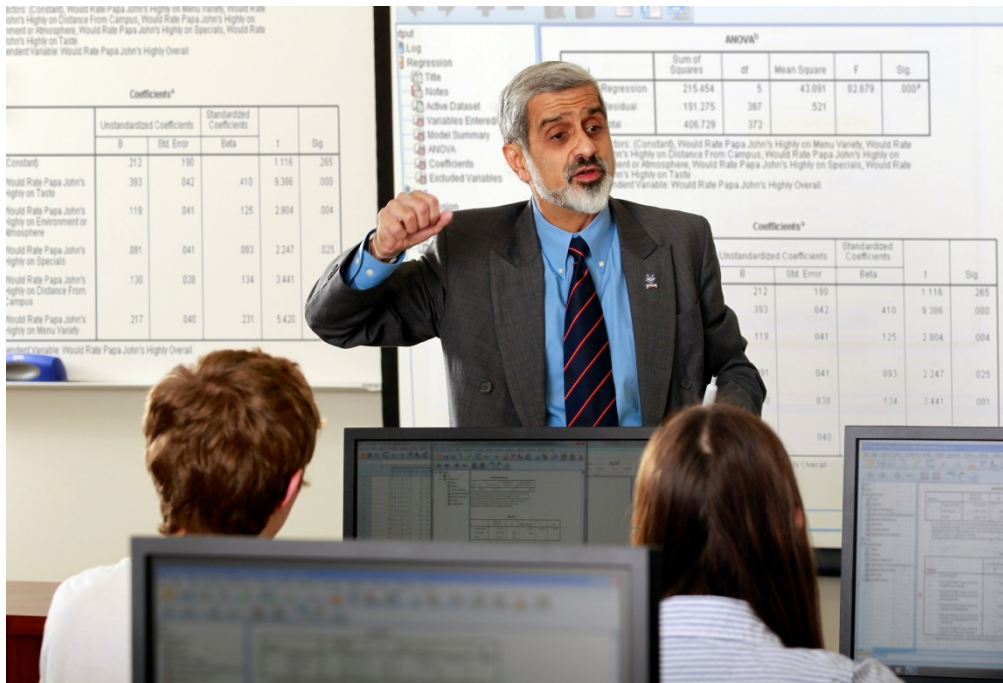


Who Wants To Be A College President?

By Beheruz N. Sethna



Peer Reviewed



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Abstract

The average age of college presidents today is 61 and the median age is 62. It appears that, within the next few years, there will be several of these presidents retiring and consequently several vacancies being created. Higher education will need good people to fill these vacancies. In this paper, three broad topics are discussed which may be of interest to those considering the possibility of someday becoming a college president.

One of these is an analysis of the major activities that presidents engage in, that they enjoy, and that they declare themselves ill prepared for when they first became president. This analysis is intended to provide the reader with an idea of what the job of a college president might entail. Another purpose served is that, if a person wishes to pursue a path to the presidency, this analysis provides guidance on skill sets, experiences, accomplishments, and candidly, lines on resumes that it might be useful to accumulate.

Another topic included in this paper is an analysis of pathways to the presidency. This is done by examining perceptual hypotheses about what today's college president in America looks like in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, religion, education, parent discipline, and career path and, understanding that some of these characteristics are not controllable and others are, what the implications might be of these in terms of getting oneself ready for the presidency.

These two sub-topics are closely related, because it is the total package of demographics, controllable attributes, and understanding of the issues that will be presented to a search committee or a governing board.

Finally, in the discussion section, a Q&A format that includes some of the experiences of the author is used to provide some idea of the challenges and the joys of the position.

Introduction

Unlike the TV game show, "Who Wants To Be a Millionaire?" there may not be too many people saying a resounding "Yes" to the question, "Who wants to be a College President¹?"

Nonetheless, the hope is expressed in this paper that more talented people should consider this career path. This is mainly for two reasons:

¹ In this paper, the phrase, "College President" is a generic term used to include leaders of both colleges and universities and with titles such as President or Chancellor. This terminology is consistent with that of the American Council on Education (ACE). ACE publishes a periodic study entitled, "The American College President" which provides a rich source of data to help with understanding the presidency in US colleges and universities. The current work draws heavily on *The American College President 2012* study (the most recent one available).

1. We will need you. The average age of presidents is about 61 years (ACE, 2012), and a reasonable hypothesis is that they will be retiring soon. In “president years” which takes into account the stress of the job, that’s about 122 years old in normal human years 😊.
2. It really is an exhilarating, exciting job. You get to effect change and, if you are lucky and passionate, that can be transformative change. (In the interest of “truth in “advertising” I have to admit that there can be just a few non-exhilarating days on the job!)

What does the Job Entail?

Before exploring a pathway to the presidency, it might be useful if we take a moment to think of what a college president’s job might entail – a discussion which may attract people thinking of becoming presidents² – or not! In this section, we discuss the activities and issues that drive and engage presidents.

