William & Mary
CHARTERED 1693

W&M ScholarWorks

Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects

Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects

2022

Leading In Crisis: College & University Presidents' Reflections On Their Response To Covid-19

Sean Michael Schofield
William & Mary - School of Education, schofieldsm@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/etd

Part of the Higher Education Commons

Recommended Citation
Schofield, Sean Michael, "Leading In Crisis: College & University Presidents' Reflections On Their Response To Covid-19" (2022). *Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects.* William & Mary. Paper 1673281647.
https://dx.doi.org/10.25774/w4-ndgz-ee72

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.

LEADING IN CRISIS: COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS' REFLECTIONS ON THEIR RESPONSE TO COVID-19

A Dissertation

Presented to the

The Faculty of the School of Education

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

By

Sean M. Schofield

February 2022

LEADING IN CRISIS: COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS' REFLECTIONS ON THEIR RESPONSE TO COVID-19

By

Sean M. Schofield

Approved February 18, 2022 by

Debbie Sydow, Ph.D.

Committee Member

Jeremy Martin, Ph.D.

Committee Member

Pamela L. Eddy, Ph.D.

Chairperson of Doctoral Committee

Dedication

Along with everything else that Jess and I endeavor; this is dedicated to Riley and Teagan. May you always be gracefully discerning, be unwavering seekers of truth amidst the sea of misinformation, and boldly discover the world around you every single day.

And to my grandfather, I wish you had the opportunity to call me doctor, just one time, as you always said you would. I miss you tremendously and I hope I make you proud.

Acknowledgments

Earning a Ph.D. is a wonderful example of a venture that ***truly*** takes a village. While one person ultimately earns the title of *doctor*, nothing about this experience is solitary. I would like to take this moment to thank as many people as possible for the herculean effort that went into making this moment a possibility.

Dr. Pamela Eddy, my doctoral committee chairperson, is a living, breathing example of how a faculty member can empower students. I cannot identify a scholar that I admire (or trust) more to guide me through the twists and turns and joy and pain that is completing a doctoral dissertation. At times, your belief in me alone has kept me going through long sessions at the keyboard at 2 AM, when I needed to keep pressing on even when feeling desperate or lost. Your suggestions for areas to explore, articles to read, and ways to reframe my arguments have made me a better writer, made this a better scholarly paper, and strengthened me as a person beyond the sphere of academia.

Drs. Sydow and Martin both, each in their own way, have altered the way that I view higher education. Dr. Sydow candidly shared her experiences and reflections as a college president, challenged me to reframe the way I saw the presidency, coached me to continue to seek opportunities for career advancement, and encouraged me to keep the college presidency in mind for my future. Dr. Martin reframed the way that I understood what it takes to operate a college and gave me the tools and knowledge I needed to see colleges and universities completely. He, to me, represents the strength of faculty members who provide students with both skills and tools to be successful in their careers. You represent just a few of the brilliant and amazing faculty members that I’ve had the pleasure and joy to work with through this program. I

can recount something that I learned from *every* member of the faculty at William & Mary and talk about how it has made me a better professional, and how it helps me to face any problem that I meet in higher education.

While I learned a great deal about higher education from the doctoral program at William & Mary, I learned how I fit in with the industry from my mentors. Dr. Esmilda Abreu-Hornbostle, who was the first person to show me that men can (and *should*) be feminists – and encouraged me to lead with empathy and think beyond what I knew and accepted. Esmilda, you have profoundly influenced me as a man, and my belief in what I can accomplish as a whole person (capable of *all* the emotions). Mike Caldwell, who trusted and believed in me even when others did not, and helped me to understand the complexities of large offices. Mike, you taught me how to manage (brilliantly) from a political frame and encouraged big-picture thinking. Patrice Lincoln, who showed me how to lead people as whole people. Patrice, you are *the* person that helped me stay in higher education and rekindled my faith in the work we do when I felt lost, confused, and downtrodden. I hope I always focus on building people up, which you have done for me.

I also would like to offer gratitude for my friends and colleagues, who quite literally carried me at times. We laughed together, we cried together, we anguished and celebrated together. Dr. Rob Thompson, I have incredible respect for you. Your support and encouragement have helped me through some of the most challenging times I've faced in this program, and you give me a belief that I can conquer anything. Dr. Johann Ducharme, you are a bright light in this world, and see the very best of people. I am thankful for you as a human, and for the times you reached out to me (unprompted) to check in during comps, to calm me as I awaited my results

from comps, and for including me in your dissertation work. You, more than anyone else in the world, have demystified this whole process, and I am grateful to you for it. Daria Lorio-Barsten, you are an incredible person and always reminded me that being a parent and a full-time employee are not excuses to not earn a Ph.D. Your tenacity and kindness have made me better, period.

Finally, and most importantly, I want to acknowledge several people to whom I owe thanks for more than just this scholarly undertaking. To Mom and Dad, your belief in me is the most compelling constant in my life. For nearly 40 years you have taught me to pick myself up, have been with me through all the good times and bad, and have given me the most important gifts I could imagine: hope, love, and encouragement to make the world around me my own. My path to this point in time was paved by your making learning and living fun. Trips to the Environmental Center reinforced a love of science and exploration, journaling across America reinforced the importance of reflection, and the selfless ways in which you provided for me (working extra jobs and even putting duct tape on your sneakers) provided me with the safety to reach far beyond my own experience. Also, Mom and Dad (NAnnie and Poppopz), you both have given so much to my family, supporting us in ways we couldn't have imagined. Many times, we leaned on you to help us get through, and you never let us down. You always put family first, and your belief in us helps us grow and prosper. Aly, Nic, Pete, and Jocelyn, you are absolutely brother and sisters to me. If it's rare to like your "in-laws," I hit the lottery with you! Jason, my brother, you always looked up to me, and now I also love looking up to you as well.

Lastly, and above everyone else, I want to acknowledge the true lights of my life, Riley, Teagan, and Jess. Jess, my wife and partner, you have sacrificed more than anyone to help me

reach this point. You were the legs I stood upon when I didn't have strength, myself. You were the reason moving to Williamsburg, entering a Ph.D. program, and taking classes (as a father), were even possible. You simultaneously lift me up and keep me grounded. This doctorate should be conferred upon you as much as on me. You are a model of strength and courage for our beautiful daughters and the only person in the world that I would ever want to walk through every step of this life beside. I love you, and I hope you know how much I appreciate you.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction 2

Statement of the Problem 5

Supporting Research 6

Research Questions 9

Methods Summary 10

Significance of the Study 10

Deficiencies in the Evidence 12

Audience 13

Definition of Terms 15

Summary 18

Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature 19

A Brief History of Leadership Theory 19

Obsession with Leadership and Leader Behavior 21

Leader-centric Theories 22

Process-based and Follower-aware Leadership Theories 24

Leadership through Crisis 26

Defining Crisis 27

Person-created crises 28

Natural disasters 30

National or global crises 31

A Synopsis of Five Eras and their Presidential Challenges in Higher Education 33

A New World – America's Colonial Colleges (1638-1785) 33
Lands Granted and Battlefields Lost – The Civil War (1785-1865) 34
Reconstruction through the Rise of Women in the Academy (1865-1945)......................35
From Combat Boots to Mortarboards - The Golden Age of Higher Ed (1945-1970) 36
The Crisis Era – Modern Higher Education Since the 1970s 38
Challenges Facing Institutions Across Carnegie Classifications......................................40
The Defunding of Education 43
Race and Higher Education 44
Enrollment Trends 47
COVID-19 and Higher Education Responses 49
The Changed Role and Goals of Modern College Presidents 50
Budget and Financial Management 52
Structural Frame Assumptions 52
Human Resource Frame Assumptions 53
Political Frame Assumptions 54
Symbolic Frame Assumptions 56
Fundraising 58
Structural Frame Assumptions 58
Human Resource Frame Assumptions 59
Political Frame Assumptions 59
Symbolic Frame Assumptions 60
Management of Senior Officials 62

Structural Frame Assumptions 62
Human Resource Frame Assumptions 63
Political Frame Assumptions 64
Symbolic Frame Assumptions 64
Governing Board Relations 65
Structural Frame Assumptions 65
Human Resource Frame Assumptions 67
Political Frame Assumptions 67
Symbolic Frame Assumptions 68
Enrollment Management 69
Structural Frame Assumptions 70
Human Resource Frame Assumptions 71
Political Frame Assumptions 71
Symbolic Frame Assumptions 72
Summary 73
Chapter 3: Methods 75
Research Design 76
Ontology 77
Epistemology 80
Philosophical Tenets 81
Participants 82
Data Sources 84

Career Pathway Analysis 85
Brief Pre-Interview Survey 85
Bolman & Deal Leadership Questionnaire 86
Semi-Structured Interviews 86
Web Content Analysis 87
Data Collection Process 88
Data Analysis 90
Analysis Approach for Research Question 1 92
Analysis Approach for Research Question 1 Sub Question A 93
Analysis Approach for Research Question 1 Sub Question B 93
Analysis Approach for Research Question 2 94
Analysis Approach for Research Question 2 Sub Question A 95
Analysis Approach for Research Question 2 Sub Question B 95
Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions 96
Delimitations 97
Limitations 98
Assumptions 98
Researcher as Instrument Statement 99
Influences from Past Experiences 99
Contextual Beliefs About the Phenomenon and Participants 100
Threats to Discovery and Early Expectations of Findings 101
Ethical Considerations 102

Timeline 102
Summary 103
Chapter 4: Findings 104
Revisiting the Four Frames of Bolman & Deal 104
Review of the Research Design 108
Pre-Interview Survey 109
Web Content Analysis 112
Participant Interviews 118
Participant Introductions 119
Alexis 120
George 124
Jason 127
Russell 130
Andrew 132
William 135
Christine 138
Summary of Profiles 139
Institutional Characteristics 140
Emergent Theme Groups 142
Research Findings 143
Finding 1: Reflection and Experience Informed Prioritization & Response 144
Calmness & Patience are Learned Behaviors that help in Driving Consensus..........147

Leadership Responses Evolved through Lessons Learned during the Pandemic 150
Changing Perceptions of the Presidency and Higher Education 151
Finding 2: Engaging Stakeholders is Essential to Crisis Decision-Making 154
COVID Response Teams or Task Forces 155
The Governing Board 156
Senior Administrators 160
Faculty 161
Students 163
Finding 3: Communication was an Evolving, Intentional Crisis-Response Strategy 167
Finding 4: Framing and Reframing Throughout an Evolving Crisis 170
Crisis Response Began with a Structural Approach to Health and Safety 171
Reframing and Multi-Frame Thinking Emerged Throughout the Crisis 173
Summary 178
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations 179
Summary of the Findings 179
Discussion of the Findings, Relevant Literature, and Research Questions 180
Presidents Utilized Reflections and Stakeholder Input Throughout their Pandemic Response 180
"Put all the 50-pound-heads in a room, and listen." 182
"Consider Your Experience, and Trust Your Gut." 183
"A Leader in Higher Ed has to Embrace the Duty of Care." 184
"How Do We Bring Students Back for an In-Person Experience in the Fall?" 186

"Almost Everything We Got Asked Was Somehow Included in that Document."...189

"They're just the smartest people on the block when it comes to this." 192

How Did Leadership Philosophies Inform Pandemic Response, and Vice Versa? 193

"I had been in that situation before, well, almost."..193

"It's a very agonizing thing, trying to drive consensus." 194

"The only thing that works is transparency, the more you share, the better the end." 195

"We had to give people hope and provide a sense that we were going to come through this better."..197

"We can learn to be a whole lot better if we accept that this could change us forever." 200

"You've poured into everybody else for almost two years, you've got to pour into yourself, somehow." 201

Implications for Policy and Practice 203

Presidents and Other Education Leaders Should Practice Reflection During a Crisis ...204

Crisis Response Strategies Should Include as Many People as Reasonably Possible.....207

Communication and Transparency are Essential and Must Evolve Throughout a Crisis210

Leaders Benefit from Multi-Frame Thinking in their Crisis Response Actions.............211

Structural Frame Analysis Came Naturally to Each President in the Study.............212

Human Resource Assumptions Provided Connectedness to the Campus Community 213

Political Savviness Helps Presidents Navigate Needs, Consider Resources 214

Symbols, Shared Language, and Values Help with Follower Motivation................215

Recommendations for Future Research..216

Conclusion 219

References...222

Appendices...259

Appendix A: Email to Solicit Participation 259

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form 260

Appendix C: (Pre-Interview) Survey 264

Appendix D: Bolman & Deal Leadership Questionnaire 267

Appendix E: Permission to Administer the Leadership Questionnaire 271

Appendix F: Semi-Structured Interview Prompts 272

Appendix G: Research Question Cross Walk Table 275

Appendix H: Emergent Themes and Codes Table 278

Vita...280

List of Tables

Table 1. *Composition of Enrollment Management Organizations* 70

Table 2. *Table of Web Analysis Data: Presidential or Other Communication*................ 88

Table 3. *Research Questions and Data Sources and Analyses Methods* 96

Table 4. *Aggregated Responses to the Initial Survey* 111

Table 5. *Table of Web Analysis Data: Extant Presidential or Other Communication* .. 114

Table 6. *Participant pseudonyms and background information* 140

Table 7. *Institutional Characteristics*.. 142

Table 8. *Findings, Recommendations, and Supporting Literature* 204

List of Figures

Figure 1. *Academic rank of U.S. Faculty by race/ethnicity and gender* 44

Figure 2. *Race/Ethnicity and non-resident alien status of U.S. postsecondary students* .45

Figure 3. *WICHE Knocking at the college door high school graduation projections* 48

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a tremendous influence on higher education in America. While college presidents have led through multiple crises in the past several decades, this challenge is unique for both the depth of its influence (e.g., revolutionizing course and service delivery methods, financial upheaval and institutional closures, political implications of institutional decisions) and the fact that every college and university in the world was influenced nearly simultaneously, providing the inability to benchmark decisions. As college presidents were faced with series of unprecedented choices during the period from March 2020 through November 2021, this study sought to prompt reflection on the choices made, as well as influences on those choices and implications to inform crisis leadership in the future. This hermeneutic phenomenological study utilized interview data and a thorough web content analysis to engage college presidents in reflections on their experiences, specifically evaluating the impact that COVID-19 had on their leadership style and their perceptions of the effectiveness of their choices from a retrospective stance. This research surfaced four key findings: 1) that reflections and past experiences informed presidential crisis response decisions throughout the evolving crisis; 2) that central to the success in managing a pervasive and unprecedented crisis is engaging as many people as possible in the crisis response; 3) that communication is essential and that communication strategy must be intentional and evolving with respect to the most salient needs of the community, and; 4) that presidents must employ a holistic approach to viewing, assessing, and solving institutional problems that can be supported by utilizing a four frame approach to leadership decision-making and execution.

LEADING IN CRISIS: COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS' REFLECTIONS ON THEIR RESPONSE TO COVID-19

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In a press conference on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially classified COVID-19 as a global health pandemic. Even though higher education leaders expect to lead institutions through a variety of campus, state, or national crises (R. B. Archibald & Feldman, 2017; Eddy & Kirby, 2020; Gigliotti, 2020; Leslie & Fretwell, 1996), the pandemic quickly became a unique leadership crisis test for every American institution of higher education, simultaneously. As COVID-19 thrust college presidents into, what Marcus et al. (2020) describe as "their leadership moment" (p. 2), the litany of choices and decisions that followed had large impacts on institutions and the overall higher education landscape. Between March 2020 and November 2021, COVID-19 forced alterations to every student's college experience and presented logistical and financial hardships that had not previously been included in crisis scenario planning exercises. The decisions (and early outcomes of those decisions) occurring on college campuses were widely publicized through media outlets, yet the personal reflections of the presidents who made the decisions remain largely unknown. Even though reflections from leaders have emerged in alumni-focused publications and commencement addresses, these tend to address learned resilience, broad changes to the academy, and future pathways, not detailed reflections of leadership choice-making. This study focused on interviews with college and university presidents to access their reflections on the pandemic, to allow the participants an opportunity for self-critique of their leadership throughout the 2020-2021 timeframe, and to learn their thoughts on what lasting influences COVID-19 may have on the

future of higher education in America. This study examined presidents' reflections through the lenses of organizational and leadership theory (Bess & Dee, 2012; Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Unprecedented demand from the public, rapidly changing markets, unclear or non-transparent missions and marketing collaterals, depleted public financial contributions, and corpulent operational structures were identified as five of the most pressing problems colleges and universities faced in 1993 (Leslie & Fretwell, 1996). Nearly 3 decades later, these issues continue to beleaguer higher education leaders (American Council on Education [ACE], 2017). Additional pressure has arisen due to the increased prominence of campus mass shootings, two catastrophic financial collapses, the rising visibility of systemic racial and gender issues, and the largest global health crisis in over a century. The increased frequency and culmination of these normally unconnected crises has given birth to the concept of "mega crises" (Helsloot et al., 2012, p. 5).

Higher education has navigated a plethora of challenges throughout its long and successful history. Periods of rapid expansion, wars, shifts in public perceptions of the academy, and changes in funding have all necessitated leadership responses (Thelin, 2011). Although higher education has persisted through these ebbs and flows over time, the litany of challenges that currently face the industry is unprecedented in its long and prosperous history (M. S. Harris & Ellis, 2018; Kezar & Eckel, 2002). Crises have become an important, anticipated element of college leadership, presenting institutions with both immediate and enduring effects (Heide & Simonsson, 2019). Even though there have been some clear, undeniable crises that have had a profound influence on entire institutions (and systems), leaders within an institution or across varying institutions rarely reach a consensus on whether to deem any specific challenge a crisis (Gigliotti, 2020). During crises or periods of elevated stress, college presidents and other

institutional leaders face more scrutiny than others throughout the organizational structure (Leslie & Fretwell, 1996). Unlike many crises that have plagued institutions over the past several decades, COVID-19 presented the clearest opportunity for leaders across different types of institutions of higher education to reach this consensus.

Even though public scrutiny of college presidential leadership is widely dispensed, the public's understanding of the role of a college president may be lacking. According to the ACE (2017) survey, the majority of college presidents spend most of their time on budget and financial management, and fundraising. This position focus is contrary to the experiences of organizational leaders in other (especially for-profit) industries in which CEOs of well-established companies spend more than 50% of their time on strategy and organizational development, and less than 3% of their time connected to financial investors (M. E. Porter & Nohria, 2018). The same ACE (2017) report identifies a lack of funding as the largest frustration that most presidents face in their role. Even though presidents can influence organizational vision and direction, financial decision-making does not rest solely under their direction due to accountability to internal and external stakeholders. Furthermore, to satiate the demands of external stakeholders, college leaders often imperfectly mimicked corporate structures and trends, increasing "administrative bloat" and adding bureaucratic layers to the organization (Friedman & Kass-Shraibman, 2017, p. 287). Increased globalization and workforce development represent two of the most important ways in which colleges and universities enforce meaningful, mission-driven change in America (Zumeta et al., 2012), and these critical contributions to society occur amidst pressure to respond to critical external stakeholder voices that may blur these priorities. According to Thelin (2013), perceptions of opulence and

ambiguity concerning the educational mission of colleges and universities have greatly diminished public confidence in higher education over the past 7 decades.

In the chief executive role, leading highly nuanced, loosely coupled (Weick, 1979, 2000) institutions necessitates trust in key internal and external partners. Furthermore, presidents must ensure the health and organizational success of their institution by winning over external stakeholders who have diminished trust and faith in higher education (Doyle, 2016), yet still have meaningful control over their financial health and direction. In crises, organizations can experience elevated levels of uncertainty and threats to both their existence and purpose (Leslie & Fretwell, 1996). To manage multiple stakeholders and ambiguous, rapidly changing environments effectively, successful modern college presidents must possess entrepreneurial qualities (Fisher & Koch, 2004).

Statement of the Problem

The COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc on higher education in myriad ways. COVID-19 upended both the revenue and expense side of college budgets, forced sweeping pedagogical changes in a rapid shift to online course delivery (Aristovnik et al., 2020), emptied residence and dining halls, cut intercollegiate athletic programs (Swanson & Smith, 2020), and spread fear and uncertainty among students seeking full-time and internship employment alike (Aucejo et al., 2020). Each of these issues, unwieldy on their own merits, was experienced concurrently and layered on top of the partisan divisiveness largely assigned to each pandemic response action (Felson & Adamczyk, 2021). Federal, state, and local politics asserted a powerful influence on decisions to reopen or continue in a distance-learning format on many campuses (Felson & Adamczyk, 2021). For college presidents, the COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly presented the leadership challenge of their careers.

With COVID-19 presenting such an evident crisis that college presidents were forced to respond to in real-time, under heavy scrutiny, and amidst an avalanche of compounding challenges, the opportunity or space for reflective thinking may have been greatly diminished. Bess and Dee (2012) highlighted that leaders might tend to prefer to make decisions based upon past success and by evaluating all possible solutions one at a time (p. 592). COVID-19 necessitated a series of immediate responses from college leaders with no precedents, frequently occurring concurrently, not consecutively. The problem at the heart of this research study was to examine the decision-making processes that college presidents employed during their crisis response; to provide an opportunity to reflect on their decisions, initiatives, or choices that were effective or ineffective; and to intentionally examine COVID-19 choice-making to inform how leaders make decisions in future crises.

Supporting Research

Leadership is among the most highly studied elements of organizational behavior (Northouse, 2019). Leaders are diverse in their thought, style, and approach to problems. Leadership skills are honed, developed, and prized throughout organizations. Several well-known studies and publications attempt to understand or operationalize leadership. Carlyle (1885) posited that *great men* leveraged their divine, inherited characteristics to shape history. Lewin et al. (1939) identified different styles of leadership (authoritarian, participative, and delegative). Heifetz (1994, Heifetz et al., 2009) commented on the inborn values concerning leadership and differentiated between adaptive and technical problems and created archetypes to address the most common adaptive challenges that organizations face. Bolman and Deal (1984, 2013) developed a comprehensive leadership framework, which provides a flexible, reflective model that allows leaders to draw on the strengths of each frame depending on the situation or

task. This flexibility and comprehensive understanding of leader behaviors is especially important when studying crises because leaders that can *reframe*, or shift between frames, have a distinct advantage when dealing with issues that have no precedence (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

The four frames outlined by Bolman and Deal (2013) are *structural, human resource*, *symbolic*, and *political*. These frames help leaders make sense of the challenges that they face by providing a lens and set of assumptions with which they can break down and respond to organizational challenges (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The structural frame, which is chiefly concerned with positioning staff and resources in the most effective positions within the organization, is considered by Bolman and Deal (2013) to be metaphorically linked to a factory or machine. From this frame, structuring and restructuring organizational roles, lines of communication, policies, and procedures allow leaders to focus on overcoming problems and ensuring consistent results. Dissimilar to the structural frame, the human resource frame primarily focuses on the marriage between personnel and positions, determining that the organization's health is reliant on the satisfaction of its employees. When leaders adopt a human resource frame, they focus on empowering their teams and considering feedback from individuals and groups. The political frame is chiefly concerned with amassing power through political savvy and management of scarce resources and applying power to advance initiatives and manage negotiations. Finally, the symbolic frame is concerned with uncovering meaning and purpose for an organization and its employees and centralizing actions around the organization's culture and identity (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

COVID-19 represents a type of problem for leaders of modern institutions to address through reframing (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The general public, during the global health crisis, paradoxically beckoned for leaders to provide decisive direction, but then critiqued those leaders

and evaluated them based upon unfair and unreasonable metrics (Gardner, 1990). Even though leaders are often idolized and placed on a pedestal, they are frequently evaluated by measurements that reduce them to their worst single decision. These decisions are often not functions of leadership choices, but the organic relationship between institutions and their environment (Morgan, 2006). Nonprofit colleges and universities are inextricably linked to the rapid, unpredictable changes of greater society, necessitating strategic thinking and planning throughout all levels of the organization (Bryson, 2018). Internal and external stakeholders look to college presidents to solve the most difficult contemporary problems in academia, and they are frequently exalted and vilified, simultaneously.

This historical top-down view of leadership is contradictory to many modern leadership styles that focus on collaboration and a more horizontal structure. Because of these contradictions, modern leaders are sometimes criticized for acting unilaterally by some, and for not acting quickly enough by others. Sigelman et al. (1992) showcased this paradox by examining how the speed of decision-making among politicians is evaluated by different constituents, differently. While some stakeholders negatively evaluated politicians for taking too long and being too indecisive in their responses, other stakeholders believed that the politician handled the situation too quickly and unilaterally. Likewise, higher education leaders have grown accustomed to making decisions with the understanding that a reasonable response will likely not satisfy all constituents, but that the cost of searching for such a decision is often too great for an organization to bear (Bess & Dee, 2012).

Through an expanded review of the literature in the pursuant chapter, it is clear that the college presidency has undergone significant changes throughout each of the American eras of higher education as identified by Thelin (2019). To contextualize the role of the college

president, I examined the five self-reported priorities of college presidents (ACE, 2017), and examined how leaders using the structural, human resource, political, and symbolic leadership frames would address these activities (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Furthermore, the frames guided coding efforts as I reviewed the responses from the participants, considering language, priorities, and themes that emerged and positioning beside each frame's assumptions.

Research Questions

To develop a deeper understanding of the influences on college presidents as they faced making decisions during a crisis, as well as the method by which they prioritized and executed their COVID-19 response actions, this study was guided by the following questions:

1. How did college presidents at 4-year higher education institutions from three mid-Atlantic states determine what to prioritize throughout their pandemic response?
    a. What type of information did the presidents rely on in determining their priorities?
    b. What stakeholders did the presidents solicit to obtain information and help determine campus priorities?
2. In reflecting on their decisions from March 2020–November 2021, how do the participating presidents describe the ways that their leadership approach influenced their actions?
    a. How, if so, did the college presidents studied alter their typical leadership approach and choices in the presence of a pervasive crisis?
    b. How do the college presidents studied anticipate leading during a crisis will shape their leadership in the future?

Methods Summary

This study employed qualitative methods to answer the research questions. This approach was most appropriate to understand a phenomenon within a social context in great depth, relying on inferential, rather than operational meaning-making (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 30). In this phenomenological study, I interviewed seven college presidents from three states in the mid-Atlantic region. I intended to leverage a stratified purposive sampling method, however, elected to interview all participants that chose to be interviewed. Fortunately, the volunteers represented a relatively diverse sample of college and university presidents, and a diverse sampling of institutions by Carnegie classification as well as geographic location.

During the interviews, I asked college presidents to critically reflect on the decisions they made from March 2020 through November 2021, the strategy they had for prioritization and execution of critical actions, the distinct challenges that they faced throughout the pandemic, and the meaning that they made from the experience. Through the interviews I uncovered and developed a greater understanding of internal and external influences on college leadership and leadership styles, as well as theories or tactics that helped or hindered the COVID-19 response on campus. To triangulate the interview data, I reviewed publicly available communications and reflections published by the presidents, video recordings, publicly available articles, and scholarship. Although one of the roles of a college president is to inspire and bring attention to their institution, many of the challenges that presidents divulged in these resources illustrated some of the key areas that took a lot of their time and energy throughout the pandemic.

Significance of the Study

Americans have long been infatuated with both higher education and leadership. Since the chartering of the first colonial colleges, some have viewed higher learning as an apparatus to

advance the *greater good* (Labaree, 1997), others a mechanism for self-improvement and an access point to the middle class, and still others a gatekeeper and unnecessary contributor to nationwide financial hardship. Marginson (2011) describes yet another confounding position to the debate, adding that while public and private goods are often considered opposing ends of the spectrum, higher education is grounded less in the university and more in public policy, and can be considered by some a public good or goods. Tilak (2008) attributes more recent philosophical shift and trends of decreasing public support for higher education due to its being viewed as a private commodity driven by neoliberal market forces, compounded by institutional efforts to increase institutional prestige and generate revenues that have sometimes been described as "academic capitalism" (Weerts, 2016, p. 197).

Strong advocates for and critics of higher education abound, each presenting valid (and perhaps some invalid) reasons and justifications to support their claim. Brady (2013) noted that the American public expects colleges and universities to prepare students for meaningful careers in an information economy and engaged citizenship, while not fully understanding or appreciating the "peculiar features of higher education" (p. 94). Even though the nuances of higher learning may indeed escape industry outsiders, blind spots do not solely exist among external stakeholders. College presidents draw upon a confluence of personal experiences and theoretical beliefs as they make meaning of their current situation and priorities (Neumann & Bensimon, 1990).

COVID-19 is a unique crisis due to the breadth of institutions that it has influenced, as well as the depth to which it challenges each institution. Global health pandemics occur infrequently, yet several of the immediate and lasting components of the COVID-19 crisis could provide valuable insights into how leaders make decisions, including which stakeholder voices

are prioritized to inform institutional direction, and how college presidents make meaning of crises and communicate with constituents. Though the influence of COVID-19 is sweeping, the principles of crisis leadership and differences between how leaders react to the same stimulus across all institutions represent a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for researchers. Reflective practices serve leaders both during a crisis, as tools to develop more appropriate actions, as well as after a crisis, to promote self-assessment (Coplan & Knapp, 2006). With COVID-19 being explored as a phenomenon occurring at several campuses, simultaneously, presidents all represent pioneers in pandemic crisis response.

Deficiencies in the Evidence

While several studies have examined leadership through a variety of crises, both acute and chronic, the opportunity to study global health crises and their many influences on higher education is as novel as Sars-CoV-2. To study the impact of crisis leadership, it is important to first identify the different types of crises that institutional leaders face. Person-created crises like mass shootings and massive scandals may have large-scale influences on higher education as an industry; however, they are normally considered institution-specific (e.g., mass shootings at the University of Texas at Austin and Virginia Tech and sexual abuse scandals at Pennsylvania State University at University Park and Michigan State University at East Lansing). Natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina tend to have larger geographic areas of direct influence; however, they also tend to be acute, with a focus on emergency management. Finally, global health crises, which are far rarer, present immense pressure to alter operations both during and after the incident at all institutions, simultaneously. Institutions that may have benchmarked against other institutions for how they handled the former crises are forced to create a response plan with no ability to see how other institutions have fared in the past. During the last massively deadly

global pandemic, in 1918, college leadership was in a very different place than it is today. The national population was less than one-third of today and of people over the age of 25, fewer than 10% were college-educated (National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), 1993). Density on college campuses was also much lower, as the mean college campus population during 1918 was between 243 and 781 students, with fewer than 600,000 students enrolled in American colleges and universities (NCES, 1993). In the fall of 2020, 33 times the number of students (nearly 20 million) were enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States than were when the Spanish flu pandemic reached campus (NCES, 2021).

Additionally, access to information and the ability for individuals to reach large populations through social media has presented obstacles and opportunities that were not present in the second decade of the twentieth century. Social media increases information sharing speed and power, which has been evidenced in the way that dissenting individuals can organize and influence change at institutions of higher education (Gruber et al., 2015). Creating strategies to manage the damage of this increased access and power, with leadership decisions being subject to immediate and broad scrutiny has become a need of higher education leaders across America (Gruber et al., 2015). As concerned and confused people have turned to social media for health and policy information during the pandemic, many are exposed to misinformation, which can be detrimental to the advancement and adherence to policies (Schiavo, 2020).

Audience

Universities share some similar features with larger social systems. Frequently containing condensed and highly specialized versions of the health, social, and professional systems that we normally attribute to towns, counties, and even states. Universities, according to Kerr's (2001) contested description of *multiversities*, act mostly as a "series of communities and activities held

together by a common name" (p. 1). Increasingly large, complex systems present a greater number of stakeholders and an increased likelihood of dissent. Better understanding decision-making strategies and crisis responses can serve two non-competing purposes. First, engaging in self-reflection has been shown to increase leadership capacity (Branson, 2007) and could help college presidents make meaning of their experience leading through COVID-19, uncovering strengths and limitations to their style of leadership for future benefit. Secondly, studying the strategies and choices that presidents make, including who they choose to listen to, can provide common themes or inform different applications for further research. To encourage engagement in reflection, as well as uncover a more significant depth of understanding, I used a qualitative research design, with open questions to serve as prompts for the participants. The intent was to view, in-depth, presidents' responses to the COVID-19 crisis as a phenomenon experienced globally. The focus was not on statistical generalization, however. By participating in active reflection, the questions and responses that arose from the research can provide immediate benefit to the participants, as well as longer-term benefits for further research.

While the sample of college presidents in this study all lead four-year institutions located in three mid-Atlantic states, the effects of COVID-19 are truly global. The lived experiences showcased throughout this dissertation demonstrate several institution-specific challenges and stakeholders; however, the trends and demands on higher education as an institution are not unique to the mid-Atlantic region, or to the institutions that were represented in this study. Friedman and Kass-Shraibman (2017) asserted that leadership challenges emerging from the "fourth industrial revolution" (p. 286) are rendering preceding leadership strategies obsolete. A function of the internet and social media, consumers of information have ready access to all types of unfettered data and anecdotes. Higher education leaders are frequently prompted to react

defensively to negative press during a crisis-level event or to avoid a potential crisis (Cole & Harper, 2017). With college presidents representing the highest-level administrator at their institution, they are subject to what Hambrick and Mason (1984) referred to as the upper echelon effect, illustrating perceptions that the performance of entire organizations is reflective of the choices of its top leaders. With this immense pressure to quickly respond to problems that have no easy solutions, uncovering reflections on how presidents prioritize, make choices, and who they listen to could possess immense value in advancing modern leadership theory and literature. Beyond illuminating the chief inputs for crisis response decisions at the institutions that are represented in this study, the presidents with whom I communicated continue to be exposed to stress and crises throughout their careers. The reflections of the participants of this study will also serve to provide prioritization and coping strategies for new leaders as they face challenges of all magnitudes.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are provided to guide the reader's understanding of terms that are used throughout this manuscript:

- *College*, *University*, and *Institution of higher education* are used interchangeably throughout this manuscript but always denote a tertiary, 2- or 4-year, degree-granting educational institution.
- *COVID-19*: The disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 Novel Coronavirus
- *Crisis*: Although *crisis* can be defined broadly and differently by many, for the sake of this study crisis refers to Pearson and Clair's (1998) definition: "[a] high-impact event that threatens the viability of the organization and is characterized by ambiguity

of cause, effect, and means of resolution, as well as by a belief that decisions must be made swiftly" (p. 60).

- *Crisis Era*: This term refers to the expectations of leaders to experience crises during their tenure and is used to describe the increased number of crises that are highly visible throughout higher education over the past few decades.
- *Eras:* Throughout this manuscript, I refer to eras of higher education. To clarify this, I am speaking specifically about eras that were modified from Thelin (2019) in reference to major themes in the timeline of American Higher Education. Those eras are the colonial era, the time leading up to and including the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the rise of women in the academy, the period between World War II and the Vietnam War, and the modern *crisis* era since 1970.
- *Frames (Or Leadership Frames):* One of the central themes will be the leadership frames as referenced by Bolman and Deal (2013). These frames provide a lens through which leaders can understand challenges, and assumptions that leaders can make about the challenges and potential interventions in response.
    - *Structural Frame:* The structural frame is likened to a machine or factory, and the key driving assumptions include prioritizing putting the right people in the right places and attuning structure to the challenge or task.
    - *Human Resource Frame:* The human resource frame is concerned with aligning people and roles, prioritizing empowerment of employees, and focusing on creating relationships.

- *Political Frame:* The political frame is compared metaphorically to a jungle, where leaders are forced to compete for scarce resources, and amass power through growing networks and managing conflict appropriately.
- *Symbolic Frame:* The symbolic frame is the most theatrical and ritualistic of the frames, where leaders can call upon powerful themes, organizational heroes, and shared passion to inspire unity and meaning for the work that needs to be done.

- *Hermeneutic Phenomenology (or Interpretive Phenomenology):* The research method applied to this study is marked by the tenets that each participant has his or her own true understanding of the experience that they have participated in, but also leverages social pressures and the researcher's understanding and interpretation to provide added depth to the study.
- *Modern:* Although modern is a completely subjective term, I used modern to delineate the period beginning in the final 3 decades of the 20th century to the present day. I selected this period as these decades witnessed a significant emergence of crises as a norm, with consistently decreased funding (Leslie & Fretwell, 1996), and public and political demand for accountability in the academy being persistent themes (Thelin, 2019).
- *Person-created:* Commonly referred to as *man-made*, I use the term person-created to be more inclusive and define crises or actions that are a direct result of human-influenced issues or challenges. These include (but are not limited to): active shooters, scandals, and so forth.

- *Political*: More specifically used in this manuscript, political is not referring to political parties, but the framework associated with activities such as coalition building and leading especially in times of scarce resources (Bolman & Deal, 1984, 2013).

Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic represented an unprecedented leadership challenge for higher education institutions around the United States and the world. Even though few studies have been published on presidential response to COVID-19, there exists a wealth of research discussing higher education crises and crisis leadership on institutional, state, and regional levels. This interpretive phenomenological study sought to uncover a deeper understanding of the inputs and leadership challenges posed by COVID-19 on college presidents at four-year institutions within three states in the mid-Atlantic region, the process and reasons behind choices that were made, and reflective self-evaluation of said choices. To help conceptualize the leadership activities that the participants were responsible for, I enlisted Bolman and Deal's (2013) four leadership frames (structural, human resource, political, and symbolic) to approach the self-reported presidential priorities from the 2017 ACE survey of college presidents, focusing on the assumptions, strengths, and limitations of each frame for the task at hand.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In this review of the relevant literature for this study, I examined three central topics that guide this research of presidential leadership through times of crisis in higher education. The first section provides historical background on leadership theory, and the evolution of these theories from trait-based theories to the more modern theoretical position focused on followership (Northouse, 2019). Second, I review a brief history of modern higher education, with special attention to the role of college presidents in navigating trends and crises over the past few decades. Finally, I review the role of the modern college president, specifically focused on self-reported priorities and the required ability to lead from different frames.

A Brief History of Leadership and Leadership Theory

Leadership is widely studied (Northouse, 2019), ferociously criticized, and riddled with paradoxes (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014; Farrell, 2018; Taylor-Bianco & Schermerhorn, 2006). Leaders must successfully navigate the ability to lead with logic and rationality, yet also manage to break free from the belief bias (which encourages confirmation rather than the rejection of held beliefs) frequently attributed to rational thinking and instead reach followers on an emotional level (Sheard et al., 2011). Exceptional leaders must inspire with charisma yet maintain the interpersonal and relational qualities that ensure follower participation in key decisions (Farrell, 2018); however, charisma alone is not a sufficient condition to solve or even approach modern crises.

To ensure organizational continuity during periods of high stress or crisis, employees must be able to "persevere in their work, despite the adversity they face" (S. A. Sommer et al., 2016, p. 173). Leaders provide a central role in helping followers make sense of a crisis (Weick,

2000), which can help provide comfort and pathways through crisis and provide a sense of normalcy in which employees can continue to perform their roles. With contemporary organizations subject to constant change and external pressures, leaders must have a high comfort level encouraging employees to remain connected to the mission of the organization and their work, while simultaneously being an agent of change and ensuring continuous innovation to achieve organizational relevance into the future (Taylor-Bianco & Schermerhorn, 2006). According to Van Vugt et al. (2008), leadership is unimportant and unexceptional in times of peace and prosperity, however, in the presence of crisis, it can become a “matter of life and death” (p. 182). Using Pearson and Clair’s (1998) definition, the specific instances of a crisis that I will address assume that disruptive events will be influential throughout the organization, challenge the organization’s validity or existence, have no immediately clear solution or resolution, and necessitate swift and decisive action (p. 60).

To navigate organizational challenges effectively, leaders must lead and follow simultaneously (Sigelman et al., 1992), and possess the ability to navigate the past, present, and future concurrently through reflection and prediction (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014). Crises have not only increased in higher education as of late, but the longer-term influences of crises echo through declines in admission (Luca et al., 2017), potential damage to the institution’s reputation (Downes, 2017; Shim & Yang, 2016), as well as through direct punitive damages to budgets like the $500 million settlement paid by Michigan State University to the victims of Larry Nasser (Engler, 2018). To mitigate these negative crisis results, leaders must be comfortable leading through periods of uncertainty and ambiguity. Although each of the leadership theories that I will discuss in the following section has strengths and limitations, the application of modern leadership theories that emphasize leadership interactions with followers

and a shared-governance model has become more pervasive throughout modern organizations (Hackman, 1990, 2012; Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009; Northouse, 2019; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014), and thus, will be examined more in-depth in the review of modern organizations and crises. Though shared governance has historically been a common leadership model in higher education, many faculty members perceive that budgetary and operational choices during the pandemic were made unilaterally by the administration (American Association of University Professors [AAUP], 2021). This debarkation from the preferred method of operational leadership may illustrate (at least from a faculty perspective) that in the presence of pervasive crisis, leadership decisions are elevated to top-level administrators (Leslie & Fretwell, 1996).

Obsession With Leadership and Leader Behavior

For as long as there has been written text, leadership has always been the object of lore, study, and intrigue (Grint, 2011; Van Vugt et al., 2008). In considering ancient (and even modern) times, the subjects of songs or stories are those who are exceptional. Frequently, these tales are stories of leadership. People celebrate examples of overcoming fantastic odds, stories of driving people to betterment (and sometimes savagery), or examples of one person influencing the lives and thoughts of many. Some consider leadership to be innate (Carlyle, 1885; Spector, 2015); others dependent on timing or situation (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982; Thompson & Vecchio, 2009); and still others believe it to be uncovered through growth and development (Day et al., 2014). Trends throughout the leadership literature have largely shifted from early epics, citing the superiority of great titans who rose to fulfill their birthright as champions of their followers and society, to the more modern focus on leaders being responsive to followers (Northouse, 2019) and even as servants to their followers (Greenleaf, 1977).

Leader-Centric Theories. "History is written, generally speaking, by the winners" (Grint, 2011, p. 3). This principle aptly describes why the great conquerors of antiquity account for most of the surviving examples of early leadership that are accessible today. Many of history's best-known leaders held great influence, either by amassing large kingdoms, shaping society, or prowess on the field of battle. The common thread among these leaders is that they possessed either a birthright to their position or rose to the occasion and exhibited traits that lifted them higher than the common person. The underlying assumptions of trait-based leadership theories are that the subject of the relationship and the study is solely on the leader, neglecting follower behavior or influence (Northouse, 2019). No theory is more leader-centric than one of the earlier theories on leadership and leader behavior than Carlyle's (1885) *Great Man* theory.

Perhaps the single-most leader-centric work that has become synonymous with trait leadership is the writing of Thomas Carlyle (Spector, 2015). Tethered to a religious concept of salvation for society, Carlyle (1885) advocated that only divinely blessed men can pick up the mantle of leadership and deliver society from evil. Although modern leadership theories are more empirically based (Spector, 2015), the viewpoint that some leaders are destined or born to lead still reverberates through modern society. Certain leaders, scholars, and public figures obtain wide followership, sometimes without sound justification. Spector (2015) suggested that Freudian "impulses that drive us toward authority figures" (p. 251) beg to be studied in the leadership literature, as they may offer insights into the existence and power of "corporate saviors" (p. 251). Although empirical evidence challenges the universality of born leadership traits and points to the growth of leadership behaviors through development (Northouse, 2019; Stogdill, 1948), history is littered with examples of followers being drawn to follow leaders with

certain traits or behaviors, even if not appropriate. Nichols (2016) highlights that many leader-follower relationships can be classified either by dominance or cooperation and although dominance has fallen out of favor in modern times, examples still exist in which dominant behavior is present in what people identify as "typical" leadership relationships (p. 659).

More fluid than the *great man* theories, however, no less focused on leader behavior, are skills-based theories (Katz, 1955, 1986); behavioral approaches to leadership (Stogdill, 1948); and situation-based leadership (Blanchard, 1985; Blanchard et al., 1993). According to Katz (1955, 1986), leadership skills and strong administrators are measured not by who they innately are, but rather by their actions. This concept departs significantly from Carlyle's (1885) concept that God sends great leaders, and instead posits that leaders can be trained, and administrators can be cultivated. Katz (1955, 1986) suggested that good leaders have technical skills that allow them to be highly knowledgeable within their specific industries, human skills that allow them to create a collaborative environment and coach others, and conceptual skills that allow high-level administrators to see the organization as a whole and prioritize the health of the collective over the health of an individual. Although Katz (1986) noted that executives can be trained and learn technical and human skills, he argues that conceptual skills are an "innate ability" (p. 198). Even though many core elements of Katz's theory are still widely accepted today, researchers have also pointed to the importance of emphasizing managerial skills in addition to the core technical competencies that have notoriously gotten individuals hired and then promoted (Peterson & Van Fleet, 2004).

