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The Status of Women Leaders in Utah Education

In September of 2013, the *Center for American Progress* released a report titled “The State of Women in America: A 50-State Analysis of How Women Are Faring Across the Nation.”¹ The report ranked Utah last of all 50 states in terms of women holding positions of decision making and leadership. Because the focus was solely on the percentage of women in elected office and private sector management positions, we determined that a more detailed look at the status of women and leadership in various sectors within the state would be useful. This is the third of four 2014 briefs, and it focuses on the status of women leaders in Utah education (higher and public K–12). The previous briefs highlighted data on women in Utah politics and nonprofit organizations, and the remaining one will focus on business. Each compares Utah data with national data and reviews applicable literature.

Higher Education

According to a recent report, *Benchmarking Women’s Leadership in the United States*, women comprise an average of 24.5% of “positional leaders” in academia across the country.² The positional leaders included full professors, board trustees, presidents, and chief academic officers at doctoral-granting institutions. However, there is a significant gender disparity in senior leadership between doctorate-granting institutions and community colleges. A 2009 Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) publication³ stated that women represent 52% of senior leaders at community colleges but only 34% in doctorate-granting institutions. Yet, a 2008 American Council of Education (ACE) report titled *On the Pathway to the Presidency: Characteristics of Higher Education’s Senior Leadership*⁴ stated that 45% of all senior administrators were female when all types of higher education institutions are included. There are obvious discrepancies in the data, but all of the sources consistently acknowledge that these percentages are not high enough. They also call for increased preparation and hiring of women throughout all levels of management and leadership within higher education.

Position-Specific Data

This section compares national and Utah data on six position-specific categories within the higher education arena (i.e., Board of Regents, President, Boards of Trustees, Chief Academic Officers and Vice Presidents, President’s Cabinets, and Academic Deans). Utah data were obtained by collecting information on each institutional website and/or contacting people in each institution. The public colleges and universities analyzed are Dixie State University (DSU), Salt Lake Community College (SLCC), Snow College (SC), Southern Utah University (SUU), University of Utah (U of U), Utah

State University (USU), Utah Valley University (UVU), and Weber State University (WSU).

Boards of Regents

In the United States, state governing bodies usually oversee the system of state universities and community colleges. According to the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB), 39 of the 50 states are overseen by a board of regents or another governing board,⁵ as is the case for Utah. After searching widely for the national percentage of females serving on these boards, it was clear that these data do not exist. Hence, these data were collected through an online search of all 50 states’ governing board websites. Governing boards were found in 39 states, but only 37 had enough detail to be included in this analysis. The state governing boards consisted of 14 boards of regents, nine commissions, five boards of governors, four councils, three boards of higher education, three coordinating boards, and one other. It appears that 29.3% of state governing body members within the 37 states analyzed are currently women, with Colorado, Iowa, and Ohio topping the list at 45% and Georgia, South Dakota, Oklahoma, and Louisiana at the bottom (10%–13%).

Utah has six women (31.6%) and 13 men serving on the State Board of Regents; Bonnie Jean Beesley, the current chair, is female. Hence, Utah is below the national average in terms of female regents, but well ahead of a number of other states.

Presidents

A 2012 ACE report stated that 26.4% of college and university presidents across the U.S. were female.⁶ However, the percentage of female presidents by institutional type varies. Women fill presidential positions at 22.3% of doctoral, 22.8% at master’s, 22.9% at bachelor’s, and 33% at associate-level institutions.⁷ Currently, only one of eight public institutions in Utah, SLCC, has a female president (12.5%).

Boards of Trustees

According to the AGB, 30.2% of members of United States university and college boards of trustees in 2010 were female, which was an increase of 1.8% from 2004. Although it had actually doubled between 1977 and 2010, AGB reported that the rate of change has now slowed.⁸ Today in Utah, 29.8% of members of college and university boards of trustees are female, which is quite close to the national average. In addition, we discovered that 20% of chair and vice chair positions on Utah boards of trustees are filled by women. Most Utah boards have three women, except for SC, which has just two, and DSU and SLCC, which have four.

Chief Academic Officers & Vice Presidents

A 2013 survey⁹ conducted by the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR), found that 39.1% of institutions surveyed had female Chief Academic Officers (CAO). A 2009 ACE report¹⁰ provided similar data; it stated that, on average, women make up about 40 percent of CAOs, with fewer women at research institutions. In addition, “women comprise 50 percent of CAOs at community colleges, 38 percent at the master’s level, 37 percent at baccalaureate institutions, and 32 percent at doctorate-granting institutions.”¹¹ Two of eight (25%) CAOs in Utah public institutions are female, and both are at Utah’s research universities (U of U and USU).