The American College President 2012 (2012) reported on a 2011 survey of 1,662 presidents on a variety of topics. Let us examine three of these to see what presidents do with their time. These three are:

- The activities that occupy most of their time
- The activities that they enjoy the most
- The activities for which they were insufficiently prepared when they assumed their first presidency

And, in true academic spirit, let us start with a quiz. Before reading further, which are the top five areas you think occupy most of their time, the top five which they enjoy the most, and the top five for which they least prepared when they assumed their first presidency?

Hint: Golf does not figure in the top five in any of these lists! (Now, admit it, you thought that that is what presidents did all day.)

Answers to the Quiz:

The activities that occupy most of presidents’ time are presented below in Table 1. It is important to note that presidents were presented with a list of 20 such activities, and allowed to check all that applied. A complete list is provided in the appendix.

² This paper focuses on issues related to and pathways to the presidency. How to succeed as president (or what to avoid) is a topic that would probably warrant a book in its own right! Nonetheless the latter section of the paper explores some questions of interest during the presidency that might be of assistance to the reader.

Table 1
Activities Which Occupy Most of Presidents' Time¹

Activity	Percent Selected
Budget/financial management	57.9
Fund raising	47.0
Community relations	22.7
Strategic planning	22.2
Personnel issues (excluding faculty)	21.6

1. *The American College President 2012 (2012)*

The activities that presidents enjoy most presented below in Table 2. Respondents were allowed to check all activities that applied to them.

Table 2
Activities Which Presidents Enjoy Most¹

Activity	Percent Selected
Community relations	37.2
Strategic planning	36.4
Fund raising	35.4
Academic issues (e.g., curriculum changes)	31.1
Capital improvement projects	27.5

1. *The American College President 2012 (2012)*

It is fortunate that fund raising, community relations, and strategic planning are on both lists, because at least presidents have a few activities that they enjoy on the list of activities that occupy most of their time. However, for those readers who enjoy academic issues and perhaps thought that they would spend most of their time on these issues as presidents, a comparison of the two lists might be disappointing, though educational. Correspondingly, those who don't enjoy personnel issues should be aware that such issues will probably occupy a significant proportion of their time as presidents.

The activities that presidents felt insufficiently prepared for when they assumed their first presidency are presented below in Table 3. This list provides a good indication of what to get prepared for if a person wants to get ready for a presidency. Respondents were allowed to check all activities that applied to them.

Table 3
Activities for Which Presidents' Felt Insufficiently Prepared¹

Activity	Percent Selected
Fund raising	40.0
Technology planning	33.6
Risk management/legal issues	29.7
Capital improvement projects	27.4
Entrepreneurial ventures	26.7

1. *The American College President 2012* (2012)

Table 3 has clear implications of how to spend the few years prior to applying for a presidency. A candidate who has experience and accomplishments in budgeting and financial management, fund raising, community relations, strategic planning, and personnel issues is likely to be viewed with more interest than one who does not. Perhaps more meaningfully, if those elements are absent, the potential president is encouraged to explore opportunities to acquire them.

For a slightly different take on the same topic, let us examine the *2015 Inside Higher Ed Survey of College & University Presidents* (2015), which included a survey of 647 higher education leaders on a large number and variety of issues that presidents have to handle. The issues mentioned below are taken from that report.

Higher Education Outcomes: Most presidents did not favor President Obama's proposed college rating system, and felt that it would not adequately portray their institution. About 45 percent of them did not support his proposal to offer free tuition to in-state community college students.

Budget and Finances: While more than half of presidents surveyed expressed confidence in their own institution's financial sustainability over the next five-year period, just under 40 percent expressed that same confidence over the next 10-year period.

Sexual Assault: Thirty-two percent of presidents agree or strongly agree that "Sexual assault is prevalent at U.S. colleges and universities" but only six percent agree or strongly agree that "Sexual assault is prevalent at my institution." Fifty-two percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that "Fraternities play a disproportionate role in sexual assault cases on campuses." Interestingly, these percentages were given the lowest ratings by Master's institutions' presidents (32 percent) and highest ratings by presidents of Associates institutions (61 percent).

Race Relations: Much in the same vein as the sexual assault findings, 43 percent of presidents give an "Excellent" or "Good" rating to "Generally speaking, would you say the state of race relations on college and university campuses in this country is excellent, good, fair, or poor?" but 81 percent of presidents give an "Excellent" or

“Good” rating to “Generally speaking, would you say the state of race relations *on your campus* (emphasis added) is excellent, good, fair, or poor?”

Faculty Hires and Tenure: Fifty-five percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that “Presidents should take a more active role in decisions about which faculty members to hire.” Sixty-six percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that “Presidents should take a more active role in decisions about which faculty are granted tenure.” Interestingly, these percentages were almost identical (58-62%) for Public Doctoral, Master’s, Baccalaureate, and Private Doctoral & Master’s and Baccalaureate institutions, and somewhat higher (71 percent) for Public Associate institutions.

