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Competencies for the College Presidency

A NATIONAL STUDY OF EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Acknowledgments

Contribution Statement

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Executive Summary

The U.S. college presidency has always been a difficult job, and the present is not lacking in challenges for aspiring and sitting leaders. In the aftermath of the pandemic, presidents face intensified political polarization, campus unrest, demographic changes, and continued financial constraints. What it takes to be an effective college president evolves in concert with the context, meaning presidential competencies are not a fixed checklist but rather a constellation of skills whose salience rises and falls. Presidential competencies must be regularly examined in light of the unique circumstances shaping colleges and universities. Updated data on presidential competencies is necessary to identify, select, and prepare successful presidents.

Led by Academic Search in partnership with the American Academic Leadership Institute (AALI), the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC), and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), this is the first national study of presidential competencies responsive to the era following the height of the pandemic. It examines presidential leadership competencies salient to the current context based on data from sitting presidents at a sample of primarily bachelor's degree-granting colleges and universities. The study included survey responses from over 700 college and university presidents and four focus groups with 14 current presidents.

Our Study Featured

700+
college and university presidents surveyed

4
focus groups with 14 current presidents

The study yielded the following main findings that describe important presidential leadership competencies that can assist both individuals and programs as they plan and prepare for the demands of the moment.

Trust-Building

Demonstrating Resilience

Communication Savvy

Crafting a Cabinet and Team Building

Emotional Intelligence

Leading with Courage

Data Acumen and Resource Management

Trust-Building

The survey item that was most frequently rated as very relevant was behaving in a way that is trustworthy, consistent, and accountable.

- Focus group participants explained that they built trust by bringing internal stakeholders into decision-making processes, minimizing surprises, supporting shared governance, and showing consistency through alignment of actions with personal and institutional values.
- Trust-building was one of the most frequent codes for open-ended comments on the survey, with many comments underscoring the importance of listening, integrity, and having a strong ethical core.
- Listening to and understanding the needs of stakeholders was frequently rated by survey respondents as very relevant (84%) and was also cited as a critical skill for building trust in focus groups, whether through listening sessions, one-on-one conversations with key stakeholders, or small-group meetings.

Demonstrating Resilience

Coping with adversity and demonstrating resilience was frequently rated as very important by survey respondents.

- Being resilient, showing grit, and being able to endure criticism and the challenges of the position were often mentioned in open-ended comments.
- Focus group participants discussed that their resilience is a product of leaning on their teams and networks of friends, family, mentors, and faith communities. In other words, resilience was not a solo project, but rather a product of relationships.
- Focus group participants found resilience through being in positions where their personal values aligned with institutional priorities and mission–it was easier to navigate challenges when they felt anchored in their personal and institutional purpose.
- Resilience for some focus group participants was established through experience, and for Women of Color, came through owning their authenticity while overcoming an academic culture that frequently marginalized them.

Communication Savvy

A strong majority of respondents viewed communicating effectively and authentically in formal and informal settings as very relevant.

- Related communication skills were evident in survey results, including the development and articulation of a clear vision for the institution (80%) and knowing how to convey the value of higher education (57%).
- Focus group participants explained that communication savvy entails tailoring messages to different audiences, storytelling through diverse types of data, infusing their personality and emotion into messages, and discerning which issues merit the "president's voice."
- Communication skills were prominent in open-ended comments, with a particular emphasis on the ability to translate information to different constituencies, communicate in a way that conveys respect for multiple points of view, model civil discourse by engaging with disagreement, and provide explanations or rationale behind decisions–the "why" and not just the "what" or "how."

Crafting a Cabinet and Building a Team

One of the top institutional management skills rated as very important was building a collaborative cabinet and empowering it to make progress on institutional goals.

- Multiple respondents indicated through open-ended comments that they rated several survey items lower in relevance or importance because they have delegated and entrusted those tasks and operations to their cabinet.
- Crafting a cabinet or team of senior leaders was one of the most frequent codes for open-ended comments, with several comments about the importance of "surrounding yourself with brilliant and hardworking people" and developing the leadership skills of cabinet members.
- Focus group participants stressed the importance of being able to trust and rely upon cabinet members. To achieve this, participants cited being aware of their limitations and the areas where they needed the support of capable colleagues and not waiting too long to get the right team in place.

Emotional Intelligence

Focus groups and open-ended comments emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence.

- Focus group participants highlighted the importance of self-awareness, knowing when to ask for help, and not needing to be the smartest person in the room.
- Focus group participants connected trust-building to being willing to demonstrate who they are as people, showing vulnerability, and countering the perception of presidents as "superhuman."
- One of the most frequent codes for open-ended comments on the survey was humility, appearing in 37 separate comments. Comments spoke to the importance of admitting mistakes, apologizing, and praising others while not expecting to receive credit for successes.

Leading with Courage

Focus groups and open-ended comments described resilience as a corollary to the need for decisive leadership and a willingness to make difficult decisions for the long-term benefit of the institution.

- Dealing with hard but necessary decisions was a nearly unanimous experience among focus group participants.
- Open-ended comments spoke of the need for presidents to listen but ultimately take action, avoid paralysis after hearing from stakeholders with different priorities, and take responsibility for managing change and advancing the strategic plan.
- Focus group participants shared that a key strategy to facilitate leading with courage is transparency in two ways: 1) explaining the decision-making process; and 2) openly communicating both good and bad news.

Data Acumen and Resource Management

A constellation of data points in the study indicate the need for presidents to be comfortable with multiple forms of data and effectively use data to drive decisions, as well as demonstrate skills stewarding and increasing institutional resources.

- 80% of survey respondents indicated that gathering and using relevant data to evaluate the best course of action was a very relevant leadership skill.
- Several other survey items related to data acumen and resource management were frequently rated as very important, including securing resources from established and innovative methods (70%), adjusting strategy in response to market trends (67%), and understanding demographic changes that impact enrollment (66%).
- Focus group participants spent less time discussing competencies related to data acumen and resource management. Some noted their need to increase their knowledge of institutional finances, while others dedicated considerable time to ensuring they had the right people in finance, enrollment, fundraising, and marketing roles.
- Open-ended comments emphasized the ability to balance or blend analytical and relational skills, while also stressing the importance of having a sufficient understanding of institutional finances and fundraising practices.

It is important to highlight that these findings are limited to presidents' perceptions of the most relevant skills and knowledge at the time when the survey was deployed and focus groups were conducted. This research found notable differences on how women and Presidents of Color rated several items. For example, we found differences on how women and Presidents of Color rated equity-mindedness and emotional intelligence. Women were more likely than men to indicate that demonstrating a commitment to equity-mindedness and weighing the consequences of decisions on different groups were very relevant. Presidents of Color were more likely than White presidents to indicate help-seeking and recognizing how emotions impact other people as very relevant.

The competencies highlighted in this report are not meant to serve as an exhaustive checklist. This research revealed that presidents' identities–with an emphasis on race and gender–are essential to consider when drawing conclusions about which presidential competencies are most important. Moreover, presidents' discussion of competencies often varied by institutional context and situations. What is needed to be an effective president can depend on individual strengths, the political climate, and the composition of a president's cabinet.

Survey Results

The survey instrument consisted of four main question blocks with a total of 85 items and three open-ended questions. The survey sample included 3,071 college and university presidents. 792 presidents responded to the survey and 713 completed questions about presidential competencies for a 23.2% response rate. See Appendix A for additional information about the survey design and data collection procedures. Table 1 shows a profile of survey respondents by gender, race, age, and total number of years serving as a college president.

Table 1. Profile of Survey Respondents

Characteristics	Group	Percentage of Sample
Gender	Men	53.0%
	Women	33.5%
	Nonbinary	0.1%
	Not reported or declined to state	13.3%
Race	White or Caucasian	68.0%
	African American or Black	9.5%
	Hispanic and/or Latinx/a/o	3.5%
	Asian American or Asian	2.1%
	American Indian or Alaska Native	0.4%
	Middle Eastern or North African	0.4%
	Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0.8%
	Multiracial	0.8%
	Not listed or not reported	14.3%
Age	40 years or younger	0.6%
	41-50 years old	9.0%
	51-60 years old	36.2%
	61-70 years old	33.8%
	71 years or older	7.9%
	Not reported	12.6%
Total time in college president position	Less than 1 year	5.8%
	1-5 years	28.8%
	6-10 years	28.9%
	11-15 years	14.2%
	16-20 years	5.3%
	21 years or more	5.3%
	Not reported	11.8%
	Total Respondent N	713

Top Survey Items Rated as Very Relevant

Leadership Qualities or Abilities

The first question block consisted of leadership qualities and abilities organized into three groups: personal qualities, interpersonal skills, and leadership abilities. Figure 1 presents leadership qualities or abilities that 60% or more of presidents rated as very relevant. **The top three qualities most frequently rated as very relevant are behaving in a way that is trustworthy, consistent, and accountable** (96% and the first most frequently rated as very relevant in personal qualities), **demonstrating resilience and an ability to cope with adversity** (92% and the second most frequently rated as very relevant in personal qualities), **and communicating effectively and authentically in formal and informal settings** (90% and the first most frequently rated as very relevant in interpersonal skills).

Figure 1. Items Most Frequently Rated as Very Relevant in Leadership Qualities or Abilities

Item	Percentage
Behaves in a way that is trustworthy, consistent, and accountable	96%
Demonstrates resilience and an ability to cope with adversity	92%
Communicates effectively and authentically in formal and informal settings	90%
Listens to and understands the needs and concerns of stakeholders	84%
Gathers and uses relevant data to evaluate the best course of action	80%
Remains curious, open to feedback, and having ideas challenged	72%
Weighs the consequences of decisions on different groups	71%
Centers transparency in communication and decision-making	71%
Engages in self-reflection and exhibits self-awareness	70%
Commits to continuous learning and a climate of learning for others	68%
Recognizes how emotions impact other people and situations	62%

In addition to the top leadership qualities or abilities highlighted in Figure 1, there are additional qualities and abilities in each group that were frequently rated as very relevant. They included listening to and understanding the needs and concerns of stakeholders (84%), gathering and using relevant data to evaluate the best course of action (80%), and remaining curious, open to feedback, and having ideas challenged (72%). Weighing the consequences of decisions on different groups (71%), engaging in self-reflection and exhibiting self-awareness (70%), and centering transparency in decision-making and communication (71%) were likewise viewed as very relevant by a strong majority of respondents. Many of these qualities and abilities are often associated with emotional intelligence. For example, being open to feedback shows the extent to which a president is not only attuned to their surroundings but to their ability to handle criticism.

Leadership Qualities/Abilities Rated as Very Relevant

96%
behaving in a way that is trustworthy, consistent, and accountable

92%
demonstrating resilience and an ability to cope with adversity

90%
communicating effectively and authentically in formal and informal settings

Figure 2. Differences by Gender and Race in Leadership Qualities or Abilities

GENDER   Women   Men

Quality/Ability	Women	Men
Gathers and uses relevant data to evaluate the best course of action	87%	76%
Weighs the consequences of decisions on different groups	81%	68%
Centers transparency in communication and decision-making	77%	66%
Engages in self-reflection and exhibits self-awareness	77%	65%
Commits to continuous learning and a climate of learning for others	74%	64%
Demonstrates a commitment to equity-mindedness	71%	55%
Shows an appreciation for the value of shared governance	62%	48%
Eliminates bias by reviewing operations, policies, and practices through an equity lens	55%	42%

Note. Percentages reflect respondents indicating the item was very relevant.

Presidents of Color   **White Presidents**

Weighs the consequences of decisions on different groups	79% / 69%
Recognizes how emotions impact other people and situations	76% / 58%
Demonstrates a commitment to equity-mindedness	74% / 58%
Eliminates bias by reviewing operations, policies, and practices through an equity lens	61% / 43%
Brokers compromise between competing stakeholders or priorities	59% / 48%
Seeks help and resources to deal with the emotional toll of the job	47% / 28%

Note. Percentages reflect respondents indicating the item was very relevant.

There were several notable differences by gender and race in this question block. We sorted these items into two general categories: equity-mindedness and emotional intelligence. **In Figure 2, women were much more likely than men to indicate that demonstrating a commitment to equity-mindedness and weighing the consequences of decisions on different groups are very relevant.** This does not mean men saw these abilities or qualities as irrelevant–simply that a smaller percentage of men marked them as very relevant.

