Closing the Gap:
Leadership Development and Succession Planning in Public Higher Education

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AASCU American Association of State Colleges and Universities
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About AASCU

The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) is a Washington, D.C.-based higher education association of more than 400 public colleges, universities and systems whose members share a learning- and teaching-centered culture, a historic commitment to underserved student populations, and a dedication to research and creativity that advances their regions' economic progress and cultural development.

Executive Summary

Given the many challenges that higher education faces today, adroit and visionary leadership for public colleges and universities has never been more imperative. Yet much work remains to be done to define and develop the competencies and skill sets that public university presidents need—both for today and projecting into the future.

To better understand these critical issues, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) undertook an in-depth study to determine and clarify the leadership qualities that can help public colleges and universities succeed and thrive. Fundamentally, we sought to derive a deeper understanding of the key competencies required of current and future public university leaders. At the same time, we also sought to explore how common practices for leadership development and succession planning in the private sector—in particular, assessment center methodology—might be adapted and applied to meet the needs of public higher education. To those ends, we asked the following research questions:

1. What do we know about effective practices for developing current and future leaders in higher education?
2. What leadership skills and perspectives are critical for success as a public university president, now and in the future?
3, How might assessment center methodology—a standardized evaluation of behavior based on multiple inputs—be used to improve succession planning and leadership development in higher education?

We addressed the first question primarily through a thorough review of the literature on best practices in leadership and succession planning in higher education. In the course of that review we studied a variety of leadership development programs regularly used by leaders and would-be leaders in colleges and universities. Among many lessons learned, we found that the topics addressed in such programs and the pedagogy they use are relatively similar. We also found that some programs today include efforts to assess the performance of sitting higher education leaders.

At the same time, however, we found little or no evidence of the use of the assessment center methodology in the development or selection of future leaders in higher education. Indeed, there was little evidence that any systematic set of competencies was rigorously addressed within programmatic efforts for leadership development and succession planning in public higher education. Further, we found that leadership development programs do not typically seek to assess, develop and improve leadership behaviors from the perspective of others who interact directly with the leader.

To address the second research question, we conducted a survey of successful public university leaders (presidents) and university system heads (chancellors)[1] that was designed to develop a profile of the skills, knowledge and personal characteristics required for success as a public university president. Respondents were asked to respond to questions designed to elicit a broad set of skills and attributes that contribute to an individual's success in this role. From a qualitative analysis of the responses, we produced a profile of a successful leader that we then tested on a focus group of other public university presidents. The profile we developed indicates that the successful president will:

- Understand and appreciate the academic enterprise;
- Provide anchoring through personal integrity;
- Understand and manage the university's financial and resource-allocation processes;
- Communicate well in formal and informal settings;
- Be resilient and not take things personally;
- Be energetic and engaged;

1 *The leader of a single university campus is sometimes called a "president" and sometimes a "chancellor." Similarly, the leader of multiple campuses within a system of affiliated universities is sometimes called a "president" and sometimes a "chancellor." To avoid ambiguity, this report refers to the top campus leader as the "president" and the top system leader as the "chancellor."*

- Develop and sustain competent interpersonal relationships;
- Know how to work with different constituencies;
- Provide and deliver a strategic direction;
- Be entrepreneurial;
- Know how to manage a large organization;
- Develop a strong leadership team; and
- Know how to listen.

To begin to answer the third research question, AASCU convened a planning symposium, engaging a panel of experts and practitioners in assessment center methodology, along with higher education leaders and search consultants. The preliminary profile of a successful university leader and the findings developed in the first phase of this project were shared with the group. With guidance from the panel of experts, the group also explored many different dimensions of assessment center methodology and its possible applications for higher education.

Based on our literature review and, particularly, the preliminary profile of successful public university presidents we had developed, discussions at the symposium indicated participants clearly felt there was considerable promise in the possibility of applying assessment center methodology to improve succession planning and leadership development in higher education. Participants offered specific suggestions for developing a vision and sustainable business model for a higher education leadership assessment center. Among other recommendations, they suggested that leadership competencies be linked to improving institutional effectiveness and student success, and that development of assessment center methodology in public higher education be linked to existing AASCU programming for leadership development.

As a result of this work, we believe that there is a critical need to evaluate current professional development programs to determine whether their content and pedagogy, linked with improved criteria for selection of participants, can enhance the development of individuals as leaders. Moreover, we believe that the methodology associated with assessment centers offers a promising avenue for improving the professional development of those seeking increasingly more responsible leadership positions in colleges and universities. In the longer term, this methodology also may help public higher education achieve greater success in the selection of individuals for leadership positions.

As next steps, we seek to develop a strategy for implementing a leadership assessment center designed to meet the needs of public colleges and universities. Specifically, we intend to:

- Build on our initial leadership profile to develop distinct, assessable leadership skills and competencies mapped to appropriate higher education strategies;
- Validate the leadership profile using surveys and interviews of subject-matter experts;
- Test the validity for university leadership of existing face-to-face and virtual assessment centers to determine the degree to which customization is needed; and
- Evaluate the information collected and develop a business model for a higher education assessment center.

AASCU's mission is to serve as a truly transformative influence in public higher education. To that end, we must push the boundaries of existing practice and lead efforts to innovate and change. Adopting assessment center methods for AASCU's leadership programs is a definitive and potentially defining step in that direction.

Introduction

Leaders of public colleges and universities face unprecedented challenges and opportunities. Their rapidly changing environments are becoming more complex and demanding. Declining budgets, flattened management structures, and the increased need for collaboration and transparency all require that public institutions pay heightened attention to developing effective leaders at all levels of the organization. A related challenge for institutions is that many colleges and universities will experience a transition in leadership over the next few years as the Baby Boomer generation retires.

Eckel and Hartley (2011) identify the following key leadership challenges for higher education:

- Today's presidents are not tomorrow's presidents. Nearly half of all college and university presidents are over the age of 61, quickly approaching traditional retirement age.
- Increasingly diverse campuses have not had increasingly diverse leaders. Only 23 percent of college and university presidencies are held by women and only 14 percent of presidencies are held by a person of color.
- The nature of presidential work is changing and many new presidents are unprepared for key aspects. New presidents report being least prepared for some key tasks, including fundraising, risk management, capital improvements, budgeting, and entrepreneurial ventures.
- The traditional presidential pipeline is insufficient—at the top and bottom—to fill expected need. Only 26 percent of female CAOs [Chief Academic Officers] and 33 percent of male CAOs, the traditional most likely prior position to a presidency, say they have intentions to become presidents. At the bottom of the pipeline, only 15 percent of all faculty at four-year institutions and 11 percent of faculty at community colleges are aged 44 or younger and working in permanent roles. This suggests the pool for future leaders may well be sparse. (pp. 1-2)

Despite these widely known and well understood challenges, higher education as an industry has been slow to embrace private sector talent management strategies that may be effective in helping to close the anticipated leadership gap. Assessment center methodology offers one set of strategies from the private sector that potentially could be applied to improve and support the professional development of future public higher education leaders.

This description of assessment center methodology, excerpted from one of its grounding documents, is helpful to understanding the approach:

> "[Assessment center methodology]…consists of a standardized evaluation of behavior based on multiple inputs. Several trained observers and techniques are used. Judgments about behavior are made, in major part, from specially developed assessment simulations. These judgments are pooled in a meeting among the assessors or by a statistic[al] integration process. In an integration discussion, comprehensive accounts of behavior—and often ratings of it—are pooled. The discussion results in evaluations of the assessees' performance on the dimensions or other variables that the assessment center is designed to measure." (International Task Force on Assessment Center Guidelines, 2009, 244-245)

In this study, we sought to advance understanding of the key competencies required of current and future public university leaders by suggesting how to adapt private sector leadership development and succession planning practices—specifically the assessment center methodology—to meet the needs of colleges and universities. With the goal of improving practices in higher education, we asked the following research questions:

1. What do we know about effective practices for developing current and future leaders in higher education?
2. What leadership skills and perspectives are critical for success as a public university president, now and in the future?
3. How might assessment center methodology be used to improve succession planning and leadership development in higher education?

We sought answers to these research questions first by conducting a review of the literature on best practices in leadership and succession planning in higher education. Second, through the use of a sample of successful public university leaders (presidents) and university system heads (chancellors), we developed a profile of the skills, knowledge and personal characteristics required for success as a public university president. Finally, we convened a panel of experts and practitioners of the assessment center methodology to recommend ways to assess and develop current and future leaders consistent with the profile developed for successful public university presidents in the second phase of the research project. Additional conceptual and methodological choices are described in the sections below.