The Bully Pulpit: Eighty-four percent of presidents agreed or strongly agreed that, “When presidents speak out on issues, they face significant risk if they take controversial positions.” For public institutions, this number is even higher at 87 percent, and for public Doctoral institutions, higher still at 93 percent. In the mid-1900s, presidents spoke out forcefully on matters of higher education and even general policy. Increasingly today, it appears that there is a hidden clause in the First Amendment to say that these protections have been repealed specifically for college presidents!

The purpose of reporting on the 2015 Inside Higher Ed survey of College & University Presidents is not so much to do justice to the findings of this survey, but to share other examples (beyond the ACE survey) as to the issues with which college presidents deal each day.

Finally, it might be useful to examine a list of the *Top 10 Shifts in Higher Education identified by the Chronicle of Higher Education in 2015*. The entire list is reproduced below:

1. “Spotlight on Retention: Your students can’t graduate if they don’t return.
2. Career Competence: Colleges need to offer job guidance long before students graduate.
3. Board Battles: Conditions are ripe for the rise of the rogue trustee.
4. Social-Media Skirmishes: More colleges are deciding how—and whether—to regulate faculty speech online.
5. College à la Carte: With more choices in the academic marketplace, higher education has begun to “unbundle.”
6. Adjunct Advocacy: Contingent faculty are demanding better working conditions—and getting them.
7. Team Science: Cooperation may be one of the few benefits of a gap in research funding.
8. Focus on Teaching: A renewed emphasis on the classroom may actually stick this time.
9. Dialing for Millennials: Colleges are wooing recent grads in hopes that they will one day become donors.
10. Managing Change: Successful colleges know a passing trend from a true opportunity.”

As was the case before, the purpose of this list is to give potential presidents an idea of the shifts that they will be dealing with should they choose to pursue such a career path.

This section has referred to findings by three very credible sources of national data in American higher education: The American Council on Education, Inside Higher Ed, and the Chronicle of Higher Education. It is intended to provide the reader with an idea of what the job of a college president might entail.

The top five activities that occupy most time of presidents were shown in Table 1; the next five are shown below in Table 4. Respondents were allowed to check all activities that applied to them.

Table 4
Activities Which Occupy Most of Presidents' Time (Activities Ranked 6-10)¹

Activity	Percent Selected
Governing board relations	20.7
Enrollment management	19.6
Faculty issues	15.0
Government relations	13.1
Capital improvement projects	12.6

1. The American College President 2012 (2012)

The reason this list of the activities ranked 6-10 is reproduced here is that all of these are fraught with challenges once a person becomes president, and any one of these might lead to a troublesome situation that is sometimes the cause for removal of a president. So, he or she would be well advised to tread carefully in all of these areas, because to the knowledge of author, each one of these has led to the premature departure of a president or chancellor. And, even if that unfavorable scenario can be avoided, these do consume a tremendous amount of time and mind space.

While the preceding tables listed some of the key issues involved in the presidency, it may also be worth looking also at the more detailed Table 5 in Appendix 1: Areas Which Occupy Most of Presidents' Time, which includes many more of the salient issues.

The preceding discussion and the lists that emerge also serve other purposes: If a person wishes to pursue a path to the presidency, it provides guidance on skill sets, experiences, accomplishments, and candidly, lines on resumes that it might be useful to accumulate. For example, a resume of a candidate who has experience and accomplishments in budgeting and financial management, fund raising, community relations, strategic planning, and personnel issues is likely to be viewed with more interest than one that does not. Further, if those elements are absent, the potential president is encouraged to develop them and to explore opportunities to acquire them.

Go to those who are responsible for such functions and ask to be involved and be willing to help. Attend programs and university activities that help you learn about these, and about technology planning, risk management, legal issues, capital improvement projects, entrepreneurial activities, and the longer set of 20 activities shown in Appendix 1. Become knowledgeable through reading the higher education literature about assessment and higher education issues and outcome measurements (which sometimes means understanding the political landscape), fiscal issues, sexual assault, race relations, retention, progression/ persistence, graduation, career planning for students, dealing with boards, social media and adjunct issues, different modes of delivery of instruction, respect for teaching, STEM issues, the different needs of millennials, managing change, walking on water, and the like.

Seriously though, even if it is not practical to expect expertise in all these areas, some awareness of all the aforementioned topics might help avoid the embarrassment of looking totally blank if someone during an interview raises them.

So, if the reader has not been completely turned off by the type and variety of issues that occupy college presidents' attention, the next section will discuss common pathways to the presidency.

Pathways to the Presidency

Let us propose some hypotheses as to what today's president looks like, not in the traditional sense of testing hypotheses with primary research, but by using secondary national data that already exist – just to examine our own gut feel about the profile of a college president in America.

Hypotheses:

The reader is encouraged to examine if each hypothesis seems reasonable. Also, after each hypothesis there is a question in italics to test the reader's knowledge of the pathways to the presidency. Record your answers before reading further.

Gender-based Hypotheses:

H1a: Today's college president is more likely to be male than female.

