CHARACTERISTICS, ATTRIBUTES, AND QUALIFICATIONS PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION SEEK IN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

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Abstract

The purpose of this doctoral research study was to examine characteristics, attributes, and qualifications one needs to be considered for the position of president in higher education institutions. The job of the president is puzzling to those who are not in academia due to institutions that have hired individuals from various fields for the presidency, and the pathway to the presidency remains unclear as far as the characteristics, attributes, and qualifications that are required. Institutions of higher education are seeking individuals for the presidency who are leaders, possess integrity, and have the necessary essential educational credentials to fill existing vacancies. However, it was interesting to note that there is no generic “agreed-upon” set of qualifications for the presidency. This qualitative case study addressed the characteristics, attributes, and qualifications public institutions of higher education in the southeastern United States region are seeking in candidates for the presidency. Recommendations were made for current and aspiring college presidents, individuals participating in presidential selection processes, state-level officials who oversee the appointment of college trustees, and organizations that prepare and train future college presidents.

Keywords: president, presidential characteristics, attributes, qualifications, higher education, university, college
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my late mother, Mrs. Francella Millicent Knibbs, who departed this Earth on February 9, 2014, and was later laid to rest on March 9, 2014. I thank her for her belief in me and for making me believe in myself. Although she did not survive to see me complete this journey, I know she is watching over me and smiling at me for a job well done. Without her early encouragement during my educational journey, this task would have been merely impossible. When the road became a little rough, it was her voice and the sincerity in her eyes I remembered telling me to press on. Mama, I thank you for your encouragement. Sleep in Peace in Heaven!

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to explore the desired qualifications of presidential candidates from the perspectives of presidents and trustees at public institutions of higher education in the Southeastern United States. Information garnered from this study is useful for higher education institutions and to those who aspire to the senior level executive position. The findings of this study add to the body of literature dealing with presidential leadership of higher education institutions. Specifically, this study addressed the sole research question about how presidents and trustees described the traits, characteristics, attributes, and qualifications public institutions of higher education seek in ideal candidates who aspire to the presidency. Chapter One introduced the study through an overview of the context of the problem, the statement of the problem, the significance of the study, the purpose of the study, the central research question to be investigated, and the definition of terms used in the study to provide a clear understanding of the research. The theoretical framework was also introduced.

Background of the Study

The role of the college president is one of the most visible, senior administrative leadership positions in existence at an institution of higher education. Hired by the board of trustees (BOT) to manage the institution on a day-to-day basis, the role of the president requires one to be the public face of the institution, leading it and furthering its mission, among other duties. S/he is ultimately responsible for providing leadership in all areas of institutional activities, including public relations, fundraising, friend building, spokesperson, morale booster, financial officer, guardian, scholar, and cheerleader (Ramsden, 1998). Theoretically, decision-making is shared between the president and various constituencies, most notably, the faculty.
For the most part, colleges have a system of shared governance in which various groups of stakeholders partake in key decision-making processes, often through elected representation, allowing certain groups to exercise primary responsibility for specific areas of decision-making (Birnbaum, 1992a, 1999a, 1999b; Cohen & March 1986, 2000; Ingram, 1993; Lilly et al., 1987; Padilla, 2005; Thelin, 2004; Tierney, 2004). It is characteristic for the college president to play a dominant role in the college decision-making process and maintain more power than other stakeholders (Cohen & March 1974); however, it should also be noted that the president acts on behalf of the BOT, which delegates its authority to him/her. According to Cohen and March (1974), college and “university governance is simultaneously a system for making decisions and a system for certifying status” (p. 121). People outside of the university system believe that most responsibility lies with the president, but in actuality, the ultimate authority for activities relating to the institution resides elsewhere (Duderstadt, 2000).

Due to the dichotomy in the perception of the role of the president in higher education, it is difficult to define infinite and consistent terms the role of the president to his/her institution, and what job skills and characteristics that person should embody (Cohen & March, 1974). Historically, “college presidents were initially faculty members who assumed additional responsibilities for working with students and for the general welfare of the institution” (Brumfield & Miller, 2006, p. 10). Presidents typically came from academic disciplines due to their exposure to and expertise in educational matters and disciplines.

Being a university or college president is one of the most prestigious roles in higher education; however, very little research information exists regarding how to prepare for the role. In contrast to the business world, many colleges and universities do not prepare leaders to assume the presidential role at their institutions through strategic succession plans (Bornstein,
Historically, early college presidents were selected from within the college/university (Weisman & Vaughan, 2007, ACE, 2012). The expression, “first among equals” was used to describe ascendance to the presidency from faculty ranks (Martin & Samuels, 1997). Presently, the process of selecting a new president occurs mainly with the hiring of candidates from other institutions and, increasingly, from the business and political worlds.

The college presidency itself is a heavily researched area in the field of higher education, resulting in a wide assortment of publications, including longitudinal studies, memoirs, and individual doctoral dissertations. The American Council on Education (ACE) has studied the American college presidency since 1986. It continues to conduct surveys every four years to determine the career backgrounds, demographics, and length of tenure of serving presidents (ACE, 2012). The *Chronicle of Higher Education* also conducts an annual study to determine similar information on college and university presidents of four-year colleges and universities (ACE, 2012). These studies provide very little information regarding the characteristics, attributes and qualifications sought in presidential candidates; and there is a growing concern from many academic stakeholders regarding the preparation of college and university presidents to be effective in their roles as leaders (Ruben, 2003; Madsen, 2008; Polonio, 2004; Bridges, Eckel, Cordova, & White, 2008; Glick, 1992; Fisher & Koch, 1996; Fretwell, 1988). The problem of finding qualified leaders in the academe has escalated because colleges are moving away from the typical pathway and are now more likely to prefer prior presidential experience while searching for new campus leaders.

**Problem of Practice**

Increased attention has been devoted to higher education, especially as it relates to a current crisis facing institutions that are searching for presidential candidates. Nationally, 35%
of college presidents were expected to retire by 2015 (Shults, 2001), creating numerous vacancies. “More than half of college presidents plan to retire in the next six years” (Fain, 2010, p.1). Other projections indicated as high as 50% of higher-level administrators within higher education, beginning in 2014, will have some form of leadership turnover (Klein & Salk, 2013). Adding to this projected turnover, a study conducted on college presidents and their job satisfaction in the United States revealed that there is a significant lack of “enough qualified, interested, and prepared individuals to assume the number of presidential positions that will open once the current generation of college and university presidents retire” (Perrakis, Galloway, Hayes, & Robinson-Galdo, 2011, p. 57). Some analysts share their opinion that demonstrates the history, experience, and expertise that will be lost with these impending retirements are immeasurable (Cook, 2012; Weisman & Vaughn, 2007; Hockaday & Puyear, 2000; Little, 2002). To combat these concerns across the United States, efforts will be needed to prepare the next generation of leaders on campuses for the job of the president. Towards this end, there is a need to know what institutions desire in the candidates for the presidency. As many colleges and universities continue to face the daunting task of searching for a new president, a large pool of qualified candidates will need to be prepared to assume the leadership of colleges and universities across the United States. In addition, it is vital to consider the type of individuals that will fill these existing vacancies. This study examined what characteristics, attributes, and qualifications public institutions of higher education located in the Southeastern United States are seeking in presidential candidates.

**Purpose of the Study**

This research explored the topic of characteristics, attributes, and qualifications that public institutions of higher education seek in presidential candidates. The study provided
perspectives that may be of interest to boards of trustees and search firms regarding the selection of their candidates for the presidency, as well as the stakeholders within the institutions hiring new college presidents by providing information about the qualifications of what constitutes successful presidents. An understanding of these traits can benefit potential presidential candidates.

This study employed a qualitative case study research method. The case study research method investigates a phenomenon or a special issue by exploring one or more cases related to the topic. The purpose of the study was to explore the characteristics, attributes, and qualifications of six higher education institutions who seek candidates who aspire to the presidency. The central research question was designed to add to the body of knowledge on this topic. The next section articulated the need for the study and discussed the research that guided the investigation.

Significance of the Study

The American college presidency has changed dramatically (Selingo, 2013). “College presidents are the most critical and endangered species in American higher education today” (Fisher & Koch, 1996, p. 330). College leadership is nearing a tipping point, as the traditional aspirants among Chief Academic Officers (CAOs) are less willing to be candidates for the presidency than in the past (Ekman, 2010). According to a 2009 TIAA-CREF Institute study, there are no succession plans in place to accommodate CAOs who are deemed to be at a level of leadership directly below that of the president. Essentially, CAOs frequently retire or return to the faculty.

The average age of a college or university president is about 61, and the median age is 62, and a wave of retirements over the next five to ten years is inevitable (ACE, 2012; Spanier,
2010; Selingo, 2013; Stripling, 2011; Lemons, 2015). The American Council on Education (ACE, 2012) reported, “The average age of presidents increased from 52 years in 1986 to 60 years in 2006” (viii). In addition, presidential tenure at a single institution only averaged from 5 to 7 years (Basinger, 2002). Since the qualities for the position are not clear, existing and pending vacancies have become a timely and critical issue in higher education. Taking all of these factors into consideration, many academic stakeholders are concerned about the preparation of the next generation of college and university presidents to be effective leaders.

The increasing number of college presidents hired from outside academia is quite perplexing. Institutions of higher education were increasingly led by individuals who never had direct experience as faculty members, department chairs, deans, or provosts (Delabbio & Palmer, 2009). Kim and Cook (2013) reported that there is an increase in the number of first-time presidents who are hired from outside of the academe. Additionally, in 2013 the American Council on Education (ACE) reported an increase of 23% of first-time presidents appointed outside of academe. If this practice continues, there may be a risk that the field of higher education will eventually become an industry led by people who may not truly understand it. This is cause for concern, as talented individuals with an understanding of academia are needed to lead institutions of higher education -- individuals who understand the core operations of a campus in all areas, including governance, finance, student affairs, development, and admissions.

This study extends the existing body of knowledge by providing additional insights as they relate to leadership traits that are critical for future presidential aspirants. The next section discusses the overarching central research question that guided the study.
Central Research Question

Maxwell (2005) indicated, “The function of your research questions is to explain specifically what your study is about” (p. 67). Based on the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, and the theoretical framework, the researcher identified an overarching research question for the study to bring to the forefront what is sought in candidates for the presidency. The use of a single overarching central research question allowed the researcher to capture the basic goals of the study in one major question (Agee, 2009). The question, which provided the focus for this study, was:

*How do presidents and trustees of six public institutions of higher education describe the traits, characteristics, attributes, and qualifications they seek in ideal candidates who aspire to the presidency?*

While the responsibilities of the board of trustees in the presidential search process were clearly outlined, and the criteria that trustees use to make hiring decisions were not as transparent. Therefore, this question addressed what attributes were sought in presidential candidates. This question allowed the researcher to gather information by identifying those desirable traits, characteristics, attributes, and qualifications that were important areas of exploration and consideration when selecting new presidents.

Definition of Key Terms

Throughout this study, the following definitions of key terms were provided for clarity and consistency.

*Attributes:* Characteristics, knowledge, skills, qualities, and values possessed by a leader that differentiate the leader from followers, and predispose the leader to behave in consistent ways (Bass, 1990; Northouse, 2013).
**Board of Trustees**: The elected or appointed body which has been vested with responsibilities for authorizing, financing, and evaluating the educational activities in a given school system (National Center for Education Statistics Glossary).

**Characteristics**: A feature or quality belonging typically to a person, place, or thing that serves to identify them (*The Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 2012 Edition).

**College**: A higher education institution or establishment. College is used interchangeably with the university when referring to an institution of higher education in this study for the purpose of consistency (Jarvis & Wilson, 1999).

**President**: The designated leader of an institution of higher education, who reports to the board of trustees. The chief executive officer of the college, university, or system (Trachtenberg, Kauvar & Bogue, 2013). This study includes public college and university presidents.

**Public Institutions of Higher Education**: An educational institution operated under the authority and supervision of a state and supported primarily by public funds (National Center for Education Statistics Glossary).

**Institution of Higher Education**: Educational institution beyond the secondary level, especially at the college or university level (*American Heritage Dictionary*).

**Qualifications**: The action or fact of becoming qualified as a recognized practitioner of a profession or activity; a quality or accomplishment that makes someone suitable for a particular job or activity; a condition that must be fulfilled before a right can be acquired; an official requirement; the action or fact of qualifying or being eligible for something (*The Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 2012 Edition).
**Trait:** Personality, temperaments, dispositions, and abilities, as well as to any enduring qualities of the individual including physical and demographic attributes (Zaccaro, Kemp & Bader, 2004, p. 103).

**Theoretical Framework**

It is important for researchers to identify and present a theoretical framework when conducting a study (Evans, 2007). Eisenhart (1991) defined a theoretical framework as “a structure that guides research by relying on a formal theory…constructed by using an established, coherent explanation of certain phenomena and relationships” (p. 205). Without a theoretical framework, a study can lack proper direction. The framework leads to a fruitful review of literature; it can also be used in interpreting and explaining the findings accruing from the investigation (Imenda, 2014). A theoretical framework serves the purpose of informing the research questions for case study research, as the theory assists in defining the selection and parameters of cases (Yin, 1994). The conceptual framework is the system of concepts, suppositions, beliefs, expectations, and theories that support to inform the research (Miles & Huberman, 2004).

This study utilized trait theory as the theoretical framework (Stogdill, 1948). Trait theory offers in-depth insight specifically related to the area of higher education leadership. In educational settings, leadership is generally viewed through myriad lenses. When reviewing the literature, various perspectives provide a rationale for examining leader trait configurations.

Trait theory was one of the first systematic attempts to study leadership. In the early 20th century, leadership traits were studied to determine what made certain people great leaders (Northouse, 2012). “The trait approach to leadership suggests that select individuals have fundamental characteristics that differentiate them from non-leaders” (Silva and Carter, 2009, p.
The trait approach underlays one of the first attempts to study leadership “and was explored throughout the twentieth century” (Silva and Carter, 2009, p. 3). Trait theory played a dominant role in the early decades surrounding the notion of scientific leadership research. Later, it came under great scrutiny and was challenged by research that questioned the universality of leadership traits, therefore, questioning the theory in terms of its validity. More recently, the theory has made a resurgence and has regained some prominence based on conceptual, methodological, and statistical sophistication (Zaccaro, 2007). Locke and Kirkpatrick revisited the notion of trait theory in 1991 based on evidence that suggests that successful leaders possess ideal traits (Zaccaro, 2007).

Trait theory seeks to identify specific personality traits that distinguish leaders from non-leaders. It is based on the premise that leaders are born, not made; i.e., leadership is innate, rather than being developed through learning (Stogdill, 1948; Mann, 1959). Trait theory is defined as integrated patterns of personal characteristics that reflect a range of individual differences and serves to foster consistent leader effectiveness across a variety of group and organizational situations (Zaccaro, Kemp & Bader, 2004). As a theory of leadership, trait theory evolved from the “Great Man Theory” and takes into consideration human characteristics such as beliefs, values, and temperament (Yulk, 2013). Northouse (2013) summarized the leadership traits that are central to such the approach: intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability.

In the 18th century, and continuing into the early 20th century, the concept of leadership was studied in terms of leadership characteristics or “traits.” The predominant focus was on people in positions of leadership with responsibilities in formal, hierarchically-structured organizations (Creighton, 2005). The theory of trait leadership developed from early leadership
research, which primarily focused on finding people with heritable attributes (DeRue, Nahrgang, Wellman & Humphrey, 2011).

Over time, trait theory was further developed to include qualities that typical leaders should possess, such as honesty, integrity, confidence, motivation, and an understanding of business (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991). Traits that leaders possess are considered enduring characteristics that people are born with and that remain relatively stable over time (Fleenor, 2007). Trait theory also provides direction regarding which qualities are suitable if one aspires to a leadership position. This is based on the abilities of exceptional leaders in terms of personal characteristics.

During the mid-20th century, researchers challenged the trait theory as to its effectiveness for predictability and reliability (Amoroso, 2002). During the 1940s, the theory was called into question when Zaccaro (2007) stated, “many researchers discarded trait-based leadership approaches as being insufficient to explain leadership and leader effectiveness” (p. 6). However, the 1980s was a stimulating era, prompting scholars to look beyond the trait theory of leadership. That era saw new research surfacing on charismatic leadership and brought other theories to the forefront (Kenny & Zaccaro, 1983). Trait theory continues to be influential in relation to effective leadership in higher education. Trait research has become more conspicuous because of renewed interest in focusing directly on critical traits. According to Northouse (2013), “It [trait theory] began with an emphasis on identifying the qualities of a great person; next, it shifted to include the impact of situations on leadership; and most currently, it has shifted back to reemphasize the critical role of traits in effective leadership” (p. 16).

The theoretical framework surrounding this study stems from the notion that leadership has traditionally been viewed in terms of the traits or qualities that effective leaders should
possess. As such, this framework is used to identify potential leaders, in that it relates to the position of the presidency in a higher education environment. This allowed the researcher to identify a combination of personal characteristics, attributes, and qualifications, which can be as perceived as significant to effectively impact, successful academic leadership. Additionally, trait theory allowed the researcher to focus the study by examining a specific aspect of the topic and offering unexpected insights that may have been previously overlooked. As one of the longstanding leadership theories, it is still credible and relevant today. “The strength and longevity of this line of research give the trait approach a measure of credibility that other approaches lack” (Germain, 2012, p. 32). This theory asserts the overall importance of this role to include the personality traits in the leadership process.

Various theories can be applied to presidential leadership in higher education; however, understanding the relative importance of specific leadership traits could help institutions improve their leader selection and development practices. Trait theory focuses exclusively on the leader. As a result, the trait approach is theoretically more straightforward when compared to other approaches. In essence, it is primarily concerned with what traits leaders exhibit and who possesses those traits. Trait theory advocates that having a leader with a certain set of traits is crucial to have effective leadership. It is the leader and their personality that are central to the leadership process (Northouse, 2012). This theoretical framework was used to guide this study and provide a lens through which to garner information as it relates to the characteristics, attributes and qualifications, public institutions of higher education are seeking in candidates who aspire to the presidency. In summary, trait theory is an implicit leadership theory that is frequently recognized by higher education leaders and administrators (Birnbaum, 1989b). This theory informs empirical research studies (Bensimon et al., 1989; Birnbaum, 1989b; Northouse,
2013; Ramsden, 1998a; Smith & Forti, 1998) that frame contemporary leadership thought, and it informs the practices of successful leaders.