PART 1: Succession Planning and Leadership Development Practices in Higher Education

This section summarizes our review of the existing practices and lessons learned in leadership development in public colleges and universities.

Types of Leadership Development Programs

Leadership development efforts are now offered by a variety of organizations and institutions. These include organizations created for the sole purpose of offering leadership development programs; professional organizations and associations that offer such programs; formal degree programs in educational leadership; programs created for talent development within a particular college or university; and, finally, assessments designed to improve performance of those serving in a leadership position.

Leadership Development as the Sole Organizational Purpose

Public colleges and universities often turn to professional organizations that specialize in leadership performance to groom their leaders. One example of such a professional organization is the Higher Education Resource Services Institute (HERS), which provides leadership advancement training for women and individuals from previously underrepresented groups. HERS is geared to help women in mid- to senior-level faculty, staff and administrative positions groom their leadership abilities, skills and support networks.. The curriculum is based on a three-pillar leadership model that includes networking, self-knowledge and institutional awareness. The curriculum includes readings on transformational leadership, plus projects with senior officers from a participant's home college or university. Overall, HERS is instrumental in providing networking opportunities and competencies for emerging female university leaders.

The Institute for Educational Management (IEM) at the Harvard Graduate School of Education offers several well-known leadership development programs for mid-career professionals, as well as individuals seeking senior-level and leadership positions. One example is the two-week Institute for Management and Leadership in Education (MLE) for mid-career professionals, which is designed to help participants:

- Master new approaches to leadership;
- Develop and implement effective strategies;
- Review and assess the impact of changes in the higher education competitive environment;
- Realign faculty and financial resources; and
- Evaluate the impact of new initiatives and alliances.

The IEM programs employ a case-study methodology and emphasize the value of the professional networks gained by participation in the program.

Professional Organizations that Offer Leadership Development Programs

Professional organizations that serve higher education in a broad range of ways also offer leadership development opportunities to their members. These efforts recognize that the complex demands that current and aspiring university leaders face require an ongoing commitment to learning (Rivas and Jones, 2015).

Some of the professional organizations offering leadership development programs are discipline-based, such as the American Association of Colleges and Schools of Business, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, and the Association of Leadership Educators. Other professional organizations serve different segments of higher education, including the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), the American Council on Education (ACE), and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU). Public universities and colleges typically turn to these professional organizations for assistance because the cost of developing and offering such programs internally is often prohibitive (VanDer Linden, 2006).

ACE has offered the ACE Fellows Program since 1965, and describes it as the longest-running higher education leadership development program in the United States. The fellows program has had more than 2,000 participants, including some 1,300-plus who became provosts, vice presidents and deans, and some 300 who became chief executive officers of universities or colleges. The program uses a combination of retreats (lectures/discussions) and observation of real-life work situations through placement at a college or university to enable participants to learn varied approaches to leadership in higher education. Fellows also have the opportunity to complete a self-assessment of their capacity for leadership.

ACE also offers a leadership development program for presidents in their first three years, providing them with knowledge, skills and practical advice from more-seasoned successful presidents. For example, new presidents are provided with guidance in working with the media, which is a unique challenge for higher-level leaders today (Bisbee, 2007; Miller & Krosnick, 2000). The participants are also provided with tools to help them manage their executive teams, which is often a significant criterion in measuring presidential effectiveness (MacTaggart, 2012).

AASCU provides well-received training programs for emerging leaders in higher education. The Executive Leadership Academy is a year-long program geared toward preparing senior executive leaders for the presidential role. Participants are taught advanced knowledge and skills, but also engage in experiences designed to highlight the differing demands of leadership. Participants also work with their home institution's president to develop a professional "executive plan" designed to help ensure that they obtain the right mix of structured experiences related to the work of the presidency. Readings, discussions, coaching and mentoring are other features of the program.

Another AASCU program, the Becoming a Provost Academy (BAPA), is offered to those interested in that senior academic leadership role. The one-year program offers training activities, webinars, and opportunities to network with current provosts. In addition, BAPA participants spend a significant amount of time working on their individual needs related to leadership development, typically in collaboration with a mentor from their home university.

The AASCU New Presidents Academy (NPA) is another well-established example of this type of leadership development program. The NPA is designed to support presidents and chancellors as they enter the presidency. Participants engage in structured discussion with NPA faculty, who are current or recently retired AASCU presidents, learning about the nature of the presidency, strategic visioning, organizational development, managing student enrollment, financial management, and interpretive communication through case studies and other active-learning strategies. The program also provides mentorship and guidance throughout the year after the academy.

Finally, AASCU's Millennium Leadership Initiative (MLI) focuses on preparing diverse senior administrators for presidential roles. MLI's goal is to diversify the highest levels of public college and university leadership. As with other AASCU programs, MLI offers preparation, skills, mentoring, and networking opportunities for participants. Since its inception, it has broadened the pool of qualified candidates for senior executive positions, including nearly 100 participants who have advanced to the presidency.

Formal Degree Programs in Educational Leadership

Formal education is another common route for identifying and grooming current and future university leaders (Allen & Hartman, 2008). Educational programs for administrative leaders, typically offered at the master's and doctoral levels at public institutions, are significant resources for preparing professionals for university leadership roles (Orr, 2006), and there is ample evidence of the success of these programs (Zepeda, 2007). These programs often focus on understanding the business aspects of higher education administration. The curriculum typically includes topics such as quality management, fiscal responsibility, human resource management, and courses on finance, marketing, law and economics. Leaders who complete this curriculum at an early stage in their careers appear better prepared for administering the business aspects of leading a university in later years of their careers (Townsend & Bassoppo-Moyo, 1996). Research has also demonstrated that younger leaders of color who complete these programs at earlier career stages later become as competitive as their white counterparts (Wolverton et al., 2002).

A frequent criticism of some of these formal educational programs, however, is that they lack vision, purpose and coherence (Orr, 2006). In an effort to address this criticism, many graduate leadership programs have redesigned their content and delivery in several innovative ways, including strongly integrating theory and practice. Such programs have demonstrated significant effectiveness in preparing leaders in previous studies (Bailey, 2014; Leitwood et al., 1996; Rosch & Anthony, 2012). Two examples of redesigned programs are those at the University of Colorado Denver and the College of William & Mary (Va.). The former has integrated active learning strategies into its Administrative Leadership and Policy Studies Program (APLS; The University of Colorado Denver, 2015), which now requires that students link coursework with field-based experiences through an internship to develop their leadership competencies. During the internships, students develop a project specifically tailored toward university improvement and must propose steps for its implementation. The program also requires students to reflect on their leadership experiences in order to foster a deeper understanding of their individual leadership strengths and weaknesses (Orr, 2006). A benefit from these degree programs is that most students pursue leadership opportunities within degree-granting institutions (Land, 2003). Freeman and Kochman (2012) assert that incorporating issues of assessment and accountability in educational degree programs assists in the preparedness of those who aspire to a college or a university presidency.

Programs for Talent Development Within a Specific University

Public colleges and universities sometimes sponsor their own programs for leadership growth for their professional staff (Wolverton et al., 2002). The Southeastern Conference Academic Leadership Development Program (ALDP) at the University of Georgia is one example. This program offers faculty members the opportunity to groom for leadership positions by working with senior administrators who mentor the faculty and help them gain important leadership knowledge, skills and abilities. Faculty participants also interact with other administrators and observe the institutional decision-making process in key areas and on critical issues within the university. In addition, they participate in a series of workshops to improve their knowledge and skills in areas such as conflict resolution, emergency preparedness, structure and operations, budgeting, accreditation, and accountability. The goal of the program is to spark interest and prepare potential candidates for the rewards and challenges of leadership in higher education. While not all participants choose to pursue a leadership position, exposure to the demands of leadership provides understanding and a deeper appreciation for how a university functions (SEC Academic Leadership Development Program, 2015).

Several institutions develop their own professional staff in order to ensure a more diverse administrative workforce. The Management Internship Program at Arizona State University, tailored for women and staff from underrepresented groups, is one example. This program requires participants to conduct research and other analytic work, study organizational development and implementation, and learn how to manage budget-setting and allocation strategies (Clark & Clark, 1996). Another example is the Administrative Fellows Program at Pennsylvania State University, where faculty and staff members from underrepresented groups gain administrative knowledge to increase their effectiveness as leaders. During the program, fellows learn about some of the pressing issues facing higher education, how decisions are made and implemented, and common difficulties in leadership. The program gives professional staff the opportunity to express interest in leadership responsibilities and also assists the institutions in identifying potential leaders. Arizona and Penn State are only two examples of universities that are actively seeking to increase the number of women and individuals of color available for leadership advancement (Penn State Administrative Fellows Program, 2014).