Presidents of Color were more likely than White presidents to indicate help-seeking and recognizing how emotions impact other people as very relevant. A much larger percentage of Presidents of Color compared to White presidents saw eliminating bias by reviewing operations, policies, and practices, through an equity lens as very relevant.

Institutional Management Skills

The second question block focused on institutional management skills organized into three groups: vision-setting and planning, relationship-building and communicating, and promoting institutional outcomes. Figure 3 presents institutional management skills that 60% or more of presidents rated as very significant. **The institutional management skills most frequently rated as very significant included building a collaborative cabinet and empowering it to make progress on institutional goals (85%), developing and maintaining healthy relationships with the board based on trust and respect (85%), and developing, articulating, and executing a clear vision for the institution's future (80%).**

Figure 3. Items Most Frequently Rated as Very Significant in Institutional Management

Item	%
Builds a collaborative cabinet and empowers it to make progress on institutional goals	85%
Develops and maintains healthy relationships with the board based on trust and respect	85%
Develops, articulates, and executes a clear vision for the institution's future	80%
Identifies and addresses emergencies, crises, and controversies on campus	71%
Secures resources from various sources using established (e.g. fundraising) and innovative methods	70%
Cultivates and maintains relationships with donors and alumni	67%
Builds purposeful relationships throughout the institution	67%
Orchestrates effective change management via short- and long-term strategic planning	65%
Has a visible and active presence in the community beyond campus	64%
Develops partnerships that will secure financial and non-financial resources	64%
Demonstrates comfort and confidence in writing, speaking in public, and using social media to communicate	63%

The institutional management skills most frequently rated as very significant included building a collaborative cabinet and empowering it to make progress on institutional goals (85% and the first most frequently rated as very significant in vision-setting and planning), **developing and maintaining healthy relationships with the board based on trust and respect** (85% and the first most frequently rated as very significant in relationship-building and communicating), and **developing, articulating, and executing a clear vision for the institution's future** (80% and the second most frequently rated as very significant in vision-setting and planning). Among promoting institutional outcomes, the institutional management skill most frequently as very significant is identifying and addressing emergencies, crises, and controversies on campus (71%).

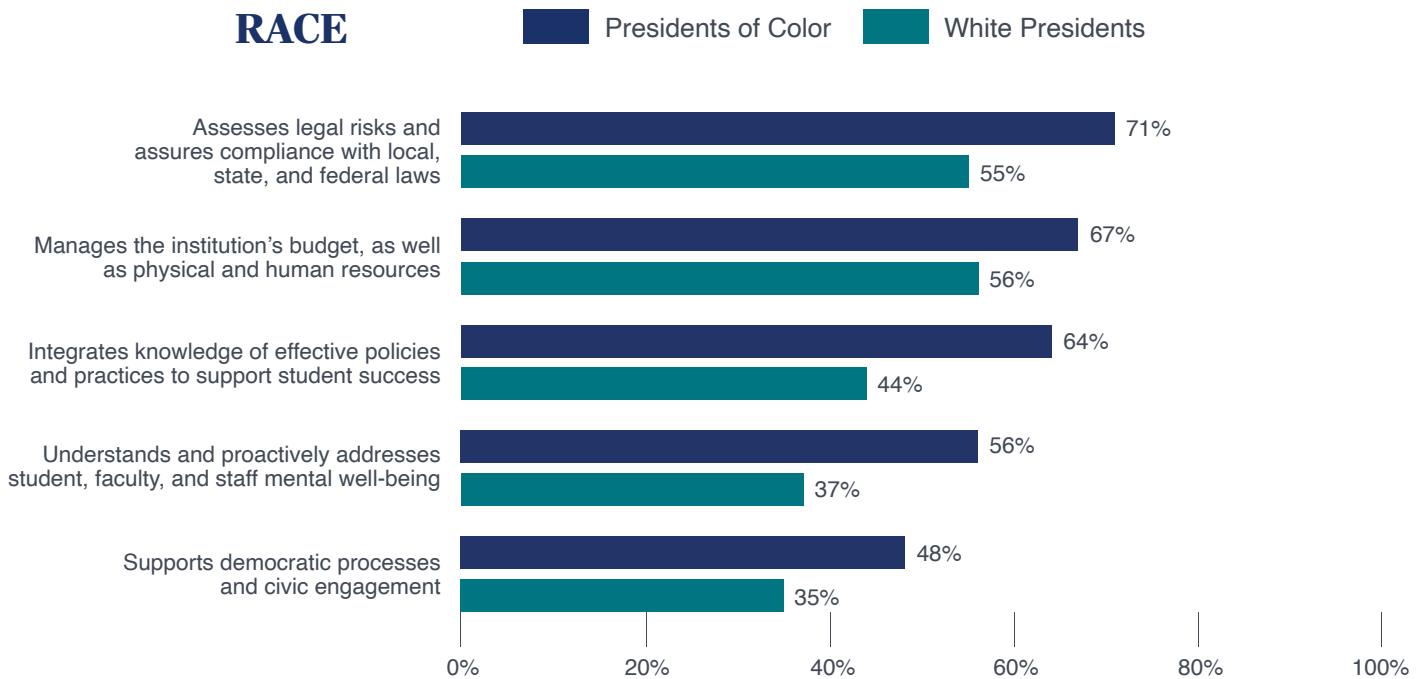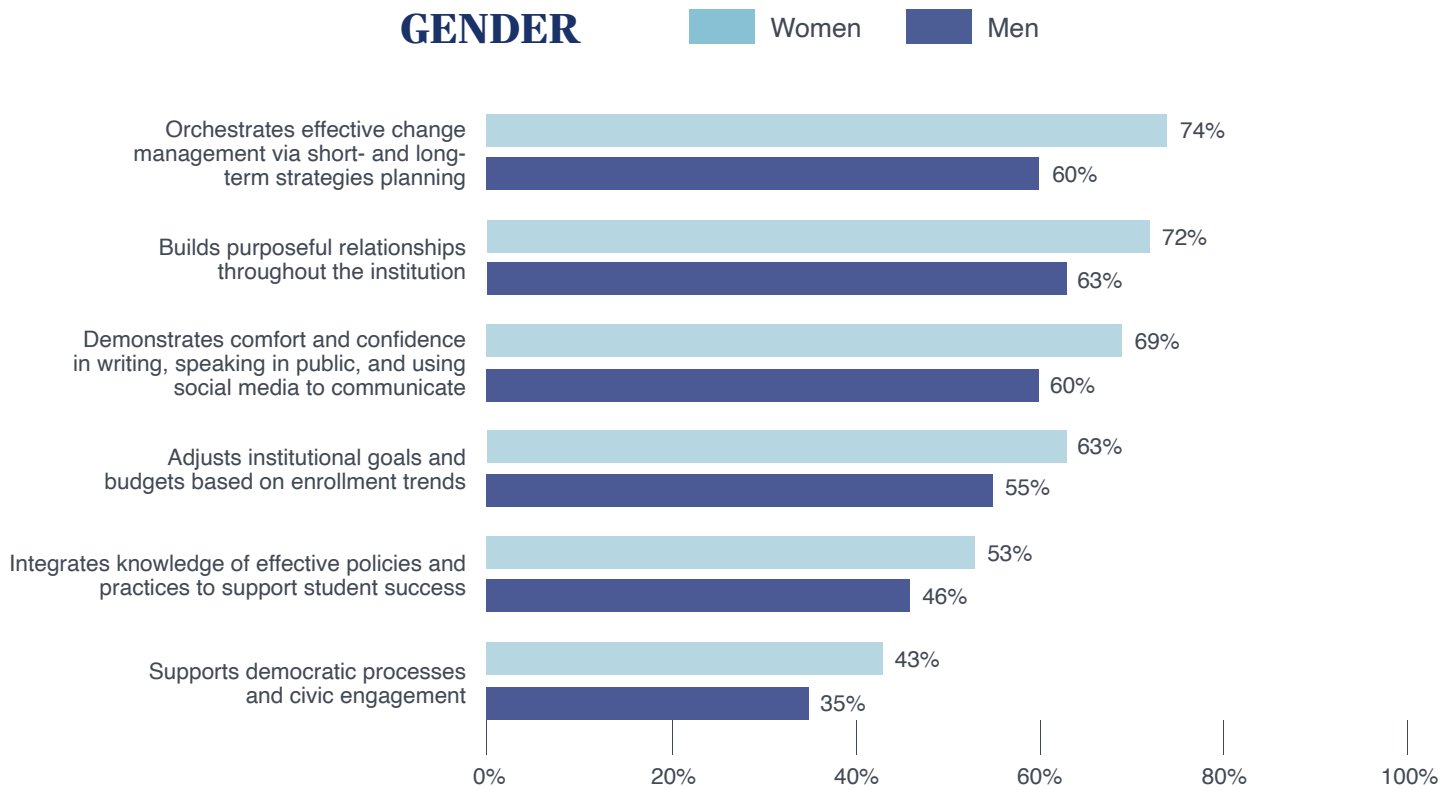## Institutional Management Skills Rated as Very Significant

85%
building a collaborative cabinet and empowers it to make progress on institutional goals

85%
developing and maintaining healthy relationships with the board based on trust and respect

80%
developing, articulating, and executing a clear vision for the institution's future

Figure 4. Differences by Gender and Race in Institutional Management Skills

GENDER

Legend: Women, Men

Skill	Women	Men
Orchestrates effective change management via short- and long-term strategies planning	74%	60%
Builds purposeful relationships throughout the institution	72%	63%
Demonstrates comfort and confidence in writing, speaking in public, and using social media to communicate	69%	60%
Adjusts institutional goals and budgets based on enrollment trends	63%	55%
Integrates knowledge of effective policies and practices to support student success	53%	46%
Supports democratic processes and civic engagement	43%	35%

RACE

Legend: Presidents of Color, White Presidents

Skill	Presidents of Color	White Presidents
Assesses legal risks and assures compliance with local, state, and federal laws	71%	55%
Manages the institution's budget, as well as physical and human resources	67%	56%
Integrates knowledge of effective policies and practices to support student success	64%	44%
Understands and proactively addresses student, faculty, and staff mental well-being	56%	37%
Supports democratic processes and civic engagement	48%	35%

Note. Percentages reflect respondents indicating the item was very significant.
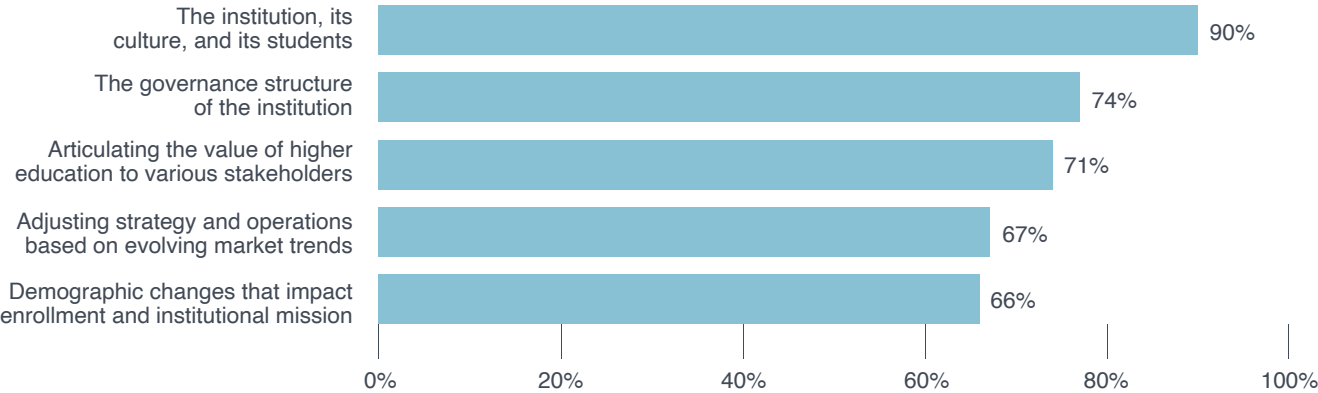
In Figure 4, women generally indicated more items in this question block as very significant than men. There was a large difference in the percentage of women versus men who saw orchestrating change management as very significant, though most of both groups indicated that this skill was relevant.

