed to the success of academic leaders serving in higher education administration. The data suggested that formal leadership training in addition to mentorship were the most helpful facets of academic leadership development for participants who were later career land-grant administrators. This theme of participation in formal programs seems to be in line with what has been described as a growing positive sentiment toward academic leadership development programs across the academe (Gigliotti & Ruben, 2017; Ruben et al., 2017). In addition, participants benefitting from mentorship is also felicitous with findings from the literature where mentorship has been found to be one of the key benefits of participation in academic leadership development programs (Gigliotti, 2017). Mentorship being of great value to participants, particularly peer-based mentorship, is also indicative of the importance that socialization plays in becoming a leader within a system such as a university setting (Gmelch, 2000; Gmelch, 2013; Tierney, 1997).

Regarding the LID Model (Komives et al., 2005; 2006; 2009), participants overwhelmingly indicated their enthusiastic service as mentors, be it in formal programs or informally within their discipline. This implies that these administrators have engaged in the generative phase of leadership identity development. Intriguingly, though peer mentorship is of great importance to these individuals, as they themselves progress through leader identity development, they did not speak much to engaging as a peer mentor themselves. It gives one pause as to whether this facet of mentorship naturally manifests later in a career and generativity or if it is more a product of the synthesis stage as they recognize that mentorship, like leadership, might indeed be inherently differentiated.

Participants seemed to have a humanistic and people-centric view of their leadership and outcomes. Participants often spoke about how other people help to determine when they would become a leader. In addition, a pressing need for more thought partnership and peer support was also likely indicative of a more differentiated view of leadership. From the standpoint of synthesis, participants by and large seem to be applying their leadership capabilities in other context within their home institution and among other contexts within the academe. It might not be possible to say whether these participants have fully traversed the six stages of the LID Model as even the original authors had difficulty making this assertion. However, the data suggested that participants have successfully entered the generativity phase and might jump backwards and forwards from that stage to leadership differentiated and even integration/synthesis. Additional time as an administrator could certainly lend itself to more robust assertions regarding stages four and six.

Another interesting theme that merged from the data, particularly given the more seasoned nature of participants in their training and time as administrators, is that they felt additional formal leadership training would have been helpful when they considered where they are now in their administrative careers. This sentiment is certainly in the general spirit with much of the literature regarding this study's topic given that academic leaders often begin their administrative posts underprepared for the role (Cipriano & Riccardi, 2013; Gmelch, 1996; Gmelch & Buller, 2015; Gmelch & Burns, 1994; Gmelch & Miskin, 2011; Wolverton, et al., 2005). Beyond the desire for the formal trainings and the socialization and mentorship benefits that this study's research has affirmed, participants went a step further in articulating complementary pieces that would have been helpful such as additional intrapersonal leadership training with personality assessments, instruction in budget management, and grant writing. This notion of desiring more personality assessments could be indicative of participants wanting to know more about themselves both from a personal growth standpoint in addition to wanting to work well/better with others (i.e., knowing themselves could help them participate more effectively in leader-follower dynamics and/or among their peers). For budget management and grant writing, this could speak to a developmental need that these participants have not received enough of over the years, resorting to learning by doing or heavy reliance on others. This sentiment also begs the question of whether these participants' skill development (Gmelch & Buller, 2015) was so negatively hindered that they are not in the habit of engaging in such practices moving forward. It is important to know if there is an interplay between their hindered skill development and a lack of awareness about academic leadership development programs in general.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

Findings from this study have generated a number of recommendations for both future research and informing the praxis of academicians that oversee leadership development opportunities for administrators within the academe. Additional considerations might include the further exploration of the leadership differentiated and integration/synthesis stages of the LID Model. This is likely best addressed in studies of similar design by developing questions that will explore these facets of the model more in-depth than what was carried out for the current study. In addition, the findings regarding mentorship, particularly peer-based mentorship's prominence among participants warrant further exploration. Future studies of this kind should consider exploring the elements of peer-based mentoring for academic administrators including best-practices, outcomes, initiation, closure, and related constructs. This should better inform understanding of peer-based mentoring for academic administrators and better contextualize its role as a complement to academic leadership development programs. Scholars might also wish to consider facilitating survey-based methods to ascertain from participants which programs regionally/nationally and in-house have been helpful to them in their leader identity development. Depending on the sample, patterns could be established regarding the programs that seem to have been most successful among participating academic leaders and a repository could be devised to build greater exposure for these programs, increasing accessibility and awareness among target audiences.

Senior administrators and leadership development specialists seeking to positively impact the training and development of academic administrators at all levels within the academy might consider better means of connecting later-career administrators with mentors as it seems that mentors are harder to find for participants as they rise in rank. In addition, budget management training and grant writing instruction are subjects that formal programs for academic leadership development, either regionally/nationally or in-house, should consider incorporating into their curricula if they do not already exist. It might be advisable to do so in a protracted way rather than a one-off fashion seeing as, like many things, grant writing and budgets, and the skills to manage these are apt to evolve over time. Additional considerations might include helping administrators develop best practices to facilitate conversations for requisitioning additional support, be that from individuals above them in institutional hierarchy or in the capacity of requesting complementary aid with operations. Developing a national repository for interdisciplinary opportunities for academic administrators (e.g., governmental agencies committee opportunities) could be of great use for professional development. Similar actions could be taken in-house based on what university committees the institution in-question offers administrators the opportunity with which to engage.

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Journal of Higher Education Management, **39**(2), 27-36 (ISSN 2640-7515).

Why Should College Leaders Consider the Power of Their Place?

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Abstract

Do campus leaders in higher education consider the importance of their institution's "place" when they are making decisions? This research project interviewed higher education presidents and vice-presidents. Expert interviews with college leaders revealed the ways that Cresswell's "place" concept (2015) is important for distinguishing institutions in the higher education landscape.

Keywords: higher education leadership, power of place, strategic planning, institutional values, stakeholder values, campus and community, connections, identity, and belonging

Introduction

During the first COVID-19 pandemic summer of 2020, an interdisciplinary group of architects, educators, designers, and consultants (the continuing member of this group include: Verna Case, Carmine Gibaldi, David Hales, Felix Kronenberg, Henry Myerberg, Christine Sheridan, and Tucker Viemeister) began meeting weekly to discuss the future of college campuses. Colleges and universities were forced to hold classes virtually and cloister students in dormitories or evacuate campuses entirely. Numbers of smaller institutions verged on closing completely, a trend that unfortunately continues (Albright and Querolo, 2023). One of the conversations that emerged from this diverse group focused on the concept of "place" as it relates to institutions of higher learning. The authors of this paper asked, "Do campus leaders at colleges or universities consider the importance of their institution's 'place' when they are making decisions?"

To investigate this question, we interviewed college leaders via Zoom in 2021 and 2022. In an academic blog post published in August of 2022, we summarized our analysis of these interviews and stated, "Recent events on campuses throughout the country, such as the coronavirus pandemic, innovations in technology and pedagogy, and changes in demographics, have created challenges related to the relevance of 'place' for institutional leaders, faculty, students, and other constituents. We believe that such challenges can benefit from an understanding of the power of place in higher education" (Kronenberg and Case, 2022).

As Cresswell stated, people invest meaning into spaces and become attached, turning spaces into places. Places can provide a mechanism for being more intentional about meaning: "When we look at the world as a world of places, we see different things. We see attachments and connections between people and place. We see worlds of meaning and experience. Sometimes this way of seeing can seem to be an act of resistance against a rationalization of the world that focuses more on space than place” (Cresswell, 2015, p. 18). Löw (2016) argues that “[i]n contrast to spaces, places are always markable, nameable, and unique” (p. xvii). The connections, attachments, and community created by places are more enduring than spaces. Place allows us to understand the world around us. A particular college, for example, is a place that creates meaning of its own that differs from all other colleges, both to individuals and groups.

Spaces and places provide educational institutions with different ways of examining their role and effectiveness: “To think of an area of the world as a rich and complicated interplay of people and the environment-as a place-is to free us from thinking of it as facts and figures” (Cresswell, 2015, p. 18). While we can see an educational institution through different statistics, e.g. its faculty-student ratio, graduation rate, endowment, and retention rate, this view does leave out crucial components that place can better explain in a complementary way. In other words, the place of an institution may encompass community connections, cultural identities, and emotional attachments. Place provides a dimension that is both an individually and socially constructed reality (Hutchison & Orr, 2004). We can think of place as a way of knowing rather than as a thing in the world. Cresswell (2015) cited Pred’s 1984 paper which argued that places are never finished but are always a result of processes and practices. Cresswell broadened that premise by stating that places are constructed by people doing things and in this sense are never finished but are constantly being performed. We discovered from our research that a college is not just its location, buildings, and physical footprint. It is also the result of its relationship to its history, community and values, and geographical location. Each college’s unique place will also change over time as different people interact and create new meaning in its spaces.

Methods

We interviewed ten leaders of private, small colleges to better understand the power and relevance of “place” to the leaders of these institutions. Five of the leaders were presidents of these institutions at the time of the interview, one was a former president, and four were vice-presidents. They represented private, primarily undergraduate institutions, four in rural environments and the remaining ones in suburban or urban areas. Our primary goal was to understand the qualities that college leaders felt gave special meaning to their institutions and the value that they placed on understanding these qualities of their place. We also hoped to find out how the institutions of higher education leverage their unique “place” to improve outcomes and how their concept of the institution’s place in higher education might help them become better leaders.

Using the “expert interviews” methodology, we created codes and categories that were revealed during the interviews. Hitzler, Horner and Maeder (1994, as cited in Meuser and Nagel, 2009) posit that experts possess “institutionalized authority to construct reality.” The interviews were semi-structured with only a few common questions to start a more open conversation. Meuser & Nagel (2009) describe the method as follows:

> Different from the analytic approach appropriate for case studies, in the analysis of expert interviews attention is focused on thematic units, that is passages with similar topics which are scattered about the interviews. Sequentiality of statements within a single interview is not of interest. Instead, what gains importance is the

> institutional-organizational context within which the expert's position is embedded and which provides the actor with guiding principles. (p. 35)

The expert interviews methodology is well-suited to our research with its focus on context and participants whose institutional positions give authority to their perspectives. The interview questions in Figure 1 align with the method providing a framework for exploring the topic.

Figure 1
Interview Questions

1. How and why is sense of place important on your campus?
2. In what way(s) do you consider your institution/campus unique, particularly regarding "place"?
3. How did the way the institutional representatives identified "places" of importance help you understand the college's mission and perhaps the role you could play in that mission? (In other words when you came to your institution, what did the representatives identify as places of importance?)
4. How does the importance of place at your institution compare to your previous institution?
5. How does your campus interact or relate to the surrounding community?
6. What challenges and opportunities do you see regarding place at your institution?

Results and Discussion

Interview Analysis

Our interviews with the campus leaders began with our asking them how and when they think about the importance of place at their institutions. Many of the leaders identified special structures, such as unique architecture, a memorable location, a geographical feature with special significance, or an area where special institutional events are held. As each interview progressed, the leaders began to delve into features of their institutions that they believed were distinctive because of the institution's geographic location, such as surrounding communities or natural environments. Almost all the leaders talked extensively about "community" as an important element that defines their institution's place. They cited physical spaces both on campus and off campus that created opportunities for building a sense of community, like the campus commons and event facilities that promote interactions with the communities near their campus.

The leaders felt that their institution's place is reflected in its mission statement, values, and goals. At the same time, they believed that their constituents, including students, parents, alumni staff, faculty, trustees, and donors, have different relationships with the institution and its values. One leader we interviewed posited that place is where different kinds of people can feel they belong without being normatively constrained to do so.

The leaders recognized that most of their institution's constituents have emotional connections to the institution. These connections may be based on personal experiences that were shaped during their formative years as undergraduates or their individual values that support the institution's values. Emotional connections to a college may be initially triggered by its attractive physical environment or by welcoming, friendly individuals who love the institution. These connections are further solidified by becoming part of the place through building relationships and memories. Long-term institutional connections must be nourished to sustain the core values of the place. Strong leaders recognize the role they must play in nurturing and maintaining those connections.

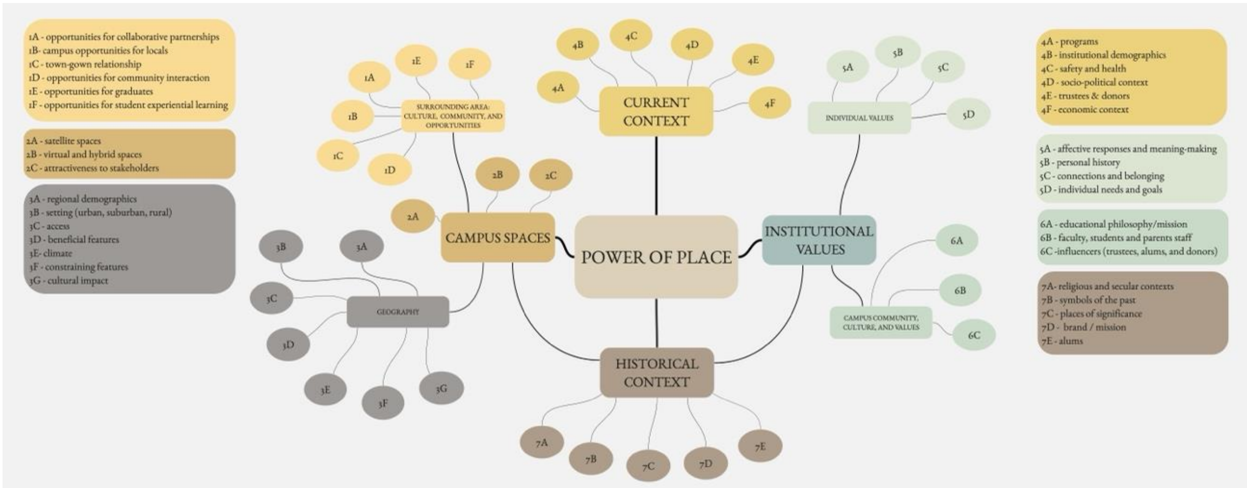
During the interviews, most leaders mentioned the role history played in shaping what place means at their institutions. One leader stated that an institution's history, present, and future are connected within ever changing realities. Another noted that individual leaders can only make a dent in defining an institution's place because so much history and so many people have shaped that past. Yet another interviewee said, "As leaders there were generations before us and there will be generations after us. You are not working independently from those generations, but you want to be different." While institutional history can't be changed, institutions are learning that each place must understand its history and create learning opportunities based on that past. Sometimes they must also help the institution reconcile histories that are no longer consistent with its current values.

By the end of the interviews, the campus leaders began to appreciate that they need to understand and attend to the intangible, affective parts of their institution's place in addition to the physical and environmental components of place to help their institution meet current and future challenges. The leaders acknowledged that the very nature of their job at the institution—that is addressing day-to-day challenges-- rarely gave them the opportunity to consider or appreciate the many factors that define their institution's place in the higher education landscape. One leader wistfully stated that she wished to have more time to view her institution from 40,000 feet.

Concept Map

After our analysis of the interview transcripts, we focused on general categories that each leader identified as a unique feature of their institution's place. To better visualize how these categories might form a complete picture of the important aspects of place that the campus leaders cited, we decided to create a concept map. (See Figure 2.) We identified four primary institutional features that the leaders viewed as most crucial in defining the power of their place: *Institutional Values, Campus Spaces, Historical Context, and Current Context*. The map's subnodes are surrounded by specific elements in small ovals that were mentioned by these leaders as playing a distinctive role in strengthening the power of their institution's place. These elements may change at any point in time or other elements may come into a prominent role, but all are important in shaping distinctive features for each institution. College leaders should continually monitor these features and the role they may have in reaching institutional goals.

Figure 2
Concept Map



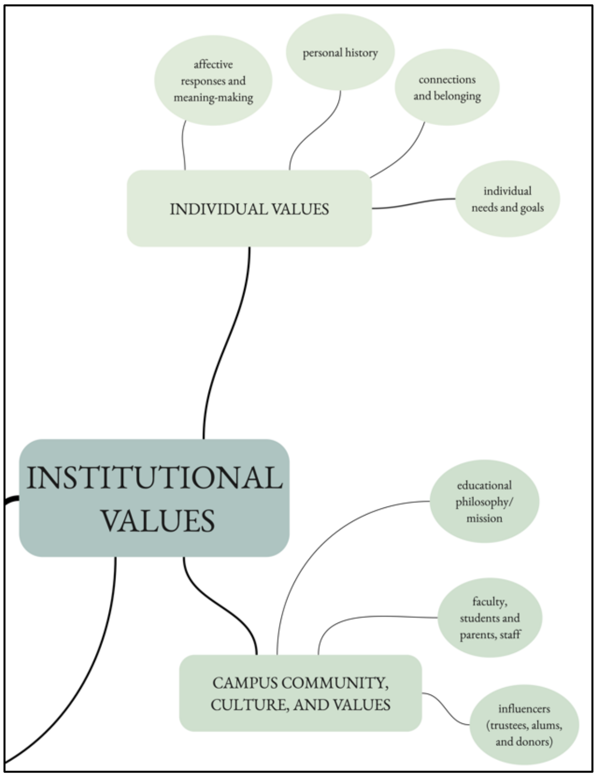
Institutional Values

The Institutional Values node has two subnodes (*Individual Values* and *Campus Culture and Values*). The “values” nodes are affective elements of the map that are time dependent and may change as new populations of students, faculty, and administrators occupy the place. (See Table 1.) Individual and campus community values give social meaning to the place that is campus. These social meanings are time dependent in a sense that they may change for new constituents, but they also become part of the memory of certain groups of constituents and, therefore the history of the institution. (See Figure 3.)

Table 1
Institutional Values: Social Meaning

Individual Values	Affective responses and meaning	5A
	Personal history	5B
	Connection and belonging	5C
	Individual needs and goals	5D
Campus Community, Culture, & Values	Educational philosophy/mission	6A
	Faculty, students and parents, staff	6B
	Influencers (trustees, alums, and donors)	6C

Figure 3
Concept Map Node: Institutional Values



Campus Spaces

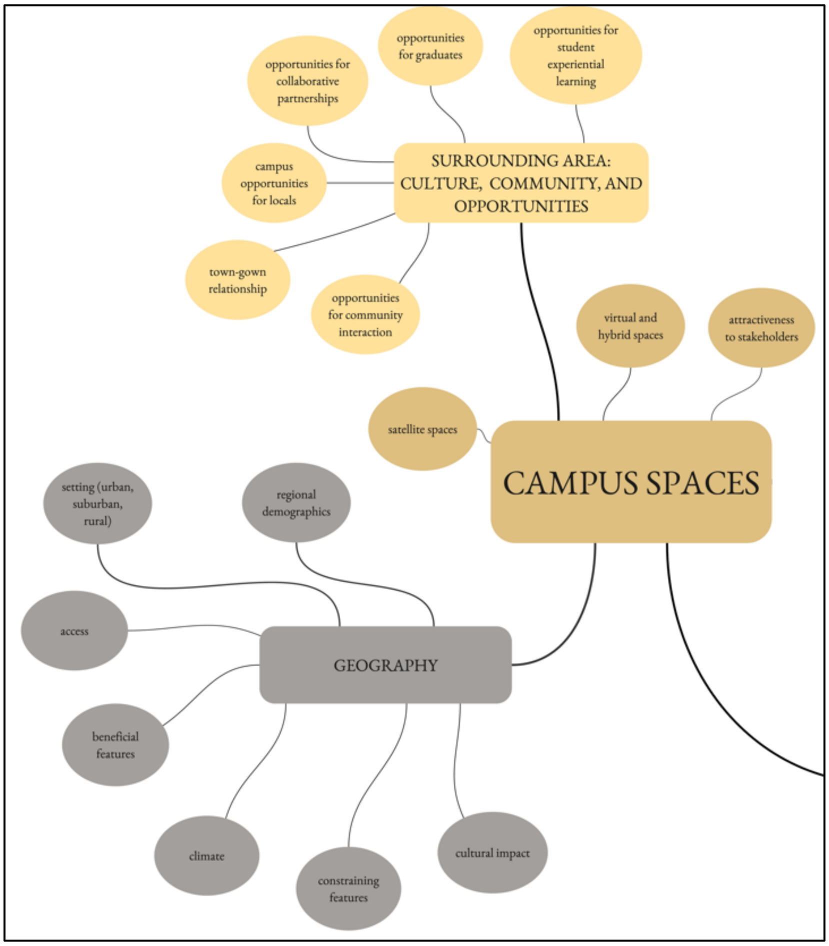
The Campus Spaces node on the left side of the concept map has two subnodes (*Surrounding Area: Culture, Community* and *Opportunities and Geography*). These are the more traditional "space" and location elements of a campus and include buildings and other specific on-campus features, environmental and geographic features, global location, and communities surrounding the physical campus. (See Table 2.) All the features that connect primarily to the *Campus Spaces* node are relatively stable and less subject to short-term change. (See Figure 4.)

Table 2
Campus Spaces: Traditional "Space" and Location Elements

Surrounding Area: Culture, Community, & Opportunities	Opportunities for collaborative partnerships	1A
	Campus opportunities for locals	1B
	Town-gown relationship	1C
	Opportunities for community interaction	1D
	Opportunities for graduates	1E
	Opportunities for student experiential learning	1F
Geography	Satellite spaces	2A
	Virtual and hybrid spaces	2B
	Attractiveness to stakeholders	2C

Figure 4

Concept Map Node: Campus Spaces

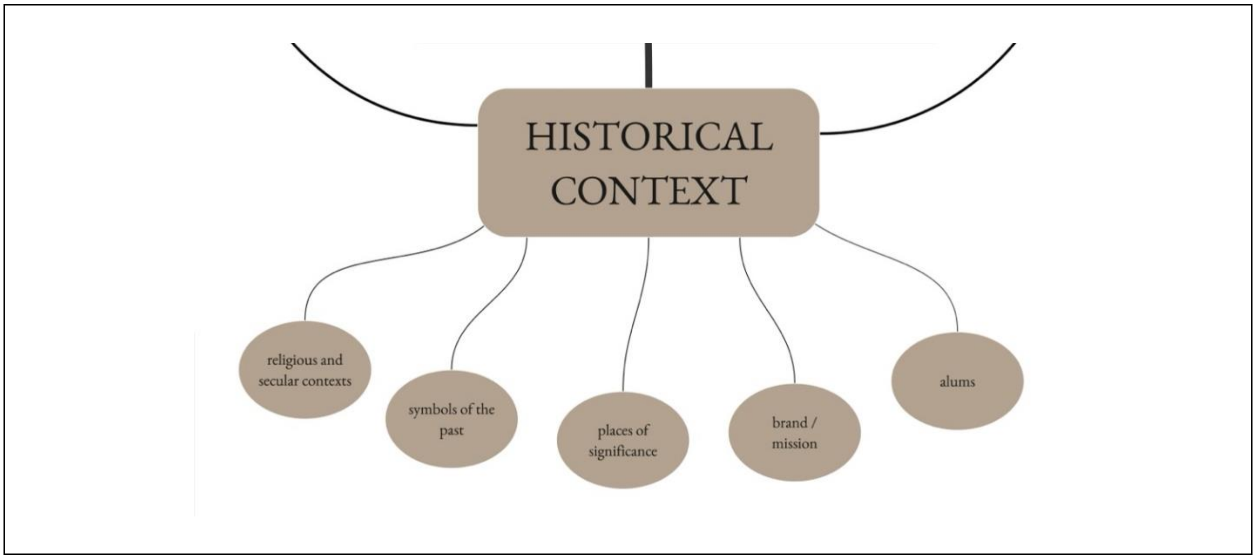


Historical Context

The one immutable element of the concept map, the *Historical Context* subnode, has links to both the right and left side of the map (campus space and institutional values). Emergent themes include: religious and secular contexts, symbols of the past, places of significance, brand/mission, and alums. (See Figure 5.) Today, many institutions are grappling with past histories related to slavery or to other dishonorable actions of founders and donors. How institutions deal with these challenges needs to begin with understanding how history influences both the campus places and the past and present culture of an institution. Lessons learned from the past are necessary to move an institution into its future.

Figure 5

Concept Map Node: Historical Context

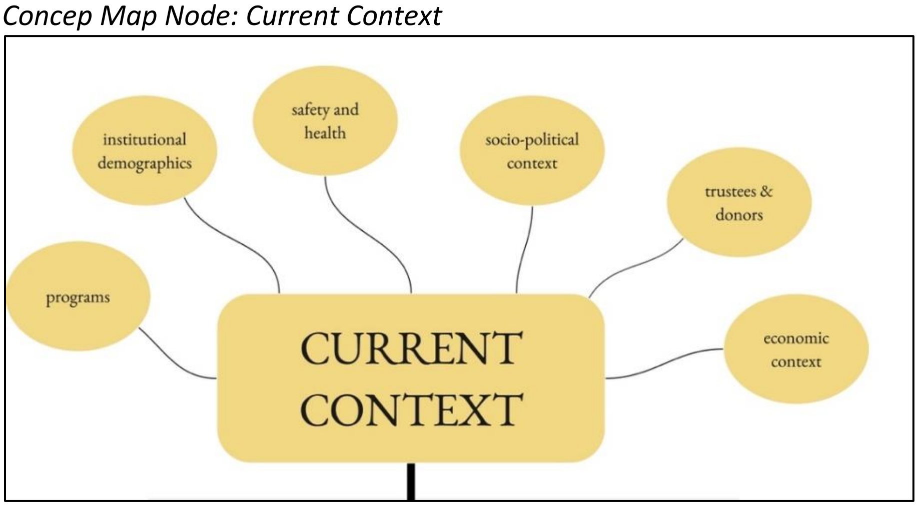


Current Context

Current Context is the most transient of all the concept map nodes. While changes in the current context demand a response, sometimes quickly (e.g., the COVID pandemic), most of these changes do not immediately contribute to the power of the institution's place in the higher education landscape. The events or conditions that occur in the current context (programs, institutional demographics, safety and health issues, socio-political environments, trustees and donors, economic factors) are more likely to impact the shorter-term individual values affective node on the map rather than the longer-term campus community, culture, and values node associated with an institution. (See Figure 6.)

Figure 6

Concep Map Node: Current Context



After creating the concept map, we had follow-up conversations with nine of the interviewees to receive their feedback and to ask if they would find this visualization of the power of place useful in their leadership roles. All said the map could be a useful tool to remind leaders to consider all the factors that shape their institution's uniqueness. They felt that the map could help them recognize the complex factors that make their institution unique and to better differentiate their place from other colleges and universities.

All the leaders agreed that the future of any campus could be well served if they worried less about keeping up with the latest higher education trends and spent more time understanding how to make the most of their place. They said there is a clear need for higher education institutions to integrate who they are with what they look like on their websites and social media. Leadership should make sure the mission of their institutions reflects the uniqueness of their place in the higher education landscape.

When we explored the websites of these and other similar institutions, we found that many college and university sites look and feel the same. Similar themes are highlighted, such as exploring the world, and pictures depict a smiling and diverse student body engaged in classrooms and extracurricular activities. What is missing on many of these sites is a clear articulation of the unique nature of the institution's place.

We feel that by keeping the Power of Place Concept Map as a focus, campus leaders will be able to better understand and articulate the unique place their institution holds in the higher education landscape (Figure 7). As these leaders distinguish the special place of their institutions, they will be able to speak directly to prospective students, faculty, and staff who are searching for a place that best fits their hopes and needs as a place to learn and grow. Further, if an institution wants to make changes that will better serve its students, understanding the institution's history and current context will help identify areas for improvement. The attention that leaders will need to pay to any one section of the concept map will change from time to time depending on circumstances, needs, or events. What will not change are the interconnections of all the map sections crucial in determining the unique identity of place for each institution.

Figure 7

How Can the Power of Place Concept Aid Campus Leaders?

Leaders will be better equipped to:

- Differentiate their institution from other similar institutions.
- Envision future directions that will be most effective for their institution.
- Assist in addressing specific challenges and fund-raising, such as the following:
    - Does the institution need to build new facilities or re-imagine existing ones?
    - How can the institution improve relationships with the surrounding community or take advantage of the surrounding environment?
    - How can the institution change its traditional demographics by understanding how it might need to address some historical biases that sometimes are not the obvious ones?
- Understand how the institution's history continues to shape its place in higher education.
- Prepare for current and future challenges facing the institution by drawing from its traditional strengths, while responding to a changing world where external factors shape institutional needs.

Summary

Our research corresponds to Cresswell's (2015) assessment that place is a rich and complicated interplay of people and the environment. During our expert interviews, campus leaders began their descriptions of their college's place by speaking about specific spaces on their campuses. It did not take long, however, until they recognized that these spaces only define their college as unique because of the highly personal interactions that attach meaning to them (Hutchison & Orr, 2004). Colleges are places where individuals grow, and their perceptions of place define the complex relationships that are specific to that place and time. By understanding a more complete picture of the relationships that shaped and will continue to shape their colleges' uniqueness within the higher education ecosystem, leaders can be more effective in helping their institutions adapt and meet future challenges. The connections between people and their environment are inextricably intertwined. To understand this truth allows leaders to articulate a complete picture that makes their institution a rare and unique place.

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Journal of Higher Education Management, **39**(2), 37-52 (ISSN 2640-7515).

Cultivating Senior Teams: Perspectives from University Presidents and Senior Leaders

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Abstract

Presidential transitions are a critical time for the university and the new president. The absence of succession planning in higher education can hinder leadership continuity. This study explored university presidents' selection processes for the senior leadership team and examined how senior leadership team members perceive their experiences after being selected.