**Organization of the Study**

This study was divided into five chapters and created a strategy for the study. Chapter 1 began with an introduction to the study that incorporated background information, the statement of the research problem, an explanation of the purpose of the study, the significance of the problem, research question, and definitions of terms that were used throughout the study. Chapter 1 also introduced the theoretical framework, which influenced the direction of this study. Chapter 2 examined literature as it related to American higher education and the role of the presidency. In addition, this chapter provided background on the topic, including the current state of the research as it related to higher education, the presidency, and leadership. Chapter 3 presented an explanation and description of the research methodology to address the problem, multiple case study design, and information about the participants, data collection and analysis methods, and limitations and delimitations of the research. The chapter also presented an explanation of the steps that were taken to ensure the protection of human subjects and measures to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. Chapter 4 presented the findings of the study with perspectives from both presidents and board member participants, along with thematic analysis. Chapter 5 concluded the study with a discussion of the findings, contributions to the scholarly dialogue about presidential leadership in higher education, and implications for practice.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

In the process of writing this literature review, scholarly books, journals, and texts relevant to presidential leadership in higher education were reviewed. This literature review identifies the position of this study by referencing past, present, and contemporary research on the topic of presidential leadership in higher education. The review of the literature is divided into four sections. First, a brief overview of the role of the American college presidency is presented. This serves to provide information about the expansive scholarly and practitioner contexts related to the study, as well as define the college presidency and the changing role over time. The second section explores leadership by defining the term, its perspective, and its importance. The evolution of leadership is defined in higher education and is incorporated within the main topic, the role of the president, to the forefront. The third section of the literature review builds upon information that was introduced in Chapter I, explored characteristics, attributes, qualifications, and skills sought by institutions in presidential candidates. The fourth section reviews literature related to the role of the board of trustees.

Leadership Theory

Theories of leadership emanated from early civilization. Leadership theory is defined as “an explanation of some aspect of leadership; theories have practical value because they are used to better understand, predict and control successful leadership” (Lussier & Achua, p. 17, 2007). The concept of leadership was in early writings by Confucius in approximately 500 B.C. (Ayman, 1992). There are also numerous reflections on leadership found in the writings of Plato, Plutarch, and Caesar (Bass, 1990).

Trait theory, which will be explored more thoroughly in the next section, assumed that specific physical and intellectual attributes were inherent in leaders. Leaders were born to
assume leadership roles, and thus the notion of enhancing leadership traits through education and training was dismissed. In the modern era, while there are numerous studies that focus on leadership styles and types of college presidents (Benezet, Katz, & Magnusson, 1981, American Council on Education, 2007, 2008, 2012; Bensimon, 1989; Bensimon & Neumann, 1993; Birnbaum, 1988, 1999; Fife, 1987; Fisher & Koch, 1996; Fisher, Tack & Wheeler, 1988; Greenwood, 1996, 2002; McLaughlin, 1990; Nelson, 2000; Neumann, 1990). In addition, there is a small but growing body of literature that explores aspects of the career trajectory in aspirants for the presidency (Corrigan, 2002; Sullivan, 2001). Studies related to leadership in higher education are somewhat sparse, with most focusing on the role of the college or university president (Fisher et al., 1988; Plowman, 1991).

This research was grounded in the leadership theory founded in the literature reviewed. This study focuses on leadership theory and offers valuable and in-depth insights specifically related to the field of higher education leadership.

**Role of the President**

The role of the president on a college campus can be both symbolic and functional (Fisher & Tack, 1988). From a symbolic perspective, the president represents the “face” of the institution (Cohen & March, 1974). From a functional point of view, s/he is the titular academic leader of a college (Lilly, 1987). The notion of a symbolic role takes the form of being the head, the representative at ceremonial events, and the leader of the institution (Cohen & March, 1974). In the capacity of the functional, this individual plays a diverse role. This is portrayed in the various functions of fundraising, public relations, consultation, budgeting, planning, articulating a “vision,” crisis management, mediation, staff development, and consensus-building. The role of the president is viewed as “the personal embodiment of the institution’s values” (p. 15).
Reisman (1986) refers to the president as the institution, “living logo” (p. 10). The role of the president appears to be extremely complex and requires versatile abilities.

**Defining the College President**

In the United States, the senior-level administrator who is in charge of an institution of higher education is commonly known as the president. This individual is in charge of furthering the institution’s mission and exercises broad responsibility for the academic, student, financial, physical, technological, philanthropic, and all other dimensions of the institution. The president reports to the board of trustees to formulate a shared vision for the institution and seeks to bring it to the next level of accomplishment and recognition. There are several definitions in the existence of the role of the college president. The president is ultimately responsible for providing leadership in all areas of institutional activities, including public relations, fundraising, friend-building, spokesperson, morale booster, financial officer, guardian, scholar, and cheerleader (Ramsden, 1998). That definition highlights who or what constitutes a college president and the role s/he plays in higher education.

**The Changing Role of the American College Presidency**

The college presidency is one of the oldest professions in the United States and was in existence even before the United States became an independent nation (Birnbaum, 1999b). The title of “president” officially became a part of the American higher education system in 1640, when Henry Dunster was elected president of Harvard College (Hofstadter & Smith, 1961; Prator, 1963; Rudolph, 1990; Lilly et al. 1987, Thelin, 2004). The president, recognized as a symbolic head of the institution, “is the personification and embodiment of the institution” (Fisher & Tack, 1988, p. 34) and plays a central role in the management and governance of the institution. The president's broad areas of responsibility include academic affairs, oversight and
maintenance of facilities, fund-raising, and communication of the image of the institution through institutional advancement.

The model the colonial colleges adopted in early America emulated the English and European institutions. The president became the central authority, both academically and administratively, and traditionally received a great deal of delegated authority from the board (Hofstadter & Smith, 1961; Rudolph, 1990; Thelin, 2004). Historically, the role of president was an educator but has now changed to include the performance of more administrative duties. Kauffman (1974) wrote, “the college president should provide the knowledge and leadership to guide the institution in its responses to the challenges and opportunities it faces” (p. 8). There has been a dramatic change in the role of the president (Ikenberry, 2010). This change is evident when the comparison is made to today’s president, who may never engage in the development of the academic curricula, teach, or involve in the recruitment of faculty.

A historical review of the American college presidency revealed that in previous years, the president was seen as the most important person in the institution. The president was tasked with and served as the head disciplinarian, teacher, counselor, and “father” to many young students who transitioned and made professional contributions to society (Schmidt, 1930). During the mid-to-late 1800s, the role of the president evolved, resulting in both the educational process and the college becoming more sophisticated (Rudolph & Thelin, 1990; Schmidt, 1930). Back in the 1800s, the role of the college president and the power affiliated with the office was quite different when compared to the president in the 1900s. The office of the president took on some spiritual and pastoral roles, later transforming into duties that were administrative in nature with fundraising at the helm (Rile, 2001). Historically, the president was viewed as an academic leader who was responsible for developing the academic curriculum of both faculty and students.
Approximately 400 years of existence, the American college presidency has progressed into the complexity of interrelated roles (Fleming, 2010).

Interestingly, the job of the president has now diminished from what it used to be and is lacking in prestige as viewed in contemporary society (Duderstadt, 2010; Fisher & Koch, 1991). Significant changes in the last several decades have led to academic, administrative roles in colleges and universities that are less attractive than they previously were (Strathe & Wilson, 2006). Overall, however, serving as a president is viewed as both a privilege and a high calling in academia.

The presidency is not a lifelong career but should be viewed as a chapter during a career (Kerr, 1985). Although much has been researched and written regarding the leadership characteristics and competencies important to affect professional practice in higher education administration, leadership in higher education appears to be a bit more complex (ACE, 2007a; ACE, 2008; AACC, 2004; Bensimon, 1989; Bensimon et al., 1989; Birnbaum, 1989b; Birnbaum, 1992; Northouse, 2007; Ramsden, 1998a). This is because of the unique characteristics of normative, professional organizations, ambiguous goals, dual control systems, and conflicts between professional and administrative authority (Bensimon et al., 1989; Birnbaum, 1989b).

**Leadership**

Leadership has been studied from both a theoretical and empirical perspective (Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014; Grint, 2011; Northouse, 2013). To date, there is no single universal definition of leadership, even though it continues to be one of the most researched aspects of behavioral science in organizational psychology. “There are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are people who have tried to define it” (Northouse, 2013, p. 2). Since leadership has multiple definitions, there has not been a
consensus of its usage and meaning. The term is generally felt to be a deep-rooted characteristic that certain individuals possess. One formal definition states, “Leadership is the ability to influence individuals or groups toward the achievement of goals. Leadership, as a process, shapes the goals of a group or organization, motivates behavior toward the achievement of those goals, and helps define a group or organizational culture. It is primarily a process of influence” (Ratzburg, 2002, n.p.).

Leadership in higher education is not as conspicuous as leadership in the corporate world (Bornstein, 2010). This can be attributed to the idea that most leaders in the capacity of college presidents started their careers as faculty (Cook, 2012). Later in their careers, they may have been promoted to the department chair, administrator, or vice president. The American Council on Education (ACE) reported that 70% of university and college presidents began their careers as faculty. The report also showed that 45% of faculty were in roles of CAO/Provost or senior academic affairs executives immediately prior to becoming president. In addition, another 20% served as presidents of other higher education institutions, and 20% came from outside of higher education (Cook, 2012). Succession planning, which is the cornerstone of business leadership, is missing in academia (Fulton-Calkins & Milling, 2005). It is quite unusual for department heads, deans, provosts, or university presidents to groom potential successors, which plays a pivotal role as far as succession planning is concerned (Smith, 2007; Witt/Kieffer, 2008; Association of Governing Boards, 2013; Scott-Skillman, 2007). When someone does step down from their position, an outside search is usually conducted, and it is often a year or more before a permanent successor is in place (Sanaghan, Goldstein, & Gaval, 2008; Moore & Burrows, 2001).

Colleges and universities need leaders who can turn overwhelming expectations for leadership into reality (Padilla, 2005). Leadership training, which is vital in virtually every
company, is lacking in higher education. Candidates who rose to the presidency were successful because they navigated a clear pathway by mastering the academic hierarchy (Greenwood, 2002). They were effective in their former roles as faculty members, department chairs, deans, and academic vice-presidents (Fisher et al., 1988; Cohen & March, 1974). Despite the number of career pathways and previous roles, no one is completely ready for the position; “No matter how accomplished one has been in other positions, the presidency is a completely different experience” (Sanaghan, Goldstein, Jurow, & Rashford, 2005, p. 34).

The job of leading a college can be quite complicated. The president is expected to be on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year (Bowles, 2013; Ekman, 2010). Bowles (2013) discussed the numerous roles of the position and wrote, “It is a 24/7 job like no other. A president is constantly with many people who want a piece of her time. It requires the agility, stamina and fitness of a boxer, and the ability to take a punch both physically and metaphorically” (p. 1). The American Council on Education (ACE) Fellows Program advocates that a president must be strong physically, emotionally, and mentally (2013).

The Presidency

Despite the extensive body of research, higher education institutions are finding it a difficult task to identify the characteristics, attributes, and qualifications in potential candidates for the presidency. There are various viewpoints and practices about developing a statement of requirements for a presidential vacancy. Some institutions issue an extensive list of qualifications that could not possibly be met by any living candidate to declare that he /she possessed such qualifications” (Kauffman, 1974, p. 35). This list of qualifications, in the form of generic descriptions, is extensive, ambiguous, and subject to interpretation by board members.
The role of the president is regarded as the most prestigious and influential in academia (Fisher, 1991).

Prior to their appointments, most presidents know little about the role they will play (Freeman & Kochan, 2012a). The only person who approaches the job with real knowledge is someone who has experience by virtue of previously holding a successful presidency (ACE, 2012; Rottweiler, 2005). Bornstein (2003) stated, “The presidency is not a typical profession for which an aspirant can prepare through specific education and training. Unlike lawyers, doctors, military professionals, and the clergy, presidents hold the prestige and status of their position only as long as they inhabit the office” (p. 17). Kauffman (1983) argued that the presidency is “a temporary role” for which one applies but to which one is “called” (p. 7).

In higher education institutions, the president represents the voice for the vision of the institution. However, s/he does not create that vision alone. Stakeholders (students, faculty, staff, alumni, parents, visitors) are the "assets" of colleges and universities and play a vibrant role due to their competing interests (Bornstein, 2010). The president needs to identify and be attentive to the strengths and weaknesses of the institution by preserving and developing these assets by not only meeting their needs but also exceeding their expectations. Understanding the capacity of those who work for the college or university and how the institution fits within the larger higher education sector allows the president to determine what the institution can achieve.

The president reports to the board of trustees (BOT) and is responsible for day-to-day administration, management, leadership, and oversight of the institution. The president’s job is not only internal; the president works with a wide range of external constituents to support and sustain the institution’s vision, values, and mission (Trachtenberg, Kauvar, & Bogue, 2013). As a leader in higher education, the president is challenged with envisioning and affirming,
articulating, implementing, and serving as the keeper of the institution’s goals and values (Shaw, 1999).

**Presidential Leadership in Higher Education**

Balderston (1995) identified five major functions of university leadership. These five functions are as follows: 1) the clarification of the mission of the organization and determination of long-range objectives and shorter-range goals, 2) the allocation of the organization’s resources to priority uses within the terms of objectives and goals, 3) the selection and evaluation of key personnel, 4) representation of the organization to external constituencies and strategic management, and 5) organizational change (p. 78). The essential tasks of the position of the president include defining and articulating the mission of the institution, developing meaningful goals, recruiting talent, building consensus, creating the climate, and providing resources (Rhodes, 1998). However, the most challenging task is defining the institution’s mission and developing its goals. While this appears to be a short list of functions, presidential leadership in higher education goes beyond these roles and duties.

**Characteristics of a President**

Examining the vacancy listings for presidents in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reveals that institutions are seeking a strong leader who is capable of moving the institution to the next level (Alexander, 2013). Many advertisements seek individuals who are highly effective administrators with strong interpersonal skills, as well as a strong understanding of the role of academics, faculty, and scholarship. In addition to these characteristics, institutions seek
someone who is caring, fair, sensitive to students, and in touch with faculty and staff needs. In addition, BOTs valued five characteristics in presidential candidates:

1. fiscal management ability
2. fundraising capacity
3. external relationship-building skills
4. communication skills
5. ethical and risk-averse behavior

(Aspen Institute and Achieving the Dream, 2013)

One expectation is that the presidential candidate should possess power in their capacity. Fisher and Koch (1996) asserted, “power is a subject about which leaders, perhaps especially college presidents, are seldom candid” (p. 12). Duderstadt (2010) specified, “if presidents value integrity, openness, truth, and compassion in their personal activities, these characteristics are more likely to be embraced and valued by those within their universities” (p. 110). These are just some of the many characteristics that are used by many higher education institutions in seeking candidates for the presidency.

Attributes

In addition to characteristics, there are attributes that potential candidates must possess. According to Moss and Johansen (1991), “attributes act as predispositions, facilitators, and constraints that predispose and shape behaviors in a wide array of tasks, groups, and contexts. The greater the latitude provided by the situation, the more likely it is that attributes will shape behavior” (p. 4). Today, the job of a president in higher education institutions requires attributes similar to those of a corporate executive officer, as the role of the presidency has become very complex and requires the use of versatile abilities (Bowles, 2013). Presidents of local
community colleges are usually hired from the private sector (Brumfield & Miller, 2006) because they have a responsibility to serve as an economic engine for the community, whereas in stark contrast, at the university level, nearly all presidents come from prior academic positions (Monahan & Shah, 2011).

Some of the many studies regarding college presidential leadership attributes concluded that individuals with strong interpersonal skills, budgeting, and a vision for the institution were needed for the diverse institutions of higher education (Corrigan, 2002). Others advocated that having a broad range of interests is advantageous for the position of a college president, as it allowed the individual to feel comfortable and to relate to others when engaged in discussions (Seagren, Wheeler, Creswell, Miller & VanHorn-Grassmeyer, 1994).

Attributes can also take the form of mannerisms and appearance, including the style of dress. An individual vying for the position of president is expected to take pride in personal grooming and appearance, in that it will be a matter of interest to campus colleagues and the community. Pierce (2012) emphasized presidents’ appearance and remarked that their safest choices are “tailored clothes in subdued colors that travel well without wrinkling and do not call attention to their appearance other than by suggesting a professional persona” (p. 107).

More recent analysts posit that specific traits, skills, and competencies are ideal for the pool of presidential candidates (Blackman & Schweyer, 2007). Those in the past stated that aspirants to the presidency should be good leaders possessing a broad mix of high-quality leadership traits and behaviors (Bolman & Deal, 1997). Still, others argue for clearly defining the competencies required of an executive position (Cashman, 2001) and assert that identifying the strengths or skills necessary for success in a position is important for aspiring leaders to have the opportunity to develop professionally (McCall, 1998).
Skills and Qualifications

The qualifications that are sought in presidential candidates should relate to the specific needs of an institution, as identified by their board of trustees (Kerr, 1985). Institutions should find a president with a strong background in the academic world because it would be difficult for someone to successfully lead an educational institution if they do not truly understand its workings (Whittier, 2006; ACE, 2007; Freeman & Kochan, 2012; Vaughan & Weisman, 1998). Candidates vying for the position of the president are expected to possess a terminal degree and an academic background that demonstrates a commitment to academic quality, including outstanding teaching, scholarship, and service.

Board of Trustees

In the United States, a board of trustees or BOT governs colleges and universities. The BOT plays a significant role when it comes to presidential leadership, as they appoint and support the president during his/her tenure. The selection of a college or university president “is one of [a governing] board’s most important functions” (Nielsen & Newton 1997, p. 34). The board appoints search committees, determines the characteristics and qualifications of an ideal candidate, and oversees recruitment, including advertisements, reviews of applicants, interviews, and finally, the appointment of a new president (Plinske, 2009). In addition to these responsibilities, the BOT advises the president, evaluates his/her annual performance, and determines appropriate compensation (Pierce, 2012). The relationship between the board and president is very important in maintaining the institution’s public image and achieving its vision, mission, and goals (Carver, 2006). While the responsibilities of BOTs in presidential searches are clearly outlined, the criteria that trustees use to make hiring decisions are not as transparent, leaving one to ponder the question: what are the qualities needed for this position, and why?
The BOT must have a clear understanding of the key leadership roles during a presidential search to have a successful outcome (AGB, 2012). Despite the BOT’s weighty responsibility of hiring a college president, the responsibility is not theirs alone; it is shared between the trustees, faculty, and external stakeholders and the state board (in a state college or university) (Florida Board of Governors). Skinner (2010) indicated that as a search committee seeks candidates, it would be prudent for them to seek those who have “…courage and tenacity to assert priorities and make choices among competing goods and then to report on the results of those choices” (p. 12). This does not appear to be a simple task since many times; presidential searches fail due to disagreements between the parties involved (Trachtenberg et al., 2013).

**Summary of Literature Review**

Based on this literature review, it can be concluded that institutions of higher education are generally seeking outstanding candidates with a record of academic leadership. They desire to find someone who has a strong academic background, fundraising abilities, and a commitment to educational quality, student services, and student success. At the same time, the demands currently placed on colleges drive the need to recruit presidents who possess the leadership characteristics and skills necessary to guide their institutions through the challenging, higher educational environment.