Technical savviness appears to have had a primary influence on college presidents, at least historically, as most of the college presidents noted in a 2017 report conducted jointly by Deloitte's Center for Higher Education Excellence and The Center for 21st Century Universities

at Georgia Tech have moved up to the role from an academic background (Selingo et al., 2017). As leaders of academics, having prowess in disciplinary fields contributes to the understanding of the technical operations of the academy. However, Selingo et al. (2017) noted that this pathway to the presidency is quickly changing, as business acumen, fundraising ability, strategy development, and storytelling have all risen above academic and intellectual leadership as the most in-demand skills or competencies of modern presidents, favoring candidates with a non-academic background. Still, nearly 75% of current college presidents have arrived in their role from these traditional academic routes (ACE, 2017). Although leaders are still revered in modern times, and trait-based assumptions about leaders hold a place in modern industry, the focus on interactions between leaders and followers has become increasingly prevalent in the modern leadership literature (Northouse, 2019).

Process-Based and Follower-Aware Leadership Theories. Although traits and leader behavior are the sole subjects of the leader-centric theories discussed above, many modern theories incorporate follower motivations (Evans, 1970; House & Mitchell, 1974); leader-follower relationships (Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen, 1976); transforming followers (Bass, 1997); creating adaptable followers and structures (Heifetz, 1994); and even selflessly prioritizing the experience of followers (Greenleaf, 1977). These leadership theories, including path-goal leadership, leader-member exchange, transformational leadership, adaptive leadership, servant leadership, and team leadership, have been heavily researched following the emergence of followership and follower behavior after the 1980s (Northouse, 2019). Although leader behaviors, skills, and traits still emerge as important, they are enhanced by follower behaviors, skills, and traits. The concept of followership as an important component of leadership is less studied than leader traits and behaviors (Kelly, 2008), and to many, *following* has a negative

connotation (Northouse, 2019). For the sake of this study, I examined followership as an important and influential component of leadership, considering both followers and leaders to be working for a common purpose (Chaleff, 2008).

Leadership and followership have been diametrically opposed to one another within several leadership theories, as well as through popular culture, athletics, and other social behaviors (Northouse, 2019). Individuals do not frequently aspire to be great followers. Chaleff (2008) positioned leaders and followers in a cooperative, rather than combative relationship, and considered leader *and* follower behaviors as they both serve a common purpose, rather than as working solely in self-interest. In higher education, this common good could be organizational, or in service to the educational mission of the college, with leaders in service to the organization or industry. Chaleff (2008) further posited that organizations are strengthened if followers have courage, are insightful, and place the organization first. This championing of the follower in the leader-follower relationship lends itself well to theories that acknowledge followers as important contributors to the leadership process and overall organizational health.

Recognizing an advantage of the leader-follower relationship not only allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the organization but also provides the potential for leaders to achieve a more complete view of the challenges an organization faces (Heifetz et al., 2009). Attunement to the experiences of followers can also provide leaders with a sensitizing structure, or early warning system to detect emerging problems (Weick, 1979). Further highlighting the importance of follower-awareness, modern leadership has shifted away from *command-and-control* leader behavior in favor of a more collaborative leadership strategy that serves to "empower others throughout the organizational system" (Eddy & Kirby, 2020, p. 12). Collaborative leadership can provide benefits to both leaders and followers. This collaborative

leadership style can also increase employee engagement on campus, which Friedman and Kass-Schraibman (2017) suggested is a "measurement of an employee's emotional commitment to an organization" (p. 289). Employees more emotionally connected to an organization or mission will act more ethically than those devoted to a leader (Chaleff, 2008). This type of service to a common goal can also serve to protect an organization from unscrupulous or deviant leaders.

Leadership Through Crisis

"All leaders will face a crisis of some type" (Eddy & Kirby, 2020, p. 79). Crises have become an expected condition of modern organizations (Gigliotti, 2020). Leaders must not only navigate crises as finite events but also navigate crisis as a "condition, a state of affairs, an experiential category" (Roitman, 2014, p. 16). A crisis is no longer something that represents a single turning point in an organization's lifespan, but a state in which modern organizations must learn to grow and thrive. To effectively navigate crisis (or multiple concurrent crises), leaders must depart from archaic views of crises as rare events to be passively experienced, and instead, actively reflect on the crisis with the intent to generate meaning from the process (Roitman, 2014). Furthermore, leaders in higher education must act quickly and decisively, even though "the typical bureaucracy and hierarchy of colleges create barriers to quick reaction" (Eddy & Kirby, 2020, p. 80). As change in higher education occurs slowly, leaders must navigate and mobilize organizational policies and players in a way that both honors institutional systems and commitments, but also respond to crises before they become pervasive throughout the organization.

Central to crisis responsiveness is a leader's ability to quickly recognize the leadership challenge at hand and develop a response strategy (Liu et al., 2021). Kolb (1984) suggests that leadership is an experiential practice and that to be able to adapt strategies to fit new challenges,

leaders must experience an event, reflect on an event, and learn to accommodate that information into their assessment. Additionally, Kolb (1984) also outlined that there are four learner types, each of which with strengths and weaknesses, especially when interacting with one another. These types include the converger (who can understand things from a detailed perspective and value action and progress over perfection), the diverger (who focuses on bigger picture thinking, but who often can delay action), the assimilator (who thrives in data collection and allowing theory and information to inform action), and the accommodator (who prefers action and experimentation and is comfortable learning as they go; Kolb, 1984).

Defining Crisis

I elected to use Pearson and Clair's (1998) definition that a crisis is a "high-impact event that threatens the viability of the organization and is characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect, and means of resolution, as well as by a belief that decisions must be made swiftly" (p. 60). This definition was selected to set parameters for the weight of an event that can be identified as a crisis in this study, the complexity and wickedness of the problem, and the need for immediate action. Although this definition aptly defines the magnitude of an event that can be elevated to crisis-level, it does not speak to the breadth of the crises that plague modern higher education institutions. Although college leaders may have an idea of their risk for specific natural disasters (e.g., geography may make an institution more prone to wildfires, tornados, hurricanes), the unpredictability of person-created crises and global health crises adds another level of the unknown to leadership decisions. To further explore the different types of crises that have befallen modern institutions and presidencies, I will explore crises by their origin in the following sections.

Person-Created Crises. Perhaps the crises most associated with modern higher education are generated by people operating with malice. Ranging from the devastating effects of campus shootings, which have grown in frequency and publicity over the past 3 decades (Fox & Savage, 2009; Kaminski et al., 2010; Kruis et al., 2020); to athletic and admission scandals (Hextrum, 2019; Smith & Willingham, 2019); to sexual, physical, or emotional assaults on campus (Brown et al., 2015; Frederick et al., 2021), the reputation of an institution can suffer a great blow at the hands of a malicious actor or group (Downes, 2017). These incidents, although they receive widespread notoriety and media coverage, are isolated, finite, and usually associated with only one institution. Although many person-created crises have a clear actor or actors who can be blamed for the crisis or its escalation, person-created crises sometimes illustrate the ignorant or nefarious actions of campus leaders and push campuses to reform their governance structures (Downes, 2017). Perhaps a key differentiator between scandals and abuse in higher education and the explosive and unpredictable violence of mass shootings or terrorist activity is that scandals are more frequently long-occurring and do not warrant a response until they are uncovered (Downes, 2017).

Another element that can add to the confusion during a crisis, is the increased power of voices of those on the periphery of the event or the response to the crisis (Brown et al., 2015). This multitude of opinions, coupled with the fact that "while the crisis is still unfolding, the drama of accountability and blaming begins" (Boin et al., 2010, p. 706), serves to confound the actual crisis and response. As the handling of a crisis becomes a point of politicization (Boin et al., 2010), leaders are judged both on their responses to crises, as well as what they do not respond to. Further confounding crisis response is the fact that many of these crises are what Maier and Crist (2017) refer to as "wicked crises—events so intractable and threatening that they

leave even the best leaders speechless and the most prepared organizations grasping for answers" (p. 164). These crises have no *good* solution (Maier & Crist, 2017), and crisis communication and response are dependent on a leader's phenomenological understanding of the crisis (Heath, 2010). When institutions attempt to repair their image in the wake of a crisis, the actions can sometimes further damage the institution's reputation if they are construed as inauthentic, insufficient, or inappropriate (Frederick et al., 2021). In the case of scandals, the response of university leaders, including the communication vehicle they use to deliver their response, plays a role in the public or stakeholder perceptions of their crisis response (Frederick et al., 2021). The speed at which crises are addressed, and the avenue used to relay information to the broader population are components of public satisfaction and expectations of leaders (Jin et al., 2011). In practice, a delayed response can sometimes precipitate a more significant public backlash, as can incomplete responses that fail to address core problems faced at institutions of higher learning (Cole & Harper, 2017). Cole and Harper (2017) further note that in an analysis of 18 racist actions on American campuses studied, only four university presidents provided a complete detailing of the incident, underlying issues, and institutional response within the context of institutional racism. Implications of this failure to recognize or challenge systemic issues have generated powerful groundswells of action, even leading to the ousting of university leaders like the demands for the resignation of University of Missouri system president Tim Wolfe in 2015, whose response to racism on campus was deemed insufficient by an organized collective (Cole & Harper, 2017).

Acts of explosive violence on campus (e.g., school shootings, terrorist activities) present significant threats to campus safety; however, the active threat tends to be removed quickly. Frequently considered symptoms of larger systemic issues, these crises are often followed by

more thorough conversations and policy alterations that sometimes go beyond what Fox and Savage (2009) consider to be reasonable or effective responses. Perhaps evidence of the external pressure on campus leaders, colleges sometimes quickly re-route resources away from academic endeavors in favor of safety measures that may not be effective or necessary (Fox & Savage, 2009). Referring to Pearson and Clair's (1998) definition of crisis, the social response to violence illustrates significant ambiguity in what may be considered an unambiguous scenario, and leaders feel immense pressure to take significant corrective action (Fox & Savage, 2009).

Natural Disasters. Major natural disasters have displaced college students and instructional delivery for as long as colleges and universities have been open. Natural disasters tend to be regionally based and include hurricanes (B. J. Johnson, 2011), tornados (Siegal, 2006), earthquakes (C. Sommer, 1994), and wildfires (Go, 2008). These events tend to mimic what Seymour and Moore (2000) refer to as a cobra crisis, surprising organizations and running their course quickly. While these crises can have a profound impact on localized institutions and populations, natural disasters do not have a pervasive impact on all institutions, simultaneously. As the threat and damages created by natural disasters do not influence all institutions equally, there exists an opportunity for colleges and networks to collaborate to help one another. Many striking examples of these networks of support come from Hurricane Katrina, one of the most devastating natural disasters to ever strike the United States (Blake et al., 2011).

Hurricane Katrina displaced nearly 80% of the residents of New Orleans (Blake et al., 2011), and directly impacted 31 New Orleans area colleges and universities (Alpert, 2012). Katrina was responsible for over 1,000 deaths (Blake et al., 2011), as well as profound damages to college and university property, student and employee health, and continuity of services (AAUP, 2007). The AAUP (2007) special committee report described Katrina as "the most

serious disruption of American higher education in the nation's history" (p. 61). Based upon Pearson and Clair's (1998) definition, Katrina represented a clear crisis to the institutions and systems impacted. Although the damage and cost-of-life were catastrophic, colleges and universities across America quickly responded to their devastated peers, sending supplies, coordinating efforts to re-home displaced students, and even supporting entire curricular endeavors and programs (ACE, 2015). College leaders creatively identified ways that affected students could remain supported during the crisis and its aftermath, as Baylor University (along with several other Texas-based medical schools) even hosted Tulane students and faculty on campus to ensure that they did not lose time in their programs (Searle, 2007). This response was only one example of an outpouring of support and assistance provided by institutions across America and the world (ACE, 2015).

Natural disasters command immediate and decisive responses from leaders. As strategic decision-making in institutions of higher learning tends to be spread out among various parties (Birnbaum, 1988), crises like Katrina have become the impetus for college leaders to adopt an emergency management philosophy, which helps leaders understand the profundity of the crisis' impacts not only to funding, structural components, and continuity of service, but also the often-overlooked psychological damages resulting from the human experience (Alpert, 2012). Preparedness planning for natural disasters has become commonplace at American institutions, particularly those that have been directly or tangentially influenced by disasters in the past. These psychological influences may be more apparent in the third designation of institutional crises, national or global crises, which I will discuss next.

National or Global Crises. A key difference between national or global crises and person-created and natural disaster crises, is that national or global crises affect all institutions

within a system severely, simultaneously, and with significant impact. In 2021, American higher education is reeling from the confluence of several of these crises, namely, the retaliatory movement against systemic racism and murder that has plagued the United States and other nations since their inception, and the COVID-19 pandemic. College presidents are remiss if they do not address both crises, both publicly through communication, and through careful action and operational changes within their institutions and networks. Although systemic racism is not a new crisis in the United States, the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and several other people of color in 2020 (and over the past several years) have sparked a visceral and coordinated response by American citizens. According to Scott Cowen (2020), who was president of Tulane University during Hurricane Katrina, the pandemic represents a completely different challenge as it has no end date, and people are wondering when they will feel safe again.

Systemic racism also has a profound influence on how different people experience crises and the severity with which the crises affect their lives (G. S. Johnson & Rainey, 2007). G. S. Johnson and Rainey (2007) illustrated that for students of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), the disaster relief efforts and media responses "portrayed racism, injustices, and exploitation" (p. 102), noting that students felt that the portrayal of citizens of color as "depraved criminals" (p. 102). Similarly, COVID-19 severity is markedly different across racial groups, with Black or African Americans, as well as Hispanic or Latin Americans being nearly 3 times as likely to be hospitalized, and twice as likely to die from COVID-19 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2021). The CDC (2021) further identified systemic racial issues of socioeconomics, access to healthcare, and workplace exposure as key factors in the disparity between racial groups in America. These elements represent an

intersection of race and crisis whereby people of color are exponentially influenced, and leaders must deliver a more tailored response in their crisis communication and response.

A Synopsis of Five Eras and Their Presidential Challenges in Higher Education

No corporations in the United States have existed longer than its oldest institution of higher learning (Thelin, 2019). The nation's original nine colonial colleges still survive today and were all operational before the ratification of the Constitution of the United States. With a history this long, and stories so deep, American higher education has enjoyed periods of success and weathered numerous storms.

A New World—America's Colonial Colleges (1638–1785)

No recount of American higher education would be complete without noting the success and importance of American institutions on a global scale, while also making mention of the (sometimes) fierce debate over its value in the United States (Thelin, 2017). With a history longer than any other corporation (Thelin, 2019), colleges and universities have experienced periods of explosive growth, periods of dwindling public support and funding, and weathered long-standing debate about the value of colleges' mission. Colleges in the American colonies were designed to spread the virtues of Christianity, both by educating White males to join the ranks of the clergy and by offering the native people Christian salvation (Durnin, 1961; Thelin, 2019). The colonial colleges were chartered with both public and private funding and operated on the moral authority of the church (and the divinity of the crown in the case of William & Mary; Thelin, 2019). The institutions of higher learning in the American colonies proclaimed to serve the greater good through the moral growth and development of the colonists and natives (Durnin, 1961), and in doing so commanded rich public support, even during a period in which much of the wealth or opportunity for wealth was being redirected back to the crown of England

(Thelin, 2019). The position of college president was not always prestigious, or influential. In the case of Cotton Mather, president of Harvard College, the role of president was considered a secondary function of his important ministry (Thelin, 2019).

In the modern argument for or against higher learning as a public good, the coerciveness of the institutions displacing native people, along with the incredibly narrow and homogeneous student population that were invited to be educated (Durin, 1961; Thelin, 2019), higher education would have a hard time arguing its position as a public good during the colonial era. Throughout the ensuing centuries, the discussion of the public benefit or harm attributed to the institution of higher learning in America would be a prominent factor in the debate over its value, meaning, and importance (Labaree, 1997).

Lands Granted and Battlefields Lost—The Civil War (1785–1865)

The first Morrill Land Grant Act, which passed on July 2, 1862, paved the way for the establishment of many state institutions. President Lincoln signed the bill into law a mere month before the single bloodiest day of combat in the history of American warfare (Hennessy, 1993). This beacon of educational expansion to meet the societal need for agricultural technology to feed a growing nation (Duemer, 2007; Nevins, 1962) was juxtaposed with the carnage and bloody division of a fractured union at the Second Battle of Bull Run. Although its pathway into law was hotly contested for years, Justin Morrill of Vermont (the bill's author) championed the legislature with a belief that education was serving both the public good and numerous private goods simultaneously (Nevins, 1962). The design and purpose of the land grant act were more to develop land than to place the government in the business of education (Thelin, 2019); nevertheless, it provided the opportunity to expand the higher education network in service to the agricultural needs of a divided nation. Presidents of colleges who were funded by this bill exalted

Justin Morrill (Ross, 1938), however, its passage through congress was attained only after the secession of southern states, and the bill faced vehement opposition from fears that publicly held land would be earmarked for "speculative interests" (Simon, 1963, p. 104).

This major legislation, which in the end did put the government in the college business (Thelin, 2019), also created the dialog that, if colleges were being publicly funded, they should be focused on solving public problems (Duemer, 2007; Kliebard, 1986). While presidents like Andrew D. White of Cornell were proclaiming Morrill to be a general in the battle for educational advancement (Ross, 1938), the Morrill Act moved education into the realm of national politics and public accountability, creating a tenuous relationship that has increased over time (Heller, 2011).

Reconstruction Through the Rise of Women in the Academy (1865–1945)

Bringing on a period of rapid demographic expansion, the period following the civil war in America gave rise to the coeducation movement (Thelin, 2019). Although coeducation is not uncommon in modern times, with more women participating in higher education than men across every racial and ethnic category (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019), the first women who attended coeducational institutions were frequently subjected to hostility (A Student, 1918; Thelin, 2019). Although women had attended institutions of higher learning, first in the seminaries of New England, and then in baccalaureate coeducation at Oberlin College in 1837 (https://www.oberlin.edu/about-oberlin/oberlin-history), the academy did not consider the education of women as central to their mission until decades later (Hogeland, 1972). Hogeland (1972) describes that the function of women at Oberlin in the earliest years of coeducation was to enrich the experience of men. For institutions that switched from single-sex to coeducation, women and their institutions were often subject to severe backlash from the public (Coburn,

1988). Different than educating women in female-only institutions, the presence of women in coeducational institutions became a visible and central threat to the legitimacy of the institutions, and their masculine legacy (Malkiel, 2016). Coburn (1988) pointed to the pseudoscientific and errant sociological arguments that warned of the devastating effect that college would have on women's bodies and American society. Opposers of coeducation evolved their arguments as the intellectual inferiority claims of women were quickly debunked, shifting instead to the argument that women would displace men in the academy and at work (Coburn, 1988), a clear threat to male privilege.

Regardless of the merit of these claims, college presidents during this period of demographic expansion had to reconcile with outraged student bodies and alumni the choice to admit women into their institutions (Goldin & Katz, 2011). Geography and institutional type also played a role in the choice to move to coeducation, as single-sex education was favored in the south, and public institutions were slower to adopt coeducation than were private colleges (Goldin & Katz, 2011). It is important to note that this period of educational growth was tempered by two world wars, the Great Depression, and the Spanish Flu of 1918, which remains the most infectious disease outbreak with the highest morbidity rate in American history (Pederson, 2018, p. 2317). Coeducation was introduced at some institutions coinciding with World War I and World War II, with William & Mary opening its doors to women in 1918, and Harvard approving coeducational instruction in 1943, partially to replace lost revenues due to male students serving in the armed forces (Goldin & Katz, 2011).

From Combat Boots to Mortarboards—The Golden Age of Higher Ed (1945–1970)

Thelin (2019) describes the 25 years that immediately followed World War II as "marked by prosperity, prestige, and popularity" (p. 260). This period of rapid expansion was accentuated

by advances in two distinctly different institution types, community colleges growing in domestic popularity, and research universities gaining global prestige (Thelin, 2019). According to Labaree (2016), the remarkably brief era of higher education after World War II and before the Soviet collapse is the only period in which Americans truly viewed higher education as a public good. During this time, colleges and universities enjoyed rapidly escalating expansion (NCES, 1993, 2021). The Cold War was, according to Labaree (2016) "the glory years, when fear of annihilation gave us a glamorous public mission and what seemed like an endless flow of public funds and funded students" (p. 31). During these times, colleges and universities expanded at a rate that was not previously seen in America (NCES, 1993, 2021). In this period, postsecondary institutions benefitted significantly by partnering with the federal and state governments, most notably through policy initiatives like the Servicemen's Readjustment Act (Thelin, 2019). The G.I. Bill (as it became widely known) significantly increased the technically trained workforce, generating true economic growth in the postwar period (Kiester, 1994), and more than doubled the enrollment at some state flagship institutions (Kiester, 1994; Thelin, 2019). To further enforce the public's partnership with colleges and universities, the use of G.I. Bill benefits for higher learning was positively correlated with increased civic engagement and civic association membership with organizations such as fraternal groups (e.g., Lions, Elks), parent-teacher associations, homeowners associations, and support groups among veterans (Mettler, 2002). The G.I. Bill also was, perhaps, the most significant advancement in the democratization of higher education, diversifying the college-enrolled population more than any other prior policy (Bound & Turner, 2002).

Although rich and plentiful in many ways, the period that Thelin (2019) refers to as the "golden age" (p. 260) was not devoid of challenges. The slow adoption of racial integration in

colleges and universities occurred at many southern institutions over a century after the Civil War ended, frequently reaching a fever pitch in the mid-20th century (Clayton & Peters, 2019). Many southern states fervently fought against integrated schools, and in the case of some mid-Atlantic states, policies prevented Black students (even veterans who had served in World War II), from enrolling in undergraduate programs at public universities (Clayton & Peters, 2019). The American Civil Rights movement, replete with fatal clashes between activists and the establishment, first reached college campuses in 1968 when students from South Carolina State College, were involved in an altercation with police on campus that left 27 students injured and three dead (Toth, 2011). This event, along with several other events of the turbulent 1960s, would usher in the next era of higher education, marred with escalating crises like drastic increases in campus shootings, an increased prevalence of natural disasters, increased racial unrest, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Crisis Era—Modern Higher Education Since the 1970s

Over the past 4 decades, higher education has principally been consumed with proving that it is accessible and affordable to students (Heller, 2011), and shares some form of accountability for student outcome metrics (Deming & Figlio, 2016; Heller, 2011) and preparation for meaningful careers (Heller, 2011; Spellings, 2006). This demand for accountability and the threat of crises in education was popularized by an American lag in public education rankings showcased by *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), which remains a divisive document among educational leaders to this day (Floden et al., 2020). Although the report was geared toward improving public primary and secondary education in America, it reaffirmed sentiments that education is paramount to national success (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). By this suggestion, and

among other suggestions within the report, education and institutions that contribute to a learned society are providing a public good. Convening in 1993, a collection of leading colleges and universities delivered what would be known as the Wingspread Statement, which sounded alarms about the current state of higher learning and proposed a new model for higher education in America. Focusing on internationalization, increasing collaboration between institutions, and removing college and university impediments (among other things), The Wingspread Group (1993) recommended several areas to improve international competitiveness and avert what would be a national problem. *A Nation at Risk* was a flashpoint, which later ushered in metrics of affordability, access, and outcomes demanded by the Obama administration in 2013 (Deming & Figlio, 2016). According to the Spellings Report (2006), the American higher education industry must undergo significant changes and innovation as it has not grown at the same rate as other nations and has fallen behind in training core concepts that allow graduates to effectively enter the workforce.

I argue that these three concerns about higher education accountability (affordability, access, and outcomes) are symptoms of an underlying debate in which colleges and universities are reconciling their purpose in the presence of robust public scrutiny. Atanassow and Kahan (2013) pose the question, does a college, particularly one steeped in the liberal arts, help a student to become a more able citizen, or does it carry a financial and time cost, offering more of a distraction to student success? As college debt soars higher than $1 trillion, colleges have never felt as much of a burden to prove the worth and value of the degrees they confer (Heller, 2011; Thelin, 2017). Perhaps a function of a college’s competitiveness for survival, their lifeblood tethered to formal and informal ratings, rankings, and the very things to which colleges stake

their reputations, following the tuition or tax dollar at an institution elicits more questions than answers.

In viewing higher education as a business, especially a business of advancing individuals, America's anomalous love affair with the academy that existed for the 3 decades leading up to the 1970s has long perished (Labaree, 2016). Furthermore, higher education's public reputation suffers from some of its passé structures, as things like opacity are giving way to transparency, and the movement toward fiscal accountability is shedding light on mission-distant activities and shoddy accounting practices (Labaree, 2014). This drive toward transparency is relatively young in higher education, though it has deep and lengthy roots in managerial ideology (Macheridis & Paulsson, 2021).

Although occurrences of certain types of crises, like mass shootings, have risen in higher education's modern era (Kaminski et al., 2010; Kruis et al., 2020), crises over the past two decades can likely trace their notoriety to 24-hour news cycles and today's unprecedented access to information provided by the internet and social applications. Perhaps also contributing to the fear and reaction to crises in modern higher education is the incentive to exaggerate events to increase attention and readership (Gigliotti, 2020). The access to information that has, at times, been a catalyst for the spreading of misinformation during a crisis, if used effectively by higher education leaders, can also serve as a barometer of sorts for understanding stakeholder sentiments (Gigliotti, 2020).

Challenges Facing Institutions Across Carnegie Classifications

Grint (2011) cites Sun Tzu's suggestion that leaders "burn [their] own bridges" (p. 5) to illustrate a leadership principle that is commonly held among entrepreneurs, however, highly unconventional in the slow-moving, change-averse culture of higher education. This metaphor

illustrates a central element of entrepreneurial thinking, which is to fully commit to an idea or practice, without leaving oneself with an out or escape. This philosophy of fully investing in new ideas runs counter to the philosophy of the higher education industry, which celebrates traditions and scaffolding of knowledge and experiences. Colleges are steeped in symbolism, from ceremonial traditions and commencement garb, and the numerous rites of passage that students participate in to become fully indoctrinated in their college's unique stories. These elements harken back to an ancient symbolic *temple* (Bolman & Deal, 2013). While there is significant value in honoring and respecting the past, entrepreneurial thinking focuses on the present and future. This different approach to thinking about leadership may be in direct competition with the methods by which change occurs in higher education, which is more similar to Vroom and Yetton's (1973) Group I mode of decision making. In this mode, decision authority is shared among a highly technical group of collaborators. Although this allows shared values to be central to the decisions, it is slow-moving and could inhibit institutions from pivoting when needed. Shared governance, a collective leadership strategy that uses faculty as technical collaborators in the decision-making process, has deteriorated in past crises and further deteriorated during the COVID-19 pandemic (AAUP, 2021; Flaherty, 2021; Leslie & Fretwell, 1996).

The concept of entrepreneurship in college presidents is a trait celebrated by some (Fisher & Koch, 2004); however, the industry largely continues to operate from a shared governance approach, in which presidential authority is "ill defined, constrained, and shared with others" (Ruscio, 2017, p. 26). Decisions in colleges and universities rarely succeed unilaterally, as leaders at all levels of the institution benefit from garnering buy-in from academic faculty and other important stakeholders (Honu, 2018.) Should a college president truly bring their institution to Tsu's "dead ground" (Grint, 2011, p. 5), modernly referred to as the *point of no*

return, the bridge might likely be burned after only the president crosses it. Coupled with the extraordinary diversity among institutions concerning mission, student goals, stakeholder demands, and overall purpose for existing, the governance structure also has unique elements at each different college and university.

All enterprises experience pressure to change and adapt, regardless of the presence of a crisis. Adaptation within colleges and universities is a slow and methodical process (Bess & Dee, 2012). Colleges and universities metaphorically align with Weick and Quinn's (1999) illustration of episodic change, where change is infrequent, intentional, and responsive to environmental stimuli. Entrepreneurship and modern change strategies prize change as positive, constant, and emergent, metaphorically aligning with acceptance of continuous change (Weick & Quinn, 1999). Aligned with these pressures, many presidents also experience conflict between the expected efficiency of top-down leadership styles, and the need for collaborative leadership, especially with the faculty (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017). While many would consider the modern college president to be the chief executive officer of an educational institution, the self-reported modern presidents' day-to-day schedules more closely mirror that of a chief advancement officer, than that of a corporate CEO (ACE, 2017).

With presidents being tasked to complete a variety of non-operational functions, divergence from hierarchical leadership also can provide much-needed redistribution of authority over decision-making to highly qualified members of the university community. As Kezar and Holcombe (2017) noted, this aligns with modern leadership models (e.g., adaptive leadership, systems leadership) that are highly effective in complex environments, and evidenced in the array of presidential duties that today's higher educational leaders face. Kezar and Holcombe (2017) pointed to a push for top-down leadership styles to effectively manage the landscape of

change that modern colleges must navigate, however, research showcases the need for shared leadership. The authors further illustrated that process-driven leadership styles like adaptive leadership, as opposed to leader-trait styles, leverage collaboration to understand challenges and problem solve more quickly. Randall and Coakley (2007) suggested that this focus on shared leadership also provides flexibility in that "the process can be instigated at any stage of a particular situation" (p. 329). The following sections explore several of the challenges facing college presidents.

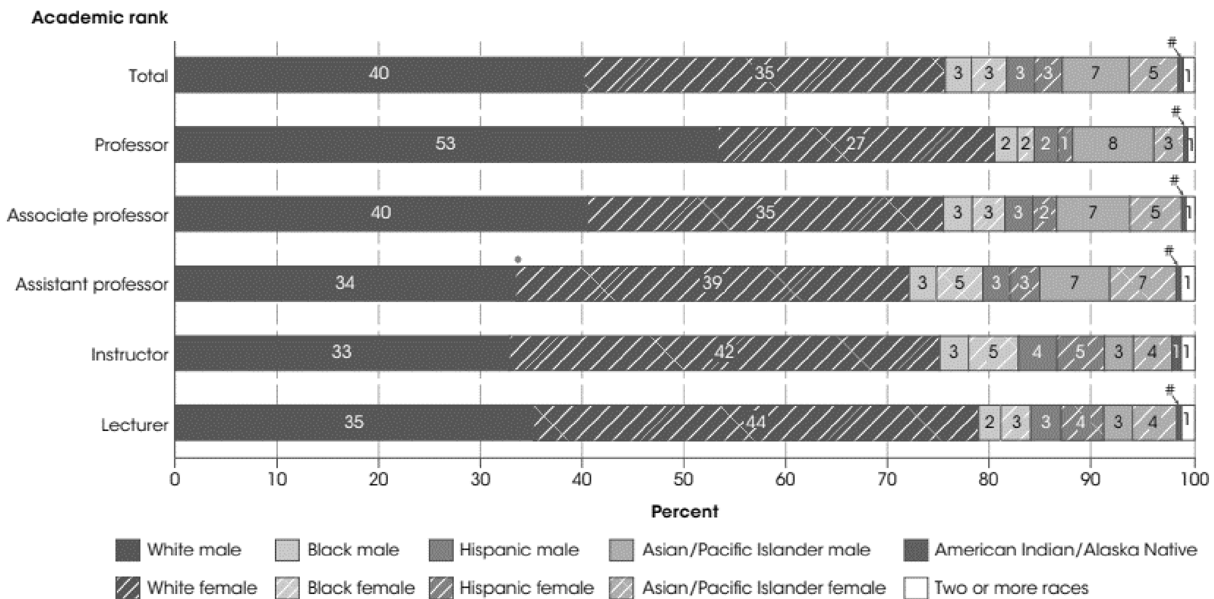
The Defunding of Education. Although public financial support for higher education has risen and fallen in concert with the economy over the past 4 decades, the growth and expansion have not fully rebounded from the periods of decreased support (Laderman & Weeden, 2019), and costs to operate institutions continue to rise. External critics of higher education finance poke at what they refer to as a spending problem. The painful truth is that operating a college is a labor-intensive endeavor (Zumeta et al., 2012), and public institutions are further subject to decreasing state support dependent upon tax-related income (R. B. Archibald & Feldman, 2011). Furthermore, the labor of higher education is as highly skilled (and educated) as in any other industry in the American workforce (Zumeta et al., 2012).

The fervent competition among modern institutions has increased (Musselin, 2018), and with it an amenities arms race (McClure, 2019) and an academic arms race (Enders, 2014; Stocum, 2013). When considering that the student share of financing (evidenced in net tuition revenue) has risen from 20.9% to 46% over the past 40 years (Laderman & Weeden, 2019), many critics of higher education are focusing their attention on the real cost of doing business as an institution.

Race and Higher Education. Another incredibly important issue facing higher education today is the history of systemic racism and segregation in higher education (Barabino, 2020; Cole & Harper, 2017). One of the most valid arguments challenging education being a public good is the absence of racial and ethnic parity among the ranks of the professoriate and other campus leadership positions and the student bodies of most universities in the United States (Hussar et al., 2020). The underrepresentation of faculty of color in U.S. institutions is dramatic, and illustrated in Figure 1, below.

Figure 1

Academic Rank of U.S. Faculty by Race/Ethnicity and Gender

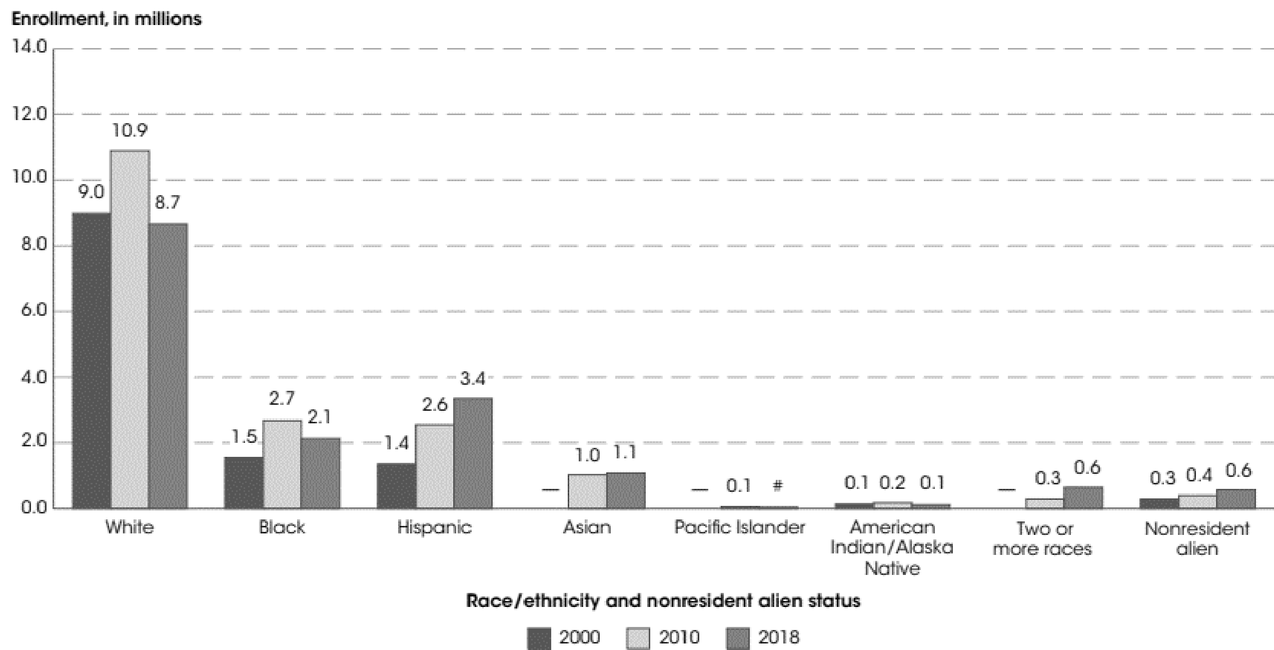


Note. # rounds to zero. Sex breakouts were excluded for faculty who were American Indian/Alaska Native and of Two or more races because the percentages were 1 percent or less. Degree-granting institutions grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Percentages are based on full-time faculty whose race/ethnicity was known. Detail may not sum to 100 percent

due to rounding. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. From Hussar, B., Zhang, J., Hein, S., Wang, K., Roberts, A., Cui, J., Smith, M., Bullock Mann, F., Barmer, A., & Dilig, R. (2020). *The Condition of Education 2020* (NCES 2020-144). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved [2021, April 18] from https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2020144. Similarly, White and Asian students are overrepresented in the college student population throughout the United States, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Race/Ethnicity and Non-Resident Alien Status of U.S. Postsecondary Students



Note. – Not available. # Rounds to zero. Prior to 2010, separate data on Asian students, Pacific Islander students, and students of Two or more races were not available. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Race/ethnicity categories exclude nonresident aliens. Degree-granting institutions grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal

financial aid programs. Some data have been revised from previously published figures. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. From Hussar, B., Zhang, J., Hein, S., Wang, K., Roberts, A., Cui, J., Smith, M., Bullock Mann, F., Barmer, A., and Dilig, R. (2020). *The Condition of Education 2020* (NCES 2020-144). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved [2021, April 18] from https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2020144.

To effectively argue that higher education serves the public and is a force or tool for empowerment and social advancement, institutions must first examine how their practices either advance or retard the movement toward equity in America. According to a 2018 NCES race and ethnicity report, Asian and White students were overrepresented both in attending postsecondary institutions, as well as in successful completion of their degrees (de Brey et al., 2018). These racial and ethnic trends (deliberate or indeliberate), represent a key opportunity for colleges and universities to grow and diversify, and many (if not all) institutions have prioritized diversity equity and inclusion programming to help reshape their student bodies.

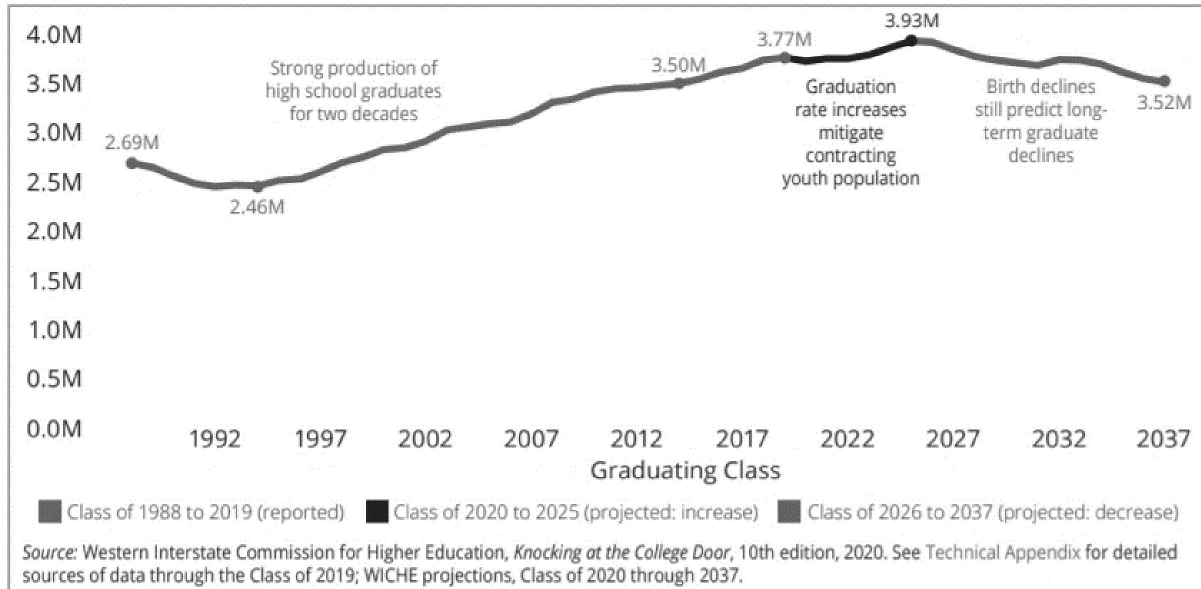
Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programming and policies are now commonplace across campuses in the United States, following public social support for attention to the topic, as well as the introduction of Critical Race Theory by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995). Although campuses publicly highlight their DEI actions, the process of developing integrated and inclusive environments, and breaking down systemic issues like white supremacy both in the academy and through the primary and secondary education systems represents a complex and important longer-term challenge (Patton, 2016). As college presidents create institutional strategies and communicate on behalf of their institutions, they would be remiss not to consider the fact that although diversification has been a push in recent times, simply criminalizing discrimination

without sincere efforts to create inclusive environments falls short of what is necessary to equalize opportunities for students of color (Tienda, 2013).

Enrollment Trends. There is an increasing demand for student enrollment dollars to offset diminishing public financial support for institutions (Laderman & Weeden, 2019). Trends concerning the number of students graduating from secondary institutions (Bransberger et al., 2020), as well as the increased need for tuition discounting (especially among private institutions) to remain competitive (Zumeta et al., 2012), are intensifying the financial struggles at most colleges and universities (Pierce, 2014). Bransberger et al. (2020) noted that the *enrollment cliff* precipitated by the "birth dearth" (p. 1) from the 2008 financial crisis likely will be slightly mitigated by improvements in graduation rates and diversification of college classes. Although promising, Bransberger et al. (2020) suggested that enrollment rates are still projected to decline modestly (Figure 3). Grawe (2021) suggested that while enrollment trends may have a detrimental impact on college enrollment, they also may be exacerbated by the presence of longer-standing structural issues in the academy including a lack of online programs, already low enrollment, high tuition discount rates, and tuition dependence. Though these challenges present a clear danger to institutions, Grawe (2018) suggested that low birth rates may be mitigated by higher high school graduation rates and by bridging the historical gaps experienced by traditionally underrepresented college populations.

Figure 3

WICHE High School Enrollment Rates (1988 to 2037)



Note. From Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, *Knocking at the College Door*, 10th edition, 2020. https://www.wiche.edu/resources/knocking-at-the-college-door-10th-edition.

In response to these data, American colleges and universities have searched for new students to recruit, and over the past few years, many of these students have come from China (Martel, 2020). Yet an additional enrollment issue exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic is the inability of American institutions to host international students. In the 2018-2019 school year, over 369,000 students enrolled in U.S. institutions from China, alone (Martel, 2020). Travel bans, lockdowns, and uncertainty about obtaining educational visas persisted throughout the 2020-2021 school year. Though many institutions offered support for international students and attempted to retain students, global recruiting for the 2021-2022 school year showcased that over 80% of institutions surveyed by Martel (2020) had concerns about reaching their recruitment goals from China, including persistent concerns for the future.

COVID-19 and Higher Education Responses. As a result of timing, all COVID-19 research is pioneering in 2020-2021. There is a great deficiency in the literature, not because studies are not taking place, but due to COVID-19 research being underway and in the process of peer review. Although the person-created and natural disaster crises that have received the lion's share of attention in recent years may have catastrophic repercussions on a college (Brown et al., 2015), COVID-19 is different because it massively impacted every institution and organization in America, simultaneously. Crisis response examples are replete with evidence of neighboring institutions, states, societies aiding crisis-affected institutions, however, due to the completeness of COVID-19, even the systems that have lent support to colleges and universities in the past have been unable to aid them. In the case of Hurricane Katrina, the most significant natural disaster in the United States in terms of population displacement since the Dust Bowl of the 1930s (Graif, 2016, p. 289), the higher education community was able to rally around affected institutions in New Orleans (Christ, 2005; Hennessy, 2005; Oden, 2005; Randel, 2005). As COVID-19 has pervaded every institution of higher education, leaders have not been able to support other institutions, but rather each institution was forced to look inward and prioritize their students, employees, and alumni.

Similar to Katrina, COVID-19 has highlighted that while disaster and illness do not discriminate, people affected by systemic issues such as housing and community segregation, school funding, and underemployment are impacted more deeply than those who are not resource-poor (Perry, 2020). College leaders must recognize the potential for inequity caused by this confluence of person-created and natural disasters (Perry, 2020), as they weigh their coronavirus response and appease other stakeholders as well. The ambiguity of the problem, prioritizing student safety, and external pressure to close campuses may have influenced the

immediate choices of college presidents in March and April of 2020. College presidents also had to consider what Graif (2016) noted of the students displaced by Hurricane Katrina: that campus is sometimes the safest environment for underserved students. College leaders must also reconcile the fact that for many at-risk students, there exists a further performance gap between online and face-to-face instruction (Xu & Jaggars, 2014).

The Changed Role and Goals of Modern College Presidents

The sentiment expressed by Cotton Mather in the early 17th century that being the president of Harvard was less important and influential than his ministry (Thelin, 2019), would likely shock most anyone in modern academia. Modern college presidencies are not considered *part-time* employment. The modern college presidency has “evolved into a complexity of interrelated roles” (Fleming, 2010, p. 251). Presidents are both administrative leaders and symbolic leaders to a campus community, and when challenges or crises arise within the community, presidents frequently bear the brunt of the fallout (M. S. Harris & Ellis, 2018). In times of crisis, Birnbaum (1988) notes that college presidents are frequently the answer to the question “who’s in charge here” (p. 4), even though they may have little power or authority to avoid or manage said crisis (Birnbaum, 1989). Further adding to the complexity of the external pressures on a college, Leslie and Fretwell (1996) highlight that external sources of pressure on institutions are both independent and interconnected.