The reader is encouraged to make a guess at what percentage of presidents are male. Is it closer to 90%, 80%, 70%, or 60%?

H1b: While today's college president is more likely to be male than female, the percentage of female presidents is increasing.

This seems reasonable, but ask yourself: how much of an increase would we have seen in the most recent 5-year period for which data exists (2006-11)? Is the upward trend closer to 2%, 5%, 10%, or 20% in a five-year period?

Race-based Hypotheses:

H2a: Today's college president is more likely to be White/Caucasian than any other race.

What percentage of college presidents are White? Is it closer to 90%, 80%, 70%, or 60%?

H2b: The percentage of minority presidents is rapidly increasing.

H2c: The percentage of African American presidents reflects the percentage in the population (approximately 12.6 percent)

Given that some African American presidents lead Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs), is this reasonable? How about the percentage when we exclude HBCUs?

Religious Affiliation-based Hypothesis:

H3: Today's college president is more likely to be Christian than belonging to any other religion.

What percentage of college presidents identify themselves as Christian (including Protestant denominations, Catholics, and Mormons)? Is it closer to 90%, 80%, 70%, or 60%?

Highest Degree-based Hypotheses:

H4a: The vast majority of college presidents have an earned Ph.D.

Given that the Ph.D. has the connotation or aura of being the highest academic degree, is it reasonable to assume that the Ph.D. is the "coin of the realm?"

H4b: The vast majority of college presidents have either the Ph.D. or the Ed.D.

How about the percentage of D.B.A. or M.D. degrees?

Discipline-based Hypothesis:

H5: Given that most college campuses have more Arts and Sciences faculty than any other discipline, by far the majority of college presidents come from those fields.

Is the percentage of presidents from the Arts and Sciences closer to 90%, 80%, 70%, or 60%?

What are the percentages of presidents from Business or Education?

Career Path-based Hypotheses:

H6a: The vast majority of people become presidents from being provost or chief academic officer in their last position.

Is that percentage of former provosts closer to 90%, 80%, 70%, or 60%?

H6b: By far, the majority of people become presidents from a senior academic officer in their last position.

Is that percentage of the academic administration track closer to 90%, 80%, 70%, or 60%?

Results:

The data published by ACE in *The American College President 2012* (2012) provides answers to many of the hypotheses and related questions asked earlier.

Gender:

H1a stated: Today's college president is more likely to be male than female.

- 73.6 percent are male, and 26.4 percent are female. So, H1a is supported. (Did you get the percentage right?)

H1b stated: While today's college president is more likely to be male than female, the percentage of female presidents is rapidly increasing.

- In the 2006 study, 23 percent were female (relative to 26.4 percent in 2011), so the "rapid" part of H1b is not supported. There has been a very modest positive trend in favor of female presidents during that five-year period. (It would seem reasonable to expect a much greater increase, but that has not happened.)

Race:

H2a stated: Today's college president is more likely to be White/Caucasian than any other race.

- 87.2 percent of today's (2011) presidents are white, so H2a is supported. We expected to see a majority of presidents being White/Caucasian, but some readers may be surprised that it is that high.

H2b stated: The percentage of minority presidents is rapidly increasing.

- The percentage of White/Caucasian presidents in 2011 actually *increased* by about one percent since 2006, so H2b is not supported.

H2c stated: The percentage of African American presidents reflects the percentage in the population (approximately 12.6 percent)

- 5.9 percent are African American, 3.8 percent Hispanic, 1.5 percent Asian American, and 0.8 percent American Indian. However, looking closer, the situation is even worse for minorities than these low numbers reveal as when we exclude minority-serving institutions, only about nine percent of presidents are from racial or ethnic minorities. H2c is not supported.
- The ACE report states (p. 18): “Minority presidents continued to be underrepresented relative to the higher education workforce, in which minorities accounted for 24 percent of faculty and senior staff in 2009. Until colleges and universities improve the board/trustees’ presidential hiring practices as well as the pipeline of minority faculty and senior staff through ongoing, customized leadership programs, progress in recruiting minority presidents will continue to be slow.”
- However, earlier publications by Sethna (2005, 2011) indicate that, at least in the case of some minorities and at certain stages of the pipeline, it is not always a pipeline problem that prevents minorities from reaching more senior positions. Using national data, this research studied the entire pipeline from college to graduate school, to assistant, associate, and full professor, to department chair, senior executive positions, and finally to president/CEO. It showed that blaming “the pipeline problem” is an overgeneralization – because different minorities do differentially well or badly at different stages of the academic pipeline relative to each other and relative to the majority population.

Religious Affiliation:

H3 stated: Today’s college president is more likely to be Christian than belonging to any other religious affiliation.