Analyzing presidential leadership through numerous studies has revealed a wealth of information. Regardless of the context, leadership is the ability of a person to influence others towards goal accomplishment. Every year, higher education institutions face the challenge of choosing a new president, yet the task remains complex, controversial, and difficult because it remains unclear what is desired in a presidential candidate. The role of the president continuously changes, making the process considerably more challenging. What are the
characteristics, attributes, and qualifications public institutions of higher education seek in candidates for the presidency? As discussed, there is little known about the specific personal attributes, characteristics, and abilities that are most sought after and are critical for future presidents. This chapter presented an overview of the scholarly and research literature related to the presidency of colleges and universities. Chapter Three discussed the methodology for this research study.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Overview

In this chapter, the following entities were incorporated into this chapter as (a) research traditions and paradigms that influenced the methodological approach, (b) the research design, and (c) the necessary steps that were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the data.

Purpose of the Study

This research study was designed to examine presidential leadership in higher education as it relates to the characteristics, attributes, and qualifications public institutions of higher education seek in presidential candidates. Through qualitative inquiry, the researcher examined the following research question:

*How do presidents and trustees describe the traits, characteristics, attributes, and qualifications public institutions of higher education seek in ideal candidates who aspire to the presidency?*

Qualitative Research Methods

A qualitative design was selected for this research to facilitate the exploration of how sitting presidents and trustees of public institutions of higher education described the traits, characteristics, attributes, and qualifications they seek in candidates for the presidency. This qualitative research allowed for a detailed look into understanding what the binding characteristics, attributes are, and qualifications public institutions of higher education in the Southeastern United States seek in candidates for the presidency. A qualitative paradigm is appropriate when (a) a problem or issue needs to be explored; (b) we need a complex, detailed understanding of the issue; (c) we want to understand the contexts or settings in which participants in a study address a problem or issue; and (d) quantitative measures and the
statistical analyses simply do not fit the problem (Creswell, 2012, pp. 39-40). According to Creswell (2015), qualitative research is the best approach when a researcher needs to “research a problem in which you do not have the variables and need to explore” (p. 16). Therefore, this study utilized a qualitative methodology to gather and analyze data to answer the research question.

Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, seeking to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012). There are several reasons for using qualitative methods for this study. The use of a qualitative approach is appropriate when one is dealing with an educational problem (Creswell, 2012). A qualitative paradigm is appropriate when (a) a problem or issue needs to be explored; (b) a complex, detailed understanding of the issue is needed; (c) the contexts or settings in which participants in a study address a problem or issue need to be understood; and (d) quantitative measures and the statistical analyses simply do not fit the problem (Creswell, 2012).

Creswell and Miller (1997) supported the use of a qualitative approach to research by advocating that it “places a substantial emphasis on how participants in a study make sense or meaning of a situation” (p. 5). Qualitative research is well suited in studies where the knowledge sought involves:

(a) understanding the meaning for the participants in the study of the events, situations, and actions with which they are involved

(b) understanding the particular context within which the participants act, and the influence that this context has on their actions

(c) understanding the process by which the events and actions take place
(d) identifying unanticipated phenomena and influences and generating new grounded theories about the latter
(e) developing causal explanations
(Maxwell, 1996, p. 5)

Case Study

The specific approach selected for this qualitative study was the case study approach. A case study is a “research process that investigates a phenomenon within real-life contexts, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2003, p. 13). A case study takes into consideration a particular study that is conducted within a real-life or contemporary context or setting, and it has been designated as the preferred method when posing “why” and “how” questions (Yin, 2009). This approach allowed the researcher to have minimal control over events since the focus entails a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context.

Corcoran et al. (2004) argued that the case study is a mechanism that seeks to transform and improve practice, and the use of a case allows for confirmatory (deductive) as well as explanatory (inductive) findings (Hyde, 2000; Yin, 2009). Case study research reveals a particular event in a real-life context (Eisenhardt 1989; Merriam 1988), involves information affiliated with an individual or a group of people and is done through observation, interviewing, and by use of other evidence. The information that was garnered from case studies provides data to the researcher regarding why phenomena occurred and what can be learned from those occurrences (Yin, 2003). Case study research produces an abundance of information, which may be complex to understand at first hand without in-depth analysis (Stake, 1995).
The qualitative research method selected for this study was the multiple case study approach, which allowed for a multi-perspectival analysis (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). A multiple case study allowed the researcher to analyze within and across each case. Through this research, a rich, detailed description of multiple bounded systems was used (Johnson & Christiansen, 2004). The adoption of multiple cases allowed the researcher to intentionally utilize more than one specific site or case. Merriam (1998) asserted that the inclusion of multiple cases is a “common strategy for enhancing the external validity or generalizability of findings” (p. 40). Qualitative case study analysis was used to analyze data gathered from each of the cases included in the study. Through data analysis, themes and patterns were identified that indicated relationships and fundamental differences, as well as variations, with regard to what trustees and presidents of public institutions describe as the traits, characteristics, attributes and qualifications public institutions of higher education seek in ideal candidates who aspire to the Presidency.

**Participants and Interview Protocols**

The researcher identified the cases studied (Merriam, 1998), which included sitting presidents and corresponding BOT members from six public institutions located in the Southeastern United States. The researcher intended to conduct twelve interviews with twelve participants, one president and one board member from each of six institutions, and gathered extensive field notes including rich, detailed descriptions of participants’ lived experiences (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009).

Interviews were conducted using an interview protocol and probing questions to gain an understanding of how the participants in the research perceive their experiences as they relate to the presidency. The six cases in this study represented the multiple-case study approach. The
precision, validity, and stability of the findings were strengthened through this method (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

**Data Collection**

Interviews were the primary form of data collection. The interviews consisted of six public college presidents, and six corresponding board members provided in-depth responses, which became data for this study. Interviews were conducted to explore the personal traits, attributes, characteristics, and qualifications, which were considered most critical in the selection of future college presidents, as perceived by the board members and presidents. The researcher’s line of questioning put forth non-threatening and open-ended questions. In this way, the interviews allowed the participants to act as informants, rather than simply respondents (Yin, 2009).

**Role of the Researcher**

The researcher interviewed all the participants by including probes for open-ended questions. The researcher included transition messages for the interviewees and captured interview comments during reflection after each interview. The researcher made notation that related to anything unusual and any concerns about the interviews. The researcher used non-directive probes for open-ended questions about unclear responses or responses that did not address the questions posed to the interviewees (Brenner & Canter, 1985). This included probes such as “anything else?” “can you elaborate some more?” “why do you feel that way?” and “are there any other issues involved?” The interview protocol included introductory statements and closing statements. A typical example included the researcher beginning with an opening statement regarding the need for the study coupled with facts concerning what are sought in presidential candidates. The researcher incorporated self-reflection as a strategy to eliminate
potential biases and to exemplify transparency during the process, which could have affected the study. The researcher ensured that the research questions that were posed in the study be designed to allow each president to give detailed, first-hand accounts of their experiences, thoughts, and decisions, which led each of them to their positions in the academy. In like manner, the BOT members were asked to give detailed, first-hand accounts of their experiences, thoughts, and decisions regarding what they were seeking or have sought in candidates for the presidency. Through the interview process, the researcher focused on personal traits, attributes, skills, abilities, and other factors that were crucial for presidential leadership. The open-ended research protocol questions that were used with the participants are contained in Appendix A.

**Site Selection**

The purposeful sampling strategy was used in this study, and participants were matched to meet specific criteria (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Purposeful sampling is a method whereby the researcher intentionally selects individuals and sites for the study to learn or understand a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2012B). Gliner and Morgan (2000) described purposeful sampling as a method of selecting the study participants from a population that is accessible and appropriate for gaining information relevant to the study. Yin (2009) pointed out that there are several essential criteria for the selection of the research site. The researcher included public institutions of higher education in the study that were close to an urban area and were located within the Southeastern United States. The institutions selected included two major state universities, three state colleges, and one public honors college; this allowed for different perspectives from individuals at the different institutions, which was advantageous to the study.

The participants in this study consisted of six currently serving presidents of public institutions of higher education in the Southeastern United States and six members of the boards
of trustees, one from each of those institutions. The criterion ‘public’ refers to four-year institutions that are funded by the state. The goal was to procure a minimum of twelve individuals from the institutions to respond to the interview questions.

**Participant Selection**

According to Creswell (2008), there is no set number of individuals when conducting a case study; however, it is essential to select cases within a study as a sampling strategy to benefit from having the representation of diverse cases and descriptions from multiple perspectives. The participants who are currently sitting presidents of accredited public higher education institutions served at least one full term in office (a minimum of five years). Board members were presently serving members on one of the boards of trustees for at least five years, who have participated in at least one presidential search. The criteria for inclusion were to select participants who were in the presidency, were informed about the characteristics, attributes, and qualifications candidates should possess for the presidency, and were able to speak about how vital those were from a higher education perspective.

To be eligible for participation in the study, trustees must have participated in at least one presidential search. The board members were important to the study because they played a major role in making decisions about how the president would be selected. They are responsible for appointing a search committee, determining the characteristics and qualifications of an ideal candidate, overseeing advertisement of the position and recruitment of candidates, reviewing applicants, interviewing finalists, and finally, selecting and appointing a new president (Plinske, 2009). Based on the purpose of the study and the intent of the research questions, the context of this study allowed only sitting university/college presidents and board members to meet the
criteria for inclusion. The participants for the study were selected from six of the Southeastern state institutions.

**Positionality**

According to Foote and Bartell (2011) and Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013), the term positionality both describes an individual’s worldview about a particular study and the position they have chosen to adopt in relation to a specific research task. I selected this topic because my passion for this work derives from my career aspirations as I, too, aspire to one day become president of a higher education institution. I currently work in higher education as an Academic Advisor. I have worked in this sector for the past 17 years in various roles. I have observed that unlike other industries where one can participate in a formal training program and get promoted to senior positions, there is no formal training or academic background, which prepares leaders in higher education for the unique and distinct experience that are required for the presidency.

This interest or problem of practice I explored brought to the forefront the issue of the presidency and the deficit higher education is currently experiencing in finding leaders in relation to the characteristics, attributes, and qualifications public institutions of higher education are seeking in presidential candidates. Therefore, my job as a researcher was to try to provide the readers with something new to add insight and perspective to their knowledge. I highlighted a particular angle or focus, a neglected aspect of a topic, and used my own personal experience and observation to my advantage by adding my contribution to the ongoing debate. I gleaned information from several peer-reviewed articles to solidify my argument and made it more credible for the reader. My intention was to be objective instead of being subjective since I am not in a presidential position and relied on the experts by using their points to strengthen my
argument. This study assisted me in reducing my biases by being objective and not subjective; showed how studies related to one another, and how my own ideas fit within the existing literature. However, while doing this, I was cognizant of my generalizations and social categorizations because those could expose my biases in many ways. Therefore, it was imperative that during the course of the study, I adhere to proper standards and guidelines. The main idea behind this was to convey to the reader my academic opinion of the knowledge and ideas that have been established on a topic and what were their strengths and weaknesses.

**Recruitment and Access**

The researcher sent an email letter of invitation to each potential president participant in the study (see Appendix B). The email introduced the researcher and the purpose of the study. In addition, the information was provided to the potential participants regarding the length of the interviews and that the interviews would occur at each participant’s convenience. Prior to establishing the interview schedule with the presidents, each potential participant was asked to provide access to interview one member of the board of trustees from their institution. Accordingly, the same letter of invitation (see Appendix B) was sent via email to the board participant as an invitation to participate in the study. It is the hope of the researcher that all participants maintained participation in the current research study throughout the duration of data collection and analysis. However, the participants were allowed to withdraw at any time and for any reason. No incentives or rewards were provided as part of their participation.

When interviewing elite individuals who are in positions of power and influence, researchers might need to “adapt the planned structure of the interview, based on the wishes and predilections of the person interviewed” (Marshall & Gretchen, 2011, p. 155-156). The interviews were conducted during a visit to each of the six institutions. Since the study involved
human subjects, all participants were required to review and sign an informed consent form, and additional verbal consents were documented of interviewees; the interviews were recorded. The data for the study was transcribed from the interviews, stored, and managed by the researcher.

**Data Collection, Storage, and Management**

Interviewing has been described as “a conversation with a purpose” (Kahn & Cannell, 1957 p. 149) and as the “favorite methodological tool of the qualitative researcher” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994 p. 363). Interviews provide the most significant amount of data, as the intention is to investigate the experiences, perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of individuals (Merriam, 2009). In this study, the data points included interviews, documents, and observations. The researcher documented field notes written during participant interviews; ideas developed during the research process were incorporated. In addition, the digital recording of the interviews allowed for verbatim transcription. The principal data-gathering strategy consisted of personal interviews that were conducted in face-to-face format (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Polkinghorne (1994) advocated that there are tremendous benefits to conducting face-to-face interviews, as they facilitate trust and openness. Face-to-face interviews allowed for the observation of verbal and non-verbal data, including facial expressions, gestures, and other non-verbal communications (Carr & Worth, 2001; Hiller & DiLuzio, 2004).

Each interview session lasted for approximately 45-90 minutes. The interviews were recorded with a digital recorder for transcription. Upon completion of the interviews, all digital recordings were forwarded to the third-party professional, confidential transcription service, Rev (www.rev.com). The data analysis began with the delivery of the first transcript. In addition to the recorded interviews, the researcher kept field notes of conversations with participants, as well as phone conversations. All e-mail correspondence and information gathered for this study were
kept in a locked file cabinet at the home of the researcher. The participants were assured that the audio recordings and transcriptions would not be used outside of this study and that the materials would be stored as electronic files in a locked file cabinet in a location accessible only by the researcher.

The electronic files were numbered according to the participants. The researcher assigned a code number to each of the presidents and members of the board of trustees who were interviewed. For added confidentiality and anonymity, the participants were assigned first-name pseudonyms as well as institution pseudonyms, which were used when referring to each individual. Signed documentation was kept for a period as specified by the Institutional Research Board (IRB) of Northeastern University. Once the dissertation has been completed in accordance with Northeastern University’s IRB standards and published with ProQuest, all of the electronic files will be destroyed, and the paper copies were shredded. However, signed consent forms will be retained in a locked file cabinet for a period of three years following the completion of the study and in conjunction with Northeastern University’s requirements. Only the researcher has access to the interview data. After that time, all records will be destroyed or deleted. All data specific to the study were analyzed, interpreted, and reported.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the method of analytically searching and organizing the interviews, field notes, documents, and other data that are collected to allow the researcher to identify research findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). An inductive process was used to analyze the data and build themes (Thomas, 2006). Data were analyzed through inductive means by first interpreting the transcript through codes, then placing the codes into categories, and finally developing themes
that encompass the ideas from the categories that have emerged (Corbin & Strauss 1990; Polkinghorne, 2005).

After the interviews were transcribed, a copy of each transcript was sent to the appropriate interviewee to review for accuracy, correctness (member checking), and an opportunity to clarify her/his data should he/she wish to do so. Upon the return of materials, the researcher analyzed the transcript by conducting a thematic analysis of the data through clustering. The data gathered were analyzed from the interview responses and coded to compare the data collected in the interviews. The participants’ responses to the interview questions were analyzed by establishing categories related to each question. The identifying commonalities among responses included the identification and interpretation of patterns. Saldana (2013) noted that when qualitative coding data, there is no universal way. The researcher’s coding process involved using descriptive and evaluative coding, which identified groups of essential categories within the data (Saldaña, 2013). Notes were made along the margins of the interview transcripts, as well as field notes. This eventually assisted the researcher in capturing emerging themes or concepts.

Data were organized and coded into categories by use of descriptive coding. Codes that share similarities were threaded into groups that were intuitively and logically bonded. To analyze the interview responses, the coding and themes method, as identified by Guba and Lincoln (1994), were employed. In qualitative data analysis, codes are defined as “tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 56). The authors discussed the process of coding, which involves labeling chunks of text for the purposes of organizing themes and patterns.
The data were coded, and commonalities and emerging themes were identified. Qualitative data analysis is “working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 145). Once this process was completed, the information was organized into a format that illustrated commonalities among participant responses. To ensure that valid inferences were made from the data collected, the researcher employed a triangulation process, in which data from multiple sources were integrated to confirm or support the inferences drawn within a study (Stake, 1995). Results from the interview transcripts were triangulated with field notes, personal reflections, and relevant documents, which assisted with the interpretations of the findings.

Limitations/Delimitations of the Study

The researcher made every effort to protect the study’s integrity and to eliminate bias. As with all studies, there were several existing limitations and delimitations, which were noted when interpreting the study’s findings. Limitations might affect either the reliability and the validity of the findings and conclusions of this research. The scope of the study was limited to six public colleges/university presidents and six members of the BOT from the six Southeastern state institutions. The semi-structured interview protocol results may reflect individual bias and opinions of the participants who were interviewed and will not be generalizable to other populations or locations. In addition, the relatively small number of participants were included in the current study limits the findings from being broadly applicable to the general population. This study relied on the willing participation of college presidents and board of trustee members to explore their perceptions regarding the characteristics, attributes, and qualifications that are sought in presidential aspirants. It may not capture the personal intent of all board members
since the researcher interviewed only one BOT member from each institution. Only public institutions of higher education in the Southeastern state were considered for this study; the findings may not be generalizable to all colleges.

Delimitations, as defined by Creswell (2007), further narrow the study. Specifically, Creswell (2007) concluded, “the scope may focus on specific variables or a central phenomenon delimited to specific participants or sites, or narrowed to one type of research design” (p. 148). The delimitations of this study included the scheduling of the interviews that complied with the presidents and BOT members’ schedules and the understanding that those participants would have complete autonomy of the setting, means, and locations where the interviews were conducted. College presidents and BOT members are extremely busy individuals; therefore, the interviews may be subject to change and reschedule at their request. Trustworthiness, validity, and creditability were crucial parts of a qualitative study, and the terminologies were explored based on the ability and effort of the researcher.

**Trustworthiness, Validity & Credibility**

To ensure trustworthiness, it was important to provide participants the opportunity to review the researcher’s interpretation of the data through member checking (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). To emphasize trustworthiness, the researcher openly acknowledged his involvement in higher education by identifying his academic leadership position, in addition to providing his contact information to respondents. After concluding the interviews with the presidential participants and BOT members, follow-up e-mail interviews were conducted for purposes of member checking and data validation. This allowed participants the opportunity to ensure that what was said in the interview accurately reflects the participants’ feelings and responses and clarified any issues that were unclear. The researcher ensured trustworthiness during the
interview process achieved through member checking, which the researcher intensified by restating, summarizing, or paraphrasing the information received from a respondent. This augmentation was done to ensure that what was heard or recorded was accurate.

Trustworthiness is significant to the study as well as credibility and validity. The study established trustworthiness by providing participants with the opportunity to review the interpretation of the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Ensuring credibility was an extremely important factor for establishing trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It was the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that information and data were not misrepresented or misunderstood. In this study, the concepts of internal and external validity were used as a means of enhancing the credibility of the findings. Merriam (1998) described internal validity as “hinging on the meaning of reality” (p. 201), and determining if the research findings match what was there. Of Merriam’s six strategies for achieving internal validity, three were incorporated within this study: (a) Triangulation (b) Member checks, and (c) Statement of researcher’s biases.