Regardless of fault, blame has been increasingly placed on college presidents over the past three decades in the form of dismissal or other involuntary turnovers, especially since 2008 (M. S. Harris & Ellis, 2018). While presidents do represent the chief administrative officer in higher education, the diverse and often competing duties that presidents are responsible for completing frequently pull them far from the campuses that they are responsible for managing

(Bowen, 2011). Furthermore, with the role of modern college presidents being so task-diverse, effective presidents must possess, and be able to call upon different leadership characteristics, depending on the situation that they find themselves in. In a study on presidential turnover, Tekniepe (2014) found that presidential turnover was influenced by political conflict with the governing board, lack of cohesion with faculty, increased pressures by outside stakeholders, and fiscal stress.

Though his remarks were delivered during a different era of higher education, Daniel Marsh, President of Boston University suggested the formula for character traits expected of a good college president. Marsh (1951) outlined that a college president must have, among other traits, “the powers of physical endurance” (p. 81), “patience,” “honesty-in word and deed” (p. 82), “singleness of purpose” (p. 83), “intellectual flexibility” (p. 83), fairness, even when they do not agree and tensions are high, “feelers on his soul” (p. 84) and a sensitivity to everything they do and say, courage, and the ability to “not take ourselves too seriously” (p. 85). While these traits remain important to modern college presidents, the leaders of today’s institutions would likely be served by adding expediency to Marsh’s blueprint. Although Marsh (1951) spoke largely to traits that would help a president persevere through the daily work to which they are subjected, the blinding speed at which the world now can access information requires modern presidents to react quickly, and publicly to crises on campus (Cole & Harper, 2017). Furthermore, these reactions are increasingly scrutinized, and missteps can frequently spell the end of a presidency (Cole & Harper, 2017). College presidents must also possess a high level of resiliency because although news, information, and other organizations are more agile, in mimicking private industry, colleges and universities have added layers of bureaucracy and administration (Friedman & Kass-Shraibman, 2017).

To examine presidential leadership, I have used the ACE's (2017) research report to consider the top five tasks that college presidents report taking most of their time and positioned them within Bolman and Deal's (2013) four frames of leadership. Understanding each of the four leadership frames and being able to apply strengths from each can deepen understanding of organizations and challenges, as well as provide leaders with a competitive advantage (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The five tasks I will examine in this study include budget and financial management, fundraising, managing a senior-level team, governing board relations, and enrollment management (ACE, 2017). Viewing the ways in which these tasks occur within the four frames helps illustrate the diverse competencies demanded of modern college presidents.

Budget and Financial Management

Of those college presidents surveyed by the ACE (2017), 65% reported that budgeting and financial management occupied a majority of their time. Non-profit (especially public) colleges must adhere to strict, external accounting processes, which can often slow the budgeting process. Transparency in financial operations, perhaps exacerbated by the rapid increase in sticker price, swelling student debt crisis in America, and growing misunderstanding or distrust of higher education spending, has become increasingly important over the past four decades (Heller, 2011; Leslie & Fretwell, 1996; Zumeta et al., 2012).

Structural Frame Assumptions. Governed by clear, transparent metrics, rationality, and efficiency, budgeting and financial management lend themselves to what Bolman and Deal (2013) describe as several of the assumptions that undergird the structural frame (p. 45). Planning, executing, and tracking financial operations of a university evidence what Bolman and Deal (2013) consider a vertically coordinated structure, with clear lines of authority and accountability based on "rules and policies, and planning and control systems" (p. 51). From a

structural frame perspective, forecasting spending and planning for eventualities have been bolstered by an increased reliance on data and streamlined by a clear flow of information (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Similarly, as budgets are numerical, structural assumptions can provide clear, followable metrics. From a structural perspective, these metrics can effectively be tied to performance evaluations and incentives (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Financial operations also provide a structural need for lateral coordination, especially as organizations grow larger and more complex (Bolman & Deal, 2013). If a budget crisis emerges at any point in time, internally or externally driven, presidents can benefit from taking immediate action by creating task forces, calling on knowledgeable officials throughout the organization to formulate a strategy, and even restructuring units or divisions to populate key positions with the best-suited employees (Bolman & Deal, 2013). In the case of institutions of higher education, complexity arises from "the unique combination of regulation by national, state, local, and institutional bodies and the professional organizations both inside and outside that guide the main production functions of higher education" (Bess & Dee, 2012, p. 888). Bess and Dee (2012) further suggest that one of the key foci of higher education leaders is to mitigate risk while responding to increased demands for accountability, which beckon for structural rules, policies, and controls (Bolman & Deal, 2013). In colleges and universities, committees and task forces are frequently assembled to combat challenges or capitalize on opportunities, which Bolman and Deal (2013) consider a structural response.

Human Resource Frame Assumptions. Although budgeting and financial management may be strengthened by several structural frame assumptions, coordinating budgets, uncovering creative solutions to problems, and ensuring the adaptiveness of a college is still a human intervention. Presidents must adhere to policies and governing structures to be fiscally

responsible, however, presidents must also understand that colleges need people and serve people (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Eddy and Kirby (2020) note that for innovation to thrive on campus in any capacity, some older structures may need to be challenged. While many of the individual challenges of college finance may be considered technical, change aversion resulting from a failure to perceive the sum of these challenges as an adaptive leadership problem may illustrate a failure of leaders to understand the true complexity of the challenges they face (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009; Randall & Coakley, 2007).

As leaders shift their thinking toward a human resource perspective of serving and supporting employees (Bolman & Deal, 2013), budgeting and financial operations become more than simply supporting the health of an institution, but the welfare of the workforce and those who benefit from the institution's health and wellbeing. Illustrating Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, fear and absence of basic safeties will prevent employees from performing to their best ability, thereby diminishing their capacity to move organizations forward. Leslie and Fretwell (1996) suggest that leaders should understand that "colleges and universities are composed of easily mobilized and vocal people" (p. 120), and that leaders must focus on "bringing these assorted voices into some kind of harmony" (p. 120). Enacting the human resource frame by empowering multiple diverse voices to influence the conversation can mitigate feelings of oppression and neglect and replace them with opportunity and feelings of loyalty (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Political Frame Assumptions. Budgeting and financial management processes are strengthened by a leader who can understand that goals of coalitions, and their diverging beliefs and values, are at the heart of their decisions (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Modern colleges are an amalgamation of coalitions, each vying for resources that would advance their objectives.

Modern college presidents are well-served by understanding that power, or as Bolman and Deal (2013) suggested being "the capacity to make things happen" (p. 190), is at the center of an organization's ability to mobilize resources and adapt when necessary. According to Leslie and Fretwell (1996), modern colleges and universities suffer from concrete examples of having to allocate scarce resources, noting that institutions were suffering from decaying physical plants, low morale (perhaps attributed to financial uncertainty), overcrowding, increasing student and family costs, and several other symptoms of financial strain on the system.

Modern college presidents report that financial challenges are among the most pressing concerns that they have for the health of their institution (ACE, 2017). Continually expected to do more with less (Heller, 2011), presidents in the modern era of education must be artful in their ability to create collaborative relationships and effectively satiate stakeholders among a scarcity of resources. To navigate doing more with less, college presidents must be able to draw upon the political frame, building coalitions and communicating effectively through modern crises (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Central to my considering 1970 to be the dawning of the crisis era in higher education were the red flags raised by Cheit (1971), which illustrated that 71% of the 41 participating institutions were experiencing financial strain or expected to experience financial strain in the future due to increased demand for resources but decreased access to resources. This, further reinforced by suggestions of transferring the financial burden of higher education attendance from the public to students and families, precipitated the decades-long shift in revenue sources (Zumeta et al., 2015) that has elevated student debt to crisis levels in the United States, fueling more demand for accountability on behalf of colleges and universities. To establish a path forward, college leaders must address the influence of "social proof" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 198), which on one hand laid the foundation for continued enrollment throughout

the majority of the crisis era evidenced by the college for all movement endorsed by President Barack Obama (https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/issues/education/higher-education), but is threatened due to mounting student debt (Zumeta et al., 2015) and the threat that alternative credentialling poses to the college degree's claim as the gold standard (Eddy & Kirby, 2020).

Also emerging in the crisis era was the onslaught of vocal detractors of college decisions coming from internal stakeholders such as faculty, students, and alumni (Thelin, 2019), whose demands to influence organizational direction evidence clear coercive power within the organizational structure (Bolman & Deal, 2013). From a political frame perspective, the mere presence of conflict is not negative but can be the basis of interest, curiosity, and movement within an organization (Bolman & Deal, 2013). A leader who can leverage conflict to increase his or her understanding of the coalitions in play, as well as their motives, and foster organizational advancement through negotiations with multiple stakeholders will be effective at managing a situation (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Symbolic Frame Assumptions. University presidential communication has become increasingly symbolic and inspirational in recent years (Thacker & Freeman, 2019), as letters and press releases about social issues, natural disasters, and political leanings have become commonplace. Speaking on behalf of the institution they represent, presidents must carefully consider the weight of their language, as well as the benefit of using unifying organizational symbols to further advance their agenda (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Notably, in 2020, several college presidents leveraged several meaningful symbols as they addressed their campus communities (and the world, via YouTube) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Folt, 2020; Fuchs, 2020; Jenkins, 2020; Rowe, 2020). Harkening on powerful institutional myths, college presidents can sometimes reach internal stakeholders on a more personal level (Bolman & Deal,

2013), and therefore communicate powerful messages from a position of unity and togetherness. Replete with ceremonial riches, colleges and universities capitalize on symbolism through fight songs, university charters, mascots, campus imagery and buildings, and myriad other unifying symbols.

The symbolic frame can provide a powerful megaphone through which leaders can transform uncertainty, ambiguity, and mundane tasks or actions into evocative experiences (Bolman & Deal, 2013). By transposing values, legacy, and feelings onto tasks, leaders can encourage collaboration (Bolman & Deal, 2013), and effectively generate union among disparate voices. The act of managing finances may not be symbolic on its own merits, a leader that can harness the power of symbolic artifacts to help others make meaning of their experience and renew a sense of unity with the organizational mission or objectives (Bess & Dee, 2012). College presidents often leverage symbolic rituals and age-old traditions to provide a stable backdrop when introducing new directions for their institutions. Darryl Pines, President of the University of Maryland unveiled his plan to invest in multiculturalism and inclusion as two pillars of the path forward, intertwined with rich descriptions of the formal investiture process, a widely utilized quotation by Robert Kennedy, and a reference to the university's athletics mascot (Pines, 2021b). In an address to the Board of Governors, University of North Carolina System President Peter Hans (2020) conjured up imagery of a grizzled 11th-hour problem solver stating that the office has "had their sleeves rolled up" (p. 2), amidst a sea of language ensuring that UNC will fulfill its mission of providing world-class education at low costs for North Carolinians. There exist myriad examples of presidents calling upon symbolic references to energize collaborators to accomplish and persevere through the epic and routine alike.

Fundraising

Bess and Dee (2012) state that "college and university presidents have as a primary role securing a firm financial future for their institutions" (p. 23). According to the ACE (2017) survey of college presidents, fundraising and endowments are going to become more important to the health of universities over the next five years. While not surprising, in an era of dwindling state and local support, this realization will only galvanize the need for high-quality university advancement professionals, and for college presidents and other ranking officials to increase their advancement efforts. Although blurred lines between chief advancement officers and university presidents can create a structural tension (Bolman & Deal, 2013), a president who can become a "boundary spanner… with diplomatic status who are artful in dealing across specialized turfs" (p. 55) can bolster the fundraising efforts of a chief development officer. Fundraising has been identified as part art, part science (Ahern, 2007; Burnett, 2006; Gabbert, 2018). To this end, presidents, as fundraisers, must call upon strengths from all leadership frames to assure goals are met, empower staff to connect their purpose to actions, and inspire others to give philanthropically.

Structural Frame Assumptions. With the decrease in public funding, even before COVID-19, philanthropic efforts of colleges and universities have become priorities for the health of the organizations, as well as creating support for key priorities and initiatives. Although raising operational funds through philanthropy is a practice as old as higher education in America, the concept of campaigns and alumni giving is still relatively young compared to higher education history in the United States (Thelin, 2019). Modern university advancement divisions are highly structured, highly professionalized components of the fundraising machine on college campuses (Skinner, 2019). Advancement professionals hold roles specific to their

skills and abilities (e.g., research skills among prospectors or advancement services, sales and communication skills among front-line fundraisers), and are structured for efficiency, which are both clear illustrations of structural frame assumptions (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Human Resource Frame Assumptions. Modern fundraisers accomplish their goals by connecting people to opportunities that fulfill their philanthropic objectives. This relationship is centered upon the tenets of the human resource frame, which include the fact that organizations exist to serve people, and that when the fit between the organization and individuals is strong, it benefits both parties (Bolman & Deal, 2013). As presidents have been considered the chief fundraiser at higher education institutions (ACE, 2017; Cook, 1997), they have a responsibility to ensure that alumni and other external constituents are invested in their goals for the institution. To uncover motivation for giving, presidents and other fundraisers must achieve a more holistic view of the relationship between a supporter and their goal. Showcased by Mary Parker Follett (1924), to establish a truly holistic understanding of motivation, we must not only understand a subject (or person) and an object, but also the relationship between the subject and object. To this end, a holistic view of motivation for philanthropic giving would include not only an alumnus's or alumnae's motivation and the institution but how the institution influenced that alumnus's or alumnae's sense of self and sense of themselves in relation to the institution. Engaging in relationships with constituents that are based not upon the president's view of the constituent or institution, but rather from a human resource perspective whereby the president empathizes and attempts to view the institution from the perspective of the constituent is a method that Follett (1924) suggests is more meaningful and complete.

Political Frame Assumptions. Whether spoken or unspoken, soliciting gifts from donors is, in a sense, a competition for their resources. Colleges, among a host of other non-profit

entities, all require fundraising to supplant revenues and ensure the delivery of their service or product. Different types of institutions look to different sources for funding (e.g., federal, state, or local government grants, corporate sponsorship, auxiliary revenues, enrollment dollars), but a common theme among higher education fundraising is soliciting an institution's alumni base. Alumni represent a coalition, with an assumed group of shared values from their experience with the institution. A powerful method by which action can be compelled is *social proof* (Bolman & Deal, 2013). In the case of alumni, not only is social proof introduced in the fundraising process, but presidents often call upon alumni groups as mini coalitions, to compete against one another in service to their college.

Fleming (2010) stated "the American college presidency has evolved into a complexity of interrelated roles" (p. 251). The diverse demands placed upon college presidents by institutional stakeholders take both time and energy to address (Fleming, 2010). As such, time may be counted among a college presidents' most precious and scarce resources. Scarcity, according to Bolman and Deal (2013) increases something's value and can motivate action. A president operating from the political frame associates power with this scarcity, and when a president is leveraged in the solicitation process, scarcity combined with the power generated by reputation and positional authority can command action.

Symbolic Frame Assumptions. Over 100 years ago, Yale University and Harvard University pioneered the concept of "mass giving" multi-year fundraising campaigns in higher education (Kimball, 2015, p. 164). These campaigns have now become a central part of the advancement strategy at institutions across the country (Cook, 1997; Kimball, 2015; McClure & Anderson, 2020). College presidents frequently are tasked with presenting a compelling case for institutional fundraising (Cook, 1997; McClure & Anderson, 2020; Nehls, 2012; Speck, 2010).

According to Cook's (1997) analogy, the college president is the "quarterback…the president is the central player in the fundraising offense and follows instructions from the head coach [chief development officer]" (p. 73). With the increase in fundraising importance in the modern era (McClure & Anderson, 2020), previously unmentioned presidential characteristics like charisma can also have a large influence on presidential success (Bastedo et al., 2014).

One of the most potent methods by which fundraising professionals succeed is by connecting philanthropy to the institution's brand, and then establishing brand communities to reinforce behavior (McAlexander et al., 2006). McAlexander et al. (2006) further noted that these communities are linked by "overlapping interest in a branded product, service, or institution" (p. 108) and that they can be nurtured by shared "rituals, traditions, and a sense of responsibility toward the brand" (p. 108). This use of tradition is illuminated by the emergence of days dedicated to institutional giving across many institutions, employing social proofing, competition, and other advancement strategies to solicit participation. Hodson (2010) considered college presidents to be "fundraiser-in-chief" (p. 40) of their institution, and routinely have a very public role in inspiring philanthropic efforts and alumni participation in giving. College presidents inspire philanthropic action by employing rich, unifying stories (Bolman & Deal, 2013), and engage in theatrical expression to evoke feelings and inspire action (Bess & Dee, 2012). As extensions of the brand (Hodson, 2010), university presidents frequently place themselves in approachable scenarios such as William & Mary President Katherine Rowe posing around prominent campus locations (https://giving.wm.edu/fundraising/one-tribe-one-day/) or Muhlenberg President Kathy Harring engaging in self-deprecating feats of athletic inability to solicit donations for Mulementum (https://www.mulementum.org/). Connecting institutional colors, drawing upon institutional themes, alluding to campus myths and heroes, and infusing

humor and passion throughout messaging are all symbolic methods by which modern university presidents connect with followers and bring the brand to life (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Management of Senior Officials

Colleges and universities are complex entities (Eddy & Kirby, 2020; Gigliotti, 2020; Leslie & Fretwell, 1996; Zumeta et al., 2012). While there is no consensus among scholars about any single thing that makes a college president effective, the scope of the presidency prevents any modern leader from controlling all aspects of the organization. To effectively manage the key elements that drive success in modern institutions, college presidents must rely on senior officials to manage the nuances and individual aspects of the operation of the organization.

Structural Frame Assumptions. Glancing at the operational structures of several universities, roles in a president's senior cabinet tend to be differentiated by process areas, one of Mintzberg's (1979) options for organizational units. Presidents call upon chief fundraising officers, chief finance officers, chief academic officers, chief information officers, chief marketing officers, chief student affairs officers, chief admission or enrollment services officers, as well as a variety of deans who are responsible for the operation of specific (diverse) units within the institutional structure.

Presidents who understand the importance of leveraging what Bolman and Deal (2013) identify as differentiation and integration of workflow, as well as place trust in the organization's structure, can benefit from efficiency in the process and generate a clear, quick understanding of potential breakdowns or threats to the workflow. Furthermore, due to the novel functions of the many units throughout the organization, universities are loosely coupled systems (Weick, 1979, 2000). By focusing on creating structural integrity in the organization, the loose coupling can

serve as a sensitizing structure (Weick, 1979), offering the president insights on emerging issues or challenges throughout the organization of which they may not have had prior awareness.

Human Resource Frame Assumptions. At its heart, the human resource frame is centered upon the concept that "organizations exist to serve human needs rather than the converse" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 117). Although structural assumptions and solutions revolve around metrics, hierarchy, and efficiency, human resource assumptions consider the fit between people and their roles and view individuals as central to the success of the greater organizational structure (Bolman & Deal, 2013). If employees are underperforming, managers should first consider if their most basic need for safety (Maslow, 1943), or their personal motivations (Herzberg et al., 1959) are being met. Restructuring, a solution in the structural frame, can serve to undermine the important interpersonal relationships that govern the leader-follower relationship from a human resource perspective (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

College presidents have always presided amidst an array of conflicts, but modern presidents do so in a period where disruption is pervasive (Friedman & Kass-Shraibman, 2017). Faculty members of institutions possess a powerful voice, external stakeholders apply immense pressure on institutions to mimic high-efficiency non-educational organizations, and students have more power than ever before to apply pressure for institutional change (Friedman & Kass-Shraibman, 2017). Herein lies one of the most powerful impossibilities that modern presidents face: keeping extraordinarily diverse groups of stakeholders happy, concurrently. The cost of ignoring any single stakeholder can be the precursor to institutional crises. While modern presidents are expected to govern decisively and efficiently, the cost of alienating any group within the shared governance model (be it the board, or the faculty) is often not worth the sacrifice of expediency (Pierce, 2014). To lead (and manage) and prevent the alienation of

employees, college presidents are served well by investing in employees, empowering employees, encouraging participation, and understanding the position and sentiments of the team that carries out the hard work of the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Political Frame Assumptions. Universities can best be described by what Mintzberg (1979) refers to as professional bureaucracies. With highly educated, powerful, autonomous faculty members possessing academic freedom as a license to self-govern (Bolman & Deal, 2013), presidents are better suited to utilize bargaining and negotiation, rather than coercion, to lead the organization. Resulting from vastly differing opinions on institutional purpose (Birnbaum, 1988) and the importance of professional duties (Fleming, 2010), modern colleges and universities feature a tenuous relationship between administrators and institutional faculty (Fleming, 2010). The COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing financial crises faced by colleges have precipitated faculty votes of no confidence in several institutions (Jesse, 2020; McKinniss, 2021; Sokol, 2020), and while these votes do not inherently have the authority to change the governance of an institution, they can frequently be followed by serious campus disruption (Tierney, 2007). Managing relationships and including faculty in decisions is a powerful way that presidents can establish power and influence by gaining trust among faculty, who in this case represent partisans: people who aim to exert power and influence from the bottom, up (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Presidents who fail to understand the coercive power of collective bargaining or other organized and mobilized groups are vulnerable to losing their ability to get things done (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Symbolic Frame Assumptions. “Universities are our greatest and most enduring social institutions” (Balderston, 1995, p. 1). Although Mintzberg’s (1979) model of organizations would consider the faculty to be the operating core of a higher education institution, the president

remains the institution's primary spokesperson (Balderston, 1995). Although this provides the opportunity to create tension in leadership, symbolism can present in the form of artful storytelling (Bolman & Deal, 2013), and be leveraged to generate momentum, unity, and foster collaboration. Bolman and Deal also stated that "metaphors make the strange familiar and the familiar strange" (p. 262). The business of higher education, to many institutional faculty members, may seem strange at best, and counterproductive at worst (Fleming, 2010). College presidents can leverage symbolism through shard language to help faculty and other constituents make meaning of challenges that their colleges face, and to coordinate a response.

Governing Board Relations

As noted by Proper et al. (2009) higher education boards are ultimately legally responsible for all aspects of an institution's health and success, however, most of their time and energy is focused on specific elements of operational success. While boards of directors or trustees ultimately have the power and responsibility to enact organizational change when needed, the day-to-day functioning of a board is more commonly to support the institution's objectives (Proper et al., 2009). Effective college presidents must meet the goals of governing boards, but also steer governing boards and leverage the unique talents and positions of trustees.

Structural Frame Assumptions. College presidents, much like CEOs in private industry, also report to someone. Although publicly traded company CEOs are culpable to a board of directors, and ultimately shareholders who demand profits, college presidents also report to a governing board (among other stakeholders). In this sense, presidents benefit from a structural understanding of where they reside in the organization, as well as the specific metrics and objectives by which they are evaluated. While the board does represent a supervisory position over the president, according to the ACE (2017) survey of college presidents, presidents

perceived their boards to be the most influential external constituents regarding advancing the institutional mission. With fundraising being perceived by presidents as a large component of a successful tenure (ACE, 2017), the fact that trustees are considered to be “presidents’ key strategic partners” (H. Porter, 2020, para. 7) should govern how the relationship between a president and their board is structured. Depending on whether a university is public or private, presidents may have to navigate not only their institutional board but also boards that take a more macro look at education either throughout a sector or an entire state (Bess & Dee, 2012). Institutional governing boards “span the boundaries between universities and their environments” (Barringer et al., 2019, p. 884) and thus represent an invaluable asset to colleges in advancing their mission. Additionally, due to their positions in other organizations, university board members also often hold influential positions within other organizations (Barringer et al., 2019), and with that the capacity to support campus initiatives financially and strategically.

Careful selection of board members for their ability to connect institutions to their environment is a hallmark strategy from a structural perspective (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) leveraged one trustee from Merck to support over 200 faculty members' research projects (Barringer et al., 2019). Other institutions leverage board members based on giving capacity, and still others on political influence (Proper, 2019). Regardless of the reason for their selection, college presidents must take direction from trustees as well as provide direction for trustees. As colleges grow and age, they increase in complexity. To combat this, Bolman and Deal (2013) suggest that “clear, well-understood goals, roles, and relationships and adequate coordination are essential for performance” (p. 44). Presidents must not only create a strategy for the institution but assist board members in understanding where they can fit into the plan.

Human Resource Frame Assumptions. Governing boards represent a unique relationship in that they hold a tremendous amount of threat to a president, but also represent an unparalleled potential for support. To capitalize on the potential for support, savvy presidents can harness the human resource leadership frame to manage their board through empowerment and increase feelings of ownership among trustees (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Using Follett's (1924) evaluation of conflict strategies, presidents should not perceive the relationships with board members as combative, compromising, or submissive, but instead integrative, where the best parts of the relationship can be combined (p. 156). Scull et al. (2020) suggested that the human resource frame (partially rooted in Follett's work) has strong implications for college leaders in that it emphasizes relationships both within and beyond the organization. As governing board members are internally focused members of the external community, collaboration with trustees can demonstrate a situation where everyone (including the institution) shares in the success. In some instances, trustees have dual relationships with the institution, being either alumni or parents of students who attend. This union of roles can include preconceived notions of the institution and must be considered as part of the complete relationship.

Political Frame Assumptions. Although board seats are carefully selected and have far-reaching implications for an institution and a president's success, the relationship between trustees and college presidents can suffer from misalignment in determining the "best direction for an institution, how to achieve that direction, the role of the president and staff, and the role of the board itself" (Proper, 2019, p. 4). Effective political leaders do not reject or dismiss conflict, but rather embrace it as a mechanism for change (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Where conflict is perceived from a structural lens as the presence of role gaps or overlap, both of which breed inefficiency, conflict can help a politically savvy leader understand the individual goals of people

or coalitions (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Board members have a significant amount of influence both inside and outside a university (Barringer et al., 2019), and thus represent powerful allies to the organization and president. According to Trower and Eckel (2019), although many see and understand the power that boards have over presidents, presidents often have expert power and institutional knowledge of higher education over their trustees, which can be wielded to influence trustee behavior. Using French and Raven's (1959) bases of positional power, presidents must understand that their legitimate power, reward power, and coercive power exist at the pleasure of the board, and by taking time to build upon expert power and referent power, there exists an opportunity for increased leverage as these types of power and authority tend to be within a president's control. Understanding this power dynamic and living within the conflict that it can sometimes cause can generate movement from a political leadership frame perspective (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

In contrast to the board selection strategy at private institutions, which is an internally driven process, trustees at public institutions are frequently appointed by politicians or coordinating boards (Barringer et al., 2019). This external influence only increases the importance of political frame leadership when the president deals with trustees, as presidents must engage with external constituents and understand political pressure being applied to them to make governing board decisions. Just as internal constituents are often vying for power to advance their initiatives, political leaders, and politically appointed constituents, too, are vying for power to advance their initiatives.

Symbolic Frame Assumptions. The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly altered the way that colleges do business and provided challenges far beyond the medical issues precipitated by the virus (Seltzer, 2020). Further confounding presidents from harnessing the symbolic frame,

is that “the pandemic has in some cases crushed college leaders’ rhetoric under the weight of reality” (Seltzer, 2020, para. 18). In addressing constituents, presidents have routinely attempted to rally campuses around shared values and imagery, and emotionally return people to a sense of belonging within their college community (Drake, 2020; Fuchs, 2020; D. Harris, 2021; Pines, 2021a; Rowe, 2020; Westmoreland, 2020). While these messages are designed to convey a sense of gravity for the situation, they also conjure feelings of hope for the future, and stability for the organization. Shared language and imagery are designed to inspire unity, and presidents symbolically position themselves in alignment with their boards, to convey increased weight for college-wide decisions (Wake Forest University, 2021). College presidents and boards, acting collaboratively, have begun to use resources like YouTube to publicly celebrate unifying events such as presidential selections (LeTourneau University, 2021; University of Texas at Austin, 2020), purposeful emergence from the pandemic, and major investments (Virginia Union University, 2021).

Enrollment Management

Enrollment is a critical concern throughout the higher education industry and an important marker that helps determine the success of a president (ACE, 2017). Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, institutions were planning on reductions in student attendance due to decreasing birth rates (Bransberger et al., 2020) and increasing tuition discounting among private colleges to remain competitive in price and fill classes (Zumeta et al., 2012), creating a revenue shortage that in most cases is not a feasible long-term plan. College presidents and other high-level administrators have increasingly needed to focus their attention on the global marketplace to source talent and ensure enrollment revenue for their institutions (Martel, 2020; Zumeta et al., 2012).

Structural Frame Assumptions. Enrollment management is a structural operational strategy, as it "involves the consolidation of various administrative functions that have the potential to affect enrollments and tuition revenues" (Kraatz et al., 2010, p 1524). With college finances being a paramount concern for modern college presidents (ACE, 2017), and increasing reliance on enrollment dollars to ensure the security of their institution (Zumeta et al., 2012) college presidents must develop strategies to create pipelines and coordinate communication. Out of necessity and nimbleness, enrollment management strategies were adopted by private colleges before they became widespread throughout public institutions, and as such private institutions tend to have expanded or comprehensive strategies (Bontrager, 2004). In Table 1, Bontrager (2004) illustrates basic, expanded, and comprehensive structures for enrollment management organizations.

Table 1

Composition of Enrollment Management Organizations

Basic	**Expanded**	**Comprehensive**
Admissions	Pre-College Programs	Institutional Research
Financial Aid	Academic Support Programs	Marketing
Orientation	Academic Advising	Community Relations
Registration & Records	Career Services	Alumni Relations
Enrollment Research		
Retention		

Although enrollment management has become more widely used as a structural strategy, college presidents must consider the skills and abilities of enrollment management leaders and match them with the right roles. By centralizing a structure along a single vertical line in the organization chart, enrollment management can, to a leader leveraging the structural frame, increase effectiveness and efficiency in reaching goals (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Human Resource Frame Assumptions. Bontrager (2004) reports that enrollment management is not an appropriate solution for every institution, nor is it simply a structural strategy. For enrollment management to succeed in the academy, special attention must be paid to the relationships that students and other constituents have with the institution, especially concerning the needs of students to achieve success (Bontrager, 2004). These relationships must be modeled at every level of the organization, and by understanding individual or group motivations for selecting the institution (either choosing to work or study at an institution) leaders operating from the human resource frame will carefully consider the complex relationship that individuals have with an organization when structuring or restructuring strategies to empower and motivate followers (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Enrollment management from a human resource frame perspective also will view the relationship with students and employees as long-term. To achieve these relationships, presidents must consistently check in with students and employees of the institution to understand if the policies or direction that the administration choose, resonate with other constituents.

Political Frame Assumptions. Although the concept of enrollment management became popular in the 1970s, it did not become central to higher education strategy until the 1990s, when strategic enrollment management became integrated with college strategic plans (Marguerite, 2012). As it is a solution founded upon scarcity of resources, the enrollment problem that institutions face beckons for leaders to understand the political frame (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). Marguerite (2012) referred to anticipatory enrollment management as a potential solution, whereby campus leaders actively source new markets and expand enrollment, with the awareness that public funding and other revenue sources will continue to dwindle in future decades. Though college finances affect everyone at an institution, making a

business case for reallocating funding can often lead to partisan pressure, which according to Bolman and Deal (2013) can coercively halt processes in an institution. The retaliation from faculty citing unilateral budget decisions in the form of faculty votes of no confidence, especially in response to the COVID-19 collegiate financial crisis, has been a hotbed of conflict in 2020 and 2021 (McKinniss, 2021). To approach enrollment management, presidents must first understand the political landscape of the institution, which provides insight into the actions and responses of various coalitions (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

This process is time and labor-intensive, and in times of crisis, presidents may not have the luxury of spending a great deal of time in committee. COVID-19's influence on higher education budgets and operations was both swift and complete, with an industry deficit exceeding $183 billion as of February 2021 (Friga, 2021), and enrollment reaching a decade-long low (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2021). Retaining students and filling classrooms has been a chief concern of presidents at colleges nationwide (Friga, 2021; Whitford, 2021). Mapping the political terrain can help a politically savvy leader understand which members of the community wield power, how to best communicate strategy and direction, and identify potential issues that may emerge from resource-generated conflict (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Symbolic Frame Assumptions. As enrollment, tuition and fees, and other student-generated revenues are becoming more important in higher education, the concept of filling a class is becoming a key benchmark by which presidents are evaluated (ACE, 2017). Although institutions rely heavily on enrollment managers and admission officers to manage this important process, some research points to the fact that charismatic presidents can positively influence enrollment numbers at some institutions (Bastedo et al., 2014). Days for admitted students,

invitations made by members of elite communities of learners to join their community of scholars, is a powerful symbolic gesture. Higher education leaders draw attention to the buildings and facilities of which they are most proud. The white-trimmed red-brick Georgian buildings at Dartmouth, the Sir Christopher Wren Building at William & Mary, and Massachusetts Hall on the grounds of Harvard, represent features of campus tours and are entwined in the ceremonies of their institutions. Students at William & Mary are invited to walk through the Wren portico at convocation and accept membership into an exclusive community and look forward each year to the reading of the royal charter, granted by King William & Queen Mary in 1693 (https://www.wm.edu/about/history/traditions/index.php). Students at Harvard engage during their first year in *Housing Day*, when they will learn which house they will belong to, a community that will last far beyond commencement (https://college.harvard.edu/life-at-harvard/student-activities/traditions). Even the sentiments that are felt by visitors envelop college and university students in a sense of pride. When President Dwight D. Eisenhower visited Dartmouth College, he remarked that it was how he always pictured a college (Hill, 1964). This sentiment was shared in Hill's (1964) *The College on the Hill*, which he proclaimed was to be written to share Dartmouth's heritage with the reader.

Summary

The college presidency, and leadership theory, have changed significantly over the past several hundred years. While college presidents are still tasked with leading institutions of higher learning, the role has become highly focused on the financial health and wellbeing of institutions, which have been significantly threatened because of the COVID-19 pandemic. By identifying the self-reported priorities of college presidents, and aligning those chief tasks with the strengths, limitations, and assumptions of Bolman and Deal's (2013) four-frame leadership theory, the

procedural role of the college presidency can be conceptualized. The uniqueness of the COVID-19 pandemic as a truly global health crisis that has altered the operations and finances of every institution in the world, simultaneously, presents an unprecedented opportunity to study leader behaviors, as well as gain insight into the reflections of leaders amidst a plethora of other pending institutional challenges that appear to be concurrently affecting American colleges and universities.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

To understand better how leaders reacted during the COVID-19 crisis and their reflection on their decision-making during the crisis requires the use of methods aligned with getting at the essence of the leaders' experience. Groenewald (2004) offers that from a phenomenological perspective, "To arrive at certainty, anything outside immediate experience must be ignored, and in this way the external world is reduced to the contents of personal consciousness" (p. 43). Although crisis leadership and the higher education presidency are both well studied, all research on COVID-19 is pioneering. Even though dissertation research is replete with studies on person-created crises like scandals and interpersonal violence (Horton, 2015; Lail, 2020; Landahl, 2015) as well as natural disasters (Alpert, 2012; Gavin, 2018), there exists a gap in the literature on leadership responses to global health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. Although no topic likely received more global interest and renown in 2020, quality research and peer review are lengthy processes, and therefore publications are limited.

The time between the institutional reactions to COVID-19 in March of 2020 and November of 2021 as institutions attempted to return to normal operations while managing variant outbreaks and lower-than-anticipated vaccination rates, involved higher education institutions scrambling to adapt and provide continuity of services to their students. Most American colleges and universities moved to remote learning in March 2020 (Miller, 2021), and the pandemic offered no precedence by which institutions could benchmark their shift. While colleges and universities found themselves learning to adapt, and defray lost revenues and massive refunds to students, pundits quickly seized the opportunity to chastise the education

industry and its leadership (Gallagher & Palmer, 2020). College presidents, representing the highest level of leadership at their institutions, were subject to the lion's share of these indictments. Though many presidents offered *reflections* about the pandemic, racial injustice, and other crises that America and its institutions faced between March 2020 and November 2021, there exists a gap in the literature examining the reflections on the hard leadership choices that college presidents made in response to the pandemic.

Research Design

According to Mays and Pope (1995), "The basic strategy to ensure rigor in qualitative research is systematic and self-conscious research design, data collection, interpretation, and communication" (p. 110). In this section, I explain the ways this study was designed to ensure quality and rigor. This study employed a hermeneutic phenomenological study, which considers and interprets the conscious understanding of the participants, to examine, from the perspectives of a diverse array of college presidents, leaders' reflections on the choices they made during the COVID-19 pandemic. This phenomenological study attempted to answer two primary research questions.

1. How did college presidents at four-year institutions of higher education in three mid-Atlantic states determine what to prioritize throughout their pandemic response?
    a. What type of information did the presidents rely on in determining their priorities?
    b. What stakeholders did the presidents solicit to obtain information and help determine campus priorities?

2. In reflecting on their decisions from March 2020–November 2021, how do the participating presidents describe the ways that their leadership approach influenced their actions?
    a. How, if so, did the college presidents studied alter their typical leadership approach and choices in the presence of a pervasive crisis?
    b. How do the college presidents studied anticipate leading during a crisis will shape their leadership in the future?

Despite the large array of literature discussing crises and higher education leadership, the concept of leading institutions through a pandemic is novel. This study focused on generating rich descriptions of the reflections of the lived experiences of the participating presidents during the pandemic to attach meaning and purpose to their choices (Finlay, 2009). This research study leveraged Bolman and Deal's (2013) four-frame approach to leadership to analyze the findings.

Ontology

Ontology is "concerned with 'what is,' with the nature of existence" (Crotty, 1998, p. 10), and more specifically, the nature of a phenomenon (Taber, 2013). Even though most people do not deny the existence of COVID-19 or the novel coronavirus, the perceptions of how to best mitigate its impact, as well as questioning which of two evils, exposure to the virus or social isolation, presents more of a danger to individuals elicit a range of responses. This topic has been politically and popularly debated, and how individuals respond to the COVID-19 pandemic has largely been tethered to their belief about their potential impact with the disease. As this is a phenomenological study, with the phenomenon being the leaders' reflections of their choices in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was important to uncover ontological preconceptions and biases that undoubtedly influence both me as the researcher and participants.

As the primary research instrument in this study, I am doubly affected by the ontology of COVID-19 as a phenomenon due to being a higher education administrator and an individual affected by the crisis. The hermeneutic phenomenological approach I applied to this study considered the conscious understanding of participants' views of the phenomenon to be inextricably linked with the existential concept of the human and social experience as offered by Heidegger (Dowling, 2005; Lopez & Willis, 2004). As social pressure, human fear and subjectivity, and political influences all played a part in the COVID-19 response plan of universities, I do not feel that Husserl's pure mental construct, whereby social and other extra-mental influences and considerations are attempted to be removed from the exploration of the phenomenon (Beyer, 2020; Dowling, 2005) paint as complete a picture of the systemic and social implications of the choices made by the participants. In the hermeneutic tradition, understanding is educative (George, 2020). As it was my objective to understand the motivations, choices, and evaluation of the COVID-19 response by college presidents, positioned within immense social and structural pressure, I elected to perform the study from this interpretive philosophy.

From a research perspective, the ontology of the research study was deeply influenced by my perception of the challenges that befell colleges and universities during the 20-month period beginning in March of 2020, as well as my understanding of the role and responsibilities of a college president, especially as viewed through Bolman and Deal's (2013) four-frame leadership approach. These beliefs served to inform the study and development of interview questions; however, they also had the potential to lead participants or detach participants from the direction they chose to take in the interviews. Another interpretive phenomenological assumption that I made in this research study is formed from scholarship by Crotty (1998), namely "all knowledge,

and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of the interaction between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (p. 42). To study leaders' reflections of a crisis like COVID-19, the hermeneutic understanding of leader responses positioned within the social context of internal and external pressures precipitated by the crisis played a significant role in developing an understanding of the phenomenon and meaning that is made from it (Lopez & Willis, 2004). The philosophical underpinning that understanding a phenomenon requires positioning within a social context guided the questions, data generation and analysis, and my understanding as the primary research instrument in the study.

Furthermore, an interpretive phenomenological perspective guided this research due to the belief and understanding that Heidegger espoused that human experience is distorted by "assumptions" that influence how people relate to the world around them (Moran, 2000, p. 197). Finally, the hermeneutic interpretive phenomenological assertion that humans are naturally questioning beings (Moran, 2000), would suggest that presidents have likely questioned their choices, their interaction with their environment, and their role in responding to the crisis at hand. It was the ontological goal to uncover these reflections and paint a rich picture of the reason behind choices made, the choices themselves, and the presidents' reflections on their effectiveness within a greater context.

I elected to use a constructivist paradigm through which to view this study, specifically because I wanted to localize the insights to the relationship between myself and the participants stemming from the research interactions and my assumptions and understanding of leader actions and motivations (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The intention of this study was not to statistically generalize the findings, but instead to cultivate a deep and rich understanding of the unique

perspectives of each of the participants, and to uncover themes that arose between their experiences as they are shared in the research process. This study was built on the premise of relativism and with the assumption that multiple realities are surrounding the nature of the phenomenon, which Guba and Lincoln (1994) noted are created by multiple mental constructs with social implications (p. 110). Furthermore, as Scotland (2012) noted, "our realities are mediated by our senses" (p. 11), and each person creates their own reality.

Epistemology

Guba and Lincoln (1994) pose that the epistemological question is "what is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known" (p. 108). The intention of my selection of a constructivist paradigm through which to conceive this study was to not only explore the first-person reflections of college presidents but to co-create knowledge through the exploration and reflection process (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111). From a constructionist paradigm, the epistemological goal of the study was to make sense of the world (Crotty, 1998), and in this case, to make sense of the president's reactions to COVID-19 as they impact higher education, specifically the president's office. From the constructionist perspective, the researcher's and participants' perceptions of the phenomenon create a reality (Crotty, 1998).

In descriptive phenomenology, the term *bracketing* describes a method by which the researcher removes subjective influences and *pauses* their judgment about a participant or topical area (Dowling, 2005; Finlay, 2009; Lopez & Willis, 2004; Moran, 2000). This focus on objective knowledge is fitting for positivistic research and descriptive phenomenology (to a point; Guba & Lincoln, 1994), yet interpretive phenomenological studies are inherently infused with researcher subjectivity and, in fact, made richer from the jointly constructed reality between participants and researchers (Dowling, 2005). To honor the impossibility of truly divorcing subjectivity from

interpretive phenomenology, I instead considered the concept of bridling while conducting this study. According to Dahlberg and Dahlberg (2004):

> Because of the characteristics of perception, the phenomenological epoché is necessary. We inevitably exist in a world, and are tied bodily and intentionally to that world. We cannot do anything about the fact that this lived being provides us with an implicit understanding that comes to play when we talk to other people in interview dialogues in order to understand a phenomenon of the world. We can do nothing but acknowledge all these facts as the foundation for our being in a world and our understanding of this world and other people. (p. 271)

Bridling, therefore, becomes a method by which researchers can track their subjectivity and still maintain focus on the phenomenon, without allowing their subjectivity to diminish the findings (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2004; Dowling, 2005). I participated in bridling primarily by maintaining a reflexive journal throughout the entirety of the study, and by participating in member checking with the participants and peer debriefing as I coded the interview transcripts. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest that knowledge is known by understanding the deeply subjective perceptions of individuals, which can be uncovered by exploring participants' first-hand experiences. Because of the deeply personal understanding that is brought into the research relationship by both researcher and participants, each can assist the other in the creation of knowledge and understanding.

Philosophical Tenets

This exploratory research study was performed in the constructivist tradition, as my central focus was to leverage the researcher-participant relationship to understand a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The process of reflecting on choices made during the COVID-19

pandemic, bolstered by the researcher-participant relationship, created a new level of understanding and meaning-making for the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), and better informed my interpretation in the study. According to Crotty (1998), from a constructivist paradigm, meaning is created, not discovered. To facilitate this creation of meaning, the dialectical interchange guided the interviews with the presidents, creating a joint meaning more robust than the singular meanings previously held by the interviewer and participant (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The hermeneutic process, in this study, was utilized to look deeper than the descriptive phenomenological context, at the motivations and implications of choices made by the participants in a greater context (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

Participants

Although I have suggested that COVID-19 has influenced the entirety of the higher education industry, I elected to narrow the participants for this study to college presidents from three mid-Atlantic states. This bounding of the study provided some insulation against varied regional responses and policy differences enacted during the pandemic. Since early in the pandemic response, COVID-19 has not only been a public health crisis but a political issue (Colvin et al., 2020; Holsten, 2020). Colleges are uniquely susceptible to state politics, and consequently, the pressures applied to college presidents in different regions were remarkably different. As college presidents represent the chief executive of a college campus, their role results in experiences that present specific challenges concerning the success of the institution from a variety of stakeholder perspectives.

I originally intended to use a maximum variation selection method to ensure as diverse a sample as possible, however, due to the low number of respondents to the initial survey who shared a willingness to participate in the follow-up interviews, I chose to interview all

participants who volunteered. Fortunately, due to happenstance, the group of presidents that I surveyed for this study were more racially and ethnically heterogeneous than the ACE (2017) survey noted higher education presidents to be. Additionally, I originally intended to include only presidents who were at least three years into their current presidency, however, one president that I interviewed transitioned into his new presidency from another presidency in the first two months of the pandemic, and his total amount of time (over 5 years) was instead considered. This ultimately proved to be a good choice for the study, as I was able to explore his crisis response from both institutions, as well as the challenges that he faced joining a new community during a mandatory remote period on campus. Instead of prioritizing interviews based on these planned strata, I began scheduling the interviews as survey responses came in.