- The question asked was: "What is your religious preference—Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, another religion, or no religion?"
- Approximately 78 percent of presidents in America are Christian (52 percent Protestant and 26 percent Catholic). An additional 5 percent are Jewish. None of the other declared religions make it to even one percent each. A possible explanation might be that many colleges were started by Catholics, Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians. Although many are not today tightly controlled by their Christian founders, a strong influence still prevails; this may be a cause of the high representation of Christians. Demographics also account for the high percentage of Christian presidents. According to a recent Gallup poll (Gallup, 2015), about 72 percent of Americans identify themselves as being Christian.

Highest Degree:

H4a stated: The vast majority of college presidents have an earned Ph.D.

- Only 55.5 percent of college presidents have an earned Ph.D. Depending on your connotation of “vast” majority, H4a is not supported.

H4b stated: The vast majority of college presidents have either the Ph.D. or the Ed.D.

- 76.8 percent of today’s (2011) presidents have a Ph.D. or Ed.D., up marginally from 75 percent in 2006. M.D. degrees account for another 1.3 percent, and the D.B.A. does not even appear on the ACE table (probably lumped in the “Other degree” category). Law degrees account for another 7 percent. One possible explanation might be that many colleges began as teacher’s colleges, and so that may play a role in so many Ed.D.s becoming college presidents. H4b is supported, though some perceptions may be that this percentage would be even higher.

Parent Discipline:

H5 stated: Given that most college campuses have more Arts and Sciences faculty than any other discipline, by far the majority of college presidents come from those fields.

- The top three parent disciplines for presidents (in order) are education or higher education (37.7 percent), the humanities (14.2 percent), and the social sciences (11.9 percent). These were the same three in 2006, with education or higher education in the lead (43 percent), and the other two virtually tied at 13.7 percent and 13.8 percent). Business was at 5.6 percent in 2011 and 4.9 percent in 2006. Note that, in both studies, the percentage from education is considerably greater than the sum of the humanities and the social sciences. H5 is not supported. As mentioned in the discussion of H4b, it may be that because many colleges began as teacher’s colleges, and that results in many people from the field of education becoming college presidents.

Career Path:

H6a stated: The vast majority of people become presidents after being provost or chief academic officer in their last position.

- In their immediately preceding position, the largest percentage of presidents have been chief academic officers. So, that path is the most likely one to lead to the presidency. However, while the CAO / Provost is indeed the most frequently mentioned path, it accounts for *only 34 percent* of current presidents, thus leaving about two-thirds of presidents coming from other routes.

H6b stated: By far, the majority of people become presidents from a senior academic officer in their last position.

- Approximately 20 percent have previously been presidents (see below for computations without this group), 34 percent have been provosts or chief academic officers (CAOs), 11 percent have been other senior executives in academic affairs such as deans, 4.5 percent have come from senior student affairs positions, and 7.4 percent from senior positions in business or administration, and 3.5 percent from chair or faculty positions. A total of almost 80 percent (79.7 percent) have come from within higher education. The remaining 20.3 percent come from outside higher education; elected or appointed governmental officials, people from business and industry, people from the non-profit sector (museums, foundations, etc.), and people from the K-12 sector and religious orders who account for approximately 2 percent each. In 2006, only 13.1 percent of presidents came from outside higher education, so the jump from 13.1 percent to 20.3 percent in five years is quite significant.
- About 30 percent of presidents have never been a faculty member, and almost 48 percent have worked outside of higher education at some point in their careers.
- Note: If we exclude from the computations those who previously had been presidents, 42.3 percent of the remainder have been provosts or CAOs, and 13.3 percent have been senior executives in academic affairs. So, about 56 percent of presidents have come from senior administrative positions within academic affairs, and 4.4 percent from chair or faculty positions. Thus, academic affairs is clearly the most likely path (accounting for about approximately 60 percent of presidents) to the presidency, but other paths still account for as much as 40 percent. About one quarter of such pathways come from outside higher education. Elected or appointed governmental officials, people from business and industry, people from the non-profit sector (museums, foundations, etc.), and people from the K-12 sector, religious orders account for approximately 2.5 percent each.

So, what do we conclude from the above analysis? An obvious conclusion would be that to be white (87 percent), Christian (78 percent), and male (74 percent) provides a significant advantage (considerably greater than the percentages in the U.S. population), but one cannot simply choose to be white or male, and it appears disrespectful to consider changing religions just to get a job! Of course, we know that to discriminate on the basis of any one of these characteristics is against the law and against ethical principles as well. So, let us examine those attributes that we can control. Some conclusions might be:

- Earn a Ph.D. or an Ed.D. (77 percent)

- If your parent discipline is education or higher education (37.7 percent), the humanities (14.2 percent), or the social sciences (11.9 percent), you have a distinct advantage. If it is business, it's not quite an advantage (5.6 percent). Note that campus search committees are typically dominated by faculty from the arts and sciences, and so an applicant from the field of business needs to build and speak of experiences and anecdotal evidence as to his (not a typo, but rather a contraction for "his or her") ability to relate to arts and sciences disciplines. A system chancellor or a board may well appreciate someone from the field of business, but a candidate has to make it to that stage first. I liken it to the primary season and the general election. One has to be sensitive to the fact that the messages of the primary season may not be the same as those of the general election. Unlike the political process, however, a candidate cannot simply change a message half-way through the process. So, s/he must make sure that his application letter and other written and oral communications stresses points of importance to the faculty committees *and* the chancellor and board.
- A career path in academic affairs is the most likely path to the presidency (48 percent to 60 percent, depending on whether you include previous presidencies in your computations). Of these paths, the most likely is via the provost / CAO position, though other senior executive positions in academic affairs are definitely worth pursuing, because: (a) they can lead to the presidency in their own right, and (b) they lead to the provost's position which leads to the presidency. Another recommendation is to acquire line management experience such as a chair, which gets one on a path to the presidency.