Recognizing talent among the faculty ranks for entry-level leadership roles, such as chairs, directors and associate deans, is a goal of other university-based leadership development programs. For example, the University of Texas at Brownsville offers three successful leadership development models (Rivas & Jones, 2015). In one program, called the Provost Fellows, the institution's provost annually selects two or three faculty members to assist in complex but targeted administrative initiatives. Examples include policy development, course development, assessment, data management techniques to address university accreditation requirements, and the development of instructional support for faculty. Once selected, fellows are given one year of time and compensation to analyze and formulate recommendations to accomplish the administrative initiative. During this time, the fellows become acquainted with senior leadership through meetings and work to understand the policies, procedures and university structures that can help them accomplish their assigned initiatives.

The second leadership development model from UT Brownsville is called ULead. Faculty participants are selected by the Leadership Development Committee based on their interests in linking leadership development theory to practice. The one-year program consists of a curriculum of readings in organizational behavior, leadership theory, business acumen and functions, strategic planning and implementation, and leadership development (Rivas & Jones, 2015). Other topics, covered through group discussions, lectures and case studies, include goal setting and expectations, conflict resolution management, ethics and culture, and managing organizational change. Upon completion of the program, participants have the opportunity to meet with senior leaders to discuss their potential for administrative responsibilities. Rivas and Jones (2015) found that several faculty members who completed both of these leadership programs were more likely to be placed in leadership positions at the university, including the positions of dean and director.

Another model at UT Brownsville, the Next Generation Academy, identifies 10-12 administrative staff members with the potential to assume leadership positions. The participants complete a two-year program with a curriculum prepared by the president and key members of the division of student affairs. The curriculum includes readings in leadership theory, successful business models, budgeting and university policy. Monthly lecture sessions are held with discussions, exercises and interaction with administrative departments. The program teaches principles in ethics, human resource management, conflict resolution and customer relations. The vice president of student affairs assigns a complex task—such as grant writing or an enrollment challenge—for participants to complete over the summer. Similar to the ULead initiative, the goal of this program is to inspire administrative employees to consider leadership roles. Rivas and Jones (2015) found this model to be effective, finding evidence that participants moved into specific leadership roles, including as director of financial aid, director of admissions, registrar, the presidency of a community college, and vice president of student affairs (at a different institution).

Overall, these internal systems illustrate the effectiveness of institutional-level development of future leaders (Land, 2003). The programs emphasize that it is in a university's best interest to provide development opportunities for leaders at all levels (Brumm, 2013). More generally, a continual focus on learning and improving leadership skills and

knowledge, whether it is by professional organizations or programs within institutions, is imperative for indiviudals to achieve excellence in the leadership role. As Bisbee (2007) stated, "leadership development is a process, not a single event" (p. 86).

One barrier to these internal development programs is that some employees with leadership responsibilities or potential have dispositional barriers to learning. (Catalfamo, 2010). Often professional staff members do not seek to augment their knowledge because they feel that they are "too old to learn" (Catalfamo, 2010, p. 11). Anxiety is another factor among professional staff members that can cause them to resist leadership development experiences (Van Veslor, Moxley, & Bunker, 2004; Young, & Brewer, 2008). Ironically, while they work to support educational opportunities for students, professional staff are sometimes hesitant to take advantage of opportunities for their own career advancement.

Assessments that Improve Performance for Those Serving in Leadership Positions

Another type of leadership development in higher education is the use of performance assessment of current leaders as a form of professional development. Assessment is a fairly common practice for presidents and others in more-senior academic leadership positions. Feedback through assessment is used to evaluate performance and as an element in retention and/or advancement (Yukl, 2012). Members of governing boards often use a 360-assessment model to evaluate a president's performance as a factor in contract renewal and compensation decisions (Cacioppe, 1998; Yukl, 2012). The 360-model often consists of 20 to 50 confidential quantitative, qualitative, or semi-structured interviews focused on the president's past performance. Regardless of the type of interviews conducted, the evaluations tend to focus on the president's ability to foster and maintain relationships, his or her success in achieving goals, and the degree to which he or she fulfills specific presidential responsibilities, including fundraising, planning and budgeting (Allen & Hartman, 2008; Bisbee, 2007; Freeman & Kochan, 2012; Gonzalez, 2010).

This approach includes tapping into the leadership style the president employs. Batch and Heyliger (2014) assert that some leadership styles are more likely to be judged effective because professional staff find these styles more satisfying to work with. These include both the *transformational* and *transactional* leadership styles. The transformational leadership style emphasizes a high-quality relationship between leaders and their followers, which fosters inspiration and motivation, and stresses the "building of and maintenance of social networks in the workplace, on both vertical and lateral levels, resulting in higher levels of task performance and active participation in citizenship behaviors" (Li & Hung, 2009, p. 1141). Transactional leadership, on the other hand, "guides and motivates employees and clearly defines the organizational goals as well as the roles and duties of the employees" (Okçu, 2014, p. 2164). Effective leaders utilize both of these styles depending on the demands of a particular situation (Batch & Heyliger, 2014). These leadership styles are known to produce increased work satisfaction among staff, good working relationships among employees, strong administrative support, and positive interactions with students (Ertureten, Cemalcilar, & Aycan, 2013; Froesche & Sinkford 2009; Rowold, 2014; Okcu, 2014). Because of these benefits, transformational and transactional styles are the most desired styles for university leaders (Batch & Heyliger, 2014; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010).

In addition to leadership styles, skill sets are also reviewed in the assessment process. As noted by Wang and Berger (2010), university leaders must possess technical, conceptual and interpersonal skills. Each type of skill is needed and used differently depending on the nature of the leadership position. For those who serve in positions such as deans, program directors and chairs, technical skills are typically the more important. For those in more-senior positions, such as provosts and presidents, conceptual skills are more important and relevant. Conceptual understanding involves the ability to see the university as a whole; to recognize how different departments interact, depend and impact each other; and to see how the university extends its relationships to higher education overall, the community in which it serves, and its political, social and economic impact in the region (Katz, 1995).

Using this assessment approach to improve the leadership profile of a sitting president also presents a challenge. As MacTaggert argues:

> For universities and presidents, a future-centered comprehensive evaluation gives a sharp focus on pursuit of the vision; with the rapid pace of change in higher education, informing and guiding successful leadership for the university's future must be at the heart of the performance assessment process. (MacTaggart, 2012, p. 11)

Likewise, congruence of the president's vision and desired changes with those of the governing board and other key stakeholders is critical to understanding the role of president as change leader. In *Leading Change: How Boards and Presidents Lead Exceptional Institutions*, MacTaggart (2011) describes several presidential skills as "change-leadership traits" (p. 11). They include emotional resilience, strategic adaptability, optimism, and the capacity to collaborate with the board and stakeholders to augment change. MacTaggert describes the importance of 360-evaluations as providing insights into whether the president is able to facilitate the difficult discussions with others that are necessary for the implementation of change. A 360-review also can provide feedback to presidents about whether they effectively manage their own emotions when they are criticized or their decisions are vehemently opposed.

360-evaluations specifically target whether the president can competently handle difficult, yet necessary, change-oriented conversations, rather than simply whether the president has great relationships with stakeholders. MacTaggart (2011) also argues that the governing board and other stakeholders should not only evaluate the president's performance for evidence of these skills, but also should support the president in working to make personal changes to develop these competences. MacTaggert recommends that presidents utilize an executive coach (p. 11) to make the necessary adjustments in leadership actions and approaches, with the coaching process based on a deep understanding of the president's strengths and weaknesses.

Successes and Failures of Current Leadership Development Efforts

Our analysis of these leadership development efforts revealed a number of factors that can contribute to their success or failure.

Curriculum for Leadership Development Programs

While each program describes the "subjects" taught using slightly different language and with varying emphasis, there is great similarity across leadership development efforts in higher education. The programs typically have a curricular component that "teaches" essential knowledge for different levels of leadership, including theories on leadership, finance, management, human resources, fundraising, and change management. Most leadership development programs provide experiential opportunities so that participants can learn and practice applying knowledge in situations that approximate actual leadership decision making. This is done by having participants develop practical and "real-life" projects and initiatives for implementation. The programs also typically provide the opportunity to interact with those currently serving in leadership positions in order to learn firsthand about the roles, implementation of responsibilities, and, importantly, the human experience involved.