Presidential outreach began with an invitation email (Appendix A), accompanied by an informed participant consent form (Appendix B), which the participants digitally signed and return to me. Additionally, I requested that all participants who chose to participate in the interview provide a copy of their Curriculum Vitae (CV). This helped me verify their length of tenure in their current role and provided an opportunity to ask questions about crises or events that they have experienced in their past leadership roles, and if those experiences influenced their pandemic response. I continued this outreach strategy until thematic saturation was reached. Before the semi-structured interview, I also requested that participants complete the Bolman & Deal Leadership questionnaire (Appendix D), which I have received permission to administer from Lee Bolman (Appendix E). Only one participant chose to complete the Bolman and Deal Leadership questionnaire, however, framing and reframing were discussed during the interviews, and my understanding of the four frames assisted in my coding of the interviews and web analysis. In addition to attempting to diversify participants based on school characteristics and

length of tenure, I paid close attention to demographic characteristics including race and gender of the presidents.

As reaching "inductive thematic saturation" is an important methodological element in the inductive coding of qualitative research (Saunders et al., 2017 p. 1896), a researcher must consider sample size when conducting a qualitative study. While there is no specific, agreed-upon number of participants for an interpretive phenomenological study (Vasileiou et al., 2018), Morse (1994) suggested a minimum of six participants. Creswell (1998) suggested a wider range of between five and 25 participants but maintains that saturation is the primary concern. Guest et al. (2006) affirmed that data saturation varies between topics, arguing that primary thematic saturation can occur sooner than expected when selecting participants based upon shared criteria. I interviewed seven presidents in this study, all of the presidents who volunteered to participate in the interview portion. The pool of potential participants that I reached out to exceeded 60 individuals. As the researcher, I was satisfied that saturation was achieved, as it was apparent newer presidents were not adding new information that would more appropriately answer the research questions (Guest et al., 2006).

Data Sources

Central to hermeneutic phenomenology is the concept that there are a wide variety of perceptions, therefore realities, of a single phenomenon (Hein & Austin, 2001). Although themes naturally emerged from the data generation process, in the hermeneutic tradition, thoughtfulness and reflection of my personal and professional experiences with COVID-19 were considered before the data generation process (Bynum & Varpio, 2018; Hein & Austin, 2001). I used one-on-one interviews as the primary data generation tool for this study because they provide an opportunity to observe verbal and important nonverbal responses (Ryan et al., 2009), and allow

the flexibility to dive deep as meaning is uncovered. To address credibility in a phenomenological study, Guba (1981) suggested, and Shenton (2004) agreed, that triangulation of the phenomenon with other types of data sources can illustrate alternative perspectives of the same phenomenon. To perform data triangulation, I performed a web analysis of extant communications, including published news articles (both professionally published and student newspapers); web communications and press releases; and video publications through a variety of online databases (e.g., YouTube and college websites).

Career Pathway Analysis

By requesting that the participants furnish a CV before the interview I accomplished two things. First, I was able to consider the length of tenure of the president at their current institution, whereby I was able to understand the length of time that presidents had to begin to enact their administrations' goals, as well as develop rapport or trust with the campus community and key constituents. Secondly, I was able to conduct a career pathway analysis, which provided me with additional prompts in the semi-structured interviews. I asked if the presidents had experienced other crises in leadership roles in their career and if that experience influenced their decisions as they led their campus in response to COVID-19.

Brief Pre-Interview Survey

I utilized the brief pre-interview survey (Appendix C), to inform the semi-structured interview, but also to triangulate the qualitative data generated in the interviews. By requesting that participants complete a brief survey, I not only was able to understand the self-ranked magnitude at which COVID-19 influenced their experiences as a leader, but also began to

develop a deeper understanding of how much the pandemic influenced their prioritization of the five presidential priorities as listed by the ACE (2017) survey.

Bolman & Deal Leadership Questionnaire

I intended to review the participant response to the Bolman and Deal Leadership Questionnaire (Appendix D), however, only one participant elected to fill out the questionnaire. Instead, I gained insights into the participants' leadership tendencies through coding responses and member checking throughout the interviews. These interventions used my understanding of the frames to prime the participants for deeper reflection throughout the semi-structured interviews. These prompts offered points of reflection for the participants and surfaced more about how their leadership styles informed their reflections of their leadership decisions during the pandemic.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were the primary methodology for data generation in this study. I elected to utilize semi-structured interviews to provide some standardization of the process but to also allow for rich, participant-directed dialog. As noted by Ryan et al. (2009), semi-structured interviews provide the interviewer flexibility to spontaneously dive deeper into responses provided by the participant. Kallio et al. (2016) noted semi-structured interviews are "proved to be both versatile and flexible" (p. 2955). In semi-structured interviews, the questions (Appendix F) provided prompts and structure to the conversation. However, in the constructivist spirit, when opportunities arose to uncover meaning or create meaning from any of the responses provided by the participants, I probed further to generate a new understanding based upon the lived experience of the participants and the theoretical understanding that I brought to the relationship.

I elected to use Zoom for the interviews, as this had distinct advantages for both me as the researcher and the participants, especially considering the financial advantage of using video conferencing in place of in-person interviews (M. M. Archibald et al., 2019). Although Zoom does not replace the ability of a researcher to sense through the process, synchronous video interviews provide distinct advantages in recognizing participant nonverbal communication over asynchronous methods like email (M. M. Archibald et al., 2019; Lo Iacono et al., 2016). Mirick and Wladkowski (2019) further described that synchronous digital interviewing has become more widely accepted with increased comfortability with the internet, especially in cases where the researcher and participants are physically distanced. To have the time to get through the interview prompts, the interviews lasted 60–90 minutes.

Web Content Analysis: Extant Data and Communications

Just as access to technology can threaten to elevate a crisis, it can also paint a more complete picture of the varying perspectives about a phenomenon. Analyzing content (both text and artifacts) has been used in conjunction with one-on-one interviews and other qualitative methods in myriad studies to address a variety of research questions (White & Marsh, 2006). As data generation and analysis are taking place simultaneously during many qualitative studies (J. L. Johnson et al., 2020), web analysis was used to gain additional insights into the experience of the participants, as well as a more robust understanding of feedback from internal and external stakeholders. Once participants agree to be in the study, I began sourcing the extant data from publicly available web sources. I used a template (Table 2) to track and code data retrieved from the internet.

Table 2

Table of Web Analysis Data: Extant Presidential or Other Communication

Pseudonym	Video Communication	Written Communication	External Periodical
College 1	YouTube Video: 3/20/2020 Themes or Information	Alumni Magazine Article: 5/15/21 Themes or Information	Student Newspaper Article: 4/30/20 Themes or Information
College 2	YouTube Video: 3/22/2020 Themes or Information	Alumni Magazine Article: 6/1/21 Themes or Information	Local Newspaper Article: 4/10/20 Themes or Information

To uncover possible motivating factors for the decisions made in response to COVID-19, a portion of the interview protocol invited the participants to reflect on any feedback that they received, including feedback from published sources, during the year. I added individualized prompts in interviews based on information that I was able to uncover in the web content analysis. As Andrew communicated most frequently through internal memos and emails, I was unable to access as much publicly available content that he authored during this time, which was something that we discussed in his interview. During the COVID-19 pandemic, college presidents frequently used YouTube as a line of communication to students, employees, and external constituents of their institutions (Folt, 2020; Fuchs, 2020; Jenkins, 2020; Rowe, 2020). As part of my interview protocol, I asked presidents about their feelings regarding the medium, as well as the process that went into them putting a message out, or not putting a message out, as well as exploring any additional mediums for communication that were used.

Data Collection Process

The short survey that I administered in the initial outreach to the potential participants (Appendix C) provided me with some initial information about how (if at all) the pandemic has influenced the president's institution, as well as their key presidential priorities. When a

president chose to continue with the study, I conducted a career pathway analysis on each participant's CV and administered the Bolman and Deal leadership questionnaire (Appendix D) via email. Although only one president completed the Bolman and Deal Leadership questionnaire, the four frames were considered during the interview interactions, as well as the coding and synthesis of data. After collecting these initial data, I participated in a concurrent exploration of semi-structured interviews and a web content analysis to collect data for this research study. To select participants, I created a comprehensive list of all 4-year, non-profit, degree-granting, public and private higher education institutions in three mid-Atlantic states by performing a data pull from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Using this list, I administered the email and pre-interview survey to all 60 public and private 4-year institution presidents in the three states. I reached out to the presidents as they responded to the survey and attempted to schedule interviews. As I continued to reach out to presidents, I paid careful attention to other diversity markers (e.g., gender, race). As participants agreed to join the study, I reviewed web content from the institutions.

The web content analysis and semi-structured interview in this study influenced one another, as I sought direction from the participants on sources that they found to be influential, and I used the content analysis of the web-based materials to inform the conversations with the participants. I performed a background analysis on their institution, as well as any political or social challenges already facing the institution or state. As the interviews were semi-structured, I had a common set of questions that I ask of each of the participants (Appendix F), however, insights into issues raised by news media, student news sources, and digital sources were also broached with the participants. Furthermore, I have included a cross walk table (Appendix G) to ensure that the prompts address the research questions.

I conducted one, 60–90-minute interview with each participant, during the fall of 2021. This timing provided the presidents with the opportunity to reflect on their COVID-19 response while still in near temporal proximity to the phenomenon. The design of this study, and the interview protocol, were iterative in nature, following the suggestion of Cope (2005) that ontology informs epistemology, which in turn guides the method. As I studied the perceptions of the college presidents in this study as their individual truth, no questions carried an inherent motivation or asked to sway their beliefs or reflections, but rather offered insight or alternative perceptions with the intent to deepen the understanding of the phenomenon. Supplemental perspectives that arose from the web analysis were introduced in the line of inquiry to encourage deeper analysis of specific topics or challenges on which the participants were reflecting. The web analysis was coded and tracked in a web analysis table (Table 2). This table acted as a repository for web links, downloads, and coded communications. I used an inductive coding strategy, rather than utilizing a priori codes for both web analysis and interviews.

Data Analysis

According to Armour et al. (2009), "the researcher's use of self is the primary analytic tool [in qualitative research]; reading and reflecting on the description of the lived experience of respondents is the primary analytic activity" (p. 106). While this researcher-led assessment of the participant-generated data and the web content analysis are central to the process of hermeneutic phenomenology, they also present one of the philosophy's most important challenges, a lack of objectivity (Armour et al., 2009). To ensure the quality of the study, I leveraged the markers of quality suggested by Tracy (2010), in that this study (a) was a worthy topic; (b) was rigorous; (c) was sincere; (d) was credible; (e) achieved resonance; (f) contributes significantly to the field; (g) was ethical; (h) was meaningfully coherent.

The timeliness of research on crisis leadership, especially leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic is both revolutionary and critically important to our understanding of higher education leadership, as this phenomenon will have lasting influences on the way in which colleges and universities operate. I practiced reflexivity by maintaining a reflexive journal, developed a robust and living researcher as instrument statement and reflected on biases and feelings that emerged throughout the research process.

I ensured multivocality by providing a findings section laden with unadulterated quotations from the participants, triangulated the data through an exploration of alternative sources and voices, and provided opportunities for member checking during the interview as well as during the assessment process, as well as to stem further reflection. This research will hopefully inform future studies and deliver insights for higher education leaders as crises are becoming increasingly common in the academy. I propose that this study will have significance to the research community as it provides a unique and under-researched perspective about a prolific event in the history of higher education. In addition to procedural ethical behavior like participating in the institutional review board process (Tracy, 2010), I also operated from a position of beneficence, placing the relationship as my priority in the research process. Leveraging the ontological overlap of the constructivist paradigm and the hermeneutic phenomenological philosophy provided meaningful coherence to the research study.

In addition to Tracy’s (2010) big tent criteria, I used an inductive coding procedure and peer debriefers to bridle my subjectivity. While researcher subjectivity is not inherently negative in a hermeneutic phenomenological study, the use of peer debriefers and outside readers mitigated research subjectivity that could have interfered with an appropriate understanding of the phenomenon. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that peer debriefing can help by “exploring

aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (p. 308). This type of check is an important difference to note, as interpretive phenomenology relies on subjective interpretation, but the coding and credibility of the study hinge upon appropriately assessing the reflections of the participants. To provide an additional description, I enumerated my data analysis approach for each research question, individually, in the following sections. In addition to the details offered in these following paragraphs, I also have created a cross walk table in Appendix E.

Analysis Approach for Research Question 1: How did college presidents at four-year institutions of higher education in three mid-Atlantic states determine what to prioritize throughout their pandemic response?

It is clear from the review of the literature, that college presidents are beholden to the goals of a variety of stakeholders (Doyle, 2016; Frederick et al., 2021; Friedman & Kass-Shraibman, 2017; Kerr, 2001; Sigelman et al., 1992). At times, the goals of these stakeholders can be in direct competition, as their goals may detract from the goals of other stakeholders. Several of the prompts in the interview protocol (Appendix D) encouraged reflections about the participants' experiences in evaluating different stakeholder demands, as well as the information and thoughts used to make choices during the COVID-19 response. In addition to understanding the perspective of the presidents, I used the web content analysis to gain additional insights into the language and pressures that were placed upon the presidents. The review of web sources was not to dismiss or challenge the perception of the participants but to encourage deeper reflection.

Analysis Approach for Research Question 1, Sub question A: What type of information did the presidents rely on in determining their priorities?

Leaders faced many challenges during the pandemic. For college presidents, the safety of the community, the health of the institution, and communication with constituents were made exceedingly difficult as COVID-19 and its influence were very much moving targets. Leaders were forced to adapt to changing conditions (sometimes hourly) and there was no ability to predict outcomes or success probability, therefore no ability to apply rational decision-making theories (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2015). Leaders were forced to make choices heuristically, as they needed to adapt quickly to changing situations, often with less information than they would have hoped (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2015). To address this sub-question, I probed the presidents to reflect on their sources of information, as well as the sources that they trusted to inform their COVID-19 response decisions. These responses were then coded, and each of the coded interviews was peer debriefed. These codes were placed in the larger thematic areas, and when themes and codes emerged throughout several interviews, they were synthesized and listed as major findings.

Analysis Approach for Research Question 1, Sub question B: What stakeholders did the presidents solicit to obtain information and help determine campus priorities?

Colleges and universities answer to a variety of diverse stakeholders. Stakeholders can apply pressure on organizations in different ways, and often may be conflicting with other stakeholders (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Bryson, 2018). One of the ways that COVID-19 tested leaders, is by pressuring them to weigh options that seemingly had disparate solutions. While leaders vocally prioritized human health and wellness in their decisions to move to (or remain in) remote operations (McCartney, 2020), they also had to balance this with the significant financial

stress that came from closing auxiliary enterprises and refunding students for housing and dining costs. As dissonance grew stronger and pressure mounted on presidents, solutions were less about consensus, and became political in nature, focused on selecting a path that would be at least minimally acceptable to different cohorts vying for their goals to be met (Bolman & Deal, 2013). During the interviews, I asked the participants about the voices they recall being the loudest or most powerful as they thought through their response to COVID-19. In the analysis, I explored how themes responding to this sub-question fit within the themes that explored COVID response tactics, but also paid close attention and intertwined the thematic areas that spoke about the leadership frames as well as the characteristics that participants identified as those of an effective leader.

Analysis Approach for Research Question 2: In reflecting on their decisions from March 2020–November 2021, how do the participating presidents describe the ways that their leadership approach influenced their actions?

This research question was answered by prompts that encouraged presidents to reflect on their leadership style before the pandemic, as well as during the pandemic response. I probed what changes, if any, presidents experienced in their leadership philosophy, what leadership behaviors were strengthened, and which leadership behaviors they amended. This reflective component was also strengthened by reviewing their publications and media releases (e.g., campus addresses, YouTube videos), encouraging reflections on where they were, mentally, during these communications. I also was interested in learning more about how they identify as a leader from a frame perspective, as well as what language they use to describe their leadership approach. These data were carefully coded, inductively, and peer debriefed to ensure that coding and the ensuing interpretation are defensible.

Analysis Approach for Research Question 2, Sub Question A: How, if so, did the college presidents studied alter their typical leadership approach and choices in the presence of a pervasive crisis?

This question intended to understand how crisis influences the perception of leadership behavior, as well as gain insights into what stakeholder pressures may have influenced choices. As COVID-19 presented a crisis that threatened the existence of many institutions, I was especially interested in the choices that were made to ensure the financial stability of the colleges, as well as the tradeoffs and potential areas that were threatened by those choices. This also provided the presidents with an opportunity to reflect on alternative choices, as well as what they would have meant for the institution, constituents, and external stakeholders. These questions also provided me the opportunity to dive deep into responses and engage in deeper reflections as needed. For the analysis, I leaned heavily on questions that addressed leader problem-solving cognition and strategies, frequently following up with questions about why the leaders took actions that they noted in the interview or that I was able to glean from the extant web data. These coded responses richly added to the reflections theme group, as well as informed the challenges relating to the COVID-19 theme and the COVID response theme. During peer debriefing, I was able to further differentiate these themes in response to thematic overlap that was brought to my attention.

Analysis Approach for Research Question 2, Sub Question B: How do the college presidents studied anticipate leading during a crisis will shape their leadership in the future?

As COVID-19 threatened the safety of people and institutions, I was interested in learning whether it influenced choice-making speed or efficiency. During the pandemic, institutions were not able to participate in benchmarking or reviews of how other institutions

reacted to pandemics in the past, which made all leadership decisions revolutionary and pioneering. Choices made without the ability to look to past successes and failures can sometimes lead to rash decisions or the inability to make decisions. Additionally, this question was answered by the presidents' assessments of their leadership style from a vertical or horizontal structure, as well as their ability (because of influences like shared governance) to make decisions at the speed at which they are needed to be made.

Table 3

Research Questions (RQs) and Data Sources and Analyses Methods

RQ (Sub-Question)	Sources	Analysis
1	Interview & Web Analysis	Inductive coding & peer debriefing
1 (1)	Interview	Inductive coding & peer debriefing
1 (2)	Interview	Inductive coding & peer debriefing
2	Interview & Web Analysis	Inductive coding & peer debriefing
2 (1)	Interview	Inductive coding & peer debriefing
2 (2)	Interview	Inductive coding & peer debriefing

Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions

In the following section, I will address several of the challenges to performing good research, as well as several of the choices that I made to ensure that the research questions were being answered, and that research rigor was ensured. To achieve this, I created "an account of method and data" (Mays & Pope, 1995, p. 110), and attempted to "produce a plausible and coherent explanation of the phenomenon under scrutiny" (Mays & Pope, 1995, p. 110). In addition to these considerations, I relied heavily on Creswell and Creswell's (2018) suggestions

to ensure that researcher subjectivity was accounted for (to the extent possible) and that considerations had been taken before, during data generation, and during analysis to understand variables and criteria which may have altered my understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

Delimitations

Even though statistical generalizability was not the intention of this study, I included the following delimitations to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. The goal of these delimitations was to ensure what Tracy (2010) suggests that quality research is what it is purported to be about. This study was delimited to leader responses to the COVID-19 crisis. It was further delimited to three mid-Atlantic states to allow maximizing variability between the institutions included and minimizing differences that could negatively affect the results. I elected to sample presidents of institutions that are in the same geographic region, from states that shared political leanings as marked by the electoral college votes in the 2020 election, as well as having at least 2 of 3 political administrative offices from the same political party (governor, state house, and state senate). This approach helped prevent the political leanings of the governors and legislative administrations from influencing the choices made by public higher education institutions. If a governor was more or less likely to participate in a state-wide shut-down as a result of COVID-19, the institutions would have different priorities and choices to make than if politicians were encouraging opening the state.

I had originally intended to interview presidents who had a minimum of two years of tenure in their current role prior to the COVID-19 pandemic because I wanted to speak with individuals that experienced maximum disruption from the pandemic. As a lower than estimated number of participants joined the study, I chose to include one president who was in the process

of transitioning between presidencies during the pandemic. This provided me with the opportunity to hear what a leadership transition was like during the pandemic from a person who experienced it firsthand.

Limitations

Limitations create threats to the quality of the results. To address the threat of researcher subjectivity, I participated in reflexive journaling, member checking, and peer debriefing to *bridle* throughout the data generation and coding process. Reflective honesty of the presidents presents a clear threat to the data. Whether unable to reveal the most pressing or important challenges or sources of frustration during the pandemic due to fears of limited confidentiality, or lack of reflection before the interviews, the phenomenological approach trusts that each participant holds his or her own truth about the phenomenon. While this may enrich the study in many ways, it also can pose a threat to discovery as well as to the findings and replicability of the study. Finally, a potential limitation exists in that the results of some responses have not yet been fully realized, and response to COVID-19 in the fall of 2021 was still very much a moving target. Furthermore, with the resurgences of COVID-19 and numerous variants, colleges and universities still have not weathered the entire pandemic as of Fall 2021.

Assumptions

I made several assumptions as a researcher. First, I assumed that the participants would respond to the questions fully, accurately, and honestly. Secondly, I assumed that each of the participants had a perception-altering experience with the COVID-19 pandemic and that it threatened their institutions and leadership ability as they reacted to the pandemic in some way. I also assumed that leaders had seen a response to some of their choices, even though COVID-19 still presents a persistent challenge to institutions, globally. Finally, I also assumed that the

presidents have studied or considered their leadership style, can identify tenets of their leadership style, and have had their leadership style challenged during the pandemic.

Researcher as Instrument Statement

"Phenomenologists all accept that researcher subjectivity is inevitably implicated in the research" (Finlay, 2009, p. 11). Qualitative research is interpretive research that features the researcher as the primary research instrument (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This role carries an inherent subjectivity that must be carefully considered, monitored, and controlled for to the extent possible (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To combat subjective interference that serves to complicate the perspective of the participants in reflecting on the phenomenon, phenomenologists participate in reflexive practices during the design, data generation, and data analysis phases of the study (Moran, 2000). I entered this study fully aware that as a hermeneutic phenomenological study subjectivity of both the researcher and participants guide and enrich the study. While I actively delimited the sample, I also accepted that I needed to practice reflexivity throughout the study, as threats to the research could have surfaced at any time. While I participated in the researcher as instrument exercise before conducting the study, I am fully aware that past experiences were not the only influential experiences in this study.

Influences From Past Experiences

Over the past several years, I have studied leadership in higher education as a doctoral student. This course of study has offered me the opportunity to learn about strategic planning, leadership, policy, organization and governance, and a bevy of other roles and influences on higher education leaders. While I have studied multiple perspectives for many of these, the selection of certain texts, the inclusion or exclusion of some theories or historical experiences, and the training that I have received to mitigate crises and ensure high-quality administrative

leadership have a level of subjectivity. Even the selection of Bolman and Deal's (2013) four-frame leadership approach was a direct result of the depth in which it was explained to me, and its use as one of the core texts for my course on organization and governance. While other leadership frameworks were considered and even attempted early in the research, the completeness and comfortability I have as a result of how it was taught helped me to use it to make sense of the research study.

Contextual Beliefs About the Phenomenon and Participants

I have spent over 10 years as an administrator in higher education, in a variety of offices at five different colleges of three different institutions. Each of these experiences has a great deal of influence on my perceptions of crisis management, the influences on higher education leaders, and my critique of the college presidency as a role. I have served under four college presidents, all with unique strengths and differences. I would describe two of the presidents as engaging in horizontal leadership practices, and two as hierarchical leaders. All of the presidents used symbolism frequently, all leveraged the political leadership frame; however, two were drastically more structural in their leadership approaches, and two operated from more of a human resource frame. In a crisis scenario, I believe that while the human resource frame would allow members of the community to feel heard and supported, the structural frame would provide a swifter response time, and a feeling of safety due to what Bolman and Deal (2013) describe as team members' abilities to focus on their specialized role.

The contextual belief I hold about COVID-19 representing an extinction-level event for some institutions may be premature. While even some larger state institutions experienced incredible losses of revenues and the need to refund students for many auxiliary services, the threat of COVID-19 on the survivability of the institutions varied greatly. While lost revenues

were experienced across the board, the ability of some institutions to rely on donors and other modes of support was not. In this vein, it is important to also note that I hold a belief that leadership, while always important, becomes truly pivotal during a crisis, and that the decisions that the leaders made during the pandemic will have lasting influences on their institutions as well as the field of higher education.

Threats to Discovery and Early Expectations of Findings

Although this study is not tethered to a critical lens and is built on the inductive principles of constructivism and hermeneutic phenomenology, I do hold certain expectations that I must uncover as a portion of this researcher as instrument statement. Most importantly, I have posited that COVID-19 has had a profound influence on higher education and higher education leadership. In this sentiment, I estimated that if participants respond that they were not influenced by COVID-19, or that it did not challenge them in any way, I would have had a hard time reconciling this with the literature, statistics, and my first-person understanding of the pandemic's influence on higher education operations and finance. Each participant did note that they had experienced significant challenges and hardship as a result of the pandemic, therefore this concern was unfounded. To this end, I expected that the presidents would note that this phenomenon had an immense influence on their experiences as institutional leaders and that the dialog and information that they shared will be able to provide a baseline for future scholarly research. As this is an exploratory study, the coded themes that emerged could provide researchers with themes to test in a positivistic study, with goals to further generalize their findings to the larger categories of higher education and crisis leadership.

Ethical Considerations

Although I used email and the assistance of my committee to obtain the participants, the methods by which I protect their confidentiality are numerous. I will never release the states that are in the study, and I was careful not to identify any markers that would threaten participant confidentiality. Additionally, the process was protected, as I referred to all of the participants by a pseudonym that was randomly generated by an online name generator and removed any potentially identifying language or institutional descriptions from the research report. Participants were required to sign an informed consent form (Appendix B). I cleared the interview protocol and process through the William & Mary Education Institutional Review Committee (EDIRC). I used a form to ascertain informed consent, and I handled all materials through Microsoft One-Drive, using the Microsoft Authenticator for access. Video files were saved to a password-protected personal computer and destroyed after their contents were transcribed. The interviews and all coinciding materials will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study, and the reflexive journal contains no information that could potentially reveal the identity of a participant or their institution. As the web analyzed data is in the public domain, I redacted sources to ensure confidentiality for the institution, including redacting any geographic identifiers or name identifiers for the periodicals or reports that I used.

Timeline

To complete this study, I defended the research proposal in August of 2021. This was followed by EDIRC approval in September, and the process of web content analysis began. The initial outreach to participants began in October and continued through November, and web research continued from October through December. Although I originally intended to interview 10–15 participants in total, the initial survey returned only four volunteers for full participation.

Second and third rounds of outreach between October and November yielded three additional participants. The inductive coding process began after the completion of the first interview and continued throughout the data generation component of the study. Peer debriefing took place in January, and although I intended to only debrief half of the interviews, due to the value of the process I elected to debrief all the interviews. I worked with two different peer debriefers to substantiate or challenge the codes for each of the transcribed interviews.

Summary

Hermeneutic phenomenology is uniquely positioned to achieve an educative understanding of the research questions at hand in this study, for it honors the lived experiences of the participants within the broader social construct of the COVID-19 pandemic. The use of semi-structured interviews, triangulated with extant data uncovered in a web content analysis, allowed me to paint a more complete picture of the situation, and dive more deeply into the phenomenon being studied. By bridling subjectivity and creating a conscious awareness of assumptions, the phenomenon and context achieved a purer interpretation. Finally, the use of inductive coding allowed themes to be explored and an understanding of the phenomenon cultivated.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

I have devised Chapter 4 to fulfill three individual, inextricably linked goals. The first goal is to provide a brief recount of the research methodology and purpose for applying a hermeneutic phenomenology to this study, as well as offer a brief reintroduction of Bolman and Deal's (2013) Multi-Frame Leadership Theory, which was influential in the coding process (eventually becoming one of the six major themes). Secondly, any first-person accounts provided by the participants would be less powerful without formally introducing each participant and providing relevant characteristics about them and the institutions that they lead. Finally, I discuss emergent themes and research findings from the web content analysis and interviews, supported by ample participant voice. I organized these findings into four overarching groups: (a) How prior experience and reflection informed prioritization; (b) How participants engaged and managed stakeholder demands; (c) How participants used communication and transparency; and (d) How participants framed and reframed to inform their analysis and approach throughout the evolving crisis.

Revisiting the Four Leadership Frames of Bolman and Deal

"In a given situation, one cognitive map may be more helpful than others" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 311). While leaders may have tendencies or lean toward one particular frame or another, the ability to shift their approach to a different frame based upon the unique scenario or its participants can be an effective method to achieve results. To better understand the actions and reflections of the participants in this study, I sought to position them within the four leadership frames: a mental map of sorts that Bolman and Deal (2013) suggested helps leaders

understand and navigate challenges. Though leaders may feel drawn to a particular frame, creative leaders approach the frames as lenses through which problems can be creatively viewed and solved (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

According to Bolman and Deal (2013), viewing organizations as mechanized, and focusing on intentionally structuring or restructuring organizations to maximize solution efficiency is at the heart of the structural frame. Bolman and Deal (2013) identified colleges as professional bureaucracies, a term coined by Mintzberg (1979) in defining organizations that are "democratic, disseminating its power directly to its workers (at least those who are professional)" (p. 371). In higher education, this dissemination of power exists in the concept of shared governance (Bejou & Bejou, 2016). Shared governance, is a concept discussed in an AAUP (1966) statement which describes that "the president's leadership role is supported by delegated authority from the board and faculty" (para. 22). In this same document, pertinent to executive authority that was demonstrated by many institutions during the pandemic, the AAUP (1966) further suggests that if circumstances warrant executive decision-making, that faculty should "have opportunity for further consideration and further transmittal of its views to the president or board" (para. 27).

Bejou and Bejou (2016) suggested that in the modern university shared governance instead refers to the process by which leadership decisions are shared with those who will be most affected by their outcomes or shared among constituents that can provide the most insight and expertise to inform the decision. As faculty are highly trained, and possess a significant amount of expert power, and represent the operating core of the institution, the faculty voice carries considerable weight, and leaders that choose to ignore this voice do so at their own peril. Presidents who neglect to include faculty in the decision-making process, even in times of crisis,

frequently find themselves receiving votes of no confidence (Jesse, 2020; McKinniss, 2021; Sokol, 2020), which can impede the workflow at an institution, at best, and can include removal from office or resignation, at worst. Relying singularly on presidential decision-making due to positional location at the top of the hierarchy highlights an extreme in the use of the structural frame.

The structural frame was pervasive throughout the pandemic as presidents focused on developing structures that would provide expediency and accountability when response time was the most important factor in successfully navigating the crisis. Leslie and Fretwell (1996) note that in times of crisis, increased reliance is often placed on the hierarchy of the institution, placing more authority with the president.

Though the structural frame leverages the strengths of bureaucratic structure to provide clear direction and solutions, the human resource frame resembles more closely a family, in which individuals are central to the organization's existence (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The human resource frame honors the individuals who make up a team and focuses on empowering them and improving their satisfaction. Through the human resource lens, according to Bolman and Deal (2013), leaders are transparent and supportive, providing followers with information and access to institution-wide challenges and priorities. Bringing people together and increasing collaborative efforts in solving complex problems was a strategy that emerged several times throughout the interviews, and many of the reflections that participants vocalized during the interviews were admittedly due to a lack of infusing human resource frame tenets. As noted above, the pandemic showcased high use of the structural frame by the participants.

To combat competing priorities and divergent expectations of stakeholders, the participants frequently demonstrated a political frame savviness. Many presidents noted that they

were thankful that conflicting opinions and perspectives arose among their leadership and COVID response teams and that they encouraged it as it allowed for multiple perspectives to emerge. Within the political frame, conflict and power are important tools to move an organization forward (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Additionally, since COVID-19 has (and could continue to have) a lasting draw on resources, understanding how to negotiate and allocate resources to maximize impact is best managed through the political frame (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Finally, from a political frame, the role of a president to understand a group's risk-aversion and willingness to change (Bolman & Deal, 2013) became a key component of the crisis response during COVID-19, as presidents were navigating the needs and desires of multiple (often competing) stakeholders while managing continued movement toward fulfilling the institutional mission.

"Managers who understand the significance of symbols and how to evoke spirit and soul can shape more cohesive and effective organizations" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 264). Colleges and universities are steeped in tradition. From visual symbolism (e.g., mascots, colors, buildings, medieval robes), to legends, folklore, and heroes, and through the use of shared language that unifies and evokes pride, colleges and universities are highly effective at creating a sense of membership and belonging. Symbolism is pervasive on campuses, through communications, and at the very core of individual identities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, college presidents leaned heavily on this strategy. To navigate the health crisis, several of the participants indicated that the community could only be as safe as its least-safe members. To inspire a collectivist mindset, presidents continually invoked imagery and inspired hope throughout their addresses to their campuses during the pandemic. Some told stories that exemplified the behavior that the participants were attempting to reinforce in their communities. The symbolic frame was the most

pervasive in the extant videos and letters that I was able to review before and after each participant interview.

Review of the Research Design

As COVID-19 continues to unfold and evolve, research attempting to examine reflections of college and university presidents is truly emergent. I intended to examine these reflections, considering the first-person accounts of the participants as their true reality, as well as my (as primary research instrument) bridled experiences as a higher education student and practitioner during the pandemic. To inform the semi-structured interview prompts, I leveraged a set of proposed questions, and frequently incorporated publications, press releases, YouTube videos, board reports, and statements to the community and other documents that I had access to as someone external to the campus communities of which these participants are leading.

Honoring Hein and Austin's (2001) suggestion that as perceptions vary between individuals, the reality that they live and experience also varies, I elected to employ a phenomenological research study. The goal of this study was to develop an understanding of a phenomenon, in this case, the reflections of college presidents' responses to COVID-19, to dive deeply into their decisions, the reasoning behind those decisions, the pressures applied to their decision making, and the longer-term influence of this leadership experience on their leadership practice. In selecting a non-positivistic research strategy, I also am not attempting to *statistically* generalize these results, although I posit that many of the findings are, as noted by Hammersley (2008), *theoretically* generalizable. Though certain elements of the COVID-19 pandemic are universal, this study intended to reach a depth of understanding that was individualistic and personal.

Every American college president was influenced in some way by the pandemic, however, myriad differences in their understanding of the infectious disease, personal philosophy, personal interaction with the illness, institutional characteristics, and even political affiliation presented influence both on how the participants mentally processed the pandemic and how they responded. To reach this depth of understanding, I elected to use a multi-pronged strategy, first requesting that participants fill out a brief survey (Appendix C) and to take the self-administered Bolman and Deal Leadership Instrument (Appendix D). Once participants agreed to be a part of the study, I analyzed openly accessible content from the web (published or delivered by the participants or stakeholder publications about the participants) and then participated in a 60–90-minute, semi-structured interview with each participant.

Pre-Interview Survey

The pre-interview survey (Appendix C) was sent to the president of every 4-year institution within the three Mid-Atlantic states that bounded this study. Ten of the 60 presidents surveyed responded to the initial survey, and of those 10, nine fully completed the survey. Seven noted that they would be willing to participate in the follow-up interview. Not all the presidents that participated in the interview fully completed the survey, and not all of the presidents that agreed to have a follow-up interview responded to the invitation to be interviewed. Perhaps unsurprisingly, all but one of the respondents noted that they had experienced either considerable change or complete change because of COVID-19. Notably, one of the chief casualties of the pandemic as identified by all the respondents was fundraising. All of those who responded to the survey noted that fundraising became less of a priority during their response to the pandemic. Another element of the survey that reached consensus among all participants is that students, faculty, staff, and health or medical advisors were listed as stakeholders that were *most*

influential during the pandemic. Three of the respondents also noted additional stakeholder priorities, including parents, political figures (respondents from public institutions), alumni, and external community partners. Lastly, it is worth mentioning that although gubernatorial executive actions set the parameters by which colleges had to abide during the pandemic (e.g., congregation size limitations, business requirements for masking), only two respondents noted that external political figures were "most important" during the pandemic. Both presidents, unsurprisingly, were from public institutions in their state. The aggregated survey responses are illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4

Aggregated Responses to the Initial Survey

	0-3 Years	**4-8 Years**	**More than 8 Years**		
Time served in current presidency	1	5	3		
	No Change	**Moderate Change**	**Considerable Change**	**Complete Change**	
Magnitude change experienced since March 2020	0	1	7	1	
	Budget & Financial Management	**Fundraising**	**Management of Senior Officials**	**Governing Board Relations**	**Enrollment Management**
% Respondents who ranked as *top pre-pandemic priority*	0	55.6	0	22.2	22.2
% Respondents who ranked as *top pandemic priority*	44.5	0	33.3	0	22.2
Stakeholder Groups	**Number of Presidents who Selected Group as “most influential” during pandemic response**				
Students	9				
Faculty	8				
Staff	8				
External Political Figures	2*				
Alumni	1				
External Business Partners	0				
Governing Board	5				
Health or Medical Advisors	9				

Note. * External Political figures were only identified as “most influential” by respondents from public institutions.

Web Content Analysis

The web content analysis served two important purposes in the study. First, I leveraged web data to learn about how the participants communicated with their constituents in a controlled, scripted, one-way communique. These videos and releases were measured, intentional, and leaned heavily on the symbolic frame, with numerous allusions to shared language, shared imagery, and frequently attempted to inspire hope and convey warmth and care for the community. Each president spoke about the importance of community, shared values, and a shared mission to regain celebrated components of the individual institutions. The tone of each of the one-way communiques began solemnly but transitioned to messages of hope, asserting that by acting responsibly and in the best interest of the community, the community would once again be able to enjoy beloved elements of the institution and its environment.

Most of the presidents in this study issued video messages about the status of their institutions regarding COVID-19 early in the pandemic, especially focused on planning and looking to the future. Only two of the presidents in this study continued to use their campus's YouTube video channel beyond the spring semester of 2020 to distribute public messages to the community. All of the presidents did continue to communicate via other avenues throughout the pandemic. Video messages crafted early in the pandemic tended to be focused on inspiring solidarity, speaking with deep care and concern for the institution and the wellbeing of its constituents. Participants that delivered video messages in March or April of 2020 tended to employ a tremendous amount of symbolism, both verbally as well as with visual imagery. Presidents recorded videos from their offices, intentionally flanked by mascot-laden imagery and school colors. Presidents used shared language, shared rituals, and institutional mythology throughout their addresses, and spoke with hope and inspiration about students, faculty, and staff

returning to their beloved universities. It was apparent that nearly all of these videos were created to foster unity, rather than relaying information that detailed the structural response for each institution.

With each passing phase of the pandemic, return to campus, vaccine mandates, variants, and threats to in-person learning, the nature in which presidents communicated also changed. Videos tended to be replaced by written letters and other institutional documents, and the content communicated shifted from a sole focus on empathy, togetherness, and hope (early in the pandemic), to operational responses, plans, and expectations of the community (from summer of 2020 through fall of 2021). Though imagery, hope, optimism, and symbolism were still present in the videos, guest appearances on podcasts, news broadcasts, and community addresses from August of 2020 through the fall semester of 2021, transparency with the structural aspects of the crisis response, as well as facts and expectations became the chief point that presidents conveyed. The financial and economic impact on the colleges were nonexistent in addresses in March and April of 2020, but they became featured in later messages. Each president that I interviewed confirmed that health and safety, or "duty of care" as one of the public institution presidents in the study explained, was the chief priority throughout the entirety of the pandemic, however, every participant also noted that financial impact was a secondary or tertiary concern as they began to understand that COVID would do more than simply add a week to spring break in the Spring of 2020. Individualized assessment of the extant web content listed in *Table 5*, below, is feature in the participant introduction section that follows.

Table 5

Completed Table of Web Analysis Data: Extant Presidential or Other Communication

Pseudonym	Video Communication	Written Communication	External Periodical
Alpha University (Alexis)	YouTube Video: 05/20 • Human Resource Frame • Past Experience • Decisive Action • Courage • Symbolic Frame • Hope/Optimism • Student Accommodation YouTube Video: 04/21 • Hope • Future Thinking • Symbolic Frame • Collective > Individual • Resilience		Podcast Guest: 06/20 • Past Experience • Hope/Optimism • Structural Frame • Collective > Individual • Courage • Human Resource Frame External Article: 09/21 • Structural Frame • Collective > Individual • Past Experiences • Political Frame • Resilience • Courage • Communication • Transparency

Pseudonym	Video Communication	Written Communication	External Periodical
Beta University (George)	YouTube Video: 03/21 • Inspire Hope • Voice of Reason • Planning & Strategy • Symbolic Frame • Transparency • Courage		Guest Appearance – News Broadcast: 05/20 • Human Resource Frame • Courage • Stakeholders • Symbolic Frame (Religious Symbolism) • Planning & Strategy National Periodical: 2020 • Hope/Optimism • Structural Frame • Past Experiences • Transparency • Symbolic Frame • Collective > Individual

Pseudonym	Video Communication	Written Communication	External Periodical
Gamma University (Jason)	YouTube Video: 03/20 • Symbolic Frame • Voice of Reason • Bring people together • Courage YouTube Video: 03/21 • Collective > Individual • Priorities • Inspire Hope • Symbolic Frame • Positive Outcomes • Student Accommodations	Letter to the Community: 03/20 • Priorities • Ambiguity • Decisive Action • Student Accommodation Letter to the Community: 06/20 • Decisive Action • Human Resource Frame • Student Accommodation • Priorities • Decision → Action Letter to the Community: 10/20 • Symbolic Frame • Collective > Individual • Priorities • Hope/Optimism	
Delta University (Russell)	YouTube Video: 03/20 • Priorities • Courage • Hope • Ambiguity • Decisive Action • Expert-Seeking • Collective > Individual • Structural Frame • Transparency	Written Campus Address: 08/21 • Priorities • Hope • Decisive Action • Provide Direction • Collective > Individual • Symbolic Frame • Transparency	Guest Appearance – Podcast: 05/20 • Human Resource Frame Campus Newspaper Article: 02/2021 • Symbolic Frame • Transparency • Hope/Optimism • Collective > Individual

Pseudonym	Video Communication	Written Communication	External Periodical
Epsilon University (Andrew)	Much of Andrew's communication was through campus emails and was not accessible to me. Andrew did not have any accessible YouTube or other videos that I was able to view.		
Zeta University (William)	YouTube Video: 04/20 • Symbolic Frame • Hope • Collective > Individual • Transparency • Building Others Up YouTube Video: 08/20 • Priorities • Hope • Transparency • Collective > Individual YouTube Video: 08/21 • Hope • Symbolic Frame • Human Resource Frame • Inspiring Hope		

Pseudonym	Video Communication	Written Communication	External Periodical
Eta University (Christine)	YouTube Video: 03/20 • Stakeholders • Hope • Transparency YouTube Video: 06/20 • Hope • Symbolic Frame • Structural Frame • Transparency • Bring People Together	Written Campus Address: 09/20 • Priorities • Collective > Individual • Symbolic Frame • Human Resource Frame • Courage Written Campus Address: 09/20 • Comparison to other Campuses • Courage • Hope/Optimism • Collective > Individual	

Note. Codes in all communications are recorded in order of appearance.

Participant Interviews

Although the web analysis showcased several important pieces of content to help me begin to understand the COVID-19 response from each participant, they did not provide (nor were they intended to provide) a depth of candid reflection about each president's COVID-19 leadership decisions. To achieve this, I performed 60-to-90-minute, semi-structured interviews with each participant. These interviews were guided by prompts written to answer the research questions that I introduced in Chapter 1. Although many of the presidents' responses were diplomatic, each participant did, at points in the interview, offer unfettered recounts of their experiences, complete with feelings of uncertainty, isolation, the burdens of leadership, and, in two cases, moments of being (at least momentarily) emotionally overwhelmed during reflection.

Three of the respondents noted that this was the first time that they felt they had to look back at some of the interpersonal challenges, as well as acts of heroism and unity during this health crisis. Throughout the interviews, I took opportunities to deviate from the questions when I felt that follow-up would unearth a deeper understanding for the participant or me, especially when I noted that participants hesitated or hastily concluded a response.

I also employed the techniques of summarizing, paraphrasing, and reflecting feeling and meaning as a method for member-checking during the interviews. I felt that this was effective for prompting further discourse, but also as a validation technique (Birt et al., 2016). I also was careful to probe further as to not make assumptions or allow my experience or the experience shared by other participants to influence my understanding of each president's reality. Additionally, I sent each section written about the participants to the subject of that section to provide additional feedback or corrections as they felt appropriate. None of the participants provided any feedback on the information I shared with them.

Participant Introductions

The seven participants in this research study were all presidents of 4-year institutions from three mid-Atlantic states. The presidents ranged in their years of service in their current roles from 18 months (William) to over 13 years (Christine) and have a variety of leadership backgrounds and training. William transitioned from one presidency to another during the early stages of the pandemic and was responsible for making the earliest COVID response on both campuses. He supported the presidential transition at his old institution while simultaneously leading the COVID response at his new institution. Although he was not three years into his current appointment, I elected to include him in the study as his insights on transitioning and

COVID response at two independent institutions provided an additional layer of insight from the interview portion of the study.