Researcher’s Biases

When conducting qualitative research, it is challenging to eliminate biases (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Therefore, the researcher was aware of how personal biases may influence the study. The researcher did self-reflection, which exemplified transparency in the process. This identified and controlled, resulting in biases that could have affected the research. In addition, the researcher was cognizant that the choice of a research topic should not be based on personal issues, as individual passion may undermine objectivity.
Audit Trail

Another internal validity measure that was employed for this study was the use of an audit trail. An audit trail is a transparent description of the research steps taken from the start of a research project to the development and reporting of findings (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The audit trail is record-keeping of what was done in an investigation (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). In the case of this study, an audit trail was used to solidify trustworthiness. Incorporating the use of audit trails assisted in solidifying both the dependability and conformability of the research study. Using audit trails provided transparency of the process because they were available for quick checking of raw data, field notes, memos, and procedures for data analysis. The utilization of audit trails was beneficial because they provide a detailed description of the steps that were taken as far as gathering the data and the formulation of conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, the researcher conducted uniform research by using the same methods in data collection for all participants. The participants were asked similar semi-structured interview questions with responses captured accurately via the recordings, field notes, and transcriptions. Overall, the research process was fully documented and auditable. Ethical assurances were a priority in protecting the participants and in compliance with research standards.

Protection of Human Subjects

“Protection for participants goes beyond confidentiality and anonymity” (Butin, 2010, p. 106). There are two traditional considerations in the ethics of qualitative research involving human participants: (a) having informed consent and (b) protecting participants from being harmed (Bogdan & Biklin, 1998). The protection of human subjects was central to the design of this study, so ethical issues could be identified before the study takes place (Creswell, 2013).
Throughout this study, extensive care was exercised to protect the rights and privacy of the participants. The design plan of this study was submitted for approval to the Human Subjects Committee of Northeastern University Research Review Board on research involving human subjects (see Appendix A for HSRB Approval Form). In addition, all participants’ informed consent forms contained the following information: (a) the purpose of the study; (b) the methodology of the study; (c) the benefits of the study; (d) an estimate of the required time commitment; (e) a statement indicating that participation would be voluntary and that they may withdraw at any time during the process; and (f) a statement that the identity of participants would remain confidential.

**Summary**

The purpose of this multiple case study was to examine presidential leadership in higher education as it relates to the characteristics, attributes, and qualifications public institutions of higher education seek in presidential candidates. In this chapter, the researcher provided a description of the methodology and procedures for this study. A multiple case study approach allowed the researcher to gain insight into what qualities, characteristics, and qualifications are sought in candidates who aspire to the presidency in public higher education institutions. The population for the study included currently sitting presidents and BOT members.

An explanation of the organization, data collection, analysis, and trustworthiness was introduced. The researcher also included a discussion of data collection procedures, the role of the researcher, and the rights of human subjects. Finally, the description of the data analysis and data verification procedures were outlined. The findings and analysis of data were contained in Chapter Four, and Chapter Five included discussion of the findings.
CHAPTER 4. Presentation of the Data

This chapter provides data collected through interviews with presidents and board members, as well as the findings that emerged through this case study. All of the participants were interviewed in a face-to-face setting to best capture their responses. Additionally, the chapter provides a detailed description of the participants in this study. Demographics of each of the college and university presidents who participated, as well as the board members, are included in the results presented. Data were gathered from the interviews to ascertain responses to the following research question:

*How do presidents and trustees of six public institutions of higher education describe the traits, characteristics, attributes, and qualifications they seek in ideal candidates who aspire to the presidency?*

Six college and university presidents in southeastern states, as well as six board members of those institutions, were interviewed and asked a series of interview questions categorized as background questions, research-focused questions, and future-aspirants-to-the-presidency questions. These questions were designed for this study with the purposes of eliciting responses based on the central research question. Following data collection, the data were transcribed using basic qualitative analysis per Creswell (2018). The interviews were transcribed, prepared, organized, analyzed, and manually coded, and several themes were generated and identified. The coding was done by hand through the use of open and axial coding methods based on directions by Corbin and Strauss (2015). The interview protocol and questions used for the study are contained in Appendix A.

Initial interviews were conducted in a face-to-face format that was beneficial to understanding how the participants responded in their own space. The interviews were
substantial in discussing the merits of the study and how it could contribute to the dialogue relating to presidential leadership in higher education. During the interviews, the participants provided an understanding of how they carry out their job functions on a daily basis. The twelve participants were at ease and comfortable within their identified spaces, and each one shared their reflections as they built trust with the researcher.

This chapter provides insight into the participants’ backgrounds and their ascension to the presidency, as well as their experiences during the presidency. It includes members of the board of trustees and the length of time they have served in their role in addition to information about their appointment. The chapter includes participant profiles, a description of the sample, the data analysis, the findings of the analysis, and a summary.

**Description of the Sample**

The participants’ profiles provide a brief synopsis of their lives, experiences, and opinions. Given the nature and responsibilities of both the presidents and the board members, all of the participants were devoted to furnishing significant data for the study. The participants consisted of six presidents at various institutions of higher education (four males and two females). The six board members were comprised of three males and three females. All participants met the established selection criteria for the research, as described in Chapter 3.

The participants were affiliated with public four-year institutions. Of the six presidents who participated in the study, all held terminal degrees in various disciplines and served in a variety of academic leadership roles in higher education. The presidents began their academic careers as faculty members and, over time, were promoted to department chairs, deans, vice presidents, vice chancellor, chancellor, and provost. Three served as president in another higher education institution prior to their current role. All six board members held the minimum of a
Bachelor’s degree. However, one had a terminal degree and served a short term as an interim president; one other board member held a Master’s degree and an Honorary Doctorate. All presidents were over the age of 50, and board members were all over age 30.

The participants represented three currently-sitting presidents from three state universities and three currently-sitting presidents from three state colleges. Two were presidents of institutions offering doctoral-level degree programs, while the other four presidents were from institutions offering Baccalaureate degrees. The study included participants from three state colleges that offered Bachelor’s degree programs but did not offer a Master’s degree. The remaining institutions in the study provided students with the opportunity to obtain their Bachelor’s, Masters or Doctoral degrees. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) Commission on Colleges accredited each of the institutions to award the degrees as mentioned above. The first interview was conducted in January 2018, and the final interview was conducted in December 2018.

Table 4.1
Characteristics of the Study Participants – Presidents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Experience in the Presidency</th>
<th>Years of Experience in Higher Ed.</th>
<th>Traditional Route Yes/ No</th>
<th>Institution Type</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Public/Baccalaureate</td>
<td>Ph. D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Public/Baccalaureate</td>
<td>Ed. D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Public/Baccalaureate</td>
<td>Ph. D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Public/Baccalaureate</td>
<td>Ph. D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Public/Doctoral</td>
<td>Ph. D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Public/Doctoral</td>
<td>Ph. D.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.2
Characteristics of the Study Participants- Board Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Experience on Board</th>
<th>Served on Search Committee for the Presidency Yes/ No</th>
<th>Appointed to Board Yes/ No</th>
<th>Institution Type</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Public/Baccalaureate</td>
<td>Associate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Public/Baccalaureate</td>
<td>B.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Public/Doctoral</td>
<td>MBA/Honorary Doctorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Public/Baccalaureate</td>
<td>B.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Public/Doctoral</td>
<td>J.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Public/Baccalaureate</td>
<td>B.S.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All participants were given pseudonyms, and the order in which they were assigned; these names were randomly shuffled to maintain confidentiality. The following pseudonyms for the presidential and the board member participants are indicated below in alphabetical order and last names along with brief narratives:

**Presidents**
- President Atkinson
- President Baker
- President Camden
- President Decatur
- President Echols
- President Fulton

**Board Members**
- Trustee Appling
- Trustee Bibb
- Trustee Cook
- Trustee DeKalb
- Trustee Elbert
- Trustee Fayette
President Atkinson

Dr. Atkinson is the sitting president of a State University, a public Doctoral-granting institution serving over 15,000 students. Dr. Atkinson earned a Bachelor’s degree, a Master’s degree, and a Ph.D. in Economics. He has an extensive career in higher education, and previously served in the positions of chancellor, president, and vice president, department chair, dean, associate dean, and tenured faculty member. Those positions propelled Atkinson to the first presidency. Having approached retirement, Atkinson suddenly decided to embark on another presidency and is currently serving a second tenure as president.

President Baker

Dr. Baker is the sitting president of a state university, a public doctoral and research-one institution serving over 50,000 students. Among the study participants, Dr. Baker is the longest-serving college president. Baker earned a Bachelor of Arts in Social Work and Psychology, a Master’s in Social Work, and a Doctorate in School Counseling and Counseling Psychology, respectively. Baker was a tenured faculty member with a full professor rank and served as the dean of education. Dr. Baker’s journey into the academy was also extensive. She previously served as provost and vice president of academic affairs. Additionally, Baker also served as director and as chair of the NCAA Board and the American Council on Education (ACE) Board.

President Camden

Dr. Camden is the president of a public liberal arts college serving approximately 1,000 undergraduate students. He is an accomplished scholar who completed Bachelor’s, Master’s, and Doctorate, all in mathematics. Camden previously served as head of the office of research and sponsored programs, department chair in mathematics, and vice president of academic
affairs. In addition, Dr. Camden has served as a visiting professor at major universities in the U.S. and overseas.

**President Decatur**

Dr. Decatur currently serves as the president of a public state college serving a student population of approximately 17,000. Like President Atkinson, President Decatur is serving in a second presidential appointment. Dr. Decatur’s career began as a faculty member. This participant gained tenure and decided to seek other opportunities within the academy. He served as director for a satellite campus, associate dean, dean of liberal arts and sciences, and president. President Decatur holds an undergraduate degree in chemistry, a Master’s degree in mathematics, and a Doctorate in chemistry.

**President Echols**

Dr. Echols is the president of a public state college that serves approximately 11,000 students. Dr. Echols has served almost 30 years in higher education, with experience spanning small private institutions to large public colleges. Echols served as vice president for finance and administration, chief financial officer, and treasurer. She is also serving a second appointment as president. President Echols has undergraduate degrees in accounting and marketing, an MBA, and a Doctorate in organizational leadership.

**President Fulton**

Dr. Fulton is the sitting president of a public state college serving around 16,000 students. Fulton has earned four degrees: an associate in science degree, a B.A. in business administration; a Master of Science in education administration; and a Ph.D. in community and junior college administration. Like Presidents Appling and Decatur, this participant is serving a second
appointment as president. Prior to that, Fulton served in the capacity as assistant director of business and computer technology, associate dean for business, science, and technology, graduate research assistant, dean, and vice president. His journey in academia began as a faculty member. President Fulton served very little time as a teaching faculty member before making the transition to administration.

**Trustee Appling**

Trustee Appling completed an undergraduate degree in political science, then went to Law School and completed a Juris Doctorate. This participant’s passion for continuing education led to serving on the board of trustees. Prior to that, Trustee Appling served at the same institution in the role of interim president, as well as two years on the board at another higher education institution. He is currently serving in the capacity of chair of the board. Being in that position has allowed Trustee Appling to serve on presidential search committees.

**Trustee Bibb**

Trustee Bibb works in the financial industry, which includes private banking, investment management, insurance, securities, institutional services, and fiduciary services. Trustee Bibb has received several awards and recognitions, which included an honorary doctorate degree. This Trustee has an undergraduate degree in accounting and an MBA, both from the alma mater, where he currently serves as chair of the board of trustees.

**Trustee Cook**

Trustee Cook is a local entrepreneur, CEO, and a board member. She is a certified professional florist and is the longest-serving board member. Cook has an undergraduate degree and is serving a second term on the board of trustees.
Trustee DeKalb

Trustee DeKalb is the youngest member on the board of trustees. He was appointed to the board seven years ago and is the board chair. DeKalb is currently a financial investment consultant and has been working in the financial service industry for 13 years. This participant has an undergraduate degree in business.

Trustee Elbert

Trustee Elbert is the second longest-serving board member in the study. Trustee Elbert currently has other board responsibilities within the local community. This participant treats the current appointment to the board of trustees as a priority. She is the current chair, but prior to that served as secretary, vice president, and president of the institutions’ foundation. The foundation has been instrumental in raising money for scholarships, research, and educational programs. Trustee Elbert has an undergraduate degree in business.

Trustee Fayette

Trustee Fayette works as a finance manager. He is a Veteran who served in the United States Marine Corps. Fayette is also an alumnus and the current vice-chair on the board of trustees. Interestingly, this participant is the youngest member of the board and is serving the second term. Trustee Fayette has an Associate Degree.

Presentation of Data and Results of the Analysis

This section will represent the themes that have emerged from the collection of data. The data were compiled from the case study participants’ interview transcripts. The research was conducted with individuals in two different roles, president and board member, at each of six institutions.
Six major themes were identified and are shown in the following table of themes based on presidential responses. The research data revealed in this study the following pertinent themes:

(1) Mentors play a key role for professionals who aspire to become college and university presidents

(2) The time-honored, traditional academic pathway to the presidency is relevant and favored

(3) Presidents intentionally prepared themselves for the role of president

(4) Presidents obtained formal strategic preparation through professional organizations

(5) Individual personal characteristics and attributes are key in the selection of presidents

(6) Characteristics and attributes of the college president were described by both president participants and board member participants

Table 4.3
Themes Based on Presidential Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1</td>
<td>Mentors play a key role for professionals who aspire to become college and university presidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2</td>
<td>The time-honored, traditional academic pathway to the presidency is relevant and favored</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 3</td>
<td>Presidents intentionally prepared themselves for the role of president</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 4</td>
<td>Presidents obtained formal strategic preparation through professional organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 5</td>
<td>Individual personal characteristics and attributes are key in the selection of presidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 6</td>
<td>Characteristics and attributes of the college president were described by both president participants and board member participants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mentors Play a Key Role for Professionals Who Aspire to Become College and University Presidents

A major theme that emerged from the analysis of the data provided by the presidents was the importance of mentorship. The presidents indicated that a large part of their success was due to the help and advice of mentors they had throughout their careers. They indicated that mentorship was crucial to their presidential aspirations because it paved the way for them to be where they were at the time of the interview. They revealed that anyone who aspires to a senior level position in higher education would need someone to mentor and guide them to this pinnacle of their career.

President Fulton stated, “My mentor was the catalyst for getting me to where I am as the president.” President Atkinson said:

I was able to take advantage of some absolutely stellar mentors and role models who got me where I am today. I go back to these people who paved the way for me as mentors simply because I appreciate their advice, skill set, and perspective, which gave me a better sense of how to be a university president.

President Decatur spoke about the mentor and paid tribute to that individual: “I owe my first and second presidency to him because he was the one who was instrumental in encouraging me to seek the position.” President Decatur spoke about the beginning of an academic career as a faculty member. His mentor encouraged him to seek out the presidency. President Decatur described the mentor as someone who was “an outstanding human being…self-effacing…he wasn’t pompous. I just loved him because he embodied what a true president should look like and be…I admired a lot in him.” Decatur felt obligated to that mentor for the first presidential
appointment because he was quite supportive. In addition, Decatur was appreciative of the mentorship and encouragement that were provided during the search for the position.

President Baker had a lot to say about the importance of having mentors for the presidency and about the continuation of being mentored while still in the position. Baker attributed a lot of growth and development to the people who served as mentors by stating:

In higher education, you don't have one mentor; you have many. Think about all the individuals who have helped to mold and develop you as you began this journey in academia. You could essentially reflect upon this experience of who was instrumental in mentoring and how this was beneficial in assisting one to the next level.

President Camden attributed his success to the former mentor, who also served as a college president because of viewing the mentor as someone who was aspiring and, therefore, influential to obtaining the presidency. This mentor served as a role model in preparing Camden for the presidency and provided the level of mentorship that secured the first presidential appointment. President Camden stated, “had it not been for her, I would not be where I am today as a college president.” President Echols had a different experience when compared to the other presidents. Echols did not have the same privilege as President Camden and was hired based on academic credentials. Camden agreed that having a mentor would have been beneficial but was able to attain the presidential appointment without any support or guidance. President Echols stated, “The board members trusted me, as I was the next best person for the job, so they didn’t have any choice.”

Each of the participants explained the importance of mentorship as it has contributed to their success. The advocacy and support through mentorship is essential in building confidence, the importance of guidance, and overall social support. Without mentorship and support, the
participants clearly acknowledged the challenges associated with becoming a college president and the complexities in obtaining this senior executive-level position. Some of the participants did not use mentorship as their sole aspiration, but they indicated that mentorship played an important role and served as a key contributor in their overall personal success. The next theme examines the exploration of the career pathways that led each president to the college presidency, as well as the importance of preparing for the role of president.

The Time-Honored, Traditionally-Aligned Academic Pathway to the Presidency is Relevant and Favored

Participants made it clear that having the job of the college presidency should be considered as a high and a special calling. While some presidents followed the traditional pathway from faculty member to department chair, to dean, vice president, to president, other presidents were appointed by a board of trustees to the position without going through the various traditional levels of seniority or ladders within the academy.

President Atkinson spoke about his pathway to the presidency when discussing navigating the various areas within higher education and how the experience had been an enormously gratifying career. Atkinson stated, “I have kind of dipped my toes in almost all the ponds that you could dip into in higher education. It’s been an enormously gratifying career.” That participant spoke extensively about career pathways and the trajectory towards the presidency.

The job is academic in nature; therefore, I feel that anyone who aspires to the position must come from an educational background and senior-level executive position in academia. Traditionalists, i.e., those within the realms of higher education and are familiar with such field; otherwise, it would be impossible to gain the respect of the
faculty. Having that knowledge about the structure of the institution is fundamental because you need to be equipped to deal with your stakeholders, particularly your faculty. President Atkinson stressed that “it is important to serve in the role of faculty by going through the promotion process and understanding it first.” Atkinson valued having the “lived experience” because of trajectory, moving from a faculty member to department chair to dean, vice president, provost, and then to the top job of the president. That participant stated, “it was not an easy journey for me, but having the professoriate ranking made a significant difference with all my appointments.”

President Baker also indicated that it is important to have earned tenure before embarking on a journey towards the presidency. Baker stated, “don't do anything without your full professor position…be very diligent about getting that full professorship first.” This participant stressed that many times, including:

You cannot do anything without [being a] full professor because you don't have respect from the others. You can't make promotion and tenure decisions to full professor if you’re not full yourself. You won't get any leadership positions because you'll always be an assistant to……or an associate to… and that's really, really important.

President Baker indicated that, because of what the job entails, especially working with faculty, there is a level of respect that comes with the position from earning tenure. Baker expressed, “if you aspire to the presidency, you could be deemed as limited without being a full professor because you would not have respect from the others.” President Baker stated that “it would be unwise to make promotion and tenure decisions to full professor if one has not served in that capacity.” That participant advised “if you want to get to the presidency, garner some experience in administration.” Baker added that “it is important to seek appointments to
university-level administrative positions and vibrant committees.” President Baker stated “anyone who aspires to the presidency needs a wealth of knowledge in higher education administration coupled with teaching experience.” Baker further advised that if individuals want to be college-level administrators, it is important to get on the college-level committees and to get full professor rank first.