Keywords: presidential transition, senior team building, narrative research, succession planning, senior leaders, mid-level administrators

Introduction

As predicted, a wave of retirements is taking place from the baby-boomer presidents (Harris & Ellis, 2017; Skinner, 2010), increasing presidential departures in higher education (Alvarado, 2021; American Council on Education, 2017; Gaval, 2009; Selingo et al., 2017). According to Melidona et al., in the American College President Study (2023), university presidents indicated they had been in their jobs for 5.9 years, and a quarter of respondents indicated they intend to step down within the next year or two. The COVID-19 pandemic likely has exacerbated this increase in retirements, as many college presidents left their jobs after two grueling years trying to navigate their schools through the pandemic (Zackal, 2022; Doherty, 2022). Leadership transitions are inevitable and disruptive (Cavanaugh, 2017).

Upon assuming office, presidents bear the weight of leading fundraising, budgeting, and strategic planning efforts, alongside fostering relationships with local communities and governing boards (Eckel & Kezar, 2016; Freeman & Kochan, 2013; Gednalske, 2022; Harris & Ellis, 2017). University presidents can face numerous challenges as they try to adapt to a new culture, team, and work processes; at no time during their career are leaders more susceptible to failure than when they are in transition (Mandershied & Harrower, 2016). Therefore, the creation of a senior leadership team comes at a time critical for the new president's success.

A new president's arrival almost guarantees the departure of members of the inherited leadership team. This period often involves disruptions, job insecurity, and turnover among senior administrators (Alvarado, 2021; Reed, 2017; Freeman & Kochan, 2013; Smerek, 2013; Overend, 2011; Gaval, 2009). The absence of succession planning in higher education for senior team members hinders leadership continuity and stability. Given the significant turnover during a presidential leadership transition, succession planning within the institution could benefit the university and the new president.

Highly successful organizations have a critical mass of passionate advocates who understand that succession planning is the key to sustainability (Gonzalez, 2010). Succession planning is a strategic planning tool that addresses the issues created by individuals' departure and bridges the knowledge gap created by a departure (Klein & Salk, 2013). It provides an organization with a surplus of talent by helping members realize their potential, which should not be confused with performance (Gonzalez, 2010). Finally, it provides opportunities while recognizing that only some participants in succession planning activities will move into leadership roles (Golden, 2014).

Succession planning can effectively preserve institutional memory and improve institutional knowledge (Estedadi & Hamidi, 2015); therefore, the shortage of succession planning in higher education may weaken institutional effectiveness because of changing leadership and the loss of institutional knowledge (Grossman, 2014). However, by keeping the values, mission, and strategic plan at the center of the organization's succession management process, the organization, whether it is a corporation or an institution of higher learning, can compete in a rapidly evolving environment (Long et al., 2013).

For universities to seize this opportunity, they must begin to invest and prepare for future leadership through succession planning. Succession planning prepares for a successor and develops successors from within (Golden, 2014). Trustees and top administrators must provide visible support and convey that succession planning is essential (Clunies, 2004). Deans and other executive administrators must identify and develop talent and staff for operational support. Succession planning should be a flexible and evolving process intricately linked to the department and institution's mission and respond to changing organizational demands (Clunies, 2004).

Literature Review

The literature on senior team building after a presidential transition and succession planning in higher education is significantly limited (Cavanaugh, 2017; Jackson & Allen, 2022; Kezar et al., 2020; Klein & Salk, 2013), as is the literature on building the leadership team from the perspective of university presidents and senior leaders (Alvarado, 2021; Gaval, 2009). This narrative study contributes to the academic literature addressing these gaps. The literature showcases the uncertainties accompanying presidential leadership transitions in higher education and the challenges university presidents face during this period.

Turnover

High turnover during an administration transition can lead to a sweeping overhaul of top managers and strategic reorientations (Padilla, 2004), generally replacing many or all executive team members (Gaval, 2009; Gonzalez, 2010). These departures and other factors of a presidential transition can leave the president in a difficult situation. Turnover can cost the institution, causing it to lose valuable institutional memory (Rosser, 2004).

Succession planning

Colleges and universities must reexamine recruitment, professional development, and succession plans currently in place to attract candidates seeking new careers or transitioning into higher education and develop leaders internally (Betts et al., 2009). The intentional preparation of future leaders for higher education remains a critical need today in institutions across the globe (Madsen et al., 2012). Institutions must take the necessary steps to prepare who is next.

Despite experience with the inevitability and disruption of leadership transitions, higher education institutions have primarily resisted proven success practices such as succession planning that could help ease these events (Cavanaugh, 2017; Richards, 2016). Odwusi (2018) argues that identifying and developing potential successors for critical positions in an organization through a systematic evaluation process and training competent employees for transition processes is fundamental for the success of every organization. However, succession planning is a complicated concept in academia due to dramatic cultural differences between the boardroom and the campus (Clunies, 2004).

Preference for external hires

Higher education institutions in the United States tend to search and hire more externally than internally for senior and executive leaders, as there is an extreme bias in favor of outside hires (Cavanaugh, 2017; Paul, 2017). Thus, the traditional national search can hinder succession planning (Klein & Salk, 2013; Witt & Kiefer, 2008). Gonzalez (2010) suggests that external candidates can bring prestige to an institution, increasing its status by hiring administrators from universities that are perceived to be more prestigious. External candidates are seen as having new energy and charisma, while internal candidates' weaknesses are already known; they have baggage, and because of this, the bar is often set higher for them (Klein & Salk, 2013).

Diversity in higher education

Minorities are significantly underrepresented in senior-level leadership (Chang et al., 2014). White males are highly represented in upper-level administrative positions, and people of color are represented in lower-level administrative positions (Jackson, 2000; Jackson, 2003). While national demographic data on faculty, governing boards, and presidents are readily available, there are limited common data sets delineating a demographic breakdown for entry, mid, and senior-level positions (Betts et al., 2009).

Practical Framework

The first studies to emerge on succession planning were those conducted in 1916 by Henri Fayol (Collins & Collins, 2007). Fayol believed that succession planning could help to avoid organizational missteps because succession planning ensures putting the right people in the right positions at the right time (Ahmad et al., 2020). According to Fayol, if an organization continues to react rather than proactively plan, leadership continuity and vacant senior posts will be filled by unqualified successors (Chevalier, 2008; Siambi, 2022). Like many others who have developed succession planning frameworks, Rothwell’s (2005) framework is grounded in Fayol’s guide to succession planning. Estedadi and Hamidi (2015) state Rothwell’s four fundamental reasons for succession planning:

> Succession planning is the method an organization must employ to ensure the right people are in the right place at the right time. It lessens the effect of downsizing, advances diversity and multiculturalism, and provides a framework for establishing career paths, training, developmental plans, and individual career moves. This framework was used when analyzing the data generated through the study. (p. 42)

Rothwell's (2005) framework was used as a lens when analyzing the data generated through the study. This study explored university presidents' decision-making regarding selecting leadership team members, considering internal promotions, external hires, retention, and termination. It also explores methods for establishing diversity within senior leadership and examines the perspective of selected team members. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do university presidents in higher education form their leadership teams?
2. How do diversity, equity, and inclusion influence presidents’ decisions when appointing members to a senior team?
3. What are university leaders’ pathways to presidential leadership teams?
    a. How do direct reports to university presidents make meaning of their experiences as the senior team is established after a presidential transition?
4. What factors are perceived by the university president and senior team members to contribute to the promotion or retention of leaders during a leadership transition?

The findings from this study offer valuable perspectives from individuals currently in the role of the university president or on a senior leadership team. This insight benefits both sitting and aspiring presidents, senior leadership team members, and mid-level administrators who aspire to serve on the senior leadership.

Methodology

The methodology employed in this study is narrative inquiry using interviews. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), narrative inquiry studies how humans experience the world. Narrative research is a form of inquiry in which the researcher studies the participants' lives through their stories (Creswell, 2003; Overend, 2011). The interviews lasted 60–90 minutes and were transcribed.

Participants

Purposive sampling (Etikan, 2016) was used to identify participants for this study. Selection criteria included sitting university presidents and senior leaders at public higher education institutions in the United States who had undergone a presidential transition within the last six years. Eleven participants were selected for the study and interviewed: five university presidents, two chiefs of staff/board professionals, and four vice presidents. The participants were diverse, including persons of color, women, and men. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms are used throughout the article.

Institutional Review Board approval (IRB-489) was obtained, and all participants gave informed consent before data collection.

Data collection and analysis

The procedures implemented to conduct the data analysis included developing case narratives, coding, and thematic analysis. Case narratives were developed from the interviews for each participant. After a thorough review of the case narratives, coding was completed. The coding process identified themes that appeared across each of the participants. Following the coding, a thematic analysis was completed to highlight similarities and differences in patterns across all the participants' case narratives. Next, an examination of how themes from the data responded to the research questions was conducted. Lastly, the codes, themes, and thematic analysis were shared with critical friends and a validation group as reviewers of the data analysis. McNiff and Whitehead (2011) suggest that practitioner researchers should aim to submit the data and findings to rigorous critique at all stages, including asking critical friends to provide feedback on the data, emerging analyses, and ideas.

Study limitations

A small sample of individuals who serve as presidents and senior leaders in higher education were interviewed. While their experiences shed light on senior team building after a presidential transition, they cannot be broadly generalized.

Results

The purpose of this study was to learn how university presidents, during their leadership transition, form their teams, if succession planning and opportunities for promotion were extended to internal candidates, and the perspectives of individuals selected to serve on the senior team. The data analysis identified several themes:

- Institutional practices and governing bodies influenced university presidents' hiring decisions.
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion influenced the new presidents' hiring decisions.
- Effective communication, collaboration, expertise, and trustworthiness were key attributes that influenced the new university presidents' decision-making.
- There were similarities between the pathway of senior leaders to the senior leadership team.
- All the senior leaders indicated they had participated in some leadership development through engagement within various professional associations and organizations.
- The senior leaders found their new university president supportive.

This section synthesizes the findings to the research questions that guided this study.

Research Question 1: *How do university presidents in higher education form their leadership teams?*

The university presidents prioritized aligning their senior leadership teams with the institution's needs. Many university presidents mentioned the institution's hiring practices and strategic priorities as a top consideration when building their senior leadership teams. Lastly, the board of trustees indirectly influenced the building of their senior teams.

The institution's needs were key to the university president's decision-making. These considerations helped them determine if an internal candidate was equipped with what was needed for the role or if they should look externally: "It's not about you. It's always about the institution, the organization trying to make the organization better."

Navigating team building during the transition also involved the university presidents' significant consideration of the board of trustees: "I do report to the board, and the board's opinion is not determinative about who the team will be because they trust me, but it does matter to them." Likewise, many of the vice presidents also felt the pull and influence of the board of trustees. They all shared that when the relationship with the board of trustees is turbulent, it directly impacts the senior leadership team: "All it takes is one bad relationship."

The university presidents had multiple considerations for what was needed for the institution and their teams, which helped to determine if an internal or external candidate was most appropriate for the institution's needs. There was no preference for internal or external; instead, the top priority was the institution's needs: "Sometimes the internal is so dysfunctional that you can't imagine anybody from the internal actually being able to do it … there are other times where it is actually really functional and somebody internal, maybe, kind of is the perfect fit." All the presidents expressed an openness to considering internal candidates. However, institutional culture at most institutions requires the presidents to complete a national search. Even with the national search, some internal candidates were selected to serve on the senior leadership team.

Research Question 2: *How do diversity, equity, and inclusion influence presidents' decisions when appointing members to a senior team?*

University presidents shared an immense commitment to having a diverse senior leadership team. This was made evident by creating a chief diversity officer at four of five institutions. The presidents all concurred that having diverse senior leadership was critical for leading a complex institution such as a university and that diversity at the senior level would improve decision-making for the entire organization. Some university presidents expressed frustration with the makeup of their inherited team, with two of the presidents saying specifically that there were "too many white males." All university presidents acknowledged the importance of having senior leadership that mirrors the university community: "As a public university, we ought to reflect the population of the public at a minimum." Diverse representation at the senior level is beneficial for the community to understand that the university is committed to its mission of inclusion and excellence:

> When making future hires, I will be sensitive to diversity, equity, and inclusion. It doesn't mean replacements will be the same; it just means that I want to be sensitive to the overall profile of who the cabinet is. Turnover isn't all the time, so you have to really be sensitive to

> that because people stay in the role for a while. Otherwise, you could be locked in for a long time to a certain profile that maybe doesn't reflect your commitment to diversity.

The university presidents understood that intentional hiring strategies would be needed to ensure diverse representation at the senior level. Specifically, ensuring a diverse candidate pool meant communicating with search committees and firms: “You get the pool of candidates that you get, and from there, you must hire the best candidate, and sometimes, that can be challenging. So, I'm a big believer that the most important step really is building the pool of candidates.”

None of the university presidents appointed individuals solely because of their race. The university presidents stressed that senior leaders who are successful in these roles will likely remain for a substantial period. Therefore, intentional hiring strategies such as a diverse candidate pool were critical.

Research Question 3: *What factors are perceived by the university president and senior team members to contribute to the promotion or retention of leaders during a leadership transition?*

The university presidents were slow to make initial changes to their inherited senior team, except for one who was internal and already had concerns about a couple of team members. Key considerations for team selection were the senior leader’s expertise, ability to communicate effectively, collaboration with other senior team members and divisions, and ability to lead without micromanagement from the university president. Lastly, trustworthiness was of the utmost importance for the university presidents.

The presidents reflected on how they measured and evaluated their inherited team. Most of the time with their team was spent in a virtual environment because of the global COVID-19 pandemic. This was a challenge for some university presidents and their teams. The retained senior team members were said to have completed projects and exercises as requested and kept open and honest communication with the university presidents; others were removed from the team due to performance, poor communication, or lack of trust.

When discussing their leadership philosophies, university presidents and senior leaders overwhelmingly responded that they do not micromanage. As such, they all expressed the need for experts on their teams. Many said they offer guidance and support when needed but prefer these leaders to lead as the experts: “My philosophy is to let them do their jobs, give them advice when they ask for it, and help them stay out of trouble. I just don't try to make daily decisions that they ought to be making.”

A recurring theme in the interviews with university presidents and senior leaders was how effective communication is critical. Senior leaders and university presidents reflected on communication after the presidential transition: “I'm a hands-on leader who believes a lot in a lot of communication.” Most participants indicated that communication challenges occurred during the presidential transition due to the remote nature of communication during the global COVID-19 pandemic. When the senior leaders described their working relationships with the university presidents, they all expressed the importance of open and honest communication. Similarly, this was a key consideration for university presidents when identifying what was necessary for their senior leadership team members.

The university presidents discussed a need to believe what the senior leaders told them about their divisions. Trust and honesty are qualities that four of the five university presidents mentioned as necessary: “Getting back to micromanagement, we don't have to agree. You can tell me, look, I'd really rather do it this way. But what you can't do is tell me one thing and do another … I just felt like overtime working with these individuals that I couldn't trust them.”
Trust in the senior leaders' capabilities and performance was also a consideration: “I totally trust them. I don't look over their shoulder. They get the job done, and they do it well.” While the university presidents' descriptions of the importance of trustworthiness varied, it was evident that each prioritized it. For some, the lack of trust of some team members resulted in termination.

The senior leaders opined on developing shared goals with their university presidents, with many expressing their university presidents’ support in wanting them to succeed as leaders. The collaborative leadership approach was helpful during the turbulent time of navigating a global pandemic, and collaboration was a critical skill that the university presidents deemed significant. Some university presidents found it essential not to work in silos and advantageous to work collectively across the institution: “You must be a team player … one of the key things we talked about with the athletic director … can we find someone that has some collaboration with academic affairs?”

All the university presidents shared that they gave each leader on the inherited team an opportunity to remain on the team. The university presidents indicated that those who did not stay on the team were removed because of their inability to communicate, lack of trust, or incompetence. The university presidents described the senior leaders promoted internally to the senior leadership as capable leaders who demonstrated what the university needed at the time. The promoted senior leaders believed that their university presidents communicated clear shared goals throughout the year rather than just at review time. They felt that the university presidents wanted them to succeed and provided them with the needed support.

Research Question 3a: *What are university leaders’ pathways to presidential leadership teams?*

Initially, the senior leaders did not plan to serve on the senior leadership team, but their awareness of this aspiration developed after many years of working in their fields. Each senior leader's pathway comprised professional experiences, professional development opportunities, and mentoring. The senior leaders advanced in various administrative roles throughout their careers, and many attributed their success to mentorships established early in their careers.

Mentoring relationships were established for the senior leaders through on the job guidance and engagement in professional organizations and associations:

> “He taught me a lot about being a leader and appreciating people on your team … that has led me all my life.”

> "I had a lot of really amazing mentors who saw a lot more in me than I planned for myself … who were great sponsors and supporters of me through … organization as a very young professional early in my career."
>
> "She has been invaluable to my trajectory professionally. She has certainly served as a mentor, and in some ways, she's been a sponsor."

Experience, professional development, and mentoring established the pathway for these leaders to the senior leadership team.

Research Question 4: *How do direct reports to university presidents make meaning of their experiences as the senior team is established after a presidential transition*?

Most senior leaders referred to their presidents as supportive as they transitioned into their roles on the senior leadership team while navigating the COVID-19 global pandemic. Many opined on the evaluation and goal-setting process with the new president, with the majority stating that there is a collaborative approach to setting goals connected to the president's overarching goals and the institution's strategic priorities. They all indicated that their president is not a micromanager and trusts them to do the work they were hired to do: "A couple of things I appreciate about my president. He is not a micromanager; he trusts what the team does, and he's there if I need him … I can count on him."

While they all expressed that their university presidents were not micromanagers, they felt that support was often offered, and they felt comfortable with their presidents that they could go to them for advice when needed. This support was critical when undertaking necessary staffing cuts and making decisions that impacted the university community as it pertained to the pandemic: "What I can appreciate about my president … He helps us as leaders be equipped to be successful … He does that through providing financial resources to participate in professional development and leadership development."

All the senior leaders expressed that they worked with their university presidents to establish shared goals. They appreciated the open feedback from their university presidents throughout the year. None of the senior leaders expressed concerns or lack of trust in their presidents. On the contrary, they felt a genuine desire from their university presidents for them to do well.

Throughout the transition times arose that were tumultuous, as much of their time with their teams was spent in a remote environment due to the global pandemic: "It was a great lesson in learning to lead in turbulent times." Many of the senior leaders experienced divisional reorganizations in their roles' early stages related to the pandemic, including a realignment to support students better, layoffs associated with a decrease in revenue due to the pandemic, and the acquisition of units from another division: "We had a short experience together … we were also able to realign the division, even in the midst of going through the pandemic, so that we could better support students."

When asked about hindsight reflections, many senior leaders reflected on the early stages of their transition. While none of them shared any regrets, some reflected on the need to pause when making changes that impacted the lives of others, as several embarked on a reorganization shortly after being hired. Some offered care and concern for the well-being of their teams and how they learned to lead with grace while enduring the pandemic. Many wished they had more in-person time with their teams to get to know them. They felt the virtual environment took that away.

Discussion

The findings from this study add to the limited literature on presidential transitions and succession planning in higher education (Cavanaugh, 2017; Jackson & Allen, 2022; Kezar et al., 2020; Klein & Salk, 2013) and to the limited literature on senior team building from the perspective of senior team members and university presidents (Gaval, 2009; Alvarado, 2021). Existing literature discusses higher education's preference for external hires (Gonzalea, 2010; Cavanaugh, 2017; Paul, 2017). Regarding diversity at the senior level, existing literature discusses the lack of underrepresentation at the senior level in higher education (Wolf & Dilworth, 2017). Lastly, the literature discusses the turnover of senior administrators after a presidential transition (Overend, 2011; Smerek, 2013; Reed, 2017; Alvarado, 2021).

Succession Planning

As the research literature suggests, there was no intentional succession planning at any of the universities (Chevalier, 2008; Cavanaugh, 2017; Siambi, 2022). However, participants did mention funding support for professional development. In addition, many senior leaders made professional development accessible to their team members through professional development opportunities within the institution and external endeavors with professional organizations and associations. Many university presidents and senior leaders indicated they were directly responsible for supporting and encouraging their direct reports and assisting them on their career journeys. They also felt obligated to support their team members' professional development and advance them on their professional journeys. This commitment to professional development was expressed throughout the various interviews and aligns with Wisniewski's (2004) assertion that higher education must create leadership development opportunities for faculty and staff for the organizations to thrive.

While much of this work aligns with Rothwell's (2005) framework, the missing ingredient is the intent to develop employees for the organization's and individuals' success. Learning the university president's processes and reasoning for selecting members of the senior team and their support of professional development (even if that meant growth elsewhere) addresses a critical gap as to why succession planning is not common practice in higher education. Universities must have opportunities for professional growth and development at all levels and for all employees, with attention given to those who would not usually be chosen for such opportunities.

Perspectives of University Presidents

The university presidents interviewed expressed a desire to establish a senior leadership team of experts who were effective communicators, had a collaborative approach to work, and were trustworthy. Presidents cited the institution's needs as a top priority when selecting an individual for the team. Other critical considerations were diversity, equity, and inclusion. The university presidents shared a similar belief that the senior team's makeup should reflect the campus and surrounding community population. While the presidents noted that they never hired specifically because of race or diversity, these concepts resonated at the forefront of their minds and remained a priority for each of them.

Perspectives of the Senior Leadership Team

The senior leadership team members shared various professional experiences that prepared them to serve on the senior team. Senior leaders all opined about professional organizations and associations and the opportunities these organizations created for professional development. As such, many are still active in these organizations and now serve as mentors to other young professionals. Senior leaders also reflected on these professional organizations' networking opportunities, which turned into mentorship relationships for some. The senior leaders reflected on mentors who became vital to their professional success. This aligns with the research suggesting that mentors influence higher education advancement (Brown, 2005).

A common thread among the senior leaders was that they already worked with their presidents before joining the senior team. Some were already on the senior team, and others served in an interim capacity before their appointment. Many of them were onboarded during the COVID-19 global pandemic. Navigating their new role with a new president during a time of uncertainty was challenging, yet they all shared high respect for their university president’s leadership. Each senior team member reflected on the unique transition as they built relationships with their new president through virtual meetings and phone calls while establishing relationships to lead and motivate their teams in the same virtual environment.

Diversity in higher education leadership

Existing literature suggests a lack of racially diverse individuals in leadership roles (Chang et al., 2014; Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015). However, many of the university presidents for this study were hired at the time of the Black Lives Matter movement due to the murder of George Floyd. While none of the university presidents noted a connection between their choices for hiring racially diverse candidates, undoubtedly a desire existed for each to have a diverse leadership team, which is inconsistent with the existing literature. Since 2020, many persons of color have been hired for senior leadership roles in higher education. According to a recent article in Forbes (Nietzel, 2023), the nation's top private institutions are being led by a woman or a person of color.

Preference for external hires

The university presidents interviewed had no preference for internal or external candidates. This contradicts the research literature that suggests universities prefer an external candidate (Cavanaugh, 2017; Paul, 2017). While the university's culture may have called for an external search (Klein & Salk, 2013; Witt & Kiefer, 2008), the university presidents in this study said they often looked internally to see how current employees could respond to institutional needs. All the university presidents hired and promoted senior leadership team members from within. While leading in a completely remote environment for the beginning of their presidencies, some university presidents found the stability offered by inherited team members and internal candidates beneficial. In some cases, an external candidate was the needed choice.

Turnover

As the research suggests, turnover was inevitable (Overend, 2011; Smerek, 2013; Reed, 2017; Alvarado, 2021). Turnover on the university presidents' teams occurred due to the retirement and termination. The number of individuals who resigned or were fired from each team represented no more than a third of the respective teams.

Implications

This study provides perspectives from sitting university presidents and senior leadership team members regarding the team-building process following a presidential transition. No indication of intentional succession planning emerged. The progression to the senior team showed a consistent pattern of career advancement due to recognition for excellence over time, often facilitated by mentorship. Communication, collaboration, and trustworthiness were noted as essential. When assembling their teams, university presidents considered the institution's needs and priorities. They adhered to institutional hiring practices such as national searches when required and sought after a diverse candidate pool. Research showed no preference for internal or external candidates. Lastly, they maintained open communication with the board to prevent unwanted interference and foster positive relationships.

The findings provide insights for new presidents building their teams and new senior team members navigating a presidential transition. Lastly, the results of this study help mid-level administrators and sitting university team members understand the team-building process from the perspective of university presidents.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research on senior leaders navigating presidential transitions would enhance existing literature. A deeper dive into their experiences could benefit mid-level administrators and current senior leaders. Including insights from leaders terminated by new presidents would fill a gap in understanding. While this study indicates positive relationships between senior team leaders and university presidents, hearing from those who experienced turbulent transitions could offer valuable lessons for aspiring and current senior leaders.

Further investigation into senior team building after COVID-19 is imperative to understand the evolving dynamics and challenges higher education institutions face. Additionally, future research should prioritize examining diversity hires, particularly considering the increased scrutiny and political debates surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives in higher education. Understanding the impact of these socio-political factors will be critical for fostering inclusive environments and advancing equity and belonging within academic institutions.

Another recommendation might involve interviewing more university presidents to gain additional insights about decision-making while building the senior team. Only five university presidents were interviewed for this study; thus, adding additional voices may expand the viewpoint on what is necessary to serve at the senior level. A final recommendation for future research is to investigate how the board of trustees could influence succession planning in higher education to establish stability and continuity throughout leadership transitions.

Conclusion

The perspectives shared by university presidents highlight the complexities involved in senior team building and its critical importance for new presidents. The findings emphasize that university presidents prioritized the institution's needs and diversity, equity, and inclusion considerations when forming their senior teams. They also underscored the importance of effective communication, trustworthiness, and expertise in team members. The experiences shared by senior leaders provide a comprehensive view of the journey to the senior team, affirming the significance of thoughtful team member selection. Participants in this study experienced challenges during their transition to the senior team due to navigating the global pandemic, division restructures, and their role as senior leaders. Yet, they all shared pride for their teams and relationships with university presidents.

The study uncovered a notable absence of succession planning practices within university leadership. While professional development and mentoring were observed among university presidents and senior leaders, a lack of intentional focus on cultivating a comprehensive succession plan arose as a gap in practice. Given the inevitability of leadership turnover, universities must prioritize the development of a strong bench and intentional preparation for future leaders to maintain continuity and stability.

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Journal of Higher Education Management, **39**(2), 53-69 (ISSN 2640-7515).

Review of Existing Research on Homelessness and Housing Insecurity among College Students

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Abstract

The current trend in college enrollment indicated that most college students are not first-time, full-time students, with many of these students working hard to make ends meet. Recent research has shown that about three in five college students faced basic needs insecurity, where basic needs include food and housing. Indeed, national estimates indicated that over one million college students may be homeless. Given this estimate, understanding housing issues among college students may be a key missing piece in the broader issue of obstacles to student success. This review focused on research in this area. Our review indicated that research had primarily focused on the prevalence rates of homelessness and housing insecurity among college students and documenting homeless students' experiences. There is a research evidence gap on what programs would work in addressing these students' needs as well as what risk factors are significant predictors of housing insecurity.

*Keywords***:** Homelessness, housing insecurity, college students, basic needs

Introduction

Based on the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) -- where data is collected annually across all postsecondary institutions that received federal student financial aid -- analysis of data from the Outcome Measures (OM) survey component of IPEDS (IPEDS, n.d.) found that for student cohorts from 2009-10 to 2012-13, the postsecondary enrollment trend indicated that most students are no longer first-time, full-time students. That is, most college students are non-traditional students. For example, in 2012–13, at two-year institutions, only 36 percent of Pell Grant recipients and only 16 percent of non-Pell Grant recipients were traditional students. At four-year institutions, 43 percent of Pell Grant recipients and 44 percent of non-Pell Grant recipients were traditional students (Pitcher, 2022). These figures dispelled the myth that college students live in a state of bliss, spending their days in classes, parties, and extracurricular activities. Instead, most students had to make ends meet while trying to stay enrolled in college (Mellow, 2017). A recent survey conducted during the pandemic with participation from 130 two-year institutions and 72 four-year institutions found that about three in students experienced basic needs insecurity, where basic needs include food and housing. Such obstacles will likely have implications on college students' persistence and success. Although studies on college students' basic needs are crucial to address the obstacles to their success, research tends to focus their food insecurity rather than their housing insecurity (Broton, 2020). In this paper, we will focus on research in housing insecurity, with the aim of developing an understanding on what has and has not been done in this area.

For practice and policy reasons, the homeless services world generally focuses on specific populations of homelessness. Of those that are homeless, it is estimated that 22 percent are chronically homeless individuals, six percent are veterans, and five percent unaccompanied youths (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2024). In most references to the homeless population, there is a specific group that is often not mentioned, though growing research on its prevalence rate seemed to indicate this is not a negligible population – struggling college students. With the recent increase in housing costs, it is not surprising that housing becomes unaffordable to college students, many of whom are probably still not fully financially independent or are returning to college to upskill for a better paying job.

The problem of having access to stable and affordable housing among college students appears to affect a relatively large number of students. Statistics can point to a sizable student population that are struggling. For 36 years, the U.S. government has conducted the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study every three or four years to examine how students finance their education. In recent years, they have also collected data on students' food insecurity and homelessness status. As a result, the latest 2019-20 national dataset (NPSAS:20) collected during 2019-20 contains nationally representative data on food insecurity and homelessness among undergraduate and graduate students enrolled anytime between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020 in postsecondary education in the U. S. (NPSAS, n.d.). The NPSAS:20 data show that eight percent of undergraduate students and almost five percent of graduate students reported experiencing homelessness in the previous 30 days. This translates to approximately 1.4 million undergraduates and 166,000 graduate students who experienced homelessness nationwide in the U.S. during 2019-20 (McKibben, Wu, & Abelson, 2023). Furthermore, this is only an estimate of the number of homeless college students without considering how many more college students are at-risk of losing stable housing and therefore are housing insecure. Contrast this estimate of homelessness among college students with the general homeless estimate done by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), who conducts a one-night count of homeless people annually, both sheltered and unsheltered, during the last 10 days of January. According to the 2018 point-in-time estimates (Henry et al, 2018), 552,830 people experienced homelessness, where most of the homeless were veterans or the chronic (i.e. those who experienced homelessness for at least 12 months or on four separate occasions in the last three years (HUD Exchange, 2015)). Another estimate provided by a non-profit organization aimed at preventing and ending homelessness in the U.S. – the National Alliance to End Homeless (2024)–provided an estimate of 421,392 individuals who were homeless in 2022, and of these, 127,768 were chronically homeless individuals. Compared to these chronically and veteran homeless estimates, the number of college students facing homelessness are estimated to be higher. This problem might also be more severe in cities with high housing costs. For example, City University of New York (CUNY), the largest public university in New York City and the largest urban university system in the U.S., found that 14% of their students reported being homeless the previous year (Goldrick-Rab et al, 2019). If this estimate is stable and based on a total headcount enrollment in Fall 2022 of 225,881 (Office of Applied Research, Evaluation, and Data Analytics, n.d.), nearly 32,000 CUNY students might have been homeless.