On the one hand, five of the presidents followed a traditional trajectory to their position and served as faculty and in academic leadership roles including academic deans, provosts, and chancellors. On the other hand, two of the presidents had administrative backgrounds. One spent time as a former president and chief student affairs officer, and the other as a vice president of student affairs and enrollment and in university advancement. Three of the presidents listed their primary roles at one point during their career as external to higher education, in a military or industry capacity. These prior experiences were highlighted by each of the participants during the interviews, as reference points or leadership training before their current role. Additionally, the participants ranged in gender and racial demographics, as I interviewed two women and five men, two of the participants were from international backgrounds, and two of the participants were African American. In all, the seven presidents that participated in the study were more racially diverse than the population of U.S. college and university presidents (ACE, 2017). In the following sections, I introduce each of the participants, as well as provide an overview of their reflections on their experience as institutional leaders during COVID-19.

Alexis

Alexis is a confident, content expert. She has been incredibly active as a scholar and teacher, as well as working in an industry outside of higher education. Her business sense and experiences working with federal and state government agencies, as well as coaching and guiding entrepreneurs and business professionals, provided her with the courage and confidence to make and stick to leadership decisions, as well as hold firm to her beliefs. Alexis provided a wealth of communication to campus and community stakeholders through external periodicals

such as Forbes and a variety of local and national business journals. This form of public communication was not a deviation from her pre-pandemic behavior. She continually wrote for and was featured by well-known, prestigious business news sources to openly share leadership strategies, as well as discuss personal experiences that she had throughout COVID-19 and in previous leadership roles as case studies.

Aligned with my experience in the interview, Alexis's communication style in recorded videos and in written press is intentional, direct, and transparent. She credits her scholarship and academic training in engineering and information management for the value she places on communication, and she believes that organizations improve when all members of the organization have access to information. In her words, "I don't want to be in a situation where our community is not able to make the best decisions because of information asymmetry." Alexis further explained that transparency allows people to be included not only in the decisions, but transparency also invites them to understand the reason for the decisions made.

Most of Alexis's communication during the pandemic was content-driven or topical, and she exhibited the structural frame in her assessment of challenges as well as the solutions that she discussed in the interview, however, she did also note the value of building people up and ensuring that individuals have the resources that they need to be successful within a structure, which draws from a human resource frame value. More than any other participant, Alexis's public persona continued to demonstrate strict adherence to her public strategy before COVID-19, and she continued to focus on areas of improving equity and diversity, championing fiscal solvency, and sharing leadership strategies and information widely. Alexis did showcase symbolic leadership as well during a video communique to the campus community in which she discussed getting vaccinated, and that getting vaccinated is each community members'

responsibility to protect other members of the community. She further noted that the tool of vaccinations is a method by which we can reach the conclusion of the pandemic and return to the elements of pre-pandemic life that we cherished and long for.

During our interview, Alexis exhibited several structural frame characteristics, especially in the way that she thinks of the functionality of systems within her institution. She focuses on creating teams filled with experts, who can provide her with information and feedback, though she understands that the institution ultimately relies on her to make decisions, and she explains that one of the chief roles of a president is to drive consensus. Alexis is no stranger to crisis, having experienced several weather-related crises in her former leadership roles, as well as significant training in crisis management, both from an emergency management perspective as well as a systems and cybersecurity perspective. Her first COVID response action was to "quickly put together a team, using the incident command structure." This interdisciplinary team became central to the success of the organization throughout the pandemic. Alexis repeatedly mentioned how the structure of the team and organizational response were important factors in how well Alpha University performed throughout the pandemic.

Similarly, from a structural frame perspective, Alexis made sure that the team contained experts in a variety of areas. "Well, they were either an expert in their field—like we had representation from—we have a very strong college of health and education, and we had a representative from the area of public health." She went on to mention that the team also had representatives from the student body, residence life, wellness (mental health), finance, as well as people that had significant knowledge of government and government funding.

Alexis also spoke about the ability to make expert-informed decisions quickly, and the ability to pivot as information changed as important elements of managing the pandemic. She

spoke at length about how, though she had experienced crises as a leader before, this pandemic did not come with a "playbook, so we were making decisions in a space where we couldn't rely on prior case studies" or what "has worked in the past." Offering, instead, that higher education leaders "just figured things out as the situation unfolded." Some of the challenges that needed to be figured out included the need for student accommodations, such as international students that were stranded in the United States, the speedy pivot to remote-only education, as well as lack of accessibility to learning that was suffered by some of the most at-risk students. During the conversation about student accommodations, Alexis exhibited multi-frame thinking as she shifted into a human resource frame, whereby she placed importance on the value of the individuals, the importance of listening to individual students, faculty, and other community members to understand how she and the organization could remove barriers and ensure that individuals had the requisite investment to achieve educational continuity, and therefore, the organizational mission.

A theme that emerged throughout the conversation with Alexis, was the importance that leaders take courageous, decisive action, even in situations marred with ambiguity, or when facing adversity. Alexis identified that vaccinations would be an important tool for the institution to regain a sense of normalcy early on, and once vaccinations became available, she decided to mandate vaccinations for everyone on campus. Although Alexis noted that a lot of people expressed concern that the institution would experience student attrition, she understood that students needed to be able to make plans in advance. By creating a pathway by which the institution could safely return to campus and understanding what she referred to as "the rhythms of academia," those students would have the ability to plan travel, housing, and a return to in-person learning in the fall of 2021. Alexis also noted that Alpha was one of the earliest

institutions to decide to mandate vaccines, a decision that made Alexis proud. Even in the face of tremendous adversity, when a cyber-attack was perpetrated in response to her vaccine mandate, Alexis noted that her tenacity and grit allowed her to keep focused on the mission and stand by her decisions. She further added that “we have made the decision that was best, and it had to be anchored in what was best for students.” This anchoring, in the interest of what is best for students, gave Alexis the strength to stand by her decision.

George

Although George held academic and administrative leadership positions in higher education, most of his career was in military leadership roles. I am only aware of one video message that George distributed to the public, in which he describes in great detail the path forward for reopening campus in late 2020. This video, aligning with George’s leadership philosophy, demonstrated the careful scenario planning and courage in taking decisive action even when surrounded by ambiguity. The video carries elements of hope, calmness, providing direction, and leverages multi-frame thinking, especially from the structural and symbolic frames. Throughout the video, George notes that due to structural successes through expertly coordinated efforts, “we figured out how to safely have students on campus, and engaged in classes, athletics, and other activities this year, following prudent health protection measures.” Immediately following this statement is an exclamation of “Go [Beta].” An article published by *Inside Higher Ed* about George’s success and leadership in a tumultuous time prior to the pandemic for Beta University corroborates George’s intentions to lead with transparency, leverage honest communication, and involve as many people as possible in his decision-making.

George was open to offer that he, nor anyone else for that matter, could have foreseen what COVID would bring to American Higher Education, however, he cited robust planning for

his institution's successful navigation of the COVID-19 pandemic. George cites his military training and leadership experience for this behavior, noting that "in the military, you tend to get involved in a number of, let's say, crisis action planning modes. And so, there's a great—in my past life or experience in the military, there's a lot of emphasis on planning." Further adding, "the reason we plan so deeply is to be able to anticipate. Anticipate what may happen and then plan for those potential scenarios." George added an increased challenge in that planning in a crisis scenario often involves making decisions with imperfect information. He noted that as a leader it is not possible to wait for perfect information or a perfect solution, but that planning must occur, instead, that considers the likelihood of scenarios playing out under careful assessment.

Unsurprisingly, George's comfort leading in a structural frame, putting the right people in the right positions, and then letting them accomplish the mission, aligns well with a military leadership philosophy (Department of the Army, 2013). George noted that while the final decisions for the campus ultimately resided with him, he leveraged the expertise of teams that he assembled to provide him with the most well-rounded, complete information that he could access. Never losing sight of the mission, George assembled teams to participate in scenario-planning, and then present him with ideas and possible outcomes to inform his decisions. George noted that "when you have an uncertain situation, you want to get a lot of people involved. Because you know you've got—we've got great talent across the university campus—use them." George further noted that people from all over campus truly wanted to get involved and that this helped them to feel a sense of ownership of the actions moving forward.

This strategy to involve many people in a process when dealing with crisis or ambiguity has permeated George's pandemic response. In addition to allowing a broad swath of the campus

community to be involved in the planning, George attributes much of the campus's success to the fact that leadership actions and decisions must be transparent and well-communicated. He credits the trust that his administration has achieved to "the fact that we involved a lot of people in the planning, and that we kept updating people (so that) they just developed some confidence that maybe the university knew what it was doing."

During the interview, George exhibited several illustrations of multi-frame leadership thinking. Upon joining the university, George noted that there were issues with the structure of the organization, and in his earliest actions he altered the structure through personnel actions to "professionalize roles and ensure that the best-qualified people were in the right positions." He further offered that once this was accomplished, he empowered those people through increased authority and autonomy. Additionally, he noted that ensuring the right people were in the right positions allowed the university's strategic planning to also come to fruition when he hired a new chief of staff that was able to "take us home on the planning process." George, however, demonstrated human resource frame leadership when discussing failed leadership transitions that he has witnessed, when leaders destroy organizations in an effort to singularly serve the bottom line. He offered, instead, that a leader's task is to "accomplish the mission, but also improve the organization." Strengthening the organization, according to George, includes "improving the people." George noted that successful leadership involves "really caring about people and being a servant leader and somebody who's in it not for themselves, but for the success of the people and the organization."

George illustrated an aptitude for political leadership, noting that when a president joins an institution it is important to "figure out who the power brokers are, so to speak…those who are influential in the organization, who appear to carry influence, and meet with them and just

listen." This understanding of organizational power and influence, as well as building coalitions with individuals who do possess political power within an organization to advance the institutional mission, is a clear exhibit of the political leadership framework. Finally, George also showcased a comfortability harnessing the symbolic frame, as he noted that higher education is riddled with "folklore," and that there are numerous traditions and ceremonies that hold value within the higher education landscape. Further exhibiting this sense of symbolic leadership, during addresses to the campus community, George is frequently heard referring to Beta University using shared community language, harnessing nicknames and symbolic imagery to convey a sense of belonging and a shared language to inspire unity. George also noted that by centralizing beliefs around a shared language and set of goals, he can inspire change, even in stoic and unchanging environments.

Jason

Jason is the leader of his state's flagship public institution. His pathway to the presidency was traditional, beginning in an academic position as a faculty member and then academic leader at several other institutions before joining Gamma University as president. He has been in his current role for over five years. Jason has been incredibly vocal throughout the pandemic, both internally at Gamma University, and externally as a business leader and partner in the state and community, as Gamma is one of the state's oldest and largest employers. Perhaps due to leading a state flagship institution, there are a variety of stakeholders that vie for Jason's attention. Jason is a member of several committees and is frequently called upon to participate in business, political, and other external (to Gamma) affairs. Jason's interview added a reflective depth to the many communications that I accessed, and he provided a more complete view of the challenges that COVID-19 presented to an institution that was focused on accommodating students, but also

continuing research at a high level, including important research to assist with managing the pandemic. Jason exhibited a high comfort level with the structural frame as he held a hierarchical understanding of his organization, and he restructured the university during a crisis to increase the efficiency of inbound and outbound information. This restructuring may have been even more important at Gamma due to the large size of the institution. He also, however, frequently demonstrated the ability to leverage multiple frames simultaneously, employing both the human resource frame in the way he freely shared information with all constituents, sourced feedback about how different members of the community were faring during different points in the pandemic, and coordinated efforts with the expressed consent to empower them to grow throughout the pandemic response, as well as the political frame as he navigated tremendous pushback and conflict among internal and external stakeholders. Jason further noted that a significant source of external pushback came from the fact that due to Gamma's size and stature, some significant implications and precedents are set when the president of Gamma University makes a choice.

Jason noted several times that the role of a higher education leader is often to drive consensus, in crises and in normal times. This need provided challenges early in the pandemic, as the thoughts of his senior leadership team varied greatly regarding the appropriate handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Jason stated that "different people (around campus) interpret the science differently, which isn't necessarily a bad thing, but it's very agonizing when trying to drive consensus." He further added that stakeholders within and outside of his community ran the gamut from believing that this should be treated like a common cold, to those who believed that everything should have been shut down immediately and remain shut down. Jason noted that to drive consensus "I always tried to take a measured approach. I listened to a lot of people, but I

always make it very clear that it is my decision.” As noted above, authority often reverts to the president in times of crisis (Leslie & Fretwell, 1996).

In a YouTube video addressing the campus community in March of 2020, Jason’s tone and language were calm, concerned, and infused with audible and visual symbolic imagery. In other public addresses, Jason is wearing business attire; however, in his initial address about the status of campus and COVID-19, he wears his mascot-adorned windbreaker, speaking in front of a credenza embellished with athletic symbols and a framed collage in Gamma’s colors, with vivid imagery of students in celebration and togetherness. Jason opens the address by highlighting his family’s well wishes for the families of Gamma community members, solemnly noting that the world has changed, and offering an expression of support for everyone who is listening. This outward expression focused on individual well-being reflects the human resource frame. Jason’s comment during his communication provided followers with a sense of connection and reflected his sincere consideration of what they were going through (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Jason transitions his address, to place ownership of the community’s health on each member of the community, urging community members to adhere to public health information and medical wisdom. Furthermore, Jason refocuses the viewer’s attention to the mission, and how he and the entire community are dedicated to looking forward and continuing to support students.

Additionally, Jason felt strongly that he must be transparent and highly communicative throughout the process. He managed multiple lines of communication, creating videos, as well as assembling a compendium of letters to the community, delivering speeches, sharing board reports, and sending messages to the alumni base. Early in the pandemic, his outreach was

sometimes daily. As the pandemic carried on, he settled into a weekly and biweekly communication strategy.

Reviewing these multiple messages before and after interviewing Jason was beneficial, as his reflections and responses in the interview were common themes in his communication with multiple constituent groups. Though tempered by the gravity of the pandemic, Jason spoke of hope, optimism, and several positive outcomes that emerged from Gamma University's COVID-19 experience. He discussed innovations that came from his campus in the public health space, he noted that state officials came together to offer financial and moral support, and he also discussed that the shift to remote learning helped to modernize course offerings, even identifying some courses in which the online modality ended up being more effective for student learning and outcomes.

Russell

Russell has been the leader of his institution, a premier HBCU in his state, for over a decade. Being the president of an HBCU added, according to Russell, an additional layer of challenges to navigating the pandemic. Russell noted that historically, many African Americans in the United States have a mistrust of medical science, resulting from being subjects of unethical experiments, specifically citing the Tuskegee syphilis experiment. This theme emerged both in the interview that I conducted and also in a news segment that I was able to listen to featuring Russell in April of 2021. Russell made remarks about how he is conscious of the fact that medicine has unethically targeted African Americans in the past, however, based upon the reading and discussions he had with medical professionals, he acted immediately when he was able to get the vaccine, and he urged the public and members of his community to do the same.

Russell's path to his presidency, like several of his peers in this study, was through academic affairs and other administrative leadership roles. Russell held academic leadership positions at several prestigious institutions before becoming president at Delta University. As well, he authored books, several scholarly articles, and has acted in an advisory capacity at the federal level. He credits the trust that has been built between himself and Delta University's board, high-ranking administrators, faculty, and students with the efforts he has put into his entire presidency, especially being open, communicative, and authentic throughout his tenure. Russell credits this intentional leadership style, practiced long before (and throughout) the crisis, for the grace and trust his community shared with him throughout the pandemic, noting that the board provided him with the autonomy to make decisions on behalf of the institution without board approval and that members of his campus community (from senior administrators to students) tend to be very forthcoming with their feelings and thoughts. This type of interaction is something that helped Russell change his mind on occasion, and to make what he believes to be the best decision that he made in the whole pandemic, which was to listen to student perspectives and hold an in-person commencement in the spring of 2021.

Russell expressed raw emotion during our conversation, especially when discussing the value of the Delta community, and how much he respects the students, faculty, staff, and others that help the institution fulfill its mission. Russell drastically changed the landscape of his cabinet meetings after the start of the pandemic in 2020, increasing the number of people involved from 15 to 60, a demonstration of how much he values the voices around the room, but also how much he wants to include people in the decision-making process. His focus on transparency, arming people with completely unfettered information, and prioritizing bringing people together were all evidence of Russell's comfort managing from the human resource

frame. These actions all helped Russell maintain the ethos of the caring Delta community, and truly helped when he had to make tough decisions during the pandemic. Russell credits boldly transparent actions, like opening up about a nearly $40 million budget deficit, for mitigating pushback on the most difficult decisions that he had to make as president during this time.

Russell surfaced another unanticipated pain point in bringing students back to campus, in that during the pandemic, campus buildings fell further into disrepair as a result of cost-saving deferred maintenance schedules. Russell discussed that his campus has several legacy buildings which Delta had been spending small amounts of money on to keep functional as capital could be raised for renovations that went largely untouched during the pandemic.

> Being dormant for 2 years, and deferred maintenance caught up with us, and then you have mold and mildew and systems that are breaking down. And so now in order to reopen the campus, you've got to get in there, and you have to figure out a way to bring that renovation forward immediately.

These physical plant challenges were coupled with social challenges that Russell also discussed, in that students were (during the pandemic) not able to be properly oriented to the community values of Delta, and therefore there were several behavioral challenges when students were eventually able to come to campus for the first time. Even the sense that legacy buildings, buildings that students had symbolic relationships with, were in such a state of disrepair, provided a sense that Russell had a fluency leading from the symbolic frame (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Andrew

Andrew began his post-collegiate career working in a Fortune 500 company outside of higher education. He commented how this experience provided him with business sense and

influenced his leadership within the academy. Also influencing Andrew's leadership is his scholarship and academic leadership roles. Andrew has published articles about shared governance and other higher education leadership philosophies and appreciates leveraging experts to inform his decision-making process, including members of the faculty. Andrew's slow and considered approach to reflecting conveyed self-awareness that allowed for a critique of his leadership style during the pandemic, even though his institution is still thriving with steady enrollments and what he referred to as "reasonable financial stability, considering campus adjustments" due to the pandemic. Andrew also openly shared challenges concerning the role, noting that college presidents own several "awful" tasks. It should be noted that Andrew candidly mentioned, during the interview, that we may be conversing on a "bad week," noting that he was recovering from an illness, and was feeling particularly negative about the job. Andrew also was one of three presidents that noted that being a college leader during the pandemic was very different than being a leader during normal times. He mentioned that COVID years, as a president, could count for two, three, or even more years during normal times, and included "It's a terrible job, you know, I wouldn't have said that maybe 2 years ago…I always felt that the rewards outweighed the negatives, but boy." The weight of responsibility for presidential leaders during the pandemic was great.

Unlike many of his peers, Andrew did not create public YouTube content to address the campus community. Members of his faculty and senior leadership did create videos that were laden with several of the themes discussed throughout the interview with Andrew, however, his social media absence was something that he mentioned when discussing self-identified shortcomings in his COVID-19 response. Andrew noted, during the interview, that if he had the opportunity to redo his approach to COVID again, he would have been more visible to the

community, noting that he retreated into his introversion. He grappled with the fact that having the president visible in a time of social distancing could be taken in a variety of ways, however, in reflecting on his being in the community, he stated that he should have been walking around campus and visiting with people more often, rather than staying in his office and communicating with emails and written messaging. Most of Andrew's messages were made directly to community members and therefore unobtainable to me as someone outside the community; nothing was on public media.

Andrew spoke with humility about his leadership philosophy, noting that he appreciates the fact that his team is full of opinionated people, adding that "I always used to feel like when we finished a meeting that we had definitely had a chance to get everything out on the table." This leveraging of two-way communication helped Andrew access as many varied opinions as possible, which he then was able to distill down to leadership action. The comfort that Andrew felt amidst conflict was evidence of his ability to lead from the political frame (Bolman & Deal, 2013). While Andrew prioritized the health and safety of the community in his decision-making, he simultaneously was aware of the financial impact that COVID was having on Epsilon University. He spoke about the reliance on tuition and revenues associated with a residential education, and how this played a role in institutional decisions. Andrew noted that "there were a couple of points where I was accused of, I mean, I remember there was a faculty member who told me I value the bottom line more than I valued human life." This viewpoint illustrates one of the challenges brought on by COVID-19, as the fiduciary responsibility of a president as a steward of an institution sometimes competes with a stakeholder's analysis of the situation.

Andrew also spoke openly about the success of reopening sooner than many of the other institutions in his region. Andrew noted that he received incredibly positive feedback from the

students, who spoke openly about their excitement of returning to in-person learning quickly and how they noted to Andrew that their friends were all having “the University of Phoenix experience.” This pejorative comment showcased Andrew’s understanding of the value that students placed as stakeholders on the campus experience. The return to campus was an area in which Andrew was sometimes placed squarely between stakeholders with competing priorities, faculty and students, however, Andrew was incredibly forthcoming when he spoke about the duration of this crisis as being overwhelming as a leader. He shared that he has managed through crises before, including acute but “horrible” crises like the deaths of students, but noted that the sheer pervasiveness and “duration of this is throwing [everyone] for a loop.”

Andrew’s comments demonstrated a clear propensity toward the structural frame. Even in times when most of the other participants reframed to the human resource or symbolic frames, such as in consensus building, Andrew considered the greatest contributor to success to be “a well-understood vision or plan for the school and have everybody understand what it is we’re trying to do.” Though Andrew did not discuss the method by which he obtains this vision, he spoke matter-of-factly throughout several points about the structural flow of information, the adherence to communicating pointed goals, explicitly, and the desire to have “people to be generally rowing in the same direction.”

William

William was the only president that I interviewed who had been a president at a prior institution. He left his presidency at his former institution and transitioned to Zeta in May of 2020, and although he was technically out of bounds for the initial criteria for this study, I elected to interview him as his perspective regarding leading in COVID spanned two different organizations, and even though he was not at the same institution, he met the criteria of time of

being a president in years prior to the start of the pandemic. I was also interested in learning more about his process of exiting an institution and joining a new institution during the pandemic. William's path to his presidencies was through student affairs and enrollment management leadership roles at other institutions. One of the keys to Zeta University's success throughout the pandemic, according to William, is the institution's reliance and maintaining a shared governance model. William believes that top-down directives are not viable methods for solving wicked problems, and the fact that he leaned into the culture of Zeta during the crisis was necessary for managing the crisis and protecting the spirit of the institution. William further expanded his approach to shared governance beyond its traditional use (i.e., involving faculty in decision-making) to include students. He argued that students should have the opportunity to inform decisions, as they should have ownership of their education.

Throughout the pandemic, William spent a considerable amount of time addressing the Zeta population, as well as keeping internal and external constituencies informed through live and recorded town hall meetings, addresses to the community, as well as through external media outlets, such as local collaborative videos with the mayor's office of his city and local media interviews. Zeta University, an HBCU in a major metropolitan area, is focused on community. According to William, the campus is a family, and his leadership is modeled on the principle that problems are solved inductively, as he "never walks into a room and thinks this is what we are going to do. [He] challenges them to bring their expertise to the situation," as to understand problems from different perspectives. William's leadership style has several human resource frame hallmarks, however, in his public addresses, he leverages the power of the symbolic frame, often centering his message around shared language and shared traditions. Williams's first response to the COVID-19 pandemic, along with every other participant in this study, was

structural. He assembled a team based upon their expertise and then relied on the team to help inform and inductively make the best decision. Finally, joining with other leaders (including his city's mayor, higher education leaders, and coalitions that he helped create during his leadership), William leverages the political frame in his crisis response.

William discussed that Zeta, for many of its students, "is a safe haven. [Students] don't have the technology that we have here on campus. They may not live in conditions that lend themselves to studying for college and being successful with the rigors of higher education." William noted that these thoughts weighed particularly heavily on him and reinforced the importance of getting students back to campus as quickly as safely possible. This sense of care for the student population was a guiding principle for many of the decisions that William made during this and in previous leadership roles, most recently as president of another HBCU, and was evidence of his ability to view the crisis from a human resource frame (Bolman & Deal, 2013). William continually noted that the people were a priority and that the institution had its identity and success because of the people. This centering assisted William with fulfilling one of the most significant crisis leadership roles, providing direction and making decisions. These difficult decisions, according to William's reflections, were sometimes not the right choices, but as long as they were made in service to the mission, with integrity and transparency, were still important to make. William also noted that presidents who were careless or disregarded the shared governance model did not receive a "lifeline" when they ran into trouble. Presidents that included the community in decision-making were frequently given grace, even when everyone was feeling overwhelmed by the pandemic and the challenges that it brought to higher education.

Christine

Christine, with over 13 years in her current role, had the longest tenure of any president that I interviewed for this study at the same institution. She showcased a deep emotional appreciation for members of Eta University's community, even welling up when recalling the herculean efforts and acts of heroism that those around her participated in to keep the campus running. She was able to articulate several reflections of her experiences as a leader during the pandemic and provided a day-to-day recount of her mindset as the pandemic unfolded and the earliest decisions were made. Christine's pathway to her presidency was through student affairs leadership positions, enrollment management, and university advancement. These positions provided her with a holistic understanding of higher education administration, and although Christine clearly stated that her first priority was the health and safety of the campus population, she provided an incredibly well-rounded explanation of the many stakeholders and priorities that a college president must consider when making decisions, which were evidence of her ability to recognize human capital issues from a human resource frame.

Christine's COVID-19 response was multi-framed. Her initial response was to seek expertise from the most qualified individuals, but then to structurally respond by creating a team that would inform her and collaborate within the group and with outside experts to inform decisions. She also recognized structural challenges within the greater community when it came to vaccine administration and the overburdened health network. She was able to provide campus resources and expertise to increase productivity and get more shots in arms quickly. Christine's response relied heavily on the human resource frame, as her words and actions throughout the crisis response were very people-centric. She not only accounted for the feelings of the campus community during the initial ambiguity but also created campaigns on campus, in concert with

the board, to recognize and personally thank the people that helped Eta University through the crisis.

Christine also clearly demonstrated the value of the symbolic frame, discussing that she developed a "rally cry" for the institution going through the pandemic. This rallying cry helped to hold people together, provide a reminder that unity was necessary to come through the crisis, and Christine noted that people continually went back to it throughout the length of the pandemic. Christine's symbolic rallying cry was founded upon giving grace, giving comfort, and embracing the opportunity to learn. Christine believed that this leadership opportunity, this learning opportunity, would have a profound impact on how she viewed herself as a leader and as a person. She also believed that by maintaining the humanity of the institution, focusing on the people, everyone could grow and become better from the experience.

Summary of Profiles

The following table provides an overview of the key demographics of the participants. This information includes the pseudonyms used for the presidents interviewed and for their institutions. The career paths of the individuals are given, including the length of time they have been in their current position. Finally, gender and race/ethnicity is provided.

Table 6

Participant Pseudonyms and Background Information

Pseudonym	Years in Current Role	Demographics	Path to Presidency
Alexis (Alpha University)	3.5	Female, Hispanic, International Origin	Faculty; Provost & Chief Academic Officer; Concurrent Industry Experience
George (Beta University)	4	Male, White (Non-Hispanic)	Military Leadership; Dean & Chief Academic Officer
Jason (Gamma University)	5	Male, White, International Origin	Faculty; Provost; Concurrent External Industry Leadership and Partnerships
Russell (Delta University)	> 10	Male, African American (Non-Hispanic)	Faculty; Associate Provost; Chancellor
Andrew (Epsilon University)	5	Male, White (Non-Hispanic)	Industry; Faculty; Vice President of Academic Affairs
William (Zeta University)	1.5	Male, African American (Non-Hispanic)	Military; VP Student Affairs & Enrollment Management; President (4 years at former institution)
Christine (Eta University)	> 10	Female, White (Non-Hispanic)	Student Affairs Leadership; Enrollment Management Leadership; Advancement

Institutional Characteristics

As this crisis was a global pandemic, I was interested in obtaining a diverse sample of institutions, as infectious diseases have an increased ability to spread quickly through high population centers. The Carnegie classifications for institutions of higher education that I highlighted in this study included Research 1 (R1) institutions (with very high research activity); Research 2 (R2) institutions (with high research activity); and classifications based upon degrees granted (e.g., doctoral, master’s, baccalaureate) and geographic location of campus (e.g., urban,

suburban, rural). Happenstance delivered a diverse sampling of 4-year institutions, with one large R1 institution, one R2 institution, three masters institutions, and two baccalaureate institutions according to the most recent Carnegie classifications. The presidents represented four private and three public institutions. Geographically, the institutions were also dispersed throughout the three states bounding this study, and three of the schools were in large urban centers, one institution was in a large suburban locality, two in fringe suburban localities, and one in a distant rural location. Student population also varied among the institutions, with one institution a large state institution with over 20,000 students, one institution had between 5,000 and 9,999 students, three had between 1,000 and 4,999 students, and two had under 1,000 students. Additionally, two of the institutions are HBCUs. All of the institutions offered residential living on campus and had students living both on and off-campus during the period between March 2020 and November 2021. For individualized institutional characteristics please see Table 7.

Table 7

Institutional Characteristics

Pseudonym (University)	Institution Characteristics
Alexis (Alpha University)	Private, Urban, Masters Colleges & Universities, 1000-4999 Students
George (Beta University)	Private, Suburban/Rural, Masters Colleges & Universities, 1,000-4,999 Students
Jason (Gamma University)	Public, Suburban, Doctoral Universities: Very High Research Activity (R1), Over 20,000 Students
Russell (Delta University)	Public, Urban, Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity (R2), 5,000-9,999 Students (Historically Black)
Andrew (Epsilon University)	Private, Rural, Baccalaureate (Arts & Sciences), Under 1,000 Students
William (Zeta University)	Public, Urban, Masters Colleges and Universities, 1,000-4,999 Students (HBCU)
Christine (Eta University)	Private, Suburban/Rural, Baccalaureate, Under 1,000 Students

Emergent Theme Groups

Several reoccurring patterns began to emerge when coding the interviews, which I then placed within six thematic groups (Appendix H). The first group, *reflections*, encompasses broad codes illustrating when the participants were discussing their thoughts about the pandemic, specifically regarding their relationship with those thoughts, or remembrances of their thoughts or thought processes as they were going through the pandemic as a leader. The second group, *challenges resulting from COVID*, specifically referenced problems that arose from the pandemic, though more concrete than self-reflective. The third thematic group, *COVID response tactics*, deals with participant responses that identify specific actions that they took in response to the pandemic. Fourth, *four frames and multi-frame approach* contains examples of a single Bolman and Deal (2013) frame (structural, human resources, political, or symbolic), or multiple

frame approach to a problem or scenario. Fifth and sixth, *role of a president* and *behaviors of a successful leader* respectively, both show examples of the primary tasks of a president in their role, and the overarching leadership approaches and tendencies that create positive leader-follower interactions or exemplify leadership characteristics that improve organizations. These themes were then grouped and began to inform the larger narrative in the study. As certain patterns emerged universally during the interviews and were supported by the extant web analysis, they became the findings that I present in the following section.

Research Findings

Themes and findings began to coalesce after only a few interviews. Some of these themes were present in all of the interviews, as well as the video and written communication that were reviewed for the web content analysis. It is important to note that presidential reflections on past experiences informed how presidents prioritized their COVID-19 response, and reflections on choices during the early phases of the pandemic informed decisions that the presidents made as the pandemic evolved. Presidents in the study universally discussed the role that various (sometimes competing) stakeholders played in their decision-making, both informing by informing decisions, as well as responding to decisions. Next, each president reflected on the value and importance of communication, including what they did well, and sometimes, what they might have done more effectively. The participants considered communication to be an essential skill, but also a method to convey both information and feelings to the campus community and beyond. Finally, there were clear examples of framing and reframing to understand or meet the various problems that the presidents faced during their pandemic response. It should also be noted that every president surveyed felt an important pull to have students return to campus and considered that experience central to their community ethos.

There are four main findings from this research. The first is that presidents relied heavily on reflections of past experiences and reflections of their early COVID-19 response strategies to inform their crisis response as the pandemic evolved. The second was select stakeholders played an important role both in informing the presidents' crisis responses and in assisting with the dissemination of information and supporting the path forward. The third was that communication and transparency were effective tools for engaging internal and external stakeholders and that as information and transparency increased, presidents felt more support from their constituents. The fourth was that although each president's crisis response started with a structural frame assessment and response, each of the presidents noted successful outcomes when engaging in multi-frame thinking at different points during their pandemic response.

Finding 1: Reflection and Experience Informed Prioritization and Response

One of the central goals of the semi-structured interviews was to engage in meaningful reflection about their experiences and response to COVID-19 as college presidents. Throughout the interviews, participants reflected on their feelings, elements of the pandemic that increased their stress or anxiety, moments where they witnessed the best of humanity. Several of the quick responses that the participants provided demonstrated a moral or value-laden understanding of the world around them. I probed more deeply when presidents responded with comments which could be interpreted in different ways, such as when several of the participants stated that focusing on health and safety was "the right thing to do." As a central objective of this study was to understand each participant's personal *why* regarding their COVID-19 choices, I challenged them to reflect more deeply. Through this probing, I was able to uncover a variety of responses, all generally pointing to the fact that the presidents had either learned what to prioritize or how to

respond because of case studies that they had read, or personal experiences leading through similar, but different, crises in the past.

For example, George challenged the people that he brought into his crisis response team to participate in scenario planning. He knew that he could not predict (with certainty) the course of the pandemic, and scenario planning to forecast multiple eventualities was central to his military training. Alexis' foci on courage and transparent communication came from leading during weather-related crises where action needed to be taken quickly and from her scholarly training which depicted the numerous challenges that would be caused by *information asymmetry*. Russell understood challenges that would arise due to the complex relationship that African Americans have with modern medicine because of his connection to the community and his historical knowledge of unethical and atrocious behavior where "Black men were used as guinea pigs" in historical medical studies.

Jason specifically highlighted that in one of his past roles he had to make drastic budgetary cuts as a result of losing a government contract and that this informed his financial awareness and response as Gamma University was facing several hundreds of millions of dollars in operating budget dollars. He noted that from experience he learned that cutting certain elements of the campus was much harder to recover from and took much longer to recover from.

> The portion you cut says a lot [about] your values and your priorities. I always made sure to do the least amount of harm to academic programs, those are the hardest to bring back. And so, you know that one of my experiences was [to] cut administrative efforts in other areas, you know you can always rebound there.

Jason also noted that based on his experience he felt the need to act compelled choices, as he noted that “an imperfect decision is better than no decision at all.” These two factors, or hopeful avoidance of these two factors, motivated Jason’s choices at several points during the pandemic.

Christine has enjoyed a long and productive tenure in her current role, and this played a role in her COVID-19 response. Not only had Christine had the ability to build a significant level of trust and social capital on campus, which afforded her flexibility and autonomy to make choices for the institution, she also had a comfort with the institution’s culture and its strengths. When the community hospital was overwhelmed during the vaccine administration phase of the pandemic, her knowledge of her campus, her personal strengths, and the strengths of those in her community could help solve a problem and expedite this important health service.

Jason and Alexis also spoke in-depth about how their academic training informed the way that they viewed problems, identified potential solutions, and developed and implemented crisis response plans throughout the pandemic. Interestingly, both Jason and Alexis shared an engineering background, which was different than any of the other participants. Jason noted that his academic training helped him where other presidents struggled:

> By nature and training I’m an engineer and a systems person, and I actually think that has served me very well. Right from the beginning, I interpreted this and I approached it as a very complex problem that has many possible outcomes. There's many inputs, you know many stakeholders, and obviously you need to come up with the best solutions at any given time, but under great uncertainty. That's the thing, many people are actually bothered by this, when the outcomes are not known precisely or you can’t predict them with some certainty, and that was the nature of this business continues to be.

Dealing with ambiguity was a central issue that each of the presidents faced during the pandemic. Not only did the presidents identify that a lack of clear direction presented a threat to the institution, but that despite this ambiguity, followers relied on them to provide clarity amidst the chaos. Jason and Alexis noted that feeling comfortable with this ambiguity was a strength that they learned throughout their training.

Past academic training influenced the thinking and actions of the participants. For example, Alexis reflected that her academic training and scholarship are at the center of her leadership strategy. She noted several times that her academic training in engineering and information security provided her with an understanding of the various challenges in a crisis. She credits her disaster management background and experience as both an academic and an administrator through several weather-related crises in the past with her success in responding to the pandemic. In addition to her scholarship, she also has taken considerable opportunities to achieve advanced training in disaster management from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which, according to her, proved to be an important element of her response to COVID-19.

Calmness and Patience are Learned Behaviors That Help When Driving Consensus. The pandemic, a global crisis, presented both immediate and long-term challenges to institutions. These challenges, concurrently happening, were both fast and slow. At moments, information and decisions were arriving and being made and communicated hourly. Russell noted that the campus could sometimes "get a communique at nine o'clock in the morning, saying one thing, but because you have no control over the virus, they can get another communique at 4 o'clock saying something different." At other times, presidents were forced to manage the dull and persistent pain and prolonged lack of normalcy. Visibly frustrated and seemingly perplexed,

Andrew noted, “who would have ever guessed that this crisis might go on 18 months?” As recommended by Kahneman (2011), there is a value to thinking quickly and jumping to conclusions when it saves time or the scenario has a high likeliness to be correct, however, “jumping to conclusions is risky when the situation is unfamiliar, the stakes are high, and there is no time to collect more information” (p. 79). Engaging in *slower* thinking was something that the presidents all reported that they intentionally participated in, to the best of their abilities, and several noted that previous crisis experiences had shown them the value of this action.

Whether stated explicitly or demonstrated throughout the conversations with every participant, driving consensus is a chief responsibility of a leader. Several of the participants discussed that much of their successful execution of this responsibility was their understanding that listening, calmness, and thinking rationally are all behaviors of a good crisis leader. Andrew’s leadership practice was informed by his learned viewpoint that “nothing’s ever as good or as bad as might seem.” He attributed the trust that he had built with his board, as well as with his senior leadership on campus, to this centrist philosophy, and credited this philosophy for his ability to “find middle ground” among divergent stakeholders.

Alexis noted that she is intentional in drawing in multiple perspectives and managing the process, but she expects that once a decision is reached, action will be carried out without exception. William noted that calmness is a chief responsibility of a college president. He places importance on “reassuring the campus community that we were going to thrive, regardless of this situation,” adding that modern crises are intensified by the overwhelming presence of information and the 24-hour news cycle. Christine also discussed the importance of leaders maintaining calmness to be effective, but also to maintain a vision beyond the crisis at hand. Other campus leaders challenged her when she asserted that the campus should continue to focus

on the strategic plan, noting that there is value in maintaining forward momentum and giving people a sense that there will be an end to the crisis, and that Eta University will persevere. This refusal to panic, along with Christine's commitment to honor the lived experience of the people she works alongside not only reinforced trust from her board and senior officials, but also allowed her to maintain civility and camaraderie in spaces with diverging perspectives.

Jason noted that he addressed the crisis quickly and was among the first institutions in his state to take the actions of bringing students back from abroad and sending students home from campus. Although he stated that he experienced "enormous pushback from everybody," as a result of those decisions, he did so as a result of taking a "measured approach." He discussed the challenge brought forth by the spectrum of opinions:

> This pandemic, different people interpret the signs differently, which isn't necessarily a bad thing. It's a very agonizing thing trying to drive consensus out of those situations because some people think decisions are too extreme, and that [COVID-19 is] like the flu. And somebody else would say no, this is terrible, let's make sure we shut everything down from the first day.

Ultimately, Jason decided to move students off-campus. He further clarified that no one person can make a decision like that, but once a decision was reached, it was his decision. He noted that he participated in several of the committees, even when he could not provide an expert opinion, but as a person who could help drive consensus even when the situation is highly complex. Jason also added that in times when people remain at odds with decisions, "to be completely honest, that means you haven't really spent the time to bring them along or to hear each other." Keeping calm in the heat of uncertainty was, for Jason, a behavior that he learned and honed throughout several of his past leadership experiences.

Leadership Responses Evolved Through Lessons Learned During the Pandemic. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the participants in this study discussed not only how their previous experiences informed their leadership choices during the pandemic, but also how their reflections on their successes or failures during the pandemic have also informed their pandemic response and anticipated crisis response strategy in the future. William noted that during the pandemic leaders felt as if they were "building the plane while we were flying it." The inability to benchmark or consider precedence, coupled with the perceived need to provide direction or guidance to constituents created a variety of learning opportunities for the participants of the study. To combat the inability to benchmark previous crisis solutions, each president studied participated in expert-seeking behavior. These actions quickly returned positive results in the early stages of the pandemic and then were continually reinforced throughout the ensuing stages of the pandemic. Though participants noted that they were solely responsible for making decisions, they relied on the often-imperfect information and expertise of epidemiologists, health agencies, and scientific publications about infectious diseases to help triangulate information on which they were making decisions. The participants reflected on how feelings of loss and fear gripped the communities early in the pandemic, and that they saw their role to help provide hope and direction throughout their subsequent pandemic communications. Christine noted that the single largest thing that she learned was the value of communicating hope:

> Hope was the biggest thing. While we were going through it—it's so funny because it just seemed natural that I get emotional, today, thinking about it—but, at the time, there was nothing emotional about that. It was more, it was about helping people see where we're going. And see that we're going to be fine. We're going to get through this.

This sentiment was shared, in their own ways by each of the participants in the study. Hope was not originally something that the presidents would have defined as central to their leadership practice, but as William noted, “it became one of the most important elements of what we [campus leaders] did.” The leaders in this study demonstrated that their responses evolved with the pandemic, as did their understanding of what the campus and their followers needed from them at different stages in the crisis.

Changing Perceptions of the Presidency and Higher Education. The college presidency has always been a demanding job, which was exacerbated during the pandemic. George described the personal and professional fatigue he felt as president stating, “There's just a lot of things that weigh down on you as college president, with all the dynamics happening in society, the political, social, economic, racial landscape that you know I mean a university campus is.” The weight of presidential leadership during COVID-19 was highlighted in Andrew’s profile, in which he reflected that prior to the crisis, dealing with a student’s death was one of his greatest leadership challenges. He noted that the requirements of leading during the pandemic were much more taxing, noting “somebody asked me how many years I’ve been President, and I said, ‘does COVID count less, or does it count twice? Maybe three times… it at least it counts double.” These comments by George and Andrew imply that there is an increased complexity to the traditional chief executive role, as students and the social pressures that they experience, are central elements of presidential leadership expectations.

Another essential component of presidential leadership is acting as the campus’s chief administrative officer. In this role, operational decisions, replete with varied stakeholders, become important for the continuity of the educational mission of a college or university. Participant discussions from this perspective were often centered on three specific choices during

the pandemic. First, the decisions to bring students back from international experiences and send the students home in March of 2020 were made either unilaterally based on a president's prior crisis planning experience, as in the case of George, or in collaboration with a small, centralized pre-existing structure like the university cabinet and executives.

Ultimately, as identified by Jason, Russell, Alexis, George, and Christine, ownership of the tough decisions fell squarely on the president. Leslie and Fretwell (1996) noted that in times of crisis the "shift in overall initiative and strategic decision making [shifted] to the central administration" (pp. 64-65). With an increased pressure to make quick decisions, the second operational challenge that presidents faced, the transition to fully remote learning, emerged quickly thereafter. This task was, according to both Russell and Jason, "unimaginable." Often in the span of one to three weeks, entire campuses were shifted remotely. Each of the presidents in this study credited the successes of their campus's transitions to online learning and implementing vaccine mandates to the employees and students who carried out and lived the transition. Russell further added that this decision was actually easier than most that would follow, due to the fact that mandates were influential and that everyone was experiencing uncertainty at the same time.

The decisions to follow would present an even greater challenge for the executives. The decision of whether to incorporate a campus vaccine mandate and the decision on when the institutions would appropriately return to in-person learning and living quickly became the most hotly contested issues both within their individual campus communities, as well as in the states and nation in which the institutions were housed. The shift to remote learning at primarily residential colleges was swift and jarring, however, participants shared that some of the change was overdue in higher education, and Jason specifically noted that at Gamma University, up to

20% of the courses, moving forward, should be taught in a remote format. Most of the changes that the presidents believe will outlive the pandemic are those students desire or those made due to financial constraints. During the pandemic, many of the leaders centered their major and minor crisis actions around the experience of students, which almost universally was a refocusing on mission alignment.

Although stress, anxiety, and feelings that are typically viewed as negative abounded in the reflections and conversations with the presidents about leading through COVID-19, another theme emerged among nearly all of the participants, which was optimism about the future of higher education. Just as the leaders shared that problems in higher education are becoming more frequent and severe, they also noted that colleges, college leaders, and stakeholders have demonstrated an ability to change that was thought to be impossible in academe. Each participant shared sentiments that aligned with and were supported by Christine's closing statement in the interview:

> We [now] know we can respond [to crisis] much faster. We've been criticized for decades—centuries! [Higher education] was believed to be one of the slowest moving organizations, and no, we are not. We can do it. We can respond. We can be creative. We can do things that we never imagined would be possible. Things that might have taken two years to chart out, we did in a week. So I hope that confidence to let go, or where people have fear, let go of that fear [to] be open [to change]. And realize that that we can do it, and we can do it quickly when needed. And in very new and different ways. I think that's the biggest thing that I hope we take with us.