Discussion

It might be useful to address some FAQs on the job of a president that have not been captured by the preceding analysis. This is done below, with a couple of caveats:

1. Some important and relevant questions on the presidency would take a book to answer well. For example, there are entire books and chapters in other books devoted to the topic of fund raising in non-profit organizations.
2. There are several distinct and distinctive management and leadership styles, many of which have considerable merit, so there is no one right answer to many such questions. The author has spent almost two decades at the level of president and CAO of a large university system, but would be the first to state that his responses would not be universally applicable.

Q: Fund raising is an important element. How do you approach it? Would you meet them in your office or theirs? How is it different raising money for athletics versus history?

A: Fund raising is a major (if not the major) aspect of the job of a president. It appears in the top three of all three lists presented at the start of this paper: the activities for which presidents were insufficiently prepared when they assumed their first presidency (#1 on that list), the activities that occupy most of presidents' time (#2 in that set), and the activities that they enjoy the most (#3 on that list). So, to a potential president, I would say, get fund raising experience. If you are chair or a dean or a provost, ask the relevant VP or president for opportunities to become more involved, ask to be part of developing a case statement, and play whatever role they feel comfortable with your playing.

The "Golden Rule" of fund raising is: "He (or she) who has the gold makes the rules!" What that means is you should be available to go to the location they want, present the proposal in the form they want, and make the pitch for things that interest them. If you and all your senior colleagues are agreed that that the biggest priority for the university is an endowed chair in history, there is still no point making that pitch to the athletics supporter who has made it clear that his world revolves around football! We must go looking for and try to find someone (with the gold) who loves history; we cannot typically simply go where the gold is more evident and try to convert that person from athletics to history. Find out what is important to the potential donor, and see if you can reasonably meet those needs.

As an example, shortly after I became president, I read all the past correspondence between senior administrators and a major potential donor who was personally very close to those administrators. They had asked him on more than one occasion for a seven figure gift, but none of those appeals had resulted in a major gift. So, when I paid my first fund raising call on him, I told him I had read all the previous "pitches" and had gathered that none of them had appealed to him. I mentioned a few things we were doing (not quite a case statement, but an abbreviated version of them) and asked him directly what would excite him. And, he told me, in one sentence what that was! I resolved to work on that, and come back to him when we were ready to make a formal presentation. We did so, and after a couple of iterations, got the gift we had hoped to get.

He who has the gold makes the rules.

But, within reason, as the next response reveals.

Q. How do you handle situations when a potential big donor wants something in return?

A. Here the answer is very personal. So, these answers are only mine, and might be different for another respondent. My first question is: Is it legal? If not, tell them so, ask them to reconsider, and if not, thank them for their time and walk away. Most times, the requests are legal, but sometimes they are not ethical. We once lost a major gift because we would not do what we believed was unethical and in very poor taste besides. We had worked on that gift for a very long time, so the expenditure of time and effort was bothersome, but it was really not a difficult decision in terms of our personal

ethical values. While we were sorry for the sake of the institution that this was one deal that we could not make work, we slept easier at night knowing it was the right thing to do.

Q. As a corollary to the previous question, how do you handle situations when a powerful person wants something?

A. Again, the answer is personal. Clearly, if that something is moving a date or time or location of an event, we would try to accommodate those wishes if it could reasonably be done. If that something is illegal, then the same answer as before applies – walk away. If it is legal but not ethical, we would respectfully explain the situation, but not yield. Yet let us recognize that others have handled that same situation differently. According to a recent report in the Statesman (2015), a “select handful’ of applicants to the University of Texas’ undergraduate programs are accepted each year at the insistence of President Bill Powers over the objections of the admissions office, a report released Thursday concluded. ... Such applicants were typically recommended by state legislators, members of the UT System Board of Regents, donors, alumni and other influential people, according to the report by Kroll Associates Inc.” According to the article, no legal wrongdoing was found and no disciplinary action was planned, though a review of admissions processes is expected to take place.

When we faced similar pressures from powerful people, we did not give in. In such cases, we promised to look into the matter and offered to have the student meet with appropriate colleagues who might advise them how to improve their prospects the next time around – and we did this for the non-well-heeled and non-well-connected students as well. What were the reactions? Some powerful people understood and moved on – some truly great ones actually helped us later on, but others never forgave us. Again, while it may hurt to have important people be upset, we slept better knowing we had done the right thing.