Not being able to afford stable housing while enrolled in college will have implications for struggling students being able to persist and graduate. Indeed, having a college degree is an important factor at increasing the economic security of low-income Americans since it has been found that increased college degree attainment would improve the economic security for low-income earners and reduce poverty rates (Hershbein, Kearney, & Pardue, 2020). A lack of college attainment may feed further into a vicious cycle of poverty and possibly continued homelessness. Therefore, it is worth looking more closely at the research for this particular population of struggling students. As noted by Broton (2020), "There are no reviews that synthesize extant research on the problem of housing insecurity and homelessness among college students. Instead, studies of students who are housing insecure or homeless often use qualitative methods designed to illuminate students' experiences."

Definitional Approach to Framing Homelessness and Housing Insecurity

To understand homelessness and housing insecurity, including the extent of the problem and the extent of research on this topic among college students, it will be prudent to first examine how these two terms have been framed by various researchers, administrators, and policymakers in postsecondary institutions. Different entities, particularly government and postsecondary organizations, would frame these terms differently since these would be dependent on context. Specifically, for government entities, the framing of these terms would be related the policies that would be adopted to address this problem.

Before proceeding to the definitions, it is worth highlighting that homelessness and housing insecurity are generally considered separately, primarily because homelessness is viewed as the most severe form of housing insecurity. Hence, those who are experiencing homelessness might have needs that are different from those who are experiencing housing insecurity.

Homelessness

The irony of looking for a definition of homelessness to help shape the understanding of homelessness among college students is that a standard definition does not seem to exist (Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017). Nonetheless, the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act (PL100-77) appears to be the most common approach used to frame what homelessness might be for college students (Bowers & O'Neill, 2019; Crutchfield & Maguire, 2017). A federal law was created to support the enrollment and education of homeless students in kindergarten through grade 12 (National Center for Homeless Education, n.d.). Specifically, children are considered homeless if they "lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence," including (a) sharing housing due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or some other similar reason; (b) living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; (c) living in emergency or transitional shelters; (d) abandonment in hospitals; (e) having a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed to be sleeping accommodations; (f) living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or other similar settings; and (g) migratory children. Most of these circumstances can be applied to any individuals and not just children. Therefore, the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness has become an important reference point for definitions of homelessness among college students as well.

Notably, the McKinney-Vento definition appears to be broader than the definition provided by the U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) agency (see p. 75998, Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2011). HUD's definition is based on the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act of 2009 (P.L. 111-22, Section 1003), which encompasses sheltered individuals (in a HUD funded emergency shelter, transitional and supportive housing) and unsheltered individuals (on the streets, in abandoned buildings, or other places not meant for human habitation). However, it does not consider vulnerable populations such as individuals who couch surf. In contrast, the McKinney-Vento definition includes other scenarios that are common among college students, such as couch surfing (Curry et al, 2017; Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017).

These different approaches to framing the definition of homelessness have implications for how homelessness should be measured. Crutchfield and Maguire (2017) developed an instrument to assess homelessness among college students by tapping into the definitions from the Department of Education and HUD. The large-scale survey on student basic needs administered by The Hope Center, a research, practice, and policy center focused on postsecondary students' basic needs, adopted these items to measure homelessness among college students (p. 66, The Hope Center, 2021) These items from Crutchfield and Maguire (2017) are displayed in the first column in Table 1.

Table 1

Survey Items Used to Measure Homelessness and Housing Insecurity

Homeless (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2017)[a]	**Housing Insecurity** (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2017)[b]	**Housing Insecurity** (The Hope Center for College, Community and Justice, 2021)[c]
• Campus or university housing • Sorority/fraternity house • In a rented or owned house, mobile home, or apartment (alone or with roommates/friends) • In a rented or owned house, mobile home, or apartment (with family) • Temporarily stayed with relatives, friends, or couch surfing until I found other housing • Temporarily at a hotel or motel without a permanent home to return to (not on	• My current accommodation is only temporary even if I wanted to stay. • I get along with the people I live with. My housemates are reliable when it comes to obeying the landlord's rules and paying their rent on time (choose strongly agree if you live alone). • Where I live has subsidies, workers, or specific policies that help me to maintain my housing. • In the last 6 months I have had a history of maintaining my accommodation.	• Been unable to pay or underpaid rent or mortgage • Been evicted from home • Received a summons to appear in housing court • Not paid the full amount for utilities (such as gas, oil, electric, water, internet, phone) • Borrowed money from friends or family to help pay bills

Homeless (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2017)[a]	Housing Insecurity (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2017)[b]	Housing Insecurity (The Hope Center for College, Community and Justice, 2021)[c]
vacation or business travel) • At a shelter • In transitional housing or independent living program • At a group home such as a halfway house or residential program for mental health or substance abuse • At a treatment center (such as detox, hospital, etc.) • In a camper or RV (not on vacation) • An outdoor location such as street, sidewalk, or alley, bus or train stop, campground or woods, park, beach, or riverbed, under bridge or overpass • In a closed area/space with a roof not meant for human habitation such as an abandoned building, car or truck, van, encampment or tent, or unconverted garage, attic, or basement	• In the last 6 months I have not been evicted (includes moves as long as there was no period of couch surfing or homelessness). • I am settled in my place and know what to expect about living here (for example, consideration of roommates and neighbors, rules, landlord, etc.). • I follow my landlord's rules (for example, not smoking, not doing drugs, not being noisy, no pets, etc.). • I feel confident about my ability to pay my rent on time. • I am working or enrolled in classes and I have been showing up on time. • Drugs and alcohol are a source of conflict in my personal relationships. • Drugs or alcohol interfere with my ability to fulfill my responsibilities or to work towards personal goals. • I have legal troubles that may interfere with my ability to adequately maintain my housing or fulfill my personal responsibilities over the next 6 months. • I am satisfied with my current housing. • Overall my life feels stable to me. • How many moves have you made in the past year?	• Had an account default or go into collections • Moved in with other people, even for a little while, because of financial problems • Lived with others beyond the expected capacity of the house or apartment • Had trouble finding an affordable place to live

Note.
[a] These items can be asked within the past 30 days or past 12-months-timeframe.
[b] Adopted from Frederick, Chwalek, Hughes, Karabanow, & Kidd (2014). Except for the last item, these items are asked using a 5-point Likert scale from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'.
[c] Adopted from National Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) Adult Well-Being Module. Items are asked within the past 12-months-timeframe.

Housing Insecurity

While there have been some attempts at defining homelessness, there is less consensus on a definition of housing insecurity among college students than for homelessness (Broton, 2020; Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017). In general, when housing insecurity is discussed within the postsecondary context, it refers to a spectrum of experiences related to instability in one's housing situation or being at risk for homelessness. Therefore, conceptually, homelessness is considered the most severe form of housing insecurity. However, it is important to note that researchers tend to measure homelessness and housing insecurity separately. For example, Crutchfield and Maguire (2017) recommended using a scale developed by Frederick et al. in 2014 to specifically measure housing insecurity separately from homelessness among college students. As claimed by Frederick et al (2014), their housing security scale was developed to measure common dimensions of housing security. Items from their measure can be found in the middle column of Table 1.

Another instrument used to measure housing insecurity among college students is the large-scale student basic needs survey administered by The Hope Center (The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice, 2021). The items in the survey were adopted from the National Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) Adult Well-Being Module. SIPP, a nationally representative longitudinal survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, provides comprehensive information on households in areas of income, employment, household composition, and government program participation (United States Census Bureau, 2014). While the SIPP items that focused on housing insecurity were not developed specifically for college students, they have been adopted for measuring housing insecurity among college students. These housing insecurity items derived from SIPP are shown in the last column in Table 1. Overall, Table 1 compares the various items used to measure homelessness and housing insecurity among college students. As noted, many of these items were not developed with college students in mind but have been adopted to estimate the prevalence of homelessness and housing insecurity among college students.

Goal of Review

With this understanding of homelessness and housing insecurity among college students, the goal of this review is to scan the research literature focused on homelessness and housing insecurity among college students in the U.S. and identify the gaps that would move forward this area of research to inform policy and practice. The scope of the review is intentionally broad; we did not limit our research scan to a particular subtopic, such as what is the evidence base of housing programs used to address the needs of homeless or housing insecure college students. Instead, if such research literature exists, our goal would be to document the extent of the research evidence, along with the extent of research evidence in other areas related to our broad topic of homelessness and housing insecurity among college students. Given that the basic needs of college students, including homelessness and housing insecurity, only gained traction in 2015 with the launch of a large-scale survey examining student basic needs in the U.S. (The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice, 2021), this field is in its relative infancy. Thus, a broad review of the existing research is appropriate.

Gathering the Relevant Articles

To ensure an unbiased approach in the review of relevant research articles and to cast a wide net that will ensure that we considered as many pertinent scholarly articles as possible in our review, we decided to use Google Scholar to scan widely for research sources that might focus on homelessness and housing insecurity among U.S. college students. Google Scholar was used for the scan because it would include not only published, peer-reviewed research articles, but also grey research literature outside traditional publishing channels. To conduct such a scan in Google Scholar, we used keywords such as "homeless," "housing insecurity," "United States," "college," "university," "postsecondary," "higher education." We limited the articles to the U.S. because the definitions of homelessness came from U.S. government entities. Hence, we would need to limit the review to align with the source of the definitions.

During this retrieval process, one category of articles that was excluded is non-research articles such as opinion pieces, op-ed, or news column reporting. A second category of articles that was excluded is descriptions of housing programs for the homeless or articles that provided information on how to interpret and implement housing programs based on the understanding of the McKinney-Vento Act, all without any research on these programs. A third category of articles that was deemed not relevant is research articles on housing programs, but these programs were not meant to address homelessness or housing insecurity among college students. The research articles that were deemed as relevant were then sorted according to their content and then qualitatively reviewed to help us synthesize and summarize the state of existing research in the area of homelessness and housing insecurity among college students. With this review of existing research, we can then determine what the research gaps in this area are.

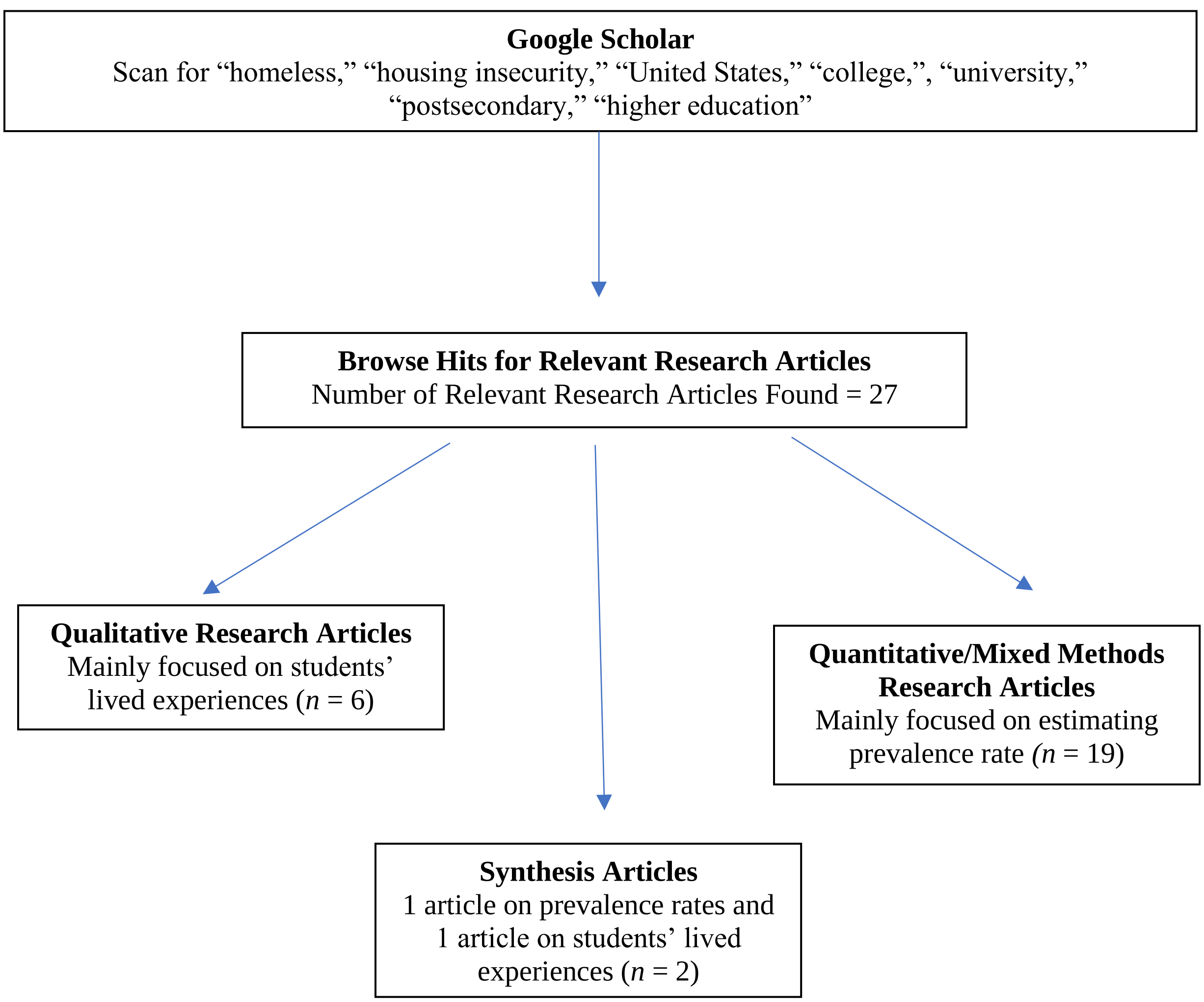
Research Studies on Homelessness and Housing Insecurity

When we focused on retrieving articles that appeared to be research studies focused on homelessness or housing insecurity among college students, 27 articles were found. Of these, six were exclusively qualitative that primarily employed interviews as their research methodology to collect the data (Crutchfield, 2018; Gupton, 2017; Hallett & Freas, 2018; Klitzman, 2018; McTier et al., 2023; Trawver et al, 2020). Four of them (Crutchfield, 2018; Gupton, 2017; Hallett & Freas, 2018; Klitzman, 2018) used interviews and a narrative approach to document the personal and life experiences of the homeless student population. Most interviewed less than 10 students while one interviewed 20 students. A fifth (McTier et al., 2023) used interviews to document the experiences of students with criminal records in finding on-campus housing. The sixth article (Trawer et al., 2020) gathered insights from three researchers on their research into homeless and housing insecurity college students. Nineteen studies were quantitative or mixed methods where all of them used a cross-sectional survey, with the studies that were mixed-methods also including interviews (Black, 2023; Blevins, 2018; Broton, 2021; Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018; Coakley, 2022; Frank, Rice & Thomas, 2022; Glantsman, 2022; Haskett, Kotter-Grühn, & Majumder, 2020; Kava, 2021;

Kornblub et al., 2022; Moya et al., 2023; Olfert et al., 2021; Silva et al., 2017; Smith & Knechtel, 2020; Soria, 2023; Trawver & Hedwig, 2020; Wagler at al, 2022; Walsh-Dilley et al. 2022; Wilking et al., 2022). These 19 studies primarily focused on reporting the prevalence rate and/or used a survey to examine the relationship between homelessness or housing insecurity and certain outcomes (e.g., academics, health). Some of them focused on a particular population like varsity student athletes or pregnant and/or parenting students while others explored which subgroups (e.g., Hispanic or Black adult undergraduates) were more likely to be housing insecure or what risk factors (e.g., gender, employment, dependents) might be significantly associated with housing insecurity. Finally, two remaining studies were syntheses (Broton, 2020; Bowers & O'Neill, 2019). One of the syntheses focused on determining an overall prevalence rate for homelessness and housing insecurity among college students (Broton, 2020). The other is a qualitative synthesis of studies that documented the experiences of homeless students (Bowers & O'Neill, 2019). Figure 1 displays a flow diagram of the research articles that were retrieved through Google Scholar and then classified accordingly into qualitative studies, quantitative/mixed methods studies, or syntheses.

Figure 1

Retrieving Articles and Examining the Existing Research Literature



Prevalence Rates of Homelessness and Housing Insecurity

For the 19 studies that were classified as quantitative or mixed method studies and used a cross-sectional survey, the items used to measure homelessness or housing insecurity came from different survey instruments. Table 2 shows the different survey instruments that these studies reported using. As indicated in the table, many studies adopted items that were based on the definition of homelessness and housing insecurity among college students, as shown in Table 1.

Table 2
Type of Survey, as Reported by Study Authors, Used for Measuring Homelessness and Housing Insecurity

Survey Instrument Used	Number of Studies from Pool of Review Articles
The Hope Center survey on student basic needs	8
Study developed items	2
A combination of both The Hope Center and study developed items	3
Other surveys o Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) o Items recommended by Crutchfield and Maguire (2017) o Los Angeles Community College District Survey of Student Basic Needs o Homelessness Management Information System Guidelines o Community College Success Measure Scale o Survey developed from various sources	6

As for the prevalence rates, some studies provided the percentage of survey respondents that were homeless and some provided the percentage for housing insecure while most studies provided both percentages. To present a general idea on how prevalence rates were examined and reported in these articles, Table 3 provides quotes from those studies that specifically examined the prevalence rates.

Table 3
A Sample of Prevalence Rates Reported in Research Articles Reviewed

Example of Prevalence Rate Reported	Study Citation
"…the descriptive results examining how housing insecurity appeared among NCAA college athletes during the COVID-19 pandemic. Five hundred thirty-five participants (47%) experienced housing insecurity when surveyed in Fall 2020."	Black 2023
"The sample size was 343 African American women attending community college in the United States with 143 students (41.7%) reporting they faced challenges with housing."	Blevins 2018

Example of Prevalence Rate Reported	Study Citation
“At least one-third of 2-year students are housing insecure, including up to 14% who are homeless, whereas between 11% and 19% of 4-year students are housing insecure.”	Broton & Goldrick-Rab (2018)
“…with 356 students (43.6%) experiencing housing insecurity in the past year.”	Coakley et al (2022)
“40.2% of students reported housing insecurity and 9.4% of students reported having experienced homelessness within the last 12 months.”	Frank, Rice & Thomas (2022)
“In the overall sample, a similar rate of students experienced housing insecurity during the pandemic (35.8%) compared to before the pandemic (34.2%, $\chi 2$ =1.73, p = 0.118).”	Glantsman et al (2022)
“A total of 1,703 students provided information on their housing situation, and 163 (9.6%) had experienced homelessness over the last 12 months.”	Haskett, Kotter-Grühn, & Majumder (2020)
“Students who identified as PPS [pregnant and/or parenting students] were eligible to complete the survey….The vast majority (95%) of respondents had not experienced homelessness, but 90% perceived finding affordable housing as a moderate to serious issue…”	Kava 2021
“Strikingly, 43.9% of the sample had one or more experiences with HI [housing insecurity](a level consistent with national trends). Furthermore, 12.4% of the sample (n = 173) experienced 3 or more instances of HI. In regards to homelessness, 14.6% (n = 191) of the sample experienced some form of homelessness.”	Kornbluh et al (2022)
“Findings indicate that students at highest risk for HI (using Q19) are those who do not live with their family off campus, and instead live on campus, off campus alone or other, and have an income in the lowest two levels of all income levels. The risk of HI is 26% for this group. … Other identified groups had less than an 8% risk of housing insecurity”	Moya 2023
“Results indicate that 44.1% and 52.3% of students were food and housing insecure, respectively. From the full sample, 1.8% of students faced homelessness.”	Olfert et al (2021)
“In terms of HI, 5.4% of the participants indicated that they had experienced homelessness since attending college.”	Silva et al (2017)
“In the 2017–2018 administration, we know that only 62% of the 19,619 students to whom the survey was sent even opened it. Of those who opened the survey, 123 reported their own experiences of homelessness while attending college.”	Smith & Knechtel (2020)
“…60.6% experienced housing insecurity.”	Soria (2023)
“…more than 30% reported being unsure of their ability to pay rent. In the current study, 8.3% of students had experienced homelessness since beginning college.”	Trawver & Hedwig (2020)
“possessing a permanent address increased from 89 in 2019 to 95% in 2020.”	Wagler et al. (2022)

Example of Prevalence Rate Reported	Study Citation
"…41.4% of respondents were classified as housing insecure."	Walsh-Dilley et al (2022)
"More than half (56.2%, n = 783) of respondents did not report experience of any incidents of housing insecurity" "14.6% (n = 191) of respondents had experienced homelessness in either the last 30 days or the past 12 months, at the time of survey completion"	Wilking et al. (2022)

Based on the studies that provided the percentages, the prevalence rates for housing insecurity can range from over 10 percent to about 60 percent, though most studies reported over 40 percent. As for homelessness, the range can be from about one percent to about 15 percent, with a mid-point range of around eight to nine percent.

Relationship Between Housing Insecurity and Student Outcomes

Six of the quantitative articles focused on examining the relationship between homelessness or housing insecurity and specific outcomes. Two studies focused on academic outcomes (Broton, 2021; Silva et al, 2017), two studies focused on health outcomes (Coakley et al, 2022; Frank, Rice, & Thomas, 2022), and two studies focused on both academic and health outcomes (Kornbluh et al., 2022; Olfert et al, 2021). In these studies, the direction of the relationships was as expected. Specifically, there is a negative association between students experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity and these outcomes. The specific relationships found in these studies are as detailed below. However, caution should be used since the number of studies reviewed is limited.

Significant Negative Relationship with Academic Outcomes

Academic outcomes examined included later degree attainment or persistent enrollment, grade point average, and passing the course. These were generally reported to be statistically significant and negative by the authors.

Significant Relationship with Health and Well-Being Outcomes

One study reported a significant positive relationship with anxiety and fair/poor health (as opposed to excellent health). Other health and well-being outcomes examined in these studies included physical health, emotional health, social health, and spiritual health. One other study reported positive relationships with coping strategies and body mass index though we do not know if these relationships were significant.

Although further research is needed to confirm these negative relationships, the extant literature suggests that homelessness and housing insecurity, if left unaddressed, are associated with a host of negative outcomes for college students who are experiencing it. In addition, we have seen that there is a non-negligible student population that is experiencing this problem. Hence, there are serious implications for postsecondary institutions and other relevant stakeholders if this problem is left unaddressed.

Two Syntheses on Homelessness and/or Housing Insecurity

In our retrieval of relevant research articles, we found two that were syntheses. A summary of the findings from these two syntheses is provided as follows:

Synthesis on Prevalence Rate

In her review of 17 articles, Broton (2020) analyzed estimates of the prevalence of housing insecurity and homelessness, weighted according to the studies' sample sizes. She found that the weighted estimate of college students who experienced some level of housing insecurity was 45 percent and the weighted estimate for homelessness was 12 percent. When she estimated the homelessness rate using a nationally representative dataset on college students in the U.S. – the 2016 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:16, NPSAS, n.d.), she found the homeless rate was almost nine percent. Her estimates were consistent with the estimates from the 19 articles that were reviewed in this paper.

Synthesis on Experiences of Homeless College Students

For the other synthesis, Bowers and O'Neill (2019) used a qualitative interpretive meta-synthesis (QIMS) to synthesize studies that examined the lived experiences of homeless college students. Through this synthesis, they uncovered four themes: 1) the trauma of being homeless; 2) priority hierarchy–the constant need to make basic choices; 3) embracing being homeless or not; and 4) resilience–surviving and thriving while homeless. As noted by the authors, the major contribution of such a synthesis for this field is that it summarized the experiences of homeless students across multiple studies, thereby providing an overall picture of the experiences of these students across disparate studies.

Discussion

In summary, our review of the existing research on homelessness and housing insecurity showed that about nine percent of college students experienced homelessness and about 40 to 50 percent experienced housing insecurity. This is not a negligible number of college students and has implications for postsecondary administrators as well as other stakeholders. However, beyond having estimates of the prevalence rates and documentation of these students' lived experiences, our review did not uncover any other types of research for this topic.

Gaps in Research

As this review has shown, there is clear evidence for the prevalence of homelessness and housing insecurity among college students. The gap in research is the lack of evidence on what programs might work to help address this issue. While there might be descriptions of various programs that were meant to address this problem in the literature, our review is focused on research, such as the evidence of the impact of such programs. We did not find any such studies. This type of research is essential for informing practice, policy, and advocacy work. Postsecondary administrators and other entities need such evidence so that they can adopt and implement evidence-based programs that can meaningfully address these students' needs. Yet our review shows this is a missing gap in research.

Some of the quantitative or mixed method studies that were reviewed have also explored subgroups or risk factors that were significantly associated with homelessness or housing insecurity among college students. However, these analyses were exploratory in nature, and the authors might have considered only those subgroups or risk factors for which they had collected data or in which they had a research interest. As such, even if the authors found some significant subgroups or risk factors, the findings were only significant in relation to the specific study sample. A national representative sample would be more accurate for determining if any of the subgroups and risk factors were significant. McKibben, Wu, and Abelson (2023) had provided such findings for homeless students using the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS: 20). For homelessness, rates were higher among Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, and gender nonconforming students. However, NPSAS:20 is limited to homeless students, and there is no data for housing insecure students. Such a study would be useful so that postsecondary administrators and policymakers would have an idea of who might be at-risk and who might be appropriate for targeted support.

Furthermore, though not a formal focus of this review, the literature on homelessness and housing insecurity among college students is divorced from other literature on homelessness in general. In the homeless services world, college students are not part of the consideration (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2024). However, given the prevalence of homelessness and housing insecurity among college students, this is a major gap in the homeless literature.

As postsecondary administrators grapple with the increasingly visible issue of student homelessness and housing insecurity, there is a significant opportunity for housing stakeholders within and outside higher education to come together to collaborate on research, practice, and policy to address housing shortages and social determinants of housing insecurity and homelessness. Such a collaboration would have the potential to address affordable housing shortage issues as well as improve on educational outcomes for college students, ultimately supporting general economic development.

Limitations

This review has its limitations. Given that it is not a systematic review, it will be difficult to replicate this review. However, to ensure that we provide an unbiased review as much as possible, we used Google Scholar to uncover the relevant research, given that Google Scholar is extensive and covers both published and grey literature beyond the traditional channels of publications. Our goal is to ensure that we include as many articles as we can find to give a well-rounded, unbiased review.

Another limitation is that this review is time-limited while the research on student basic needs, including housing, has been a relatively new and constantly developing field. Hence, between the time this review was completed in late December 2023 and now, more research in this area might have been conducted and published.

Conclusions

With rising costs, particularly with housing, homelessness and housing insecurity have become widespread societal issues. One specific population often overlooked in the homeless count is college students. The goal of our review is to uncover the research that has been done in this area. Our review revealed that the number of college students facing homelessness and housing insecurity is significant. Our review also revealed that there has been no extensive or published research on the effectiveness of programs that could be used to address these students' needs or what are the significant risk factors for housing insecure college students. This study identified a critical research gap. Ideally, the findings herein will guide future research and ultimately inform the work of postsecondary administrators and policymakers focused on addressing homelessness and housing insecurity among college students.

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Journal of Higher Education Management, **39**(2), 70-81 (ISSN 2640-7515).

Grow Your Own Leadership Development Programs in Community Colleges

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ABSTRACT

One way community colleges have aimed to increase the diversity of leaders is through in-house Grow Your Own Leadership Development programs. Findings from this systematic literature review indicated that intentional recruitment efforts, infusing networking opportunities, senior leadership involvement, experiential learning opportunities, and reflection activities were all essential components.

Keywords: grow your own "GYO" leadership, leadership program, community colleges

Introduction

The community college sector continues to expand its student diversity. However, their efforts to diversify the composition of its faculty and administration in a way that better reflects their students have been slow at making a noticeable difference (Brown, 2021; Rodriguez, 2015; Patton et al., 2019). This problem is the lack of leadership development offered at community colleges, especially for people of color (POC). Leadership development opportunities can provide growth opportunities for POC already in the profession. More specifically, institutional-level leadership development programs (often called "Grow Your Own" [GYO] leadership programs) can work well.

In response to concerns about the leadership pipeline, the AACC (2018) published its third edition of the *Competencies for Community College Leaders*, which provided various options and guidance for leadership development. There are 11 focus areas in the document, which are specific to each employment-level grouping identified as having significance to the internal and external workings of the community college. The competencies are listed under each focus area, along with illustrations of what each competency means to each specific job (AACC, 2018). These competencies serve as the foundation for many leadership development programs, including some outlined in this analysis.

Types of Leadership Development Training

There are multiple avenues for community college professionals to develop their leadership skills and potential for advancement.

Degree Programs

The first is the traditional university-based leadership programs that primarily focus on research and theory (Bernard, 2012). The newer community college leadership doctoral programs that have emerged since 2000, compared to older ones, are more responsive to their students' needs as their delivery is more flexible and designed for working adults with family and work responsibilities (Amey, 2006). Additionally, Amey (2006) added that almost every community college leadership program was created by an individual or small team of scholar-practitioners who identified state community college leadership needs and advocated for structured programs connected with universities as an appropriate response.