Barriers to Participation in Leadership Development Programs

Aspiring leaders face barriers to participation in leadership development programs (Catalfamo, 2010). A significant limitation is the individual's willingness to commit the necessary time and energy, given other professional responsibilities. Sullivan (2014) indicates that this is particularly a problem for tenure-track faculty members. Indeed, adults generally cite a lack of time as the most frequent barrier to seeking further learning (Peters & Smith, 2004). The

same concern regarding time and balancing other commitments holds true for the more-seasoned university leaders, whose participation is critical to both the curriculum and pedagogy of leadership development programs (Sullivan, 2014).

Other institutional barriers are scheduling conflicts and a lack of financial support from public colleges and universities (Catalfamo, 2010). Moreover, learning opportunities such as these are typically the first initiatives to be cut back or eliminated when there are university budget concerns (McDade, 1994).

External Relationships (Networking as a Form of Leadership Development)

Many leadership development programs offer the opportunity for leaders and would-be leaders to build professional relationships outside their current institutions. External relationships offer information, advice and support that can be used for growth at the home institution (Allen & Hartman, 2008; Zepeda, Bengston, & Parylo, 2010). Scholars assert that external relationship-building is essential to learning to lead effectively, given the increased accountability and expectations from key stakeholders (Bisbee, 2007). External relationships also enable leaders to learn additional successful strategies for managing financial and human resources.

The Role of Mentoring

Many leadership development programs employ some form of mentoring—pairing the participants with experienced leaders. Mentoring, as an approach to professional growth and development, is highly regarded in the literature on talent development and succession planning in higher education (Catalfamo, 2010; Gonzalez, 2010; VenDer Linden, 2006; Zepeda, 2010). Mentoring is defined as a professional relationship between a mentor and a protégé in which a more-experienced, skilled individual provides guidance, knowledge, support and advice to a less-experienced individual (VanDer Linden, 2006). Mentoring is sometimes formal, with a structured, specific assignment of a mentor to a particular protégé. Mentoring can also be informal, occurring when one individual starts to work with and provide advice and support to a protégé. Zepeda (2007) added that the most critical part of mentoring is the "established trust between the mentor and protégé" (p. 147), which influences whether the experience supports the development of successful leaders (Brown, Van Ummeren, & Phair, 2001).

Mentoring allows those aspiring to the roles of dean, provost or president to gain perspective from another person who is in a position to assess whether the protégé can effectively manage the demands of the more responsible role. Mentors can share insights based on challenging and problematic experiences they have had, thus providing the aspiring leaders with important perspectives about whether to continue in their current roles or seek different ones. Deans, for example, may learn through a mentoring relationship that their leadership skills are not sufficient for success in the provost's role. Scholars argue that mentoring can prevent leaders from incurring the personal and institutional costs of taking on a role that is a "bad fit" for them (Ribando & Evans, 2015).

Further, mentoring also has been positively correlated with the extent to which university leaders derive satisfaction from their sense of career preparedness and advancement (Cleveland, Stockdale & Murphy 2000). Mentors also benefit by sharing their experiences with others, sometimes learning new skills and competencies themselves in the process. Meanwhile, protégés learn new skills, receive encouragement, and sometimes find advocates for advancement to new roles; at the same time they develop greater awareness of the expectations of leaders (Wolverton et al., 2002).

Scholars also identify barriers to utilizing mentors. Time is a factor, for both potential protégés and for those who could mentor them, particularly when either individual is in a demanding leadership role (VanDer Linden, 2006).

A sometimes-untapped resource for mentoring, however, is asking former academic leaders to serve as mentors for developing leaders (Bridges, Eckel, Cordova, and White, 2008). Most colleges and universities have former administrative leaders who could share their knowledge and experience through mentoring (Gonzalez, 2010). Public universities and colleges, however, rarely ask former leaders to help develop new leaders, sometimes perhaps because of the circumstances in which the former leaders left their positions. Leadership selection and retention practices definitely have a "political" dimension, making assistance from former leaders sometimes problematic (Treadway, Bentley, Williams, & Wallace, 2014; Welsh, & Slusher, 1986).

Mentorship has also been examined with respect to the goal of increasing the diversity of those who hold leadership positions. Wolverton and colleagues (2002) argue that while many mentors will be white and male, and many potential protégés are women and individuals of color, the differences in backgrounds in these pairings might provide the best learning environment. These scholars further assert that significant differences in background can also improve the protégé's confidence, as well as skills and credibility. While having a mentor can increase the likelihood that diverse candidates are successful in achieving and performing well in leadership positions, previous studies have shown that male candidates with the same ethnicity as their predecessor in the position they aspire to are more likely to be selected to be mentored (Myrung, Loeb, Horng, 2011).

While the evidence supports the value of mentoring as an important feature of leadership development programs, often the practice is highly fragmented and lacks investment by public colleges and universities (Lunsford, Baker, Griffin, & Johnson, 2013).

For universities to be effective in the future, the challenge of talent development and succession planning for leadership must be met (Catalfamo, 2010). Each of the practices in leadership development and succession planning described herein offers possibilities for the grooming of emerging leaders. It is critical that higher education institutions identify, prepare and groom staff for smooth administrative transitions when a leader leaves or retires (Booth & Rosa, 2014). The imperative is clear: "Higher education institutions that prepare for the future will have an identification strategy and developmental plan that not only provides for the next generation of leaders but also ensures that they have the experiences and skills necessary for success" (Hoppe & Speck, p.10).

PART 2: Developing a Profile of Successful Public University Presidents

To develop a profile of the skills, knowledge, experiences and personal characteristics needed for success by current and future public university presidents, we conducted a qualitative study using a sample of successful presidents and chancellors. We asked interviewees to respond to questions designed to elicit a broad set of criteria that public university presidents need to succeed. A qualitative analysis of responses produced a profile of a successful leader. We then tested that profile on a focus group of public university presidents who were not part of the original survey group.

This section describes the selection of the interviewees, the development of the survey questions, the analysis of survey responses, and the resulting profile of the successful public university leader that emerged. We also describe the adjustments we made following the focus group's evaluation of our initial profile of successful public university presidents.

Sample. Our intent was to interview presidents who were widely regarded as successful and effective. Unfortunately, as Fisher and Koch (2004) suggest, "no definitive, agreed-upon definition of presidential effectiveness exists" (p. 38). Some researchers have identified "successful" or "effective" presidents by seeking nominations from individual higher-education leaders (c.f., Fisher and Koch, 2004). We identified successful university presidents using a metric that is arguably superior: presidents who were nominated and selected by a broad array of their presidential peers to serve on the Board of Directors of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU). Seventeen of the 18 current AASCU board members were available and were interviewed. In addition, because of the importance of chancellors (i.e., university system heads for the purposes of this research) in the search for and selection of new campus presidents, four sitting chancellors were asked to participate as well. Twenty-two individuals were interviewed, including 14 men and eight women, five persons of color, and five chancellors (one of whom also serves on the AASCU board).

Method. Respondents were asked questions that were designed to generate a broad set of responses. To pretest the interview questions, we asked seven current or recently retired higher education leaders to critique them. The questions were open-ended and asked respondents to identify the skills, knowledge, experiences and personal characteristics needed by successful public university presidents. Interviewees also were asked to rank-order each of these criteria as they were generated. Appendix A provides the interview protocol.

Survey questions—broad in meaning and interpretation—were designed to generate a large number of responses that could be analyzed qualitatively. Respondents were asked a final question about any skills, experiences or personal characteristics that were new or that had become more important given the changes in the nature of the president's role and responsibilities. Because a subsequent part of this project links the profile we obtained to the use of the assessment center methodology, respondents also were asked about changes they would recommend in the search and/or selection process for new presidents that could increase the likelihood of success in that role. Finally, respondents were asked an open-ended question designed to elicit any additional ideas that were deemed important to the presidential-selection process. To allow the respondents to prepare for the 30-minute interviews, they were given the interview questions in advance.

Analysis. Near-verbatim transcripts of the interviews were produced. After each interview, responses were entered into an analysis log. Sufficient words and phrases were logged to "carry" the gist of the interviewees' meanings. No interpretations of the responses were done at this stage of the analysis. Interviewees were coded to indicate their gender, leadership position (campus-based president or system-based chancellor), and whether the interviewee was a person of color.