Christine's reflection on higher education's ability to be nimble provides hope that institutions will be willing to evaluate practices and choose to evolve (even when no crisis is present). This

openness to change may be especially important as higher education currently faces several impending challenges that will test its ability to be nimble and responsive to internal and external pressures.

Specifically speaking about their role in 2020, the college presidents were in the position of navigating a pandemic, an elevated call to social justice and accountability, among other more localized threats and issues that were specific to their unique institutions. Alexis offered that “it's not for the faint of heart. I really feel that, as a university president, you really need to feel a vocation. It's a calling, and I never imagined that before [the pandemic].” Although this evaluation of the role was not shared explicitly by other participants in the study, Andrew closed his interview with the following candid remark about his assessment of the changing role of a college president, “Oh, my gosh I don't know. It's a terrible job, I wouldn't have said that—I wouldn't have said that maybe, 2 years ago, 3 years ago.” The changing role of college presidents and the ongoing re-envisioning of higher education as a sector will likely be unpleasant and upending for many presidents. Those who are prepared to take up the mantle of leadership will likely have a profound impact on their institution’s ability to change, and, in turn, higher education as an industry.

Finding 2: Engaging Stakeholders is Essential to Crisis Decision-Making

The complex role of a college or university president is replete with stakeholders who are vying for attention, often with the ability to apply financial, reputational, or political pressure to lobby for their goals. The presidents that I interviewed in this study spoke highly of the stakeholders with whom they engaged, offering that they often provided a significant level of support for presidential decisions. These stakeholders were influential throughout the decision-making process, sometimes raising helpful concerns or challenging suggestions and plans. In a

crisis, as in normal times, stakeholders present support and threat to an institution and its leadership. Presidents that were interviewed in this study noted how on several occasions that the conflicting elements of support and challenge, while not always creating an easy pathway, do provide more robust input to make better decisions in the longer term.

COVID Response Teams or Task Forces. As COVID-19 presented an unprecedented leadership challenge, presidents described creating a unit or special team to solely focus on COVID-19 and its campus influence as an important and necessary action. Aside from the decision to recall students who were studying abroad early in the pandemic, the creation of a task force was the first step in mitigating the many challenges that the disease did and would pose to their institutions. COVID task forces appeared to be crafted from a template at many institutions for good reason. As noted by George, "a university campus is—you know it's like a small city." This context involves a college community in which members live, work, eat, worship, and recreate together. As such, all of these important elements of campus life needed to be reflected in the makeup of the teams. Similarly, COVID posed a significant and persistent threat to the college's finances, therefore chief financial officers were also involved in the operation. The inclusion of faculty members who were experts in epidemiology as well as mental or physical health also were invited to weigh in on task force planning.

These teams were appointed directly by the presidents in the study, and as such, presidents also noted that they included people that they trusted and relied heavily upon for the injection of facts and thoughtful opinions, but also to disseminate information to the broader community and to support decisions, even when they may have personally disagreed with them. Although many participants noted that there was sometimes significant overlap between the task force and the senior administration, the goal of the COVID task forces were to treat COVID as a

temporary and singular component that had a wider influence on the campus and longer-term health of the organization. Presidents discussed that COVID-focused teams met as needed, and each of the participants also noted that these groups met more frequently in the early stages of the pandemic or possibly around waves of increases in infection rates, at decision points, or to respond to variants that threatened the institution's extant COVID-19 response.

The Governing Board. Price (2018) suggested that the role of a college or university board is twofold. First, the board provides strategic leadership and fulfills a fiduciary role to the institution, and second, the board provides oversite for the president (Price, 2018). In this sense, many of the participants noted that they received executive authority from the board to make and execute decisions without board approval, which coincides with suggestions about increased presidential authority during times of crisis (Leslie & Fretwell, 1996). Although presidents, like Christine and William, noted that they had heard horror stories of board micromanagement throughout the pandemic, the participants of the study spoke warmly about the support and guidance that they received from their boards. Each president noted that they practiced transparency and open communication with the board, specifically the board leadership, and each of the presidents in the study noted that the board verbalized, or demonstrated through action, a trust in the presidents and college administrations. COVID-19 increased the amount of interaction between the participants in this study and their boards, specifically altering their relationship and traditional decision-making processes, centralizing power both at the university and within the governing board and changing the method by which some presidents communicated with the board.

Jason noted that the board of Gamma University was not focused on the day-to-day decision-making, however, they were available for Jason to consult with sometimes daily. Jason

noted that as a college president he wanted to make sure that the board was supportive of "decisions like shutting down the campus or making the decision to bring students back and then deciding to clamp back again or refund certain tuition and fees," adding that the board was the body responsible for approving said fees in the first place. Jason further noted that the board of Gamma represented a powerful ally in that they also were influential in the community outside of the institution itself. He specifically noted that the trust that was built because of the transparency of his leadership style when communicating with the board was one of the reasons why the relationship that he enjoyed was so supportive.

Russell also leveraged the board of directors in an advisory capacity and added that the Delta board members appropriately challenged some of his plans and strategies. "We took a plan to the [board] and the board, in essence, told me to go back and rethink this because there was no way we could reopen at one-third capacity." Later in the interview, when prompted to further discuss his relationship with the board, Russel added that he is

> Glad that [the board] pushed back a little on some of our earlier plans because they would not have worked. They would not have worked had we gone forward and tried to reopen in the fall of 2020 and in the spring of 2021, it would have been a disaster.

The pushback that Russell received was not universal, and he noted that during the pandemic the board of Delta,

> Passed a resolution delegating to me complete authority to make decisions quickly at the institution without having to consult the entire board. All that I needed to do was to inform the chair of the board. And then make that decision because we are moving so rapidly in this climate… So that was an enormous vote of support of confidence in my decision-making ability.

This support provided Russell with a feeling that throughout the pandemic he and the board of Delta grew in trust and understanding for one another and created a new understanding of how their relationship could be beneficial to the institution.

Likewise, even though the actions on reopening differed, Andrew reported that he and his board shared alignment regarding one of the most important decisions that he made during the pandemic, which was to bring students back to campus as quickly as possible. Andrew stated that the relationship he enjoys with his board was a high point in the pandemic response for him, noting that the board has "been very supportive of what I've been trying to do from a leadership standpoint, in general, so that didn't surprise me much. It really was great to feel like they were in our corner and had our back." Andrew also stated that the board was quick to recognize and compliment the staff, who were doing the equivalent of two or three full-time jobs.

In addition to the improved relationship with the board that was noted by Russell and Andrew in the last section, Alexis added that her engagement with the board was elevated to increased dialog and collaboration with the board chair, specifically. She shared that throughout the pandemic, as authority was centered on the president at Alpha University, so too was authority centered on the board itself. Alexis noted that she has a strong relationship with the board chair and that since the beginning of the pandemic they have met for an hour and a half every week. These meetings offer Alexis the ability to inform the board chairperson of campus challenges and successes, which the chair then distributes to the greater board as needed. Alexis also altered her standard communication style to include the board. "When I was issuing communications to faculty, staff, and students, I also included the trustees so that they are informed and they're not experiencing unnecessary anxiety about how the university is navigating through these difficult and unpredictable times."

Although the board is responsible for oversight of the president, and for the strategic priorities and long-term success of a college, the crisis provided several of the presidents with a more informal relationship with the board. As trustees understood that the presidents needed increased authority to enact policy and make decisions on a day-to-day basis, several of them reevaluated their supervisory roles and instead provided consultancy for the presidents. Furthermore, even when presidents noted that they experienced increased communication with board members, it was directly with the board chair, and the presidents reported that the relationship was highly supportive and collaborative.

George also maintained operational decisions for the university but felt that this was important because it was his "responsibility to own them." His board relationship during the pandemic was strengthened by a wealth of two-way communication. George noted that the board helped ensure that the operational decisions were well thought out and offered insights as fiduciaries to Beta University. "They'd ask me a lot of questions and say, 'have you thought about this, have you thought about that.' But I never got influenced to say you have to go down this path for a decision." George sought out feedback and council from the board, which reinforces his desire to leverage experts and as many people as possible in decisions and planning.

Christine agreed that the foundation of a good relationship between a board and a president revolved around trust and communication. At Eta University, Christine has enjoyed over a decade of building that trust before the pandemic disrupted American higher education. Russell, Jason, and Alexis also noted that the time they had spent at the institution before the pandemic was instrumental in their ability to build trust and a strong relationship with the board. Andrew and George specifically noted that their boards had grown to trust them through

engaging with them in setting and carrying out campus strategic priorities before the crisis unfolded. William spoke about the challenges of joining a community in the presence of an extant crisis, as he had the dual obligation of learning the culture and making decisions that would influence people within the organization, simultaneously. Christine noted that her tenure at Eta helped develop a relationship where both she and they were contributing their strengths to the strategic process. Christine noted that the board was incredibly supportive but did not over-involve themselves in the operational decision-making. The board requested the addresses of many of the staff members of Eta University as they wanted to send personal thank you letters to recognize the dedication and commitment that was required during this crisis, an action that inspired Christine to well up during our conversation. Finally, Christine noted that the strength of the relationship between her and the board allowed her to focus on the people of the institution, which was incredibly important.

Senior Administrators. Senior administrators were central to the COVID-19 response for the presidents in this study, providing the presidents with information from their designated divisions and also serving on COVID-19 task forces. Not only did the senior administrators receive the most praise from all of the presidents, but presidents noted more often than any other group that senior administrators helped the presidents understand the crisis from multiple perspectives, challenged the presidents to think more deeply and reflectively when creating a course of action, and assisted in carrying out the actions in the wider community. Of the senior staff at Epsilon, Andrew noted:

> There's 10 of us all together and like said I really appreciate them. They have such a broad range of viewpoints. When we finish a meeting, I hardly ever feel like we haven't heard all of all the different options or all the different alternatives. It was great to have

> that that that range [among] us. At same time, it's a pretty cohesive group. Once we make a decision, even if it's not everybody's decision, they all they all get behind it and there isn't squabbling or backstabbing or anything like that.

This team approach was a sentiment that was nearly mirrored by Alexis, George, and Christine, and was perhaps aided by the length of tenure and time working together with their leadership cabinet before the crisis. Presidents in this study routinely reported that their senior staff was instrumental on COVID-19 task forces, working groups, and in helping the presidents develop cohesion in the community at all stages of the pandemic response.

Faculty. In an example shared by Bolman and Deal (2013), higher education most closely resembles a professional bureaucracy, with an operating core comprised of a cadre of trained professional faculty members. A highly trained and savvy group of skilled laborers in this scenario, according to Mintzberg (1979) develops an expectation for autonomy and authority within the operating structure. In normal operations, this is visible throughout higher education through academic freedom in curricular endeavors and in scholarship. In times of crisis, the operating core envisions this authority through the concept of shared governance, in which faculty members expect that a president will not make institutional choices unilaterally (AAUP, 1966). Faculty members were considered or involved by the presidents in all but one case reported throughout the interviews. Interestingly, Andrew, who had previously authored a journal article on the importance of shared governance that I reviewed and commented on within the interview, mentioned tensions in working with the faculty on campus.

Specifically, Andrew discussed two points of tension involving faculty at Epsilon. The first mention occurred when he was discussing the financial problems that COVID-19 was presenting, and that one (among several) of the reasons why he was pressing for a quick return to

campus was that he did not want to see sweeping furloughs, layoffs, and program closures. These, to Andrew, would have had a significant negative influence on the organization in the long term. Andrew noted that in pressing for this return to campus, he was accused by a faculty member of "caring about the bottom line more than human life." Yet, in Andrew's mind, the opposite was true in his decision-making as he was concerned about the ability of the college to retain faculty.

A second time that Andrew noted pressure from faculty was in discussions of whether to implement a vaccine mandate. During a cabinet meeting, Andrew was presented with the opinion of his chief academic officer that students should be required to be vaccinated, but that faculty and staff should not. It was presented to him that if a mandate were to be enacted, the faculty would resist it. Andrew took this opportunity to stop the meeting and ask which faculty, and the provost was able to provide only four names. This moment was powerful for Andrew, who recognized that he was not facing a large mass of faculty who would dissent, but well under 5% of Epsilon's faculty. The heightened role of faculty voice can skew or elevate the voice of a minority of the group.

The other presidents did not speak at length about faculty interactions, supportive or challenging; however, all of the participants did offer thanks and accolades for the faculty as they were essential and even heroic in their transitioning to remote learning. Several participants also noted that faculty truly went beyond expectations in service to student learning, often working far beyond what is normally expected of them. Presidents like Christine and Russell even petitioned their boards to provide acknowledgments for the response provided by faculty and staff, recognition of the sacrifices that were made and dedication to their institutions and students. Both Christine and Russell also shared impassioned remarks about the faculty of their

institution, Russell even going as far as comparing his faculty at Delta to other institutions that he has worked at, several of which are the most elite institutions in the nation, stating passionately, “Our faculty are the best. Our faculty here at [Delta], they are truly the best.”

Students. Although mission and vision statements vary, sometimes greatly, all colleges and universities exist to educate students. According to Marshall (2018), students represent the most apparent stakeholders at a college or university and certainly are among the most invested in outcomes. Students have a powerful and unique position in the higher education structure. According to Russell, students suffered immensely throughout the pandemic. His students were suffering from all that they lost due to COVID-19, but they were also suffering from a political landscape that had inspired division across the country. He recounted a powerful instance that helped remind him of perspective when he held a meeting with student government leadership concerning hosting the 2021 commencement virtually.

> The purpose of the meeting was to announce, to them, that I had made a decision that we were going to do a virtual commencement in May of 2021. And, as I am setting the context for this they realize where I’m going, and I tell you, I’ve never seen that kind of emotion out of students before. It was a complete breakdown. I mean, the wailing, the crying, the hurt. I had to close my camera because I just—it just tore my heart apart. To listen to the students talk about how much has been taken away from them. And it seems like—Mr. President, you're going down a path where you're trying to take one last thing from us. And this is really what has kept us sane for the last year or so. Knowing that, at least, you know, we could come back to the place where we love so much and get our degree in person. So, this was a Friday, and I just said to the students, “I haven't made my mind up yet, and I will let you know on Monday.” And I got off the call with them, and

> then called up my Vice President of Student Affairs, and I said, “I'm sorry we are having commencement.” They said, “well, Russell”—I said, “We are having commencement.”

Students had a tremendous amount of influence on one of the “toughest decisions” that Russell claims he had to make during the pandemic, and he further noted that it turned out to be the best decision that he made throughout his entire pandemic response. The choice to host modified, in-person commencement ceremonies at the request of the student government representatives provided, according to Russell, an important opportunity for the board, the faculty, the staff, and the students to “exhale.” This choice felt like a victory amidst several waves of disappointment and hardship and provided Russell the ability to honor the importance of student voice, but also return to the mission of Delta.

Gamma University was the largest institution represented by the presidents in this study. As a doctoral institution with very high research activity and a large international student population, Jason noted that diversity among the students influenced his pandemic response. Not only did the institutional commitment to scholarship need to continue and the campus (and surrounding community) need to provide housing and other essential services to students, but the campus also was involved in public health research that was helping to advance the national response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Jason also noted that the Gamma graduate students and faculty were also participating in essential social justice research, which became increasingly important during the pandemic as systemic racism and the gap between those with means and access and those without grew significantly during this period. The decision to offer accommodations to students and ensure the continuity of important research is something that Jason considered to be a positive outcome of the pandemic. Not only did the campus learn how to manage through the health crisis with each wave, but it was effective in not only maintaining

but increasing research by 10–15%. Jason also noted that the shift to online modalities was more effective in certain instances and that while the campus will not shift to 100% remote operations in the future, some scenarios beckon for this flexibility. Jason predicts that in up to 20% of the courses "we've discovered that this modality was better for their [students] learning. They can advance asynchronously through the learning. They can do it at their convenience. Fast forward, slow down if they need to review for an exam." This focus on customizing learning and the academic experience to advance and honor student preferences demonstrated a clear focus on students as important stakeholders to Gamma University.

Andrew also was making decisions considering the student experience as a top priority. He knew that students wanted to get back to in-person learning and socialization, and they were open about this with Andrew. He recalled meeting with student government leaders early in the course of the pandemic and them letting him know that their top priority was to come back to campus and reaffirming that they would do whatever was possible to achieve that goal. Andrew also noted that after students had rejoined campus, there were some isolated instances of community spread, traced back to single events, however, the return to campus "couldn't have gone better from a student standpoint. We had really excellent cooperation with COVID precautions." Andrew also felt a source of pride in the decision as he heard students "referring to their friends who were at places like [large public universities]. What the students said is, 'I have a friend there, he's having the University of Phoenix experience." To Andrew, students demonstrated a clear preference for the residential experience in choosing to attend Epsilon, and this statement reaffirmed what he believed the students desired. Even though it was anecdotal, it resonated with Andrew, and he elected to share it as a guiding element in his decision-making process in the interview. Andrew also considered the student perspective when he was

considering vaccine mandates. When faculty applied pressure to have a student vaccine mandate, but not a faculty and staff mandate, Andrew halted a meeting to remind every senior-level administrator that if there was to be any mandate it would be a "one-size-fits-all" response.

Both Alexis and George discussed the fact that their student populations were supportive and incredibly understanding throughout the pandemic, and they attributed this to the transparency and intentional messaging that the students received, as well as the maturity and dedication of the students. Christine noted that one whole working group was dedicated to the student experience and that the amount of messaging that went out to students increased during the pandemic. Christine also noted that she was aware that the pandemic response encompassed a hierarchy of needs, and that students (along with everyone else) needed to feel safe before higher-level thinking would even be possible. This guided a large amount of the messaging that Christine distributed during the pandemic response.

William dedicated additional services to students, as he identified early in the pandemic that not only did his students perform better in an in-person environment, but for many of the students, Zeta was a haven. William also identified how focusing on students as stakeholders could stave off a symptom of COVID-19 that would have a much more lasting impact on scholarship and advancing the body of knowledge.

> [Some students] don't have the technology that we have here on campus. They may not live in conditions that lend themselves to studying for college and being successful with the rigors of higher education. They didn't have transportation to get back and forth. For those students that were dealing with those things and the students who also needed some additional wraparound support services when they no longer could walk into a facility and get academic coaching—because, again, that was all gone. Or when they were away

> and didn't have access to broadband and technology and those things, those were factors that weighed heavily on me. Because I saw it as we run the risk of losing a generation of scholars through this pandemic, and we can ill afford to do that.

William also provided student voices and student stories in our interaction. Like Russell, William was focused on listening to the students as stakeholders, and truly hearing what this experience was like from their lived experience. He recalled:

> I got an email from a young lady, and we had involved students in our entire process throughout, right, we had focus groups and all of these things via zoom and wanted to hear from the students at town hall meetings. I had an incoming freshman email me and she said, Mr. President, my goal is to come to Zeta, and I've always wanted to come to Zeta, but I want to be on campus for the fall. She said, I graduated high school from my bedroom, I don't want to start college from my bedroom… So I could hear in many of my students, that there was no progression for them because they have been in this bubble—this unhealthy bubble for a year or so.

This, along with the fact that William noted that the one resounding commentary that he heard from students throughout the whole pandemic was a strong desire to return to campus, influenced his leadership choices and the way that he communicated with everyone.

Finding 3: Communication was an Evolving, Intentional Crisis-Response Strategy

As demonstrated in the first two findings, communication remained a priority throughout the pandemic for each of the participants. Every president noted that their need to have important and relevant information communicated to them helped them prioritize and form a campus response. Similarly, each president explicitly noted that they felt that being transparent and providing an abundance of timely information was a key to their success in navigating the crisis.

The process of obtaining publicly available communications authored by or reported on the participants helped underscore the perceived value that the participants placed on communicating with the audience's perspective in mind. In reviewing presidential communiques, videos, and articles on how the presidents reacted during the crisis, it was evident that the presidents' messaging strategies changed to fit the goal of each communique. George, Christine, Russell, Jason, and William each corroborated this and provided additional insight that they considered what the people they were communicating with were emotionally able to receive at that point in time, and what they *needed* to hear.

Presidents leveraged communal language and attempted to engage with their audience in the manner that they believed would be most effective. Without exception, presidents leveraged the symbolic frame during each address to the campus population, as if it were a necessary component of presidential communication. Videos and written communications that were addressed to students and alumni always opened and closed with symbolism, frequently in immediate proximity to statements that plead for unity, collectivist action, or humane behavior. Symbols included wearing school colors or athletic apparel, speaking from iconic campus buildings or offices, and sometimes walking the campus, which several presidents admitted to leaning on to inspire a sense of nostalgia.

This understanding of the importance that the participants placed on the receiver of their message was apparent both when communicating decisions that they had control over, and decisions over which they had no control or authority. George, Russell, William, and Christine all specifically identified how difficult the pandemic was on a variety of people, further adding that they tempered their communication at several points to honor their perception of what their constituents were experiencing. Russell spoke clearly about the confluence of what his

constituents were experiencing at the personal, social, and global level, and noted that this weighed heavily on the choices he made, but also on how he engaged with others. Christine developed a rallying cry for her institution and has leaned on it at every stage of the pandemic. This cry is centrally focused on being empathetic to one another, and kind to oneself. This rallying cry guides the way in which Christine communicates with internal and external constituents, and even when she is delivering information, she considers the emotions that the receivers are feeling and provides space for that element.

Although some decisions were made by or influenced by external actors (i.e., governors imposing restrictions on businesses and educational entities), several of the most challenging decisions were made devoid of external mandates but infused with stakeholder opinions. Presidents chose to enlist a variety of stakeholder voices when making decisions like vaccine mandates, the return to campus, and how institutions would continue to manage the evolving pandemic. While decisions had to be made quickly early in the pandemic to ensure safety, each president noted that they expanded their immediate network as the pandemic evolved. George noted that it was important for leaders to "involve as many people as possible in the process" when dealing with problems that have no easy answer. This extended involvement was to engage and create a holistic perspective, but also to begin to disseminate information and espouse ownership of decisions to as wide a variety of stakeholders as possible.

Utilizing specific communication strategies and styles to their advantage was an intentional aspect of the leadership strategy for most of the presidents in the study. One reflection that was offered, by Andrew, was that he should have been more intentional with how he communicated with the campus community. Although he was unsure whether his physical presence would have been welcomed or unwelcomed by most, he did note in the interview with

me that he retreated into his introversion, and that he, given the opportunity, would change his public visibility. He demonstrated, with this comment, that he believes there to be a value to having a president present in the community, even as a symbolic gesture. Andrew noted that he spent too much time in his office and communicating via email. This assessment is something that was corroborated by the web content analysis, as Andrew did not have visible video messages, but instead communicated to the community through a variety of direct emails that were not accessible to me as a non-member of the community.

As the crisis evolved and the audience changed, so too did the presidents' style and strategy for communication. The participants in this study discussed how their normal avenues of communication, for instance with the board and other senior officials, were streamlined to expedite information and action. Presidents purposefully altered the type and amount of content upon reflecting on what their audience was able to process at the time, and they leveraged their position and influence to inspire unity and hope throughout each phase of the pandemic, and with each decision that they were communicating.

Finding 4: Framing and Reframing Throughout an Evolving Crisis

Early in the pandemic, the presidents in this study immediately elected to leverage the strength of the structural frame, restructuring how information reached them by creating COVID-19-specific task forces and relying on the authority of their position. The task forces were comprised of experts from different walks of the campus community and health partners that would help presidents make sense of the overwhelming amount of information they were receiving from news sources and the general public. Although this outward structural response was visible and pervasive across the country, the presidents in this study were also considering problems from other frame perspectives. George and Christine talked about how the pandemic

had a psychological effect on constituents, and that one of the core objectives was identifying and helping to meet the most basic of human needs. Andrew discussed that the scarcity of resources generated some level of in-fighting, but rather than shutting down the conflict, he chose to listen and use it to enact change in the organizational response. Each of the presidents discussed that the pandemic created a symbolic void, a potential loss in the spirit of the organization, and perhaps a tragic effect in the threat of losing an entire generation of scholars. Regardless of any frame preference that presidents illustrated during times of relative normalcy, presidents in this study all saw problems and approached solutions from different frame perspectives.

Crisis Response Began With a Structural Approach to Health and Safety. Just as the participants noted that health and safety were the top priority throughout the entirety of the pandemic, each leader also took a structural approach after they recognized that the novel coronavirus posed a threat to their institution. Every participant created a unit or team, selected based upon their role at the institution, their area of expertise, or their ability to communicate with a larger group (to accurately convey messaging). As suggested by Bolman and Deal (2013), the structural frame provided a template by which the presidents could establish a unit that had a shared goal, was internally informed as to each of their responsibilities, coordinated their efforts (during planning and implementation), and developed and strengthened relationships among and beyond the group, based upon unique skills and their role. Further leveraging the structural frame, several of the presidents noted that this group had a larger charge, to communicate decisions and interact with other campus units, carrying solutions and reasons behind those solutions to the larger population.

Aligned with the structural frame, the tensions that emerged during the early phases of crisis response were surrounding the differentiation of work, and the coordination and measurement of the work executed after roles had been assigned (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Alexis illustrated this concept in her assessment of the leadership structure of organizations at several points. Originally comparing the college environment to a democracy, in that she is open to hearing opinions and facts presented by those she represents, she added "once we make decisions, I am expecting everyone to just kind of go with it." She also noted that "we all get to vote, but once the person is elected, then we should support our leaders." Alexis was no stranger to crisis management, and she had experienced success in centralizing crisis response in her training and past experiences around what she described as an "incident command structure," which highlighted the vertical coordination and ownership of high-level decisions on her as president.

Although George's military background trained him in being adept at managing from a vertically coordinated structural framework, he spent a large portion of his efforts coordinating Beta University's crisis response laterally. George recognized that the landscape of the pandemic was in a constant state of change. Information and data were reaching his desk constantly, and he felt that he needed to be able to plan for as many eventualities as possible to inform the campus's response to the pandemic. As noted by Bolman and Deal (2013), lateral coordination is less formal but can fill gaps or provide quicker responses during times when speed can have a large impact on longer objectives, especially when environments become "unwieldy" (p. 55). Also, from a structural standpoint, George noted that during periods of uncertainty it is beneficial for the organization when a leader provides direction.

> One of the things I've learned in my past in terms of if you're in a chaotic situation or crisis situation, what people need is direction. And so give a direction and realize that it may change, but you have to give people something to focus on.

He further added that leaders have the potential to experience analysis paralysis, or wait too long to make decisions in situations with high levels of ambiguity or imperfect data.

Several of the participants, in responding to their reasoning for making decisions throughout the pandemic, highlighted a structural dilemma: employee overload (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Several of the responses that participants noted alluded to the fact that their people were burned out, running beyond their capacity for too long, and overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude and length of the pandemic. Though the presidents all spoke highly of the dedication and resilience of their teams, they noted that they were aware of how this pandemic and assault on work-life balance had driven several of their peers out of their roles. Jason, Christine, William, and Andrew reflected in their responses that as a result of how colleges and universities are structured, they become a singular point between the board and the rest of the campus. While this can, according to William provide clarity and accountability, it also isolates presidents who are navigating a crisis. William added that in this structure indecision can have a detrimental effect on the organization's response to a crisis. This highlights the influence of the structure that is placed upon the college president in times of ambiguity and uncertainty and can influence the way that presidents respond. In William's case, he understood the value of being decisive and flexible and took action to avoid the organization losing a sense of focus on the goal.

Reframing and Multi-Frame Thinking Emerged Throughout the Crisis. Though the structural frame was prevalent in the initial crisis response strategies among all participants, several presidents exhibited multi-frame thinking in March or April of 2020, and every president

exhibited frame-shifting behavior as their communication goals tended to vary over the course of their pandemic response. As demonstrated in the previous section, public communications to the campus community were opened and closed with the symbolic frame—a unifying homage to the shared values of all who associate with their institutions. Although strategies and evidence of the symbolic frame are often highly visible and intentionally audible, each president identified that they also saw problems and navigated pandemic responses through a quieter, yet no less powerful, political frame.

In March of 2020, COVID-19 presented several undeniable problems for higher education. All of the campuses in this study, and most around the country, were forced to navigate an unprecedented health crisis that completely altered the method by which courses were delivered and threatened the solvency of divisions, entire colleges, and systems. During this period, refunding auxiliary expenses and fees to students became commonplace, as the many features of living on a college campus were not able to be enjoyed. This perpetuated a significant budget deficit for most institutions, leading presidents to identify areas where resources could be cut or reallocated to protect the interest of the institution. In this moment, under the auspices of personal opinions on how to best serve the institution and its people, political arenas were carved out. In resource-lean times, political leaders understand that several groups with altering perspectives, goals, and opinions will vie for those resources, and conflict will emerge.

Many of the presidents in the study discussed the value of conflicting opinions as it helped them obtain a more complete picture of stakeholder demands. George, Alexis, and Andrew talked openly about how they are not nervous when people on his team openly disagree with one another or provide dissenting opinions, and they are not quick to dismiss those opinions during the right phase of the discussion. Andrew went further to discuss the power that faculty

hold in a shared governance model, and how faculty voice is something that he and other leaders should have considered more during his pandemic response. “In some cases, we didn’t really [incorporate faculty perspectives]. We didn’t sit down and say ‘okay, this is what we’re thinking we’re going to do, what do you think? Do you agree with this?’ That stretches the relationship, obviously.” Andrew also was the only president in the study that reported faculty pushback, noting that faculty members accused him of caring about the bottom line more than their health and safety.

Each of the participants in the study noted that their board was supportive and collaborative throughout their pandemic response, however, Christine discussed the relationship with the board within the political assumption noted by French and Raven (1959), that information and expertise are levers for power, which in her case presented as autonomy and the authority to manage the pandemic response with little operational interference. “It wasn't that they were helping us with decisions. They would offer council, sometimes, but very rarely. I think they knew this was not their wheelhouse.” Christine noted that she was familiar with other presidents (not at Eta University) who had experienced boards that took advantage of their positional power and became overinvolved with the operational processes of their institutions. Christine and the other presidents that had longer tenures or had navigated crises at their institutions before the pandemic, also discussed reputational power (French & Raven, 1959), offering that they had already proven themselves and were not afraid to cite this when talking with their trustees or senior leaders.

George provided the most transparent view of the importance of power and influence as a leader by discussing the importance of understanding who wields power at different levels. In discussing an important lesson for presidential leadership, he noted:

> I would meet with various groups and really listen and learn. But you got to be with a cross-section of groups of people, you know students, faculty, staff, particularly to figure out who the power brokers are, so to speak. And an organization or the power brokers, probably too strong of a phrase, those who are influential in the organization, who appear to carry influence, and meet with them and just listen. You know, what are their aspirations for the organization. And learn from them, while also studying the data.

This political frame viewpoint, as George later identified, helps a leader to advance important initiatives and gain support at a variety of levels. This act of "mapping the political terrain" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 211) can provide context and avenues to mobilize efforts quickly, and when presidents need to "make decisions and provide people with direction" it is important for all the people to be working in the same direction.

All of the participants showcased elements of the human resource frame, especially regarding their valuing of the individual people within the organization as the organization, however, Alexis, Russell, William, Christine, and George were more explicit in their use of the human resource frame to understand and create solutions to problems. Alexis noted that her response to COVID-19, as it shifted away from the earliest, structural response, was to take a deeply interpersonal approach to the human needs of her employees and other constituencies, and to maintain a steadfast focus on increasing and valuing diversity as a central theme to the organization's success (even throughout any hardship).

Christine openly discussed how her leadership philosophy, in some ways, was directly derived from Maslow's hierarchy of needs. "I'd start every thought with survival, and then try to move us through the process." This consideration for wellbeing was foundational to many of the choices that Christine made throughout the pandemic. Russell noted that in his mind he is "the

first among equals," and that this guides the way that he engages with everyone during a crisis or in times where crisis is not present. Central to his presidency is the redistribution of authority throughout the ranks of the university.

> I believe that the power of the president is vested in how much of that power he or she distributes to everybody at the institution. And not just in a time of crisis. If you build a model where it's distributed power and people know they have a voice and know you're going to listen to them, then in a time of crisis you don't have to build something new, you simply have to build on what you've already put in place, and that's what we did here.

Russell also spent a considerable portion of his responses to members on campus in lifting those up around him, but also noted that he felt it was important to spend time supporting and growing the people in an organization.

Supporting and growing the people was something that George also discussed at length. George spoke openly about not only surviving the pandemic but maintaining the commitment to improving the organization. According to George, improving the organization means "improving the people. A characteristic of a successful leader is really caring about people – and being a servant leader. Somebody who's in it not for themselves, but for the success of the people in the organization." William discussed how institutions are strengthened by egalitarianism. His primary objectives as a president leading through a crisis were to not delay in making decisions but find ways to democratize decisions. William offered that decisions must be made, however, involving a wide variety of people in the decisions is critically important.

Summary

Although the sample of presidents in this survey was highly diverse, leading institutions that were just as diverse, clear themes quickly emerged throughout both the web analysis of extant data as well as in the semi-structured interviews. Not only did presidents share a structural response at the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, but they also nearly mirrored one another concerning the importance they placed on communication, transparency, and stakeholder engagement. Each president harnessed the power of different frames throughout the evolution of their crisis response and provided detailed examples of how they leveraged communication, situationally. The first major finding from this study illustrates the concept that reflections and experiences of the presidents informed their prioritization and crisis response throughout the pandemic. Early prioritization and action leaned on past reflections of crisis scenarios and academic training, and later prioritization and action in the pandemic were informed by reflections of earlier actions. Second, presidents showcased that engagement of a variety of stakeholders both to inform leadership decisions and to carry out leadership actions was essential to managing an institution through a crisis. Third, the presidents utilized communication as a crisis response strategy, with special attention paid to being transparent and generous with the amount of outreach they performed. Fourth, presidents' actions reflected the value of framing problems and solutions and then reframing in different situations or with different constituents. Several methods of communication leaned on multiple frames, simultaneously.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I have used the term crisis era to define the present era of higher education in the United States, due to the increase in crises that colleges have faced over the past few decades. Modern higher education leaders should anticipate leading through one or more crises during their tenure (Eddy & Kirby, 2020; Gigliotti, 2020; Roitman, 2014). Before COVID-19, few college presidents were prepared for the magnitude of the crisis that would unfold in the 18 or more months following March 2020 (Liu et al., 2021). The aspects of leading a college or university through a global pandemic have presented leaders with a crisis that is both immediate and pervasive (Liu et al., 2021; Simmons, 2022). This opportunity to study leadership reflections of a crisis of this magnitude represents a unique opportunity for scholars. Not only did COVID-19 present an immediate health and safety threat to the entire institution, but the lingering effects, variants, and spectrum of comfort on which all stakeholders (including the presidents themselves) reside have created long-term challenges for colleges and universities. In this section, I present a summary of the key findings discussed in Chapter 4, as well as implications for policy and practice, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of the Findings

After synthesis, the findings discussed in Chapter 4 directly informed the responses to the research questions. I was able to ascertain from the web content analysis and semi-structured interviews a set of findings that addressed the research questions at the heart of this study. The major findings of this study were that (a) reflections and prior experiences informed how and what the presidents prioritized during their crisis leadership response; (b) that presidents

benefitted from engaging numerous stakeholders both to create a more well-rounded understanding of the crisis and also to inform and carry out decisions; (c) that presidents used communication and transparency as crisis leadership strategies; and finally that (d) presidents' actions throughout the crisis demonstrated the value of framing and reframing to assess elements of the crisis and inform actions. These findings support the leader-follower considerations provided by many modern leadership theories (Evans, 1970; Farrell, 2018; House & Mitchell, 1974; Northouse, 2019; Sheard et al., 2011), confirmed that the crisis changed the presidential priorities suggested by the ACE (2017) survey, and were viewed and positioned within the four leadership frames as discussed by Bolman and Deal (2013).

Discussion of the Findings, Relevant Literature, and Research Questions

To respond to the research questions in this study, I felt it was important to juxtapose them with the extant literature that informed the study and with the findings that emerged from the participant reflections on their crisis response. In this section, I respond to the two overarching research questions about how presidents prioritized their pandemic response, and reflections on how their leadership approach changed or was reinforced during or since March of 2020, with supporting findings that also envelop the four sub-questions. Continuing to incorporate multivocality to ensure credibility for the study (Tracy, 2010) and to honor the phenomenological tradition. I used participant quotations for the subheadings, each of which refers to the research sub-questions.

Presidents Used Reflections and Stakeholder Input Throughout Their Pandemic Response

A college or university president, in times of crisis, may feel like a drop of oil in a bowl of water. Although those in this study felt surrounded and connected to others throughout every moment of every leadership decision, they remain positionally separate from their communities,

responsible for owning institutional crisis leadership decisions. The weight of this positionality emerged throughout several of the interviews, and although some presidents spoke of it as powerful in developing and refining their leadership abilities and self-confidence, others described it as fatiguing, stressful, and isolating. Additionally, presidents learned, throughout the crisis, that traditional crisis response strategies that centralized authority threatened the concept of shared governance at the institutions (AAUP, 2021; Leslie & Fretwell, 1996). Van Vugt et al. (2008) noted leadership becomes central to the survival of an organization in times of crisis. During COVID-19, stakeholders looked to college presidents to help them make sense of the crisis for their organizations, and the presidents in this study felt an obligation to their stakeholders and a fiduciary responsibility to their institutions. The stakes were high for the presidents, and the solo burden felt lonely.

Throughout the pandemic, the mantle of leadership was several things to the participants of this study, none of which were light or effortless. The words and actions of a college or university president have high levels of influence in their communities and beyond. The presidents in this study noted that they felt it was important, both operationally and symbolically, to assume ownership of the operational decisions that were being made, while remaining conscious of the language and message that they were sending their community. Participants discussed, at length, the reasoning they employed to arrive at decisions, combining expert opinions (from COVID-19 response teams, board members, senior administrators, faculty, students, alumni, and external stakeholders), with their understanding of the crisis based on experience and ethical guidelines that they hold or have learned in their professional careers. Liu et al. (2021) noted that many leaders in higher education focus on what they perceive to be ethical when faced with severe crises. The first research question sought to understand how these

leaders assessed the variety of challenges that COVID-19 presented, made sense of the crisis for themselves, and then prioritized their response throughout the changing crisis. In each subsection below, I showcase the different strategies, and the key priorities that presidents were compelled to respond to during the time between March 2020 and November 2021, positioned within the extant body of leadership research, to respond to this question.

“Put all the 50-pound-heads in a room and listen.” Each of the presidents in this study shared a similar viewpoint with this quote by George. Though ownership of the decisions ultimately resides with the president as an institution’s leader, the spirit of collaborative leadership in modern organizations (Hackman, 1990, 2012; Ulh-Bien et al., 2014), specifically the concept of shared governance in higher education (AAUP, 1966, 2021; Flaherty, 2021; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Vroom & Yetton, 1973), implores presidents to not make these decisions in a vacuum. In this study, each president discussed shared governance as their leadership style. This leadership self-assessment is also shared by all 30 participants in a recent study by Liu et al. (2021). Most modern leadership theories have evolved to also include followership as a central component of the leadership equation (Chaleff, 2008; Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen, 1976; Greenleaf, 1977; Heifetz, 1994). With a focus on an increased distributive nature of leadership and an awareness that crises are becoming more commonplace in higher education (Eddy & Kirby, 2020; Kaminski et al., 2010; Kruis et al., 2020), college presidents must incorporate an awareness of the follower experience into their leadership practice. This notion of collaboration was highly evident throughout each reflection that the presidents in this study offered as they reflected on their responses throughout each stage of the pandemic. Creating COVID-19 teams, developing methods by which information could be relayed to stakeholders, and sharing

information and best practices as the pandemic evolved were common strategies among higher education leaders across the United States (Liu et al., 2021).

Every president that I interviewed during this study reported that they were influenced by several stakeholders but noted that they were ultimately responsible for making and owning the decisions for the campus community. Once decisions were made, the presidents then also relied on stakeholders to enforce the mandates and disseminate information to the broader communities of stakeholders. Stakeholders informed presidents, challenged them, and simultaneously kept them grounded and lifted them. At different points throughout the crisis, participants noted that different stakeholder groups increased in presence and influence, and seemingly went dormant at other points in time. This shifting of stakeholder voices and demands further necessitated the prioritization of different, more salient stakeholder voices throughout the different stages of the pandemic. This finding supported suggestions from the literature that to be effective, leaders must find a way to lead and follow at the same time (Sigelman et al., 1992). Each of the leaders found ways to incorporate others throughout the decision-making process, something that Farrell (2018) describes as an essential practice of good leadership. The leadership experience was described as fully immersive for the participants in the study, and despite the input, it felt like "overload" according to Christine and Andrew. However, each president felt that there remained a clear structural delineation between themselves, the people they lead, the people and groups they are beholden to, and the institution to which they have a fiduciary responsibility.

"Consider your experience, and trust your gut." Though George and his peers spoke at length about the interpersonal engagement that they had throughout the pandemic with a variety of stakeholders, they also spoke about their intuition and learned leadership behaviors. Patton (2016) noted that certain scenarios necessitate quick decisions that rely on experience and

intuition. Liu et al. (2021) support this claim, adding that leaders consider the balance between shared governance and the expediency at which decisions must be reached. To begin to assess the crisis, the presidents in this study reflected on crises that they had navigated in old roles. Through this process, leaders can better understand their core values, as well as how those values influence the way they perceive the situation that they are facing (McDaniel & DiBella-McCarthy, 2012). Each noted that although there was a remarkable difference between leading through COVID-19 and any other experience they had, there were also several similarities.

Leaders were challenged to react to constantly changing information, seemingly all filtered through political and social lenses. This conflicting information flow challenged the participants in the study to create a system by which they could access information and perspectives completely, and then rapidly distill them down into a direction for the institutions they led. Fairhurst and Connaughton (2014) note that leaders are sometimes tasked with reflecting on the past and predicting the future at the same time. This temporal transcendence is precisely what the presidents in this study reported, as the crisis itself was changing frequently and rapidly, and as Jason noted, "you didn't have time to get perfect information, or even 90 or 80% perfect information. Sometimes you just had to make a decision and go with it." The rapid necessity of decision-making increased pressure on the participants in this study, as there was a perceived expectation that the community was seeking direction and guidance from the presidents even though all possible decisions were surrounded by ambiguity. Furthermore, as suggested by Leslie and Fretwell (1996), higher education leaders are susceptible to scrutiny in the face of an external stimulus if they take too long to act.

"A leader in higher ed has to embrace the duty of care." Health and safety remained the top priority throughout the pandemic, which Russell noted in explaining how the "duty of

care" went beyond the physical health and safety, and included the humanity of the people at his institution. This priority aligns well with Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, which positions safety or survival as the most basic priority for humans. This theory of human motivation was cited by Christine during her interview, who recalled it as central to her crisis response strategy, and the reason she focused on health and safety. George and Jason also confirmed this thought, both in their interviews and in videos released in the spring of 2020. The presidents wanted people to understand that they cared about the health and safety of each member of the community first.

Every president in the study specifically stated that the most important priority permeating the entirety of their COVID-19 response was the health and safety of the campus community. They varied in their assessment of what constituted appropriate health measures, however, with specific variation between the presidents on how quickly each felt their communities could return to in-person learning and living. In the end, they reported that they believed that the choices that they made throughout each phase of the pandemic (initial response, reopening, health and safety measures, ongoing campus management) were to provide safety to their student and employee constituents. Two participants, Jason and Christine, noted that they felt a significant pressure or obligation to incorporate the surrounding community's safety (beyond the campus community) in their decisions, as Jason noted the high level of interaction between the student population and the locality through experiential learning, and Christine understood that her institution could improve the underperforming immunization system within the community.

Each president spoke at length about the sometimes-competing priorities that they needed to address throughout the pandemic like fiscal solvency, the educational missions of their

college, the institutional commitment to research, and the need to provide student support services and socialization, however, none of those priorities superseded the role that their decisions played in keeping their campus (and in the case of Christine and Jason, the external) communities. Andrew spoke about how safety was a consideration for the health of his students when he advocated for a no vaccine mandate, as he was concerned with discussing, with parents, the need to have their children given a vaccine that was new and did not have long-term data (especially when the vaccines had only an emergency use authorization at the time). Although the vaccinations have received authorization from the Food and Drug Administration, Epsilon continues to suggest, but not mandate that community members be vaccinated. Andrew also spoke about dimensions of health which include socialization and the camaraderie that his students felt at his institution. Even when his early efforts to return students to campus were disparate from some of his peers, health and safety from a holistic viewpoint remained a priority.