Despite just completing the first term, President Camden spoke highly about the importance of the career pathway to the presidency. Camden stated, “It is a bit of confusion because one does not learn how to do the job before going into the position -- not unless you have prior experience as a former president.” President Camden indicated that after serving in various roles at the senior executive level, one should garner enough experience to move to the presidency. Camden stated, “a valuable and key skill that I have garnered over time in all of my positions was how to lead a group of people…leadership was pivotal towards me getting to the presidency.” Interestingly, this participant noted that a person learns the job as they go along and even regarded the presidency itself as a type of “on-the-job training.” President Camden spoke in depth about the things learned prior to the presidency. Camden stated, “I thought I knew how to do this job upon appointment, but surprisingly I had to learn to do other things in the role such as budget development coupled with the main task of overseeing human and financial resources to ensure accountability to the board.” Camden indicated that this was an interesting perspective because aspirants generally gravitate to the position based on the idea that they will further the mission of the institution.

President Decatur explained that the role of president has always been a traditional pathway and noted that positions served in the field of higher education were beneficial to the current role. That participant demonstrated concern about the presidency by stating, “the role of
presidency requires strong leadership abilities from the various levels within higher education.” Decatur stated: “It's very traditional in many ways today; I'm afraid we've seen people coming out of corporate structures or coming out of a military structure and while they understand leadership and many of those skills are transferable, where's the legitimacy in understanding the nature of the business you're running.” Decatur compared these competencies to those of the president of IBM and having these leadership traits over time through experiences. President Decatur stated: “It would be the same as me today trying to become president of IBM. I know how to lead people, but what do I know about that corporate structure and culture? I've never worked in it.” In reflecting upon experiences, Decatur noted that “individuals who have experience solely in the corporate culture and those from a military background may have difficulty transitioning into the area of higher education because these structures are drastically different.” Consequently, President Decatur acknowledged that his leadership skills have been instrumental by stating: “I have experience leading faculty, mid-level managers, and students. I am a former faculty member; therefore, I can identify with their experience in the classroom, adding to my leadership skills.” President Decatur shared sentiments about being grateful for all the experiences in higher education and reflected upon the daily challenges that allowed appreciation and reflection upon the lived experiences.

President Echols and President Fulton shared similar perspectives regarding the career trajectory for aspirants to the presidency. President Echols felt that individuals interested in the presidency should have at least some amount of higher education experience, specifically, in senior executive positions. Echols stated, “I feel strongly that someone aspiring to the top job in academia should at least come from the realms of higher education either through the administrative or academic ranks out of respect for the office of the president and the institution
itself.” President Fulton stated, “anyone who aspires to become a president should have some experience at different facets of higher education to gain a better perspective of what other positions entail.” They both equally agreed that individuals vying for the position of the college presidency should possess some academic experience in higher education. Fulton stated: “Individuals vying for the job of the college presidency should possess an academic background which is the typical traditional pathway to the presidency.” That participant felt that in this era, it is equally important to keep the job within academia instead of making it accessible to non-traditional candidates. Fulton also added that “institutions considering a candidate for the presidency must choose someone who possesses some experience as a faculty member or researcher.” The next theme examines how aspirants could prepare themselves for the role of the president through intentional preparation.

**Presidents Intentionally Prepared Themselves for the Role of President**

After serving in numerous senior executive leadership positions, President Atkinson returned from retirement to the academy to serve a second presidency. Atkinson stated, “aspirants need to serve and treat this position as a higher calling because it is about honing leadership skills and learning how to run a complex and diversified institution with intervention from various stakeholders.” President Baker warned that “the presidency is not an easy job, as many people think.” Baker spoke at length about the four terms served in the office of the president and how rewarding it was being in that position for such a long time. That participant shared stories about the progression in academia as an assistant professor of school psychology. Baker indicated, “I began at a state institution in 1976 as an assistant professor of school psychology. I was able to go up for tenure and promotion early. I went in five years rather than six, achieved my assistant to associate professor with tenure in five years. I published, received
grants, did all that, and then went quickly on to the associate and then to full professor. I achieved that in five years rather than six.”

At the time, President Baker needed to move to something else in terms of what next to do and revealed:

I wanted to pursue an internship with the American Council on Education (ACE) for one of the ACE Fellowships. I completed my application, which needed to be endorsed by my institution, but, surprisingly, I was denied by the college president, who provided an internship opportunity for me instead of at the institution.

Baker discussed accomplishments over such a short span of time by saying, “I became the acting associate provost for regional campuses and intern to the president at a state university. After serving in several other roles as department chair, president of the faculty senate, dean, and provost, I made the decision to search for a presidential appointment.” Baker discussed being very intentional towards the Presidency. That participant had nothing to lose and applied all over the country. Baker became the president of a “large public research-one state university.” President Baker stated, “I have paid my dues by coming through the various academic ranks of the traditional pathway.” Baker noted that every position served in was very valuable towards ascension to the presidency.

President Fulton described serving as a faculty member for a year. Fulton stated: “I was later promoted to an administrative position when I became an assistant director in the areas of the business and computer science.” Fulton mentioned, “I served as an associate dean, but I left the latter position, obtained a doctorate, returned to higher education, and became dean of instruction at a college.” In discussing the journey towards the presidency, Dr. Fulton stated:
I have also served for a short time in the role of director of assessment at another College. It was a brief position as an interim before my next permanent position. After serving as dean of instruction at the first college, which is a very large urban college, I went into the private sector of higher education as a vice president. I became dean of the graduate school at another university before being promoted as the executive vice president at a private university. I left that institution and became president.

Dr. Fulton’s first presidency was at a college, and it lasted for five years. After serving in that role, Dr. Fulton left that position and is now serving a second presidency. This participant stressed, “I have paid my dues and came through the traditional ranks to where I am today.” President Fulton spoke extensively about how important and how much the past positions assisted in the preparation for the role of president. Fulton stated, “being a teaching faculty, administrator, director, associate dean, dean has really paved the way for me to get to the presidency.”

Like Presidents Atkinson and Fulton, President Decatur was serving a second presidency. Decatur spoke about trajectory and ascension to the presidency. This participant’s journey into the academy was no different when compared to the other presidential participants. Decatur said I began my career as a faculty member, achieved tenure, and taught mathematics and mathematical sciences at the university. Additionally, I have served as the interim department chair of mathematical sciences and later as an associate dean. I have also taken a position at another institution as the dean of arts and sciences. I left that position, became a campus president, and was later appointed to the president at yet another institution.
At the time of the interview, President Decatur completed his first term as President at the new institution and was serving a second term. Dr. Decatur felt that after assuming numerous senior executive-level positions, it was time to “throw his hat into the ring” with the intention of serving as a president. Decatur said, “after serving in all those previous positions, the next would be the president, and you bet I was ready because I had all the necessary skills which aligned well with the position. I prepared myself and did everything that you could have asked for in an ideal candidate.”

President DeKalb revealed, “I have served in multiple roles on the board, and have a deep understanding of the structure and intricacies of higher education.” DeKalb found over time that people who aspire to the presidency approached the position with “selfish interests” instead of coming in with a vision to grow the institution to the next level. This participant questioned, “Why shouldn’t it be okay for us to hire someone who possesses no track record in the position?” Dr. DeKalb felt this would give other young budding candidates an opportunity to show their worth and what they are capable of doing.

All of the presidential participants in this study, with the exception of President Echols, were prior faculty. Some were tenured professors, while others began their academic ascension to the presidency through what is considered as the traditional pathway by appointment as department chairs, assistant/associate deans, deans, vice presidents, chancellors, and provosts.

Interestingly, all the presidential participants, with the exception of President Baker and President Decatur, indicated that they had no plans of seeking the presidency and did not begin their careers with such intention. However, over time, that decision was affirmed based on key leadership, and professional experiences garnered within the academy. President Atkinson stated, “I had all these leadership experiences and was seeking a higher calling to channel what I
have learned. I felt I wanted to give back and help mentor others who aspire to the presidency and what better way to do so than being in the position.” President Camden revealed, “I prepared myself intentionally through securing a mentor and formal training. I felt like I was ready for the role, so this was the icing on the cake getting to the presidency.” The next theme discusses how presidential aspirants could pursue formal preparation through professional organizations which are important prior to and during the presidency.

**Presidents Obtained Formal Strategic Preparation Through Professional Organizations**

The presidential participants described strategic preparations that aspirants could use to intentionally prepare for a Presidency. President Camden listed various organizations where aspirants to the presidency could strategically prepare themselves for such a role. This participant stated: “Candidates could be intentional by going through the American Council on Education (ACE), Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) and the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) in an effort to prepare themselves for the role.” Dr. Camden recommended: “If anyone is interested in the job of president, they should intentionally participate in leadership programs that could provide them with training beyond formalized educational programs and background experiences.”

President Atkinson also discussed how one should intentionally prepare him/herself for the position by “participating in training programs offered through the American Council on Education (ACE) and the Harvard Seminary, which provides a practical orientation to the presidency.” Dr. Atkinson indicated that, although it is an expensive venture, it should be “considered as an important investment for the future because it is geared at preparing individuals through training how to respond to the many issues they will encounter in their new
roles as president.” Atkinson pointed out that the program covers topics involving the board, fundraising, leadership, strategic planning, and the multiple roles of a president.

President Baker spoke about intentionally preparing for the presidency. Dr. Baker again warned, “when intentionally preparing oneself, it is important to have faculty experience and have tenure before embarking on the presidency.” Baker stressed: “It is that critical if one hopes to gain respect from stakeholders.” Baker further stated: “When attempting to prepare oneself for a presidential role, it is highly recommended to find formal and informal leadership programs that can offer assistance in the development of this particular skill set.”

President Decatur stated that “individuals could intentionally prepare themselves by earning a doctorate, gaining professional leadership experiences, learning about collective bargaining, and participatory governance within the academy.” Dr. Decatur also advised: “If individuals are serious about the job as a college president, the best way to do so is to have lots of teaching experience.” Decatur suggested to “find someone who is already in the role of a president… this could be accomplished by shadowing someone who is a successful president by learning how to lead and finally know how to run a successful fundraising campaign.” Additionally, Decatur indicated that aspirants could, at the same time, “benefit from a mentorship program geared at preparing for a presidency.”

President Fulton stated: “One could do a lot to intentionally prepare for the position.” Dr. Fulton mentioned, “although one does not get up and say ‘I want to be a college president’; this career aspiration could be realized through early and ongoing preparation.” Fulton indicated that “getting to the full-professorship, serving in the capacity as a dean among other executive-level positions could catapult one’s dream of getting to the presidency.” President Fulton suggested that honing those skills and working with stakeholders and the board would make one an ideal
candidate. The participants felt strongly that aspirants could learn a wealth of knowledge of how to intentionally prepare him/herself for the role and the expectations. The next theme examines the individual characteristics and attributes which are key in the selection of the college president.

**Individual Personal Characteristics and Attributes Are Key in the Selection of Presidents**

The participants were invited to offer their insights and their suggestions for aspirants who are desirous of securing the position of the college president. President Atkinson stated that having been a faculty member for a long time was essential. Over time Atkinson became aware that not every president had been a faculty member, by stating “now I have an understanding of what a university does at the grassroots level; this is fundamental to being able to be a college president.” President Atkinson indicated, “among the leadership skills, people have to learn how to adapt to an ever-changing external environment.” Atkinson shared perspective by stating that “anyone who thinks that the universities can be run sort of from an endogenous energy misses the point.” Dr. Atkinson advised that “the first thing the president needs to do is to be ready to know how to change and adapt on their feet.” Atkinson also suggested: “get a good group of friends who are external to the institution and who are engaged within the community.”

President Decatur advised that aspirants to the presidency should “step outside of the box, try different committees, and develop skills that apply in a variety of situations.” Decatur pointed out, “there is no training program and no degree that aligns a person towards the position when preparing for the role.” Decatur further added, “you have to hit the ground running from day one…none of the courses you pursued in your studies will prepare you for this…you have to bring that human element to the role with the understanding that you are under constant scrutiny by the board of trustees.”
President Baker suggested that candidates could prepare themselves intentionally through an internship. Baker said, “an internship is always a valuable pathway because it allows individuals to learn and develop professional skills and competencies that align with the position.” This participant stated, “serving on different committees that teaches you how to make effective decisions and attending professional development workshops” are highly recommended.” Dr. Baker indicated, “consulting is a key skill, as well as fundraising, which is rudimentary.” President Baker further stated that “people like relationships, they want to believe in you and have faith that you’re going to shepherd their donations in a way that they would be pleased. Therefore, that’s a big part of the president’s role.” Baker compared the position to that of relationship building, especially as it relates to fundraising, which is a huge part of what a president does. President Camden advised, “individuals who are interested in the presidency should have experience serving closely somewhere with a president.” Camden noted, “this could be on the senior staff of the president or in the president’s cabinet.” Dr. Camden added, “such experience would really help to secure the position.” Camden said, “there’s so much to learn … you never stop learning new things. Be open to criticisms; do not be afraid to make tough decisions with the understanding that you are always at all times accountable to the board.”

President Echols shared that there was never any aspiration to be a president. Echols said: “I did nothing intentionally to prepare myself for the role.” Echols enjoyed the relative anonymity of being in the role of the vice president. Echols’ advice to those who are interested in the presidency is to “become familiar with every piece of what are those things that make an institution run.” Dr. Echols suggested: “Get involved in professional organizations within the community…this could be accomplished through volunteering by working with diverse groups of people for common goals.” President Echols noted, “I was very good at fundraising and have
often found myself involved in annual campaigns and raising money within the institution.”
This president was already skilled in fundraising, which was a key criterion when compared to
other candidates who have sought the presidency without having done any form of fundraising
campaign.

Providing advice to aspiring candidates, President Fulton indicated that “individuals
should come prepared for the presidency with a firm knowledge base of how to run a higher
education enterprise and having an understanding of its culture.” This participant indicated that
it is essential for aspirants to “know how to manage people, how to communicate and having an
understanding of how to navigate the needs of stakeholders, both internal and external, as well as
their concerns.” Dr. Fulton would like to see aspirants prepare themselves intentionally for the
role, whether through formal or informal mentorship. Fulton stated that serving in senior
executive roles would be instrumental because it allows a candidate to dictate and allocate both
human and financial resources. The following, the final theme, examines the shift towards more
exigent requirements for the presidency.

Characteristics and Attributes of the College President Were Described by Both President
Participants and Board Member Participants

There are many on-going conversations regarding the educational qualifications that a
college president should possess, and whether or not a doctorate is still a relevant requirement.
Many institutions view an earned Ph.D. or Ed.D. as the accepted basic credential for the role of
the college president. All the presidents who participated in the study possessed a terminal
degree, either Ph. D. or Ed. D. President Atkinson stated: “I believe a terminal degree may not
be essential, but it's highly desirable.” As the presidential participant with the most experience,
this participant strongly indicated that having a doctorate “gives candidates credibility in many
venues to lead the institution.” Atkinson stipulated, “I believe the fact that I worked my way through the ranks, the professorial ranks, gives me credibility, particularly with the faculty, that you can't get if you haven't done it.” Dr. Atkinson indicated having the terminal degree does make a difference and is indeed important for the college presidency. President Baker emphasized, “you have to have a terminal degree if you want respect from the faculty and your distinguished professors and researchers.” Dr. Baker felt strongly that for a major research university, a candidate must have the credentials as good, if not better when compared to other counterparts. President Baker felt that if one aspires to lead such an institution that “a Ph.D. should be highly desirable.” Baker further added, “having the full professorship makes a huge difference and places you at the top of the list of candidates.”

President Camden noted, “in some institutions, it is important and valuable for candidates to possess a terminal degree for the college presidency.” Dr. Camden further added, “it would be very difficult to run my institution without one.” However, Dr. Camden stated that a candidate with the right JD or MBA could run it, but warned: “they would need a lot of sympathy with the academic process.” Camden indicated that they would not have the respect of the Faculty when dealing with appointments, promotions, demotion as provide by the law and the policies of the board of trustees.

President Decatur strongly stated that if candidates were going to be in the higher education sector, “they ought to obtain the highest degree in the field.” Decatur questioned: “If you haven't been tested in the doctoral crucible, because it's what it is, then how are you going to stand up in front of a group of individuals with conviction or authority?”

President Echols shared perspectives about seeing successful Presidents with or without terminal degrees. However, Dr. Echols’ opinion was that aspirants also have to be “someone
who carries the respect and credibility with the people he/she intends to lead.” President Fulton stated: “Having a terminal degree is a must; it’s about credibility, credibility among students and faculty, in addition to other institutional stakeholders.”

Beyond the educational qualifications, the characteristics and attributes of successful presidents emerged as parts of the theme. It became necessary to clarify what are characteristics versus what are attributes for the participants, in an attempt to not confuse the terms, thus making a distinction. President Atkinson revealed that communication was an important characteristic within a candidate and stressed that aspirants to the college presidency must possess impeccable communication skills. The participant pointed out that this should be one of the criteria for the position since the president “represents the public face of the institution.” Atkinson stated that “the ability to communicate effectively internally and externally is important because aspirants need to speak the language of the faculty, students, staff, donors, and legislators, as well as citizens within the community.”

President Decatur described the characteristics that could be found in many candidates, but not just any one candidate, by stating: “Honesty, integrity, having a vision, being credible as this person will be the public face of the institution and, interestingly, egotistical.” Dr. Decatur expounded on this by indicating that a candidate would not last long in the position of president if he/she were not egotistical. When discussing attributes, Decatur mentioned “effective communication, flexibility, and the ability to embrace change.” As far as attributes were concerned, Dr. Decatur mentioned: “someone with the ability to follow-through, is unrelenting, blessed with persistence, and has the tenacity for the position.”

President Baker referenced quite a number of descriptors typically affiliated with a search advertisement for a presidential candidate. Dr. Baker mentioned, “integrity, self-confidence,
determination, interpersonal skills, ability to forecast, empathetic, possesses senior leadership and administrative experience, a strong commitment to collaborations and partnerships, and fundraising efforts.” This participant felt that all these attributes were not distinguishable and separated but were instead interwoven among candidates.

President Camden spoke extensively about characteristics and felt that some of the most important factors were:

- the ability to effectively work and develop a good and lasting relationship with the board of trustees, integrity, and ability to cultivate sound and effective leadership among constituents and stakeholders, ability to prioritize institutional obligations over personal and professional obligations, and to be willing to take risks.

President Echols discussed “listening skills, empathy, willingness to compromise.” Dr. Echols pointed out that “presidents sometimes have too much ego.” Echols indicated that ego should be set aside for the good of the institution and leaving a legacy. President Fulton mentioned: strong leadership skills, integrity, honesty, and trust, someone with a vision… to further the mission of the institution and who is able to withstand the challenges when things get rough, someone who is flexible, and someone who appreciates and embraces diversity because he/she will be working with diverse populations within the academy. The characteristics and attributes mentioned by the Presidents were key things they possessed when they sought the role.