After the interviews were completed, the primary researcher conducted a thematic analysis of the responses to the questions that asked for the skills, knowledge (experiences) and personal characteristics necessary to be a successful public university president. Not all respondents gave the same number of responses to each question. Additionally, some respondents gave the same response to more than one question, some used the final question to add new items to the profile, others used the final question to reiterate and underscore a characteristic that they had previously identified, and some chose to add nothing.

We began our analysis by examining the universe of responses from all interviewees, identifying similarities based on common word choices and their underlying meanings. Comments that were very similar in their verbal descriptors were grouped into a theme, resulting in 82 different themes. Of these, eight themes occurred substantially more frequently than the others. Next, we grouped items that differed in their linguistic descriptors but were similar in meaning. These items were combined to form five additional themes that also occurred with substantial frequency. Finally, we counted the number of unique individual respondents who identified each theme in their answers.

In sum, 13 themes emerged: eight of these emerged because many of the interviewees used essentially the same specific vocabulary to describe a successful president, and five emerged because the comments made by interviewees suggested similar conceptual understandings.

Following the thematic analysis by the primary researcher, the second researcher reviewed the data to validate the analysis of the emergent themes. Suggestions for modifications were incorporated following discussions between the researchers. The most-frequent themes are best understood as patterns that are strongly and highly suggestive, but not definitive.

Key Characteristics of the Successful Public University President

The profile emerging from the identification of the skills, knowledge, experience and personal characteristics of the future successful public university president includes 13 core themes. They are described below, ordered by the frequency of their identification by the individuals interviewed.

Understand and appreciate the academic enterprise.

> *University presidents need to know and understand the history, traditions and norms of leadership that historically characterize university governance.*

This theme was identified by 14 of 22 interviewees. Typical comments suggested that successful university presidents must have an "understanding [of] the history of public higher education and democratic roots in the United States," along with an "understanding [of] the broad sweep of higher education." In preparation for the role of president, one respondent said, "It's incredibly valuable to have a strong academic background" and "understand the academic enterprise." Other respondents suggested leaders should have a "working knowledge and respect for higher education governance traditions" and "understand academics." (As one interviewee said, "At the end of the day, that's what we do.") A few interviewees described the value of direct academic experience in the classroom, followed by in-depth administrative experiences. "Above all," one respondent said, "we are an academic organization. What's important is intellectual capacity as indicated by your scholarly journey or your knowledge base if you come from the private sector."

Provide anchoring through personal integrity.

University presidents must be truthful, honest, and lead with integrity.

Fourteen respondents used the word "integrity" to describe an important characteristic for successful public university leadership. When asked to define integrity, respondents emphasized such qualities as truthfulness, honesty and reliability. (Representative comments: "Have a consistent position," "Trust that you will do what you say you will do," "Be consistent and truthful," "Try to do the right thing and not bend to strong forces," "Have a strong moral compass" and "Being candid, honest and truthful—presidents needs to be sure that whatever they say, they say with integrity and honesty.") One respondent called for "an alignment of professed values and actions." Another associated this theme with a "steadiness of person and character."

Understand and manage the university's financial and resource-allocation processes.

University presidents need to know, understand, and be comfortable with the business and financial aspects of the university.

Fourteen respondents specifically identified this area as critical to success in leading a public university. (Representative comments: "Understanding and ability to manage a budget," "Financial acuity," "Understanding institutional priorities through the budget," and "Business acumen including budgeting.") Speaking of presidents, one respondent said, "They can't be afraid of finances. I won't go so far as to say that they need to be experts, but they have to be able to ask good questions and push people so they can make good decisions." Another president simply said that what is needed is "understanding and ability to manage a budget." A caution offered by another respondent was that it is critical to understand a university's budget and how the entire budget is developed, because "if you don't know that [the entire budget], the CFOs think they control the budgets." Another respondent echoed this sentiment when saying that presidents need to know "the way money works in a university—developing a budget, and cutting and realigning a budget." Another interviewee described the negative consequence of not having this knowledge by saying that a successful university president needs to "understand and carry out an effective resource allocation process (budget, space). This is often left to the provost and CFO, but … presidents get in trouble because they don't know where the money is."

Communicate well in both formal and informal settings.

University presidents need to have a broad range of competent communication skills.

Among responses in this area, some interviewees identified communication skills in a broad context, while others identified particular types of communication skills. Specific communication skills included public speaking, writing, interpersonal communication, listening, using new information technologies including social media, and communicating for transparency. Some respondents simply identified the need for exemplary communication skills. Said one interviewee, "There are a lot of components to this. Communication skills are more important today than 10 or 15 years ago." Another respondent said, "It is increasingly important that presidents are good communicators. They need to be able to stand up and talk and give people hope." Among other comments, respondents cited the need to be able to "listen well and be transparent" and the need to be comfortable with social media.

Some interviewees' responses also described the rationale for their identification of this theme. For example, one president said, "It doesn't really matter what you do unless people know what you are doing." Another president identified as important the ability to communicate publicly, using speaking and public engagement with small to large

to massive audiences, because the "voice of the president is significant." This same respondent eloquently asserted that "there is no longer a small college and small college town. Every president is addressing a large audience and every president needs to know that their words will/can address the entire world." Another leader described the leadership role in this way: "You must be the primary communicator. You must tell the story [of your university] over and over again."

Be resilient and don't take things personally.

University presidents must be able to recover from the problems, troubles, setbacks and misfortunes that will inevitably occur and not take things personally.

While no interviewee specifically used the word "resilience," 14 interviewees identified elements of resilience as key to being a successful public university president. Resilience requires toughness, flexibility, optimism, enthusiasm, and the ability to manage one's feelings and emotions to facilitate a university's goals and objectives. Interviewees' comments that coalesce to create this theme included numerous references to being thick-skinned, and several specifically identified "emotional intelligence" as important. (Representative comments: "It's not about you," "Have a sense of humor," and "Don't take yourself [too] seriously.") One president said that success requires "an ability to distance oneself from the role. It's not personal—it's the role, not the person." Another interviewee said a successful president "must be long-suffering—the higher ed leader today in public needs to have thick skin, needs to interact with people, and not take things personally. We are insulted, vilified and treated in all kinds of ways that we have to overlook and not linger on and move beyond. People with short tempers will not succeed."

Be energetic and positively engaged.

University presidents must engage in their work with vigor, optimism, passion, enjoyment, dedication, the willingness to devote requisite time and effort, and commitment to accomplishing the necessary tasks.

Engagement as a theme emerged through the comments of 13 interviewees. Sample comments regarding engagement included "have passion" or simply "passion" and a "fire in your belly— passion for doing this job." One respondent said a successful president has to "really enjoy the kind of work that this [vocation] requires, because it is a 24-hour job." Other comments referred to the enormous amount of work that being a university president requires. One president said that success requires a strong work ethic and a willingness to provide an enormous amount of effort: This job is 24/7 and 365, and you have to commit to that kind of work." Another said that to be successful, a person needs a "strong work ethic. Presidencies are incredibly hard jobs that require a high degree of stamina." Other interviewees also identified the need for energy, saying, "If you don't have energy, you don't get it done," "you have to have a lot of drive," and that a president needs "energy and endurance (there are long days and long nights)."

Develop and sustain competent interpersonal relationships.

University presidents must be able to talk with and know how to establish interpersonal relationships with individuals from multiple constituencies and diverse stakeholders.

Another distinct leadership ability identified by interviewees is having the skills that allow the leader to develop interpersonal relationships with others. (Representative comments: "Focus on relationships and building relationships," "Superior relationship skills," "Liking people," "Good interpersonal skills," "Real empathy for those in your university community.") One president cited "the ability not only to listen well, but to respond in an appropriate way, to be able to read [others] well." Said another president, "You have to like people. People skills are the highest priority. [Presidents] have to get along with people."

The importance of an understanding that the presidential role has changed was conveyed as well, making it more critical for a president to be able to build strategically-useful relationships. As one respondent said, "Interpersonal skills [now] require much more of a public presence and you have to relate to people." Another said that "today's successful university president must be personable." One respondent elaborated: "There was a time when a college president could be an ivory tower kind of leader—a scholar and introspective and only occasionally venture outside of the office and then just tolerate other folks. That time is long past. We have so many constituencies, and we have to be able to interact with them. You can be an introvert and still interact with others. If you are a serious introvert then it might be difficult to meet and work with the diverse constituencies. You need to like working with people."

Know how to work with different constituencies.

University presidents must be able to work successfully with a large number of different internal and external constituencies.