The recent CUPA-HR survey also showed that 39.3% of positions comparable to college and university vice presidents are held by women.¹² This percentage includes the CAO and other vice presidents, but does not include associate or assistant vice presidents. Currently, 23.3% of vice presidents in Utah public institutions are women. The highest percentages of female vice presidents were found at SLCC (40%), the U of U (37.5%), and UVU (33.3%). According to institutional websites, the lowest are SUU and SC (0%), followed by USU (16.7%) and then WSU and DSU (20%).

Presidential Cabinets

The CUPA-HR 2013 study found that 39.3% of the senior institutional officers are female.¹³ Although these data are not an exact representation of presidential cabinets, it provides a fairly accurate snapshot of women in cabinet-level positions. Although there is great diversity in terms of positions represented within presidential cabinets among institutions nationally, CUPA-HR provided a breakdown of positions by gender. Positions included in the national data were then compared with positions included in the Utah analysis to ensure they were as close as possible for a viable comparison. Although not perfect, 39.3% is as accurate a national comparison as possible for the Utah data.

As mentioned, Utah data were obtained by mining institutional websites or contacting individual institutions to determine cabinet composition. Support staff names were removed from the cabinet or council lists in tallying the data. Some institutions had “councils” that included more seats than a typical presidential cabinet, so these positions were removed from the tallies as well. It appears that approximately 23% of presidential cabinet members at the eight public institutions are female. SLCC tops the list with 44% of presidential cabinet members being female, followed by WSU and the U of U at 29%. At the other end of the spectrum, SUU has no female representation; UVU (18%) and USU (19%) are slightly below the state average.

Deans

Academic deans can also be influential positions within institutions of higher education today. One 1999 source reported that women held 27% of all deanships, with their leadership

of professional colleges being especially unlikely.¹⁴ However, ACE reported in 2008 that this had increased to about 35.5%.¹⁵ And, most recently, the CUPA-HR 2013 survey found that 39% of academic deans in their study were women.¹⁶ This shows an increase of female academic deans across the country. In Utah, 30.8% of academic deans in public institutions are women, about 8% below the national average. However, there are substantial differences across Utah institutions. Currently, UVU has only one female dean, while SLCC has none. WSU and SUU top the list at 43%, while SC (40%) and the U of U (39%) are close behind. DSU and USU finish the list at 33% and 29%, respectively.

Summary

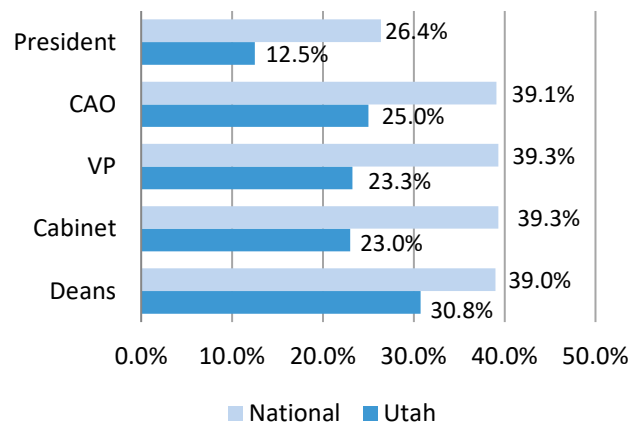
Table 1 provides an overview of the positions just discussed by gender. Overall, there are 71 females (27.8%) and 184 males (72.2%) serving in the most senior positions within Utah public higher education.

Table 1: Top Positions in Utah Higher Education by Gender

	Female	Male	Total	% Female
Board of Regents	6	13	19	31.6
Presidents	1	7	8	12.5
Board of Trustees	25	59	84	29.8
Chief Academic Officers	2	6	8	25.0
Other Vice Presidents	8	27	35	22.9
President’s Cabinets	20	67	87	23.0
Deans	20	45	65	30.8
Total¹⁷	71	184	255	27.8

Figure 1 compares the Utah percentages in Table 1 with national percentages for all types of institutions (e.g., research, comprehensive, community college) found in the literature.