Nevertheless, there is consensus that these traditional credentials are not enough to prepare aspiring leaders to assume the roles of senior leaders (Wallin, 2004). Cooper and Pagotto (2003) noted 128 responses from institutional leaders indicated a disconnect between the skills and knowledge emphasized in graduate programs and the skills and understanding today's leaders felt were most necessary for effective leadership. Additionally, some of the interviews conducted by Bernard (2012) noted that serving as dean or vice president was the most important experience that prepared them to be president.

Leadership Training Offered by National Organizations

Another leadership development alternative is the institutes housed by national organizations. For example, DeLozier (2019) included three association training programs in the review of literature as examples: the AACC Future Leaders Institute (FLI), the League for Innovation Community College's Executive Leadership Institute, and the North Carolina Community College Leadership Program. For example, the AACC John E. Roueche FLI is a 3-day seminar designed for department chairs, deans, assistant/associate deans, or directors who are looking to advance into a senior leadership role (AACC, 2021).

GYO Leadership Programs

The third and final area of focus for this brief is the homegrown, institutional-level or GYO leadership programs, which are diverse in many ways. Some state systems have taken the lead in developing their GYO program. For example, Iowa, Illinois, Massachusetts, Kentucky, Louisiana, and others have developed and offered training to professionals in their systems (Hull & Kiem, 2007; Jeandron, 2006, as cited by Ebbers et al., 2010).

Some colleges that are not part of systems have also developed their own GYO programs. This list includes Central Piedmont College in North Carolina, the Community College of Philadelphia, Metropolitan Community College in Nebraska, Johnson County Community College in Kansas, and others (Ebbers et al., 2010). In addition to whether they are sponsored by the state system or the college itself, these programs vary significantly in countless ways. For example, Bernard (2012) shared how GYO programs use a range of methods to deliver program content, which included face-to-face lectures, self-assessment, individual and team projects, assigned readings and case studies, portfolios, as well as experiential learning through job shadowing, mentoring, and attendance at board meetings. Bernard argued that GYO programs might be more effective than degree-based programs as they can be customized to the college's specific needs.

Some of the tangible benefits of GYO programs are that they increase team cohesiveness and the sense of belonging of the participants (Bernard, 2012; Carter et al., 2002; Crosson et al., 2005; DeLozier, 2019; Ebbers et al., 2010; Rowan, 2012; Thomas, 2019). GYO programs also provide leaders with opportunities to engage in reflection about their strengths and areas for improvement (Carter et al., 2002; DeLozier, 2019). In summation, GYO programs enhance the team's commitment to the overarching goals of the organization while giving participants the opportunity to strengthen their leadership skills.

Purpose of this Literature Review

This chapter is based on the review of available data, articles, and artifacts pertinent to GYO programs. The brief includes a thorough review of peer-reviewed articles, the review of websites and other outlets of public scholarship, and the perspective of practitioners who are also instrumental in understanding what works best in leadership programming. This comprehensive and multifaceted analysis shares the best practices identified within these data and literature analysis to provide recommendations that community college leaders, who are trying to develop GYO leadership programs, can follow.

Search Method

Three methods for data collection were used to identify the best practices of GYO leadership development programs. The three sources were empirical articles, websites of professional associations related to the community college sector, and conversations with practitioners. The inclusion of these three data points can create a broader and more representative picture of institutional-level GYO leadership development programs. First, the peer-reviewed articles provide a high level of credibility. It is important to note that peer-reviewed articles go through an extensive evaluation before publishing, adding significant value to this discourse. Also, the authors of these articles are field experts, which adds additional credibility to these sources.

The websites of professional associations and other platforms were also used. They provide the standard practices across the community college sector, which can be helpful yet potentially difficult to obtain outside of these associations. These professional website associations often investigate new approaches and have resources available to the community college sector.

Finally, the conversations with practitioners provided experiences and firsthand accounts of how they planned, organized, or executed their GYO leadership programs. The input from these current or former community college leaders was instrumental in determining how the theories and best practices noted in these peer-reviewed articles and websites are being implemented in the real world. Combining these three sources of information provides a fuller and richer picture of the GYO intervention being reviewed in this brief.

Peer-Reviewed Articles Search

The concept of leadership and the question of what makes a good leader is as old as history itself. However, in 2000, new community college leadership doctoral programs emerged in response to the leadership crisis (Amey, 2006). As such, January 2000 served as the starting point for this review. July 2021 served as the endpoint for the search. The inclusion of 2 decades of information provides the latest and best practices pertinent to GYO leadership development programs. Academic Search Premier, Education Source, Educational Administration Abstracts, ERIC, and MasterFILE Elite databases were used to identify articles related to GYO leadership development programs. All empirical peer-reviewed articles, even those where the entire document was not immediately available, were included in this search.

The terms utilized for the search included leadership academy or leadership development AND community college. This analysis included articles focused on community college leadership and leadership development programs, but only articles focused on the community college sector were kept for further analysis. All pieces focusing on the K–12 system, business sector, professional organizations, or other sectors outside of higher education were formally excluded. Additionally, any articles focused on studies outside of the United States were also excluded.

This search yielded 300 peer-reviewed articles that were subjected to multiple review steps for further evaluation. After advancing the list to the last page, the total number turned to 187 articles after all the duplicates were excluded. Next, all 187 articles went through a title review, of which 100 met the inclusion criteria. The third step was to conduct an abstract examination of the remaining pieces. Many abstracts focused exclusively on leadership, the K–12 system, and the 4-year and private sectors. After this step, 59 articles met the criteria for inclusion. These remaining articles were read and reviewed in their entirety, and 25 of them fulfilled the inclusion criteria and were kept in the literature review. Additionally, through the snowball technique, references from these articles were reviewed, and an additional seven peer-reviewed articles were added, making the final tally 32 empirical articles.

Public Scholarship Information Search

The following professional organization websites were searched to identify public scholarship articles that would complement the peer-reviewed collection: the Community College Research Center, Jobs for the Future's Student Success Center Network, AACC, League of Innovations, American Association of Colleges and Universities, and Achieving the Dream. The terms leadership academy, leadership development, and GYO leadership were searched on the websites. Six articles were formally included because they focused on or provided data pertinent to community college leadership development programs and best practices, including university-based programs, institutes and conferences, and various GYO examples and case studies.

Practitioner Conversations

Conversations with three practitioners provided further insights into GYO leadership development programs. All practitioner conversations took place with community college leaders who had experience developing and leading leadership development programs. The titles of these individuals included vice president for human resources, dean of continuing education and workforce development, and vice president for academic affairs. All three practitioners have experience working in midsize and large community colleges that serve diverse student bodies. Their experience at their current or previous campuses provided an excellent data source to complement the empirical sources and public scholarship.

Results

The review of the empirical articles, public scholarship, and information gathered from conversations with practitioners identified five aspects of GYO leadership programs that work well. The first one is recruitment efforts. It is important to use recruitment strategies that will get a diverse group of leaders to participate. The second one is the ability to network with other members of the organization. This theme speaks to an enhanced sense of belonging. The third theme deals with the involvement and support of the college president and other senior leaders. This theme also expands the sense of community by better understanding the administration's role. The fourth theme is experiential learning opportunities, often in the form of group projects and other tasks. The fifth and final theme speaks to reflection opportunities, which support continuous personal and professional growth.

Individually, any of these five themes can significantly contribute to a community college professional's GYO or leadership development program. However, the benefits would be superior if all five elements were included and accounted for in developing a new GYO leadership program. Although these components were consistently identified as best practices, each program is unique, and how these components were integrated varied. All five themes are discussed below, with more specific information on each one.

Recruitment Strategies

One of the first considerations in a GYO leadership development program is how to recruit and select participants. Reille and Kezar (2010) studied 15 institutional-level leadership development programs and determined that colleges used a variety of different recruitment approaches. Some programs use an application process. At the Leadership Academy of Mercer County Community College, for example, eligible participants were invited to apply for consideration to participate (L. Scherr, personal communication, September 29, 2021). Similarly, the Western Pennsylvania Community College Leadership Institute (WPCCLI), which the Community College of Beaver County, Butler County Community College, and Westmoreland County Community College formed together, followed a similar enrollment model. Prospective participants had to apply through a rigorous and competitive process that often rejects multiple applicants to the program (C. Reber, personal communication, October 15, 2021). At other colleges, participants were selected by the president of the college (D. Ruth, personal communication, April 15, 2022).

Most of the available empirical literature on institutional-level leadership development programs focused on the structure and activities of the programs and failed to discuss specific communication and recruitment efforts. If one of the goals of a GYO leadership program is to increase the number of POC in leadership roles, then targeted, culturally relevant communication to this population is needed. When senior leadership at a community college specifically targeted POC during the program's recruitment stage, this resulted in representation of POC in the leadership academy (L. Scherr, personal communication, September 29, 2021). The limited or almost nonexistent discussion of recruitment efforts in GYO leadership programs can exacerbate the problem of representation in leadership roles.

Networking Opportunities

One of the main benefits of GYO programs is that participants reported that they benefitted significantly from networking with others from the organization (Bernard, 2012; Carter et al., 2002; Crosson et al., 2005; DeLozier, 2019; Ebbers et al., 2010; Rowan, 2012; Thomas, 2019). Thomas (2019) and Rowan (2012) noted that **the** connectivity that emerged between participants and bonds that developed within the groups were primary benefits revealed through the data. For Thomas specifically, the theme of connectivity was revealed across several dimensions, including human, institutional, and applied connectivity. Additionally, several practitioners **(**A. Chapman, personal communication, October 1, 2021; V. Ray, personal communication, October 1, 2021; L. Scherr, personal communication, September 29, 2021) also identified networking and the building of relationships between cohort members as one of the main benefits. For example, V. Ray noted that members of her first cohort, which had 10 members, participated because they were required to do so. However, over the years of the program, its effectiveness and engagement increased so much that five years later, the last cohort held in 2014 had 78 participants (V. Ray, personal communication, October 1, 2021).

This reported satisfaction with the creation of new relationships also demonstrated additional compounded benefits. For example, Bernard's (2012) findings suggested that the Western Pennsylvania Community College Leadership Institute built a sense of community within the district, across campuses, sites, and departments through capacity building and networking. Individuals learned how their roles were part of the organization and how their roles and responsibilities interacted with others. DeLozier's (2019) evaluation of the Guilford Technical Community College's President's Leadership Seminar noted that networking and the new relationships changed the participants' perspectives of the college's role and mission and better prepared them for future leadership opportunities while also building relationships formed both horizontally and vertically within the organization. The networking component of the GYO leadership programs can also have extrinsic value. For example, seven of the 10 participants DeLozier interviewed reported that, due to the program, they felt more comfortable and efficient in their daily responsibilities at Guilford Technical Community College's President's Leadership Seminar, and five of them referenced that relationships established during the program continued to grow and expand long after the program ended.

An additional theme presented itself as six participants also spoke to the relationships providing them with a network of contacts to be more efficient in their roles, understanding the roles of others, and helping students (DeLozier, 2019). These data points support the argument that GYO leadership programs enhance participants' sense of belonging, cohesiveness, and overall productivity. In a study conducted by Bernard (2012), Black participants listed more comments about connectivity than White, Hispanic, or Asian Pacific Islander employees. This particular data point suggests that Black participants reported a greater connection benefit than their peers from participating in GYO programs.

Involvement and Support of the College President and Other Senior Leaders

Hull and Keim (2007) shared that 89% of presidents thought that leadership programs were valuable to participants, 85% felt that programs were of value to participants' departments, and 87% thought they were of value to the institution. These numbers are significant as Bernard (2012) noted that the president's commitment and participation in the program contributed to its success. Most participants recognized presidential support as essential for the leadership program's long-term viability (Amey, 2006).

The importance of the president and other senior leaders in GYO programs goes further than providing financial and moral support. It is one thing to send general communications about the administration's commitment to professional development and even provide financial support to support their plans. However, it is different having the president and other senior leaders fully engaged in the leadership development programs. Crosson et al. (2005) explained how the campus president joined with the fellows for a leadership luncheon at each seminar to engage personally with fellows about leadership. This experience provided the program participants with more insight into the organization, the mission, and their respective roles. Carter et al. (2002) elaborated on the experience of talking to people with significant lived experience and having the opportunity to learn what they did well, and to learn from their mistakes is a powerful educational and development experience. It is hard to imagine a more relevant person fulfilling this role than its president. DeLozier (2019) built on this by noting the concept of watching and learning from a successful and experienced leader. Furthermore, Rowan (2012) stressed the importance of having senior leaders facilitating sessions and showing interest. Finally, Vaughan and Weisman (2003) recommended that the president include some participants in staff meetings, when appropriate, to ask them questions and evaluate their answers.

Similar to the first theme, networking, which provided participants' perspectives to better understand their roles related to the organization and its mission, interacting with the president also broke down barriers, and more learning occurred. A vice president for academic affairs also noted the importance of the president, who attended every meeting once per month and engaged the participants in open discussion, which was instrumental in the program's success (L. Scherr, personal communication, September 29, 2021).

Experiential Learning Opportunities

Sullivan and Wiessner (2010) noted that experiential learning is accepted as a primary means for adult learning. Additionally**,** Bernard (2012) shared how community college leaders need theoretical and practical skills to govern community colleges in the 21st century. Through workshops and experiential learning strategies such as mentorship relationships, job shadowing, internships, and networking, participants explored leadership skills and strategies, developed organizational and leadership competencies, and demonstrated their interest in career advancement (Bernard, 2012). These programs allow participants to focus on a task that could fall outside the immediate responsibilities or take a situation from another person's perspective or role.

Many of the programs analyzed in this brief provided projects and other tasks that allowed the participants to develop their project management and strategic planning skills. Having the ability to plan, coordinate, and execute a particular task could provide valuable exposure to strategic planning, organizational impact, and other aspects of the organization to which the participants might not be otherwise introduced. This experiential learning component is also instrumental for the participants of the GYO leadership program to develop or increase their ability to cooperate and lead. A vice president for academic affairs noted how working on this project allowed the program participants to learn new skills, work within the college, and let others know they are talented and aspiring to grow (L. Scherr, personal communication, September 29, 2021).

Mentoring is one of those experiential learning practices that is also tied to employee retention as it can increase the participants' perspectives about their organization and its potential impact. However, Reille and Kezar (2010) and Bernard (2012) noted that job shadowing and mentoring required campus leaders to shift their work. Busy campus executives seemed hesitant to offer this additional time, and few volunteered to participate. A good number of the programs analyzed in this brief provided poor to mixed results pertinent to mentoring programs. For example, El-Ashmawy and Weasenforth (2010) shared that some of their comments, which were consistent with Bernard's findings, indicated that participants' experiences with mentors did not meet their expectations. They felt that mentors should have been better informed about their roles and responsibilities. However, Bernard argued that informal mentoring does occur without structured mentoring programs despite these concerns about formal mentorship program components. For example, 57% of chief executive officers indicated that a mentor had helped prepare them for the presidency, and 76% of the chief executive officers who had been on the job for more than three3 years responded that they had served as a formal mentor in developing another community college professional (Shults, 2001, as cited by Bernard, 2012). In other words, even if there are challenges with the mentoring program, it should be modified and realigned, not discontinued, as it can bring transformation.

Bernard's (2012) discussion of the example of the Portland Community College's (PCC) leadership development program, the Leadership Excellence and Development Academy, also provides valuable insights. Every year, a dozen of PCC's 185 department managers, faculty department chairs, and others were charged with creating a project initiative that would impact the campus. These programs provided growth opportunities for the participants to coordinate and lead projects, which was a valuable experience. Leadership Excellence and Development Academy cohort members presented their initial proposal to all PCC managers at the end of the eight months. If they wanted the program to continue after the cohort ended, they had to find a staff member or department to own the project (Bernard, 2012). This model has an embedded level of sustainability as the projects, once highlighted and presented, could get passed on to the department for its completion. Crosson et al. (2005) agreed that the college project was another critical curriculum component for leadership development programs. In consultation with their community college president, each fellow worked independently on a college project throughout the academy. The college project was an opportunity for fellows to demonstrate leadership within their college community. Examples of projects are chairing a vital committee, researching and implementing a new initiative, or developing a new curricular program. This type of experience is instrumental in leadership development because it places the participants at the center of these potential organizational change programs.

Reflection Opportunities

Another highlight of GYO leadership programs is the opportunity afforded to the participants for personal and professional reflection. Amey (2004) pointed out that active reflection is not a luxury but a critical aspect of leadership; she further added that leadership development is never finished but is ever evolving. This continuous improvement cycle is grounded in reflection, as participants must see where they are and how the program's experiences can lead them to where they aspire to go. GYO leadership programs allow the participants to interact with and speak to seasoned leaders, learn about best practices, and build relationships with colleagues who might not interact with them regularly. All these opportunities allow the participants to reflect on themselves as they relate to their new experiences and the ones lived by others who serve in different roles and have different lenses. All these occurrences provide an opportunity to reflect, learn, and grow. Amey also added that today's community colleges might be better served by considering leadership from a learning perspective, believing that skill training is somewhat less critical than cognitive aspects. In other words, community college leadership's current and arguably future needs might be more important to have the proper judgment and mindset than understanding facts and theories. Continuous reflection is instrumental for emerging leaders to always embrace their analytical selves and problem-solving skills.

These GYO leadership programs have the opportunity to engage the participants in reflection. For example, Campbell et al. (2010) argued that it is vital to engage participants in ways that challenge their preferred work styles throughout the program, allowing them to grow and adopt new modes of working with various situations and tasks. This is relevant because Carter et al. (2002) added that traditional doctoral or other advanced university programs will not be sufficient to prepare leaders for institutions undergoing a transition. Many of those programs are based on dated and currently irrelevant learning models not connected to community college students' current future markets (Carter et al., 2002).

Thinking and cognitive processes are very relevant for leadership development. For example, Campbell et al. (2010) noted research that championed schema development, a cognitive map or network that links a person’s understanding of a concept with how others perceive it. GYO programs include reflection opportunities in their writing assignments when participants write about their projects, perceptions, and growth opportunities (A. Chapman, personal communication, October 1, 2021). Personal and professional reflection opportunities embedded into GYO programs must be fully embraced by the participants for a more significant impact to challenge their comfort zones and think outside the box about the problems. For example, DeLozier (2019) explained how three of the interviewed participants reported that they learned it was necessary to adapt their leadership style as times and situations change, a realization that can only be reached through reflection.

Wallin (2012) further shared that adults bring various rich life experiences to the learning situation, which affects their learning. Sullivan and Wiessner (2010) noted that it is easy to repeat past mistakes or fail to repeat practical approaches in previous situations without reflection. Reflection is emphasized in the National Community College Hispanic Council Hispanic Leadership Fellows

Program for all of these reasons (Sullivan & Wiessner, 2010). Reflection is arguably one of the essential aspects of GYO leadership programs, in that it is a process that embeds continuous improvement, growth, and renewal at personal and professional levels. Reflection can enhance personal skillsets and the ability to look at and address challenges.

Conclusion

To have enough capable community college leaders in the pipeline, time and resources must be invested in their development. The community college sector must provide multiple avenues for the development and advancement of its employees. The GYO leadership programs discussed here allow community colleges to nurture an internal talent pipeline that can answer the call when current and anticipated future challenges materialize. Failure to do this would undoubtedly enhance the challenges of finding members for senior leadership with the essential leadership traits needed to advance the institutions to the next level.

The data analysis review for this brief revealed five areas that should be considered when implementing a new GYO leadership development program. Namely, recruitment strategies, networking opportunities, interaction with the college president and other seasoned leaders, an experiential learning component, and, finally, embedded opportunities for reflection are important considerations. Each of these potential components adds individual value to any leadership development program but bringing all of them together can create superior outcomes. For example, a vice president shared how her leadership academy consistently allowed her to match the retention and advancement of program participants to the larger institutional population, where participants continuously outperformed the general population (V. Ray, personal communication, October 1, 2021).

Effective recruitment strategies are an important part of the planning and development for leadership academies. This is especially important if the goal is to encourage a high level of participation of POC. An embedded component for networking is essential for the success of GYO leadership programs. A networking focus allows the participants to work with colleagues they might not usually get an opportunity to interact with. This collaboration enables GYO participants to build relationships that extend outside of the leadership program and allows for enhanced collaboration outside of the program. This collaborative approach can also highlight the participants' talents to other members of the college community.

It is also important to have the active participation of the college president and other senior leaders of the organization to participate in the program. Their active participation elevates the program and provides opportunities for the participants to learn from the historical and leadership experiences of the president and other senior-level leaders. Including experiential learning assignments or components associated with a task or special project is also a best practice. As part of experiential learning projects, colleges can establish a mentoring program, allowing the participants to learn from a colleague and see institutional challenges from another lens or angle.

Finally, the last recommendation for the GYO leadership programs is the inclusion of various reflection opportunities for the participants. The exposure to the experiences of others and potential impact of experiential learning can be fully realized with the infusion of personal and professional reflection on the program. This component, arguably, brings it all together to compound the benefits of the full program for the participants.

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Journal of Higher Education Management, **39**(2), 82-92 (ISSN 2640-7515).

Estimating The Effects of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, And Social Justice Mission Statements on Student Outcomes: A Quasi-Experimental Study

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Abstract

In the landscape of higher education, mission statements play a pivotal role, shaping institutional objectives and values. With a heightened awareness of systemic disparities and the pressing need for greater inclusivity and representation in academia, numerous institutions have explicitly integrated principles of diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice into their mission statements. This quasi-experimental study delves into the intersection of mission statements and institutional outcomes, specifically focusing on the representation of race/ethnicity and gender, alongside graduation rates. The findings not only illuminate the disparities in racial/ethnic and gender representation but also shed light on the relationship between mission statements and graduation rates among underrepresented groups. This study provides valuable insights for institutions grappling with the decision to incorporate or remove diversity, equity, inclusion, or social justice-related language from their mission statements. By understanding the tangible impact of these principles on student outcomes, institutions can make informed decisions to foster a more inclusive and equitable academic environment.

Keywords: Mission statements, diversity, equity, inclusion, social justice, race, enrollment, graduation rates

Introduction

A mission statement is a succinct expression "of an organization's reason for existence and describes its purpose, intention and overall objectives" (Society for Human Resource Management, n.d., para. 2). In an analysis of 53 articles that focused on the role of mission statements in organizations, Alegre et al. (2018) traced the phenomenon of professional mission statements back to the 1980s. As of the early 1980s, scholars lamented the rarity of mission statements, though Alegre et al. found that more recently, mission statements have become part of the nomenclature of the public sector. As an organizational mission statement is often the most visible and public facing statement of the beliefs, objectives, and polices of an organization's core values (Cochran et al., 2008), the importance of crafting a succinct and holistic picture is vital to community awareness.

History of Higher Education Mission Statements

The history of U.S. higher education mission statements reflects the evolving nature of academia and the ever-changing demands from society. An understanding of the purposes of the creation of higher education's function and structures is critical to the study of mission statements. Tracing back to the colonial period, the early years of U.S. higher education mission statements were often focused on the religious instruction and the training of the clergy (Thelin, 2004). As the nation grew and diversified, so did the higher educational purposes and missions. The passage of the first Morrill Act in 1862 created the emergence of land-grant institutions, which aimed to provide practical education in agriculture, the military, and engineering (Association of Public and Land-Grant Institutions (APLU, n.d.). By providing federal land to institutions, the U.S. enabled them to use "the proceeds from selling those federal lands to establish a public institution to fulfill the act's provisions" (APLU, para. 3). The response from higher education institutions in presenting their commitment to meeting the act's provisions was that mission statements began to take a more formalized shape, reflecting the distinct goals and purposes of higher education institutions and beginning the dissemination of knowledge to working class citizens.

The 20th century represented a notable change from previous periods as organizations began to formulate more distinct roles within U.S. society, such as with the establishment of various types of institutions, including liberal arts colleges, research universities, and community colleges (Bok, 2013). Drucker (1973) helped incorporate the focus of strategic planning into the core values presented through intuitional missions. Mission statements became a critical tool for categorizing the unique purposes and structures of higher education institutions. In the 1980's, the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education system provided a framework to categorize and classify higher education institutions in the U.S. through analyzing their institutional missions towards "recognizing and describing institutional diversity" (Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, n.d., para 1). Recently, mission statements have also been transformed to promote institutional services publicly as higher education continues to need to be competitive in the academic economic landscape (Dumanig & Symaco, 2020). The importance of the mission and purpose of higher education institutions has taken shape towards the production of defined institutional mission statements, to the extent that the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) in the U.S. requires all institutions to submit either their mission statement via uploaded text or an online link.

Purpose of Higher Education Mission Statements

Meacham (2008) described that "mission statements are declarations of a campus's rationale and purpose; its responsibilities toward students and the community; and its vision of student, faculty, and institutional excellence" (para. 1). Mission statements serve as a guidepost for internal and external stakeholders of a higher education institutions' pursuit of academic and societal contributions (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). According to Drucker (1974) in his seminal work, *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices*, the primary purpose of a mission statement is to define the institution's core values, vision, and overarching goals. Higher education mission statements seek to offer a succinct and concise declaration of an institution's identity. By pronouncing a commitment to educational instruction, research, and/or service, a mission statement works to establish an intuitional tone towards their academic and operational objectives (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). A higher education mission statement informs internal stakeholders, such as faculty, staff, and students, as well as external stakeholders, including prospective students, parents, funding agencies, and the community at large, about the institution's fundamental purpose and aspirations (Prins, 2002).

Mission statements produce several important functional roles in higher education. They serve as a foundation for strategic planning, mission statements represent public announcements for setting institutions priorities, allocating resources, and making decisions that align with institutional core values and long-term objectives (Aib & Shehzad, 2023). As a highly visible aspect of the institution, noted that a mission statement should ask three important questions: 1) who is the target audience, 2) what service is being provided to the customer, and 3) what service provides a unique edge over their competition? (Bart, 1997, p. 9). An examination of 123 U.K. mission statements revealed an apparent intention to be both different from and similar to other institutions' statements as a "competitive way to preserve their distinctiveness" (Seeber et al., 2019, p. 239). In an investigation by Seeber et al. (2019) of 123 U.K. mission statements, researchers found that a main crux of the composition of the language composed within mission statements namely sought to be written to be both unique and similar to other institutions as a "competitive (p. 239). Mission statements ground higher education institutions to "the legitimacy to market and promote services through positive statements" (Aib & Shehzad, 2023, p. 139) while adapting to changing educational landscapes, societal needs, and marketplace competition.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Social Justice in Higher Education Mission Statements

In the past few decades, with the growing emphasis on diversity, inclusion, and globalization, mission statements have evolved to reflect the broader societal goals of equity, access, and global engagement, in addition to their traditional roles in education and research (Wilson et al., 2012). Meacham (2008) discussed how mission statements may speak to student understanding of diversity or may call for faculty to incorporate multiculturism into their teaching. These statements typically emphasize the commitment to fostering diverse and inclusive learning environments that provide equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their backgrounds. Missions may also address how students are exposed to "issues of equity in American society, human rights and social justice, and responsible citizenship" (Meacham, 2008, para. 11). In response to a growing awareness of systemic inequalities and the need for greater representation and accessibility in academia, many institutions have explicitly included the principles of diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice (DEIJ) in their mission statements (Meacham & Barrett, 2003). When a dedication to addressing issues of social justice is present in higher education mission statements, community issues such as racial disparities, economic inequality, and environmental sustainability can become reciprocally entrenched in the promotion of research, scholarship, and outreach (Torres-Harding et al., 2015).

Hansen and Renguette (2023) suggested that leaders should commit to embed social justice theories and scholarship into their assessment practices. In doing so, leaders clearly define an institution's commitment towards diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice. In the early assessment and classification of higher education institutions towards the education of people from marginalized communities, the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 and the Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act of 1994, established the three institutional categories of the land-grant system, currently known as the 1862 (first land-grant), 1890 (historically black colleges and universities), and 1994 (tribal colleges and universities). Institutions sought to support local communities that had traditionally lacked access to higher education, particularly those designated to support marginalized populations (APLU, n.d.). However, in a study about how higher education institutions enact their institutional, land grant, and diversity mission statements regarding Indigenous students and communities Ambo (2023) discovered that even when institutions declared a commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice within their missions, they continued to fail to enact their expressed mission statement, confront historical legacies, such as acknowledging colonial inheritance, and take land-based responsibilities.

The language proposed in higher education mission statements highlights the desire to align institutional values with the principles of equity and social justice as well as reflect a commitment to action (Abrams, 2022). When a higher education institution values social justice as an objective of creating and providing educational equity and the protection of students who possess marginalized intersecting identities, that commitment should be firmly echoed in their institutional missions (Carver, 2020). In a study of the development of nursing mission statements that reflect diversity, equity, and inclusion, Matthews et al. (2023) discussed that "many higher education institutions have failed to institutionalize their stated commitments to DEI by including indicators into these core values in their mission statements" (p. 43). The commitment of higher education mission statements should seek not only to acknowledge diversity and inclusion by the distinct wording, but also to engage actively in efforts to dismantle exclusive and discriminatory systems and practices (Knopf et al., 2021).

Research Questions

The present research sought to investigate U.S. higher education institutional mission statements for the use of declared terms of diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice (DEIJ) and the relationship between diverse student representation and graduation. The following research questions guided this study:

1. Are any institutional characteristics associated with DEIJ in mission statements?
2. Is there is a relationship between DEIJ in mission statements and enrollment by race/ethnicity and gender?
3. Is there is a relationship between DEIJ in mission statements and graduation rates by race/ethnicity and gender?

Methods

This study employed a quasi-experimental design which relies on non-random group assignment and evaluates the impact of an independent variable on a dependent variable. The independent variable in this case is the presence of certain terminology in the mission statement and the dependent variable is student enrollment rates split by race/ethnicity and gender. This secondary data analysis study derived data from the provisional release of the 2021-22 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS, n.d.). Initially, a total of 2618 institutions were reviewed after excluding two-year institutions. From this group, 614 institutions that had provided mission statements within their IPEDS submissions were selected.