This variance in the return to campus plans was likely influenced by the fact that most states in the U.S. do not have any specified protocol for social response to a pandemic (Thomas & Young, 2011), leaving leaders to navigate health crises without a clear pre-formed plan. Though Andrew did not mention specific populations in his urgency to return to campus, this urgency was also shared by presidents when considering homeless students, or as mentioned by Russell, students whose “homes weren’t conducive to the rigors of higher learning.” The presence of these challenges, which necessitated additional accommodation on behalf of the institution, provided additional pressure to return students to campus, which may have conflicted with the president’s thoughts on how to keep the students and campus community safest.

“How do we bring students back for an in-person experience in the fall?” For Andrew, this question was posed as early as April of 2020. A return to campus, and in-person

learning, were listed as essential to the college experience by each of the presidents in this study. Although health and safety remained the top priority from the onset of the pandemic through the fall of 2021 (the point in time when the interviews took place), different, sometimes competing priorities emerged at each institution. Russell noted that the decision to bring students home from studying abroad and to close the campus in March of 2020 was, in his estimation, "the toughest decision that I would have to make…and I didn't realize that that was really one of the easiest ones, considering what was to come next."

What Russell described in this, and at other points in his interview, was a concept that was present in several of the participant interviews. The decision to close campus did not feel good, but it was a necessary decision that the participants universally made and felt to be a good choice at the time it was made and at the time of their reflection. What made this pandemic a "wicked crisis" was the myriad decisions that needed to be made when there was no good solution (Maier & Crist, 2017, p. 164). Each of the institutions represented by the participants in this study is a residential college or university and was focused on in-person learning before the pandemic, with a majority of the courses being taught face-to-face. This teaching modality, and ensuing campus ethos, were vital to the college experience for students. As Russell mentioned, not having students on campus harmed the "esprit de corps. The way we communicate with one another. The way to be respectful in disagreeing with one another. All that was lost." To fulfill campus missions of providing high-quality, residential education to students became an immediate competing priority for the participants' institutions.

This notion of losing a campus's feeling and sense of fellowship further conflated the symptoms of the crisis, threatening the way that current students view the institution, while also threatening the way that colleges showcase their campus experience and values to potential

students. As enrollment management is one of the key priorities for college presidents (ACE, 2017), and each of the institutions that were represented in this study identified as tuition-dependent, this pressure not only to retain dollars but also to provide an experience by which potential students could envision themselves attending the institution became doubly important. From a crisis leadership perspective, this awareness of reputational threat coincides with Coombs's (1995) suggestion that one of the most important functions of leading during a crisis is to sustain the positive aspects of an organization in light of threats stemming from a crisis.

Although the timelines for bringing students back to campus varied significantly across the institutions represented in this study, each of the presidents that I interviewed clearly stated that in-person studies were preferred by their students, faculty, and broader communities, and getting students back to campus was a primary concern. Andrew's institution was one of the earliest campuses of those in this study to return to in-person instruction. This action, though it was not without short-term consequences, became an important longer-term solution that has helped the campus maintain resources and personnel. Andrew confirmed, during the interview, that one of the reasons that he pushed for a quick return to campus was he felt financial pressure to generate student revenues, a thought that was both in alignment with the ACE (2017) study of presidential priorities, as well as suggestions by Bolman and Deal (2013) that from a human resource perspective, leaders take organizational actions to directly serve or support the people that make up the organization.

George noted that he felt pressure to return students to in-person learning because of his commitment to accomplishing the mission of the institution. Though he never took action that he believed would unnecessarily jeopardize the health and safety of students and other community members, the campus shifted from a crisis management planning modality to a risk-management

planning modality when discussing the potential return to campus. He specifically noted that he factored institutional risk, financial risk, and reputational risk into his decisions. He also noted that when he arrived at Beta University, the institution had suffered a significant blow to its reputation due to a scandal perpetrated by the former administration. In further researching this through the web analysis, I was able to understand that the former administration's carelessness regarding media coverage from a series of events had tarnished Beta's reputation and severely impacted applications and enrollment and that since George had been hired admission had been enjoying a large rebound and was experiencing growth before March of 2020. The history and context of an institution weigh in on current presidential actions and approaches, as reputation takes a tremendously long time to build, but damage to reputation can be swift and undo years of hard work (Friedman & Kass-Shraibman, 2017).

"Almost everything we got asked was somehow included in that document." Andrew expressed thanks for how the state education agency provided expert guidance, and how the federal and state governments opened up access to funding, even for private colleges. Both of these forms of assistance were integral in the planning process for Epsilon and other schools that were represented in this study. Several of the actions and sequences that the presidents followed to move through the pandemic and return to in-person instruction were provided by their individual states. States have, especially since the 1980s, held an influence in the governance and policy direction of higher education institutions (Tandberg, 2013). Tandberg (2013) highlighted that these influences have tended to be especially focused on financial aid policy, accountability, and regulation, yet during the pandemic, gubernatorial executive orders became sweeping mandates for operational decisions. Many of the presidents offered that guidelines, financial assistance, testing supplies, personal protective equipment, and other elements were incredibly

helpful as they navigated the crisis. Andrew discussed how his state provided a detailed prescription as to what actions campuses needed to take to reopen their doors to in-person learning. His campus and COVID-19 response followed it as a plan, and he noted that

> Having that document was really helpful…almost everything that we got asked was somehow included in that document. At one point or another almost every question was addressed by one of those points, so that became very helpful as a guide. You know, a kind of roadmap for us really.

Andrew also discussed the fact that this was the first time that private schools were able to secure state funding in addition to the federal COVID relief funding. "[The state] actually gave some COVID relief money to the private colleges. That's the first time that's ever happened, at least that's what I've heard, where the state shares public resources with private colleges. So that was terrific." Additionally, all of the schools were eligible for publicly funded COVID-19 tests and vaccinations, which also helped move campuses back to in-person learning as they were able to participate in census testing. Resources and guidance provided by the state empowered some presidents to begin the planning process of bringing students back to campus, and also provided presidents with some of the benchmarking that they were lacking early in their pandemic response. Although Andrew noted, with gratitude, that private institutions benefitted too from unprecedented state funding and centralized planning resources, these actions may actually serve to increase homogeneity among these diverse institutions through the process of institutional isomorphism (Frumkin & Galaskiewicz, 2004). Many college leaders looked to their peers to see how they handled the emerging crisis, with successful strategies adopted across institutions.

COVID tests became a topic that many of the leaders I interviewed spoke about, as testing was, according to Russell, one of the pathways that colleges needed to take to reopen

their doors. Although COVID tests influenced the return to campus, several of the institutions elected to leverage relationships that they had developed with other educational institutions and large health networks, to manage a large portion of their testing. Russell noted that the relationship between Delta University and the state's flagship institution provided insights as well as the mechanics by which Delta could open and then remain open. Reliance on resources provided by other institutions illustrated a vulnerability shared by several of the institutions in this study. Both funding and access to medical products and personnel showcased the "criticality" of these resources, and the vulnerability of the institutional decision-making in the absence of resources (Pfeffer & Salanik, 2003, p. 46)

Alexis added that periodicals like Inside Higher Ed and the Chronicle of Higher Education became important resources as they became compendia of information about institutional responses around the country. Jason noted that he had the opportunity to participate in a variety of leadership forums, stating that "the complexity was everywhere…how you handle athletics, to how you handle academics…so hearing how other campuses handled things was also very vital." The presidents were split on how they utilized the information that they were able to source from these resources. Alexis noted that the external resources she sought were largely data sets that showed a full list of institutional actions, and that they served to confirm the choices that she was making on behalf of her institution. George, Andrew, and Russell expressed a vulnerability and reliance on these external resources as components of the decision-making process, highlighting that they sourced information based upon the strengths of other institutions and their leadership. Both of these actions showcased personal and professional values that the presidents would confirm later in the interviews (with Alexis placing the highest value on courage and tenacity, and George and Andrew placing emphasis on humility and being lifelong

learners). These personal and professional values were central to their decision-making strategy, confirming Hornak and Garza Mitchell's (2016) findings.

"They're just the smartest people on the block when it comes to this." George highlighted that because of a relationship he held at Johns Hopkins University, a global leader in public health, he looked to them to model parts of his crisis response. As discussed earlier, the structure of higher education institutions and demand for decisive action, noted by the participants, isolate presidents from other members of the community. All the presidents in this study discussed how communicating with their peers became an invaluable resource as they attempted to make sense of COVID-19, as well as manage and process the many burdens of leadership during the pandemic. As all the decisions made in response to this crisis were being made at the same time, presidents noted that they spent time speaking with other college presidents in their region, state, and throughout peer institutions. Andrew leveraged the state consortium of private colleges to communicate with other presidents and build his response plan.

> It was good for me to just participate in those meetings and hear what other schools were doing what other presidents were doing and how they were reacting. It would be good for me to sort of, say, how does that sound to be should I be doing that should I not be doing that. It was really great to hear what other people were doing and the success that they're having so that I could sort of understand what my best practice might look like.

George also spent time conferring with presidents of peer institutions. He noted that it was especially helpful as all colleges were going through the same thing at the same time, so there wasn't a way to benchmark historical decisions. "We had a lot of ongoing dialogue with the Presidents of the other independent college and universities [in our state]. We had, I think, weekly chats in that forum." College presidents during this time sought out camaraderie with

peers to ensure that their response was in line with the best practices that were being created at the moment. This outlet provided presidents, who were going through significant upheaval at their institutions due to the pandemic, a group of peers with whom they could confide and make meaning of their experiences. Over time, many institutional responses took on similar approaches (Frumkin & Galaskiewicz, 2004).

How Did Leadership Philosophies Inform Pandemic Response, and Vice Versa?

The first research question (and sub-questions) sought to understand how presidents prioritized their actions and incorporated stakeholders in their organizational leadership practice. The second research question (and sub-questions) encouraged reflections about the participants as leaders, whether their self-image has changed as a result of this crisis, what presidential leadership looked like before and during the pandemic, and predictions for the future of the presidency and higher education. The first question, discussed in the former section, leaned heavily on procedural and organizational reflections, while the second prompted introspection about the reasoning behind the process, and a vision for their (and higher education's) future. The Bolman and Deal (2013) leadership frames, along with the themes that emerged from the coded interviews informed the responses to the second group of questions.

"I had been in that situation before, well, almost." Jason, when discussing facing budget shortfalls and potential layoffs and furloughs, noted that while this crisis was very different than any that he had previously led though, some of the symptoms of the crisis were experiences that he could directly draw on. Past leadership experiences were extremely influential in the COVID response of each of the participants. Not only did the reflections that the presidents offer showcase how certain elements of their practice were transferrable between crises, but they also demonstrated the role that their personal values and perception of their

institution's values in their decision-making, a suggestion supported by the literature (Eddy, 2010; Hornak & Garza Mitchell, 2016). When asked about what informed their crisis response actions, each participant was able to identify how at least a single experience positively influenced their ability to assess or respond to symptoms of the pandemic, especially regarding crisis management experiences, strategy and planning exercises, and interpersonal communication and management.

Many modern leadership theories assert that good leaders are formed, not born (Day et al., 2014; Northouse, 2019), and presidents in this study shared that their past leadership experiences informed the way that they approach problems and set priorities, as evidenced in the first research finding. In experiential learning, according to Kolb (1984), "ideas are not fixed and immutable elements of thought but are formed and reformed through experience" (p. 26). This reflective process was substantiated by each president in this study, from how George immediately returned to his military training and went into a heavy planning mode, to how Alexis chose to respond to the crisis, who "quickly put together an interdisciplinary team, using the incident command structure." Reliance on past experience underscores the role of leadership development for college presidents.

"It's a very agonizing thing, trying to drive consensus." Jason noted that he experienced meetings where he listened to opposing facts and fervent opinions about COVID-19 and retained his "measured approach" recognizing that people were all "interpreting the signs differently," and as he was chiefly responsible for driving consensus, he leveraged reason and took ownership of the final decision. Andrew discussed how problems faced during COVID were exacerbated by the way that information encouraged catastrophizing, and several of the other participants, as illustrated in the findings, felt that one of the most important functions of

the president is to take the time to unify people around decisions and objectives. The presidents in this study align with Kolb's (1984) explanation of the Lewinian experiential learning model, where they are reflecting and attributing their success throughout the pandemic to their ability to assess large amounts of information quickly, incorporate stakeholder views, and create and communicate direction clearly (including transparent reasoning for decisions), and then attempting to apply this concept to new and changing situations.

"The only thing that works is transparency, the more you share, the better the end." Jason highlighted one of the central themes that emerged from this study, which was the value that the participants placed on transparency. Urick et al. (2021) suggested that frequent, transparent communication, coupled with invitations for participation and feedback from stakeholders are essential in crises. Transparency in communication is a shared value among college presidents (Liu et al., 2021). Each of the participants noted that transparent communication was instrumental in their crisis response success and that inviting people into the process became essential in their ability to make sense of the pandemic. George and Andrew also identified shortcomings in their crisis response, both of which were centered upon failure to include certain stakeholders in the decision-making process, which resulted in a lack of transparent communication concerning decisions that had a large influence on those that were excluded.

George felt that if he were to have the opportunity again, he would have included more students in the process, something which he has since remedied in his ongoing working groups committed to improving campus diversity, equity, and inclusion. In the short survey the presidents filled out, students were identified as a top stakeholder group of influence. Andrew discussed how his relationship with the faculty became strained when he did not include them in

leadership decisions but also reflected on the fact that he often was satisfying his introversion and may have remained in his office too much during the different stages of the pandemic. Andrew noted that this lack of physical presence may have further decreased his faculty's consideration of him being available or transparent, which coincides with Leslie and Fretwell's (1996) suggestion that in times of crisis, isolation and communication breakdowns breed problems. Andrew's approach was in stark contrast to the other presidents, who each noted that being visible to the community was an important method by which they could reaffirm that elements of the community were not lost.

Transparency played an important role in maintaining the cohesion of the campus community and welcoming collaborative solutions into the crisis response process, but it also served as a method by which presidents could let people's best qualities shine through the process. Russell spoke at length about the role that transparency played in the most challenging decisions throughout the pandemic:

> Particularly as we had to make some decisions early on, about reduction and salaries and limiting expenditures. We put the numbers out there. We were projecting a $38 million budget deficit…This is a very caring institution and we didn't want to lay off that many people. [We asked] then are we willing to sacrifice something, collectively, so we absolutely just put the numbers in front of us and said, "let's have a discussion around them." And we got very little resistance, here, to the tough decisions we made. I traced that back to opening up the channels of decision making, and making sure that there's clear communication, and making sure that there is unfiltered transparency.

Alexis confirmed this strategy, noting that it was helpful for people to understand the magnitude of the situation that they were in. Heath (2010) confirms that keys to crisis communication

include “honesty, candor, and openness” (p. 246) further adding that anything that is suppressed only becomes more toxic to the organization once it surfaces or becomes transparent in a larger dialog. Transparency does offer protection from negative assumptions about presidential decisions, and it also provided a clearer understanding of what the presidents were balancing during the pandemic. It gave followers an understanding of the actions being taken and the ways that their health, safety, and security were all being attended to.

Early in the pandemic, I have noted that each president took an immediate structural frame perspective, recognizing that they would benefit from reorganizing the structure to increase the efficiency with which they could access information and make decisions (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Either simultaneously or in close sequence, each president also leveraged the human resource frame, which in this case was evidenced by the importance they placed on distributing information and viewing their role as caring for the individuals within the community. Bolman and Deal (2013) suggest that from the human resource frame, leaders empower followers through the act of providing information, support, and encouraging participation, to engage employees. The presidents in this study were not solely concerned with the physical safety of their employees and students, but truly took to heart the “duty of care” that Russell discussed, committing their leadership actions to the whole person, or as Christine noted, the hard things that “people were dealing with that we sometimes didn’t see.” Confirming Kezar and Holcombe’s (2017) suggestions for shared leadership in higher education, each of the presidents described inclusion and engagement of their communities as essential to their successes, further adding that exclusion of stakeholder voices created challenges and strained relationships.

“We had to give people hope and provide a sense that we were going to come through this better.” Although the presidents reporting that transparency provided them with

increased support when making hard decisions in the crisis aligned with Leslie and Fretwell (1996), William and Christine added insight that transparency, alone, is not enough, offering that two of the elements that must be managed throughout crisis are fear and ambiguity. Respectful of this, each of the presidents noted that one of their chief roles on campus was to act as a calming and forward-thinking force for the community. Heath (2010) suggests that crises are a "narrative. It begins with pre-crisis conditions, including any relevant narratives, and continues, if all goes well, to happily ever after" (p. 247). Beyond providing direction and verbally noting that the campus, and its people, were going to be alright, the participants felt that it was very important to help others see value in the experience they were sharing and look to the future. Christine's rallying cry for her campus was centered around human needs, but also a growth mindset, where she rejected the notion that intelligence is static and instead adopted that intelligence can be developed (Dweck, 2006). She believed and therefore inspired others to believe that the campus would be in a state of constant learning through success and failure and that as a collective they would continue moving toward their goals. Seeger et al. (2003) suggested that when organizations remain committed to learning in a crisis, they can emerge stronger. Similarly, William spoke in detail about how he influenced the community by "trying to create a sense of calmness. A sense of stability. And reassuring the campus community that we were going to thrive, regardless of this situation." Although the presidents all admitted that they were not fully prepared for this crisis (along with all other institutions, in their estimation), many of the presidents noted that people looked to them to give direction and act as barometers for their institutions. This viewpoint aligned with the notion that decision-making authority and expectations frequently revert to the president during crises (Leslie & Fretwell, 1996), and

supports that leaders, from a structural perspective, must coordinate the differentiation and integration of roles within the organization to maximize efficiency (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Jason was unique in mentioning that he treated each wave of the coronavirus as a learning opportunity, reflecting on his performance and decision-making during the pandemic. This theme, described by Kolb (1984), is evidence of the Lewinian cycle of experience, reflection, generalization, and testing theory in new situations. Jason noted that with each variant, the campus grew and developed resilience and methods to mitigate the effects and influence of the virus. He discussed how he believed that the learning that he and the community had done in the initial outbreak and then through the variants provided him with optimism and a sense of calmness with each ensuing wave. Jason noted that the feelings that he and his senior team shared about the omicron variant of the disease were tempered because of how much they learned from the delta variant and the initial waves of transmission. Successfully learning from experience and synthesizing new information from past and current reflections also furthers Friedman and Kass-Schraibman's (2017) notion that effective leaders implement and are informed by learning at the personal and organizational levels.

Russell also demonstrated the high esteem in which he holds his faculty, staff, and students throughout his interview. He, and others, stated at several points that the organization is the people and that the people are the reason for the organization's existence and success, both notions are clear evidence of the human resource frame (Bolman & Deal, 2013). He noted that he felt the need and want to periodically share inspirational messages and personal reflections that inspired him and that this practice helped others stay motivated throughout some of the challenges that the community faced, as well as the adversity and political derisiveness that the nation was facing at the same time that COVID was taking place. Of these messages, Russell

shared things that he felt would lift and provide context to those he led, a practice that harkens to appreciative leadership's notion that even the worst of situational experiences can be transformed by human potential (Whitney, 2010).

Finally, leaders must also balance their leadership response to the crisis by both staying calm and not demonstrating indifference or apathy to the follower experience (Garcia, 2006). Andrew noted that the act of maintaining calm during periods of chaos can provide hope and anchoring for the community and that actions can demonstrate the confidence that presidents have in their institutions emerging from the crisis. Leaders can walk this line between indifference and overexcitement, according to Ratzan (2005), by partnering with stakeholders, establishing trust, collaborating with external audiences, developing a message, being honest, and being prepared. Learning, providing optimism, and remaining trustworthy and follower-focused are key elements that presidents must include in their crisis response and communication strategies.

"**We can learn to be a whole lot better if we accept that this could change us forever."** Christine shared this viewpoint as did several of the other presidents in this study, with many noting that they were both surprised and amazed at higher education's ability to change quickly. I asked each of the presidents if they valued learning in their leadership practice, and each of them responded that leadership is about changing and growing, and to this point, learning is an essential component of their practice. Not only did the presidents in this study all actively seek expert advice, but as Russell noted, "I was reading everything I could get my hands on." Russell noted the fact that the organization he managed was, in fact, a learning organization, and a commitment to self-betterment was an essential component of every member's experience. Russell took this practice further, as he identified that he took classes during the pandemic so

that he could develop a better understanding of the experience that his followers were having. He noted that this practice connected him to the community in new ways and that a leader must spend time understanding those that are influenced by the leader's choices. Friedman and Kass-Schraibman (2017) have supported these actions, suggesting that the key to effectively managing an organization in the knowledge economy, is to increase institutional understanding through practicing learning as a method of institutional adaptation and advancement. Actions that increased empathy and an understanding of the experiences that their followers were experiencing were also evidence of the human resource frame (Bolman & Deal, 2013), more specifically, Argyris and Schon's (1996) suggestion that leaders benefit from actively seeking an understanding of the experience that followers are having.

"You've poured into everybody else for almost two years, you've got to pour into yourself, somehow." One of the things that Christine noted was that amid the crisis, it is easy to forget to practice self-care. This sentiment was shared by every single president, in their own way, and was the most commonly shared carat of wisdom from leading through a global pandemic. Each president noted that it was important, but each president also remained vexed about how they could have accomplished it. They shared expectations that they coached and encouraged others to practice self-care but felt unable to (or were unwilling to) practice self-care, themselves. Alexis noted that this could be a reason for the amount of presidential turnover that higher education experienced during the pandemic. Educational leaders cite an inability to balance work and life as a fatiguing and disorienting stressor during an extended crisis (Simmons, 2022). Leaders are at increased risk for mental health issues due to increased stress and potential conflicts between stakeholders (Diebig et al., 2017), something that presidents navigated both internally and externally in their COVID-19 leadership experience. These

stressors, when experienced in concert with a variety of other documented political and organizational stressors that have been found to increase presidential turnover (Tekniepe, 2014), likely confirm Alexis's notion and align with the fact that the ACE (2017) college presidents survey noted that presidents are holding shorter tenures.

In addition to the presidents reflecting on their professional practice, some also noted how their views of the college presidency had changed throughout the pandemic. Although Alexis and Jason spoke at length about how their engineering-focused academic training prepared them to be college presidents during a crisis, Andrew noted that his academic professional academic experience, where scholars operate at their own pace and can approach problems with a significant level of depth, was incredibly different than the way in which he experiences challenges in a presidential role. Considering the approaches that each of the presidents took in their crisis response, it is also worth mentioning that from a follower-aware, human resource frame strategy, the presidents might benefit from an awareness of the way that Kolb (1984) identifies leader styles interacting with followers. In the case of Alexis and Jason, who appear to be assimilators due to their tendency to prioritize gathering and integrating data to inform their decisions, they must always be aware that this can create conflict with accommodators, who prioritize task completion (Kolb, 1984). Leader cognition also likely plays a large role in guarding against diverger analysis paralysis, and converger exclusionary behavior (Kolb, 1984).

Although the organizations they are leading are currently still operational nearly two years into the pandemic, there is clear underdevelopment of personal mental health coping strategies and effective mitigation of the stress resulting from the job. Each of the participants illustrated that they need to be better about prioritizing their mental health and wellbeing,

however, no solutions were offered to that point, nor were there any offerings that they would change their behaviors. To effectively reverse the declining tenure of college presidents as suggested by the ACE (2017) survey, as well as increase leader effectiveness, presidents and governing boards must commit to reprioritizing and measuring the wellbeing of college leaders.

Leaders are increasingly responsible for making decisions during a crisis (Leslie & Fretwell, 1996); however, the majority of higher education leadership studies point to shared governance as the preferred method of leading in the academy (AAUP, 2021; Flaherty, 2021; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Vroom & Yetton, 1973). Leaders in this study cited this adherence to higher education traditions of collaborative leadership, but also noted the transferability of their leadership skills between situations. Though this reliance on their learned strategies from previous experiences is supported by Kolb's (1984) theory of experiential learning and incorporates the elements of technical training that Katz (1955, 1986) suggested can improve leadership, this confidence in their experience sometimes decreased leader participation in shared governance. This study confirmed these notions from the literature, but layered Bolman and Deal's (2013) four-frame approach to leadership on top of the body of research, which provides a template for stakeholder engagement and communication management, and also encourages meaningful reflection and suggestions for preparation for future crises.

Implications for Policy and Practice

As I have suggested throughout this dissertation, COVID-19 research can all be considered *pioneering* at present time. Although there exists a large body of research about leadership, and crisis leadership, the infrequency of events like the COVID-19 pandemic simply limits the opportunity to study leadership practice. That said, conducting this study has provided me with a series of possible suggestions, based upon the findings and positioned within the

extant research, for both policy and practice. In the following sections, I suggest three possible implications that the findings of this study have on policy and professional practice or training for higher education leaders. *Table 8*, below, traces the key findings from this study to related recommendations, considering supporting literature.

Table 8

Findings, Recommendations, and Supporting Literature

Finding	Related Recommendations	Supporting Literature
1: Reflection and Experience Informed Prioritization and Response	Reflection should be a central practice throughout each stage of crisis response	Bennis & Thomas, 2006; Heath, 2010; Kolb, 1984; Liu et al., 2021; McDaniel & DiBella-McCarthy, 2012; Roitman, 2014; Seeger et al., 2003
2: Engaging and Managing Stakeholders is Essential to Crisis Decision-Making	In crises, leaders should include as many participants in the decision that would not cause unreasonable delay in making a decision	Bolman & Deal, 2013; French & Raven, 1959; Liu et al., 2021;
3: Communication was a Core Crisis-Response Strategy and Evolved to Fit the Presidents' Goals	Follower-focused, transparent communication can be employed as a tool to inspire cohesiveness, optimism, and hope through a crisis	Boin et al., 2010; Frederick et al., 2021
4: Presidents Actions Reflected the Value of Framing and Reframing Throughout an Evolving Crisis	Leaders should implement multi-frame thinking during a crisis both to assess the situation and implement their decisions.	Bliese et al., 2002; Bolman & Deal, 2013; Maslow, 1943; Smircich & Morgan, 1982; Watkins, 1989

Presidents and Other Education Leaders Should Practice Reflection During a Crisis

Although the leaders in this study described themselves as reflective people, and they exhibited clear evidence of how they were able to reflect on previous leadership experiences to inform their pandemic response, a number of them noted that this interview was one of the first

times they reflected on some of the most significant decisions during their crisis response. This elicited tears, long pauses, and other visible signals of deep, reflective thought. Although the leaders generally had an idea of what they did well and what they would have changed, the experiential learning that leaders did early in the pandemic would be strengthened by taking time to reflect, holistically, and consider actions and reactions in greater depth (Kolb, 1984). For George and Andrew, they wished they were reflective and were able to take time to note deficiencies in their pandemic response earlier. George, who has since ensured that adequate student voice is present in leadership decisions, and Andrew, who still toiled with whether increased visibility would have been wanted by his community early in his reflection but was willing to assert that he should have been more visible later in the interview. This assessment, and his recollection of not including faculty (enough) in decisions early on, were not detrimental to Andrew's presidency, however, reflecting earlier and altering these actions could have assuaged some challenges that he faced throughout his pandemic response.

Reflection has the ability to effectively inform practice (McDaniel & DiBella-McCarthy, 2012; Roitman, 2014). As Christine became visibly emotional when she reflected on the service and dedication of her colleagues, the act of reflection helped her to uncover feelings that she later would describe as "heavy" and "important." Christine practiced reflection during her pandemic response at several points, and although she noted that this was one of the first times that she "sat back and thought about all of it," she did align her communication with the different needs of different community members. Heath (2010) suggests that reflection helps leaders understand their phenomenological perspective, which can provide insights for responding to the crisis. Bennis and Thomas (2006) further add that crises can have a transformational influence on leadership development and that great leaders are those who lead with integrity and a strong

sense of values. Throughout the interviews, William's leadership values, which were guided by a holistic view of the people that he leads, noted the importance of recognizing where people were and considering their capacity to deal with the situation that they are in. He spoke about how he communicated differently with senior faculty and junior faculty, recognizing that some of his senior faculty who had been teaching for a longer time were sometimes less comfortable with the new digital format and that they needed extra attention and services to ensure that they were able to continue to teach, effectively.

As COVID continues to present new challenges, leaders that reflect on their experiences are served well to integrate their successes and failures in their assessment of what and how they will prioritize their ongoing COVID response. By sharing their awareness of what (and why) the participants prioritized certain courses of action, they also grew in self-awareness of their leadership values. From a metacognitive perspective, this awareness of how leaders think about leading can also surface biases, blind spots, and potential interpersonal hazards that may not previously have been considered until after a leadership decision has been made. An example of this may be how Jason prioritizes academics over everything else, and this awareness may help him see inequities in the method by which he communicates with non-faculty constituents.

In addition to leaders reflecting on past experiences to inform crisis response, it is also critically important that leaders focus on the continued success of their organization and forward motion concerning their pre-COVID goals and initiatives. The ACE (2017) survey highlighted that dwindling funding and increased reliance on private gifts is one of the central reasons why presidents list fundraising as a priority for their role on campus. Fundraising, specifically infusions of capital through private gifts, is responsible for an ever-increasing share of operational revenues (Zumeta et al., 2012), and the pre-interview survey demonstrated some

concerning trends. Of the 10 presidents that responded to the survey, nearly half noted that fundraising was the area that they focused the most attention on before the COVID-19 pandemic. After the pandemic hit, none of the presidents reported that fundraising was their top priority, with a majority noting that their priorities shifted to budget and financial management and enrollment management, two of the areas that were then confirmed in the interviews as activities that would more immediately deal with budget deficits and potentially minimize personnel actions like layoffs and furloughs. Considerations of continuing strategic initiatives were not unimportant to the presidents in the survey, however, they universally were deprioritized by each of the presidents in the study, temporarily, and presidents leaned on those pre-COVID goals to inspire faith in the institution's future, as noted by Christine, or a symbolic revitalization of unity and mission orientation to pull people together, as noted by George and Russell.

Although it was important to each of the presidents to shift their priority to first consider the health and safety of their constituents, it was also important to refocus on longer-term strategies once the crisis shifted away from the early fear and ambiguity, to planning and creating strategies for reentry on campus. Although it is important to live in the moment with their community, presidents must continue to prioritize the elements of their practice that will serve their institution in the long run, and this can also be leveraged as a symbolic assurance that the organization is still focused on longevity and emerging from the crisis without damage to the mission or shared values of the community.

Crisis Response Strategies Should Include as Many People as Reasonably Possible

One challenge that each of the presidents identified was the fact that nobody had seen a crisis like this before. Early in the pandemic, Blumenstyk (2020) suggested (now famously) that the coronavirus of 2019 might be a *black swan event* for higher education, driving total and

persistent change throughout the industry. Leaders of colleges and universities scrambled to adjust their service delivery model and understand what the depth of impact might be for their institutions. Although George spoke explicitly about scenario planning as a leadership strategy, every president leaned on the practices of developing COVID-response (and other) teams, engaging with a broad variety of stakeholders, and seeking information from peer networks and public health experts. This universal attention to increasing collaboration with stakeholders further supports the wealth of literature on shared governance and collaborative leadership in higher education (AAUP, 2021; Flaherty, 2021; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Vroom & Yetton, 1973). Liu et al. (2021) noted that higher education leaders tended to consider the balance between quick action and engagement with all stakeholders, noting that some presidents were successful in pushing action forward once people could agree that they had an 80% solution. Jason spoke specifically about 80% solutions, noting that many leaders are uncomfortable when they have to move forward when they cannot predict the outcome of their situation with 90–100% certainty. George discussed how encouraging campus-wide inclusive participation in planning exercises has helped him paint a more complete picture of the crisis, but also understand how solutions might affect a wider variety of stakeholders than could a unilateral decision. Unilateral decision-making may increase during crises (Leslie & Fretwell, 1996), however, effectively using multi-frame thinking can help presidents mitigate the impact of their choices.

Additionally, the need for information to be accessible and widely distributed plays a critical role in empowering employees as problem solvers during a crisis (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Alexis noted that information asymmetry is the enemy when a leader attempts to generate a groundswell of support and solutions from his or her community, and George noted that

different people have different specializations, strengths, and abilities to contribute important information to the conversation. When presidents create task forces and engage stakeholders, they must also be prepared to monitor conflict and allow competing stakeholder perspectives to illuminate priorities and influence crisis response actions (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Although complete consensus may not be reachable, as Jason noted (and supported by Bolman & Deal, 2013), communication and follow-up can be effectively informed by what is uncovered in conflict. Lastly, as conflict will likely emerge during a long-term crisis, leaders must also make extra efforts to understand power dynamics that could skew what they are receiving from stakeholders, paying close attention to the different sources of power that influence communication (French & Raven, 1959).

In addition to the consideration of a wide variety of employees throughout the decision-making process, boards can play a pivotal role in the crisis response strategy. As noted by the ACE (2017) survey, governing board relations were one area where presidents spent considerable time before the pandemic. Presidents, during a crisis, often have increased authority and attention to solving problems from stakeholders (Leslie & Fretwell, 1996; Liu et al., 2021), which aligned with the viewpoint that each of the presidents discussed in this study. Although they believed in their ability to create and implement crisis-response strategies, presidents in this study also noted that some of their boards passed resolutions, officially providing additional authority for operational decision-making. Presidents that were on the receiving end of this action each discussed how it was a tremendous vote of confidence from the board and provided them with the freedom and formal authority to be more responsive when necessary.

The presidents also discussed that communications once reserved for official board meetings with a quorum, were now elevated to direct one-on-one conversations with the

chairperson of the board and that those conversations were then relayed by the chairperson to the remainder of the board. In crises, as presidents are experiencing increased pressure and authority, boards can also serve their institutions by demonstrating communication and procedural flexibility. Additionally, as many presidents cited trust that they had established with their boards as an important precedent for the action to provide increased formal authority, boards are well served to use times not in crisis to participate in crisis simulations or collaborative case studies with presidents to develop an understanding of the way that their institutional president will respond to crises.

Communication and Transparency are Essential and Must Evolve Throughout a Crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic is unique beyond the fact that it is influencing every organization around the world simultaneously. As a crisis, it is both immediate and long-lasting. The needs of communities in higher education have, over the past 18 months, changed drastically. Leaders are judged by the message they send in a crisis, but they can frequently be judged harsher when they delay in sending a message to their community in crisis (Boin et al., 2010). Every president that participated in the study noted the importance of communication and transparency, but presidents that noted they participated in varied methods of communication universally responded that changing mediums was effective, especially for different goals. Frederick et al. (2021) suggested that during a crisis, the vehicle for communication and the message conveyed both can influence stakeholder perceptions of the crisis and the performance of the leaders. Without speed and accuracy in their communication response, presidents expose themselves to negative stakeholder reactions (Jin et al., 2011). As presidents may not be able to include as many voices in the decision-making process as they reported wanting to due to the

need for quick decisions, transparent and frequent communication can serve to keep stakeholders connected and possibly mitigate negative impacts on shared governance presented by the crisis.

Also essential throughout communication attempts to followers, leaders can often inspire hope, unity, or action by invoking powerful symbols or language (Bolman & Deal, 2013). In communicating directly with internal stakeholders or alumni, presidents leveraged the symbolic frame pervasively throughout their videos and other addresses, especially in proximity to requests for compliance or difficult messages. Jason used YouTube videos when he was hopeful to leverage the symbolic and human resource frames, and memos and emails when condensed information was the central priority of his outreach. Rather than suggest that leaders leverage symbolism in their address to internal stakeholders, I instead implore leaders to imagine the cost of not doing so, as it was universally practiced in the extant data, as well as in all of the campus addresses that I viewed from other presidents during the research for this study. Presidents and boards can use assessments like the Bolman and Deal Leadership Questionnaire (Appendix D) to explore the leadership frame tendencies, and understand that as this symbolic role of a president is so critical to the unity of an organization (Bolman & Deal, 2013) that it must either be a conscious effort to use the symbolic frame or staff someone that has a comfortability consistently coaching or alerting the president to its need and value.

Leaders Benefit From Multi-Frame Thinking in Their Crisis Response Actions

Bolman and Deal (2013) provide a framework by which leaders can holistically approach problems. Benchmarking and peer review of problems has been a long practice of higher education leaders. However, I argue that this practice is insufficient in mounting a successful crisis response, in absence of a contextual understanding of the president's unique institution. This scenario is where multi-frame thinking can support a more rounded response. Until the

pandemic, the presidents in the study discussed that they had not participated in leadership exercises that tested their ability to respond to a global health crisis, and that crisis response strategies were often centered around financial crises, acute person-created crises, and looming challenges on the horizon. Jason, Alexis, George, and Andrew all spoke about how participation in "institutional fire drills" helped them consider specific components of their whole crisis-response strategy; however, they noted that while symptoms of COVID-19 were things that they discussed, a scenario this grand was not something that they had practiced in the drills.

Contemplating the leadership frames during a crisis response can serve all presidents, however, it may be even more helpful for new presidents as they begin their presidencies already mired in crises stemming from COVID-19 and also for other looming challenges that higher education faces. As professionals move upward into leadership roles, leaning on somewhat of a template created by the four frames can encourage holistic crisis awareness and responses, therefore potentially mitigating issues that can arise if a leader focuses their response too narrowly. As an exercise, new leaders can practice multi-frame thinking in less-critical decisions, as well as enlist the support of trusted advisors to challenge them to broaden their understanding of the crises they face or decisions that they must make. This is also an area where seeking mentorship from others who have held the position can be helpful, especially if new leaders are able to access the unfettered reflections of mentors that have navigated crises in the past.

Structural Frame Analysis Came Naturally to Each President in the Study. George and Andrew both discussed the "immediacy" of which initial COVID-19 responses were needed. To combat this feeling, shared in other words by each of the participants, every president studied resorted to a structural analysis of the situation, whereby there was a need to reform elements of the current organizational structure (Bolman & Deal, 2013) to be focused on the unique problem

at hand. As specifically noted by Russell, William, and Jason, the role of the president is defined by positional obligations to provide clarity, focus, and direction to followers, and to inform the board as a governing body. Due to the urgency needed to respond to a crisis, and the importance of expediting incoming and outgoing communication, higher education leaders must take structural actions in the earliest phase of their crisis response. As timeliness has repeatedly been correlated with perceived effective crisis responses (Garcia, 2006; Ratzan, 2005) and in crisis, all eyes focus on positional leaders (Leslie & Fretwell, 1996), college presidents should structurally position themselves to be at the convergence of all information and channels of communication.

Human Resource Assumptions Provided Connectedness to the Campus Community. As suggested by Bliese et al. (2002), good leaders can "mitigate the negative effects of environmental stressors" (p. 6). Each of the presidents in this study noted that this mitigation was one of their chief responsibilities throughout the pandemic. Christine discussed how her role was, in some ways, to follow Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, as to not expect higher-order thinking before the needs of safety and security were met at her institution. George and William noted that one of their chief responsibilities was to ensure that their employees were "trained up" on practices that would improve remote learning and eventually reintegration to campus. When Andrew reflected that he should have considered the value of interpersonal connection, specifically by being more visible around campus, he noted that this disconnected him from those he was leading. In his reflection, his reversion to past experiences and communication through what he noted as "hundreds of memos," may not have been the most complete strategy due to the needs of the people receiving the information. The human resource frame helps structurally effective leaders remain connected to their followers' motivations and needs (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Simply restructuring an organization to respond to a crisis without

concern for stakeholders illustrates converger behavior, which Kolb (1984) warns can lead to exclusion of follower voice and diverse perspectives. To maintain multivocality in the leadership decision-making process, leaders can engage in opportunities for meaningful two-way conversation both in the formal hierarchy, and also through lateral and informal leadership structures. Boards, if armed with information that assists them in assessing and providing consult for presidents who are navigating a crisis can also utilize the four frames as a lens by which presidents can bolster their response and avoid injuring relationships or owning too much of any decision. As presidents in the study noted that they leaned on boards almost as external consultants during their pandemic response, joining in informal ways can also infuse relevant information into the decision-making process, as well as provide board members with a connection to the community (and their motivations, fears, and needs).

Political Savviness Helps Presidents Navigate Needs, Consider Resources. COVID-19 presented colleges with the opportunity to take a hard look at how a crisis of external origin influenced their ability to make and carry out leadership decisions. For some presidents, the consideration that they cannot operate without the help and support of other organizations became abundantly clear, necessitating external relationships with state agencies and healthcare provider organizations. Resource deficiency became a disruptive, inhibitive force that compelled action (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). Additionally, the scarcity of institutional resources often provided tension as presidents were forced to make difficult financial, personnel, and operational decisions during their pandemic response. Bolman and Deal (2013) liken organizations to arenas when considering how conflict presents opportunity from a political frame perspective. Though only a few examples of open conflict were uncovered during the reflections, conflict was emerging throughout the pandemic. These were evidenced by the various divergent stakeholder

perspectives shared within the cabinet and COVID-19 meetings. Though presidents spoke more at length about establishing harmony, togetherness, and consensus, only Jason elected to discuss his method for reaching that consensus and harmony, unsolicited. He noted that he was not quick to gloss over conflict, and he was very intentional in managing Bolman and Deal's (2013) *arena*, as it provided him with insight as to what stakeholders were demanding, while also providing him with direction for his ultimate decision. He noted that this process was sometimes "agonizing," always time-consuming, but in the end, he felt that it was necessary to reach a sustainable path forward.

Leaders that create efficient structures and manage transparent, two-way communication through vertical and lateral coordination, must also be prepared to moderate conversations and conflicts among their constituents as a method for driving organizational consensus. In times of calm, presidents must be proactive in "mapping the political terrain" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 211), and developing an understanding of the power dynamics that are responsible for the work that gets done at their institution. In times of crisis, presidents must be flexible and engage in negotiation to advance and enforce forward action (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Finally, although leader inclination may lean on past experience and values, leaders must understand that every college is enmeshed with political agencies, communities, and other external stakeholders that must be considered throughout the decision-making process and in communicating those decisions, transparently.

Symbols, Shared Language, and Values Help With Follower Motivation. With an increase in external support and pressure felt by higher education institutions throughout the pandemic, the differentiating factors that provide stakeholders with their symbolic tie to the institution may be threatened by industry isomorphism (Frumkin & Galaskiewicz, 2004). To

combat this, the participants in this study intentionally employed symbolic frame techniques to establish motivation among their followers. Suggested by Smircich and Morgan (1982), leaders should collaborate with followers to jointly create a social awareness or understanding of a situation. This process can be influenced by the intentional use of symbols and metaphors (Watkins, 1989). Although I cannot assert that presidents utilized the symbolic frame to make meaning of their experience or frame COVID-19 as a problem, I can confidently assert that every visual address that the presidents made throughout the pandemic contained symbolic imagery or language, and a presence of this manipulation of symbols and images to influence responses (emotional or actional) from their followers.

Appropriate use of the symbolic frame can include leaders leaning on symbolism to pique interest or capture their audience's attention, as frequently used by George, even in an exclamatory fashion as he opens each of his institutional videos with increased volume, inflection, and tempo with a hearty nod to the nickname of Beta University, or as Jason utilizes it to communicate a vision for where the institution is headed. Higher education is steeped in symbolism. From the organizational structure to the ceremonies and even the medieval garb that adorns those among the scholarly ranks, symbolism is as essential to student identity. Leaders that are adept at structuring and restructuring their organization to respond to crises, who consider the values and needs of the people that create the institution, can move their college and initiatives forward by building coalitions of support, must also harness the power of institutional folklore and shared language and values to inspire togetherness and collectivist action through crises.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study provided insights into seven presidents' experiences as leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic, but it was limited in a great number of ways. I have noted several times that this (and all COVID-19 research) is a pioneering study, which assumes that there is not a large body of research from which I was able to triangulate findings. This deficiency in the literature on the topic had a significant role in my election to employ a phenomenology, as the focus was to understand and interpret the reflections that the participants had during this novel event. The novel nature of the pandemic, which increased reliance on my interpretation and adaption of different crises that presidents faced in recent history, there are several directions and corrections that I would urge be taken in replications or as next steps of this study.

First, although there was no assertion made that findings would be statistically generalizable, I would recommend that a positivistic study, informed and enhanced by the data collected in this study, and applied to a broader swath of American or international college presidents be carried out. In performing this study, I examined several studies that investigated acute, person-created crises, like campus shootings (Fox & Savage, 2009; Kaminski et al., 2010, Kruis et al., 2020); sexual violence (Brown et al., 2015; Frederick et al., 2021); and institutional scandals (Hextrum, 2019; Smith & Willingham, 2019). Additionally, I reviewed larger, more regionally focused natural disasters (Go, 2008; B. J. Johnson, 2011; Siegal, 2006; C. Sommer, 1994). This literature provided insights into leadership challenges and responses, however, in many of the studies, presidents relied on other campuses to help them through or understood that (pending litigious action) there was an endpoint to the crisis. This study reached thematic saturation on the four findings quickly, and the next step that should be taken is to test whether the findings could be generalized. To do this, future researchers could utilize a survey method and reach out to all college presidents in the United States. This would eliminate any regionally

specific issues or tendencies, as well as potentially provide insight into how presidents in different geographic areas responded to the crisis. Additionally, I would be interested in including community colleges in the study, as they have different funding sources and different auxiliary expenses and revenues.