Presidents of Color were more likely than White presidents to indicate that integrating knowledge of effective policies and practices to support student success and addressing the mental well-being of students, staff, and faculty were very significant.
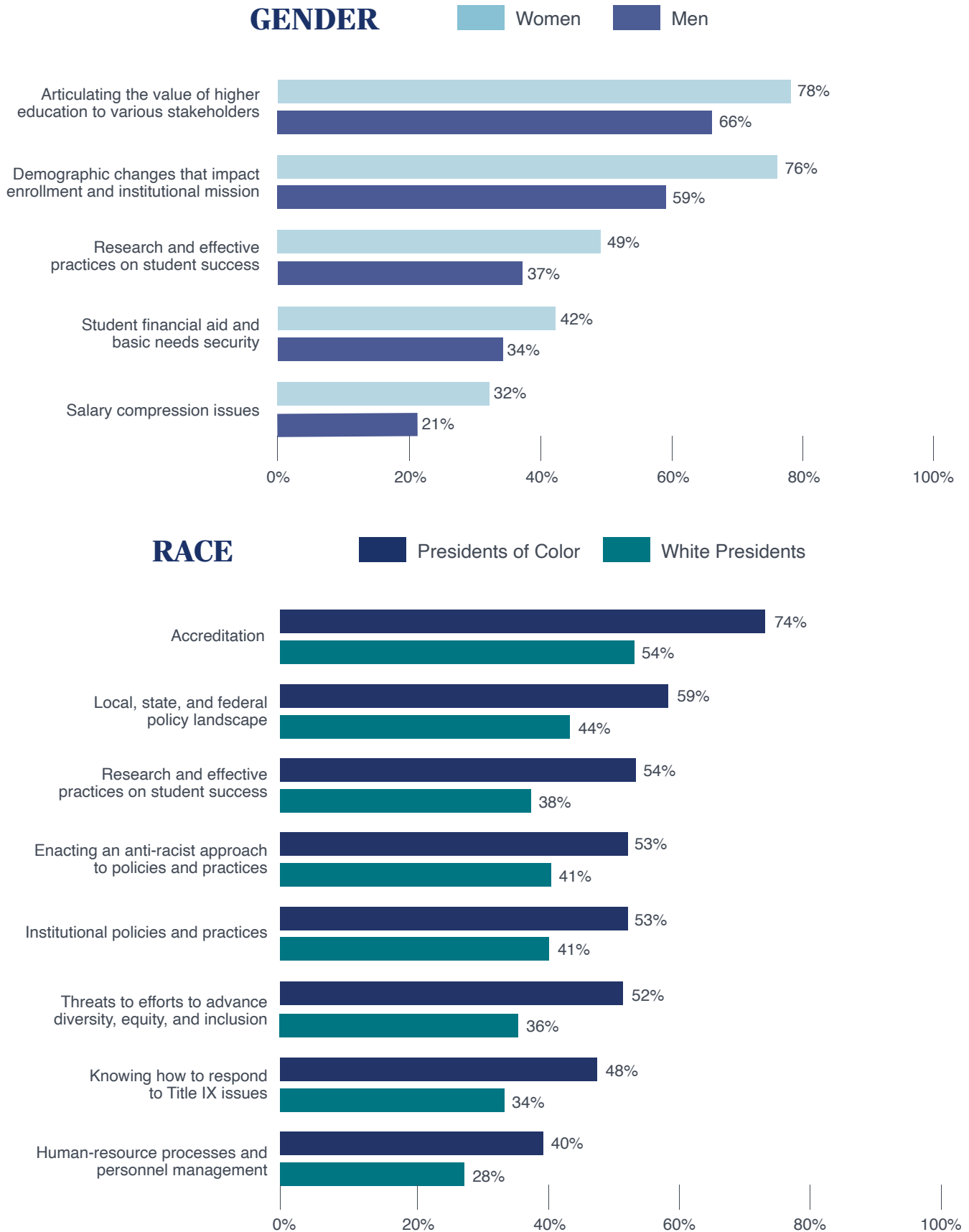
Knowledge Areas to Be Effective

The third question block asked about knowledge areas that are important for presidents to master to be effective at their institution. The questions were organized into four groups: knowledge of the institution, knowledge of the policy landscape, knowledge spanning higher education, and knowledge of emerging trends. Figure 5 shows knowledge areas that 60% or more of presidents rated as very important.

Figure 5. Items Most Frequently Rated as Very Important in Knowledge Areas to Be Effective

Knowledge Area	Percentage
The institution, its culture, and its students	90%
The governance structure of the institution	74%
Articulating the value of higher education to various stakeholders	71%
Adjusting strategy and operations based on evolving market trends	67%
Demographic changes that impact enrollment and institutional mission	66%

The knowledge area most frequently rated as very important is the institution, its culture, and its students (90%). Overall, there was less consensus about the importance of knowledge areas. It is not the case that knowledge areas were typically viewed as unimportant, but a smaller number of items were rated as very important by most respondents.

Figure 6. Differences by Gender and Race in Knowledge Areas to Be Effective

GENDER

Women | Men

Knowledge Area	Women	Men
Articulating the value of higher education to various stakeholders	78%	66%
Demographic changes that impact enrollment and institutional mission	76%	59%
Research and effective practices on student success	49%	37%
Student financial aid and basic needs security	42%	34%
Salary compression issues	32%	21%

RACE

Presidents of Color | White Presidents

Knowledge Area	Presidents of Color	White Presidents
Accreditation	74%	54%
Local, state, and federal policy landscape	59%	44%
Research and effective practices on student success	54%	38%
Enacting an anti-racist approach to policies and practices	53%	41%
Institutional policies and practices	53%	41%
Threats to efforts to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion	52%	36%
Knowing how to respond to Title IX issues	48%	34%
Human-resource processes and personnel management	40%	28%

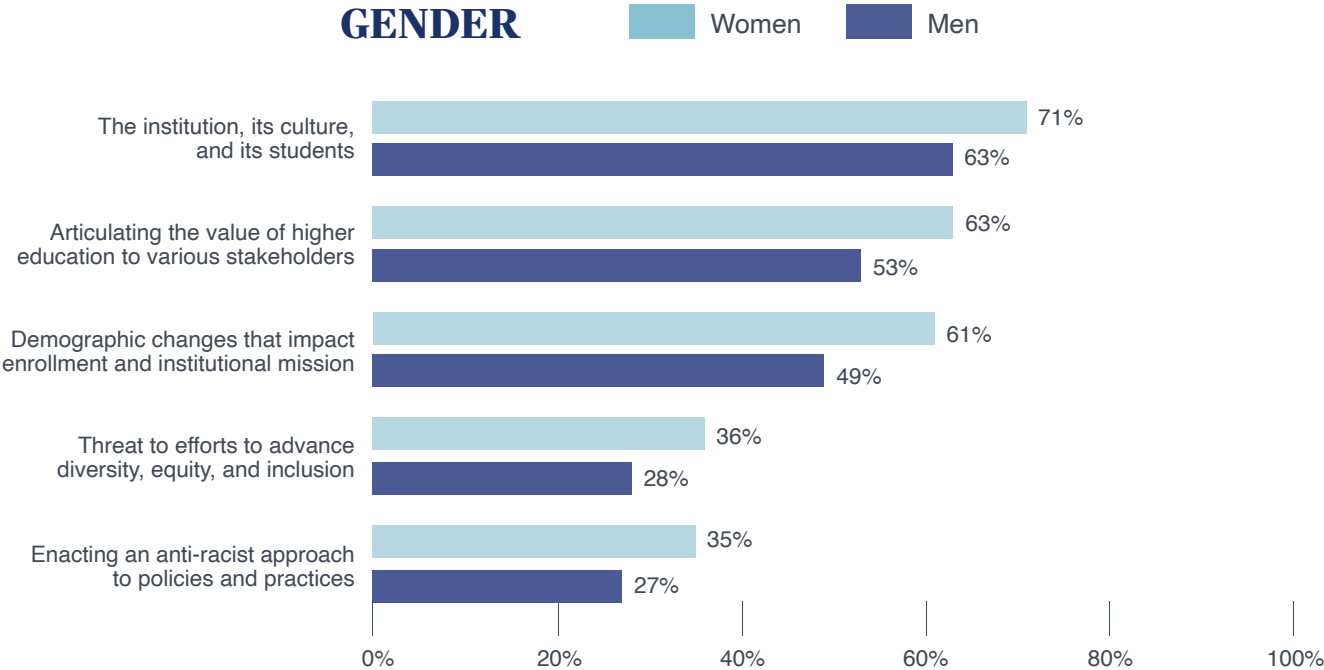*Note.* Percentages reflect respondents indicating the item was very important.

In Figure 6, a larger share of women presidents compared to men presidents rated knowledge of demographic changes that impact enrollment and institutional mission as very important (76% versus 59%). Similarly, more women than men saw knowledge of articulating the value of higher education to various stakeholders as very important (78% versus 66%).

There were multiple survey items where a larger share of Presidents of Color rated as very important compared to White presidents. There were enough items with double-digit differences that it suggests Presidents of Color perceive a greater need to be knowledgeable about a longer list of areas than White presidents. Large differences are evident for knowledge of accreditation (74% versus 54%), knowledge of research and effective practices on student success (54% versus 38%), and knowledge of threats to efforts to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion (52% versus 36%).

Knowledge Areas Leadership Programs Should Prioritize

The fourth question block asked about knowledge areas that leadership development programs should prioritize as they prepare future college presidents. The questions were organized into four groups: knowledge of the institution, knowledge of the policy landscape, knowledge spanning higher education, and knowledge of emerging trends. Only one item in this block was rated as very important by most respondents (The institution, its culture, and its students, 67%). As such, we focus on notable differences by gender and race where we saw the most potential for leadership programs to prioritize.
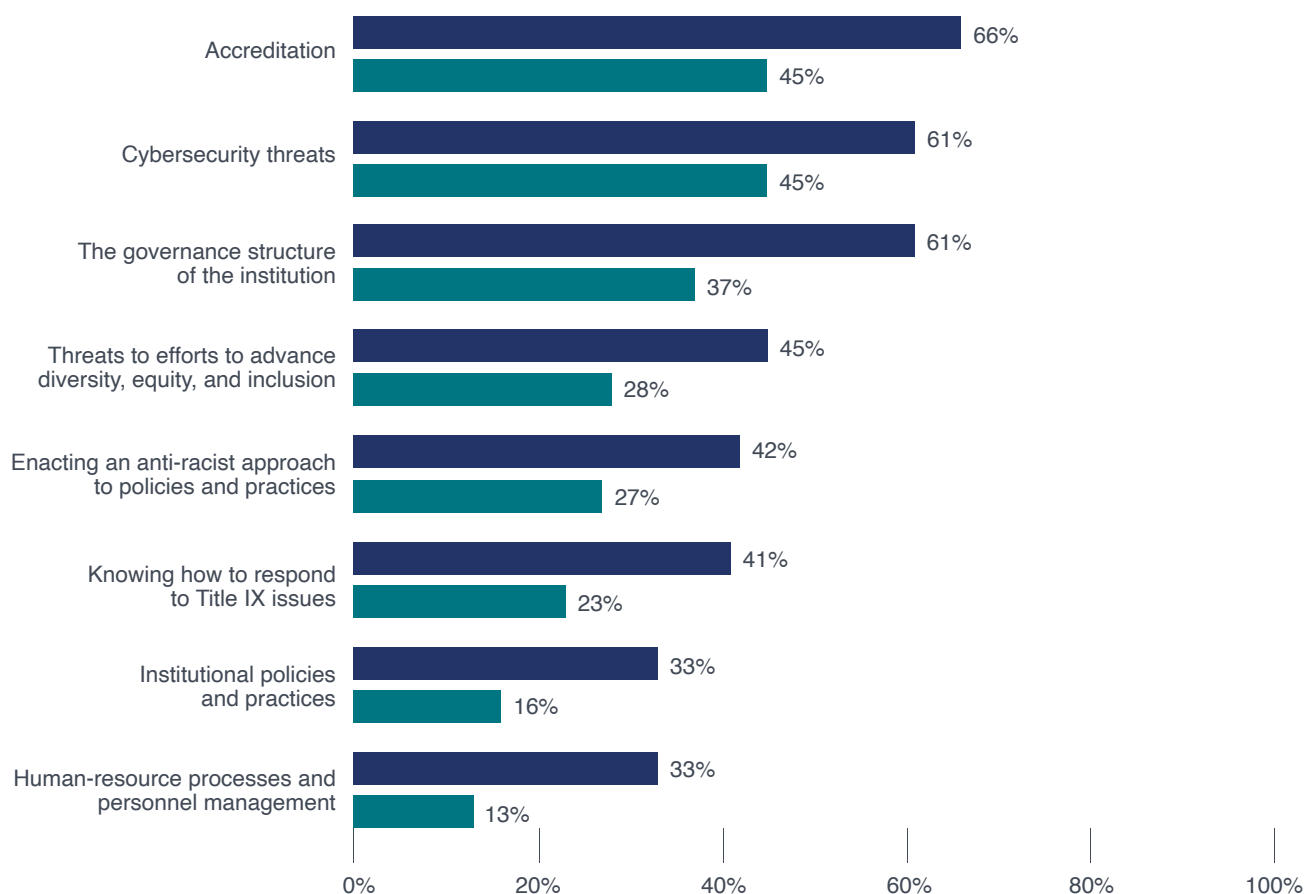
Figure 7. Differences by Gender and Race in Knowledge Areas Leadership Programs Should Prioritize

GENDER — Women, Men

The institution, its culture, and its students — Women 71%, Men 63%

Articulating the value of higher education to various stakeholders — Women 63%, Men 53%

Demographic changes that impact enrollment and institutional mission — Women 61%, Men 49%

Threat to efforts to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion — Women 36%, Men 28%

Enacting an anti-racist approach to policies and practices — Women 35%, Men 27%

Note. Percentages reflect respondents indicating the item was very important.