Q: It is not an 8:00 to 5:00 job. How many nights a week are you expected to attend a function? How many Saturdays a year are you attending an event?

A. That is correct. It is not an 8:00 to 5:00 job. It’s a 24-7-365 job. Well, here too the answer is personal. Many times, as a senior president, I was invited to speak on various topics concerning the presidency. If I was ever asked a question on work-life balance, I would simply go to the board or the flip chart, and give myself a grade of F minus on that dimension. I failed miserably. I often went home at 9:00 p.m. (or later). In 19 years, I took one vacation (a four-day cruise). So, some other president is better suited to give advice on this aspect of the job.

When my daughter was in medical school, she told me of a phrase that medical students use, called a “golden weekend.” A golden weekend is one that “normal” people would call a weekend. It means that they had Saturday and Sunday free. As president, I had very, very few golden weekends (at least during the academic year) in 19 years. As it happened, my last day on the job was a Sunday, and I gave a talk to students in UWise (an exciting program we have on campus) on the evening of that day. Then, I

went to the cafeteria and chatted with a few of them. So, my last day ended approximately at 8 p.m. on a Sunday.

No complaints; that's exactly the way I would have wanted to go out.

Q. How often do you get accused of favoritism because of the choices you make about what to attend?

A. I tried to attend most events, but I think that most people understood that I had to leave one event to get to another. There were sometimes triple bookings and once four events (each of which I attended) the same evening. I had the best assistant to the president in the world, and she kept me sane.

In my own mind, I had a guideline that I would prefer to attend an event where my presence meant more; for example, a march across campus to "Take Back the Night" (against sexual violence) rather than simply being in the audience for a recital (after I had welcomed the audience).

Q. Is it possible to read everything that you are expected to sign or make a decision on?

A. No. I trusted my VPs, and asked them to initial documents to show that they had read them first. In the main, I was blessed with excellent vice presidents.

Q. What percentage of your day gets spent on matters that are just a formality that should have been finalized before getting to you?

A. You can control most of that by letting your colleagues know that such is your preference. I believe I was able to do so, thanks to talented colleagues.

Q. How hard is it to change things that have been done the same way for decades? I ran into many things that when I asked why is it done that way the answer was "We have always done it that way."

A. It is very difficult to do so, but we used a year-long process (we called it "Planning and Prioritization") in my very first year that was a demanding process, but set the tone for looking at ourselves closely. Every single academic and academic support department was charged to examine everything they did and classify them into three "buckets": Those that needed to be added or enhanced, those that could be maintained, and those that needed to be gradually de-emphasized or de-funded so that it could free up funds for the first set. So, by definition a culture was set that examined everything we do. Of course, there were some departments which "did not get the memo" but they got the message later on, because every decision was re-examined and could be modified by the next higher level, all the way to the top institutional level. Each level had to have a faculty/staff committee review and an administrative review and each level had an appeal process built in. We literally created new money from the third set and used it to fund new initiatives and enhance what needed to be enhanced.

Implicit in this response is a major decision as to how to use the “honeymoon period,” however long or short it may be. It could be used for non-controversial activities like getting to know the institution and the various constituencies and starting several initiatives. But, in addition to doing that, it could be used for participatory activities which actually insist on very tough decisions and trade-offs. (Or something else, of course.) I would not pretend that there is one right answer – it depends on the circumstances. Because of the particular situation that we faced when I became President, where 51 percent of the entering class was on remedial education and we used rotary phones and most computers had no hard drives, I knew we would not be able to build a first class vibrant university without starting to make the really tough trade-off decisions in Year One. The evidence of later years supported that decision because there was transformative change in the institution to rise to one of the more highly regarded universities in the state, to challenge and sometimes beat Harvard in academic debate, to become a national player in undergraduate research, to become a SACS Level VI University (the highest level possible), to more than double the square footage of building space of an 88-year old institution, to more than double the total number of degrees awarded to date, and many other similar developments. But, of course, this came at a cost of being willing to make many, many tough decisions (not always popular ones) and converting the “honeymoon period” (if there was one) into a “working honeymoon!”

Q. How do you get the humanities people to get along with the professional schools and the other way around? How do you create a culture of cooperation rather than confrontation?

A. That too, is a cultural thing. First, you have to walk the walk and walk the talk. When I was a business school dean at another institution, I worked closely with the other deans, including the dean of arts and sciences – that was a quarter of a century ago and we still are friends. I helped his initiatives and he helped mine. I worked with faculty in the college of education to create an innovative program, and closely with the engineering faculty and administrators, and the dean of arts and humanities. As dean, I truly believed that the goals of the university trumped those of the college of business. I wanted to help the other units succeed, and I was willing to get a little less so they could get a little more and so that the institution could do well. That was the kind of dean I chose to be, and that was the kind of VP I was when I was appointed to (what turned out to be a long, 20-month) interim position at the “provost” level – the title was “Executive VP” but it essentially was what is called provost today. So, when I was interviewing for the position of president and met with groups on campus, I could give them names of people in their fields and say ‘Call them, and they will tell you how I work with them.’ I know that some of them did so. When I got the job and started as president, I could honestly tell the deans and VPs that I had actually done what I was asking them to do: work well with others. Your unit is important, but the institution is even more important!