Figure 1: Women in Academia by Position (Utah vs. Nation)



Why is it important to have women in senior leadership positions in Utah colleges and universities? The White House Project report answers this question in the following passage: “When we look at where women stand in the leadership ranks of academia, so much more is at stake than the mere numbers of women who have reached the top. The presence—or absence—of female academic leaders can have far-reaching influences not only on the institutions themselves, but beyond that, on the scope of research and knowledge that affects us all. Studies have shown that when prominent female academics are involved in research, for example, it can affect the nature of both the questions that are asked and the findings. Women in senior faculty positions and top-level leadership positions in academia provide male students, faculty and staff an important opportunity to work with talented women—an experience that will prove increasingly valuable. . . . In addition, these women serve as powerful role models and mentors to younger women starting out on the path to leadership themselves. Thus, these leaders can serve to bring out the best in women of not only this generation but several generations to come.”¹⁸

What is currently being done in Utah? First, the Utah Women in Higher Education Network (UWHEN), founded in 2010, was created to inspire and prepare more Utah women for leadership in higher education (<https://uwhen.org/>). Representatives from all public institutions serve on the board. Event and conference attendees report that these are making “a difference,” but tracking actual promotions will be important in future years. Second, some institutions do offer leadership training and development, but campus representatives admit that more can and should be done.

Public Education (K-12)

The recent *Benchmarking Women’s Leadership in the United States* report¹⁹ highlighted some data specific to the status of women leaders in public K–12 education across the country. Researchers averaged the total number of school board members, principals, superintendents, and chief state education officers and found that women currently comprise 30% of these positions nationally. The report indicated that this percentage is low considering that nationally 75% of K–12 teachers are female.

This section compares national and Utah data on the following leadership positions and/or categories within public education: Boards of Education, State Offices of Education Leaders, District Superintendents, District Staff Directors, and Principals. The majority of the Utah data was obtained from the extensive Utah 2013–2014 Educational Directory found online.²⁰ Research assistants identified gender by looking at the names of individuals within specific positions listed in this directory. If names were not gender-specific, online searches of schools or district and state offices provided additional details.

Boards of Education

In January 2014, the National Association of State Boards of Education provided a list of each state’s board of education membership by gender.²¹ It appears that 48.6% of state board members across the country are female. The states with the highest percentages of females are Colorado (85%), South Dakota (78%), Alabama and Nebraska (75%), and Louisiana (72%). The states with the lowest percentages of females on boards of education are Missouri (16.7%), Mississippi (22.2%), and Oklahoma and West Virginia (25%). In Utah, nine of 22 (40.9%) State Board of Education seats are held by women. Utah’s State Charter School Board of Education currently has three of eight (38%) female members.

Only two sources of national data have reported the gender of school district board members. First, a 2002 report²² stated that 38.9% of board seats nationally were held by women at that time, with larger districts having higher percentages than smaller districts. However, a more recent *2010 National School Boards Association* study²³ reported that 44% of school board seats across the U.S. are now held by women. Utah has 41 school districts throughout the state, and each district also has a board of education. Of the 250 total district board of education seats in Utah, 107 are currently held by women (42.8%). The combined total of female state and district-level board members is 119 (42.5%), while 161 (57.5%) of board seats are held by men.

State Offices of Education

Approximately 29% of the Chief State School Officers in the U.S. are female.²⁴ Utah has a male Superintendent of Public Instruction. In terms of other leaders within statewide offices of education, researchers were unable to find national data that would provide a valid comparison to the Utah findings. However, within Utah all individuals in the USOE office directory who had director or superintendent in their titles were tallied to provide the total number and percentage of females employed in USOE leadership posts. Currently, nine of the 23 individuals in these positions are held by women (39.1%).

District Superintendents and Staff Directors

According to the 2010 Decennial Study in *The American School Superintendent*, 24.1% of district superintendents across the country were women.²⁵ Another recent report²⁶ confirmed this same percentage, but added that in 2000 that percentage was at only 13.2%. Hence, in ten years the percentage of female superintendents has risen by 10.9%. Currently in Utah, only 12.2% (5 of 41) of school district superintendents are female: Canyons, Iron, Jordan, North Sanpete, and Park City. The district-level staff directors in all 41 of the school districts across the state were also tallied, and 35.1% of these directors were female. National comparison data for these directors could not be found.

Table 2 provides an overview of the positions just discussed. Overall, there are 206 females (37.3%) and 346 males (62.7%) serving in the leadership ranks of the positions just outlined within Utah public education.