RACE

Presidents of Color ■ **White Presidents** ■

Category	Presidents of Color	White Presidents
Accreditation	66%	45%
Cybersecurity threats	61%	45%
The governance structure of the institution	61%	37%
Threats to efforts to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion	45%	28%
Enacting an anti-racist approach to policies and practices	42%	27%
Knowing how to respond to Title IX issues	41%	23%
Institutional policies and practices	33%	16%
Human-resource processes and personnel management	33%	13%

Note. Percentages reflect respondents indicating the item was very important.

As seen in Figure 7, women were more likely than men to rate demographic changes that impact enrollment and institutional mission as very important (61% versus 49%). Similarly, women more frequently responded that articulating the value of higher education was a very important knowledge area (63% versus 53%).

As was the case in Question Block 3, Presidents of Color more frequently rated multiple knowledge areas as very important compared to White presidents. Presidents of Color more frequently rated knowledge of the governance structure of the institution (61% versus 37%), accreditation (66% versus 45%), human-resource processes and personnel management (33% versus 13%), responding to Title IX (41% versus 23%), threats to diversity, equity, and inclusion (45% versus 28%), and cybersecurity threats (61% versus 45%) as very important compared to White presidents. Only 27% of White presidents rated enacting an anti-racist approach to policies and practices as very important.

Qualitative Findings

Open-ended comments from the survey and focus group findings provide a more nuanced and in-depth understanding of competencies to effectively lead colleges and universities. To shed light on the real-life skills and abilities that underlie presidential leadership competencies, we focus our qualitative findings on examples participants shared and how they accomplished various processes, outcomes, and personal and professional goals.

We collected qualitative data from 14 participants across four focus groups. The participants led six private institutions and eight public institutions. To contextualize our findings, we provide a table with the profile of focus group participants. Although we highlight individual information about the participants and their institutions, there are several collective identities worth highlighting. The private colleges were all faith affiliated. The term faith affiliated

varied and included institutions that are actively affiliated with a faith denomination, institutions that were founded by a faith denomination but no longer hold ties with such denominations, and institutions that consider themselves faith-based but under no specific denomination. The public universities served primarily regional students; half of the publics were predominantly White institutions (PWIs) and the other half were minority-serving institutions (MSIs). Most participants' age ranged between 40-60 years old, and all identified as straight or heterosexual.

It is important to highlight that the focus groups were collected through the assistance of CIC and AASCU. These organizations have annual meetings with college presidents, providing access to presidents who were willing and able to participate in in-person focus groups. See Appendix B for more information about the membership of CIC and AASCU.

Table 2. Profile of Focus Group Participants

Institutional Type	Approximate Enrollment Size	Region	Gender	Race	MSI (Y/N)
Private	1,000	Midwest	Man	White	N
Private	2,000	Southeast	Man	White	N
Private	1,000	Midwest	Woman	White	N
Private	1,400	Northeast	Woman	White	N
Private	1,000	Midwest	Woman	White	N
Private	1,000	Midwest	Man	White	N
Public	5,000	Northeast	Woman	Black	Y - PBI
Public	2,500	Southeast	Woman	White	Y - HBCU
Public	10,000	Northwest	Man	White	N
Public	3,000	Pacific	Woman	Native Hawaiian	N
Public	25,000	West Coast	Woman	Hispanic	Y - HSI & AANAPISI
Public	8,000	Midwest	Woman	White	N
Public	6,000	Midwest	Man	White	N
Public	3,000	Southwest	Man	Hispanic	Y - HSI

Note. PBI = Predominantly Black Institution; HBCU = Historically Black Colleges and Universities; HSI = Hispanic-Serving Institution; AANAPISI = Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions.

In addition to focus groups, there were a total of 751 open-ended comments submitted through the survey. We coded all these comments, then presented the most prominent codes to supplement and enrich the focus group findings.

In what follows, we describe and exemplify how college presidents:

1. **Establish Trust**

2. **Communicate Effectively**

3. **Build an Executive Cabinet**

4. **Operationalize Resilience**

5. **Lead in Tumultuous Times**

How College Presidents Establish Trust

Our participants spoke extensively about how they built trust among internal stakeholders such as students, faculty, and staff. They shared key strategies and tools that underscored the importance of relationship building to establish a base for how they would like to be perceived at their institutions. In sharing these strategies and tools, they also disclosed challenges they encountered along the way.

Participants highlighted that most internal stakeholders want to feel heard and understood, and some want to feel like they are more intimately involved in decision-making. Establishing trust was also one of the most common codes used for open-ended survey comments, with multiple comments connecting trust-building to being an attentive, curious listener. Presidents emphasized the importance of giving stakeholders a reliable channel for voicing their concerns. This is especially true among faculty, who according to our participants, tend to judge the trustworthiness of a president based on how much access they have to the office of the president. In the words of a college president of a regional public university on the West Coast,

Part of trust also comes from building relationships...It's a slippery slope with the faculty...Sometimes they can like you, you can be part of it, and there's still that dissent that comes from that...so what I would say is in terms of your base is those individuals that are going to be in your base when the faculty aren't.

Another president from a private liberal arts college in the Southeast added to this point,

I don't think there's a way to communicate enough in the way people want. I think what people want, and I'm going to say what my best people want, my best faculty...They really want to have a personal conversation and they want to be on the inside, understand the inside of a decision.

These quotes highlighted that although sometimes presidents may enjoy the backing of the faculty, this trust can evaporate at any moment. Participants also stressed the importance of developing a diverse and reliable base within their college to make sure they have enough people in their corner when problems arise, especially since key groups such as faculty may not always "like you," as asserted by a president. Although giving faculty a reliable channel to voice their concerns was advised, this should also apply to all stakeholders, including students, staff, alumni, and donors.

A key strategy that presidents shared for establishing trust among their base was exhibiting consistent behavior. As shared by a participant of a private liberal arts college,

If your behavior consistently is aligned with university values, community values, and strategic planning...then you're seen as being okay. You're steering the ship in the right direction, you're making sure that the rudder doesn't slip.

Consistent behavior included but was not limited to relying on data for communicating information about the health of the institution, staying true to one's core values, and building one-on-one relationships with key people who are important to their presidency.

As such, presidents mentioned scheduling listening sessions on a regular basis as a strategy to build trust. A president from a regional public university in the Midwest described how being consistent to build trust also meant avoiding surprises,

Faculty cannot handle surprises. Shared governance folks, you have to prepare the way so that by time the worst news comes forward...Surprises absolutely kill trust. [Related] to the point of vulnerability, how do you get in spaces with folks so that you're avoiding that [killing trust]? It is on that foundation of relationships and proactivity.

By stressing the importance of shared governance, this president articulated the ways in which leaders must deliver bad news, especially to key stakeholders like faculty, which meant being proactive by always sharing as much information in advance so that bad news never comes as a surprise.

Lastly, we saw evidence that much of trust-building required leveraging what we categorized as "emotional intelligence." Most participants defined emotional intelligence as the skill and/or process of sharing their humanity to give stakeholders a closer look at who they are as a person and how their personhood informs their leadership style. Emotional intelligence has become so critical to the job that a president went as far as saying that,

The leaders who struggle the most, from my perspective, are the ones who have the least emotional intelligence and not able to say, 'I don't know how to do this, will you help?' or reach out for help.

According to this participant, not having emotional intelligence can be detrimental to a team, and presidents must have the right balance of being seen as stable leaders while showing as much humanity as possible. For

example, as shared by a chancellor of a regional public university in the Midwest,

To build the relationship, you must let them know you're human, that you're not superhuman. So I think there's a component of not only meeting with people regularly so that you have as few surprises as possible, but also who are you as a person? Sharing the anecdotes, finding the common interests is a component of that. And it's hard because you are in the role, but you're also a person.

Many participants discussed the need to humanize themselves by making sure that people do not make the assumption that presidents are superhuman and that they, too, have feelings and emotions. A president of a small liberal arts college in the Midwest emphasized that much of emotional intelligence within the context of trust-building stems from personal traits like humility, self-awareness, and vulnerability. When asked about what they do to communicate in a manner that builds trust, she added,

I think humility is just right. I would say it's having the self-awareness to be able to tap into vulnerability and courage and to be able to show both of those things...So I do think there's a vulnerability that's part of authenticity that is...you got to cultivate that, too. You don't have all the right answers. You are a human, it hurts.

By lifting up the humanity of the college presidency, this liberal arts college president named various personal traits that are critical for presidents to develop as they exercise emotional intelligence. She was not alone in giving attention to humility, which appeared more frequently than any other code in open-ended comments. Presidents made clear in open-ended comments the importance of admitting mistakes, apologizing, and praising others while not expecting to receive credit for successes.

How College Presidents Communicate Effectively

Throughout our discussions, it became clear that effective communication is key to being a successful president. In this section, we emphasize tangible examples for communicating effectively, as well as common communication issues that our participants encountered.

A particular skill that several presidents shared was using data for storytelling. Although analytical skills are critical to the job, they emphasized that being able to communicate data to diverse audiences to convey a story is just as important. One president shared that you do not necessarily need to be a "numbers person" to communicate data successfully. She stressed that there are many ways to interpret and communicate data, and they're not always through spreadsheets. She talked about the importance of learning about data through various data visualization tools (e.g., charts, figures) to get a firm grip on how you need to communicate it to stakeholders. In this quote, she provided an example about her approach to communicate data to help people relate to it,

But there's a lot of education that goes on; you have to inform people. We're using a different set of tools now to help people understand the budget because they don't [understand it]. So I think, and I said to my team the other day, they're not hearing the way we've presented it, so we have to present it differently this time. So we have to come up with a different way to say the same thing. So I think it's also about using data differently until the message gets across. And that takes time and it takes a creative team of people, too, to come up with a different way to say the same thing.

Presidents must engage in creativity to communicate data, especially data about budgets and other critical items that are integral to the health of the college. **Participants emphasized that today's presidents need to understand their audience better than ever and use appropriate channels that resonate with each audience.**

In addition to being creative about communicating important items such as data, presidents were granular about the avenues, frequency, and styles of communication for being an effective president. Practices varied depending on the type of campus they led, and participants expressed that many small campuses engage in more face-to-face interactions with students, faculty, and staff, as expected of the culture. Regardless of the campus size, effective written communication was a universal trait that required intentionality of delivery. For example, presidents utilized email and newsletters as a tool for communicating on a regular basis, understanding that there are limitations to both. They emphasized that adding emotion and personality to written communication was crucial, and shared that their audience knew when they were being authentic or not. A president from a liberal arts institution talked about sharing emotions and owning one's mistakes when applicable,

When you're crafting an email, can you put some genuineness and emotion in it... and send it out as, "Hey, I made the wrong mistake." That's a lot of emotion, and people will see that, and I've certainly had, all of us have to do that.

Presidents shared the many challenges that exist with communications, and they felt like,

When you communicate, people just want more communication. So that's not enough for them. They want to know a regular time when I'm going to be sending an email update.