A keyword search was conducted within the listed mission statements of these institutions. The initial search included the following terms: diversity, diverse, inclusion, inclusive, equity, social justice, and justice. Missions referring to legal justice were not considered to be DEIJ related mission statements. Institutions containing any of these terms were categorized as having a DEIJ (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Social Justice) related mission. This categorization resulted in the creation of a new binary variable: DEIJ mission (Yes/No), indicating the presence or absence of these keywords in the mission statement. The exception to this process is that upon inspection of the mission statements of tribal institutions, which initially received no DEIJ codes for their mission statements, it was obvious that these institutional missions indicated a dedication to serving Indigenous people, a marginalized population of interest in DEIJ work. The decision was made to code these missions as DEIJ missions.

As a result of this finding, a second a second review was conducted for institutions coded as HBCUs that were not already categorized as having DEIJ missions. While many of the HBCU missions mentioned they were historically Black, none of the language in these statements suggested a focus on DEIJ concepts. However, during this step, it was noted that one institution mentioned they were Africentric in their mission, and so the term "afri" was searched, yielding the addition of two institutions that said they were focused on students from African American backgrounds and students from countries such as Africa. These were then coded as having a DEIJ related mission. This process was repeated for similar keywords, including Hispanic, Latin*, Asian, and Pacific*. One additional institution was coded as DEIJ as a part of that process. *Multicultural* was also added as a term, yielding five additional institutions being coded as having DEIJ related missions. During the review of mission statements, one institution indicated they serve nonbinary students, and they were coded as having a DEIJ related mission, though they were the only one of two institutions to mention gender diversity. Since the outcomes data in this analysis was split on race and gender, only institutions mentioning race and gender keywords were included.

Chi-squares were performed to compare the distribution of institutions with DEIJ mission statements to those without DEIJ in the mission statement for institutional characteristics including control, undergraduate and graduate degree offerings, HBCU status, tribal status, and institutional size. An independent t-test was performed for each DEIJ mission variable, comparing the average enrollment rates and graduation rates for different race/ethnicity groups and for women (IPEDS has only recently begun to collect data on binary gender and this data is not yet available). Two-tailed significance levels were set at $\alpha=0.05$, indicating a 95% confidence level for all analyses, with equal variances assumed when Levene's test significance was greater than 0.05; otherwise unequal variances were used. Missing data were excluded from the analyses.

Based on the initial findings, the institutions were further stratified into Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and non-HBCU institutions. This categorization allowed for a nuanced exploration of the differences in graduation rates, providing insights into the impact of DEIJ mission statements in different institutional contexts. IRB was not required for this study because it relied on publicly available secondary data.

Results

As Table 1 shows, in terms of institutional control, public institutions were significantly more likely to include DEIJ in their mission statements (53.0%) compared to private not-for-profit institutions (20.8%) and private for-profit institutions (34.9%), c^2 (2, N = 614) = 43.358, *p<0.001*.

Table 1

Percent Of Institutions (N) Split by DEIJ Mission Statement by Control

Control	DEIJ in Mission Statement	No DEIJ in Mission Statement
Public	53.0 (53)	47.0 (47)
Private not-for profit	20.8 (85)	79.2 (323)
Private for-profit	34.9 (37)	65.1 (69)

There was no significant difference in DEIJ in mission statements for institutions that offered undergraduate programs and those that did not offer undergraduate programs. There was a significant difference for institutions that offered graduate degrees (Table 2). Institutions with graduate degrees were significantly more likely to include DEIJ in mission statements (31.1%) compared to institutions without graduate degree offerings (22.6%), c^2 (1, N = 614) = 4.590, *p=0.032*.

Table 2

Percent Of Institutions (N) Split by DEIJ Mission Statement by Graduate Degree Offerings

Graduate Degree Offered	DEIJ in Mission Statement	No DEIJ in Mission Statement
Graduate degree or certificate offering	31.1 (133)	68.9 (295)
No graduate offering	22.6 (42)	77.4 (144)

As Table 3 shows, there was also a significant difference between DEIJ in mission statements for institutions that were classified as HBCUs. Overall, 73.9% of HBCUs had DEIJ concepts in their mission statements compared to those not classified as HBCUs (26.7%), c^2 (1, N = 614) = X, *p<0.001*. Since all tribal colleges were categorized as having DEIJ in their mission statements as described in the methods, it is not surprising that analyses for this group yielded significant results.

Table 3

Percent Of Institutions (N) Split by DEIJ Mission Statement by HBCU Status

HBCU Status	DEIJ in Mission Statement	No DEIJ in Mission Statement
Yes	73.9 (17)	26.1 (6)
No	26.7 (158)	73.3 (433)

In terms of the institutional size, as Table 4 shows, there was a significant difference in the distribution of those with and without DEI mission statements. The larger the institution, the more likely they were to have DEIJ in their mission statement, with just 19.9% of small institutions using this language and 50% of the largest institutions using this language, c^2 (4, N = 614) = 32.794, *p<0.001.*

Table 4

Percent Of Institutions (N) Split by DEIJ Mission Statement by Institutional Size

Institutional Size	DEIJ in Mission Statement	No DEIJ in Mission Statement
Under 1,000	19.9 (71)	80.1 (286)
1,000 - 4,999	38.4 (66)	61.6 (106)
5,000 - 9,999	40.6 (13)	59.4 (19)
10,000 - 19,999	44.4 (12)	55.6 (15)
20,000 and above	50.0 (13)	50.0 (13)

The examination of DEIJ in mission statements revealed a complex relationship with enrollment and student success, one that varied across different racial and ethnic groups, gender, and institutional contexts. In terms of enrollment, the average representation of several identity groups differed at institutions with DEIJ in their mission statements and those without DEIJ in the mission statement (Table 5).

First, while IPEDS has been working on splitting data from the old category of Asian/Pacific Islander into two new categories for students who identify as Asian or those who identify as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, no differences were present for any of the categories. For students who identified as American Indian/Alaska Native, representation was significantly higher at institutions with DEIJ mission statements (11.14% average), compared to institutions without DEIJ in mission statements (1.86% average), t(50.423) = 2.517, *p=0.015*.

Similar results were found in terms of the representation of students who identified with two or more races, wherein institutions with DEIJ in mission statements saw a significantly lower average representation of students (4.00%), compared to 4.84% at institutions without DEIJ mission statements, t(369.04) = -2.380, *p=0.018*. Institutions with DEIJ related mission statements also had a significantly lower average representation of White students (41.67%), with significantly higher average representation at institutions without DEIJ mission statements (60.99%), t(502) = -7.221, *p<0.001*.

Lastly, in terms of representation in enrollment, women had a significantly higher average representation at institutions with DEIJ mission statements (64.05%), compared to 56.68% at institutions without DEIJ mission statements, t(462) = 4.471, *p<0.001*.

Table 5

Average Enrollment Rate (N) Split by DEIJ Mission Status and Race/Ethnicity or Gender

IPEDS Race/Ethnicity Groups and Gender	DEIJ in Mission Statement	No DEIJ in Mission Statement	*p-value*
American Indian/Alaska Native	11.14 (51)	1.86 (99)	*0.015*
Asian	5.78 (129)	5.52 (244)	
Asian/ Pacific Islander	6.58 (135)	6.42 (257)	
Black or African American	20.55 (143)	17.01 (281)	
Hispanic or Latino	20.77 (147)	19.88 (301)	
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	5.08 (129)	5.30 (54)	
Nonresident Alien	6.78 (106)	6.40 (231)	
Two or More Races	4.00 (131)	*4.84 (239)*	*0.018*
Unknown	5.82 (129)	6.88 (231)	
White, Non-Hispanic	41.67 (147)	60.99 (357)	*<0.001*
Women	64.05 (154)	56.68 (310)	*<0.001*

Note: Blank p-values indicate the t-test was not significant.

In contrast to enrollment trends, there were no significant differences in graduation rates between institutions with and without DEIJ mission statements (Table 6). There was a marginally significant difference in the average graduation rates of Black or African American students based on the presence of DEIJ terminology in institutional mission statements, $t(348) = 1.882$, $p = 0.061$.

Table 6

Average Graduation Rate (N) Split by DEIJ Mission Status and Race/Ethnicity or Gender

IPEDS Race/Ethnicity Groups and Gender	DEIJ in Mission Statement	No DEIJ in Mission Statement	p-value
American Indian or Alaska Native	39.33 (80)	44.07 (139)	
Asian	60.42 (106)	54.36 (180)	
Asian Pacific Islander	57.90 (108)	51.84 (193)	
Black or African American	42.24 (127)	36.74 (223)	*0.061*
Hispanic or Latino	48.71 (128)	48.28 (249)	
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	51.33 (63)	44.65 (95)	
Nonresident Alien	59.77 (94)	53.60 (181)	
Race/ethnicity Unknown	48.43 (105)	43.67 (174)	
Two or More Races	47.56 (109)	44.23 (182)	
White, Non-Hispanic	52.23 (134)	49.77 (317)	
Women	51.63 (144)	54.36 (275)	

Note: Blank p-values indicates the t-test was not significant. The p-value for Black or African American students is reported as it was marginally significant.

To delve more deeply into the marginal result for Black or African American students, the data was separated between Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and non-HBCU institutions. Notably, marginal significance emerged for several identity groups once the HBCUs were removed from the analysis, as reported in Table 7. Specifically, White students graduated at higher rates on average at institutions with DEIJ mission statements (54.78%) compared to those without DEIJ in the mission statement (50.07%), t(431) = 1.760, $p = 0.079$. Black and African American students also graduated at marginally higher rates (42.54%) at institutions with DEIJ missions compared to those without (36.69%), t(327) = 1.874, $p = 0.062$. Finally, the former combined category of Asian/Pacific Islander saw marginally higher graduation rates at institutions with DEIJ in the mission statement (59.22%) compared to those without (52.67%), t(233.26) = 1.733, $p = 0.084$.

Table 7
Average Graduation Rate (N) Split by DEIJ Mission Status and Race/Ethnicity or Gender (Non-HBCU Institutions)

IPEDS Race/Ethnicity Groups and Gender	DEIJ in Mission Statement	No DEIJ in Mission Statement	p-value
Asian Pacific Islander	59.22 (100)	52.67(189)	*0.084*
Black or African American	42.54 (112)	36.69 (217)	*0.062*
White, Non-Hispanic	54.78 (121)	50.07 (312)	*0.079*

Note: P-values were marginally significant.

Discussion

The findings of this study illuminate a compelling paradox within higher education – the nuanced relationship between institutional commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice (DEIJ) as expressed in mission statements and the disparities in student representation and graduation. The discovery of significant differences in average enrollment rates for institutions embracing DEIJ missions prompts a critical examination of the underlying mechanisms at play. Unraveling these mechanisms is essential not only for understanding the factors that drive the enrollment choices of marginalized students but also for devising targeted interventions to bridge the persistent access and achievement gaps in higher education.

The enrollment results could be interpreted in several ways, both as proactive or reactive efforts. It is possible that institutions with DEIJ in their mission statements are proactive and more likely to engage in strategies to recruit students of color and women. It could also be the results of the way these schools implement their DEIJ missions, in terms of how they present themselves, or their reputations, in that these presentations influence recruitment of students of color and women. Also possible is that rather than serving as a proactive effort, this data reflects a reactive effort, wherein institutions recognize the student population they serve and therefore add DEIJ concepts into their mission statements.

Similar to the enrollment data, the differences in graduation rates for Black and African American students could reflect both proactive and reactive efforts. In either case, institutions that actively promote DEIJ as stated in their missions might foster a sense of belonging among Black or African

American students, providing inclusive and affirming environments and resources (Abrams, 2022) and psychological safety to thrive academically (Torres-Harding et al., 2015).

This study may serve to inform debates about whether to remove or include DEIJ concepts from mission statements. The significant differences in this study establish the impacts of DEIJ language in mission statements and enrollment and graduation rates. These findings create a clear call to action for higher education institutions to consider carefully the development or revision of mission statements. As Thelin (2004) noted two decades ago, "Seldom did a college or university have the luxury of carrying out a coherent philosophy of higher education without at least considering concessions that would favor institutional survival" (p. 107). Embracing DEIJ missions is not merely a symbolic gesture but a transformative commitment that requires active and sustained efforts.

This study not only raises essential questions about the underlying factors influencing the enrollment of students of color and women and the graduation rates of Black or African American students in institutions with DEIJ missions, but also underscores the significance of these missions in higher education. Future research needs to delve further into the ways that DEIJ is enacted through the mission statement and the ways this enactment relates to recruitment and graduation of marginalized students.

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Journal of Higher Education Management, **39**(2), 93-107 (ISSN 2640-7515).

Faculty Perceptions of Merit Pay in Academia

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Abstract

The present study provides an updated look at faculty attitudes and perceptions of merit pay, in light of modern work attitudes and social influences on work in higher education. This study used a survey approach, in which faculty participants were asked about their opinions of the effects of merit pay on faculty job performance, as well as the effects of merit pay on faculty attitudes, such as job satisfaction and motivation. Results suggested that faculty hold negative views of merit pay systems and many believe that merit-based pay systems have a negative relationship to faculty job performance, including teaching, research, and service. Results also demonstrated negative perceptions of the effects of merit pay on job attitudes. An understanding of the issues addressed in this study can help university administrators better plan performance management processes in order to maximize faculty productivity and effectiveness. In particular, this research can help university administrators consider how best to approach and communicate with faculty about compensation systems, in order to obtain the maximal faculty support and acceptance of any changes in the compensation administration may be planning.

Keywords: compensation, merit pay, faculty, academia, universities

Introduction

Almost 20 years ago, Terpstra and Honoree (2005; 2008; 2009) conducted an in-depth examination of faculty perceptions of merit pay compensation in higher education. This topic is due to be examined again, however, given both: the amount of time that has passed since their data were collected, and the societal upheaval that has taken place, particularly regarding changes in employment and employment attitudes in recent years, post-COVID. Indeed, a 2022 Gallup poll (Harter, 2023) demonstrated that since the pandemic, employees (particularly younger employees) perceive the workplace to be significantly worse than it was pre-pandemic. There are other indicators that employees view their relationship with their jobs and their employers differently, post-pandemic. For instance, the "Great Resignation" was marked by a mass exodus when employees, who could afford to do so, changed jobs, changed industries, or withdrew from employment entirely and retired early. While some employees left their jobs, others changed their approach toward work (Kruse & Tata-Mbeng, 2023). Some employees became disengaged and less committed to their work and organizations, in a phenomenon dubbed "Quiet Quitting". Quiet quitting describes the situation when employees do the bare minimum, in order not to be fired. Employees who feel stressed, burned-out, dissatisfied with their jobs, disrespected at work, and unfairly treated are more likely to engage in quiet quitting (Livingston, 2023).

Changes in attitudes toward work have also been evidenced in higher education, as indicated by recent higher education union activity. For example, the 2022-2023 academic year was one of the most active years for higher education union activity, marked by strikes over employment issues including wages, benefits, and working conditions (Hall & Schermele, 2023). In January of 2024, the entire California State University system, the largest public university system in America, planned a weeklong strike (Hunt, 2024), which was canceled when an agreement was reached regarding salary increases, parental leave increases, and improvements in gender relations (NBC, 2024). Because of these recent changes in perspectives on work, both generally and within academia, the present study sought to provide an updated look at faculty perceptions of merit pay in higher education.

Employee compensation is one of the largest expenses for organizations (Kochanski & Insler, 2010). An organization's compensation system has two primary impacts on employees: performance and attitudes (such as motivation, job satisfaction, and commitment to the organization; e.g., Galaz-Fones & Gil-Anton, 2013; Guis, 2013; Terpstra & Honoree, 2008). The philosophy behind merit pay is based on the logic that rewarding desired behavior will result in improvements in overall organizational effectiveness and productivity (Benton & Radziwill, 2016). There is some research on the impact of merit pay programs on faculty attitudes and performance; what little research exists, suggests that merit pay has been implemented in higher education institutions with mixed effects on these two important outcomes.

For the present study, higher education faculty were surveyed to determine their attitudes and perceptions of the effects of the use of merit pay in higher education institutions. A fuller understanding regarding faculty attitudes and perceptions of merit pay can help university administrators better plan performance management processes in order to improve faculty productivity and effectiveness. This research can help university administrators consider how best to approach and communicate with faculty about compensation systems, resulting in maximal faculty support and acceptance of changes in the compensation system (Terpstra & Honoree, 2005). Surprisingly, there have not been many empirical studies examining the effectiveness of merit pay in institutions of higher education. There have, however, been several theoretical/thought pieces on the pros and cons of merit pay in these institutions.

Arguments in Favor of Merit Pay Systems in Academia

From an intellectual perspective, there are many reasons that merit pay systems should work effectively and result in increased performance. Indeed, Higher Education Report (2001) uses multiple motivational theories to support the logic of merit pay systems as an effective motivator of both faculty performance and morale, including Expectancy Theory, Equity Theory, and Goal-Setting Theory. This commentary notes several principles based on these theories, however, that must be included in the design of the merit pay system, in order for the system to have the desired motivational and performance effects. These include such principles as: performance must be accurately measured, all details of the merit pay plan must be clearly communicated, and merit awards should be based on specific goals. This article makes clear that an effective merit pay system must be properly planned and executed.

Indeed, descriptions of successful faculty merit pay plans include complex systems for ensuring that evaluations of merit are appropriate and fair (e.g., Hanshaw, 2004; Mathieu, 2003; Wenger & Girard, 2000). For example, Mathieu (2003) notes that the complexity of the work that higher educational faculty perform necessitates a rich, complex, transparent, and diversified compensation system that integrates a variety of performance measures and relevant incentives. Recommendations for successful faculty merit pay systems propose complex systems with differential weights for different activities and formulae for measuring meritorious activities, in order to promote fairness and efficiency in the evaluation system. They also note that faculty should have a considerable degree of control over the design and implementation of merit pay processes that evaluate their work (Hanshaw, 2004; Mathieu, 2003; Wenger & Girard, 2000).

Empirical research demonstrating the effectiveness of merit pay systems in higher educational institutions is difficult to find. In a study of public school teachers in China, however, Meng and Wu (2017) found that the perception of the effectiveness of a merit pay system influenced public service motivation. When the policy was perceived as ineffective, public service motivation was at its lowest, but when the policy was perceived as effective, public service motivation was at its highest. This study has implications for the value of effectively "marketing" a merit pay system in order to maximize the system's motivational impacts. If the marketing of the merit pay system is capable of convincing employees that the system is, or will be, effective, it is more likely to have a positive impact on employee motivation.

Terpstra and Honoree's (2009) empirical study on the effects of merit pay plans in institutions of higher education demonstrated results that were somewhat favorable to merit pay systems. In a large study surveying approximately 500 faculty members across the US, they found that faculty perceive that merit pay plans, in general, have a somewhat positive effect on *performance* levels in teaching, research, and service. They found, however, that faculty perceive that merit pay systems did not affect teaching, research, or service *motivation*. This study also noted that one of the most significant problems with merit pay systems in higher education is that the size of the merit increase is too small to be meaningful enough to motivate faculty to perform better.

Arguments Against Merit Pay Systems in Academia

Scholars have noted several problems with merit pay systems, that may actually result in their encouraging behaviors that are inconsistent with the goals that most academic institutions purport to value. For example, such compensation systems can result in a decrease in cooperation, because employees may perceive that they now must compete with each other in order to receive the limited merit raises that are available (Benton & Radziwill, 2016; Elpus, 2011). This can be especially true when there is a close differentiation among faculty performance (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002). Additionally, many faculty view merit pay systems as giving a higher weight to research-related activities, such that in some ways, teaching-related activities actually seem to be penalized (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002; Johnson, 1978; Wisman & Duroy, 2020). Along related lines, merit pay systems may discourage risk-taking because failures result in not gaining desired pay increases (Benton & Radziwill, 2016). Finally, merit pay systems may result in attempts to "game" the system, such that perceived meritorious activities are not actually substantive, and only intended to improve an employee's chances of receiving a merit raise (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002; Benton & Radziwill, 2016; Johnson, 1978; Wisman & Duroy, 2020).

The perception that merit pay systems favor research-related activities has been borne out in empirical research. Kasten (1984) performed a study using simulated, hypothetical faculty performance portfolios, in which the quality of the research, teaching, and service of the portfolio varied at three levels. In their study, 135 tenured faculty evaluated hypothetical portfolios and were then asked open-ended questions about tenure and merit pay decisions. Kasten found that research performance was more strongly related to faculty research than teaching and service. In a study of faculty perceptions of merit pay, Schulz and Tanguay (2006) also found that faculty research activities were significantly more predictive of receiving merit pay increases than teaching and service activities. In a study of academics at Mexican universities, Galaz-Fones and Gil-Anton (2013) found that merit pay systems were associated with less teaching, more research, stronger preferences for research activities, and less institutional involvement.

Benton and Radziwill (2016) note that a particularly difficult issue in higher education is determining how to measure merit. It is difficult to measure merit in higher education both at the individual level, and relative to other people. Buller (2009) notes that the performance of faculty cannot be visualized as a standard normal curve, and that while most university performance review systems consider the standard three performance dimensions of teaching, research, and service, the role of faculty at most institutions has become too complex to be effectively addressed using a merit pay system. Indeed, he notes that no two faculty members fill exactly the same role at the same university, and no single faculty member's role remains the same throughout their career. Additionally, opportunities for meritorious activities differ among different faculty members. Indeed, it can be very difficult to implement a merit pay system in teaching fields that do not have standard, quantitative outcomes, such as music and the arts (Elpus, 2011; Vagi, 2014). Additionally, merit pay systems ignore underlying reasons for differing levels of performance, assuming that compensation can solve any problems, rather than directing attention to performance problems that are related to process issues (Benton & Radziwill, 2016).

Several scholars note that merit pay increases are often too small to have a meaningful effect on employee motivation (e.g., Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002; Benton & Radziwill, 2016; Buller, 2009; Johnson, 1978). Additionally, merit pay systems rely on the assumption that extrinsic factors motivate faculty, that performance and pay are actually related to each other, and that administrators can and will make objective distinctions in performance quality among faculty (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002). Wisman & Duroy (2020) proposed that the introduction of corporate values within universities' systems of governance, such as quantifying employees' inputs (merit) in order to commensurately quantify their outputs (pay), serves as a threat to academic freedom and has the potential to increase inequality in universities.

There have been several studies empirically examining the effects of merit pay systems on faculty attitudes and behaviors. First, in a study of Canadian universities, Grant (1998) found that merit pay systems are more likely to be faced with resistance in primarily undergraduate institutions. Guis (2013) examined merit pay systems in K-12 schools, but his findings may inform the study of merit pay in higher educational institutions. He found that teachers who work in districts that have merit pay systems are not less satisfied with their jobs than other teachers, but teachers in merit pay districts were less enthusiastic, and did not think teaching was as important. However, when Guis examined only teachers who worked in merit pay districts, those that actually received merit pay were more satisfied with their jobs than those who did not.

Wilkesmann and Schmid (2012) examined the effects of new incentives (including merit pay) on German university's professor's teaching behavior. They found that these incentives did not have any direct effect on actual teaching performance, but instead they resulted in bored professors whose behavior was conditioned by the imperatives set forth by the new incentive systems.

Another of Guis's (2013) findings was that teachers in merit pay districts were more likely to leave their jobs for better pay. Similarly, in a more recent study of K-12 schools, Ryu and Jinnai (2021) found that merit pay is associated with higher turnover among qualified teachers. This finding is also consistent with Terpstra and Honoree's (2005) study of merit pay in university faculty; these researchers found that when people experience merit pay inequity, their most common response is to quit their job in an attempt to restore equity.

Given the occasionally mixed research from a variety of educational settings, the current study sought to gauge current faculty perceptions of merit pay in post-COVID academia.

Methods

Data Collection and Sample

A snowball sample was used, such that the principal investigators (PIs) of this study sent the survey out via email to their colleagues at their current university and former universities with which they had been associated. The survey was also posted on the PIs' social media as well as a subreddit dedicated to faculty (r/professors), in order to gain further reach. The message that accompanied the survey asked respondents to forward the survey to their higher education faculty colleagues as well. This study was approved by the IRB (IRB #STE-101321).

Participants completed the surveys after providing informed consent. At least partial data were collected from 125 faculty from a variety of universities. The respondents were 50% male, with a mean age of 44.73 (SD = 12.22). Faculty reported enrollment size at their institutions ranged from 1600 to 40,000 students with the vast majority being public institutions (108 or 87%). Roughly 68% of participants indicated their university was primarily teaching focused or mostly teaching focused, 10% reported it was equally focused on teaching and research, and the remaining indicated that their university was primarily research focused. In sum, our sample appears to be faculty at primarily teaching focused, moderate sized, public universities.

Measures

The measures used for this study were adapted based on the measures used in a series of previous research studies on faculty perceptions of merit pay by Terpstra & Honoree (2005; 2008; 2009).

Demographics. In the demographics questionnaire, participants were asked about their age, gender, their highest degree earned, how long they had worked at their current institution, and whether they are tenure-track faculty members or not. They were also asked if they have received tenure, what academic division and department they are in, and whether they primarily teach graduate students or undergraduate students.

Institution. Participants were next asked about the characteristics of the institution in which they are employed. These questions included information about whether the institution is more teaching or research focused, the size of the institution, whether it is public or private, perceptions of the institution's overall salary level, and whether the institution employs a cost of living raise when funds are available.

Specific characteristics of participants' evaluation systems. Participants were then asked to describe the evaluation systems used at their institutions. This measurement included questions about the primary type of performance appraisal method (such as standard rating scales, rankings, or objectives-based methods), what person or body is primarily responsible for assessing faculty performance (such as a peer committee, department chair, or dean), whether they receive formal feedback about their performance appraisal results, whether merit pay decisions are made public, and whether the faculty are operating under any sort of union or collective bargaining agreement.

Merit pay. Participants were next asked about whether their institution uses a merit-based pay system, whether they have received merit-based pay raises, and their general opinion on working at an institution that uses a merit pay system. Then the survey asked about merit pay, with a series of questions about participants' perceptions of several problems that have been identified with merit pay systems (such as that merit pay increases are often too small to result in increased motivation and that the performance criteria used for determining merit pay are difficult to measure and compare across disciplines).

Attitudes about merit pay. We concluded the survey with a series of questions about how participants perceive various job attitudes to be related to merit pay. These attitudes included Motivation (e.g., whether merit pay systems motivate faculty to become better teachers, better researchers, or engage in more service activities), Commitment (e.g., whether merit pay systems result in increases in loyalty or commitment to the university), Job Satisfaction (e.g., whether merit pay systems positively or negatively (or not at all) influence job satisfaction), Faculty Cooperation/Competition (e.g., whether merit pay systems encourage cooperation or competition among faculty members), Organizational Justice (e.g., whether merit pay systems positively or negatively (or not at all) influence faculty perceptions of the dimensions of organizational justice), Stress (e.g., whether merit pay systems positively or negatively (or not at all) influence faculty's feelings of stress at work), and Performance (e.g., whether merit pay systems positively or negatively (or not at all) influence faculty's performance in various common faculty performance criteria).

Results

When asked about the current performance appraisal methods at their university, 70% of the sample indicated they at least use a standard rating scale (e.g., meets expectations, exceeds expectations), with the next highest methods being written essays or narratives (19%) or numerical methods (i.e., publication counts and teaching evaluation scores) at 16%.

When asked specifically about merit pay systems, defined as a permanent raise as a direct result of performing at a high level based on criteria set by the organization, 29% currently had a merit-based system, 16% did not, and 58% were moving towards a merit pay system but they currently did not have one. Of the 36 participants that indicated they currently had a merit pay system, 12 indicated they had never actually received a merit increase, 7 received 1 or 2 increases over the past 5 years, and 13 received 3 or more raises in the past five years, with 4 participants indicating that they received a raise each year over the past 5 years.

Opinions

When asked their opinion of merit pay systems in general, 33% were below the middle of the scale, indicating they preferred working at an institution that used a merit pay system, 11% had no opinion, and 56% responded above the middle, indicating they would prefer to work at an institution that does not employ a merit pay system.

When asked about specific opinions of merit pay systems, regardless of whether they have one or not, the majority of faculty participants surveyed had negative views of merit pay systems in general. Participants were asked the extent to which they agreed (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree) with a series of statements about potential problems with merit pay systems. The highest-ranking perceived problem with merit pay systems was that the performance criteria used to evaluate merit are difficult to compare across departments and/or disciplines (M = 4.4, SD = .84). The second most problematic aspect of merit pay systems is that the performance criteria used to evaluate merit are difficult to accurately measure (M = 4.04, SD = 1.09). Rounding out the top three perceived problems with merit pay systems is that merit pay systems need to make adjustments for appraisal years when little or no money is available for merit pay increases (M = 3.95, SD = 1.04; See Table 1).

Table 1
Opinions about Merit Pay Systems

	N	*M*	*SD*	Rank
The performance criteria used to evaluate merit are difficult to compare across departments and/or disciplines	106	4.40	0.84	1
The performance criteria used to evaluate merit are difficult to accurately measure	106	4.04	1.09	2
Merit pay systems should make adjustments for appraisal years when little or no money is available	104	3.95	1.04	3
The performance standards used to make administrative decisions about merit raises often do not communicate specifically what is expected to achieve rewards	104	3.93	1.09	4

	N	*M*	*SD*	Rank
The performance appraisal method for merit pay systems in universities is often poor	104	3.89	1.00	5
Merit pay increases that are given out are often too small to motivate faculty	105	3.76	1.04	6
Merit pay distinctions between poor, average, and high performers are often not large enough	104	3.66	1.04	7
The performance criteria used for determining merit pay are often not appropriate	106	3.62	1.14	8
The performance appraisal decisions made by universities that employ merit pay systems are often biased and unfair	104	3.58	1.13	9
Performance standards used to administrative decisions about merit raises often vary from year to year	104	3.44	1.10	10

Note: Questions were rated on a 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) scale.