Table 2: Utah State and District Leadership by Gender

	Female	Male	Total	% Female
State Board of Education	9	13	22	40.9
State Charter Board of Education	3	5	8	38.0
Utah State Office of Education Leadership	9	14	23	39.1
District Boards of Education	107	143	250	42.8
District Superintendents	5	36	41	12.2
District Staff Directors	73	135	208	35.1
Total	206	346	552	37.3

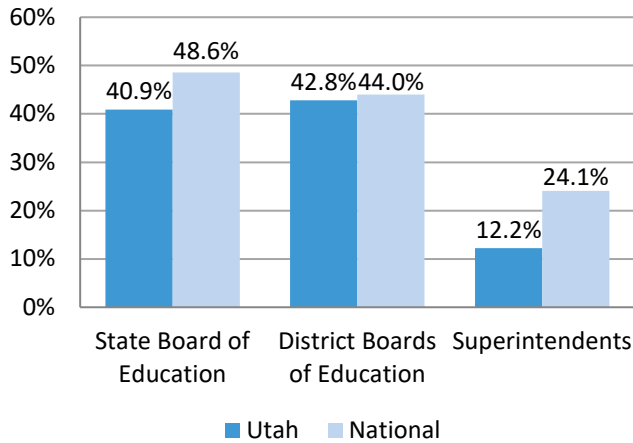
Table 3: Utah School Principals and Assistant Principals by Gender

	Female	Male	Total	% Female
High School Principals	24	99	123	19.5
High School Assistant Principals	56	139	195	28.7
Middle/Junior High Principals	47	98	145	32.4
Middle/Junior High Assistant Principals	61	96	157	38.9
Elementary School Principals	275	250	525	52.4
Specialty School Principals/Directors	31	25	56	55.4
Total	494	707	1201	41.1

Figure 2 compares the percentages outlined in Table 2 with the national comparisons outlined in the existing literature already presented.

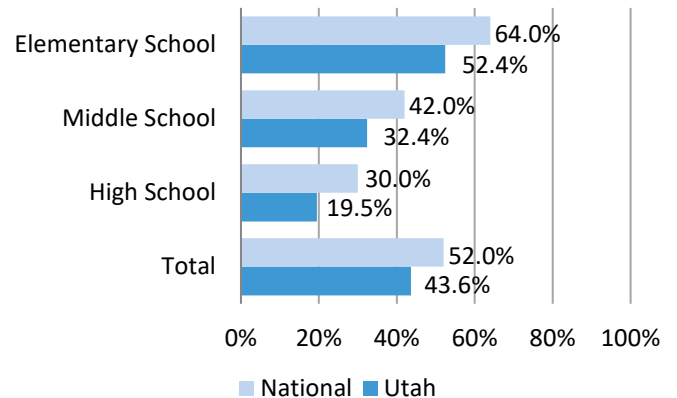
Figure 3 compares the percentages outlined in Table 3 with the positions for which national comparison data could be located.

Figure 2: State and District Boards of Education & Superintendents by Gender (Utah vs. Nation)



School Principals and Assistant Principals: In 2000, 43.7% of all public school principals were women,²⁷ and since that time progress has been made. According to a 2013 *National Center for Education Statistics* report, “the percentage of public school principals who were female was 52 percent overall, 64 percent in primary schools, 42 percent in middle schools, 30 percent in high schools, and 40 percent in combined schools.”²⁸ In Utah, only 19.5% of high school principals are women, while higher percentages exist for middle/junior high (32.4%) and elementary school principals (52.4%). Table 3 includes this and other data collected, although it is important to note that no assistant principal national comparison data could be located.

Figure 3: Utah School Principals by Gender (Utah vs. Nation)



In summary, there is a discrepancy between Utah and the nation when comparing the percentages of women in specific positions. The percentage of Utah’s district boards of education seats is fairly close to the national average, but there is a significant difference between Utah and the nation for superintendents (11.9%), principals (8.4%), and the Utah Board of Education seats (7.7%). Specific women-only leadership development offered by USOE or school districts could not be found, but they do provide professional development opportunities for women and men.

Conclusion

Ensuring that women are well represented as educational leaders will be imperative to meet the impending challenges before Utahans today. New pathways to better decision making have been forged through women’s diverse leadership

styles and focus on inclusiveness and cooperation. In addition, their presence provides female role models for staff and students.²⁹ Their focus on developing others has been shown to deeply enrich the programs and institutions of which they are a part. The research continues to report that truly diverse and inclusive leadership teams produce more creative, innovative, productive, and effective results.³⁰

Extraordinary challenges continue to face public and higher education in Utah and the U.S., and strong leaders with outstanding capabilities are needed more than ever to help schools, colleges, and universities meet these challenges. Within the constantly changing national and state educational environments, leaders must now have an exceptional and diverse set of capabilities and competencies to help their institutions rise to new levels of excellence and innovation. Yet, schools, colleges, and universities continue to struggle more than ever to find qualified, effective leaders not only to take the helms of their organizations, but also to move into other important leadership positions therein. Hence, finding, preparing, and supporting future educational leaders is imperative for the future of Utah. In fact, it is critical that Utah leaders and residents encourage and prepare all talented individuals—men and women—to take up this challenge by stepping forward to become leaders within Utah education system and schools.