The level of intentionality, frequency, and delivery that participants described was deep and precise, and communication was never to be treated as a secondary part of the job. Some presidents relied on communications/ public relations teams to help them draft messages, whereas others shared they like to have more control over their communication and drafted their own messages. Relying on a communications team can present its own challenges. A president from a private college in the Midwest shared a story that exemplified some of these challenges,

We had a phenomenal communications director who I then made my chief of staff ...We then hired her replacement who came from a corporate environment even though he was an alum twice and did his masters as well and was deeply involved as a student, he couldn't understand why I wanted to put emotion into my communications, social media as well as other communications. He wanted to use corporate speak...I finally had to say,

"We're not an insurance company that you came from. If we put out these factual messages that are devoid of emotion and empathy and sensitivity, one, it's not authentically me, it also doesn't value what we do and the humanistic job or mission we have."

This story captured the fact that presidential communication is not a one-size-fits-all strategy, and it is critical to have a team that understands how to develop messaging in a way that feels personal and authentic. This same president went on to add that presidents must also understand that although they have a team, they are ultimately "the voice of the university," and that your team ought to serve as your "megaphone."

Presidents also indicated that communication is not just about relaying information or engaging in public relations. Open-ended comments emphasized that presidents must communicate in a way that conveys respect for multiple points of view, model civil discourse by engaging with disagreement, and provide explanations or rationale behind decisions.

How College Presidents Build an Executive Cabinet

Crafting a cabinet or team of senior leaders was one of the most frequent codes for open-ended comments, with several comments about the importance of "surrounding yourself with brilliant and hardworking people" and developing the leadership skills of cabinet members.

Multiple respondents indicated through open-ended comments that they rated several survey items lower in relevance or importance because they have been able to delegate and entrust those tasks and operations to their cabinet.

Focus group participants underscored that building a successful executive cabinet takes time and requires intentionality. In the words of a president from a small private Midwestern college, "it takes years to build a good cabinet." **All participants credited their success to having a cabinet they can trust. Relying on cabinet members who possess skills that they do not have was a common theme.**

For example, if a president does not feel confident about their budgetary skills, they should have an experienced chief finance officer they can lean on. Some participants saw cabinet members as their ambassadors: "The people who are around you are going to respond in the way that you hope that they're going to respond and that they are seen as your ambassadors because you can't be everywhere."

Another common thread revolved around tensions about inheriting a cabinet as a new president. Several participants expressed regrets about not having replaced certain cabinet members upon starting their position. For some, even though they knew certain cabinet members were not a good fit for their administration, they still kept them for too long. A president from a small liberal arts college shared,

I let that go too long, and finally let the CFO go after about four years and let the provost go, although she went back into the faculty after six years. And I wish I had done that a lot sooner. I mean, my advice to a new president would be get the cabinet you need right away.

Hesitations about replacing cabinet members often stemmed from fear of backlash, especially coming from the faculty. A president from a small rural college in the Midwest shared a story from her previous institution when her president replaced the provost,

She [former provost] went back into the faculty, turned around, galvanized the faculty against him, and he got a vote of no confidence, and the board fired him...you've got to navigate that stuff carefully.

This experience shaped the hesitations that this president had about replacing cabinet members out of fear of retaliation or turning the faculty against her. Because of the natural fears and anxieties that stemmed from replacing key cabinet members, presidents stressed the importance of making each decision carefully while trusting their instincts. This is especially important when choosing a chief academic officer since faculty play a critical role in shaping the college's perception of how successful a president is during their tenure.

At the same time, presidents also emphasized the importance of making sure that the faculty are not running out their provost, and that faculty "don't get to pick [their] boss. [They] have to work with [them]."

Collectively, participants agreed that it is critical to be comfortable in their own skin when it comes to decision-making. Presidents are becoming increasingly unpopular as a result of having to make the most difficult decisions for their colleges. Good judgment and understanding our own needs as a leader are critical skills to have when developing a cabinet. Good judgment was defined as doing what is best for your college despite executing a highly unpopular decision. Replacing personnel is never easy, but dealing with the ramifications of having unhelpful or even toxic leaders in your cabinet is much more difficult long-term.

Because of these circumstances, developing a thick skin is a much-needed trait in today's landscape, and presidents must be intentional about "having to make tough decisions that are going to transform and change the culture." Cabinet members can only provide so much counsel, and presidents are seen as the ultimate decision-maker. Presidents discussed having to make a wide array of difficult decisions, such as announcing budget cuts, having to consolidate programs and departments, instituting hiring freezes, and halting salary increases. Presidents knew that although these decisions were often made collectively, they still had to carry the weight on their shoulders. As articulated by a president from a public regional HBCU after making some difficult decisions about the financial well-being of her college,

Some [decisions] you will like, some you will not. Some will be popular, some will not be. But that's okay, because I'm okay with that. My goal is to make sure that this university survives and continues on for years to come.

This president knew that while her decisions were sometimes unpopular, she understood why they were necessary. She developed thick skin because in her words, she knew that the institution was on "life support." She knew that she had been given an impossible job, yet her college came back around financially, and it is in a much better position today. Throughout our data, we learned that presidents were faced with tough decisions on a daily basis, and that their role required a level of self-awareness and resilience that needed to be cultivated.

How College Presidents Demonstrate Resilience

The presidency is rife with adversity, and presidents took considerable time defining what resilience meant to them to make sense of their priorities. Most presidents operationalized resilience within the context of their core values and beliefs.

For example, a president from a regional public university in the Midwest explained how his core values informed his resilience,

Part of resilience is having clarity of an ethical core that guides you. Part of resilience is having figured out your elements of...self-care in terms of drawing on a network, establishing what are the crises that are mine and what are the crises that are not mine...There's a very large part of the institution that's on your shoulders, so you can't take up little extra pieces here and there and do the big ones.

A common theme was having clarity of your own ethics when it comes to decision-making and prioritizing. Isolation was a common theme as well, and a president from a small rural college in the Southwest shared,

Isolation is very real in this role...my situation is unique because I'm in a very small institution in a very small world community...so having that network to reach out to in times of need is critical. But also giving yourself time to reflect on issues that arise from whatever perspective helps you rationalize what your heart and soul are going through at the time.

Many presidents described the presidency as a lonely role, and they relied on small networks to seek counsel and comfort. They also relied heavily on spouses and their faith. We often heard comments such as "if it wasn't for my faith, I would've given up" or "I need a lot of my faith in prayer and just sitting there and trying to lift myself out." Spouses played a key role in serving as a backbone and helping participants make sense of their circumstances, especially by serving as confidants for identifying personal and professional priorities.

Presidents shared that part of their resilience came from finding alignment between their core values and their institution's priorities. They noted that it is important to be attuned to the vision and mission of their institution and dig into their core values to find the best solution forward. In doing so, participants shared that when this alignment of personal core values and institutional priorities occurs, it is then easier to overcome challenges. This quote exemplified this strategic alignment,

I would say principled leadership is part of what resiliency looks like at practice and strategic alignment. As presidents and CEOs, we have strategic plans or directions from the board. So strategic alignment when you're focused on, especially if you understand your values as a leader and the institutional values.

Because several of our presidents served faith-affiliated institutions, it was not uncommon for participants to bring up their faith beliefs into the conversation of resilience. This informed how they not only approached resilience but their leadership approach as well. Resilience was also shaped by identity, and presidents with multiple marginalized identities offered tangible language for how they overcame resilience. For example, a Black woman president of a midsize public college shared when asked about building trust,

It takes a certain amount of boldness, for sure. Oftentimes we try to fit in and it's difficult to do that. And one day I came to the realization that it's okay. How I dress is how I dress, and if someone else has a problem with it, I won't let it become my problem. Because I'm a Black woman in STEM, I've been up against this for a minute, and especially when I did one of my graduate degrees at [elite institution]. I mean, it is a men's school. But I decided if they come to me with, "Well, are you going shopping today?" just because I have on a skirt and whatever. And so I just started to embrace myself to feel good about myself, because that whole imposter thing is real.

Another woman president who identified as Native Hawaiian[1] shared her anecdote of resilience,

I remember trying to figure out what to be. And I didn't have very many Women of Color, let alone Indigenous women in higher education, to look for. So I did reach out... And one of the things I learned early on, and what I talked with a lot of women who are coming into the academy is really find your story and be vulnerable. Know that there are people now, in 2023, that there are women and there are men who will be there to embrace that story.

Some presidents also recognized how their privileged identities shaped how they are perceived by others and how they were able to navigate challenges of the academy differently,

I am always aware of my privilege as a White cisgender male. I walk into the room with authority, no question about that. And it's easier for me to be vulnerable than it is for someone else. And I'm always aware of that.

Defining and sticking to core values and beliefs, alignment with institutional priorities, and remaining authentic to intersecting identities were key factors that shaped participants' definitions of resilience.

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[1]This president preferred to identify as Native Hawaiian versus using another identity to better ensure confidentiality.

How College Presidents Lead with Courage in Tumultuous Times

While presidents stressed the need to listen, there also comes a time when they must take decisive action.

As one president advised, leaders need to be able to say,

"Enough. We're making a decision. Here's the decision. We're leaving this room." It takes a certain level of courage to be a college president, and as articulated by a participant, you must "act in the best interest of others, even if they don't credit you with that and that's why we do the job, that's why I'm in the role."

Open-ended comments spoke of the need for presidents to avoid decision paralysis after hearing from stakeholders with different priorities and take responsibility for managing change and advancing the strategic plan. This is especially relevant for dealing with outside forces (e.g., media, collective bargaining) where the university has little control over, yet decisions must be made swiftly.

Although courage is often romanticized, it does not always end with feel-good outcomes. This is especially relevant when having a donor base that may not be on board with certain decisions over the future direction of the college. Presidents stressed the importance of being consistent in the most challenging times, even when it means potentially losing millions of dollars in donor money. Given how difficult it is to lead in tumultuous times, presidents underscored the importance of transparency. Transparency is key because ultimately people react better when they understand your decision-making progress. As shared earlier, internal stakeholders do not like surprises, and the more information and communication a president is able to share, the better. A president from a regional HBCU shared,

Having to make tough decisions that are going to transform and change the culture is very difficult. So my narrative coming in was, "I want you to trust me, I'm going to be transparent, but I'm going to make some tough decisions"...So that was my messaging around trust that I was very repetitive with.

This type of transparency is harder to execute when presidents must make decisions that impact people's lives. A president shared this difficult story when she had to make budget cuts and lay off people at the college that had worked for them for many years, which had left many people stunned by it,

And they remember the people who left. And I said out loud, "I want to be really clear with everybody here, just because [the chair] is not here, that doesn't mean [the chair] did anything wrong. It doesn't mean [the chair] is not a part of our community to this day. It wasn't her fault that she's not sitting in this chair anymore."

This level of transparency, boldness, and authenticity set this president apart. She understood how people in the community were impacted by her decisions, but she also understood how budgets worked and the limitations of her college. Thus, she knew how to be emotionally intelligent at a time when feelings were hurt, and community members were grieving. Another president shared another example of leading with courage in difficult times,

I had to cut $5 million out of the budget within the first 18 months. And let me just also say that it's not just communicating in the tough times, it's communicating in the good times too, so I don't mean to just focus on adversity. But what I did was I worked very closely with the cabinet at the time, and we held multiple open forums. And so, we made the announcements to groups of about, I don't know, 20 in each meeting, and then just sat with them.

This president underscored the importance of communicating bad and good news in tough times. Presidents knew that it is a considerable lift to keep morale up when budgets are being slashed and people are being laid off. However, this is when presidents should work closely with their cabinets to find ways to communicate in the most effective and delicate way.

All participants emphasized that there are many skills and competencies surrounding their role, and that balancing personhood and skill is a critical part of being successful in this role. We end this section with the following quote from a president of a regional public university in the West Coast,

You really are part of the skills that you picked up along the way, I suppose, as part of just life in general, not necessarily the role...the coping skills that you picked up to realize that when you are in a spiral, you pick up some experiences that you know it's going to end. It's not going to persist to a point of no return. In just recognizing that so that you can lift yourself out of the spiral and reach out to those coping partners that you've established a relationship with and find a way out of that dark tunnel. It can get pretty dark and pretty heavy at some points. And so yes, self-awareness and understanding that it's going to resolve.