Job Performance

When asked their views on whether merit pay systems increase specific job performance outcomes (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 -= Strongly agree), faculty generally ranked the positive effects of merit pay systems low. They ranked research quantity as the outcome most influenced by merit pay systems (M = 3.22, SD = .97). Faculty ranked the level of service second (M = 2.85, SD = .99), and similarly ranked teaching effectiveness third (M = 2.84, SD = 1.04). Faculty viewed the least positive effects of merit pay systems on the quality of research produced by faculty (M = 2.81, SD = .90; See Table 2).

Table 2

Perceived Outcomes of Merit Pay Systems

	N	*M*	*SD*	Rank
The quantity of research of our faculty	95	3.22	0.97	1
The level of service of our faculty	95	2.85	0.99	2
The teaching effectiveness of our faculty	96	2.84	1.04	3
The quality of research of our faculty	95	2.81	0.90	4

Note: Questions were rated on a 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) scale.

Attitudes

Faculty were also asked their views on the extent to which merit pay systems motivate better work behaviors (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree). Faculty perceived the most positive influence on the quantity of faculty research (M = 3, SD = 1.2), and for the quality of faculty research, the quality of teaching, and the quality of leadership/service behaviors, faculty rated merit pay systems negatively in terms of their motivational effects (M = 2.39, SD = 1.06, M = 2.36, SD = 1.21, and M = 2.61, SD = 1.21, respectively; See Table 3).

Table 3
Perceived Motivational Influences of Merit Pay Systems

	N	*M*	*SD*	Rank
Merit pay systems motivate faculty to engage in more research	106	3.00	1.20	1
Merit pay systems motivate faculty to engage in better research	106	2.39	1.06	2
Merit pay systems motivate faculty to be better teachers	106	2.36	1.21	3
Merit pay systems motivate faculty to engage in more/better service/leadership activities	106	2.64	1.21	4

Note: Questions were rated on a 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) scale.

Faculty were also asked about how they perceive merit pay systems' effects on commitment, organizational justice, and stress (1 = Very negative, 9 = Very positive). Participants revealed that they believe overall that merit pay systems have a negative effect on commitment, justice, and stress. With regard to overall loyalty/commitment to the university, participants' mean rating was 4.35 (SD = 2.15); with regard to intent to remain at the university, participants' mean rating was 4.58 (SD = 2.05), and with regard to affective commitment (feeling committed to the university because you like it there), participants' mean rating was 4.31 (SD = 2.26). With regard to justice, participants' ratings of the effects of merit pay systems on overall justice (overall fairness) had a mean rating of 4.05 (SD = 2.06); their mean rating of the effects of merit pay on perceptions of procedural justice (fairness of processes) was 4.14 (SD = 2.09), and they had a particularly low perception of the effects of merit pay systems on perceptions of distributive justice (fairness of the distribution of rewards/outcomes), with a mean of 3.66 (SD = 2.15). Finally, participants also had a very negative perception of the effects of merit pay systems on feelings of stress at work (M = 3.52, SD = 1.77; See Table 4).

Table 4
Merit Pay Systems' Perceived Effects on Attitudes

	M	*SD*
Commitment		
Overall Commitment	4.35	2.15
Intent to Remain	4.58	2.05
Affective Commitment	4.31	2.26
Justice		
Overall Justice	4.05	2.06
Procedural Justice	4.14	2.09
Distributive Justice	3.66	2.15
Stress	3.52	1.77

Note: Questions were rated on a 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) scale.

Discussion

The present study examined faculty perceptions of merit pay in academia. The results of this study are consistent with previous research examining faculty perceptions of merit pay in academia. Data from the most recent comprehensive examination of faculty perceptions of merit pay in academia, however, were collected almost 20 years ago (e.g., Terpstra & Honoree, 2005). The present study provides an updated view of the current outlook of faculty regarding merit pay. Overall, the results of this study suggest that faculty have a negative view of merit pay in academia. Before discussing the specific results, however, a few limitations should be noted. First, the sample size of the present study was small. In order to determine the extent to which our findings generalize across faculty in the US, it would be beneficial to survey a larger number of faculty. A related limitation is that the present study did not examine the perceptions of many faculty who work at universities that actually employ merit pay systems. It is possible that perceptions of faculty who have experienced merit pay systems might differ from those who have not. Finally, this study did not examine actual outcomes of merit pay systems; it examined the *perceptions* of how merit pay systems influence outcomes. It is possible that faculty's perceptions of how merit pay systems influence job performance outcomes is not completely in line with these systems' actual effects. Despite these limitations, however, the findings of the present study are informative of how faculty view the implementation of merit pay systems in academia.

Opinions

The faculty surveyed in this study generally had a negative opinion of merit pay systems. Over half of the respondents indicated that they would prefer to work at an institution that does not employ a merit pay system. Indeed, the respondents endorsed a number of problems associated with merit pay systems in academic institutions. The biggest problem with merit pay systems in academia, as seen by these faculty, is that the performance criteria used to evaluate merit in academia are difficult to compare across departments and/or disciplines. The second biggest problem is that the performance criteria used to evaluate merit are difficult to accurately measure. Rounding out the top three problems is that merit pay systems should make adjustments for years when little or no money is available for merit pay increases. These findings are consistent with those of Terpstra and Honoree (2008), who found that the top three problems that faculty perceived with merit pay systems were 1) the amount of merit pay increase typically given out is too small to motivate faculty, 2) merit pay systems should make adjustments for years when little or no money is available for merit pay increases, and 3) the use of performance criteria that are difficult to accurately measure. Indeed, a number of other researchers have noted that the difficulty in measuring merit in academic work is an extremely problematic aspect of merit pay systems (Benton & Radziwill, 2016; Buller, 2009; Johnson, 1978; Murnane & Cohen, 1986).

Job Performance

Regarding job performance, the faculty surveyed in this study perceive that merit pay systems may serve to increase the quantity of research production, but they believe that merit pay systems have either no or negative influence on the quality of research produced, teaching, and service. This is consistent with the bulk of research on merit pay systems in academia, which indicate that these systems tend to weight research performance more highly than teaching and service performance, sometimes even to the detriment of teaching activities (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002; Galaz-Fones & Gil-Anton, 2013; Johnson, 1978; Kasten, 1984; Shulz & Tanguay, 2006; Wisman & Duroy, 2020).

Attitudes

With regard to the attitudes associated with merit pay systems in academia, the results from the questions on motivation for improving teaching, service, research quantity, and research quality mirrored those from the performance questions. Faculty perceived that merit pay systems are most likely to motivate the amount of research production, and less likely to motivate better research, teaching, or service. Additionally, faculty indicated that they perceive merit pay systems to have a negative effect on organizational commitment, organizational justice, and stress. In particular, the faculty surveyed for this study found merit pay systems to have a very negative effect on distributive justice and faculty feelings of stress at work. These attitudes in particular, have not been examined in previous research on merit pay systems in academia, but they are consistent with previous research that has found that merit pay systems in academia can have a negative impact on work attitudes (Grant, 1998; Guis, 2013; Ryu & Jinnai, 2021; Terpstra & Honoree, 2005; Terpstra & Honoree, 2009).

Theoretical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

The review of the research on merit pay in higher education conducted for the present paper demonstrated that empirical research on performance management in higher education is woefully lacking. More research on performance management is needed in order to help administrators to make informed, evidence-based decisions regarding merit pay for faculty in higher education. First, in order to make decisions about whether merit pay is an appropriate way to improve faculty performance, more empirical research is needed regarding perceptions of merit pay and the actual outcomes of merit pay systems in higher education. Empirical research examining whether research, teaching, and service outcomes are quantitatively and/or qualitatively improved under merit pay systems would provide evidence as to whether merit pay systems actually result in the intended increase in productivity, whether they have no effect on productivity at all, or whether they have negative, unintended outcomes.

Related to this issue, research examining the best ways, in general, to manage and motivate higher performance among faculty in academia could help to identify whether implementing a merit pay system is the best way to motivate better performance, or if there are other interventions that institutions can implement to motivate faculty to engage in the desired behaviors that are important for productive performance in higher education. In particular, the present study demonstrated that faculty had negative attitudes and perceptions of merit pay; it is possible that there are other interventions that could result in improved performance, without the negative attitudes and perceptions associated with merit pay.

Finally, more research on how best to measure and evaluate faculty performance would help to inform the question of how best to design performance management systems for faculty and motivate better faculty performance. It is imperative that performance can be accurately measured, in order to determine: whether performance has improved and whether a faculty member's performance is high enough to warrant a merit raise. Work in academia is complex and difficult to measure (Benton & Radziwill, 2016; Elpus, 2011; Vagi, 2014), and this complexity also makes it incredibly difficult to compare relative levels of performance between different faculty members (Buller, 2009). Research on how best to evaluate faculty performance could help inform how to create and implement performance management systems that are accurate and fair, and ultimately, effective in improving productivity.

Practical Implications

The findings of the present study demonstrate that faculty generally have negative attitudes and perceptions of merit pay systems in higher education. These findings have a number of practical implications for higher education administrators who are considering how to motivate better performance among faculty.

First, we would advise administrators who are considering implementing a merit pay system to evaluate the research on the effects of and perceptions of merit pay systems before making any implementation decisions or announcements. In particular, we recommend that administrators specifically examine the research on merit pay in academia, as opposed to merit pay research based on other work industries, because evaluating and comparing performance in academia is more complex than in other work contexts (Benton & Radziwill, 2016; Elpus, 2011; Vagi, 2014). Related to this recommendation, administrators might also consider conducting some research at their own institution by surveying their faculty about their perceptions of merit pay. Administrators may also elicit suggestions from faculty regarding the design and implementation of a merit pay system. Involving the faculty as much as possible in terms of getting their feedback and suggestions will help increase the chances that they will accept the system. Indeed, research examining the outcomes of allowing employees to have a voice in how their performance will be evaluated and managed is associated with a number of positive outcomes, including satisfaction and perceptions of fairness (e.g., Cawley, Keeping, & Levy, 1998).

Importantly, the findings from the present study suggest that faculty have negative perceptions of merit pay systems, and they believe that such systems are associated with negative changes in work attitudes such as job satisfaction, motivation, and feelings of fairness. As mentioned previously, these negative work attitudes are increasingly associated with negative outcomes, such as employee disengagement (Quiet Quitting; Livingston, 2023), employees leaving their jobs (Great Resignation; Kruse & Tata-Mbeng, 2023), and even union action such as strikes (Hall & Schermele, 2023). In order to reduce the probability of these negative outcomes, administrators should carefully consider decisions to implement merit pay systems, evaluate whether merit pay systems are likely to result in the intended outcomes, and involve faculty in implementation and administration plans, to reduce perceptions of unfairness.

In conclusion, the results of this study indicate that merit pay systems are not the norm in all universities, but it does appear that more institutions are moving in that direction. However, given our results, it would appear faculty do not hold positive views of merit pay systems and many believe that merit-based pay systems have a negative influence on faculty job performance and work attitudes. The results of this study suggest that if university administrators are considering instituting a merit pay system, they should put some effort into how they communicate information about the system to faculty, and they should allow faculty a role in planning how the system will be implemented.

Declarations

Availability of data and material: You may access information about the data and materials here: https://osf.io/f6pn5/?view_only=7829fd2ae6c34a2fa4bb5b7f9ad1f785

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Journal of Higher Education Management, **39**(2), 108-114 (ISSN 2640-7515).

Persistence of Female Online Students at a Public University: Implications of Students' Life-Based and School-Based Challenges and Responsibilities for Organizational Change for Higher Education Leaders

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Abstract

Many students struggle to persist in college, particularly students in online degree programs. The purpose of this study was to analyze the responsibilities and challenges faced by female students taking online classes at a public national university. Many female online students work full-time. Many female online students are full-time students. Many female online students are married and/or have children. Many female students earn an income below or slightly below the median income in the institution's home state. The results align with persistence models and provide evidence for the need for academic and non-academic student support services. In addition, the results highlight a need for organizational change within higher education institutions to develop policies, procedures, and organizational culture that supports the persistence of female online students.

Keywords: online student persistence, online student retention, female students, organizational change, dropout

Introduction

Many online students face challenges that make persistence difficult. Managing time and balancing work, school, and family commitments were challenges for some non-traditional online students (Xavier et al., 2022). While returning students were able to overcome these challenges and return to classes, dropouts did not. Boston and Ice (2011) found that the lack of transfer credits, number of courses taken, and earning a grade of F or W in a previous course were significant predictors of online student retention. Brown (2017) found that difficulty balancing family, work, and school responsibilities made some students consider dropping out.

Theoretical Perspectives

Persistence Model

Stephen (2022) presented a contemporary persistence model based on nontraditional online undergraduate students. Categories of factors that influence persistence for this group include student characteristics prior to admission, factors during the admission process, prerequisite student skills and behaviors after admission, internal factors at the program/college/institutional level, internal factors at the course-level, and external factors. Student characteristics prior to admission include age, ethnicity and gender, intellectual development, academic performance, and academic preparation. Factors influencing persistence during the admissions process include clarity of program offerings, clarity of delivery of program, program/course relevance, and access to financial advice. Prerequisite student behaviors and skills after admission include information literacy, computer literacy, reading and writing skills, time management, commitment to goals, computer-based interaction, self-esteem, stress management, and study habits. Internal persistence factors at the institutional/program/college level include current GPA, course availability, program fit, accessibility, advising, learning community, identifying with the institution, academic integration, social integration, and institutional commitment. Internal persistence factors at the course level include teaching styles, interpersonal relationships, learning preferences, instructor presence, relevance, interaction and engagement, satisfaction, and absenteeism. External persistence factors include life crises, family responsibilities, opportunity to transfer, hours of employment, outside encouragement, and finances.

Lewin's Theory of Change

Higher education institutions experience periods of change, as do other organizations. In the first stage of change, organizations must "unfreeze" their policies, practices, or elements of culture (Lewin, 1947). In the second stage, the actual changes occur. In the final stage, organizations "refreeze" their policies, practices, or elements of culture so the changes can be incorporated into daily practice.

Kotter's Change Model

Kotter (2012) introduced an alternative model of change that may be relevant for institutions of higher education. First, organizations must facilitate a culture of urgency. Second, organizations should cultivate a group of champions for change. Third, organizations should create a vision of a desired end state and create strategies that support the vision. Fourth, expand the group of champions by integrating a larger number of engaged volunteers. Fifth, eliminate obstacles to achieving the vision. Sixth, celebrate milestones along the way to achieving the vision. Seventh, continue more emphatically after achieving small victories. Finally, integrate the change efforts into processes, practices, culture, thinking and behavior to make the change permanent.

Literature Review

Online Student Persistence

Barriers to improving online student persistence include an instructor's knowledge of his or her students, unreliable data, cultivating a sense of belonging among online students through engagement that is early and meaningful, and connection to instructors (Canty et al., 2020). Online student confidence increased after interaction with the college's outreach team (Greening et al., 2017). GPA for students that interacted with the outreach team was higher than the GPA for all online students. Students indicated that interaction with the outreach team influenced their decision to persist. The average GPA for students that interacted with the outreach team was significantly higher than the average GPA of the control group. Compared to the control group, students that interacted with the outreach team were more likely to have graduated, more likely to be enrolled, and less likely to have withdrawn.

Factors affecting persistence in online courses and programs include learner factors, course/provider factors, and instructor factors (Shaikh & Asif, 2022).. Learner factors include demographic factors, academic experience, relevant technical and management skills, behavioral and psychological attributes, and personal variables. Course/provider factors include course design, support from the institution, and intricacy of the curriculum. Instructor factors include instructor commitment and roles, faculty/student interactions, feedback, facilitation of learning, and facilitation of social connection. Retention-focused interventions include orientation, tutoring, peer mentoring, library/writing center access, nudging to complete final assignment, peer mentoring, and targeting of top 50 courses (Hwang, 2018).

Students who utilized the above interventions were generally more likely to persist. Factors that impact online learning can be grouped into four categories: support factors, social factors, course/program factors, and student factors (Rotar, 2020). Support factors include institutional support, social presence, and connectedness. Social factors include engagement, and interaction. Course/program factors include relevancy of the course, course flexibility, and course design. Student factors include psychological attributes, students' expectations, student skills (self-discipline, self-regulation time management, online communication competency), relevant experiences, academic background, and individual characteristics.

Course completion for online-only students was 3-5% below completion rates of face-to-face students (Slade and Mullett, 2010). Services for students included tutoring and peer support. Time management was a major factor impacting persistence of nontraditional online students (Xavier & Meneses, 2020). Suggestions for improving retention included assessment flexibility, individualized academic advising and support, and submission deadlines that do not overlap. While activity completion speed, login frequency, and study time per session were associated with massively open online course (MOOC) certificate completion, completing assignments during the first three weeks of the course as well as logging in consistently on the most common day or hour was negatively associated with MOOC certificate completion (Veletsianos et al., 2021). In particular, low hourly consistency was a stronger indicator of certificate completion for females than males.

Flexibility was the main reason adult second-year undergraduate students chose online education (Xavier & Meneses, 2022). Challenges included managing the course load, transitioning to online studies, becoming self-motivated, failing courses, balancing work and studies, balancing family commitments and studies, and time conflicts. Students were generally satisfied with online education. Students valued support from instructors, academic advisors, and family members. Some students considered withdrawing from their educational journey during their first year due to work, finances, stress, time management, family changes, or poor grades, but ultimately decided to persist. Students were motivated to continue their education because of individual goals, opportunities for career advancement, learning concepts they can apply to their work or life, and lack of barriers during the admissions process.

In a meta-analysis, Kara et al (2019) separated challenges that adult online learners experience into internal, external, and program-related challenges. Internal challenges included technical challenges, learning challenges, and management challenges. Management challenges included managing time, balancing personal and school responsibilities, and balancing work and school responsibilities. Learning challenges included not understanding course content, not having prior knowledge, inability to concentrate on schoolwork, poor confidence in one's abilities, finding course and program content uninteresting, and difficulty maintaining commitment to studying. Technical challenges included trouble with online communication, lack of skills in computing, and trouble finding trustworthy information. External challenges included work-related challenges and home-related challenges. Work-related challenges included too much work to study, employers not supporting student's education, conflicts with work schedules, lack of funds for education due to income, and reduced study time. Home-related challenges included not having a suitable place to study at home, problems with technology at home, and family members who don't support the student's education. Program-related challenges included institutional challenges and tutor-related challenges. Institutional challenges included materials that do not support learning, programs or courses that have too many requirements or are too challenging, and insufficient support from the college. Tutor-related challenges included course requirements that are inappropriate, limited connections between tutors and students, making students experience isolation.

Persistence of Female Online Students

For female online students, the flexibility of online classes, connection to the online learning environment, and motivation to complete a degree were associated with persistence. (Müller, 2008). Obstacles to female persistence in online courses included limited faculty interaction, classwork, technology challenges, and juggling responsibilities. Growth and challenge also influenced persistence. Gender was a significant predictor of retention in online courses (Rawal and Razak, 2022). Women were less likely to enroll in online courses during the pandemic than before the pandemic. Females were more likely to take online courses after the end of the pandemic than during the pandemic.

Some women faced lack of support from their spouse in continuing their education (Dai et al., 2022). Some women reported challenges balancing work, school, and family responsibilities. Women tended to rely on confirmation in identifying their attitude toward MOOC (online) learning. This study extends the literature by studying the responsibilities and challenges of female online students at a public national university.

Research Questions

1. What are the responsibilities of female online students?
2. What are the life-based challenges of female online students?
3. What are the school-based challenges of female online students?

Method

Surveys were sent to Distance Learners enrolled in Spring 2023 (899) or Summer 2023 (446) with considerable overlap between groups. One hundred and four participants completed the survey; 70 participants were female. This study focuses on the responses of female online students.

Results

What are the responsibilities of female online students?

Sixty-two percent of participants identified as married or partnered; 49% of participants had one or more children; 24% of participants had one or more adult dependents in their home. Forty-six percent of participants have household incomes below $70,000, similar to the Texas median household income of $67,321 (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). Fifty percent of participants have more than ten years of work experience. Eighty percent of participants work 40 or more hours per week.

What are the life-based challenges of female online students?

Fifty-three percent of participants indicated that they have experienced financial barriers that have made their educational journey more difficult. Fifty-seven percent of participants indicated that they are financing their education with student loans.

What are the school-based challenges of female online students?

Forty-seven percent of participants did not identify as satisfied with career services. Fifty-eight percent of participants did not identify as satisfied with scholarships. Forty-two percent of participants did not identify as satisfied with student engagement. Seventy percent of participants did not identify as satisfied with mental health services.

Conclusion

The results support Stephen's (2022) persistence model in that there are external factors that contribute to student persistence. While institutions cannot control the external factors, they can provide internal persistence factors (supports) that are under institutional control. For example, institutions can support female online students through advising, institutional commitment, and supporting academic and social integration. Instructors can also support female online students through connecting with students, incorporating student learning preferences, providing instructor presence, making learning relevant, and engaging and interactive teaching styles.

Institutions that want to better serve female online students might examine the change models of Lewin (1947). With respect to Lewis's change model, the results indicate that there are ways to assist female online students that may not be presently available or may not be reaching students who need these supports. Institutions must take time to examine their policies, procedures, and organizational culture and unfreeze components that are not serving students effectively. Next, institutions must implement the necessary changes to serve female online students, (advising, coaching, etc.). Finally, institutions must provide the necessary long-term resources and structures to re-freeze the changes so they are standard operating practice going forward. St. Rose and Moore (2019) found that institutional changes for online student retention included resources, accountability of faculty, increased availability of online courses and degrees, policies, academic support and reduced costs.

Leaders who want their institution to better serve female online students must facilitate a culture of urgency to act now (Kotter, 2012). Leaders must also develop a clear vision of the structures needed to support female online students and recruit champions and volunteers to serve students directly or indirectly. In addition, institutional roadblocks that are barriers for female online students need to be removed. Finally, leaders should celebrate any short-term successes in serving female online students and create structures to make the changes a long-term solution. The results of this study indicate that areas of focus for higher education leaders to improve persistence of female online students include mental health services, scholarships and short-term financial assistance, student engagement, and career services.

Opportunities for future research include comparing the experiences of male and female students, further understanding the impact of female online student challenges and responsibilities, and investigating the impact of institutional or course-based interventions on persistence of female online students.

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Journal of Higher Education Management, **39**(2), 115-126 (ISSN 2640-7515).

The Promise and Pitfalls of Campus-Wide Digital Access of Course Learning Materials in Postsecondary Education

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Abstract

After decades of unremitting increases, the average cost of course learning materials in postsecondary education has recently plateaued. This article examines one possible factor: a rapid trend toward the adoption of campus-wide digital access (CWDA) programs for required course learning materials. The shift to CWDA programs promises savings for students, ubiquitous access, equity, convenience, and environmental sustainability compared with the traditional model of textbook sales. Major concerns about CWDA programs include debate over the savings (if any) and potentially detrimental changes to the textbook marketplace such as disabling or disincentivizing the adoption of other low and no-cost solutions. There is a critical need for empirical research to understand the impact of CWDA programs on measures of student success, the cost of course learning materials, student privacy, and faculty members' academic freedom. The article concludes with recommendations for administrators, faculty members, and students regarding the implementation and maintenance of CWDA programs.

Keywords: textbooks, course learning materials, equitable access, inclusive access

Introduction

The use of technology, in particular the digitization of tools and knowledge, continues to transform postsecondary education. Many instructors today cannot remember a time when a digital learning management system (LMS) was not a primary means for hosting assignments, grades, announcements, discussion boards, and much more. In recent years, course learning materials have begun to move entirely into digital format with access often being managed through an LMS. Whereas the high cost of traditional printed textbooks has been a problem for decades (e.g., Burgraff, 2016), the ability to distribute textbooks digitally to students promises lower-priced, campus-wide access. This transformation in postsecondary education is being implemented on many campuses with little data to test the claims of proponents, little effort to assess the impact on student success, and often minimal faculty or student feedback. The present article examines both the promise and the potential pitfalls of this shift to campus-wide digital access (CWDA) programs for course learning materials at postsecondary institutions.

Features of CWDA Programs

CWDA programs go by many names[1], including "direct digital access," "equitable access," "first-day," and "inclusive access," which have been developed by publishers[2] and content distributors[3] to emphasize the claim that all students can gain digital access to course materials at a price lower than that charged for other delivery methods. In a typical CWDA program, students receive digital access to the required course learning materials selected by their instructors. This access is provided by the publishers and may require access codes or be integrated into a password-controlled LMS via learning tools interoperability (LTI). If all goes well, students should have access to all required learning materials on Day 1 of the semester for all courses. CWDA programs are nearly always designed to be "opt out." That is, students are charged a flat-rate fee on their student bill for access to the materials, and those who do not wish to participate may opt out for a bill credit later (typically, after the university census date). "Opt in" programs are less common and typically higher in price because of the lower number of students expected to participate.

If few students opt out, then this model can be quite profitable. CWDA programs ensure nearly 100 percent sell-through rates of all required learning materials in all courses, whereas traditional printed textbooks sell through at much lower rates due to factors such as students' purchases of used copies, book sharing, or accessing the books through other means (or not at all). In addition, publishers save the cost of manufacturing traditional textbooks and content distributors save the cost of shipping, stocking, selling, and returning them. The use of access codes ensures that the materials cannot be reused or shared, thereby eliminating the secondary market for traditional textbooks. As stated by a vice president for one major publisher in 2017, "The print model is really a broken business model for us… we're thinking about how to move away from print, and move towards digital" (McKenzie, 2017). In short, publishers can control access and achieve higher profits by selling a digital product to nearly all students each semester compared with selling far fewer copies of a traditional textbook that might then be shared or reused multiple semesters. Perpetual licenses for digital materials are rare for digital access.

Depending on the campus contract, instructors may or may not have autonomy to choose course learning materials that are not available digitally. Faculty members are actively encouraged to select materials that are available digitally instead of opting for traditional printed materials. In cases where digital versions are not available, traditional print copies may be provided to students. On some campuses, instructors have complete autonomy to choose any learning materials they wish in any delivery format they wish (although requests for traditional printed materials may require chair or director approval to ensure sufficient pedagogical justification), but costs for the CWDA program would certainly increase if large numbers of faculty members select traditional printed materials. Students in CWDA programs who wish to receive traditional printed materials often pay an additional fee and shipping charges, because these items are no longer stocked in campus stores.

Growth of CWDA Programs in the US

Initially, CWDA programs were offered on a small scale, typically for one section of a course or for all sections of a single course. In the former case, the instructor would opt for digital access typically offered by a publisher representative in conjunction with the campus registrar and/or other administrative office (e.g., an office of finance and support services). In the latter case, a decision may have been made at a departmental or school level to offer all sections of a course using only digital access. In both scenarios, students would be charged for digital access as a fee on their student bill that would be less than competitive market rates.

Following this initial phase of course-by-course digital delivery, some publishers began to offer digital access to all books in their portfolio for a single price. However, this model required agreement among faculty to select books from a single publisher across different courses or even disciplines to maximize the savings for students. Such coordination is challenging, and so all-access programs within a single publisher did not become popular. Instead, two content distributors emerged to provide campus-wide access to learning materials from all publishers. These content distributors operate numerous campus bookstores across the US and were well positioned to provide this service due to their extensive connections throughout the industry. In many cases, these two distributors have been able to negotiate "most favored customer clauses" with publishers thereby ensuring the publishers would not be able to offer better terms or prices to another content distributor before offering those same or better terms to the contracted content distributor.

In 2015, the Office of Postsecondary Education in the Department of Education published a regulation for "Cash Management" that allowed postsecondary institutions to charge a fee for course learning materials instead of having students themselves purchase the materials (Disbursing Funds, 2015). This relevant portion states:

An institution may include the costs of books and supplies as part of tuition and fees under paragraph (c)(1)(i) of this section if —

(i) The institution—
- (A) Has an arrangement with a book publisher or other entity that enables it to make those books or supplies available to students below competitive market rates;
- (B) Provides a way for a student to obtain those books and supplies by the seventh day of a payment period; and
- (C) Has a policy under which the student may opt out of the way the institution provides for the student to obtain books and supplies under this paragraph (c)(2). A student who opts out under this paragraph (c)(2) is considered to also opt out under paragraph (m)(3) of this section...

The three components of this law, namely that (a) materials be available below market rates, (b) they are available in a timely manner, and (c) students may opt out, have become the foundation of CWDA programs.[4]

Promise of CWDA Programs

For many years, the cost of traditional printed textbooks steadily increased at an average rate three times higher than inflation in the US, which represents an increase of 1,041 percent between 1977 and 2015 (Hansen, 2023). Surprisingly, the cost of textbooks plateaued, or even dipped, at the end of the last decade. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021), the average cost of college textbooks increased by 40.6 percent from July 2011 through March 2018, but then declined back to 30 percent by January 2020. Hansen reports that 2022 showed the lowest average cost of course learning materials over the past 15 years. Several factors may have contributed to this change: increased used of digital materials by students, increased use of rental programs by students, and increased adoption of Open Educational Resources (OER) materials by faculty. CWDA programs may be contributing to the first category, although it is difficult to isolate the magnitude of this effect compared with other factors using national data sets.