The board member participants in the study highlight the other perspective by providing insights into what they seek in potential candidates who aspire to the presidency. The following themes emerged from the board of trustee’s participant interviews. There were six participants who were instrumental in completing the study. The researcher felt that the study would not be complete without having their input and in having them add their voice to such an important
study. The participants in the study are community personnel from the business world, and have no background in academia. All of the participants, with the exception of one, were appointed by the governor to their respective institutions’ Board of Trustees. However, despite their lack of experience in the academy, they play an important role and are responsible for selecting and hiring the college president, among other duties. Three major themes were identified and are shown in the following table of themes that emerged from the board members’ responses in the research interviews. The research data in this study revealed the following pertinent themes:

**Themes That Emerged from Board of Trustees Participant Interviews**

1. Board member participants described certain skills, abilities, traits, and experiences as essential for a college president

2. Candidates who aspire to the presidency need to prepare themselves in multiple ways

3. Nationwide, the college presidency needs to be marked by greater diversity

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**Board Member Participants Described Certain Skills, Abilities, Traits, and Experiences as Essential for a College President**

Considering that the board of trustees selects and supervises the President, it was important to capture board members’ input as it relates to the purpose of this research study.
Some of the trustee participants viewed mentorship towards the college presidency as important and added their perspectives.

Trustee Appling described how mentorship was essential as it relates to the presidency. While serving in the role of president, prior to becoming a board member, Appling received encouragement and support from several mentors. Because of that support, Trustee Appling was able to transition from the interim president to a permanent position.

Trustee Bibb also spoke about the importance of mentorship towards the presidency, the journey to the presidency, and how difficult it would be to obtain the role without having had someone as a mentor. Bibb elaborated that “without internal and external support, it would be impossible to obtain this type of senior-level position.” Trustee Bibb stated: “The job of the presidency is based upon developing excellent relationships with internal and external stakeholders and is in no way possible without the assistance of key mentors.”

Trustee Cooke viewed mentorship in a different way and indicated that the level of mentorship was a challenge because of gender factors; however, Cooke spoke about the importance of mentorship in terms of emotional and intellectual support by stating:

It is already a tough journey, so it would be best to surround oneself with people, and why not do so with good individuals who are able to lift you as you climb to such a high calling through mentorship … I can’t see anyone doing this without some form of guidance.

Consequently, Trustee Cook indicated, when candidates are sought for the presidency it is important to seek someone who possesses the “ability to lead successful fundraising endeavors, someone with a strong measure of integrity who is able to make intelligent forecasts, academic
excellence, values diversity, is authentic, impeccable communication and listening skills, embrace change in a diplomatic manner and definitely not confrontational.”

Trustee DeKalb addressed the importance of the presidency. DeKalb indicated that “for many potential candidates, the job requires administrative and financial acumen, coupled with the ability to raise funds, and political deftness to get to a senior-level executive position.” This meant that individuals would need to be prepared through some form of mentorship, which was seen as extremely critical. Trustee DeKalb added that “an understanding of the academy is critical.” DeKalb stressed that this could be “garnered through mentorship in leadership, working on oneself through personal enrichment, and the ability to develop a strategic vision for the institution that would advance its mission.”

Trustee Elbert advised that “those who aspire to the presidency must consider the idea of being mentored by someone who has experience doing the job.” Trustee Fayette stated: “While succession planning is important today in corporate America, in higher education it is extremely different.” Fayette spoke about the importance of mentorship in the academy and, particularly, for the office of the president. Trustee Elbert felt that because the position is one that is deemed a “higher calling,” individuals should be intentional in preparing for it. Elbert stated:

Candidates could accomplish this by doing their best to ensure that they equip themselves with the prerequisites such as formal training regimen, coupled with the educational qualifications, experiences at the various senior executive levels in academia, and the most important job of learning how to be a good fundraiser.

Trustee Fayette indicated that leadership experience is necessary because the individual would be running a large, diverse institution. Fayette stated that “aspirants should definitely seek out a tailored training program that is specific to the ascension to the college presidency.”
Trustee Fayette advised that “individuals should get into politics because, after all, the position is political in nature.” Fayette encouraged candidates to take part in formal campus meetings that involve critical decision-making. Additionally, Fayette recommended learning budgeting and enrollment management and indicated that individuals should have an appreciation of servant leadership because aspirants will be serving as an advocate for students, faculty, and community partners.

When describing what should be sought in presidential candidates, Trustee Fayette stated: “I seek someone with the ability to increase resources through successful fundraising campaigns and exercises.” Trustee Fayette stated that when serving on search committees for presidential candidates, there should be a common understanding of what is termed “unique qualifiers.” Fayette pointed out that “candidates need to be scholar-practitioners and have a passion for research and publication and service to the institution as a whole.” Fayette revealed that the characteristics sought in candidates for the presidency should include “sound judgment, self-confidence, cultivate community partnership, high energy, excellent communication skills, and a commitment to diversity.”

Trustee Appling indicated that having prior experience would be beneficial toward the presidency. As someone who has served on search committees for two presidents, Appling was quite vocal about this by stating: “When I served as interim president, I lacked higher education experience. However, I was instead blessed with leadership skills and felt that was sufficient to get me to the presidency.” Appling was the chair of the board and had the endorsement of his mentors and colleagues, who all instilled the confidence in Appling to serve in that position. Trustee Appling indicated that “the job of the president is not an easy one, but one should come equipped with the skills that are necessary to make a good and successful president.” Appling
added that “it would be ideal to get some experiences as a dean, vice president or provost and most importantly, know how to fundraise, which is a key part of the job itself.”

Some of the other board members indicated that it was time for higher education to take a step from the traditionalist perspective of having a leader from within the educational academy and should be more open to accepting candidates who had business skills and acumen. Trustee Cook stated that as an executive and local entrepreneur, and based on leadership experiences, she was capable enough to make significant contributions to the institution by serving in the role of the president.

The board member participants offered some strong advice for aspirants to the college presidency. Interestingly, it is evident that aspirants could prepare themselves for such a high position by getting as much experience as possible within the academy, coupled with the solid leadership experience that could be garnered through dynamic mentorship.

The next theme provides information and recommendations related to how aspiring candidates to the presidency could prepare themselves for the role.

**Candidates Who Aspire to the Presidency Need to Prepare Themselves in Multiple Ways**

Trustee Bibb spoke about how individuals could prepare themselves by intentionally seeking out leadership opportunities at the senior level in an effort to garner some experiences that are specifically related to the job. Bibb indicated that using the described typical pathway of serving as department chair, moving towards the dean, and finally, the chief academic officer is an intentional route to the presidency. Bibb stated: “I believe that if a candidate garners well-rounded specialized experiences, coupled with some fundraising experiences, that would be enough to secure such a position.”
Trustee Cook advised that “individuals could set [themselves] up intentionally by working closely with the office of government relations … learning how to lobby would be ideal.” Cook indicated that “having such experience would be a tremendous asset that would set one candidate apart from the other.”

Trustee Elbert stated that “mentorship, leadership skills… having a good rapport with both internal and external stakeholders could result in the job of the presidency because a person learns about the job more when you are actually in the role.”

Trustee Appling stated: “Having a terminal degree gives a potential candidate a huge advantage because it goes with the position.” However, Appling also added: “teaching, research, service experiences and, not necessarily a terminal degree, are the primary qualifications for someone who is interested in a college presidency.”

Trustee Bibb indicated, “candidates who aspire to the presidency must hold a terminal degree of some sort, be it J.D. or Ph.D. or M.D.” Bibb stated that “it makes no sense trying to lead a higher education institution without having such degree… it definitely signifies the pinnacle of someone’s academic journey.”

Trustee Cook expressed: “It would be difficult to choose or vote for a candidate during the presidential search process who does not hold some form of terminal degree.” Cook added: “Hiring a candidate without a terminal degree would send the wrong message to the faculty and the students that board members do not care about who they bring into the institution to lead.”

Trustee DeKalb stated: “I have always known presidents to be holders of terminal degrees.” DeKalb spoke at length about the experience as an undergraduate student. Trustee DeKalb revealed that both presidents had Ph.D.’s, so it would be difficult as the chair to support a
candidate who does not possess a terminal degree. DeKalb said, “I may be biased, but I would wholeheartedly support a candidate vying for the Presidency who is coming out of the faculty.”

Trustee Elbert disclosed that “having a terminal degree gives aspirants clout, respect, and credibility.” Elbert indicated that as a leader at the helm of the institution, it is important to hire a candidate with the proper educational credentials. Trustee Fayette mentioned that higher education leaders “must walk the talk...because as educators; it is important to recognize that we are in the mission of educating students.” Therefore, Fayette felt that it would be hypocritical to hire a candidate who has not earned a terminal degree. This participant made it clear that as a Board Member, it is crucial when hiring a candidate for the college presidency. This meant that the job entails seeking a candidate who possesses the academic experience and who has an earned doctorate.

The trustees had their idea of what they seek in candidates who aspire to the presidency. Trustee Appling reflected that during presidential searches, the committee sought applicants who “possess a strong and impeccable work ethic and leadership skills, strong fundraising background, honesty, integrity, excellent oral and written communication, creativity, takes risks, interpersonal skills, and is confident in oneself.” Trustee Bibb emphasized:

- skills and experience, excellent communicator, someone who possesses the diplomatic dexterity and the ability to demonstrate political savviness, appreciates governance by the board, shared governance among faculty, financial acumen, and possesses the necessary talent and enthusiasm for fundraising, ability to make quick and effective decisions within a timely manner.

Trustee DeKalb stated: “I seek candidates with an impeccable record of accomplishment in fundraising” and added “leadership skills, skill in fundraising initiatives and the ability to lead
successful fundraising campaigns, business and political acumen, skill in developing advocacy with political, business and community leaders.”

The Board Members added their perspectives regarding ascension to the presidency. Trustee Appling argued, “higher education needs a ladder to show individuals who are interested in the presidency how to get there.” Trustee Bibb expressed that “higher education is too locked in with traditionalistic viewpoints and needs to start following the business model.”

Trustee Cook stated: “Higher education needs a guidebook to catapult careers just like how corporate America shows how an individual could ascend from the position of manager to CEO.” The local entrepreneur indicated and shared concerns that it was taking too long for such changes to take place and that higher education needs to get on board soon or face the daunting challenges of finding suitable presidents to lead them in the 21st century.

Trustee Elbert was a strong advocate for the traditional pathway and stated that it was important for aspirants to the presidency to have come through the “traditionalistic route” with “deep backgrounds in teaching, scholarship, fundraising, politics, and lobbying.” Elbert felt that at the same time, higher education should be seeking transformative as well as servant leaders, instead of “just a leader.”

It was obvious that all the participants felt that having a terminal degree was important for the presidency. The college presidency is considered as the top leadership position in higher education. Therefore, the expectations of having candidates possessing terminal degrees should be in alignment with the faculty members, who are expected to have similar academic credentials to achieve tenure and to conduct research. Having a doctorate appears to remain the likely recommended degree and should be considered as the academic credential towards the position of the college president. However, the participants indicated that despite seeking a candidate
with a terminal degree for the position, institutions should seek candidates with a strong academic background to lead and to truly understand their vision and mission. Therefore, it is important for individuals to equip themselves with some added skills such as communication, politician, financial and budget manager, strategic planning community relations, enrollment management, and most important, fundraising experience.

The final theme provides some perspectives from the board of trustees in relation to presidential leadership and how it lacks diversity.

**Nationwide, the College Presidency Needs to be Marked by Greater Diversity**

The issue of diversity is a topic that relates to the college presidency because of the continued underrepresentation of racial/ethnic minorities and women serving in the role of the president. Trustee Bibb introduced the issue of diversity when sharing concerns experienced while serving in the various senior-level positions. This trustee saw that the bigger picture continues to be ignored in relation to diversifying the top leadership of American higher education. Bibb indicated that “racial and ethnic diversification of the college presidency should take some precedent… considering that institutions have become so diverse, but the leadership fails to be representative of the student body.” Trustee Bibb was quite vocal about diversity as it relates to race/ethnicity, age, and gender in the U.S. college presidency. Despite the emotions expressed, Trustee Bibb remains hopeful that minority candidates for the presidency understand students better, yet the presidency continues to represent the majority of the student body.

Trustee DeKalb also expressed concerns that the position “lacks diversity.” This participant indicated that “it is still difficult for people of color to get to such positions.” DeKalb expressed frustration by stating: “It’s about time to take a deeper look and make a concentrated effort to increase the diversity among college presidents.” This participant stressed that the lack
of diversity “should be of grave concern and should be a deeper issue, particularly for women, because of the existing so-called old boy’s network that is still in existence within the academy.”

Trustee Fayette revealed that “it is quite challenging to point out how presidential candidates could prepare themselves for the complexities of the job itself considering the nature of it.” However, Fayette spoke about the importance of preparing for the role by “being ethical, possessing integrity, having courage, perseverance, and the ability to lead.” Trustee DeKalb revealed “serving in multiple roles…having a deep understanding of the structure and intricacies of higher education.” This participant found that over time people who aspire to the presidency approached the position with “selfish interests” instead of coming in with a vision to grow the institution to the next level. DeKalb questioned, “Why shouldn’t it be okay for us to hire someone who possesses no track record in the position?” DeKalb felt this would give other young budding candidates an opportunity to show their worth and what they are capable of doing in the role.

Other surprising themes that emerged during the coding process focused on the idea of developing presidential leadership skills and having those skills transitioning to Corporate America as CEO. The presidential participants felt that the job-related skills that aligned with their role and their experience were not something that they could easily transition to Corporate America. They felt that after leading institutions with thousands of students, faculty, and administration, it would have been easier, but they see themselves going into private consultancy, keynote speakers, and possibly filling in a temporary role until a permanent president is hired. The Board of Trustees were influential in the search process. The participants were vocal about hiring a candidate who previously served in the role of president. They made it clear that they were quite influential in the search process based on the notion that the
president reports to them. As such, they expressed sentiments that they were biased towards a candidate who could “hit the ground running,” “had a small learning curve,” and someone who was “easy to work with.”

Summary

The purpose of this case study was to explore and examine the characteristics, attributes, and qualifications public institutions of higher education seek in presidential candidates. The themes that emanated from the data analysis showed that the presidents viewed their position as a “higher calling” and shared common perspectives in their responses. While it could be said they shared several similar perspectives about leadership in higher education, they were not all congruent with responses. Interestingly, the interviews showed that while presidents have an idea of how aspirants should prepare themselves for the position, the themes presented revealed that the board of trustees’ participants thought that the traits, characteristics, attributes, and qualifications would never be found in any one candidate; hence there is the difficulty they continue to face in selecting the right candidate for the position.

Chapter 5 associates the established themes and discusses them in terms of selected studies described in the literature review. It also discusses the themes in terms of the theoretical framework of the study. Chapter 5 contains a summary of the research findings, with recommendations for their application to professional practice in higher education, and it provides suggestions for further research.
CHAPTER 5: Discussion and Implications for Practice

Data were gathered from the interviewees to research the central question that guided the study: *How do presidents and trustees of six public institutions of higher education describe the traits, characteristics, attributes, and qualifications they seek in ideal candidates who aspire to the presidency?* Stogdill’s (1948) Trait Theory was the theoretical framework used to understand the perceptions of the participants. This Chapter contains a summary of the overall themes resulting from the research, builds connections to the literature review and the theoretical framework, describes limitations of the study, provides an overview of the findings and conclusions, makes recommendations for future research and practice, and includes a final section on implications derived from the study.

The researcher interviewed twelve participants, six college and university presidents, and six board members (see Tables 4.3 and 4.4). The initial interviews were conducted in a face-to-face format. A full description of the common themes in this study is located in Chapter 4, Tables 4.3, and 4.4. The next section revisits the study and provides a summary in reference to the problem of practice.

**Summary of Study: Problem of Practice**

Concerns are present among many academic stakeholders about candidates and their preparation because there is no clear pathway to the college presidency. Many presidential appointments have sparked protests because candidates lack the academic experience and credentials that are highly valued by institutions of higher education. Searching for a college president can be quite challenging in higher education. Institutions, boards of trustees, and search committees have an idea of what they want in a potential candidate, however, during the search process, the committees fail to find what they seek in an ideal candidate in the best
interest of both the institution and the public. The next section examines the research findings in relation to the literature review.

**Research Findings and the Literature Review**

The results from this qualitative case study generated data that specifically related to the characteristics and attributes of the college president; the traditional pathway to the presidency; the individual and personal characteristics and attributes that are important when selecting candidates for the presidency, and certain skills, abilities, traits, and experiences which are essential for the college president. While this study aligns with some similar findings in the current literature, it also presents data that were inconsistent with the literature. Results include the following: mentorship and the important role it plays towards the college presidency; formal strategic preparation through professional organizations; and the need for greater diversity nationwide in the college presidency.

Commodore et al. (2016) examined the role that mentorship played in preparing the next generation of Historically Black College and University (HBCU) Presidents. Although that study examined aspiring presidential candidates through a different lens, the findings are consistent with this study, in that ascension to the presidency came through guidance, grooming, support, and encouragement. The participants were at the peak of their careers in the academy and felt that the next step was getting to the presidency, based on their passion and their desire to give back.

Comparing this study with Jeppesen’s (2014) revealed similar findings, that individuals who aspire to the presidency should possess financial acumen, experience in leading fundraising campaigns, excellent communication skills, demonstrate leadership, and possess the educational credentials affiliated with the job of the president.
Freeman and Gasman’s (2016) study on the characteristics of HBCU presidents revealed that participants were expected to show expertise in vision, communication, fundraising, shared governance, and collaboration. The responses from this current study’s participants were consistent with the literature on presidential leadership. Comparing Freeman and Gasman’s study with HBCUs and this current study, the consistencies in the findings show that despite the differences in the unique cultures existing between both types of institutions, aspirants need to possess certain characteristics for the role. The next section of the study analyzes the research findings in relation to the theoretical framework.

**Research Findings and the Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework that was employed as a lens in this study was the Trait Theory by Stogdill (1948). Stogdill’s theory of leadership sought to identify specific personality traits that distinguish leaders from non-leaders and envisioned the concept of leadership based on the interaction between individuals and their social situation. The theory is not merely based on the results of a predefined set of traits. Instead, it provides readers with the lived experiences of college presidents in public higher education institutions. Stogdill’s findings were beneficial in understanding how the educational institutions acknowledge and prepare individuals who wish to apply for the role of the college president and what leadership characteristics are essential for the role.

Trait theory is an effective theory that identifies strengths and pinpoints weaknesses in individuals who aspire to leadership roles such as the presidency. The theory is intentional because it is utilized to identify specific personality traits such as vision, integrity, good judgment, persistence, impeccable communication skills, the preparation for a leadership position, and the desire and ability to lead.
From the current study, it was discerned that some of the skills, traits, and characteristics that are sought in presidential candidates are not transferable to corporate America but are more applicable within an academic setting. Participants in this study identified qualifiers that are important for potential higher educational institutions to consider in candidates, and what specific skills candidates should possess for the role of president. They also described the characteristics, attributes, and qualifications that are needed for successful presidencies, as well as areas in which aspiring presidential candidates can prepare themselves for the presidency.