Final Takeaways

1. There is no "checklist" for presidential leadership competencies today

2. Public perception influences the salience of certain competencies

3. Emotional intelligence was a key ingredient in trust-building and resilience

4. Cabinets can be your biggest asset—or your biggest challenge

5. Data acumen is more than just numbers

1.

There is no "checklist" for presidential leadership competencies today

Presidents recognize that the job requires a set of evolving skills that are highly situational and individual. They are situational because presidents employ strategies and tools that are tailored to their specific institutional contexts and unique circumstances (e.g., pandemic, political contexts). They are individual because some presidents must develop certain competencies more than others depending on their previous experiences, contexts, and educational background/training. These skills require a certain level of self-awareness and willingness to work on areas of growth that could take time to develop. Relatedly, the meaning that presidents ascribe to these competencies is often related to their identities, especially their race and gender, as seen in Figures 2, 4, 6, and 7. Although prior reports on presidential competencies have provided a "checklist" of competencies to master to be a successful leader (e.g., AACC, 2018), our research signaled that the salience of competencies depends on the extent to which a leader's identity is viewed as legitimate by their most critical stakeholders (e.g., governing boards, faculty, donors, C-suite). There is no universal narrative for presidential leadership competencies today–individuals must carefully assess their skills and growth areas in context.

2.

Public perception influences the salience of certain competencies

There is a set of pressures that led presidents to develop certain competencies that were often fueled by accountability, campus preferences, and the political climate, to name a few. The survey item that respondents most frequently rated as very relevant was behaving in a way that is trustworthy, consistent, and accountable (96%). Communicating effectively and authentically in formal and informal settings and having mastery of knowledge related to the institution, its culture, and its students were both rated as very important by 90% of survey respondents. These findings indicate that presidents feel the need to leverage these competencies because public perception matters. For example, when presidents are no longer perceived as trustworthy, their ability to lead crumbles. When presidents are no longer perceived as communicative enough their constituents become frustrated.

3.

Emotional intelligence was a key ingredient in trust-building and resilience

Presidents felt the need to be more intentional about developing emotional intelligence, both to engender trust with constituents and cope with the adversity inherent to the position. Emotional intelligence is defined as the "ability to understand and manage your emotions, as well as recognize and influence the emotions of those around you" (Landry, 2019, para. 3). Presidents discussed the importance of self-awareness, reaching out for help, and developing the emotional intelligence of their cabinets. Humility was one of the most common codes in open-ended comments, and presidents stressed the need to give credit to others, check their egos, and be willing to admit mistakes. This evidence points to the importance of balancing technical skills with relational skills to be an effective leader.

This report sheds light on how presidents operationalized resilience within their personal and professional lives. Although the concept of resilience has been studied in education, psychology, and sociology (Patrón & Garcia, 2016), minimal attention has been paid to operationalizing resilience within the context of senior leadership in higher education, let alone college presidents. When surveying the literature within educational leadership, there has been a proliferation of scholarship focused on understanding how leaders with multiple marginalized identities demonstrate resilience while navigating structural barriers. For example, there is a growing body of research dedicated to understanding how Black women and Women of Color navigate adversity, especially within leadership contexts that are predominantly White and male (see for example, Chance, 2022; Commodore, 2019; Gray, 2023). In a recent American Council on Education research brief, Gray (2023) developed an "invisible checklist" tailored to Women of Color as they ascend the leadership ranks, highlighting more tangible and targeted efforts to support this population of leaders. This report signals the necessity of relying on scholarship grounded in the experiences of Women of Color in educational leadership as a means of operationalizing presidential resilience broadly but even more so in times of uncertainty. This is especially relevant for developing new curriculum, programming, and training at leadership programs and various educational settings, such as graduate degrees and certificate programs.

4.

Cabinets can be your biggest asset—or your biggest challenge

Presidents dedicated a significant amount of time to speaking about how they interacted with their cabinets, as well as strategies they employed to build them. Survey results also showed that respondents considered listening to stakeholders, building a collaborative cabinet, and developing a healthy relationship with the board as very relevant. In our focus groups, we noticed a sense of regret by presidents who waited too long to replace key cabinet members that were not a good fit for their presidencies. Cabinet members too were integral to complementing presidents' skill sets. When presidents felt like they lacked a certain skill or ability as a result of their background/training or previous experiences, they relied on certain cabinet members to be successful. Having a dysfunctional cabinet can make a presidency more challenging because it reveals fractures or leadership gaps in times of crisis. When needed, hiring cabinet members should be treated as time sensitive because waiting too long to replace them can produce toxic environments and public mistrust.

5.

Data acumen is more than just numbers

Research in higher education has underscored the importance of data-driven decision-making (Cox et al., 2017). Much of this research has stressed the importance of interpreting research and data to inform leaders' decisions. However, most of this body of work has overlooked how leaders ought to interpret data, and most importantly, how they ought to communicate it. Our study revealed that being a data-driven decision-maker is not as simple as being a "numbers person." Combining technical knowledge with people skills and a willingness to learn is one of the most important aspects of becoming a successful president.

Presidents also stressed the importance of data storytelling. Data storytelling is essential because stakeholders must understand and resonate with data for it to actually have an impact. Spreadsheets and numbers do not do much to public perception if they are not communicated in an accessible and consumable way. Presidents highlighted the importance of using data visualization tools to enhance their storytelling. Failing to communicate data and how it informs decision-making can be detrimental to any presidency because it lacks the emotional connection that key stakeholders need to trust and support their leaders. This is especially relevant at a time when political tensions are high and public demands for information are of essence.

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Appendix A:
RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. We began with a survey of current presidents (as of spring 2023), then conducted four focus groups with current presidents in November of 2023 and January of 2024. The data collection and analysis happened sequentially, with survey results being used to craft focus group questions. The study underwent IRB review and approval to comply with standards of research ethics involving human subjects.

The survey instrument consisted of four main question blocks with a total of 85 items and three open-ended questions. The first question block consisted of leadership qualities and abilities organized into three groups: personal qualities, interpersonal skills, and leadership abilities. The next question block focused on institutional management skills, consisting of vision-setting and planning, relationship-building and communicating, and promoting institutional outcomes. The final two question blocks asked about knowledge areas that presidents should master and knowledge areas that should be included in presidential development programs. These two question blocks included knowledge of the institution, policy landscape, issues spanning higher education, and emerging trends.

Several sources informed the construction of survey items. We began by collecting and reviewing literature in four areas: leadership competencies in higher education, presidential leadership in higher education, survey instruments and popular media articles, and the context of presidential leadership. Through this literature review and the author's prior research on the college presidency, we identified four domains for the purposes of survey item construction: personal qualities and skills of effective presidents, established presidential responsibilities, institutional and sector knowledge, and emerging trends and growth areas. This led to the initial creation of a list of items under each domain. We then checked this list of items against four prior efforts to study and identify presidential leadership competencies: McDaniels (2002), Smith and Wolverton (2010), AASCU (2016), and AACC (2018). This allowed us to compare our survey items for gaps, redundancies, language discrepancies, and contributions to new understanding. Draft survey items were shared with members of the Academic Search, AASCU, and CIC staff members supporting the research for feedback. The AASCU research committee, which consists of current presidents, provided feedback on the survey during one of its regular meetings, then the survey was piloted among the AASCU and CIC board members.

There is no regularly updated database of the entire population of college presidents. The Integrated Postsecondary Data System includes the name and an email address for the institution's president, but this data tends to be out of date because it reports the prior year's information and is unreliable because of turnover or leaves of office. In some cases, the email provided is a generic email address (e.g., president@institution.edu) and therefore less likely to be checked by a president. We created a non-random sample consisting of presidents of AASCU member institutions, presidents of CIC member institutions, and presidents in Academic Search's contact database. We combined these three lists and removed any duplicates. The sample included 3,071 college and university presidents. One challenge with survey administration is that using a survey application like Qualtrics can mean emails go to

recipients' junk or spam folders. To address this issue, we followed a strategy used by the American Council on Education in their American College President Study and used a mail merge where the email came from the presidents of AASCU, CIC, and Academic Search. The survey was open for a month, with two reminder emails.

792 presidents responded to the survey in part and 713 completed all of the questions about presidential competencies for a 23.2% response rate. Survey data was analyzed descriptively through frequencies. We used cross-tabulation analysis to examine survey results by gender, race, and whether the institution was rural or a minority-serving institution. Because of the smaller number of respondents in some racial identities, we created a combined category for Presidents of Color. This decision obscures important insights about the experiences of presidents who are Black, Latinx, Asian American, Native American, and multi-racial. Additionally, we acknowledge that the intersection of race and gender yields different experiences that our data and its presentation here does not capture. The survey also yielded 751 open-ended comments, which we coded using the codebook described below.

Survey results gave direction to the semi-structured interview protocol used during focus groups. Two focus groups occurred at the AASCU Annual Meeting and two focus groups occurred at the CIC Annual Meeting. Participants for the focus groups were contacted by staff members from each organization, with a goal of gathering diverse groups in terms of the individuals' identities and the institutions/regions they served. The first two focus groups lasted approximately 60 minutes and the second two focus groups lasted approximately 90 minutes. Focus groups were facilitated by the lead researchers, who were both present and asked planned and impromptu questions. The goal of focus groups was to understand how presidents practiced or enacted some of the skills and abilities that survey respondents rated as very relevant. Focus groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

To analyze the focus group data, the lead researchers each independently coded two of the focus group transcripts using line-by-line open coding. The researchers met to compare and discuss their codes, generating a single code book. The researchers then each independently coded all of the transcripts using Dedoose. This process resulted in the five overarching themes presented in the qualitative findings. The same code book was used to code the open-ended comments.

Appendix B:
THE MEMBERSHIP OF AASCU AND CIC

This appendix discusses the membership of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) and the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC). The membership of these two organizations constituted a large share of the survey sample. The remaining institutions in the sample came from Academic Search's database. All focus group participants were affiliated with either CIC or AASCU.

American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU)

AASCU is a network of 350 state colleges and universities—also known as regional public universities (RPUs)—and the systems that support them (AASCU, n.d.). AASCU member institutions enroll a significant percentage of Pell-recipient students, first-generation college students, and Students of Color. Consistent with research on RPUs, all AASCU member institutions strive to provide affordable access to higher education (Crisp et al., 2022). Approximately 90% of public four-year Historically Black Colleges and Universities and 58% of public four-year Hispanic-Serving Institutions are AASCU members (AASCU, n.d.). In addition, 43% of public four-year bachelor's degrees were awarded by AASCU institutions (AASCU, n.d.).

Council of Independent Colleges (CIC)

The Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) is an association of nonprofit independent colleges and universities, state-based councils, and higher education affiliates (CIC, n.d.). With a network of 650 institutional members, CIC is driven by the independent sector of higher education, which includes traditional liberal arts colleges, small to mid-sized schools, research universities, religiously affiliated institutions, historically black colleges and universities, single-gender colleges, and performing and visual arts institutions (CIC, n.d.). While CIC member institutions traditionally serve undergraduate student populations, most currently offer graduate programs as well, including schools of engineering, business, nursing, and other professions (CIC, n.d.).

Appendix C:

PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Introduction and Consent

Academic Search and the American Academic Leadership Institute (AALI) have partnered with Dr. Jorge Burmicky, assistant professor at Howard University, and Dr. Kevin McClure, associate professor at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, to conduct a study to identify key presidential leadership competencies for leading today's colleges and universities.

This survey is estimated to take approximately 10 minutes of your time.

We will also ask information about you and your institution. Please keep in mind that this information will be reported in the aggregate. Your responses will remain completely confidential.

This is the most comprehensive survey to date on college presidents' perceptions of competencies. Data from this research will be used to identify and prepare future college leaders by informing leadership programming and search processes.

We use the term "college president" to refer to presidents, chancellors, and other chief executive officer positions for college and university campuses, as well as multicampus systems.

Your participation is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or may refuse to answer any question. You may stop at any time without penalty.

If you have additional questions about the survey, please do not hesitate to contact Dr. Jorge Burmicky at jorge.burmicky@howard.edu and Dr. Kevin R. McClure at mcclurek@uncw.edu.

Thank you.

Please print a copy of this document for your records.

Q1) Please indicate your consent or non-consent by selecting one of the following:
O I give my consent to participate in this research study and will begin the survey now.
O I do not give my consent to participate in this research study.