Twelve interviewees cited this competency as critical. The typical cadre of internal constituencies with whom presidents must work successfully—faculty, staff and students—now has expanded to external groups including alumni, parents, prospective students and donors. Further, presidents now must have skilled interactions with legislative and other governmental leaders at all levels of government, with local and regional community leaders in both the private and public sectors, with the presidents of other educational institutions, and with regional and national foundation leaders.

Representative comments by respondents regarding this competency included "experience working with multiple external constituencies" and an "ability to relate to multiple audiences and compromise and hold your own appropriately." One respondent said a successful university president has a "genuine interest in interaction with the various multiple constituencies [and is] someone who relishes meeting and greeting faculty and staff, community [members, and] donors," and has the "ability to relate to multiple audiences—college kids, moms and dads, alumni, veterans, along with the ability to explain the color red in six different ways." To be successful, presidents must work with multiple constituencies in ways so that "large groups of differently situated people believe in your leadership."

When comparing her current responsibilities as a university president to those of her predecessor, one interviewee said that whereas her predecessor "camped out in his office, I have to be present in our community. The external role is more and more important." Another president said simply that in "previous iterations of this role you could focus only on your campus." Another president described this competency by saying that "experiences in understanding the communities you live in" are essential for success.

"The purpose of the constituency-building skill," one respondent said, "is to develop support for your institution by others." One president described this competency by saying, "It is the ability to develop and reinforce your connections to stakeholders. The president's role today is that there is a lot more emphasis and pressure to be more external and to do private fundraising and to have more connections to political forces." Another president suggested that one must "be connected to government and community leaders because they hold our future in their hands." As one president remarked about the importance of working with legislatures, "Good grief! I don't think I knew how critical that would be."

Provide and deliver a strategic direction.

University presidents must be able to determine, communicate, and then execute a "vision" or strategic direction for the university's future.

This theme emerges from a slightly more disparate set of comments than those described above, but 12 interviewees pointed to the same kind of leadership skill, indicating it is imperative that presidents be strategic through determining, communicating, and then executing a "vision" or direction for the university's future. Another way of understanding this theme is through the priorities the president sets regarding what is important in order to guide and improve the university over the following years. This theme includes identification of the desired changes (vision), communicating them (gaining support for those changes), and then executing to achieve the changes. It also includes an admonition not to spend too much energy and time on tactical and day-to-day tasks.

Sample comments suggest that a successful university president needs "an ability to see the big picture" and "should have some understanding of strategic planning and processes." One respondent said, "You have to be the person who sees beyond what others are currently seeing, to have the vision to see where the place is going," while another cited the need to "understand the value-added [importance] of vision and to be the chief architect of the need for the vision." In short, a successful university president needs "the ability to maintain focus on the big picture," said another respondent. "The person needs to be able to hold a vision and picture of where the institution is going and how they are leading the institution to that place."

Interviewees also linked this theme to how a president ought to spend her or his time. (Representiave comments: "Spend time on the strategic, not the trivial," "Articulate a clear vision," and "Manage change in order to achieve it.") One president offered the "80-20 rule. You need to spend 80 percent of your time on 20 percent of the things that [most] need to get done, or spend time on the [most] strategic things."

One respondent wrapped up this theme in the following comment: "You need your game plan and your ability to manage change in the institutional environment. You need vision and when you determine it, you need to have a plan to effectively implement that change (how fast; perhaps a more long-range plan)."

Be entrepreneurial.

University presidents must be adept at creating, developing and securing resources from new sources.

This theme was identified by 12 interviewees. Entrepreneurship involves a willingness to take risks and withstand uncertainties so as to enhance resources. It also entails a willingness to seek out and to develop partnerships between the university and other public and private entities that provide additional resources and an increased capacity to achieve the institution's mission.

Respondents suggested that "prior fundraising experience" is necessary and that "fundraising and entrepreneurial abilities are now more important." Said one interviewee, "The resource piece is critical. A person can't come into this [role] and think that the old revenue streams are going to work. You need to find the resources." Said another, "Leaders need to be much more entrepreneurial. If you want to sustain the operations of your institution, given that state resources are flat or declining, you have to find new sources of income, and so you need public-private partnerships." The reality, said one interviewee, is that "You have to be entrepreneurial. Public support in the best case is going to be flat and likely to be less." Said another interviewee in summing up this competency, "Today's universities are facing almost a crisis, and it is incumbent on presidents to face new things, so new [entrepreneurial] skills are needed."

Know how to manage a large organization.

University presidents must be skilled in managing a large, complex organization.

This theme, identified by 12 interviewees, includes supervision, delegation, holding others accountable for assignments, managing human resources, and the use of legal frameworks. It includes prior experiences in leading and managing, and the identification of specific kinds of knowledge and the application of specific skills as well.

A comment illustrative of the theme in terms of general management ability was that "the successful president needs fundamental organizational intelligence—needs to know how the machine fits together" and "have management skills—know how to run a large organization" along with the "ability to manage people and to set expectations and to hold people accountable."

Another comment linked this theme to previous work experiences, with the interviewee saying that successful university presidents should "have an experience where they have been responsible for an organization of significant size, with multiple personalities and agendas." Other comments that emphasized prior experience suggested a successful president should have "experience in large organizations (anything over 1,500 people is a big organization);" "leadership experiences with personnel decisions;" "experiences supervising people;" and "a paper trail of leadership experiences."

One respondent identified a successful president as someone with "knowledge and understanding of human resources and policies and practices." Another president stated: "When I became president, I realized how much of our time was devoted to personnel issues. The toughest issues come to the president. These consume tremendous amounts of time and when you go into the presidency, you don't understand how much time they take and how quickly these decisions erode support among your faculty."

Develop a strong leadership team.

University presidents must be adroit in building strong, cohesive and collaborative leadership teams.

Nine respondents stressed the importance of selecting competent individuals for the leadership team and then building those individuals into a cohesive and collaborative team that works together to achieve the president's goals and the institution's priorities. (Representative comments regarding this competency: "Develop your cabinet," "An ability to build and work with teams," "Recognize and assemble around you a strong team," and "Build the team; if you don't have a team, you will not be able to implement what you want to do successfully.") As one president put it, "Get the right people on the bus and get them in the right seat."

Several presidents elaborated on the necessity of collaborative teams, suggesting the need to "build and work with collaborative teams" and "work to build collaborative teams." One person elaborated on the need for this skill, saying, "One must know how to build and lead leadership teams. Jobs are too complex and too big for one person to do it all and to carry all of the weight and burden. This goes beyond hiring good people [and extends] to the need to mold our top people into leadership teams. This doesn't just happen. Building and leading leadership teams is critical in higher education."

Know how to listen.

University presidents must be excellent listeners.

While listening was often included as a type of communication skill, eight current leaders separately identified listening as a distinct characteristic, skill or type of knowledge. Their responses directly mentioned "listening" and frequently

identified this as distinct from, or in addition to, the communication skills described previously. Interviewees offered the word "listening" and then elaborated to emphasize the importance of really listening in order to understand the views of others. (Representative comments: "The ability to listen well" and "Be an engaged listener.")

One president said, "The longer I have been a president, the more that I understand that my success is in listening to others and hearing and fashioning what others need. Too many leaders think that leadership is about declaring what they want, rather than what others need." Another respondent highlighted how important it is to "sincerely be a good listener. Often as a leader you feel you don't have time. [By listening,] you may learn something from others; in addition, it's important to allow and have everyone think they can talk to you."

Exploring the Profile with a Focus Group of Presidents

A focus group comprised of 10 university presidents discussed the preliminary profile detailed above at AASCU's Summer Council of Presidents (July 2015). Basic focus-group techniques were used to elicit responses to the themes that emerged from the interview data. Three questions were asked:

- In your view, does the profile contain the themes that describe a successful university president?
- Are any themes missing, and if so, which one(s)?
- What nuances or differences in emphasis should be included?

The focus group concluded with participants individually selecting the three themes they thought were most important.

What we learned from the focus group is congruent with what we learned from the interviews and qualitative analysis. Participants in the focus group had a variety of ideas and suggested changes, but these primarily were ways to elaborate or improve upon the descriptions of the themes. Interestingly, when asked to select the three most important characteristics of the successful public university president, the responses were essentially distributed evenly among nine of the 13 themes. Four themes were not in anyone's "top three" list, including: the needs to understand and appreciate the academic enterprise; understand and manage the university's financial and resource-allocation processes; develop and sustain competent interpersonal relationships; and know how to work with different constituencies. Yet all four of these themes were very prominently identified by the original interviewees.