The presidents who participated in this study provided their perspectives regarding what would be beneficial in assisting the board members as to the best practice for selecting aspiring candidates. In contrast, board members clearly articulated specific criteria that they felt would be an effective measurement in assessing candidates. Understanding these traits could benefit potential presidential candidates, as well as understanding how trait theory plays a critical role as it relates to presidential leadership in higher education. The next section provides an analysis in relation to the themes emanating from the study.

**Analysis**

Analysis of data from this present study defines what a president in the higher education sector should be based upon, concerning education, traits, characteristics, and attributes. Several areas within the study revealed agreement regarding how ideal candidates who aspire to the presidency can best prepare themselves for the role. The findings from this study included nine distinct themes that emerged from the data analysis – six from the Presidential interviewees, which will be summarized first, and then three from the Board members. No one president’s experience directly mirrors that of the others; however, the presidential participants shared similarities, and their experiences overlapped. The results also revealed that for candidates who
aspire to be presidents, having a terminal degree was of the utmost importance. The study’s findings revealed that candidates without a terminal degree would make them an outlier, placing that person in competition for positions with others who more than likely possessed a terminal degree.

**Theme 1: Mentors Play a Key Role for Professionals Who Aspire to Become College and University Presidents**

Mentorship is instrumental to career development in higher education (Brown, 2002), especially as it relates to college and university presidents (McDade, 2005). Indeed, Brown (2002) claimed that mentorship within the academy is important and is a significant contributor to developing future leaders who aspire to the college presidency. Brown’s results were reinforced by this study, which advocated and supported that mentorship is essential in building presidents’ confidence, in presidential guidance, and presidents’ overall social support. It is recommended that individuals serve in senior-level executive positions before pursuing an appointment as the president (Brown, 2002).

Areas of mentorship included guidance in honing leadership skills, learning some job-related skills, including how to operate a college, learning how to make strategic decisions and how to formulate a vision (VanDerLinden, 2005). The findings from the board members were consistent with the presidential participants’ responses. Findings indicated that the type of mentorship does not matter; it could be mentorship through a professional group, colleague, or through someone in senior-level leadership. The primary objective of mentoring was the professional development of future leaders in higher education.
Theme 2: The Time-Honored, Traditionally-Aligned Academic Pathway to the Presidency is Relevant and Favored

Aspirants can prepare themselves for the college presidency through many pathways, both traditional and non-traditional. Travis and Price (2013) wrote about the presidential career pathway in higher education and postulated that it should include candidates from academic backgrounds. The data from the interviews showed numerous career pathways that could potentially lead to the presidency. The study revealed that while there is a so-called traditional pathway from faculty member to department chair to dean, chief academic officer, and then the president, other aspirants could find themselves in the position without having to go through such routes (See Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1 The Traditional Pathway to the Presidency

Cohen & March, 1974

Some literature revealed concerns about a trend in higher education to select high-profile candidates from outside the traditional fields in academia for presidential appointments (Song & Hartley, 2012). A growing number of institutions of higher education are being led by individuals who had no direct experience as faculty members, department chairs, deans, or provosts (Beardsley, 2017). If this practice continues, there is a risk that the field of higher education will eventually become an industry-led by people who do not truly understand that
which they lead. Critics believe higher education should not be led by non-traditionalist presidents but rather by talented individuals with an understanding of academia. They should be aspirants who understand the core operations of a campus in all areas, including finance, student affairs, development, and admissions. They see the ideal way to the presidency as the time-honored, traditionally-aligned academic pathway.

From a different perspective, a solid argument can be made that higher education should be open to adopting new strategies as well as other pathways and embrace candidates with non-traditional backgrounds from the political sector, the military, and even corporate America. Therefore, search firms and search committees should consider the skills and experiences of those from outside the typical academic pathways and be open to hiring candidates outside the academic ranks. The role of president has evolved over time, with a particular focus on fundraising and legislative issues; it could be advantageous for colleges and universities to start adopting and entertaining “succession planning,” as is often done in corporate America in an effort to combat critical vacancies in the office of the president (Murphy, 2010).

The traditional pathway to the presidency continues to be within the academy where aspirants could begin their careers from faculty members through the various ranks, then finally to the president (Duree, 2007). It is important to have a clear understanding of the various pathways to the college presidency. Higher education stakeholders need to consider the broadest possible pool of candidates, regardless of prior career path, to ensure that the preparation and professional experience of the candidates are aligned with the needs of the institution.

The development of future applicants for the role of college and university president should not be taken lightly. Aspirants need to prepare themselves through experiences acquired
within the academy, through training or through a doctoral program that is specifically geared at preparing aspirants for leadership within higher education.

**Theme 3: Presidents Intentionally Prepared Themselves for the Role of President**

Presidents intentionally prepare themselves through prior academic and administrative experiences; however, a key approach for aspirants was to ensure that they earned tenure before seeking the role. This was based on the idea of shared respect within the academy, earning full professorship prior to aspiring to the presidency as they understood the process of promotion and knew the system and how one’s peers play a vital role.

Aspirants prepared themselves intentionally by garnering the leadership experience, possessing the academic credentials, and serving in various roles, preferably in senior executive-level leadership. The presidency is deemed as a higher calling, and higher education is facing a critical crisis in finding suitable people to lead from the traditional pathway (Beardsley, 2017). Quality candidates with traditional experience face pending retirements, the aging of the American college president as well as the length of tenure, which averages roughly seven years (Song & Hartley, 2012, Negrea, 2008).

**Theme 4: Presidents Obtained Formal Strategic Preparation Through Professional Organizations**

Besides intentional preparation, aspiring candidates used formal organizations such as the American Council on Education (ACE), Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU), and the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) to prepare themselves for the role of president (Rabey, 2011). Despite candidates’ possessing the academic credentials and academic background experience, they benefitted from learning key skills such as budget management, fundraising, strategic plan development, enrollment management, risk management, legal issues, and board relations.
The American Council on Education (ACE) Fellows Program and the Harvard Seminary were identified as formal organizations that could prepare aspirants for the presidency. The ACE Fellows Program was instrumental in allowing participants to maximize their learning opportunities by providing a pathway to leadership for individuals who sought executive-level positions in higher education, such as chancellors, vice-chancellors, vice presidents, provosts, deans, department chairs, faculty, and other emerging leaders (American Council on Education, 2012b). The Harvard Seminary program equipped candidates with information about board governance, fundraising, academic leadership, strategic planning, the digital president, and the public role of the presidency (Harvard Graduate School of Education). Regardless of the pathway that aspirants chose, it was highly recommended that candidates immerse themselves in the practice of leadership (Goodchild, 2012).

Theme 5: Individual Personal Characteristics and Attributes Are Key in the Selection of Presidents

This study provided key information and offered insightful suggestions regarding the individual characteristics and attributes of both participants. The transition from faculty members to the role of the president gave candidates an advantage. Community engagement was imperative for a president to engage with external stakeholders and build that spirit of community involvement with donors, corporations, local businesses, and schools (Kubala & Bailey, 2001). However, to be successful, it was seen as important to possess a human element, such as motivation, creativity, problem-solving prowess, and the ability to think outside of the box. Fundraising was a key skill sought after during the selection process and has long been a part of what a president does and is expected to do to secure stewardships, scholarships, and research initiatives for the institution (Kubala & Bailey, 2001).
Having a terminal degree was seen as important for the presidency (Freeman & Kochan, 2012a). The college president is considered the top leadership position in higher education. Therefore, the expectations of participants in this study were that candidates possessing terminal degrees should be in alignment with faculty members who were expected to have similar academic credentials in order to achieve tenure and to conduct research. Having a doctorate appears to remain the likely recommended degree and is considered as the academic credential towards the position of the college president (Freeman & Kochan, 2012a; Allen & Hartman, 2008; Orr 2006). It was suggested that institutions find candidates with strong academic backgrounds to lead as candidates who truly understand their vision and mission.

One of the important qualifiers of an ideal candidate for the presidency was effective communication. It was seen as essential for a president to be able to communicate effectively on all levels within as well as outside the institution, especially as it relates to stakeholders (Commodore, 2018; Trachtenberg, Kauvar, and Bogue 2013; Charan et al., 2001). Additionally, participants in this study indicated that presidents need to be individuals who are flexible, possess integrity, and are trustworthy, honest, credible, and sincere. They need to have the vision to see beyond the horizon and to enable the institution to achieve its goals. As participants reflected on those qualifiers, however, it was acknowledged that it could be quite a challenge to find all these qualifiers in any one candidate. In addition, many of the characteristics and attributes are considered by the search committees, and trustees for a college president have changed over time, as shown in the perspectives presented by the board members (Duderstadt, 2010; Fleming, 2010).
The themes from the board members were discussed more in-depth and provide another perspective regarding their contribution to the study. The board members’ perspectives were instrumental to the study based on the fact that the board has the responsibility for hiring the president. The next section examines the themes resulting in the board members.

**Theme 1: Board Member Participants Described Certain Skills, Abilities, Traits, and Experiences as Essential for a College President**

The topic of fundraising was one of the primary skills sought by board members in presidential candidates. Close attention needs to be paid to the skill and the ability of the candidates regarding fundraising, and this should remain a focal point as the board seeks the best candidates who are deemed as fit during the search process (Cook, 1997). This study also revealed that search committees need to seek candidates who have previously served in the presidency, and who can "hit the ground running." Previous research in the American College Presidential Study by the American Council on Education revealed that there is a growing preference for older, experienced presidents (2016).

Candidates for the presidency need to possess financial acumen, as they are expected to prepare the institution’s strategic plan. As such, they need to be familiar with budgeting and enrollment management; and they need to be able to spearhead conversations as they relate to class size, full-time enrollment (FTE) funding, and any budgetary shortfall in fulfilling the institutions' vision (Selingo, Chheng & Clark, 2017). Politics was also one of the qualifiers, as the position is political (Seltzer, 2016). Candidates are expected to show skills in political dexterity and legislative relations by their interactions with elected officials and staff members at the local, state, and national levels. Another political expectation is the ability to lobby for funding. It is essential for presidential candidates to leverage the skill of being able to navigate the political field with legislators, local politicians, and board members, considering that board
appointments are political (Seltzer, 2016). All but one of the board members who participated in this research study were politically-appointed trustees.

Trustee participants indicated that presidents need to possess excellent oral and written communication skills. Communication should never be taken lightly and should be paramount for all college and university presidents (Trachtenberg, Kauvar, Bogue 2013; Charan et al. 2001). This was based on the idea that the president is the public face and voice of the institution and is expected to address issues that affect the institution, both internal and external, in a diplomatic manner (Ruscio, 2017; Aspen Institute and Achieving the Dream, 2013).

**Theme 2: Candidates Who Aspire to the Presidency Need to Prepare Themselves in Multiple Ways**

Candidates could garner experience for the role through an intentional internship that is specifically geared towards the presidency (Boggs, 2003, Reille & Kezar, 2010), and through traditional pathways by making the trajectory from a tenured faculty member towards a department chair, to a dean, to a provost, and then to the president. This is perhaps the most common and certain route of securing the position, based on experience in academia in leadership roles (American Council on Education, 2012, Birnbaum & Eckel, 2005). At the same time, they could lead fundraising campaigns while in the senior leadership capacity, which would also be instrumental for the future (Freeman & Kochan, 2013).

There are numerous opportunities through the ACE Fellows Program and other training programs that were offered to prepare aspiring candidates. It would be in the best interest of candidates to get as much experience in leadership ventures within academia, as it would be otherwise challenging to secure the role of president. Having a deep background in teaching, scholarship, and research is also vital.
Having a terminal degree is important for the presidency (Freeman & Kochan, 2012a), as the college president is considered the top leadership position in higher education. Therefore, the expectations of having candidates who possess terminal degrees need to be in alignment with the faculty members, who are expected to have similar academic credentials to achieve tenure and to conduct research. Having a doctorate appears to remain the likely recommended degree and needs to be considered as the key academic credential towards the position of the college president (McNair, 2015; Jones & Warnick, 2012; Jaschik, 2011).

**Theme 3: Nationwide, the College Presidency Needs to be Marked by Greater Diversity**

In 2016, the American Council on Education reported that the demographic profile of American higher education institution presidents remains predominantly White and male. The study highlighted the topic of diversity, which includes race and gender, among other categories of diversity. The same study by ACE revealed that females were underrepresented in higher education leadership, specifically the president. In this research study, board members indicated that, nationwide, the college presidency needs to be more diverse as it relates to minority presidents and women presidents. Diversity was seen as a “touchy subject” and brought to the forefront the idea that the leadership in higher education needs to be more reflective of the increasingly diverse student body and the world in which we live. Despite the number of qualified women in higher education in leadership roles, they are not selected for the presidency. With this in mind, board members indicated that institutions should begin making a more concerted effort towards embracing various categories of diversity, including gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, age, and sexual orientation. When searching for presidents, diversity should be a significant factor. This would assist institutions as they channel their efforts toward sustainable leadership based on the notion of an increasingly diverse student population and an
evolving curriculum with diverse viewpoints (Williams, 2006; Davis, 2002; Humphreys, 2000; Williams 2008). The next sections of the study provided recommendations and implications for professional practice.

**Recommendations and Implications for Professional Practice**

Based on the major themes outlined in this study, this section examines and delineates other implications and recommendations for practice.

The themes from data obtained from president participants include:

- information, as it relates to how mentors play a key role for professionals who aspire to become college and university presidents
- information about how the time-honored, traditionally-aligned academic pathway to the presidency is relevant and favored
- information regarding how presidents intentionally prepared themselves for the role of president
- information about how presidents obtained formal strategic preparation through professional organizations
- information regarding how individual personal characteristics and attributes are key in the selection of presidents
- information about the characteristics and attributes of the college president were described by both president participants and board member participants

The themes from the board member data set include the following:

- information about how the board member participants described certain skills, abilities, traits, and experiences as essential for a college president
• information regarding how candidates who aspire to the presidency need to prepare themselves in multiple ways

• information relating to the idea that nationwide, the college presidency needs to be marked by greater diversity

The findings in this study are important information for candidates who aspire to the presidency; these results also inform higher education institutions, and they provide research-based guidelines that could be useful for presidential search committees and search firms about the American college presidency. Presidential candidates from other wide-ranging career paths, educational accomplishments, and demographic backgrounds could find the results of this study relevant as they launch their presidential goals in higher education. From an individual’s perspective, the findings from this study could serve as a catalyst by informing those who aspire to the presidency, and it could help to prepare them for executive leadership within higher education. From an organizational perspective, results from this research could be informational and serve as a guide for institutions of higher education, administrators, search firms, and search consultants nationwide in their quest to find the “right” candidates who may be considered for the role. The research study also provides interesting findings and adds to the existing body of knowledge as it relates to presidential leadership and leadership overall. For example, the results of the research study addressed the need for greater diversity in the applicants for the role of the president within higher education. The next section discusses the benefits of the study for aspiring presidential candidates.
Aspiring Presidential Candidates

The nine themes that emerged from the study revealed that the most common pathway to the presidency is through the traditional route within higher education. This includes the trajectory from faculty to the department chair, dean, provost, and then president. Pierce (2011) noted that the most frequently-used career pathway to the college presidency is through the academic route. Despite such a claim, the study's findings showed that presidents and board members shared similar perspectives.

The research results highlighted the importance of the traditional pathway and how aspiring candidates could prepare themselves for the presidency through various avenues. In light of the findings, the implications from the study are that candidates could intentionally garner leadership experience towards the role, such as:

- serve in senior-level capacity within the academy
- possess a terminal degree
- gain teaching experience
- conduct research
- gain experience with budget and finance
- participate in fundraising

Considering that the presidency is deemed as a higher calling, aspiring candidate’s must have a passion for the position and must be in a position to serve the presidency well. The next section discusses how the study benefits higher education institutions.

Higher Education Institutions

Institutions of higher education have created job postings specifying the characteristics, attributes, and qualifications they seek in candidates for the presidency. However, it is difficult
and challenging to identify all of the characteristics and attributes in any one candidate based on the qualifiers. This study showed that institutions of higher education seek candidates for the role of the president based on the following information:

- Academic Credentials
- Experience
- Financial Acumen
- Political Acumen
- Management
- Fundraising
- Strategic Planning
- Advocacy
- Communication
- Shared Governance
- Diversity
- Personal and Leadership Attributes/Qualifiers
- Partnership with the Board of Trustees
- Excellence in Teaching & Research

(See appendix 5.1)

Boards of trustees, which are responsible for hiring presidents, could utilize findings from this study in an attempt to create “ultimate” job descriptions as well as selection criteria to identify successful candidates. This study indicates that boards could benefit from analyzing their hiring practices when shortlisting candidates for the role by ensuring that the pool of candidates is qualified, talented, and diverse. Additionally, board members could use the study’s
findings to create a presidential evaluation based on the qualifiers that were identified. The next section discusses how the study could potentially benefit presidential search firms.

**Presidential Search Firms**

Presidential search firms typically choose candidates from a network of individuals who have previously served as president. The continuation of that practice could pose a problem of individual bias by advancing candidates with whom they are familiar through their network. Search firms could be intentional and change their practices to ensure that they do not inadvertently skew the pool of candidates toward White males, but instead that they are intentional in the design of new ways to look at the diverse pool of candidates and make recommendations based on their merits and diversity. Presidential search firms could use information from the qualifiers that were suggested by both sets of participants in this research study to use as a checklist and guide when screening and selecting candidates. Based on the research study, presidential search firms could refer to the checklist to see a list of the qualifiers for criteria (See Appendix 5.2). Those could potentially be used as sources of reference when screening potential candidates for the presidency. The guide could be employed for training purposes for first-time search committee members to familiarize themselves with information that may be used to shortlist aspiring candidates. They could also improve the process by reducing the length of time it takes to fill existing presidential vacancies, based on logistics. The guide could eventually lead to a better selection of candidates based on using the established checklist to eliminate candidates who did not meet the established criteria to advance to the next stage in the search process. The implications from this research study suggest that search firms and consultants always remain mindful of their role in the process, which is to seek candidates who are capable of embracing and advancing the mission of the institution.
The findings of this study implied that aspirants for the presidency must go through all of the various pathways mentioned. Individuals could use the pathways to prepare themselves because, despite the suggestions not being universal and applicable to all, they are still important for creating awareness. This study has been primarily concerned with presidential leadership in higher education. The findings of the study are from public institutions of higher education located in a Southeastern state. Therefore, the findings cannot be taken or read as evidence for general or universal appointments to the presidency. The next sections of the study provide recommendations for future research.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The study covered many facets of how presidents and trustees of six public institutions of higher education described the traits, characteristics, attributes, and qualifications they seek in ideal candidates who aspire to the presidency. In an effort to build on this body of literature, future studies could provide a more comprehensive overview of participants and their perspectives. It could include search consultants, as well, who could contribute a wealth of information to the discussion as it relates to what aspiring candidates need to do to equip themselves in preparation for the presidency. The study was conducted in the Southeastern United States; it would be prudent to replicate this study where various institutional types could be explored, as well, since the study focused on public state institutions and not private institutions, community colleges, research universities, or other types of colleges and universities. The use of another theoretical framework to frame the study could provide additional perspectives. Another perspective could be the use of a different qualitative research approach to re-design the study. Other areas that could be explored include age, gender, race, and individuals outside of the academy who was appointed to the presidency through the non-
traditional pathways. That would allow aspirants to have a better understanding of what is required, the expectations of the position, and how they could prepare themselves for and in the role of the presidency. The final section of the research concludes the study.