At my institution, there was a time when relationships were very, very strained between the administrators and faculty of arts and sciences and education. The VPAA

and I let it be known that that was unacceptable. Today, we have extensive and exciting cooperation and cooperative programs between them, and great faculty-to-faculty and administrator-to-administrator relationships have led to external grants and a positive culture.

As president, when I interviewed VP and dean candidates, I would tell them that I was less interested in them as a VP or a dean than “as a partner in the leadership of the university.” That was the more important role. That kind of message increases the probability (but cannot ensure) that a positive, cooperative, collaborative culture is set.

Q. Overhead has been growing at most institutions in recent years. How do you control the growth in the number of directors and programs that are not directly degree programs.

A. You try and try, and sometimes you can and at other times you cannot. When I started as president in 1994, phrases such as “risk management,” “assessment,” and “enrollment management,” “retention, progression or persistence, graduation,” existed only in the dictionary. There were no such formal functions in most colleges and universities in America. Today, they are, not because power-hungry presidents wake up each day and say, “What new non-academic compliance program can I add today,” but more likely “Oh heck; I guess we cannot continue to meet federal, state, accreditation, or NCAA compliance standards without a dedicated person in charge of that function.” In addition, our world has changed. For example, distance education meant something else entirely and on-line education, something in which we excel today thanks to wonderful faculty and staff colleagues, was unheard of – increased IT staff and helpdesk personnel are critical to the academic mission today. To pick another example, with the legitimate focus on retention and graduation comes a need for more financial aid personnel, writing labs, tutoring centers, and the like. It is not realistic to believe that all these national changes have no administrative cost at each university or college.

Every couple of years, I prepared and shared a chart showing growth of positions in every division and demonstrated that: (a) the growth was consistent with the enrollment growth, (b) the growth was more for academic affairs than for the other divisions, and (c) the least growth was for the president’s office! In fact, every chancellor (we have a multi-campus system) who visited my office was stunned that we had only one secretarial staff position (thanks to the best assistant in the world referred to earlier).

Again, we were able to show that we walked the talk *and* walked the walk.

Before we end this discussion session, one more important piece of advice needs to be mentioned: Give lots of thanks and give lots of praise. For example, I ended almost every e-mail message to my faculty and staff colleagues with, “Thank you for all you do,” and I meant it. During public events, I thanked and praised those who were making the university work so well. And, every five years, I would write a column in the newspaper entitled, “Don’t look at me; someone else did it!” This phrase is usually intended to deflect blame, but I used it to deflect praise for specific things that the

community liked and appreciated, and were really due to the efforts of my wonderful colleagues rather than those of the president.

Conclusions

The preceding discussion attempts to make the case that it is desirable for talented people to consider being a college president. There are specific areas, activities, and accomplishments that a potential president should consider acquiring. Examples include: budgeting and financial management, fund raising, community relations, strategic planning, personnel issues, technology planning, risk management, legal issues, capital improvement projects, entrepreneurial activities, assessment and higher education issues and outcomes, fiscal issues, issues concerning sexual assault, race relations, retention, progression/persistence, graduation, career planning for students, dealing with boards, social media and adjunct issues, different modes of delivery of instruction, respect for teaching, STEM issues, the different needs of millennials, managing change, and the like. A resumé should be strong in some of these and a candidate should at least be able to discuss, articulately and knowledgeably, most of the others.

Guidance may also be found in the paper as to pathways to the presidency in terms of education and experience accumulated in terms of specific positions such as department chair, dean, and provost. Having said that, there are several alternate pathways to the presidency from other areas within and outside higher education.

The discussion section followed a Q&A format in order to provide some idea of challenges and the joys of the position. An important caveat needs to be stated: For each question and every answer described in this section, there are many, many more!

I make no apology for that.

Such are the challenges and the joys of the presidency...

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Appendix 1

Table 5
Areas That Occupy Most Time of Presidents¹

Activity	Percent Selected
Budget/financial management	57.9
Fund raising	47.0
Community relations	22.7
Strategic planning	22.2
Personnel issues (excluding faculty)	21.6
Governing board relations	20.7
Enrollment management	19.6
Faculty issues	15.0
Government relations	13.1
Capital improvement projects	12.6
Academic issues (e.g., curriculum changes)	12.2
Entrepreneurial ventures	6.1
Media/public relations	5.1
Accountability/assessment of student learning	4.9
Crisis management	4.2
Athletics	4.0
Student life/conduct issues	3.4
Risk management/legal issues	3.1
Campus internationalization	1.9
Technology planning	1.1

1. *The American College President 2012* (2012)

Note: Respondents were allowed to check all that applied.