Nuances or enhancements of the descriptions of the original key characteristics that emerged through the interview process included adding "tenacity" to the theme of "resilience" and modifying "energetic and engaged" to "be positively engaged." Both of these changes were made to the profile. For the theme of "provide and deliver a strategic direction," the focus-group participants asked to include language that emphasizes the execution of the university's strategic direction. For the theme of "be entrepreneurial," participants suggested including "the ability to see things differently." However, for each of the latter two suggested changes, the judgment was made that the earlier profile description already addressed the focus-group respondents' suggestions.

Comparing the Profile to Literature on Presidential Effectiveness

We also sought to better understand how our study and the resulting profile of the successful public university president compares to other efforts on the subject of leadership effectiveness, specifically university and college presidential effectiveness and its characteristics. There are a multitude of books and research articles on leadership generally and on university presidential leadership specifically. Penson identifies the challenge: "The professional literature in management and leadership is filled with varying descriptions of an extraordinary number of presidential skills. One can

count as many as 500 of these separate skills" (Penson, 2006, p. 1). Clearly, comparing the successful presidential profile that emerged in this study with a comprehensive review of all of the treatises on presidential success was not feasible. Instead, we compared this study's profile to three major works on presidential effectiveness.

Penson, who has worked with boards, systems, and presidents from more than two hundred colleges and universities, offers a useful typology of the leadership skills necessary for university presidential effectiveness, clustering the skills into five key areas (Penson, 2004 & 2006, pp 1-11):

1. Administrative Skills
   This cluster focuses on structure and process, including budgeting, human resources, organizational structure, information flow, decision making, effectiveness, and efficiency. An aligned presidential team is important to this cluster.

2. Leadership Skills
   Skills in this cluster include anticipation and planning, as well as strategic execution, along with the ability to motivate others to act in a common direction, to be empowered, and to achieve desired outcomes. This skills cluster also includes the ability to establish a set of priorities for the institution that are widely known and understood.

3. Stewardship Skills
   This cluster focuses on protecting the reputation, rights, and freedoms of the university, and those who are part of the university community, including most especially the president him or herself and the presidency.

4. Relationship Skills
   At the heart of this skill cluster is the ability to build and sustain effective relationships with a variety of stakeholders who have a variety of agendas, for the benefit of the institution.

5. Entrepreneurial Skills
   At the core of this skills cluster is the ability to see opportunities for collaborations that will benefit the university. Insight and creativity, along with negotiation and mediation skills, are essential to this cluster.

Penson's research indicates that the most effective presidents are perceived as being strong in all five clusters of skills, with the administrative cluster the only area in which a president might be viewed as less strong and still be perceived as highly effective overall. In this latter case, a strong, effective presidential team is necessary to ensure that the administrative functions of the university work well. The relationship cluster is the most unforgiving and necessary of the five, followed by stewardship, according to Penson's work.

The profile that emerged from our study bears marked similarities to Penson's typology. Penson's cluster of relationship skills is similar to our profile's themes of "competent interpersonal relationships" and "knowing how to work with different constituencies." The administrative skill cluster overlaps with our themes of "knowing how to manage a large organization" and "building a strong presidential team," and could include "understanding and managing the university's resource processes" as well. The leadership skill cluster includes "providing and executing a strategic direction." The stewardship skill cluster is squarely within the admonition to possess "moral integrity." Finally, "entrepreneurship" appears in both the Penson typology and our study's profile. Themes from the present study that are only indirectly implied in the Penson study are "communication," "listening," "resilience" and "engagement."

In their recent book, *Presidencies Derailed: Why University Leaders Fail and How to Prevent It*, Trachtenberg, Kauvar, and Bogue (2013) offer a summary of 10 attributes found in a "journey through the research and literature" and add an additional theme for leaders in higher education. The themes they identified include the ability to:

1. Facilitate mission clarity and goal achievement;
2. Exemplify integrity and credibility;
3. Model interpersonal intelligence and build constructive relationships;
4. Demonstrate an appreciation for the heritage and culture of the enterprise;
5. Exhibit oral and written communication skills;
6. Adapt authority and decision style to issue, person and place—a judicious blend of "tell and compel" with "inquire and inspire;"
7. Reflect political wisdom in the capacity to be personal and to discern patterns and sources of decision influence;
9. Place the welfare of others before the welfare of self and make developmental investments in colleagues;
10. Display a judicious blend of courage and compassion in relationships and decisions; and
11. Understand the nature of the academic enterprise. (p. 3)

There are both obvious similarities to, and subtle differences between, the work of Trachtenberg et al. and our study's profile. Each profile identifies the importance of knowing and/or appreciating the nature of the academic enterprise. Each profile resoundingly stresses the importance of integrity to being a successful university president. Strong communication skills and seeking and establishing strong interpersonal relationships also are identified as critical. While the language differs in the two profiles, both identify the importance of providing a future (strategic) direction consistent with the mission of the university.

The differences between the two profiles are in Trachtenberg et al.'s inclusion of "decision style" and "political wisdom" to navigate the presidential role effectively. In addition, Trachtenberg et al.'s framework highlights the leader as a change agent who challenges conventional wisdom and traditions. Our study's profile, on the other hand, also identifies the personal characteristics of "resiliency," "engagement" and "entrepreneurship," as well as abilities related to "building a strong presidential leadership team" and "skill in managing the institution," which Trachtenberg et al. did not identify.

Finally, in 2013 the Aspen Institute's College Excellence program conducted research to identity the qualities of exceptional community college presidents, with a particular focus on presidential leadership that contributes to high rates of student success. That program's report describes five qualities of highly effective community college presidents:

1. Deep commitment to student access and success;
2. Willingness to take significant risks to advance student success;
3. The ability to create lasting change within the college, including creating and sustaining urgency, creating strong plans, collaborating, implementing and evaluating;
4. Strong strategic vision for the college, reflected through external partnerships; and
5. Development and allocation of resources aligned with student success.

The overlap with our profile of the successful public university president is obvious. An emphasis on strategic vision and direction, execution, allocation of resources, and entrepreneurial instincts and actions are identified in both profiles. The Aspen Institute report, *Crisis and Opportunity: Aligning the Community College Presidency with Student Success,* however, does not address some of the personal presidential qualities that the AASCU profile focuses on, i.e., integrity, positive engagement and resilience. Similarly, communication skills and working with various constituencies also are not emphasized to the extent that they are in our profile. The Aspen Institute's report, however, does note the value of current professional development programs (including academic programs) that emphasize the importance of building relationships, communication skills, legislative and fundraising abilities, and other entrepreneurial skills.

PART 3: Applying Assessment Center Methodology for Succession Planning and Talent Development in Public Higher Education

AASCU, working in collaboration with the Center for Leadership Assessment at the University of California, San Diego and two corporate partners, USA Funds and the TIAA-CREF Institute, convened a panel of experts in assessment center methodology, along with current and former university leaders, search firm consultants, and leadership development practitioners and entrepreneurs, in August 2015 in a leadership development symposium designed to:

1. Share results from the research presented above on leadership development practices in higher education and the profile of successful university leaders;
2. Hear from assessment center experts about how assessment center methodology typically works and how it might be adapted to higher education leadership for student success; and
3. Develop the outline and key components of a strategy for implementing a leadership assessment center designed to meet the distinctive needs of colleges and universities.

Understanding Assessment Center Methodology

Despite the use of "center" in its name, assessment center methodology is not a place, rather, it is a methodology grounded in a standardized evaluation of behavior based on multiple inputs. Any single assessment center methodology consists of multiple components, which include behavioral simulation exercises, within which multiple trained assessors observe and record behaviors, classify them according to the behavioral constructs of interest, and (either individually or collectively) rate (either individual or aggregated) behaviors. Using either a consensus meeting among assessors or statistical aggregation, assessment scores are derived that represent an assessee's standing on the behavioral constructs and/or an aggregated overall assessment rating (*International Center on Assessment Center Guidelines, 2009).*

In the private sector, assessment centers are used for talent selection and promotion, identification of training and developmental needs, and professional development. Assessment center design varies somewhat depending on a particular center's intended uses. The goal of an assessment center used for talent selection and promotion, for example, is to predict future performance. In such centers, a participant is motivated to do his or her best; evaluation criteria are designed to be statistically predictive of success in the role; the environment is standardized and controlled; and feedback is provided as an aggregate score to the person doing the hiring.