¹ Chu, A., & Pasner, C. (2013). *The state of women in America: A 50-state analysis of how women are faring across the nation*. Retrieved from <http://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/StateOfWomen-4.pdf>

² Lennon, T. (2013). *Benchmarking women's leadership in the United States*. University of Denver, Colorado Women's College. Retrieved from <http://www.womenscollege.edu.edu/bwl/>

³ Hall, C. C. I. (2009). Learning from number two: Diversity in community college leadership. *On Campus with Women*, 28(2). Retrieved from <https://go.gale.com/ps/anonymous?id=GALE%7CA229720116&sid=googleScholar&v=2.1&it=r&linkaccess=abs&issn=07340141&p=AONE&sw=w>

⁴ King, J. E., & Gomez, G. G. (2008). *On the pathway to the presidency: Characteristics of higher education's senior leadership*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.

⁵ Association of Governing Boards of Colleges and Universities (AGB). (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://agb.org/>

⁶ Cook B. J., & Young, K. (2012) *The American college president study: Key findings and takeaways*. American Council on Education. Retrieved from <http://www.acenet.edu/the-presidency/columns-and-features/Pages/The-American-College-President-Study.aspx>

⁷ Cook, S. G. (2012, May). Women presidents: Now 26.4% but still underrepresented. *Women in Higher Education*, 21(5), 1-3.

⁸ AGB (2010). *Policies, practices, and composition of governing boards of independent colleges and universities*. Executive Summary. Retrieved from <http://agb.org/sites/default/files/legacy/u3/2010IndependentBoardCompositionSurvey%20Summary.pdf>

⁹ College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR). (2013). *Administrators in higher education survey: For the 2012-13 academic year* [Data file]. Knoxville, TN: Survey Publisher.

¹⁰ American Council on Education (ACE). (2009, March). *ACE Survey: Few CAOs Wannabe President*. 18(3).

¹¹ ACE (2009); Lennon, T. (2013, p. 19).

¹² CUPA-HR (2013).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Glazer-Raymo, J. (1999). *Shattering the myths: Women in academe*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

¹⁵ King, J. E., & Gomez, G. G. (2008).

¹⁶ CUPA-HR (2013).

¹⁷ There is slight overlap in categories, so the total does not equal the columns. For example, a vice president also serves on the president's cabinet, so the total only includes the real number of these women positional leaders in the state.

¹⁸ Wilson, M. (2009). *The White House Project Report: Benchmarking women's leadership* (p. 16). Retrieved from http://www.in.gov/icw/files/benchmark_wom_leadership.pdf

¹⁹ Lennon, T. (2013).

²⁰ Utah State Office of Education (USOE). (2013). *Utah 2013-2014 educational directory*. Retrieved from <https://www.schools.utah.gov/file/2e9f3c29-1981-4834-a64a-c31aa7b7cb0a>

²¹ National Association of State Boards of Education (2014, January). *State boards of education data* [Data file].

²² Hess, F. (2002). *School boards at the dawn of the 21st century*. National School Boards Association. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED469432.pdf>

²³ Hess, F. M., & Meeks, O. (2010). *School boards circa 2010: Governance in the accountability era*. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED515849.pdf>

²⁴ Lemon, T. (2013); Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO]. (2012). *Meet the chiefs*. CCSSO. Retrieved from <https://ccsso.org/>

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Lennon, T. (2013).

²⁷ Gates, S. M., Ringle, J. S., Santibanez, L., Chung, C. H., & Ross, K. E. (2003). *Who is leading our schools? An overview of school administrators and their careers*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2003. Retrieved from http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1679.

²⁸ National Center for Educational Statistics (2013). *Characteristics of public and private elementary and secondary school principals in the United States: Results from the 2011-12 schools and staffing survey*. Institute of Education Sciences. U.S. Department of Education (p. 3).

²⁹ Hall, C. C. (2009); Wilson, M. (2009).

³⁰ Lennon, T. (2013); Wilson, M. (2009).

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