In addition to reduced cost for students, publishers and content distributors tout several other potential benefits of CWDA programs, including increased access, equity, convenience, and environmental sustainability. All students should receive access to their required materials at the start of the semester, which is typically not the case with delivery of traditional print materials. Digital materials are much more likely to be ADA compliant than traditional print materials. Allowing multiple means of representation is an important aspect of the Universal Design for Learning, and materials that can be easily navigated by a screen reader, changed to different fonts, and accessed across platforms creates equity among students by eliminating the need for some to seek assistance from a campus office of disability services. Proponents argue that including the cost of learning materials as a fee assessed on all students may benefit first-generation college students, who may not have the financial or social capital to access materials through alternative means. Third, having access to all course materials on multiple devices through an LMS may be a convenience to some students, because there is no need to source, purchase, and access materials separately. This feature may be particularly valuable to students enrolled on campuses with a national or global reach who may not live near the campus store to purchase physical materials. Finally, the shift to digital materials on a large scale may reduce the environmental costs compared with traditional print materials by reducing the need for paper, inks, production, and transportation of physical materials.[5]

Potential Pitfalls of CWDA Programs

CWDA programs are not without critics. Some argue that CWDA programs fail to produce the savings they promise. It is difficult to quantify the savings (if any) students realize from such programs for several reasons. First, digital versus printed textbooks are quite different products, with the former being lower cost but time-limited and the latter being more expensive but available perpetually with a used book market available for purchase and/or to recoup some of the initial purchase price later. Results from large-scale student surveys that include questions about digital access programs are just now beginning to emerge. In one survey of 13,000 postsecondary students in Florida (Florida Virtual Campus, 2022), 53 percent of students who participated in such programs believed they did not save money. Additionally, the cost of learning materials varies across disciplines, with students in some of the highest cost areas such as medical science, health professions, biological and biomedical sciences, business, and psychology potentially saving the most, and students in the lowest-cost disciplines including education, computer sciences, social sciences, engineering, and public administration & social service potentially saving the least or even overpaying by failing to opt out. Compared with a typical price of $260 or more per semester for a CWDA program, the same survey showed that 55 percent of students in education already paid less than $200 and would be guaranteed to lose money in a CWDA program. Critics also express concern about eliminating the secondary textbook market: if all students on a campus use access codes for time-limited digital products, there will be no alternative for students to buy or sell used items. Lack of competition could quickly lead to higher prices than the initial costs promised to campuses. Finally, CWDA may create disincentives for faculty members to adopt the most powerful tool available to contain textbook costs: OER materials. OER materials are perpetually available, free to remix and reuse, and have been shown to improve outcomes in various measures of student success (Colvard et al., 2018; Tlili, 2023). In a CWDA program, instructors can no longer directly lower costs for their students by choosing low or no-cost options. There is also concern that CWDA programs entice faculty members to increase the number of required items when flat-rate pricing is in effect.

Unanswered Questions about CWDA Programs

It is unfortunate that CWDA programs are rapidly transforming a multibillion-dollar industry when many fundamental questions about them have yet to be answered. Some examples include the following.

What are the ramifications of requiring students to provide data to publishers and/or content distributors? Access to digital learning materials such as textbooks and courseware requires that students agree with the terms and conditions established by publishers. Unfortunately, most college students have little understanding about how their data may be used. One study found that on a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 representing complete understanding of publisher terms and conditions), the median rating of college students was a 2 (Nagle & Vitez, 2020). Further, even if a student did object to a portion of the agreement for required materials such as courseware, they would have no alternative except to drop the course if digital access was required for homework or other assignments. As publishers transition from being the suppliers of print materials to information technology companies, student data becomes a valuable commodity. Information such as what content students access, when and how often they access it, how they respond to questions is routinely tracked and recorded by publishers, such that students become unwitting participants in product development and possibly the subjects of future marketing.

In addition, it may be unclear if the student data will be retained and then destroyed per university requirements. The possibility of a data breach puts student information at risk on platforms where universities have no control over security protocols. Even students who wish to opt out from a CWDA program may be required to set up a new account and provide identifying information to a content distributor simply to decline a product they never requested.

Will costs to students remain stable as CWDA programs mature, or will the continued centralization of materials into the hands of a few major publishers result in a renewed era of cost increases? According to one report, the trend to digital materials has coincided with a decrease in revenue in the textbook publishing industry from $4.81 billion in 2013 to $3.10 billion in 2020 (Hanson, 2023). Nevertheless, the major publishers continue to be profitable. As one example, Hanson states that “Cengage saw a 40 percent year-over-year growth in online skills revenue, and its digital sales have now offset the setbacks from declining hard copy book sales.” It appears that increasing digitization has not fixed the “broken system” in which publishers continue to profit by controlling the copyrighted content needed by college students. Indeed, the emerging reality may consolidate even more power into the hands of a few publishers. If CWDA programs irreparably damage the secondary textbook markets, discourage faculty from adopting OER, and allow universities to divest in campus OER initiatives, then costs are likely to increase again, but with fewer alternatives to reduce costs in the future.

Is it ethical to enroll all students into a program where it is known that some percentage of them will lose money unless they opt out? At a typical cost of $260 or more per semester as of 2024, there are many students on college campuses who would save money by opting out of CWDA programs and purchasing their learning materials individually or acquiring them some other way (Florida Virtual Campus, 2022). Content distributors have access to all the tools necessary including student course schedules and the cost of learning materials by section to determine if any given student should opt out or not, but little motivation to make this information readily available to students or to make the opt out process easy and well publicized. The ethics of instituting opt-out programs have been debated in areas such as medical decision making (MacKay, 2015), marketing campaigns, and digital privacy. Proponents of CWDA programs argue that an opt-out model is necessary to achieve economies of scale that allow for low fees while respecting student autonomy. Others argue that opt-in models would place the onus on content distributors to provide the best terms possible to attract students by requiring direct consent.

Content distributors conduct analyses to know where to set their CWDA pricing so that many but not all students will benefit. Indeed, their models are built on a certain percentage of students failing to make the optimal financial decision. Many studies of judgment and decision making have shown that people often act irrationally. A recent review is provided by Bhui (2021). Consumers generally prefer flat-rate pricing with many products and services as seen in the choice of unlimited minutes on cellular phone plans even when the cost is greater than paying per unit. Several factors can contribute to this bias: overestimation of usage or need, insurance against unexpected needs, distrust of providers, convenience, and the taximeter effect, in which consumers dislike increases in costs linked to increases in usage (Kiensler et al., 2021). It is not hard to imagine these factors at work when students face many demands at the start of a semester. First-year students, particularly first-generation students, may be particularly at risk of showing bias due to overestimation of needs if they are unsure of what materials are required in a new educational environment. Given that flat-rate bias is so ubiquitous, one may wonder about the ethical implications of postsecondary institutions signing contracts with content distributors that put some students, particularly those with the least knowledge, at risk of overpaying for their required course learning materials.

Do CWDA programs impact student success? While the commercial web sites of publishers and content distributors are replete with anecdotal claims of benefits of CWDAs, the published literature on this topic is only now beginning to emerge. Using a pre-post design, Spica (2021) found no differences in course completion rates following CWDA implementation across 141 community college courses. In contrast, research by Moore and colleagues has shown benefits in some cases. Moore and Piazza (2023) reported statistically significant improvements in some outcomes for some groups in six courses at a technical college, and one unpublished study showed some significant differences in course completion rates following CWDA implementation at a four-year institution (Moore, 2023).

Further studies are needed that isolate the impact of CWDAs in impactful areas such as student learning evidenced by individual course grades or semester GPA, retention rates, and time to graduation. Obtaining and interpreting related data present a plethora of challenges given the many potential confounding variables of instructor and student demographics, course levels and areas, possible history effects, other campus student success efforts, and more. Ideally, researchers at postsecondary institutions would be engaged early in the planning process to implement appropriate designs into well-controlled studies that collect relevant baseline data to clearly evaluate the subsequent effects (if any) of CWDA programs locally and then publish the results in peer-reviewed outlets. Also, it is important to separate student perceptions from more objective indicators such as those listed above. In fact, success metrics and stakeholder perceptions are only two of five components that should be examined when implementing educational technology (Chugh et al., 2023).

Will students on the local campus have the required infrastructure (e.g., personal computers, tablets, reliable high-speed internet access) to access the digital materials? Is it equitable to initiate a CWDA program on campuses where students may not have universal access to the tools necessary to effectively use the content? One purported benefit of CWDA involves equity: all students should have access to required course learning materials. Nevertheless, the fees charged for CWDA may be out of reach for some students who may decide to opt out with no viable alternatives, and the technology required to access the materials represents an additional burden. Across the US, 42 million people do not have access to high-speed internet (Poon, 2020). Nagel and Vitez (2021) found that during the shift to remote learning during the pandemic, 10 percent of students in a national sample did not have reliable internet access to be able to participate online. Of these students, 30 percent reported not buying at least one access code for a course, and 8 percent failed a class because they could not afford their course materials. Campuses implementing a CWDA, particularly those with a large population of students eligible for the Pell grant, should carefully consider whether this program will improve equity on their local campus. At the very least, administrators should ensure that students have access to the required technology on campus and consider ways (e.g., checking out laptops and portable Wi-Fi hotspots) to provide off-campus accessibility.

What are the implications of adopting course learning materials with time-limited access codes campus-wide? One major criticism of CWDA programs especially compared with OER materials is that the former typically do not provide perpetual access whereas the latter do. Most titles adopted in a CWDA program will have access codes that expire in the future. The exact limit is controlled by the publisher, which creates a paradox in which neither of the users (i.e., the faculty member and the students, who select and pay for the course learning materials, respectively) nor either of the parties who signed the contract (i.e., the campus administration and the content distributors) have any control over how long the materials will be available. The current system of digital access is a patchwork with different publishers offering different terms and even the same publisher offering different terms by title. This disconnect is concerning because the needs of faculty and students in different disciplines can vary widely, with some requiring access to course learning materials after the semester ends (e.g., for licensing, certification, testing, graduate studies, making up work in subsequent semesters following an Incomplete grade, etc.). In addition, Burgraff (2016) has argued that student development of personal libraries is a powerful solution that increases learning and reduces cost. However, this possibility is all but eliminated in typical CWDA programs that provide time-limited access.

Does faculty academic freedom extend to the choice of modality for course materials? Until recently, faculty members (either alone, through a committee, or some form of local departmental decision) enjoyed unquestioned control over the choice of course learning materials, including the delivery modality of materials. Most CWDA programs move the latter choice into the realm of administration. Seaman and Seaman (2020) found that many faculty report increasing administrative control over the modality of their course materials. Given that not all faculty prefer digital course materials and that there are clear differences in need between disciplines (Seaman & Seaman, 2020), the question of whether modality shall remain a protected aspect of academic freedom is crucial. Despite claims of faculty choice, CWDA programs currently pose a threat to the right of faculty on many campuses to use their expertise and professional judgment when selecting the title and modality of their course learning materials.

Recommendations Regarding CWDA Programs

There is little doubt that digital delivery of course materials will continue to increase. The rise in CWDA programs has been rapid, and at this rate all postsecondary institutions will offer some form of coordinated digital access (either course-by-course or campus-wide) very soon. What lessons can be learned from the process so far? What should college administrators, faculty, and students consider when implementing and maintaining a CWDA program?

Administrators

Administrators are urged to consult broadly at least one year prior to implementing a CWDA program. Implementing and maintaining a CWDA program involves not only faculty members and students, but staff members from across campus, including the registrar's office, student business services, campus bookstore, finance and support services, information security office, information technology support, library services, office of disability services, university marketing, and more. Using traditional routes of shared governance such as deans and college councils, faculty senate, and student government, while necessary, is likely to be insufficient given the broad impact associated with a CWDA program.

A strong recommendation is to create an implementation task force with representatives from all these groups and allow sufficient time for the group to study local needs, desires, and trends. Ideally, the task force would be able to collect baseline data regarding student usage and costs that is able to be disaggregated by major and pertinent student demographic variables, such as first-generation status, Pell-grant status, year in school, etc. It is highly likely that each campus will have a unique profile, and the task force should use tools such as surveys, focus groups, and town-hall meetings to assess the needs of diverse groups of stakeholders. For example, the modality faculty and students prefer for their course materials varies by discipline (Seaman & Seaman, 2020). Data must be gathered to determine how local students would access their digital materials, and if the content likely to be adopted is offered in an appropriate manner (e.g., is a mobile-first approach being used for course learning materials likely to be accessed via mobile devices?). A complete list of guiding questions can be found in Appendix A of Vitez (2020). If these questions are addressed prior to signing a contract, then the final product is much more likely to have a smooth implementation with high user satisfaction. On campuses where the bookstore is self-operated, there should be even greater opportunity to customize the program to meet local needs.

Contract negotiations should begin only after the implementation task force has gathered the necessary data and issued a report. It would be advisable to negotiate a short-term contract (e.g., one year) if this is a transition from traditional delivery to CWDA. The major content distributors in this market are still developing tools necessary to smoothly run CWDA programs on a large scale. Administrators must ensure that the infrastructure for their campus is in place. Some important issues to consider include the following. Does the content distributor provide an opt-out portal that uses single sign-on protocol to prevent students from having to create a new, third-party account and is easy to navigate? Does the content distributor provide automated emails that address faculty needs (e.g., acknowledgement of orders, instructions for how to make the digital materials accessible to students, etc.) and student needs (e.g., acknowledgement of opt in or opt out selections, instructions for how to access digital materials, instructions for how to print materials, return policies, etc.)? Does the content distributor compile and present an annual report to the university on all book order issues, disaggregating service tickets for CWDA from general book order issues? Does the content distributor provide a robust and individualized shopping cart tool linked to course schedules that allows students to easily compare costs of the CWDA program to all other options, including item-by-item digital rental, digital purchase, and both new and used printed copy costs, with links to access all the options?

Use of a short-term contract, and ideally, an opt-in model rather than an opt-out model, can provide leverage for administrators to ensure the content distributor provides effective tools for adoption at the lowest possible cost while respecting faculty and student autonomy. In addition, surveys of student and faculty perceptions should be conducted each semester to assess user perceptions of the program. But all of this is not enough. It is critical that administrators continue to support the development and adoption of OER, which provides no-cost perpetual access to course learning materials. As the percentage of OER increases on campus, the student fee for CWDA should decrease. Many campuses have developed considerable infrastructure to support OER initiatives, including open-access digital repositories, software for content creation, editing, and deployment into a campus LMS (e.g., Pressbooks), librarian and staff support to pursue OER grants at the federal and state levels, and campus incentives to adopt OER options. Implementation of CWDA is perhaps best viewed as an intermediate step until permanent savings can be realized by the maturation of ongoing campus transitions to OER.

Faculty

Faculty members continue to play the lead role in reducing the cost of learning materials. With traditional models of delivery, every student in the faculty member’s course benefits when low or no cost materials are selected. Flat-rate pricing in CWDA programs fundamentally changes this dynamic. At a minimum, the incentive to choose low or no cost materials is reduced because most (if not all) students in a given course will already have paid an access fee, which severs the direct connection between instructor choice and student impact. This dynamic may also lead to the adoption of materials that never get used: students in 2022 reported purchasing an average of 2.6 books in their academic career that were never used. Faculty members must continue to select the best learning materials for their students just as they would in traditional models and continue to seek low and no cost options that can meet their learning objectives. Additional materials, such as supplemental courseware, should be selected when necessary to improve outcomes. Faculty members should scrutinize all potential adoptions, including costly courseware, and incorporate low and no-cost materials whenever possible.

Faculty members can and must play a prominent role in the implementation and maintenance of CWDA programs. Administrators may not always take the deliberative steps outlined above. Faculty members may need to push for inclusion through their faculty senate, committee assignments, and conversations with administrators. Faculty members must continue to insist on complete control of the curriculum, which includes the modality of course materials. Faculty in disciplines where time-limited digital access may be problematic should especially insist on the best modality for their students.

Students

CWDA programs are unfamiliar to many students. Although federal regulations ensure that they can opt out, the mechanism to do so may not always be obvious or seamless. Students need to be vigilant by reading their campus email, checking their campus bills, reading and understanding terms and conditions, creating new accounts, installing software, and more. To be savvy consumers, they need to know the cost that is assessed each semester and investigate the cost of acquiring the materials using other means. They need to resist the bias often displayed with flat-rate pricing. They also need to work through student government and other avenues to have a "seat at the table" when CWDA programs are developed and implemented.

Conclusion

The means of delivering course learning materials to students has reached an inflection point (Seaman & Seaman, 2020). It is critical to ensure that the processes and products emerging in this new era of CWDA programs do not begin a new cycle of price increases by perpetuating the consolidation of copyrighted digital content into the hands of a few corporations, eliminating the secondary markets, encouraging adoption of materials that may not improve student learning outcomes, and disincentivizing some of the best tools available to fight costs. Maintaining positive momentum will require concerted efforts by all campus stakeholders, including administrators, faculty, and students.

Notes

[1] At the end of 2023, InclusiveAccess.org listed 28 different names for digital access programs. These programs are often branded by the campus or university system, and so the list of names is ever increasing. Given the debate over whether campus-wide equitable access or inclusive access programs are truly equitable or inclusive, I introduce the neutral term "CWDA program" in this paper.

[2] In this paper, the term publisher is used to refer to a major publisher of traditional and digital content. In postsecondary education, three major publishers control more than 80 per cent of the market for postsecondary course learning materials in the US: Cengage, McGraw Hill, and Pearson (Vitez, 2020).

[3] In this paper, the term content distributor refers to a vendor that is contracted by a postsecondary institution to sell course learning materials on campus. Although some campus stores remain self-operated, two companies, Follett and Barnes & Noble, currently dominate the US market. According to their corporate web sites, Follett partnered with over 1000 colleges and

universities in North America in 2023 and Barnes & Noble partnered with 680 higher education institutions in the US (for a detailed history of Follett, see Breeding, 2023).

[4] The Department of Education has proposed elimination of the ability for postsecondary instructions to automatically add the cost of books and supplies to the student bill, which was the genesis of CWDA programs. If approved, the change would require explicit student authorization for textbook fees: it would prohibit "opt out" CWDA models, but "opt in" models would still be allowed. The Department of Education concluded the process of negotiated rulemaking in March 2024 without reaching a consensus on the "Cash Management" regulation, which allows the proposed change to move forward. The Department of Education is expected to introduce the amendment in the Federal Register and initiate a period for public feedback. The Biden-Harris administration has signaled its support, and if the regulation is completed by November 1, 2024, then it could take effect by the middle of 2025.

[5] Digital materials incur some environmental costs, including increased power consumption to run servers and data centers, the need to purchase and maintain devices to utilize the content, individual student printing of materials, etc.

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Journal of Higher Education Management, **39**(2), 127-147 (ISSN 2640-7515).

How did U.S. University Leaders Lead During the COVID-19 Crisis? Messages, Responses, and Leadership

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Abstract

Guided by the situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) and the four-frame leadership style theory, the study content analyzed the COVID-19-related website messages posted by the leaders of the top 200 U.S. universities and colleges during the first two months of the COVID-19 lock-down. The study found that two leadership styles, i.e., political and humanistic, and three crisis response strategies, i.e., concern, apology, and transcendence, were predominantly adopted by university leaders. Most importantly, the study found strong relationships between crisis response strategies and leadership styles. Specifically, the political leadership style was closely associated with the justification strategy, the humanistic leadership style with the concern, apology, and regret crisis response strategies, and the visionary leadership style with the transcendence response strategy. The study confirmed the effectiveness of adopting the situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) in studying crisis communication and pointed to the new direction of integrating leadership styles in the SCCT model.

Keywords: situational crisis communication theory (SCCT), COVID-19 pandemic leader messages, crisis response strategies, leadership styles

Introduction

On January 21, 2020, the United States reported its first confirmed case of COVID-19 (AJMC Staff, 2020). In the following months, university leaders, like other leaders across the U.S. and the world, encountered the shutdown of in-person operations. As universities pivoted to online program delivery and imposed cutbacks in on-campus operations, university leaders were forced to develop and implement crisis strategies to address the impact of the novel coronavirus sweeping the nation and the world. The pandemic hit universities and colleges hard physically, economically, socially, and politically. University leaders faced the daunting challenge of protecting the health of students, faculty, and staff while maintaining quality academic programs and ensuring the financial viability of their educational and research enterprises. They had to address the fiscal impact of declining enrollments, nearly 1.3 million students nationwide since the pandemic's start in the spring of 2020, and the corresponding losses of on-campus dining and housing revenues (National et al., 2022; Capatides, 2020).

The nationwide university shutting down created academic and financial crises similar to natural disasters: rare, ambiguous, highly impactful, urgent, and risky (Simola, 2014). The period of discontinuity during which the organizations' core values are challenged must be managed effectively (Zamoum & Gorpe, 2018). To maintain the universities' reputation and trust and eliminate misinformation and rumors, university leaders had to implement valid and efficient communication strategies to deliver their timely messages. As chief executive officers, university leaders hold a powerful position in influencing the universities' success (Fisher & Koch, 1996). How university leaders with various leadership styles shouldered their duties and responsibilities and implemented crisis communication strategies via the popular communication channel of the website is of great interest and significance to examine, as the website messages were the most popular and vital means for the university communities. Specifically, the study embraces two theoretical frameworks, the situational crisis communication theory, and the four-frame leadership theory, in content analyzing university leaders' crisis-related website messages during the first two months of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study aims to address what messages were delivered, what crisis response strategies were used, and how the strategies related to leadership styles.

Literature Review

COVID-19 Pandemic in the U.S.

COVID-19 emerged in late December 2019 in Wuhan, China, as an infectious disease caused by a novel coronavirus (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020). On January 21, 2020, the United States reported its first confirmed case of COVID-19 (AJMC Staff, 2021). On January 31, the WHO issued a global health emergency; three days later, on February 3, the U.S. declared a public health emergency (AJMC Staff, 2021). President Trump announced a national emergency on March 13 (FEMA, 2020). On March 19, California became the first state to issue a stay-at-home order, mandating all residents to stay at home except to go to an essential job or shop for essential needs. As many states followed California's lead, the entire country seemed to hit the pause button (Kandzer et al., 2022). On March 26, the U.S. Senate passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, providing $2 trillion in aid. On May 28, U.S. COVID-19 deaths surpassed the 100,000 mark, and by June 10, the number of U.S. confirmed cases of COVID-19 hit 2 million (AJMC Staff, 2021). The U.S. named its expedited COVID-19 vaccine development project Operation Warp Speed, and on Dec 10, the FDA approved the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine (AJMC Staff, 2021).

Crisis Communication

A crisis is defined as a situation in which the core values of an organization or a system are challenged and critical decision-making is required to address its destabilizing effect on the organization and its stakeholders (Kayes et al., 2012). Crises usually have the following characteristics: rare, significant, ambiguous, urgent, and involving high stakes (Simola, 2014). Therefore, organizations or corporations cannot afford to risk overlooking or discounting the crisis. They must have crisis response strategies in place. Crisis response strategies can be based on how the public attributes responsibility because responsibility attributions and causes of the crisis have a high correlation (Ham & Kim, 2019), which is speculated in the attribution theory by Wise (2004) and Coombs (2006, 2010). Other theoretical frameworks that explain crisis communication include the situational crisis communication theory (SCCT), the uncertainty reduction theory, and the restorative rhetoric theory.

Viewing the crisis from the people's perspective, the attribution theory focuses on how people make sense of crises when damaging crises arise (Coombs, 2010). If people attribute the responsibility to the organization, their perception of the organization would become more negative (Coombs, 2010; Wise, 2004). Therefore, the attribution theory highlights the need for communication and the importance of public relations in crisis management (Coombs, 2010; Wise, 2004).

The situational crisis communication theory (SCCT), however, expands the attribution theory to cover two more factors that could potentially threaten an organization's reputation besides the responsibility attribution: its crisis history and its prior relational reputation. In addition, Coombs (2007) pointed out that the type of crisis (victim, accident, or preventable/intentional) may function as another factor to shape how people interpret the situation or attribute the responsibilities. Coombs and Holladay (2006) and Coombs (2007) developed an integrated model to describe the dynamic interplay of all the factors covered in the SCCT, including three major crisis response strategies: deny, diminish, and rebuild (previously described as repair). The model provides a comprehensive approach to understanding how an organization's reputation is affected during a crisis.

Suppose reputation is the ultimate "what" to defend, then the strategies are the "how" to defend it. However, no consensus exists in naming the "how" part. While some studies used the term *corporate apologia* to refer to the how (Coombs et al., 2010), others call it *postures* defined as denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence (Coombs, 2007). For instance, the denial posture includes three strategies: attack on the accuser, denial, and scapegoat (Coombs, 2007; Ihlen, 2002; Maclean-Bristol, 2019). Added to the naming confusion is that strategies can be either extremely broad to be equivalent to postures/perspectives or very specific to be equivalent to specific measures and plans. However, the most common approach in crisis studies is the adoption of Coombs' (2007) three postures and ten strategies: the deny posture (attack the accuser, denial, and scapegoat), the diminish posture (excuse and justification), and the deal posture (ingratiation, concern, compensation, regret, and apology).

In a case study of a vaccine scandal crisis by the Chinese government, Bi et al. (2018) examined seven strategies under two postures by Coombs (2007): excuse, justification, ingratiation, concern, compensation, regret, and apology. They added the corrective action strategy proposed by Park and Hong (2011), which involves "fixing the problem and promising to prevent its recurrence by changing its initial positions or actions" (p. 4). Bi et al. (2018) found that the government and party media used justification strategies most frequently, followed by excuse, corrective action, and ingratiation strategies. Not surprisingly, the corrective action strategy received the most positive reaction from audiences.

Vielhaber and Waltman's (2008) study of the 2006 faculty strike at Eastern Michigan University found that both the university and the faculty union used defensive and ingratiation strategies to build their case and protect their reputations. The university also used the denial strategy to argue that the strike was not disrupting regular operations.

Watkins and Walter (2021) examined the crisis communication of President Donald Trump and seven U.S. governors. They found that governors focused more on mitigation strategies and systems to combat COVID-19, and Trump used a communication strategy of deflecting blame to China, downplaying the threat of the crisis, and passing mitigation responsibility to state leaders.

While Berger and Calabrese's uncertainty reduction theory (URT) (1975) emphasizes building a campaign by targeting uncertainty in crisis within the user-centered framework, Griffin-Padgett and Allison's restorative rhetoric (2010) was designed to reduce risk, restore order, and help victims make sense of and move forward in analyzing natural disasters or victim-oriented crises.

In sum, effective communication strategies in crisis play a crucial role in maintaining stakeholders' trust, eliminating unnecessary misinformation and rumors, and maintaining organizational reputation. All communication channels, including official announcements, press releases, and social media, must reconcile and remain consistent and robust in strategies and messages (Americas, 2020).

Leadership

Leadership has been conceptually defined from several theoretical perspectives, such as the *great man* theory (Carlyle,1814), the *trait* theory (Galton, 1869; Mann, 1959), and the *charisma* theory (Bass, 1997). While the *great man* theory emphasized that leaders were born, not made (Carlyle as cited in Banerjee & Bagchi, 2017), the trait theory (Mann, 1959) identified characteristics that a person can develop to become a great leader, such as personality, intelligence, and leader effectiveness (Judge & Bono, 2000). Bass (1997) added charisma as the defining factor in becoming a transformational leader. All these theories attempt to define the leaders from the perspective of what they are. However, there are other studies that focus on what leaders should achieve. For instance, Banerjee and Bagchi (2017) examined the leaders' achievements and compared the aristocratic versus participatory leadership styles regarding results and accomplishments. In addition, some researchers (e.g. Jamal & Bakar, 2017; Shin et al., 2011) focus on the leader's communication skill and find that the communication skill is the most critical factor in shaping these leaders. Other studies have identified strategic thinking in recognizing issues and recommending solutions as essential to leadership roles (Shin et al., 2011).

Bolman & Deal (1991a, 1991b, 1992, 2003) conceptualized leadership by integrating various disciplines and developed four distinct frames: structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. While structural and human resource frames are developed from the managerial effectiveness perspective, political and symbolic frames are from the who-the-leaders-are perspective (Whitmore Jr., 2014). The sociology-discipline-based structural frame emphasizes operational efficacy, goal attainment, and placing people in the appropriate roles (Bolman & Deal, 1991a, 1991b, 2003). Focusing on structures within a particular organization, the structural frame underscores the use of organizational charts, rules, a formal chain of commands, standard operating procedures, and policies and technology (Bolman & Deal, 2003). The human resource frame (Bolman & Deal, 1991a, 1991b, 2003) originated from psychology focuses on people and their wants and needs (Whitmore Jr., 2014). Providing a more constructivist environment, leaders of the human resources frame center more concern on their employees as individuals, and they seek to help their employees find meaning and satisfaction in their work for the organization (Hannah, 2013; Lamar, 2008; McCormack, 2013). With its roots in the discipline of political science, the political frame focuses on the clash between individual member goals and organization goals as they compete for limited resources (Bolman & Deal, 1991a, 1991b, 2003). Therefore, these leaders must dedicate more time to networking, building support bases, and negotiating and balancing in the organization (Hannah, 2013; Lamar, 2008; McCormack, 2013). Last, developed from the discipline of anthropology, the symbolic frame views a reality where meaning and predictability are created socially, facts are interpretative rather than objective, and multiple truths co-exist at the same time (Bolman & Deal, 1991a, 1991b, 2003). In order to provide a clear direction to the organization, leaders of this type emphasize ceremony, ritual, and stories' meaning (Hannah, 2013; Lamar, 2008; McCormack, 2013).

Corresponding to the four structural, human resources, political, and symbolic frames, Bolman and Deal (2003) devised four specific leadership styles: analytic, humanistic, political, and visionary. Analytic leaders focus on the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders involved by resorting to statistics, numbers, data, and analysis to make decisions and resolve problems. Humanistic leaders view stakeholders' skills, needs, feelings, limitations, and prejudices as the most important. The priority is given to people, and the leader practices the participatory or democratic leadership style. The political (pragmatic) leaders demonstrate adeptness at resolving conflict, bargaining, and coalition building. They advocate, negotiate, and value pragmatism in the message. Visionary leaders believe common values hold people together and attempt to mobilize charisma, drama, myths, rituals, ceremonies, and stories to promote the organization's mission.