In contrast, the goal of an assessment center used for professional development is to diagnose training needs, provide experiential learning opportunities, and offer feedback that can be acted upon. In these centers, participants are motivated to learn and improve; evaluation criteria are tied to improvement in leadership competencies and change over time; the environment can be adaptive and experiential, with participants learning from each other; and feedback is rich, detailed and diagnostic.

A number of ethical concerns must be taken into consideration in designing an assessment center. Specifically, such factors as informed consent, access to data, potential role conflicts, and use of data for multiple purposes must all be addressed. Participants must be fully informed about what to expect in the assessment center process and should understand what data will be generated and who will have access to it. Designers must carefully consider how confidentiality will be protected and who actually will "own" the data. In addition, assessors must be carefully selected to avoid the potential for or appearance of any conflicts of interest regarding their roles. Aggregate data as well as individual data should not be used for purposes that were not clearly articulated and agreed to at the outset.

An important consideration in analyzing the feasibility of a customized assessment center for higher education is how technology might be used to enhance the product and reduce costs. Technology might be used to facilitate certain administrative tasks, such as scheduling of assessees, assessors and role players; developing reports; integrating ratings across assessors and exercises (automatically or to aid discussion among assessors); and final reporting and delivery of feedback. Video technology might be used to aid delivery of instruction; for administration of an exercise; to record exercises so that assessors might view them multiple times to aid ratings; and as a way to provide feedback to participants by watching video of their performance.

In addition, multimedia tools might be used to deliver behavioral simulations, for social networking applications, or for video chats as part of an assessment or learning exercise. An assessment center can be designed as a fully online experience, as an individual or group experience, as a face-to-face experience in a physical location, or as a blend of these experiences.

Building a Sustainable Assessment Center Model for Higher Education

Assessment center methodology differs from other talent management strategies in that the dimensions or competencies against which performance is being assessed are directly linked to the job—in our study, that of a university president. The competencies desired are defined in behavioral terms, and behavior is observed and rated by multiple trained assessors. The preliminary profile of a successful university president developed from this study provides a beginning framework for analysis of the university president's job and the creation of behavioral dimensions that might be used as the basis for a customized higher education leadership assessment center.

Participants in the leadership development symposium (see Appendix B) offered the following suggestions for AASCU's consideration in developing a vision and building a sustainable business model for a higher education leadership assessment center:

- Leadership competencies should be linked to improving institutional effectiveness and student success;
- To the extent possible, take full advantage of existing resources—test off-the-shelf products before customizing;
- Focus on programming and methodology that will enhance cost-effectiveness;
- Use technology where appropriate to enhance learning outcomes and reduce costs;
- Link and align the assessment center with existing AASCU leadership development programming;
- In the initial phase, the primary purpose of the assessment center should be enhancing the skill sets of current leaders in higher education and developing the next generation of leaders, rather than selecting leaders for individual institutions;
- This work should be tied to AASCU's mission and strategic goals, especially enhancing the diversity and effectiveness of leaders in higher education;
- Consider partnerships with other associations and organizations;
- Consider at the outset the feasibility of using aggregate data from the assessment center to identify gaps in professional development programming and to develop standards that might be used for benchmarking;
- Consider whether the assessment center will be designed for AASCU members, public higher education, American higher education, or international higher education; and
- Seek external funding for the start-up phase of the project.

Next Steps and Further Research

Having identified the opportunity for greater rigor in the work of developing university leaders in a complex, rapidly changing environment, AASCU proposes to build on this initial effort and to continue to explore assessment center methodology as a viable strategy for improving leadership development in higher education. The proposed next steps in the process are to:

- Identify the most critical strategic goals higher education leaders need to achieve to improve institutional effectiveness and student success;
- Build on the preliminary profile of successful university leaders developed in phase one of this project to reclassify themes into distinct leadership skills that can be assessed, developed and mapped to strategic goals;
- Develop theory-based links among the desired presidential competencies, institutional effectiveness, and student outcomes (with the Aspen Institute's *Crisis and Opportunity* report serving as a resource since it identifies leadership qualities associated with achieving positive student success outcomes);
- Through surveys and interviews with subject-matter experts, validate the importance of the competencies and their links to student outcomes;
- Conduct pilot-testing of off-the-shelf assessment center products to determine if and how they may be effectively used in higher education; and
- Conduct market research to understand the demand for a higher education assessment center and the format/scheduling preferences of potential users.

The ultimate purpose of this project is the creation of a nationwide assessment center program designed specifically for college and university leadership, in order to meet the following goals:

- Assess leaders' skills and competencies using an assessment center approach;
- Create personalized development plans for education leaders to support their professional growth;
- Provide standardization in assessing university leadership and improve leadership development practice in higher education;
- Develop national benchmarks to better understand both individual and systemic gaps in leaders' commitment and skill sets to improve student outcomes and institutional effectiveness; and
- Design or change AASCU leadership programming to better align with national needs and effective practices.

To achieve its vision of being a transformative influence in public higher education, AASCU must push the boundaries of existing practice and lead efforts to innovate and change. Adopting assessment center methods for AASCU's leadership program is a step in this direction.

Conclusion

Leadership development and succession planning will continue to present significant challenges for public higher education. Substantial investments have been made in an array of professional development programs now available to those who aspire to administrative leadership positions, and to universities that seek to identify and develop their future leaders.

The profile that emerges in this qualitative study of future successful public university leaders includes 13 themes. Successful presidents should:

- Understand and appreciate the academic enterprise;
- Provide anchoring through personal integrity;
- Understand and manage the university's financial and resource-allocation processes;
- Communicate well in both formal and informal settings;
- Be resilient and not take things personally; be energetic and positively engaged;
- Develop and sustain competent interpersonal relationships;
- Know how to work with different constituencies;
- Provide and deliver a strategic direction;
- Be entrepreneurial;
- Know how to manage a large organization; develop a strong leadership team; and
- Know how to listen.

This profile of the successful public university president has significant overlap with previous scholarly and practical efforts to document the skills, knowledge, experience and personal characteristics of successful presidents. Higher education leaders now must carefully assess and evaluate existing professional development programs to determine whether their content and pedagogy, linked with improved criteria for selection of participants, can enhance the development of individuals as leaders and, ultimately, help to fill the pressing need for highly effective leadership in public higher education today and in the future. Assessment center methodology, currently widely used in the private sector, presents a promising avenue to achieving greater success in the selection of individuals for development, and to improving that development as they occupy increasingly more responsible positions, including the presidencies of our nation's public institutions.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

AASCU TIAA Institute Sponsored Research on Presidential Leadership
Jolene Koester, AASCU-Penson Center for Professional Development

February-March 2015

Introductory comments for interviews with those selected for the purposeful sample of current university leaders:

The goal of this research project is, first, to understand better the key competencies—knowledge, skills and abilities—required for success the of current and future public university presidents, and second, how to adapt best leadership development and succession planning practices to meet the needs of our universities.

Your answers to these questions will be analyzed using a qualitative methodology that studies all interviewee responses for themes that coalesce to create a profile of key competences of the successful president for public colleges and universities now and in the next five years. Your answers will not be linked to you specifically, but you will be identified in the study report as one of the individuals interviewed in this phase of the research project. The results of this qualitative analysis of interview responses will be tested with a focus group of sitting presidents and system heads at the AASCU Summer Council.

I'd like you to think about the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary for effectiveness in your role, now and in the future.

1. When you advise those whom you believe have the potential to be future leaders in public higher education, what are the 4-5 **skills** that you identify as essential for them to be successful? Describe.

2. Of the skills that you just identified, rank them from 1 to 4, with 1 as the most important and 4 as the least important. Briefly explain your choices.

3. What **knowledge and experiences** are essential for future public university leadership success? Describe.

4. Of the knowledge areas and experiences that you have just identified, rank them from 1 to 4, with 1 as the most important and 4 as the least important. Briefly explain your choices.

5. What are the 4-5 critical **personal characteristics** for effective leadership in public higher education? Describe.

6. Of these personal characteristics, rank them from 1 to 4, with 1 as the most important and 4 as the least important. Briefly explain your choices.

7. Think about your understanding of the university/college presidential leadership role and your judgments about how the demands of the role have changed. Which of the skills, knowledge and personal characteristics that you have identified are new or are becoming more critical in today's leadership environment? Describe and explain.

8. If you could change one or two elements/aspects of the selection process for new presidents to better ensure effectiveness of the new president, what would you change?

9. Are there any other elements of the profile of successful university presidents, now and in the future, that you want to identify for me?

Appendix B: Leadership Development for the 21st Century Symposium Participants

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