Q2) Are you currently serving as a college president?
O Yes -> Skip to question 5
O No -> Go to question 3

Q3) How long has it been since you served as president?
O Less than 1 year
O 1 - 3 years
O More than 3 years

Q4) Would you be willing to participate in a focus group interview?
O Yes -> Skip to the end of survey
O No -> Skip to the end of survey

College President Competency

Q5) Using the following scale, please rate the extent to which each leadership quality or ability is most relevant for you to be an effective college president at your institution.

	Very Relevant	Relevant	Less Relevant	Irrelevant
Demonstrates resilience and an ability to cope with adversity	O	O	O	O
Behaves in a way that is trustworthy, consistent, and accountable	O	O	O	O
Engages in self-reflection and exhibits self-awareness	O	O	O	O
Demonstrates a commitment to equity-mindedness	O	O	O	O
Remains curious, open to feedback, and having ideas challenged	O	O	O	O
Commits to continuous learning and a climate of learning for others	O	O	O	O
Seeks help and resources to deal with the emotional toll of the job	O	O	O	O
Communicates effectively and authentically in formal and informal settings	O	O	O	O
Recognizes how emotions impact other people and situations	O	O	O	O
Weighs the consequences of decisions on different groups	O	O	O	O

	Very Relevant	Relevant	Less Relevant	Irrelevant
Brokers compromise between competing stakeholders or priorities	O	O	O	O
Uses humor for bridge-building and easing tension	O	O	O	O
Listens to and understands the needs and concerns of stakeholders	O	O	O	O
Gathers and uses relevant data to evaluate the best course of action	O	O	O	O
Centers transparency in communication and decision-making	O	O	O	O
Applies systems-level thinking to define problems and identify solutions	O	O	O	O
Eliminates bias by reviewing operations, policies, and practices through an equity lens	O	O	O	O
Shows an appreciation for the value of shared governance	O	O	O	O

Q6) Are there any other leadership qualities or abilities that were not included in these questions that you believe are central to being an effective college president?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Q7) Using the following scale, please rate the significance of each institutional management skill within your overall portfolio of responsibilities.

	Very Significant	Significant	Less Significant	Insignificant
Develops, articulates, and executes a clear vision for the institution's future	O	O	O	O
Orchestrates effective change management via short- and long-term strategic planning	O	O	O	O
Adjusts institutional goals and budgets based on enrollment trends	O	O	O	O

	Very Significant	Significant	Less Significant	Insignificant
Secures resources from various sources using established (e.g., fundraising) and innovative methods	O	O	O	O
Develops partnerships that will secure financial and non-financial resources	O	O	O	O
Manages the institution's budget, as well as physical and human resources	O	O	O	O
Builds a collaborative cabinet and empowers it to make progress on institutional goals	O	O	O	O
Cultivates and maintains relationships with donors and alumni	O	O	O	O
Provides relevant information to policymakers and advocates for policies beneficial to the institution	O	O	O	O
Develops and maintains healthy relationships with the board based on trust and respect	O	O	O	O
Has a visible and active presence in the community beyond campus	O	O	O	O
Builds purposeful relationships throughout the institution	O	O	O	O
Demonstrates comfort and confidence in writing, speaking in public, and using social media to communicate	O	O	O	O
Uses storytelling as a tool to build support for the institution	O	O	O	O
Helps to frame and make sense of campus events and changes for others	O	O	O	O
Understands and proactively addresses student, faculty, and staff mental well-being	O	O	O	O
Supports democratic processes and civic engagement	O	O	O	O
Identifies and addresses emergencies, crises, and controversies on campus	O	O	O	O
Assesses legal risks and assures compliance with local, state, and federal laws	O	O	O	O
Integrates knowledge of effective policies and practices to support student success	O	O	O	O
Advances the interests of the institution and constituents in the face of complex political tensions	O	O	O	O

Q8) Are there any other institutional management skills that were not included in these questions that you believe are central to being an effective college president?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Q9) Using the following scale, please rate the extent to which it is important to master each knowledge area in order to be an effective president at your institution.

	Very Important	Important	Less Important	Unimportant
The institution, its culture, and its students	O	O	O	O
Institutional policies and practices	O	O	O	O
Human-resource processes and personnel management	O	O	O	O
The governance structure of the institution	O	O	O	O
Local, state, and federal policy landscape	O	O	O	O
Academic freedom and free speech	O	O	O	O
Intercollegiate athletics	O	O	O	O
Accreditation	O	O	O	O
Enacting an anti-racist approach to policies and practices	O	O	O	O
Articulating the value of higher education to various stakeholders	O	O	O	O
Student financial aid and basic needs security	O	O	O	O
Demographic changes that impact enrollment and institutional mission	O	O	O	O
Adjusting strategy and operations based on evolving market trends	O	O	O	O
Climate change and environmental stewardship	O	O	O	O
Research and effective practices on student success	O	O	O	O

	Very Important	Important	Less Important	Unimportant
Knowing how to respond to Title IX issues	O	O	O	O
Navigating political attacks on higher education	O	O	O	O
Artificial intelligence	O	O	O	O
Cybersecurity threats	O	O	O	O
Talent management in a changing economy	O	O	O	O
Threats to efforts to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion	O	O	O	O
Mergers and consolidations	O	O	O	O
Salary compression issues	O	O	O	O

Q10) Using the following scale, which of the following knowledge areas should leadership development programs prioritize as they prepare future college leaders?

	Highest Priority	High Priority	Lower Priority	Lowest Priority
The institution, its culture, and its students	O	O	O	O
Institutional policies and practices	O	O	O	O
Human-resource processes and personnel management	O	O	O	O
The governance structure of the institution	O	O	O	O
Local, state, and federal policy landscape	O	O	O	O
Academic freedom and free speech	O	O	O	O
Intercollegiate athletics	O	O	O	O
Accreditation	O	O	O	O
Enacting an anti-racist approach to policies and practices	O	O	O	O
Articulating the value of higher education to various stakeholders	O	O	O	O
Student financial aid and basic needs security	O	O	O	O
Demographic changes that impact enrollment and institutional mission	O	O	O	O

	Highest Priority	High Priority	Lower Priority	Lowest Priority
Adjusting strategy and operations based on evolving market trends	O	O	O	O
Climate change and environmental stewardship	O	O	O	O
Research and effective practices on student success	O	O	O	O
Knowing how to respond to Title IX issues	O	O	O	O
Navigating political attacks on higher education	O	O	O	O
Artificial intelligence	O	O	O	O
Cybersecurity threats	O	O	O	O
Talent management in a changing economy	O	O	O	O
Threats to efforts to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion	O	O	O	O
Mergers and consolidations	O	O	O	O
Salary compression issues	O	O	O	O

Q11) Are there any other knowledge areas that were not included in these questions that you believe are central to being an effective college president?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Institutional and Demographic Background

The next series of questions will ask about how long you have served as a president and select demographic and institutional questions.

Q12) How many years have you served as a college president at any institution?
O Less than 1 year
O 1-5 years
O 6-10 years
O 11-15 years
O 16-20 years
O 21 years or more

Q13) How many years have you served as a college president at your current institution?
O Less than 1 year
O 1-5 years
O 6-10 years
O 11-15 years
O 16-20 years
O 21 years or more

Q14) With which of the following organizations is your institution affiliated as a member? (Please select all that apply)
O American Academic Leadership Institute (AALI)
O American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU)
O Council of Independent Colleges (CIC)

Q15) With which gender do you identify?
O Man
O Woman
O Nonbinary
O An identity not listed, self-identify: _____
O Decline to state

Q16) With which race/ethnicity do you identify? (Please select all that apply)
O African American or Black
O American Indian or Alaska Native (Please indicate your tribal affiliation) _____
O Asian American or Asian
O Hispanic and/or Latinx/a/o
O Middle Eastern or North African
O Pacific Islander
O White or Caucasian
O An identity not listed (Please specify) _____

Q17) With which age group do you identify?
O 40 years or younger
O 41-50 years old
O 51-60 years old
O 61-70 years old
O 71 years or older

Q18) Is your institution located within the United States and territories?
O Yes
O No

Q19) Is your institution a minority-serving institution?
O Yes -> Go to question 20
O No -> Skip to the end of survey

Q20) Please select the type of minority-serving institution that best describes your institution. (Please check all that apply):
O Historically Black college or university
O Hispanic-serving institution
O Tribal college or university
O Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-serving institution
O Alaska Native-serving institution
O Native Hawaiian-serving institution
O Predominantly Black institution
O Native American-serving non-tribal institution
O Not listed (please specify): _____

Presidential Leadership Competencies in Higher Education

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.
Your response has been recorded.

Appendix D:
FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOLS

AASCU Presidential Focus Group Protocol

The Higher Education Presidential Leadership Competencies Survey was administered in the fall of 2023 and received nearly 700 responses, including responses from more than 100 AASCU presidents. Our research team is now conducting follow-up focus groups based upon a preliminary review of the survey data.

Our goal in the focus groups is to further develop some of the skills, abilities, and knowledge necessary to be an effective college or university president. We are asking for your assistance in thinking through what some of the survey data looks like in the real world. What does it mean to enact these skills? How do you develop key knowledge? How do you practice some of these broad competencies?

Our strategy is to touch on the items that AASCU presidents indicated as highly important or relevant to their work. Accordingly, we likely won't have time to discuss every item that we asked about in our survey. But we also won't prevent the group from deviating from these questions and bringing up topics that aren't listed below.

Your answers in this focus group will help us generate detailed, descriptive, and nuanced competencies. We hope this information will be useful to current and future presidents who want to self-assess their skills, as well as to programs preparing future leaders. We've got two blocks of questions and a few extras if time allows. We're going to start with some of the leadership qualities and abilities that were indicated as being highly relevant.

Section I: Presidential Leadership Qualities/Abilities

1. One of the items that presidents indicated as being highly relevant was resilience and coping with adversity. What does resilience look like in practice? What skills or experience do you draw on to cope with adversity?
2. We also saw trustworthiness and accountability was highly relevant. How do you earn trust in the presidency? How does accountability take shape as a leadership quality?
3. We weren't surprised to see that communication was an important skill. But this is also a multi-faceted skill. We wanted to hear from you about what it takes to communicate effectively and authentically. What skills have you honed to help you communicate?
4. A survey item that was frequently indicated as highly relevant was listening to and understanding the needs of stakeholders. What are some of the practices you use to help stakeholders feel heard and understood?
5. We hear a lot about data-informed or data-driven decision-making. What does that mean for you as a leader? Are there particular skills that you have developed to effectively use data in your decision-making?

6. We intentionally embedded diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) questions throughout the survey to understand how these topics play out across presidential leadership competencies. Are there skills that enable you to lead from an equity framework? What does equity-mindedness look like as a leadership practice for you?

Section II: Institutional Management Skills

1. Something that came through clearly in the data was the importance of building a cabinet and empowering it to make progress on institutional goals. But most of us interested in leadership haven't ever built a cabinet. What are some of your practices when it comes to putting together the right team? What are some skills that underlie empowering your senior leaders?
2. It sometimes seems like the presidency hinges on a leader's relationship with their board. We saw that show up in the data. What goes into creating a healthy relationship with your board? Are there strategies you have used to forge trust and mutual respect?
3. Presidents have an increasingly public presence, and AASCU presidents are certainly expected to be visible and active on campus and beyond. What are the skills that you draw on when it comes to having a public presence?
4. Given the last few years, it made sense to us that addressing emergencies and crises was prominent in the data. There are probably a lot of skills that fall under the broad umbrella of crisis management. Can help us understand what some of those skills are?
5. How do you advance the interest of your institution and constituents in face of complex political tensions?

Section III: Presidential Knowledge Areas (if time allows but not central)

1. What are some helpful strategies to learn about your institution, its culture, and its students?
2. Now more than ever, there are calls to articulate the value of higher education? How do you do that? Are there skills or techniques you have developed that have been effective?
3. There are big challenges right now related to enrollment and related effects on institutional mission? What have you done to develop the insights and knowledge and lead in the face of these challenges?
4. What do you do to stay ahead of emerging topics such as AI, cybersecurity threats, and political attacks in higher education?

Final Questions:

Is there anything else you'd like to share that we haven't asked you about?

CIC Presidential Focus Group Protocol

The Higher Education Presidential Leadership Competencies Survey was administered in the fall of 2023 and received nearly 700 responses, including responses from over 253 CIC presidents. Our research team is now conducting follow-up focus groups based upon a preliminary review of the survey data.