This four-frame approach to the study of leadership has been widely recognized by leadership scholars (Roddy, 2010), even though scholars might use different names to refer to leadership styles. For instance, in their study of the coronavirus crisis, Du Plessis and Keyter (2020) proposed an adaptive leadership approach that incorporates five different leadership styles: transformational, transactional, autocratic, democratic, and servant. The transformational style that features the leader as an influencer embracing core values and ethical principles is similar to Bolman and Deal's (2003) visionary and humanistic styles. The autocratic style by Du Plessis and Keyter (2020) resembles Bolman and Deal's (2003) analytic style. Lastly, the democratic and servant style by Du Plessis and Keyter (2020) approximates Bolman and Deal's (2003) humanistic style.

Rameshan (2021) explored the COVID-19 crisis responses of world leaders from 20 selected countries from January to May 2020. The study categorized leadership styles into eight broad categories: stewardship, transactional, transformational, authoritarian, charismatic, narcissistic, autocratic, and heroism, which share some commonalities with Bolman and Deal's (2003) leadership styles. He found that the leaders with a 'missionary' action displayed positive leadership styles and generally had the best COVID-19 outcomes, while those with a 'gamer' action were associated with negative leadership styles and poorer outcomes, and those focused on 'political' and 'strategist' action fell in between.

University Leaders

While it was essential for national leaders to manage the COVID-19 crisis by efficiently marshaling national resources, it was also critical for higher education leaders to respond effectively to address the needs of their members directly impacted by the pandemic. Research has found that university leaders play a vital role in crises, and their crisis communication strategies may minimize the impact of crises on their constituents and enhance their institution's reputation. As chief executive officers, university presidents profoundly impact the institution's success (Fisher & Koch, 1996). The president representing the entire academic institution must be able to define attainable goals for administrative action; therefore, developing and maintaining effective communications systems uniting the various constituencies of the academic community are especially crucial (Moman Basham, 2012, p. 15).

Thelen and Robinson (2019) found that university leader messages that integrate rational and emotional appeals would solicit supportive reactions from the community. When university publics perceive presidents as human and understanding, their messages would more likely help the community deal with the crisis. Maitra (2007) noted that the ability of institutions to survive, reform, and excel lies in the hands of leaders. Tierney (1993) pointed out that the institutional decision-making process and institutional leaders' management affect how institutions work and how institutions are defined. Therefore, higher education institutions' leadership is vital to their academic and financial success.

Even though universities were not the direct responsible agent for the COVID-19 pandemic, university leaders had to respond to it and ameliorate its impact on the institution. To protect the health of their staff, faculty, and students, universities, and colleges had to shut down in-person academic and support functions, resulting in academic and financial crises. The crises caused by the campus shutting down have the same characteristics as other crises or disasters: rare, ambiguous, highly impactful, significant, urgent, and risky (Simola, 2014). The period of discontinuity during which the organizations' core values are challenged has to be managed effectively (Zamoum & Gorpe, 2018). That is why, during the crisis of campus closure, university leaders shouldered a significant role in addressing the crisis in their communities via significant communication channels.

Relationships between Leadership Styles and Crisis Response Strategies

As discussed above, leaders are defined by who they are (e.g., Carlyle, 1814; Galton, 1869; Mann, 1959; Bass, 1997) or by what they achieve (Banerjee & Bagchi, 2017). The four-frame approach to leadership rooted in four different disciplines of political sciences, sociology, psychology, and anthropology (Bolman & Deal, 1991a, 1991b, 1992, 2003) suggests leaders focus on different components or areas of an organization to achieve managerial effectiveness. Therefore, different leadership styles embrace different management strategies, especially in crises. For instance, Jamal & Baker (2017) found that employees who perceived a more robust demonstration of charismatic leadership communication by leaders during a crisis showed a more favorable evaluation of their organization's reputation, which indicates that charismatic leadership styles provided effective crisis strategies and earned favorable organization reputation from employees. Purnomo et al. (2021) identified the most effective leadership styles in crisis management as transformational leadership, followed by charismatic and transactional leadership. Harwati (2013) notes that an organization facing a crisis must focus on a two-way communication style, re-evaluate existing crisis strategies before implementing new strategies and introducing a transformational visionary leadership style to establish the vision and future direction of organizations. Schoenberg (2005) pointed out that leadership and crisis management are closely related, and he argued that preparation for crisis or planning may not be as important as leadership skills and that organizations should identify the most effective individuals to lead in a crisis and enlist them in crisis management efforts.

The above studies all pointed to the potential relationships between leadership styles and crisis response strategies. However, little scholarship has emerged dedicated to investigating these relationships empirically. Accordingly, this study aims to fill the gap by zooming in on the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, when both leadership styles and crisis response strategies were quite visible.

Research Questions

University leaders can adopt multiple ways and means to communicate with their communities. However, website postings may be one of the most critical channels during the pandemic. Website postings, a central resource that can update, inform, and clarify (Mooney, 2020), are much more efficient and flexible in delivering information as they may contain both text and videos. In addition, the website's reach to target audiences is much broader and more open than emails and virtual meetings. Constituents and others can find information about the university crisis response on websites quickly and easily.

For this reason, this study examines university website messages posted by university leaders. Specifically, it analyzes the messages (health-related information, campus operation plan information, and target audience), the strategies in the messages, and the leadership styles revealed in them. Last but not least, the study also analyzes how leadership styles and crisis strategies relate to each other. Here are the seven research questions of this study.

RQ1. What campus operation plans are covered in university leader messages to confront the crisis of campus shut-down due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
RQ2. What health-related measures are mentioned in university leader messages to confront the crisis of campus shut-down due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
RQ3. Who is the primary target audience for the messages of university leaders in confronting the crisis of campus shut-down due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
RQ4. What is the tone of the university leader’s messages in confronting the crisis of campus shut-down due to the COVID-19 pandemic
RQ5. What crisis response strategies do university leaders adopt in confronting the crisis of campus shut-down due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
RQ6. What leadership styles are revealed from university leader messages in confronting the crisis of campus shut-down due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
RQ7. What are the relationships between leadership styles and crisis response strategies in university leader messages confronting the campus shut-down crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Methods

Sample

A list of the top 200 USA universities and colleges ranked by the *2020 USA News and World Report* was identified. Please note that the list does not have precisely 200 universities and colleges because some colleges and universities rank in a tie. For instance, three universities were tied for No. 3, and nine were tied for No. 202 in the sample. Based on this list, researchers visited and searched the home pages of their websites.

Most universities and colleges created a special section link on their home pages with a bold, large-size heading or a horizontal banner at the top. Clicking on the link took the reader to the special section dedicated to the latest news/information on coronavirus and leader messages to their communities. If no special section on the home page appeared, researchers would go to the president's office page via the search box or the primary global navigation menu to locate the president's message. The third method of locating the president's message was to use the search box on the website by entering the keywords of the president's message and coronavirus. If the search box resulted in multiple results, researchers would identify the first most significant and relevant article on coronavirus dated from February 2020 to March 2020, and print the article as a pdf file. If the most significant president's message was delivered via YouTube as a video, the transcript of the video was obtained from the YouTube platform and used as the leader's message. When all these means were exhausted, and the leader message still could not be located, researchers would move on to the following university on the list. Overall, 199 university leaders' messages were collected from February 2020 to March 2020.

Measures

The message's date and word count were recorded first, followed by the messenger's ranks (president, chancellor, provost, vice president) and the university's geographic locations. The study followed the Census Bureau's classification (Northeast, South, West, Midwest) in coding the university's geolocation.

RQ1. What campus operation plans are covered in university leader messages to confront the crisis of campus shut-down due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Campus operation plans were analyzed using five variables: campus closures, class offerings, research activities, graduation plans, and communication channels. All five variables were measured as binary variables with yes and no answers.

RQ2. What health-related measures are mentioned in university leader messages to confront the crisis of campus shut-down due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Health-related measures were examined from the preventive aspect and treatment aspects. For the preventive, three variables were measured with yes or no: facial masking, social distance, and sanitizing. For the treatment, three variables were also measured with yes or no: quarantine, hospital, and emergency.

RQ3. Who is the primary target audience for the messages of university leaders in confronting the crisis of campus shut-down due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Target audience means the intended primary recipients of the messages. It was measured as a nominal variable with three categories: the institution's internal audience (students, faculty, and staff), the institution's external audience (parents, alums, friends, and communities), and both internal and external audiences.

RQ4. What is the tone of the university leader's messages in confronting the crisis of campus shut-down due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Tone is about sentiment, valence, and affect, which implies evoking emotions from the target audience. In this study, the tone is measured on a five-point response scale from pessimistic (anxious) to neutral (dry, serious official) to optimistic (hopeful).

RQ5. What crisis response strategies do university leaders adopt in confronting the crisis of campus shut-down due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

This study followed Bi et al. (2008) in operationalizing the crisis strategies. Specifically, eight strategies of excuse, justification, ingratiation, concern, compensation, regret, apology, and transcendence/reframing [1] were measured as binary variables of yes or no.

RQ6. What leadership styles are revealed from university leader messages in confronting the crisis of campus shut-down due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Leadership styles were measured as a nominal variable (yes or no) with four categories corresponding to Bolman and Deal's structural, human resources, political, and symbolic frames (2003): analytic, humanistic, political, and visionary. *Analytic* leaders rely on statistics, numbers, data, and analysis to make decisions and resolve problems. *Humanistic* leaders prioritize people and practice the participatory or democratic leadership style. *Political* (pragmatic) leaders are adept at resolving conflict, bargaining, and coalition building, and they attempt to bring in all sides and negotiate opinions. Such a leader is practical, pragmatic, and results-oriented. *Visionary* leaders believe common values hold people together, and they attempt to mobilize charisma and drama along with myths, rituals, ceremonies, and stories to promote the organization's mission. Moreover, they are optimistic about the future.

RQ7. What are the relationships between leadership styles and crisis response strategies in university leader messages confronting the campus shut-down crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

This last question examines the interaction between leadership styles (one nominal variable with four categories) and the eight crisis response strategies (eight dummy variables).

Intercoder reliability

[1] Excuse strategy is used to minimize the organization's responsibility by claiming its inability to control the events that triggered the coronavirus crisis. Justification strategy tries to minimize the perceived damage caused by the crisis. Ingratiation tries to remind the affected community of past good works done by the university. Concern strategy expressed great concern for the affected communities. But compensation strategy offers visible benefits such as tuition reduction, workload reduction, shortening the length of the semester or some other kind of flexibilities to make up for the affected communities. Regret strategy emphasizes the emotional side of feeling about the unfortunate situation. Apology strategy indicates that university does not take the full responsibility for the crisis but still asks the affected communities to understand what the university or college has to do to deal with the crisis. Transcendence or reframing strategy offers hope and confidence that the university or the college will survive the crisis and overcome the challenges and difficulties of the crisis.

To increase confidence in the quantitative findings, an intercoder reliability test of two graduate student coders was conducted on 10% of the sample.[2] The coding of variables on *campus operation plan*, *health-related measures,* and *target audiences* reached the satisfactory intercoder reliability in the first round, i.e., the calculated Scott's Pi coefficient was at least .8. The second-round coding training focused on the variables of *tone*, *crisis strategies,* and *leadership style*. The Scott's Pi coefficients for these variables reached at least .7 in the second round.

Results

A total of one hundred and ninety-nine presidents' messages (N = 199) were analyzed. The dates of the presidents' messages ranged between February 12, 2020, and March 30, 2020. The average length of the presidents' messages was six hundred and sixty-eight words (M = 668, SD = 538.79). The sampled universities and colleges are mostly located in the Northeast (33.7%), followed by the South (29.6%), West (18.6%) and Midwest (18.1%). Most of the messages were from presidents (73.7%), followed by chancellors (13.6%), provosts (11.1%), vice presidents (1.0%), and others (.5%)

RQ1. What campus operation plans are covered in university leader messages to confront the crisis of campus shut-down due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Class offering (n = 163, 81.9%) was the most frequently mentioned campus operation plan, followed by a *communication channel* (n = 158, 79.4%), *campus closure* (n = 146, 73.4%), *graduation plan* (n = 33, 16.6%), and *research activities* (n = 27, 13.6%). See Table 1 for details.

Table 1
Campus operation plan adopted by university leaders

	Percentage
Class Offering	81.9%
Communication Channel	79.4%
Campus Closure	73.4%
Graduation Plan	16.6%
Research Activities	13.6%

Note. These do not add to 100% because one message was coded for all five plans as five dummy variables.

RQ2. What health-related measures are mentioned in university leader messages to confront the crisis of campus shut-down due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

University leaders' messages most often mentioned *quarantine* (n = 56, 24.1%), followed by *sanitizing* (n = 48, 24.1%), *hospital* (n = 19, 9.5%), and *emergency* (n = 11, 5.5%). See Table 2 for details.

[2] To ensure the real sample's 199 messages to be kept in the sample for analysis, the researcher used other similar messages for the coding training from the same university websites from different times.

Table 2
Health-related measures adopted by university leaders

	Percentage
Quarantine	24.1%
Sanitizing	24.1%
Hospital	9.5%
Emergency	5.5%

Note. These do not add to 100% because one message was coded for all the measures as dummy variables.

RQ3. Who is the primary target audience for the messages of university leaders in confronting the crisis of campus shut-down due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

A single-sample chi-square test was run on the variable of the target audience, which found a significant difference with χ^2 (2, N=199)=284.15, p< 001. Specifically, the internal audience was the largest and the most dominant category of the target audience (89.4%), followed by both internal and external audiences (9.5%), and then by the external audience (1.0%).

RQ4. What is the tone of the university leader's messages in confronting the crisis of campus shut-down due to the COVID-19 pandemic

The average tone of the presidents' messages was more than dry or official and leaned towards optimistic (M = 3.7, SD = .94). The one-way ANOVA test showed tones of the presidents' messages varied significantly based on different leadership styles, F (3,195) = 50.27, p <.001, partial η^2 = .44. Specifically, the ***visionar****y* leadership style had significantly more positive tone (M = 5.00, SD = .00) compared to the *humanistic* (M = 4.14, SD = .87), *analytic* (M = 3.00, SD = .61), and *politician* styles (M = 3.18, SD = .62). The ***humanistic*** leadership style had significantly more positive tone (M = 4.14, SD = .87) compared to the *analytic* (M = 3.00, SD = .61) and the *political* styles (M = 3.18, SD = .62). See Table 3 for details.

Table 3
Tone by leadership styles

	Analytic	Humanistic	Political	Visionary
M	3.00_c	4.14_b	3.18_c	5.00_a
SD	.61	.87	.62	.00

F (3,195) = 50.27, p <.001, partial η^2 = .44

Note: Means with no subscript in common differ at p < .05 using Bonferroni post hoc comparisons.

RQ5. What crisis response strategies do university leaders adopt in confronting the crisis of campus shut-down due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Among the eight crisis response strategies, the most frequently used strategy was ***concern*** (n = 155, 77.9%), followed by ***apology*** (n = 126, 63.3%), ***transcendence*** (n = 102, 51.3%), ***justification*** (n = 82, 41.4%), ***regret*** (*n* = 78, 39.2%), ***compensation*** (*n* = 48, 24.1%), ***excuse*** (*n* = 43, 21.6%), and ***ingratiation*** (*n* = 24, 12.1%). See Table 4 for details.

Table 4

Crisis response strategies adopted by university leaders

	Percentage
Concern	77.9%
Apology	63.3%
Transcendence	51.3%
Justification	41.4%
Regret	39.2%
Compensation	24.1%
Excuse	21.6%
Ingratiation	12.1%

Note. These categories do not add up to 100% because one message was coded for each of the eight strategies as dummy variables.

Most presidents' messages used four strategies (*n* = 46, 23.1%), followed by three strategies (*n* = 44, 22.1%), five strategies (*n* = 37, 18.6%), one strategy (*n* = 26, 13.1%), two strategies (*n* = 23, 11.6%), six strategies (*n* = 13, 6.5%), zero strategy (*n* = 9, 4.5%), and seven strategies (*n* = 1, .5%). See Table 5 for details.

Table 5

Number of crisis response strategies adopted by university leaders

	Percentage	
	Observed	Expected
Four Strategies	46 (23.1%)	24.9 (12.5%)
Three Strategies	44 (22.1%)	24.9 (12.5%)
Five Strategies	37 (18.6%)	24.9 (12.5%)
One Strategy	26 (13.1%)	24.9 (12.5%)
Two Strategies	23 (11.6%)	24.9 (12.5%)
Six Strategies	13 (6.5%)	24.9 (12.5%)
Zero Strategy	9 (4.5%)	24.9 (12.5%)
Seven Strategies	1 (.5%)	24.9 (12.5%)

$\chi^2(7, N = 199) = 77.46, p < .001$

RQ6. What leadership styles are revealed from university leader messages in confronting the crisis of campus shut-down due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

The majority of the university presidents' messages used the *political* leadership styles (*n* = 85, 42.7%), followed by the *humanistic* leadership styles (*n* = 80, 40.2%), the *analytic* leadership styles (*n* = 17, 8.5%), and the *visionary* leadership styles (*n* = 17, 8.5%). See Table 6 for details. A single-sample chi-square test was conducted on the leadership styles. The results of this test indicated that the ***political*** (observed = 42.7%, expected = 25%) and the ***humanistic*** (observed = 40.2%, expected = 25%) leadership styles were used more than expected. The ***analytic*** (observed = 8.5%, expected = 25%) and the ***visionary*** (observed = 8.5%, expected = 25%) leadership styles were used less than the expected, $\chi^2(3, N = 199) = 86.49, p < .001$.

Table 6

Leadership styles adopted by university leaders

	Percentage	
	Observed	Expected
Political	85 (42.7%)	49.75 (25%)
Humanistic	80 (40.2%)	49.75 (25%)
Analytic	17 (8.5%)	49.75 (25%)
Visionary	17 (8.5%)	49.75 (25%)
Total	**199 (100%)**	**199 (100%)**

$\chi^2(3, N = 199) = 86.49, p < .001$

RQ7. What are the relationships between leadership styles and crisis response strategies in university leader messages confronting the campus shut-down crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

The political leadership style (51.2%) adopted significantly more justification crisis response strategies than the analytic (0) and visionary (23.5%) leadership styles. The humanistic style (43.8%) also adopted more justification strategies than the analytic (0), and so did the visionary style (23.5%).

The humanistic leadership style (95.0%) used significantly more concern crisis response strategies than the analytic (52.9%) and the political (64.7%). The visionary leadership style (88.2%) also used more concern strategy than the analytic (52.9%) style.

For regret strategy, the visionary leadership style (64.7%) was used much more than the political leadership style (16.5%), and the humanistic style (58.8%) was used much more than the political style (16.5%). In using the apology strategy, the humanistic leadership style (75.0%) surpassed the political style (55.3%) significantly.

Lastly, in the use of transcendence strategy, both the visionary leadership (88.2%) and the humanistic leadership style (81.3%) outran both the political (23.5%) and the analytical styles (11.8%) significantly. See Table 7 for details.

Table 7

Leadership styles by crisis response strategies

Crisis Response Strategies	Leadership Style				Chi-square
	Analytic	Humanistic	Political	Visionary	
Justification No	17 (100%)$_{a}$	45 (56.3%)$_{bc}$	41(48.8%)$_{c}$	13(76.5%)$_{b}$	χ^2 (3) = 17.75, p < .001
Justification Yes	0 (0)$_{a}$	35 (43.8%)$_{bc}$	43(51.2%)$_{c}$	4 (23.5%)$_{b}$	
Total	17(100%)	80(100%)	84(100%)	17 (100%)	
Concern No	8(47.1%)$_{a}$	4(5.0%)$_{b}$	30(35.3%)$_{ac}$	2(11.8%)$_{bc}$	χ^2 (3) = 29.38, p < .001
Concern Yes	9(52.9%)$_{a}$	76(95.0%)$_{b}$	55(64.7%)$_{ac}$	15(88.2%)$_{bc}$	
Total	17(100%)	80(100%)	84(100%)	17 (100%)	
Regret No	11(64.7%)$_{abc}$	33(41.3%)$_{c}$	71(83.5%)$_{b}$	6(35.3%)$_{ac}$	χ^2 (3) = 36.00, p < .001
Regret Yes	6(35.3%)$_{abc}$	47(58.8%)$_{c}$	14(16.5%)$_{b}$	11(64.7%)$_{ac}$	
Total	17(100%)	80(100%)	84(100%)	17 (100%)	
Apology No	7(41.2%)$_{ab}$	20(25.0%)$_{b}$	38(44.7%)$_{a}$	8(47.1%)$_{ab}$	χ^2 (3) = 7.99, p < .05
Apology Yes	10(58.8%)$_{ab}$	60(75.0%)$_{b}$	47(55.3%)$_{a}$	9(52.9%)$_{ab}$	
Total	17(100%)	80(100%)	84(100%)	17 (100%)	
Transcendence No	15(88.2%)$_{a}$	15(18.8%)$_{b}$	65(76.5%)$_{a}$	2(11.8%)$_{b}$	χ^2 (3) = 74.88, p < .001
Transcendence Yes	2(11.8%)$_{a}$	65(81.3%)$_{b}$	20(23.5%)$_{a}$	15(88.2%)$_{b}$	
Total	**17(100%)**	**80(100%)**	**84(100%)**	**17 (100%)**	

A chi-square test was run on leadership styles and the number of crisis response strategies. Eight strategies were dummy coded in this study. A compound variable was created by adding all eight dummy-coded strategies, resulting in a minimum of zero and a maximum of seven. To simplify and clarify the pattern, this compound variable with eight values was reduced to three values: small, medium, and large. The small value represented zero to two strategies, medium three to four, and large five to seven. The findings indicate that the analytic leadership style (52.9%) and the political leadership style (44.7%) surpassed the humanistic style (10.0%) and the visionary (17.6%) in having the small number of strategies category. For the category of the medium number of strategies, all four styles were not significantly different. In the category of the large number of strategies, the humanistic leadership (46.3%) dominated over all other three styles: analytic (5.9%), political (11.8%) and visionary (17.6%). See Table 8 for details.

Table 8
Leadership styles by the number of strategies in use

Number of Crisis Response Strategies in Use	Leadership Style				Chi-square
	Analytic	Humanistic	Political	Visionary	
Small number	9 (52.9%) a	8 (10.0%) b	38 (44.7%) a	3 (17.6%) b	χ^2 (3) = 17.75, p < .001
Medium number	7 (41.2%) a	35 (43.8%) a	37 (43.5%) a	11 (64.7%) a	
Large number	1 (5.9%) a	37 (46.3%) b	10 (11.8) a	3 (17.6%) b	
Total	**17 (100%)**	**80 (100%)**	**85 (100%)**	**17 (100%)**	

Discussion

Messages

The study examined how university leaders led during the first two months of the COVID-19 crisis when campuses shut down and switched teaching and learning from in-person to online. Leader messages averaged around 600 words and were primarily addressed to students, faculty, and staff, providing specific information on campus operation, with class offerings featured most frequently, followed by communication channels and campus closures. Different from regular campus announcements, leader messages incorporated public-health-related measures, especially quarantine and sanitizing information. Hospital and emergency information was briefly covered. However, in crises, leaders are not just messengers. They must lead and serve. They must display strength and hope in difficult times as the campus community looks to them for guidance. Therefore, the general tone of leader messages was found to lean towards optimism, which was especially important in the middle of uncertainty and the lack of knowledge about COVID-19 in the early days of the pandemic.

Crisis Responses

This study found that university leaders adopted multiple crisis response strategies in response to the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. These crisis response strategies represented university efforts to assure and comfort those involved or victimized in the crisis. Three crisis response strategies were found to be predominant in the leader messages, with the **concern** strategy being used most often, the **apology** strategy second, and the **transcendence** strategy third. While leaders attempted to appeal to their members emotionally by showing them care and sympathy (*concern* and *apology*), they also wanted to provide a sense of resilience and hope in overcoming hardships and abnormalities (*transcendence*) in difficult times. Leaders also resorted to the strategy of *justification* to rationalize operational decisions and diminish crisis damages. The *regret* strategy reminded the community of the empathetic feelings leaders had embraced. Few leaders used the strategies of *compensation*, *excuse, and ingratiation* as these strategies might be more useful if the crisis has ended *(compensation),* if the university holds a significant degree of direct responsibility for the crisis *(excuse),* or if a similar crisis happened in the past (ingratiation).

While university leaders utilized several strategies in their messages, they rarely used more than six strategies. Almost half of the leader messages included three or four strategies.

Leadership Styles

The political leadership style, one of the four proposed by Bolman and Deal (2003), prevailed as the most preferred style in the university leader messages in the first two months of campus shutdown, followed by the humanistic style, known for its concern and care for members. Taken together, political and humanistic leadership styles were present in 80% of the messages. Analytic styles appeared rarely because reliable data, facts, and numbers were not yet available in the early phase of the pandemic. On the other hand, urgent and brief messages had to be sent out quickly to communities, leaving little time or room for speculation about the future, thus resulting in the absence of visionary style in most leader messages.

Political style is results-oriented, and humanistic is people-oriented. The COVID-19 crisis created chaos for universities in teaching, learning, and other normal in-campus operations. University leaders needed to show adeptness at resolving conflicts and balancing the needs of the entire campus. Political leaders fit this role perfectly as this large-scale crisis impacted all the sectors of the campus community. Research suggests that this style works most effectively in addressing the need to keep the university in balance.

On the other hand, people were the ones victimized in the crisis, and their needs, feelings, and emotions demanded prioritization. Thus, a humanistic leadership style was also found to be a style adopted by university leaders and emerged as equally important as the political style in leader messages. Analytic and visionary styles occurred less frequently. The reason may be that at the early stage of campus closedown, leaders needed more reliable data to make informed decisions. Rituals and ceremonies, closely associated with symbolic meanings in the visionary leadership style, had to give way to more practical and humanistic treatments of the crisis. Still, nearly 10% of the messages incorporated the visionary leadership style.

Unsurprisingly, when leadership styles were compared in tone, the visionary style was found to be more optimistic than the humanistic style, and the humanistic style more optimistic than the analytic and political styles. The visionary style features hope and a focus on the future, while the humanistic style provides comfort and emotional support direly needed for those who felt stressed due to the COVID-19 lockdown.

Relationships Between Leadership Styles and Crisis Strategies

University leaders exercised the political and humanistic leadership styles most frequently in dealing with the COVID-19 crisis. Being closely associated with the justification crisis response strategy, the political leadership style starkly contrasts other leadership styles. When the COVID pandemic emerged in the middle of the semester, disrupting fully functioning campus activities and operations, university leaders had to react quickly and justify their administrative decision to close the campus and adopt online teaching and learning. Leaders had to demonstrate their decisions were results-driven because their ultimate goal was to maintain a university's operation and protect the campus community's health by preventing the spread of SARS-CoV-2. The justification strategy, as the most outstanding strategy in crisis, aligns itself well with the most prominent political leadership style.

Humanistic leaders incorporated more concern, apology, and regret crisis response strategies. This type of leadership style features the humane aspect of leaders. Humanistic leaders put themselves in the positions of affected community members and show their concern and compassion for their physical and emotional well-being. By expressing sympathy and empathy to affected community members, the leaders told the community that "I am with you" in this difficult time.

Visionary leadership did not appear as frequently as political and humanistic leadership styles. However, the visionary leadership style was found to be more significantly associated with the transcendence strategy than any other leadership style. The visionary style was also found to be similar to the humanistic style in that it was also closely associated with concern and regret strategies. These leaders focused on describing what the future held. They consistently delivered the message that the pandemic would be conquered and humans would overcome whatever hardships imposed on them. In addition, visionary leaders appealed to the community members' human feelings as humanistic leaders did. Their identification with community members manifested itself via sympathy and empathy. The analytic leadership style was not significantly related to any strategy, possibly due to the style's rare appearance in this study.

What should be noted, moreover, is the finding that all four leadership styles adopted not just one crisis response strategy but several crisis response strategies even though one leadership style might be more significantly associated with one particular response strategy. For instance, this research found the humanistic leadership style was associated with five strategies. The study concludes that university leaders, no matter their preferred style, mobilized various efforts and resources to accomplish the university's mission in crisis: ensuring its operation at its best while maintaining the community's well-being. It may be difficult to tell how effective these strategies and styles were through this content analysis of the messages. What can be sure, however, is that university leaders shouldered their responsibilities under challenging times and implemented various crisis response strategies in managing the pandemic crisis no matter what leadership style they embraced. They demonstrated leadership through integrating crisis response strategies in the pandemic crisis.

Contribution

This study made some contributions to the study of leadership and crisis strategies. It confirmed the effectiveness of adopting SCCT in studying crisis communication and pointed to the feasibility of expanding the model to include leadership styles developed by Bolman and Deal (2003). The identified relationships between leadership styles and crisis response strategies provided some empirical evidence. However, researchers have to ponder whether it is leaders of certain styles who tend to adopt particular crisis response strategies or it is the adoption of crisis response strategies that eventually defines how leaders lead. Researchers must invest further the relationships between crisis strategies and leadership styles to add a new perspective in understanding crisis communication. Still, this study validates that the analysis of both leadership styles and crisis strategies offers a solid understanding of how an organization operates in crisis. It concludes that university leaders rose to the crisis, utilized the website communication channel, and guided their institutions' constituents with their justification-response-crisis-strategy-oriented political leadership style and concern-apology-regret-crisis-response-strategy-oriented humanistic leadership styles in surviving the most challenging time. Another critical finding on leadership shows that leadership style is associated with several crisis strategies simultaneously, suggesting that leadership may not be a one-dimensional concept but a multi-dimensional one.

The sample for the study comes from the top 200 universities and colleges, and the conclusions cannot be generalized to all the universities and colleges in the United States as the sample represents only a portion of the entire spectrum of U.S. higher education. Second, the content analysis of leaders' messages is very limiting because the analysis relies only on what is present in the words of their messages. The study does not examine how audiences perceived the messages or how effective the leadership and strategies were in practice. Crisis communication as a subfield of communication studies may depend too heavily on message analysis. Researchers in this area must go beyond messages to develop an innovative crisis-related theoretical model to focus more on the recipient's views or perceptions of leadership and crisis strategies.

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