Conclusion

The American college presidency continues to be a deeply-researched topic in higher education because of what the position represents and contributes to within the academy. This case study indicates that there is not a single defined pathway to the college presidency because there are various ways to get to the position. It reveals that despite the level of credentials and the academic credentials that individuals possess, there are other factors that are taken into consideration when selecting candidates for the role. However, the study is unique in its way by providing perspectives from the presidents who are currently in the role, in addition to the board members who gave their perspectives about what they sought in potential candidates. This study provides valuable information and insights for aspirants and may assist in their preparation for the American college presidency.

Reflection

Reflecting on the outcomes of the study and what they meant to me as an individual who aspire to the presidency and as a researcher was enlightening. Despite the responses I heard from the interviews conducted, it still appears as a puzzling route to get to the top job in higher education. The recommendations that I made are worthy of attention for professionals in the field. I would encourage them to start paying keen attention to the ways of preparing themselves for the presidency through intentional training. I would encourage current presidents to “pay it forward” by giving back through a more proactive approaching training aspirants for the role.
Each interview that I conducted was enlightening. I walked away with an abundance of information filled with rich, thick strands of data that proved instrumental to my study. The presidential participants shared their personal and professional career and life journeys. This included some deep narratives involving their background, leadership experiences and style, mentor, aspirations, how they prepared themselves for the role of president, the characteristics, attributes and qualifications that were interwoven in each of them and their uniqueness in what they brought to the role of president. The surprise from one of the interviewees was that individuals who aspire to the presidency must have some ego because the position requires individuals to be egotistical.

Writing Chapter 4 of my study was a challenging process. I had all these transcripts in front of me yet I questioned myself would I be able to articulate each participant lived and shared experiences in an attempt for my readers to understand the study in depth. I wanted to tell the stories from their personal interviews and bring their characters to life by adding my voice to the ongoing conversations regarding presidential leadership in higher education but not in a boring way. I wanted the study to have impact and implications for the professional practice to aspiring presidential candidates, higher education institutions and presidential search firms. I must admit that upon meeting each president, it was a humbling and inspiring moment for me. I was never judgmental when listening to their responses but kept an open mind. The board members gave me hope. Hope that things will definitely change for the future. Upon meeting them, I found them lacking the knowledge of how many of the moving parts of higher education functions in addition to teaching and research activities. I hope that upon their appointments that they are placed into a rigorous training regime which would give them a better understanding about the intricacies of the academy.
The interviews with the board members were interesting because they provided some well thought out responses regarding the skills, abilities and traits that were essential for the college president. They provided information about how aspirants should prepare themselves not just through the traditional pathways but using multiple avenues. They provided what I deemed as the surprise that “shook up my study” when they introduced the topic of diversity. They felt that nationwide, the college presidency needs to be marked by greater diversity. This topic makes it more interesting as an area for further research regarding the lack of Black, Female and LGBT candidates in the presidency.

Overall, the study opened my eyes to a number of things. It widened my scope of horizon and provided me with a better perspective from a different lens that leadership within public higher education is completely different when compared to private institutions and the corporate sector. There are not many transferable skills for presidents moving from the higher education to the corporate sector. The hiring of individuals in the role of the president is a longwinded process based on bureaucracy, red tapes and politics. The position is political as indicated by some of the participants. One could be selected for the role but if the Governor does not approve that individual then the search committee would need to go back to the “drawing board” to select a new candidate.

Interestingly, at the conclusion of this study, I have learned that there is no single defined pathway to the presidency. Instead what I have learned is that institutions vary from one another and seek to hire candidates based on their different needs. A community college hires a president based on the leadership competencies developed by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and based on the community needs in preparation for community college presidents. A university hires a president based on the understanding that the candidate
has the ability to further the mission, vision, and values of the institution as well as the ability to raise funds, which perhaps has become the most important talent specifically to the board members.

This was a challenging and lengthy experience for me. However, it was definitely worthwhile based on the uniqueness of the study from the sitting presidents and the board member’s perspectives. It was similar to hearing from the “horse’s mouth” regarding what are the characteristics, attributes and qualifications public institutions of higher education seek in presidential candidates. In conclusion, I would like to thank my participants for sharing their lived experiences, their office spaces with me and assisting me to understand more about leadership and the American college presidency.
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http://www.universitybusiness.com


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APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol Questions

Presidential Questions

The interviews will be the primary means of data collection for this study and will be conducted face-to-face and digitally recorded. Each interview will be 45-90 minutes in length. The first set of questions are background questions followed by open-ended questions relating to the research questions.

Background Questions

1) Dr. (_________________), as our initial means of starting our conversation, would you mind sharing with me your extensive educational background?
   a) How long has your tenure as President at (Insert name of institution) been thus far?
   b) Prior to assuming the presidency at (Insert name of institution), what positions have you held, and where?
   c) Have you ever served at this college prior to the presidency? If you have, in what role(s) or capacity did you serve?
   d) Do you think that your former position(s) prepared you for this role, and if so, how?
   e) Prior to assuming your current position, have you served in the role of President at another university? Where?
   f) Would you mind sharing with me, in what other areas of higher education have you held positions in?
   g) In your opinion, what would be the reason(s) or catalyst that led you to the presidency?
   h) Recalling your initial endeavors in higher education, when would you say it dawned on you that you wanted to become a university president, and how did you prepare
yourself for this position/role/title?

i) Given your experience to date, what is your definition of a college president, and do you feel that definition has changed over time since you took on this role as president?

j) In your own words, what professional experiences contributed to your successful rise to the presidency?

k) If you would be willing to share with me today, and reflecting on what has been your experience thus far, what knowledge could you say you know now………. that you wish you would have known when you first began your presidency?

Research-focused Questions

1) If you were asked: What does it mean to you to be a university president? You would answer...?

   a) Considering your tenure as President at (Insert name of institution), what skills do you think you have learned?

   b) As I am sure you have enjoyed your position thoroughly, and considering your experience(s) at (Insert name of institution), what skills, traits, and experience do you think are essential for a President today?

   c) Research suggests that there are different types of college/university presidents, and with different types of qualities, characteristics, attributes and traits that are sought. With that in mind, would you please describe for me how these influenced you towards this position?

2) This next question refers to the central purpose of my study and takes into consideration the following:

   Characteristics
   Attributes
   Qualifications

In regards to Presidency positions held in the past, and considering your position today, do/did you feel you possess(ed) the necessary characteristics for the position?

Given the same question regarding Attributes for the position?

And what would be your thoughts on the Qualifications for those positions as well?
Future Aspirants to the Presidency Questions

1) I envisioned this dissertation as a source of information for those young administrators and faculty who might want to move into senior level administrative jobs and chart individual presidential career paths—So two questions:

   aa) What are skills/attributes that they may need to learn that cannot be articulated/understood from your CV?

   bb) What would you like to impart to those individuals about navigating the higher education structure?

a) Given what we have discussed thus far, what additional information could you provide as to how you may think individuals aspiring to a presidency should prepare or what they should consider to decide if this would be a good fit for them?

b) Considering your expertise in this field, what aspects of preparation do you think are the most critical in preparing higher education leaders to assume the role of a college president, and what can be done to prepare men and women for the college presidency in the future?

c) Given the need for positivity in our future leaders, what advice would you give someone who is considering the position of the college presidency?

d) Dr. (__________________), as a final question, and considering all of the aforementioned in addressing the overall aspects of the college/university Presidency. Are there any or comments or insights or information you would like to provide that my questions may not have prompted that speaks to skills, abilities, traits of a successful president?
Questions for the BOT Members

Background Questions

1) Mr. (__________________), as our initial means of starting our conversation, would you mind sharing with me your extensive educational background?

   a. How long have you been a member of the BOT at (Insert name of institution)?

   b. How has your tenure been thus far at (Insert name of institution)?

   c. Given your experience and education, what motivated you to accept the position as BOT member at (Insert name of institution)?

   d. Prior to assuming this trustee position at (Insert name of institution), what positions have you held, and where?

   e. Do you think that your former position(s) prepared you for this role, and if so, how?

Research-focused Questions

   f. Since it is fair to say that the Board of Trustees is at the core of the implementation and search for college/university presidents as well as hiring them, I would like to ask a few questions refers to the central purpose of my study as it relates to the ideal candidate.

   My study examines skills as a performance capacity instead of quality of personality, as such

      i. What skills do you think are ideal for a college president today?

   Examining abilities which are defined as skill, or proficiency in a particular area

      ii. What abilities do you think are ideal for a college president today?

   My study defines trait as “personality, temperaments, dispositions, and abilities, as well as to any enduring qualities of the individual including physical and demographic attributes.” Focusing on this definition….

      iii. What traits do you think are ideal for a college president today?

      iv. Finally, what experiences do you think are ideal for the presidency?

   g. Given the educational needs, demands, and environment of (Insert name of institution), what specifically are you seeking in aspirants for the presidency when developing the job description, which identifies qualifications of an ideal candidate?

   h. For as much as the Board of Trustees strives in keeping with the vast array of students with different characteristics and personalities that attend (Insert name of institution)
and that it is known for, what do you think of the criteria a potential presidential candidate ought to possess to be a perfect fit?

i. In keeping with the continual best interest of (Insert name of institution) at hand, in terms of the characteristics, attributes, and qualifications that individuals should possess for the presidency, can you tell me which are the most important of all those you have identified?

Closing: Thank you for your participation in this study. As previously discussed, your responses will be anonymous and will not be connected to any identifiable information.
APPENDIX B

Interview Request Sent to Potential Interviewees:

Hello Dr. ________________.

My name is Locksley Knibbs and I am a doctoral student in the Doctor of Education program at Northeastern University.

I am emailing to ask if it would be possible to interview you for my dissertation. The focus of my scholarly thesis is the explore the characteristics, attributes and qualifications that public institutions of higher education seek in presidential candidates. Due to your current position in higher education, I would like to interview you to gain insight and data for my study.

My passion for this study derives from my career aspirations as I too aspire to one day become president of a higher education institution. All interviews will be recorded on a digital recorder that will be kept in a locked safe and will be destroyed once interviews are transcribed. Transcriptions will be kept in a locked file that will only be accessible to the principal investigator. Participation is entirely voluntary.

Please email me at xxx@husky.neu.edu if you have any questions or if you would be willing to participate. If so, the interview will be approximately one hour. I am available anytime and willing to accommodate your schedule.

Thank you Dr. ________________, and have a great day!
Greetings!

My name is Locksley Knibbs. I am completing my doctorate at Northeastern University in Higher Education Administration. The focus of my study is on Presidential Leadership in Higher Education. The title of my study is: *Characteristics, Attributes and Qualifications Public Institutions of Higher Education Seek in Presidential Candidates.*

I am recruiting participants for my study, which includes Presidents and Board Members. I was wondering if you would please consider being a part of this study. My plan is to interview six Presidents and six BOT Members from public institutions of higher education in the southeastern United States. As a board member, I would love to get your perspective as a participant because I feel that I can gain rich, thick description to support my research question from our interview.

If you agree to be a participant, I would need to send you the formal documents (IRB, *Interview Request Sent to Potential Interviewees* (Appendix C) and the *Consent Form* (Appendix D) and explain what happens next. If you would like to discuss this in-depth please do not hesitate to contact me at (239) 738-1847 (Mobile) (239) 590-1424 (Work).

Thanks for your consideration and I hope to hear from you soon.

Locksley Knibbs
APPENDIX C

Consent Form

Consent for Participation in Research

Northeastern University, Doctor of Education Program

Principal Investigator: Carolyn Bair, Ph. D

Student Investigator: Locksley Knibbs

Title of Project: Characteristics, Attributes and Qualifications Public Institutions of Higher Education Seek in Presidential Candidates

Why am I being asked?
We are asking you to participate in this project because you are a senior-level administrator in higher education. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to become a participant in this project. Your participation is strictly voluntary. Your decision of whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Northeastern University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship or incurring any other type of penalty.

Why is this research being done?
In this research project, we would like to know what experiences you have encountered throughout your personal, academic, and professional life on your road to becoming president of your current college/university or in the selection of a college president. Insight from your experiences will help stakeholders of higher education develop policies, best practices, and behaviors that may also benefit potential presidential candidates.

What procedures are involved?
If you agree to participate in this research project, you will be asked to do participate in one interview. The setting and time of the interview will be solely your decision.

Interviews will be recorded on a digital recorder that will be kept under lock and key in a locked office at the residence of the researcher. These recordings will be destroyed once interviews are transcribed. Transcriptions will be kept in a locked file at the same location and will only be accessible to the researcher. The interview will be approximately one-hour long.

What are the potential risks and discomforts? The risks of the project are:
1. You may be under the impression that if you do not participate, your relationship with Northeastern University will be affected. No identifying information will be revealed to the University.

2. You may feel that you are being judged by your responses given to the questions. I am seeking honest answers and sincere feedback.

There are no known potential risks and discomforts associated with the procedures of this study. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures; however, the researcher has taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

**Are there benefits to participating in this research project?**
There are no direct benefits to the study participants. However, the overall potential benefit from conducting this study is that it may be useful to the stakeholders within the institutions hiring new college presidents. Educational policymakers tasked with hiring presidential candidates could potentially use this study as an illustration of what works in terms of matriculating presidential aspirants through college and into academia. may provide information about the qualifications of what constitutes successful presidents. An understanding of these traits may also benefit potential presidential candidates. The conclusions from this research might serve as a catalyst when selecting a senior leader in higher education. Organizations and focus groups such as the TIAA-CREF Institute, Aspen Institute, ACE, etc. that concentrate on providing information about how to navigate the presidential pathway could potentially use the data analysis and conclusions from this study to inform their research and give first-hand accounts and insight into the professional, academic, and personal paths traveled in order to reach these positions.

**What are some other options?** You retain the option not to participate in the study. If you decline to participate in this study, your relationship with Northeastern University will not be affected.

**What about privacy and confidentiality?**
I am the only person who will know that you are a participant in this study. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission of as required by law. If results of the research are published or presented at conferences, no information will be included that could possibly disclose your identity. If you allow me to record your interview, the recording will be used for educational purposes only and your identity will be concealed.

**Will I be reimbursed for any of my expenses or paid for my participation in this research study?**
You will not be paid for participation in this research study.

**Can I withdraw or be removed from this study?**
You can choose to withdraw from this study at any time without fear of consequences, penalties, or retribution of any kind. You also have the right to refuse to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable being asked and still remain as a participant in the study. The moment you
withdraw from the study, all written, verbal, or other information you have given me through recording or any other mode of delivery will be destroyed.

**Who should I contact if I have questions about this project?**
I, Locksley Knibbs, am conducting this study. You may ask me any questions at any time. You may call me at 239-738-1847 or email me at knibbs.l@husky.neu.edu. You may also contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection at n.regina@neu.edu or (617) 373-4588.

**What are my rights as a research subject?**
If you feel you have not been treated properly or in accordance to the descriptions in this form, all questions regarding your rights as a research subject should be directed to:
Nan C. Regina, Director
Northeastern Univ., Human Subject Research Protection
360 Huntington Ave., Mailstop: 560-177
Boston, MA 02115-5000
Phone: 617.373.4588; Fax: 617.373.4595
n.regina@northeastern.edu

_____ Yes, I agree to be interviewed.  _____ Yes, I agree to be audiotaped.

_________________________________________________________________________
Printed Name of Participant

_________________________________________________________________________
Signature of Participant  Date

_________________________________________________________________________
Signature of Locksley Knibbs  Date
APPENDIX 5.1

PRESIDENTIAL SEARCH CHECKLIST AND GUIDE FOR SCREENING AND SELECTING CANDIDATES

LIST OF QUALIFIERS

**Academic Credentials**
*Does the candidate possess a terminal degree? YES/ NO.*

**Experience**
*Served in a previous presidential position? YES/NO*

**Financial Acumen**
*Experience overseeing and managing budgets? YES/NO*

**Political Acumen**
*Previous experience working with local, state, and national representatives? YES/NO*

**Management**
*Experience managing operations and resources in a higher education setting? YES/NO*

**Fundraising**
*Possesses robust fundraising experience? YES/NO*

**Strategic Planning**
*Experience with developing a strategic plan? YES/NO*

**Advocacy**
*Advocated for internal and external stakeholders? YES/NO*

**Communication**
*Excellence communication skills? YES/NO*

**Shared Governance**
*Respect the tenets of shared governance? YES/NO*

**Diversity**
Commitment to diversity, inclusion and engagement? YES/NO

**Personal and Leadership Attributes/Qualifiers**
_Evidence of personal and leadership attributes? YES/NO_

**Partnership with the Board of Trustees**
_Familiar with board relations? YES/NO_

**Excellence in Teaching & Research**
_Evidence of teaching, research and scholarship? YES/NO_
APPENDIX 5.2

PRESIDENTIAL SEARCH CHECKLIST AND GUIDE FOR SCREENING AND SELECTING CANDIDATES

PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Academic Credentials
- A Ph.D. or other terminal degree is highly preferred from an accredited institution of higher education

Experience
- Prior leadership experience or senior leadership and administrative experience necessary and the ability to work effectively with a governing board.

Financial Acumen
- Experience in managing the finances and budgets of a major enterprise is a prerequisite for this position.

Management
- Experience managing a complex and diverse institution of higher education

Fundraising
- Strong fundraising background with an enthusiasm for fundraising campaigns and exercises

Strategic Planning
- Ability to develop and oversee the strategic planning in accordance with the mission and vision of the institution

Advocacy
- Strong record of demonstrating advocacy for key stakeholders, faculty, staff and students and external stakeholders from the following sectors political, business and community leaders

Communication
- Possesses excellent oral and written communication skills. Ability to effectively communicate with Internal Stakeholders - Faculty, Staff and students. Ability to effectively communicate with External Stakeholders - Board, Legislators, Donors, Alumni, Community Partners and others

Shared Governance
- Demonstrates and fosters commitment to shared governance with the institution and the Board of Trustees

Diversity
• Values and embraces Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion because he/she will be working with diverse populations within the academy

**Personal and Leadership Attributes/Qualifiers**
• Possesses a high level of integrity, ethical, self-confidence, determination, interpersonal skills
• Possesses sound judgement, self-confidence, cultivate community partnership, high energy, excellent communication skills, authentic
• Ability to make intelligent forecasts
• Empathetic, credible and egotistical. This person will be the public face of the institution
• Ability to prioritize institutional obligations over personal and professional obligations and to be willing to take risks

**Partnership with the Board of Trustees**
• Strong commitment to collaborations and partnerships
• Experience or familiar with board relations

**Political Acumen**
• Possesses political acumen coupled with the diplomatic dexterity ability to demonstrate political savviness with national, state, and local government officials

**Excellence in Teaching & Research**
• Successful teaching experience
• Scholar practitioner with a passion for research and publication and service to the institution as a whole