Our goal in the focus groups is to further develop some of the skills, abilities, and knowledge necessary to be an effective college or university president. We are asking for your assistance in thinking through what some of the survey data looks like in the real world. What does it mean to enact these skills? How do you develop key knowledge? How do you practice some of these broad competencies?

Our strategy is to touch on the items that CIC presidents indicated as highly important or relevant to their work. Accordingly, we likely won't have time to discuss every item that we asked about in our survey. But we also won't prevent the group from deviating from these questions and bringing up topics that aren't listed below.

Your answers in this focus group will help us generate detailed, descriptive, and nuanced competencies. We hope this information will be useful to current and future presidents who want to self-assess their skills, as well as to programs preparing future leaders. We've got two blocks of questions and a few extras if time allows. We're going to start with some of the leadership qualities and abilities that were indicated as being highly relevant.

Section I: Presidential Leadership Qualities/Abilities
1. One of the items that presidents indicated as being highly relevant was resilience and coping with adversity. What does resilience look like in practice? What skills or experience do you draw on to cope with adversity?
2. We also saw trustworthiness and accountability were highly relevant. How do you earn trust in the presidency? How does accountability take shape as a leadership quality?
3. We weren't surprised to see that communication was an important skill. But this is also a multi-faceted skill. We wanted to hear from you about what it takes to communicate effectively and authentically. What skills have you honed to help you communicate?
4. A survey item that was frequently indicated as highly relevant was listening to and understanding the needs of stakeholders. What are some of the practices you use to help stakeholders feel heard and understood?
5. We hear a lot about data-informed or data-driven decision-making. What does that mean for you as a leader? Are there particular skills that you have developed to effectively use data in your decision-making?
6. We intentionally embedded diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) questions throughout the survey to understand how these topics play out across presidential leadership competencies. Are there skills that enable you to lead from an equity framework? What does equity-mindedness look like as a leadership practice for you?

Section II: Institutional Management Skills
1. Something that came through clearly in the data was the importance of building a cabinet and empowering it to make progress on institutional goals. But most of us interested in leadership haven't ever built a cabinet. What are some of your practices when it comes to putting together the right team? What are some skills that underlie empowering your senior leaders?
2. It sometimes seems like the presidency hinges on a leader's relationship with their board. We saw that show up in the data. What goes into creating a healthy relationship with your board? Are there strategies you have used to forge trust and mutual respect?
3. Presidents have an increasingly public presence, and CIC presidents are certainly expected to be visible and active on campus and beyond. What are the skills that you draw on when it comes to having a public presence?
4. Given the last few years, it made sense to us that addressing emergencies and crises was prominent in the data. There are probably a lot of skills that fall under the broad umbrella of crisis management. Can help us understand what some of those skills are?
5. How do you advance the interest of your institution and constituents in face of complex political tensions?

Section III: Presidential Knowledge Areas (if time allows but not central)
1. What are some helpful strategies to learn about your institution, its culture, and its students?
2. Now more than ever, there are calls to articulate the value of higher education? How do you do that? Are there skills or techniques you have developed that have been effective?

3. There are big challenges right now related to enrollment and related effects on institutional mission? What have you done to develop the insights and knowledge and lead in the face of these challenges?
4. What do you do to stay ahead of emerging topics such as AI, cybersecurity threats, and political attacks in higher education?

Final Questions:

Is there anything else you'd like to share that we haven't asked you about?

Appendix E:
SUPPLEMENTARY TABLES

Table E1. Presidents' Responses to the Relevance of Leadership Qualities and Abilities

Section	Survey Item	Very Relevant	Relevant	Less Relevant	Irrelevant
Personal Qualities	Demonstrates resilience and an ability to cope with adversity	92.0%	8.0%	-	-
	Behaves in a way that is trustworthy, consistent, and accountable	96.5%	3.5%	-	-
	Engages in self-reflection and exhibits self-awareness	69.9%	28.4%	1.7%	-
	Demonstrates a commitment to equity-mindedness	59.5%	33.8%	6.0%	0.7%
	Remains curious, open to feed-back, and having ideas challenged	72.2%	27.0%	0.8%	-
	Commits to continuous learning and a climate of learning for others	68.3%	28.6%	3.1%	-
	Seeks help and resources to deal with the emotional toll of the job	31.6%	45.2%	22.0%	1.3%
Interpersonal Skills	Communicates effectively and authentically in formal and informal settings	90.5%	9.5%	-	-
	Recognizes how emotions impact other people and situations	62.0%	36.6%	1.4%	-
	Weighs the consequences of decisions on different groups	71.5%	27.6%	1.0%	-
	Brokers compromise between competing stakeholders or priorities	51.3%	43.1%	5.3%	0.3%
	Uses humor for bridge-building and easing tension	37.7%	49.1%	12.7%	0.6%

		Very Significant	Significant	Less Significant	Insignificant
	Listens to and understands the needs and concerns of stakeholders	83.6%	15.7%	0.7%	-
Leadership Abilities	Gathers and uses relevant data to evaluate the best course of action	79.9%	19.7%	0.4%	-
	Centers transparency in communication and decision making	70.5%	28.1%	1.4%	-
	Applies systems-level thinking to define problems and identify solutions	58.0%	36.7%	5.3%	-
	Eliminates bias by reviewing operations, policies, and practices through an equity lens	46.1%	42.8%	10.4%	0.7%
	Shows an appreciation for the value of shared governance	52.4%	39.8%	7.4%	0.4%

Note. Totals may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

Table E2. Presidents' Responses to the Significance of Institutional Management Skills

Section	Survey Item	Very Significant	Significant	Less Significant	Insignificant
Vision-Setting and Planning	Develops, articulates, and executes a clear vision for the institution's future	80.3%	19.0%	0.7%	-
	Orchestrates effective change management via short- and long-term strategic planning	65.2%	32.6%	2.2%	-
	Adjusts institutional goals and budgets based on enrollment trends	57.5%	38.9%	3.2%	0.3%
	Secures resources from various sources using established (e.g., fundraising) and innovative methods	70.1%	27.7%	2.2%	-
	Develops partnerships that will secure financial and non-financial resources	63.5%	32.6%	3.8%	-
	Manages the institution's budget, as well as physical and human resources	58.4%	38.5%	3.1%	-
	Builds a collaborative cabinet and empowers it to make progress on institutional goals	85.1%	14.8%	0.2%	-

Relationship-Building and Communicating	Cultivates and maintains relationships with donors and alumni	66.8%	30.1%	3.1%	-
	Provides relevant information to policymakers and advocates for policies beneficial to the institution	39.6%	49.6%	10.4%	0.4%
	Develops and maintains healthy relationships with the board based on trust and respect	84.8%	14.5%	0.7%	-
	Has a visible and active presence in the community beyond campus	63.7%	32.5%	3.4%	0.4%
	Builds purposeful relationships throughout the institution	66.5%	32.4%	1.0%	-
	Demonstrates comfort and confidence in writing, speaking in public, and using social media to communicate	63.4%	32.9%	3.6%	0.2%
	Uses storytelling as a tool to build support for the institution	43.3%	44.4%	11.5%	0.7%
	Helps to frame and make sense of campus events and changes for others	42.0%	48.8%	8.9%	0.3%
	Understands and proactively addresses student, faculty, and staff mental wellbeing	41.0%	52.2%	6.7%	0.2%
Promoting Institutional Outcomes	Supports democratic processes and civic engagement	37.2%	51.0%	11.4%	0.4%
	Identifies and addresses emergencies, crises, and controversies on campus	71.1%	26.7%	2.2%	-
	Assesses legal risks and assures compliance with local, state, and federal laws	58.9%	35.7%	5.3%	0.2%
	Integrates knowledge of effective policies and practices to support student success	48.8%	45.8%	5.8%	-
	Advances the interests of the institution and constituents in the face of complex political tensions	54.1%	39.4%	6.5%	-

Note. Totals may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

Table E3. Presidents' Responses to the Importance of Knowledge Areas to Be Effective

Section	Survey Item	Very Important	Important	Less Important	Unimportant
Knowledge of the Institution	The institution, its culture, and its students	90.2%	9.8%	-	-
	Institutional policies and practices	44.4%	51.0%	4.4%	0.2%
	Human-resource processes and personnel management	30.7%	55.3%	13.9%	0.2%
	The governance structure of the institution	74.1%	25.3%	0.6%	-
Knowledge of the Policy Landscape	Local, state, and federal policy landscape	46.7%	47.6%	5.7%	-
	Academic freedom and free speech	40.4%	50.1%	9.2%	0.3%
	Intercollegiate athletics	25.7%	46.4%	18.1%	9.8%
	Accreditation	58.7%	34.3%	7.0%	-
Knowledge of Issues Spanning Higher Education	Enacting an anti-racist approach to policies and practices	42.9%	42.8%	11.1%	3.2%
	Articulating the value of higher education to various stakeholders	70.8%	26.9%	2.4%	-
	Student financial aid and basic needs security	37.1%	52.6%	10.0%	0.3%
	Demographic changes that impact enrollment and institutional mission	65.7%	30.7%	3.6%	-
	Adjusting strategy and operations based on evolving market trends	67.1%	30.7%	2.1%	0.2%
	Climate change and environmental stewardship	14.1%	44.2%	35.4%	6.3%
	Research and effective practices on student success	41.8%	47.0%	10.8%	0.5%
	Knowing how to respond to Title IX issues	37.2%	49.7%	12.3%	0.8%
	Navigating political attacks on higher education	30.5%	53.2%	15.5%	0.8%

Knowledge of Emerging Trends	Artificial intelligence	28.9%	56.9%	13.5%	0.6%
	Cybersecurity threats	58.4%	35.0%	6.7%	-
	Talent management in a changing economy	43.4%	50.2%	6.5%	-
	Threats to efforts to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion	39.6%	44.5%	12.6%	3.4%
	Mergers and consolidations	16.1%	40.1%	37.4%	6.4%
	Salary compression issues	25.6%	58.0%	15.4%	1.0%

Note. Totals may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

Table E4. Presidents' Responses to Knowledge Areas Leadership Programs Should Prioritize

Section	Survey Item	Very Important	Important	Less Important	Unimportant
Knowledge of the Institution	The institution, its culture, and its students	66.9%	28.7%	4.4%	-
	Institutional policies and practices	19.7%	55.8%	22.6%	1.9%
	Human-resource processes and personnel management	17.8%	52.3%	27.5%	2.4%
	The governance structure of the institution	42.4%	46.2%	10.0%	1.4%
Knowledge of the Policy Landscape	Local, state, and federal policy landscape	36.7%	49.8%	12.3%	1.1%
	Academic freedom and free speech	23.4%	51.8%	23.0%	1.8%
	Intercollegiate athletics	14.1%	45.5%	28.0%	12.3%
	Accreditation	49.4%	37.1%	12.0%	1.4%

Knowledge of Issues Spanning Higher Education	Enacting an anti-racist approach to policies and practices	29.7%	46.6%	18.4%	5.3%
	Articulating the value of higher education to various stakeholders	57.1%	37.4%	5.0%	0.5%
	Student financial aid and basic needs security	29.5%	52.5%	17.2%	0.8%
	Demographic changes that impact enrollment and institutional mission	53.4%	41.5%	4.8%	0.3%
	Adjusting strategy and operations based on evolving market trends	57.2%	36.1%	6.8%	-
	Climate change and environmental stewardship	8.9%	36.7%	42.5%	11.9%
	Research and effective practices on student success	36.0%	53.6%	9.6%	0.8%
	Knowing how to respond to Title IX issues	27.3%	50.3%	21.1%	1.3%
	Navigating political attacks on higher education	28.7%	47.7%	21.6%	2.1%
Knowledge of Emerging Trends	Artificial intelligence	24.2%	54.4%	19.2%	2.3%
	Cybersecurity threats	48.5%	40.3%	10.1%	1.1%
	Talent management in a changing economy	38.8%	50.4%	10.8%	0.3%
	Threats to efforts to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion	30.8%	47.9%	17.3%	4.0%
	Mergers and consolidations	13.9%	33.3%	42.8%	10.0%
	Salary compression issues	17.6%	50.2%	28.7%	3.6%

Note. Totals may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

2024 Competencies for the College Presidency

A NATIONAL STUDY OF EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION

AS Academic Search