Second, as this study was carried out while COVID-19 was still classified as a pandemic still posing a threat to institutional operations many of the reflections on decisions had not yet played out at the time of this study. This, undoubtedly, would have an impact on presidential reflections. To this end, I would encourage a longitudinal continuation of this study, specifically focused on the same presidents, at a point when the pandemic is in the endemic phase, or no longer poses a threat to operations. Presidents that have emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic at their institution might be able to paint a clearer picture of the crisis and their response, after further opportunity to reflect. It would also be interesting to learn if presidents increased their reflective practice after participating in the study and if that played a role in their crisis response after their engagement with the interview.

Third, this study was intentionally bounded to focus on COVID-19 leadership responses, however, other social pressures and long-term educational trends are at the center of other crises, and these may have an exponential effect on how certain populations are experiencing the crisis. I would advocate for research studies to follow, actively considering social justice and the other pressures that I noted higher education is facing in Chapter 2. In addition to data that supported that minority communities were affected by COVID-19 in different ways than the Caucasian population (CDC, 2021), insights provided by George and Russell highlighted that for college presidents, systemic racism presented a more perplexing and wicked problem than did the pandemic. I would be interested to expand the bounds of this study to include specific questions

that allowed presidents to also consider the social justice issues that their campuses faced in addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, to see how they prioritized their response to competing crises in America.

Conclusion

Crises in higher education are anything but rare. In modern times, college presidential leadership is a litany of paradoxes. Leaders must accept that they will likely lead through a crisis at some point (Eddy & Kirby, 2020; Gigliotti, 2020), but at the same time this opportunity can present them with opportunities to grow and develop as leaders (Kolb, 1984) create meaning through their experience (Roitman, 2014), and deepen relationships with their organization and followers (Chaleff, 2008). Leadership responses must be swift (Jin et al., 2011), but also thorough (Cole & Harper, 2017). They must navigate systems that are wrought with barriers to quick responses (Eddy & Kirby, 2020) while facing blame and opposition as early as the crisis surfaces (Boin et al., 2010). Additionally, crises are increasing in their "wickedness," frequently having no good solution (Maier & Crist, 2017, p. 164). Finally, leaders are not only measured by how decisively they respond to a crisis, but also by whether their response was too severe or unnecessary (Fox & Savage, 2009), and even down to the medium they used to communicate their crisis response to stakeholders (Frederick et al., 2021). At no time in history has there been such a dire need to support leadership development and provide empirically-based suggestions for leaders to hone their leadership skills and increase confidence in their ability to navigate crises in their communities.

Higher education leaders are currently battling the largest public health crisis in over a century, while simultaneously attempting to reconcile systemic racism, sexism, and other issues that have become increasingly salient in the past decade, all while considering threats to their

institution and higher learning in terms of decreases in public affection for colleges (Labaree, 2013, 2016), reductions in public funding, increased competition, increased demand for accountability (Atanassow & Kahan, 2013; Deming & Figlio, 2016; Heller, 2011; Spellings, 2006) and transparency (Gigliotti, 2020), and a forecasted decrease in students as consumers in the next few decades. Although crises tend to shift decision-making authority and expectations to the president (Leslie & Fretwell, 1996), presidents must continue to engage stakeholders and maintain a commitment to shared governance to inspire collaboration with stakeholders (AAUP, 2021; Flaherty, 2021; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Vroom & Yetton, 1973). To make truly informed decisions, presidents must incorporate a multi-frame leadership approach (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

The long-term implications of the way in which higher education operates will be informed by the elements of crisis leadership that I examined in the findings. The key findings in this study and the ensuing discussion provide college presidents and governing boards with clear opportunities to improve presidential crisis leadership. When approached with a crisis, college presidents must first contend with the pace and expectations of key stakeholders and make structural adaptations to their organization. The participants in this study each noted that making structural changes (e.g., introducing COVID-19 command teams, introducing public health and other content experts to their senior leadership teams) helped them to gain access to important information, as well as coordinate responses and disseminate information to various units on (and off) campus.

While structure can provide expediency, leaders must also consider a holistic approach to the crisis, either leaning on multi-frame approaches or frame shifting as a method of assessing the crisis, and when creating their intentional, transparent, and robust communication strategy.

The participants, through an extant review of publicly available web data and in semi-structured interviews, then demonstrated a propensity to shift frames and leverage multi-frame thinking to generate a more complete crisis response, noting that at times deficiencies in their response had consequences that were not crises themselves, but did stretch relationships and deteriorate trust in some cases. Additionally, COVID-19 and other crises, also necessitate presidents to navigate external resource dependency (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003) and threats of institutional isomorphism (Frumkin & Galaskiewicz, 2004), while also managing conflict which tends to arise from the scarcity of resources (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Finally, presidents must be intentional with how they leverage symbolism when addressing their communities (Bolman & Deal, 2013). If the symbolic frame is not something that leaders lean toward, they would benefit from engaging in intentional processes whereby symbolism is infused in their communications strategy. Being prepared for the unknown requires leaders to tap into multiple approaches to connect with stakeholders, build trust and relationships throughout their time on campus (and before the test of a crisis increases fears), and to build in strategies for self-care to avoid burnout.

REFERENCES

Ahern, T. (2007). *How to write fundraising materials that raise more money: The art, the science, the secrets*. Emerson & Church.

Alpert, B. S. (2012). *College and university disaster management: The impact of leader behavior on response and recovery from disaster* (Handle No. 2027.42/96048) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan]. DeepBlue Theses.

American Association of University Professors. (1966). *Statement on government of colleges and universities.* https://www.aaup.org/report/statement-government-colleges-and-universities

American Association of University Professors. (2007). *Special report: Hurricane Katrina and New Orleans universities.* https://www.aaup.org/NR/rdonlyres/6BBEDF23-3FA6-4BBB-85BA-73424C41B5B3/0/KatrinaReportt.pdf

American Association of University Professors. (2021). *Survey data on the impact of the pandemic on shared governance*. https://www.aaup.org/report/survey-data-impact-pandemic-shared-governance

American Council on Education. (2015, August 19). Hurricane Katrina: Colleges helping colleges. *Higher Education Today* [Blog]. https://www.higheredtoday.org/2015/08/19/hurricane-katrina-colleges-helping-colleges/

American Council on Education. (2017). *American college president study*. https://www.aceacps.org/

Anonymous. (1918, April 24). Sine qua non. *The Flat Hat, 8*(21), 1-2. https://digitalarchive.wm.edu/bitstream/handle/10288/3864/Flat_Hat_19180424_vol_7_issue_21.pdf?sequence=1

Archibald, M. M., Ambagtsheer, R. C., Case, M. G., & Lawless, M. (2019). Using Zoom videoconferencing for qualitative data collection: Perceptions and experiences of researchers and participants. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 18*(1), 1-8. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919874596

Archibald, R. B., & Feldman, D. H. (2011). *Why does college cost so much?* Oxford University Press.

Archibald, R. B., & Feldman, D. H. (2017). *The road ahead for America's colleges and universities*. Oxford Scholarship Online. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190251918.001.0001

Argyris, C., & Schon, D. A. (1996). *Organizational learning II: Theory, method and practice*. Addison-Wesley.

Aristovnik, A., Kerzic, D., Ravselj, D., Tomazevic, N., Umek, L. (2020). Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on life of higher education students: A global perspective. *Sustainability, 12*(20), 8438. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12208438

Armour, M., Rivaux, S. L., & Bell, H. (2009). Using Context to Build Rigor. *Qualitative Social Work, 8*(1), 101-122. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325008100424

Atanassow, E., & Kahan, A. S. (2013). Democracy and higher education: A Tocquevillean Debate. *The Tocqueville Review, 34*(2), 157-158. https://doi.org/10.1353/toc.2013.0016

Aucejo, E. M., French, J., Araya, M. P. U., & Zafar, B. (2020). The impact of COVID-19 on student experiences and expectations: Evidence from a survey. *Journal of Public Economics, 191*, 104271. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2020.104271

Balderston, F. E. (1995). *Managing today's university: Strategies for viability, change, and excellence* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Barabino, G. A. (2020, September 11). Systemic equity in education. *Science, 369*(6509), 1277. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abe6517

Barringer, S. N., Taylor, B. J., & Slaughter, S. (2019). Trustees in turbulent times: External affiliations and stratification among U.S. research universities, 1975–2015. *Journal of Higher Education, 90*(6), 884-914. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2019.1574695

Bass, B. M. (1997). Does the transactional–transformational leadership paradigm transcend organizational and national boundaries? *American Psychologist, 52*(2), 130–139. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.52.2.130

Bastedo, M. N., Samuels, E., & Kleinman, M. (2014). Do charismatic presidents influence college applications and alumni donations? Organizational identity and performance in US higher education. *Higher Education, 68*(3), 397-415. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-014-9719-z

Bejou, D., & Bejou, A. (2016). Shared governance: The key to higher education equilibrium. *Journal of Relationship Marketing, 15*(1), 54-61. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15332667.2015.1091630

Bennis, W. G., & Thomas, R. J. (2006). Crucibles they make leaders. *Leadership Excellence, 23*(7), 15. https://www.proquest.com/trade-journals/crucibles/docview/204612694/se-2?accountid=15053

Bess, J. L., & Dee, J. R. (2012). *Understanding college and university organization: Theories for effective policy and practice*. Stylus.

Beyer, C. (2020). Edmund Husserl. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/husserl/#toc

Birnbaum, R. (1988). *How colleges work: The cybernetics of academic organization and leadership*. Jossey-Bass.

Birnbaum, R. (1989). Presidential succession and institutional functioning in higher education. *Journal of Higher Education, 60*(2), 123-135. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.1989.11775018

Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C., & Walter, F. (2016). Member checking: A tool to enhance trustworthiness or merely a nod to validation? *Qualitative Health Research, 26*(13), 1802-1811. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1049732316654870

Blake, E. S., Landsea, C., & Gibney, E. J. (2011). *The deadliest, costliest, and most intense United States tropical cyclones from 1851 to 2010 (and other frequently requested hurricane facts).* National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/6929

Blanchard, K. H. (1985). *SLII: A situational approach to managing people.* Blanchard Training and Development.

Blanchard, K. H., Zigarmi, D., & Nelson, R. (1993). Situational Leadership after 25 years: A retrospective. *Journal of Leadership Studies, 1*(1), 22-36. https://doi.org/10.1177/107179199300100104

Bliese, P. D., Halverson, R. R., & Schriesheim, C. A. (2002). Benchmarking multilevel methods in leadership: The articles, the model, and the data set. *The Leadership Quarterly, 13*(1), 3-14. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(01)00101-1

Blumenstyk, G. (2020, March 11). Coronavirus could be the "black swan" moment for higher education as we know it. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. https://www.chronicle.com/newsletter/the-edge/2020-03-11?cid2

Boin, A., ‘T Hart, P., McConnell, A., & Preston, T. (2010). Leadership style, crisis response and blame management: The case of Hurricane Katrina. *Public Administration, 88*(3), 706-723. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9299.2010.01836.x

Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (1984). *Modern approaches to understanding and managing organizations*. Jossey-Bass.

Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (2013). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice, & leadership* (5th ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Bontrager, B. (2004). Enrollment management: An introduction to concepts and structures. *College and University, 79*(3), 11-16. https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/enrollment-management-introduction-concepts/docview/225613756/se-2?accountid=15053

Bound, J., & Turner, S. (2002). Going to war and going to college: Did World War II and the G.I. Bill increase educational attainment for returning veterans? *Journal of Labor Economics, 20*(4), 784-815. https://doi.org/10.1086/342012

Bowen, W. G. (2011). *Lessons learned: Reflections of a university president*. Princeton University Press.

Brady, H. (2013). Let’s not railroad American higher education! *Political Science & Politics, 46*(1), pp. 94-101. https://doi.org/10.1017/S104909651200159X

Bransberger, P., Falkenstern, C., & Lane, P. (2020). *Knocking at the college door: Projections of high school graduates*. Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. https://knocking.wiche.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2020/12/Knocking-pdf-for-website.pdf

Branson, C. M. (2007). Improving leadership by nurturing moral consciousness through structured self-reflection. *Journal of Educational Administration, 45*(4), 471-495. https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230710762463

Brown, N. A., Brown, K. A., & Billings, A. C. (2015). ‘‘May no act of ours bring shame’’: Fan-enacted crisis communication surrounding the Penn State sex abuse scandal. *Communication & Sport, 3*(3), 288-311. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167479513514387

Bryson, J. M. (2018). *Strategic planning for public and nonprofit organizations* (5th ed.). John Wiley & Sons.

Burnett, K. (2006). *The zen of fundraising: 89 timeless ideas to strengthen and develop your donor relationships*. John Wiley & Sons.

Bynum, W., & Varpio, L. (2018). When I say…hermeneutic phenomenology. *Medical Education, 52*(3), 252-253. https://doi.org/10.1111/medu.13414

Carlyle, T. (1885). *Heroes, hero-worship and the heroic in history*. J. B. Millar.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021, June 17). *Risk for COVID-19 infection, hospitalization, and death by race/ethnicity. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html*

Chaleff, I. (2008). Creating new ways of following. In R. E. Riggio, I. Chaleff, & J. Lipman-Blumen (Eds.), *The art of followership: How great followers create great leaders and organizations* (pp. 67-88). Jossey-Bass.

Cheit, E. F. (1971). *The new depression in higher education: A study of financial conditions at 41 colleges and universities.* McGraw-Hill.

Christ, C. T. (2005, September 6). *Letter to the community about Hurricane Katrina*. https://www.smith.edu/president/letters/090605.html

Clayton, A. B., & Peters, B. A. (2019). The desegregation of land-grant institutions in the 1950s: The first African American students at NC State University and Virginia Tech. *The Journal of Negro Education, 88*(1), 75-92. https://doi.org/10.7709/jnegroeducation.88.1.0075

Coburn, C. K. (1988). The case against coeducation: An historical perspective. *Feminist Teacher, 3*(3), 19-22. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25680560

Cole, E. R., & Harper, S. R. (2017). Race and rhetoric: An analysis of college presidents' statements on campus racial incidents. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 10*(4), 318–333. https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000044

Colvin, J., Boak, J., & Alonso-Zaldivar, R. (2020, March 23). Trump: 'We cannot let the cure be worse than the problem'. *Associated Press*. https://www.local10.com/news/politics/2020/03/23/trumps-dilemma-how-to-protect-both-health-and-economy/

Cook, W. (1997). Fund raising and the college presidency in an era of uncertainty: From 1975 to the present. *The Journal of Higher Education, 68*(1), 53-86. https://doi.org/10.2307/2959936

Coombs, W. T. (1995). Choosing the right words: The development of guidelines for the selection of the "appropriate" crisis-response strategies. *Management Communication Quarterly, 8*(4), 447-476.

Cope, J. (2005). Researching entrepreneurship through phenomenological inquiry: Philosophical and methodological issues. *International Small Business Journal, 23*(2), 163-189. https://doi.org/10.1177/0266242605050511

Coplan, M. A., & Knapp, M. S. (2006). *Connecting leadership with learning: A framework for reflection, planning, and action.* ASCD.

Cowen, S. (2020, April 3). How to lead in a crisis: Advice from my time as president of Tulane University during Hurricane Katrina. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. https://wm-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/f/1r1pdk0/TN_cdi_gale_infotraccpiq_621083327

Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Sage.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (5th ed.).* Sage.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.

Crotty, M. F. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Sage.

Dahlberg, K. M. E., & Dahlberg, H. K. (2004). Description vs. interpretation – a new understanding of an old dilemma in human science research. *Nursing Philosophy, 5*(3), 268-273. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1466-769X.2004.00180.x

Dansereau, F., Graen, G., Haga, W. J. (1975). A vertical dyad linkage approach to leadership within formal organizations: A longitudinal investigation of the role making process. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance, 13*(1), 46-78. https://doi.org/10.1016/0030-5073(75)9005-7

Day, D. V., Fleenor, J. W., Atwater, L. E., Sturm, R. E., & McKee, R. A. (2014). Advances in leader and leadership development: A review of 25 years of research and theory. *The Leadership Quarterly, 25*(1), 63-82. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2013.11.004

de Brey, C., Musu, L., McFarland, J., Wilkinson-Flicker, S., Diliberti, M., Zhang, A., Branstetter, C., & Wang, X. (2019). *Status and trends in the education of racial and ethnic groups 2018* (NCES 2019-038). National Center for Education Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/

Deming, D. J. & Figlio, D. (2016). Accountability in US education: Applying lessons from K-12 experience to higher education. *Journal of Economic Perspectives, 30*(3), 33-56. https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.30.3.33

Department of the Army. (2013). *Army leader development strategy 2013*. https://usacac.army.mil/sites/default/files/documents/cal/ALDS5June%202013Record.pdf

Diebig, M., Poethke, U., & Rowold, J. (2017). Leader strain and follower burnout: Exploring the role of transformational leadership behaviour. *German Journal of Human Resource Management, 31*(4), 329-348. https://doi.org/10.1177/2397002217721077

Dowling, M. (2005). From Husserl to van Manen. A review of different phenomenological approaches. *International Journal of Nursing Studies, 44*(2007), 131-142. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2005.11.026

Downes, M. (2017). University scandal, reputation and governance. *International Journal for Educational Integrity, 13*, 1-20. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40979-017-0019-0

Doyle, W. R. (2016). Public opinion, partisan identification, and higher education policy. *The Journal of Higher Education, 78*(4), 369-401. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2007.11772321

Drake, M. V. (2020, August 17). *A message to the UC community from President Michael V. Drake, MD* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iVLliQ8JHbo

Duemer, L. S. (2007). The agricultural education origins of the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862. *American Educational History Journal, 34*(1), 135-146. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ818492

Durnin, R. G. (1961). The role of presidents in the American colleges of the colonial period. *History of Education Quarterly, 1*(2), 23-31. https://doi.org/10.2307/367637

Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Ballantine Books.

Eddy, P. L. (2010). *Community college leadership: A multidimensional model for leading change*. Stylus.

Eddy, P. L., & Kirby, E. (2020). *Leading for tomorrow: A primer for succeeding in higher education leadership*. Rutgers University Press.

Enders, J. (2014). The academic arms race: International rankings and global competition for world-class universities. In A. M. Pettigrew, E. Cornuel, & U. Hommel (Eds.) *The institutional development of business schools* (pp. 155-175). Oxford.

Engler, J. (2018, May 16). *Interim President Engler: Statement on settlement* [Press release]. https://msu.edu/ourcommitment/news/2018-05-16-Engler-Settlement-Statement.html?utm_campaign=media&utm_medium=twitter

Evans, M. G. (1970). The effects of supervisory behavior on the path-goal relationship. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance, 5*, 277-298. https://doi.org/10.1016/0030-5073(70)90021-8

Fairhurst, G. T., & Connaughton, S. L. (2014). Leadership: A communicative perspective. *Leadership, 10*(1), 7-35. https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715013509396

Farrell, M. (2018). Leadership reflections: Leadership paradoxes. *Journal of Library Administration, 58*(2), 166-173. https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2017.1412712

Felson, J. & Adamczyk, A. (2021). Online or in person? Examining college decisions to reopen during the COVID-19 pandemic in fall 2020. *Socius, 7*, 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1177/2378023120988203

Finlay, L. (2009). Debating phenomenological research methods. *Phenomenology & Practice, 3*(1), 6-25. https://doi.org/10.29173/pandpr19818

Fisher, J. L., & Koch, J. V. (2004). *The entrepreneurial college president*. Praeger Publishers

Flaherty, C. (2021, May 26). 'A watershed moment' for shared governance. *Inside Higher Ed.* https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/05/26/aaup-finds-major-erosion-shared-governance-during-covid-19

Fleming, J. C. (2010). Faculty expectations for college presidents. *The Journal of Higher Education, 81*(3), 251-283. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2010.11779053

Floden, R. E., Richmond, G., & Salazar, M. (2020). A nation at risk or a nation in progress? Naming the way forward through research in teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education, 71*(2), 169-171. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487119900628

Follett, M. P. (1924). *Creative experience*. Longmans, Green and Co.

Folt, C. L. (2020, March 13). *A message about COVID-19 from USC President Carol L. Folt* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2iiik9CAocI

Fox, J. A., & Savage, J. (2009). Mass murder goes to college: An examination of changes on college campuses following Virginia Tech. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(10), 1465-1485. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764209332558

Frederick, E., Pegoraro, A., & Smith, L. R. (2021). An examination of Michigan State University's image repair via Facebook and the public response following the Larry Nassar scandal. *Communication & Sport, 9*(1), 128-149. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167479519852285

French, J. R. P., Jr., & Raven, B. (1959). The bases of social power. In D. Cartwright (Ed.), *Studies in social power* (pp. 150-167). University of Michigan.

Friedman, H. H., & Kass-Shraibman, F. (2017). What it takes to be a superior college president: Transform your institution into a learning organization. *The Learning Organization, 24*(5), 286-297. https://doi.org/10.1108/TLO-12-2016-0098

Friga, P. N. (2021, February 5). How much has Covid cost colleges? $183 Billion. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. https://www.chronicle.com/article/how-to-fight-covids-financial-crush

Frumkin, P., & Galaskiewicz, J. (2004). Institutional isomorphism and public sector organizations. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, 14*(3), 283-307. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muh028

Fuchs, K. (2020, March 30). *UF president Kent Fuchs update on COVID-19* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQtjbdXLJk0

Gabbert, J. P. (2018). Balancing the art and science of fundraising: An artistic approach to establishing and maintaining successful relationships with donors. *Journal of Education*

Advancement & Marketing, *3*(3), 241-249. https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/hsp/jeam/2018/00000003/00000003/art00005

Gallagher, S., & Palmer, J. (2020, September 29). The pandemic pushed universities online. The change was long overdue. *Harvard Business Review*. https://hbr.org/2020/09/the-pandemic-pushed-universities-online-the-change-was-long-overdue

Garcia, H. F. (2006). Effective leadership response to crisis. *Strategy & Leadership, 34*(1), 4-10. https://doi.org/10.1108/10878570610637849

Garnder, J. W. (1990). *On leadership*. Free Press.

Gavin, E. (2018). *Helping behavior among college students who experienced Hurricane Katrina* (Publication No. 10840650) [Doctoral dissertation, Indiana State University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

George, T. (2020). Hermeneutics. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hermeneutics/

Gigerenzer, G., & Gaissmaier, W. (2015). Decision making: Nonrational theories. In *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (2nd ed., pp. 911-916). Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.26017-0

Gigliotti, R. A. (2020). *Crisis leadership in higher education: Theory and practice*. Rutgers University Press

Go, A. (2008, November 14). Wildfires scorch Westmont College. *U.S. News & World Report*. https://www.usnews.com/education/blogs/paper-trail/2008/11/14/wildfires-scorch-westmont-college

Goldin, C., & Katz, L. F. (2011). Putting the "Co" in education. *Journal of Human Capital, 5*(4), 377-417. https://doi.org/10.1086/663277

Graen, G. B. (1976). Role-making processes within complex organizations. In M. D. Dunnette (Ed.) *Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology* (pp. 1202-1245). Rand McNally

Graif, C. (2016). (Un)natural disaster: Vulnerability, long-distance displacement, and the extended geography of neighborhood distress and attainment after Katrina. *Population and Environment, 37*(3), 288-318. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11111-015-0243-6

Grawe, N. D. (2018). *Demographics and the demand for higher education.* Johns Hopkins University Press.

Grawe, N. D. (2021). *The agile college: How institutions successfully navigate demographic changes*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Greenlef, R. K. (1977). *Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness.* Paulist Press.

Grint, K. (2011). A history of leadership. In A. Bryman, D. Collinson, K. Grint, M. Ulh-Bien, & B. Jackson (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of leadership* (pp. 3-14). Sage Publications.

Groenewald, T. (2004). A phenomenological research design illustrated. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 3*(1), 42-55. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690400300104

Gruber, D. A., Smerek, R. E., Thomas-Hunt, M. C., & James, E. H. (2015). The real-time power of Twitter: Crisis management and leadership in an age of social media. *Business Horizons, 58*(2), 163-172. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2014.10.006

Guba, E. G. (1981). ERIC/ECTJ annual review paper: Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. *Educational Communication and Technology, 29*(2), 75-91. http://www.jstor.org/stable/30219811

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-117). Sage.

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods, 18*(1), 59-82. https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903

Hackman, J. R. (1990). Work teams in organizations: An orienting framework. In J. R. Hackman (Ed.), *Groups that work (and those that don't): Creating conditions for effective teamwork* (pp. 1-14). Jossey-Bass.

Hackman, J. R. (2012). From causes to conditions in group research. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 33*(3), 428-444. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.1774

Hambrick, D. C., & Mason, P. A. (1984). Upper echelons: The organization as a reflection of its top managers. *Academy of Management Review, 9*(2), 193-206. https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.1984.4277628

Hammersley, M. (2008). *Questioning qualitative inquiry: Critical essays.* SAGE. http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9780857024565

Hans, P. (2020, September 17). *President's remarks to the Board of Governors*. University of North Carolina System. https://www.northcarolina.edu/wp-content/uploads/reports-and-documents/president-docs/presidential-remarks-to-board-9.17.20.pdf

Harris, D. (2021, March 12). *President Harris reflects on the one-year anniversary of the COVID-19 global pandemic* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oo7_rP3VbI0

Harris, M. S., & Ellis, M. K. (2018). Exploring involuntary presidential turnover in American higher education. *Journal of Higher Education, 89*(3), 294-317. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2017.1390969

Heath, R. L. (2010). Crisis communication: Defining the beast and de-marginalizing key publics. In W. T. Coombs & S. J. Holladay (Eds.), *The handbook of crisis communication* (pp. 1–13). Wiley-Blackwell.

Heide, M., & Simonsson, C. (2019). Internal crisis communication: Crisis awareness, leadership and coworkership. Routledge.

Heifetz, R. A. (1994). *Leadership without easy answers*. President and Fellows of Harvard College.

Heifetz, R. A., Grashow, A. & Linsky, M. (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world*. Harvard Business School Press.

Hein, S. F., & Austin, W. J. (2001). Empirical and hermeneutic approaches to phenomenological research in psychology: A comparison. *Psychological Methods, 6*(1), 3–17. https://doi.org/10.1037/1082-989X.6.1.3

Heller, D. E. (2011). *The states and public higher education policy: Affordability, access, and accountability.* Johns Hopkins University Press.

Helsloot, I., Boin, A., Jacobs, B., & Comfort, L. K. (2012). The new challenges of mega-crises. In I. Helsloot, A. Boin, B. Jacobs, & L. K. Comfort (Eds.), *Mega crises: Understanding the prospects, nature, characteristics and effects of cataclysmic events* (pp. 5-11). Charles C. Thomas Publishing.

Hennessy, J. J. (1993). *Return to Bull Run: The campaign and battle of Second Manassas*. University of Oklahoma Press.

Hennessy, J. L. (2005, September 1). *A statement from President John L. Hennessy in response to Hurricane Katrina disaster*. https://news.stanford.edu/news/2005/september14/flood-091405.html

Herzberg, F., Mausner, B., & Snyderman, B. B. (1959). *The motivation to work*. Routledge.

Hextrum, K. (2019). Operation Varsity Blues: Discussing the legal capital exchanges and white property interests in athletic admissions. *Higher Education Politics & Economics, 5*(1), 15-32. https://doi.org/10.32674/hepe.v5i1.1359

Hersey, P., & Blanchard, K. (1982). *Management and organizational behavior: Utilizing human resources (4th ed.)*. Prentice-Hall

Hill, R. N. (1964). *The college on the hill: A Dartmouth chronical*. Dartmouth Publications.

Hodson, J. B. (2010). Leading the way: The role of presidents and academic deans in fundraising. In J. B. Hodson & B. W. Speck (Eds.), *New directions for higher education* (pp. 39-49). Jossey-Bass.

Hogeland, R. W. (1972). Coeducation of the sexes at Oberlin College: A study of social ideas in mid-nineteenth-century America. *Journal of Social History, 6*(2), 160-176. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3786607

Holston, H. (2020, March 28). The politics behind the COVID-19 responses. How much are we willing to sacrifice to protect ourselves against COVID-19? How do we battle the virus while minimizing the consequences? *Science Norway*. https://partner.sciencenorway.no/covid19-crisis-epidemic/the-politics-behind-the-covid-19-responses/1662531

Honu, Y. A. K. (2018). Shared governance: Opportunities and challenges. *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal, 22*(2), 1-8. https://www.abacademies.org/articles/shared-governance-opportunities-and-challenges-1528-2643-22-2-121.pdf

Hornak, A. M., & Garza Mitchell, R. L. (2016). Changing times complex decisions: Presidential values and decision making. *Community College Review, 44*(2), 119-134. https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552116629548

Horton, G. S. (2015). *The impact of college campus shooting incidents: An exploration of student perceptions* (Publication No. 3734048) [Doctoral dissertation, Lindenwood University]. ProQuest Dissertation and Theses Global.

House, R. J., & Mitchell, R. R. (1974). Path-goal theory of leadership. *Journal of Contemporary Business, 3*, 81-97.

Hussar, B., Zhang, J., Hein, S., Wang, K., Roberts, A., Cui, J., Smith, M., Bullock Mann, F., Barmer, A., & Dilig, R. (2020). *The Condition of Education 2020* (NCES 2020-144). National Center for Education Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2020144.

Jenkins, J. I. (2020, March 31). *Fr. Jenkins: "That's why they call us the 'Fighting Irish'"* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hPuoqLm-6lU

Jesse, D. (2020, September 18). U-M faculty now says it approved no-confidence vote against President Mark Schlissel. *Detroit Free Press.* *https://www.freep.com/story/news/education/2020/09/18/u-m-faculty-approve-no-confidence-vote-president/5830401002/*

Jin, Y., Liu, B. F., & Austin, L. L. (2011). Examining the role of social media in effective crisis management: The effects of crisis origin, information form, and source on publics' crisis responses. *Communication Research, 41*(1), 74-94. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650211423918

Johnson, B. J. (2011). Equity in the context of a crisis: Funding for higher education post-Katrina. *The Review of Black Political Economy, 38*(4), 339-348. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12114-011-9085-3

Johnson, G. S., & Rainey, S. A. (2007). Hurricane Katrina impact on three historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs): Voices from displaced students. *Race, Gender & Class, 14*(1), 100-119. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41675199

Johnson, J. L., Adkins, D., & Chauvin, S. (2020). Qualitative research in pharmacy education. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education, 84*(1), 138-146. https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe7120

Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking fast and slow*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Kallio, H., Pietilä, A.-M., Johnson, M. & Kangasniemi, M. (2016). Systematic methodological review: developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide. *Journal of Advanced Nursing 72*(12), 2954–2965. https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.13031

Kaminski, R. J., Koons-Witt, B. A., Thompson, N. S., & Weiss, D. (2010). The impacts of the Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University shootings on fear of crime on campus. *Journal of Criminal Justice, 38*(1), 88-98. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2009.11.011

Katz, R. L. (1955). Skills of an effective administrator. *Harvard Business Review, 33*(1), 33-42.

Katz, R. L. (1986). Excerpts from skills of an effective administrator. *Harvard Business Review, 64*(2), 198-198. https://hbr.org/1974/09/skills-of-an-effective-administrator

Kelly, R. E. (2008). Rethinking followership. In R. E. Riggio, I. Chaleff, & J. Lipman-Blumen (Eds.), *The art of followership: How great followers create great leaders and organizations* (pp. 5-16). Jossey-Bass.

Kerr, C. (2001). *The uses of the university* (5th ed.). Harvard University Press

Kezar, A., & Eckel, P. D. (2002). The effect of institutional culture on change strategies in higher education. *Journal of Higher Education, 73*(4), 435-460. https://doi.org/10.1080/0022/1546.2002.11777159

Kezar, A. J. & Holcombe, E. M. (2017). *Shared leadership in higher education: Important lessons from research and practice*. American Council on Education. https://www.vumc.org/faculty/sites/default/files/Shared-Leadership-in-Higher-Education.pdf

Kiester, E., Jr. (1994). The G.I. Bill may be the best deal ever made by Uncle Sam. *Smithsonian, 25*(8), 128. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ496814

Kimball, B. A. (2015). "Democratizing" fundraising at elite universities: The discursive legitimation of mass giving at Yale and Harvard, 1890-1920. *History of Education Quarterly, 55*(2), 164-189. https://doi.org/10.1111/hoeq.12112

Kliebard, H. M. (1986). *The struggle for the American curriculum*. Routledge.

Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development.* Prentice Hall.

Kraatz, M. S., Ventresca, M. J., & Deng, L. (2010). Precarious values and mundane innovations: Enrollment management in American liberal arts colleges. *Academy of Management Journal, 53*(6), 1521-1545. https://doi.org/10.5465/AMJ.2010.57319260

Kruis, N. E., Wentling, R. L., Heirigs, M. H., & Ishoy, G. A. (2020). Assesing the impacts of knowledge and location on college students' perceptions of gun control and campus carry policies: A multistate comparison. *American Journal of Criminal Justice, 45*(1), 25-47. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-019-09499-z

Labaree, D. F. (1997). Public goods, private goods: The American struggle over educational goals. *American Educational Research Journal, 34*(1), 39-81. https://doi.org/10.2307/1163342

Labaree, D. F. (2014). 2013 Dewey Lecture: College – What is it good for? *Education and Culture, 30*(1), 3-15. https://doi.org/10.1353/eac.2014.0006

Labaree, D. F. (2016). An affair to remember: America's brief fling with the university as a public good. *Journal of Philosophy of Education, 50*(1), 20-36. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.12170

Laderman, S. & Weeden, D. (2019). *2019 State higher education finance report*. State Higher Education Executive Officers Association. https://shef.sheeo.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/SHEEO_SHEF_FY19_Report.pdf

Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record, 97*(1), 47-68. https://www.unco.edu/education-behavioral-sciences/pdf/TowardaCRTEduca.pdf

Lail, A. J. (2020). *Scandals in college athletics: A case study exploring the impact of a college basketball scandal on the admissions/enrollment management process of a university* (Publication No. 27964778) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Northern Colorado]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Landahl, M. R. (2015). *The socio-behavioral response of survivors to campus active shooter events* (Publication No. 10139392) [Doctoral dissertation, State University of New York College at Cortland]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Leslie, D. W., & Fretwell, E. K., Jr. (1996). *Wise moves in hard times: Creating & managing resilient colleges & universities*. Jossey-Bass.

LeTourneau University (2021, March 11). *Special announcement from the LeTourneau University board of trustees* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q1DJ8shI83k

Lewin, K., Lippit, R., & White, R. K. (1939). Patterns of aggressive behavior in experimentally created "social climates." *The Journal of Social Psychology, 10*(2), 269-299. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.1939.9713366

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.

Liu, B. F., Shi, D., Lim, J. R., Islam, K. Edwards, A. L., & Seeger, M. (2021). When crisis hit home: How U.S. higher education leaders navigate values during uncertain times. *Journal of Business Ethics,* 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-021-04820-5

Lo Iacono, V., Symonds, P., & Brown, D. (2016). Skype as a tool for qualitative research interviews. *Sociological Research Online, 21*(12). https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.3952

Lopez, K. A., & Willis, D. G. (2004). Descriptive versus interpretive phenomenology: Their contributions to nursing knowledge. *Qualitative Health Research, 14*(5), 726-735. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732304263638

Luca, M., Rooney, P., & Smith, J. (2017, November 9). The impact of campus scandals on college applications. *Harvard Business School NOM Unit Working Paper No. 16-137.* https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2798756

Macheridis, N., & Paulsson, A. (2021). Tracing accountability in higher education. *Research in Education*, 1-20. https://doi.org/10.1177/0034523721993143

Maier, C., & Crist, J. R. (2017). From "Wicked Crisis" to responsive witness: Jean-Luc Marion and the American Roman Catholic sexual-abuse scandal. *Southern Communication Journal, 82*(3), 164-174. https://doi.org/10.1080/1041794X.2017.1315453

Malkiel, N. W. (2016). "*Keep the damned women out": The struggle for coeducation*. Princeton University Press.

Marcus, L. J., McNulty, E. J., Henderson, J. M., & Dorn, B. C. (2020). *You're it: Crisis, change, and how to lead when it matters most*. Hachette Book Group.

Marginson, S. (2011). Higher education and public good. *Higher Education Quarterly, 65*(4), 411-433. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2273.2011.00496.x

Marguerite, D. (2012). Anticipatory enrollment management: Another level of enrollment management. *College and University, 88*(1), 10-16. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ995754

Marsh, D. L. (1951). Imperatives in a college president. *Christian Education, 34*(1), 81-86. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41175560

Marshall, S. J. (2018). *Shaping the university of the future*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-7620-6_4

Martel, M. (2020, March). *COVID-19 effects on U.S. higher education campuses: Academic student mobility to and from China.* Institute for International Education. https://cbie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/IIE-COVID%E2%80%9019-Effects-on-US-Higher-Education-Campuses.pdf

Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review, 50*(4), 370-396. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346

Mays, N., & Pope, C. (1995). Qualitative research: Rigour and qualitative research. *British Medical Journal, 311*(6997), 109-112. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.311.6997.109

McAlexander, J. H., Koenig, H. F., & Schouten, J. W. (2006). Building relationships of brand community in higher education: A strategic framework for university advancement. *International Journal of Educational Advancement, 6*(1), 107-118. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.ijea.2150015

McCartney, K. (2020, August 5). Announcing a change to our Fall 2020 Plan, August 5, 2020. Smith College. https://www.smith.edu/president-kathleen-mccartney/letters/2019-20/change-to-fall-2020-plan-august-5-2020.

McClure, K. (2019). Examining the “amenities arms race” in higher education: Shifting from rhetoric to research. *College Student Affairs Journal, 37*(2), 128-142. https://doi.org/10.1353/csj.2019.0010

McClure, K. R., & Anderson, P. N. E. (2020). An uneven playing field: Fundraising at regional public universities in the aftermath of the great recession. *Philanthropy & Education, 3*(2), 1-26. https://doi.org/10.2979/phileduc.3.2.01

McDaniel, E. A., & DiBella-McCarthy, H. (2012). Reflective leaders become causal agents of change. *Journal of Management Development, 31*(7), 663-671. https://doi.org/10.1108/02621711211243863

McKinniss, S. (2021, July 21). *No confidence vote database*. Retrieved July 29, 2021, from https://www.seanmckinniss.org/no-confidence-vote-database/

Mettler, S. (2002). Bringing the state back in to civic engagement: Policy feedback effects of the G.I. Bill for World War II veterans. *American Political Science Review, 96*(2), 351-365. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055402000217

Miller, C. (2021). Online education statistics. *Educationdata.org*. https://educationdata.org/online-education-statistics

Mintzberg, H. (1979). *The structuring of organizations*. Prentice Hall.

Mirick, R. G., & Wladkowski, S. P. (2019). Skype in qualitative interviews: Participant and researcher perspectives. *The Qualitative Report, 24*(12), 3061-3072. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2019.3632

Moran, D. (2000). *Introduction to phenomenology*. Routledge.

Morgan, G. (2006). *Images of organization*. Sage Publications

Morse, J. M. (1994). Designing funded qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (p. 220-235). Sage.

Musselin, C. (2018). New forms of competition in higher education. *Socio-Economic Review, 16*(3), 657-683. https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwy033

National Center for Education Statistics. (1993). *120 years of American education: A statistical portrait*. U.S. Department of Education. https://nces.ed.gov/pubs93/93442.pdf

National Center for Education Statistics. (2019). *Status and trends in the education of racial and ethnic groups 2018*. U.S. Department of Education. https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=72

National Center for Education Statistics. (2021). *Enrollment in elementary, secondary, and degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by level and control of institution: Selected years, 1869-70 through fall 2029* [data set]. Digest of Education Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_105.30.asp

National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform*. https://www2.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/risk.html

National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. (2021, June 10). *Current term enrollment estimates*. Current Term Enrollment Estimates Report. https://nscresearchcenter.org/current-term-enrollment-estimates/

Nehls, K. (2012). Leadership transitions during fundraising campaigns. *Innovative Higher Education, 37*(2), 89-103. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-011-9193-9

Neumann, A., & Bensimon, E. M. (1990). Constructing the presidency: College presidents' images of their leadership roles, a comparative study. *Journal of Higher Education, 61*(6), 678-701. https://doi.org/10.2307/1981990

Nevins, A. (1962). *The origins of the land grant colleges and state universities: A brief account of the Morrill Act of 1862 and its results.* University of Illinois Press.

Nichols, A. L. (2016). What do people desire in their leaders? The effect of leadership experience on desired leadership traits. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 37*(5), 658-671. https://doi.org/10.1108/LODJ-09-2014-0182

Northouse, P. G. (2019). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (8th ed.). Sage Publications

Oden, R. (2005, September 9). *President's letter regarding Hurricane Katrina response - Carleton College*. https://www.carleton.edu/president/news/presidents-letter-regarding-hurricane-katrina-response/

Patton, L. D. (2016). Disrupting postsecondary prose: Toward a critical race theory of higher education. *Urban Education, 51*(3), 315-342. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085915602542

Pearson, C. M., & Clair, J. A. (1998). Reframing crisis management. *The Academy of Management Review, 23*(1), 59-76. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1998.192960

Pederson, T. (2018). Where are we, a century after the Spanish Flu? *United States: Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology, 32*(5), 2317-2318. https://doi.org/10.1096/fj.180501ufm

Perry, A. M. (2020, March 16). Hurricane Katrina provides lessons about closing campuses during the coronavirus crisis. *Brookings*. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2020/03/16/the-lessons-hurricane-katrina-taught-us-about-closing-campuses-in-a-crisis/

Peterson, T. O. and Van Fleet, D. D. (2004). The ongoing legacy of R.L. Katz: An updated typology of management skills, *Management Decision, 42*(10), 1297-1308. https://doi.org/10.1108/00251740410568980

Pfeffer, J. & Salancik, G. R. (2003). *The external control of organizations: A resource dependence perspective*. Stanford University Press.

Pierce, S. R. (2014). *Governance reconsidered: How boards, presidents, administrators, and faculty can help their colleges thrive.* Jossey-Bass.

Pines, D. J. (2021a, January 29). *University of Maryland: President Pines spring welcome message* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gcNyeTSzLMQ

Pines, D. J. (2021b, April 22). *Moving Maryland forward*. Office of the President. https://president.umd.edu/articles/moving-maryland-forward.

Porter, H. (2020, March 10). *What I learned from my term as acting president*. Inside Higher Ed. https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2020/03/10/advancement-officer-shares-lessons-serving-interim-president-opinion

Porter, M. E., & Nohria, N. (2018, July & August). How CEOs manage time. *Harvard Business Review*. https://hbr.org/2018/07/how-ceos-manage-time#how-ceos-manage-time

Price, N. (2018, February 2). The roles and responsibilities of a board of directors for a college or university. *BoardEffect*. https://www.boardeffect.com/blog/roles-responsibilities-board-directors-college-university/

Proper, E. (2019). Give or get off: The role of trustees in college fundraising. *Philanthropy & Education, 3*(1), 1-22. https://doi.org/10.2979/phileduc.3.1.01

Proper, E., Willmer, W. K., Hartley, H. V., III, & Caboni, T. C. (2009). Stakeholder perceptions of governance: Factors influencing presidential perceptions of board effectiveness. *International Journal of Educational Advancement, 9*(3), 166-173. https://doi.org./10.1057/ijea.2009.38

Randall, L. M., & Coakley, L. A. (2007). Applying adaptive leadership to successful change initiatives in academia. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 28*(4), 325-335. https://doi.org/10.1108/01437730710752201

Randel, D. M. (2005, September 7). *Katrina disaster response – A message from President Randel*. http://www-news.uchicago.edu/releases/05/katrina/letter.shtml

Ratzan, S. C. (2005). Communicating risk: From crisis to calm. *Journal of Health Communication, 10*(2), 103-104. https://doi.org/10.1080/10810730590915083

Roitman, J. (2014). *Anti-crisis*. Duke University Press.

Ross, E. D. (1938). The "father" of the land-grant college. *Agricultural History, 12*(2), 151. http://reader.library.cornell.edu/docviewer/digital?id=chla5077685_4141_003#page/54/mode/2up

Rowe, K. A. (2020, April 14). *Reflections from a quiet campus* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qub9wR_P9dA

Ruscio, K. P. (2017). Organized anarchies: The role of the president in today's university. *Change: The magazine of higher learning, 49*(2), 26-29. https://doi.org/10.1080/0091383.2017.1286213

Ryan, F., Coughlan, M., & Cronin, P. (2009). Interviewing in qualitative research: The one-to-one interview. *International Journal of Therapy and Rehabilitation, 16*(6), 309-314. https://doi.org/10.12968/ijtr.2009.16.6.42433

Saunders, B., Sim, J., Kingstone, T., Baker, S., Waterfield, J., Bartlam, B., Burroughs, H., & Jinks, C. (2017). Saturation in qualitative research: Exploring its conceptualization and operationalization. *Qual Quant, 52*, 1893-1907. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-017-0574-8

Schiavo, R. (2020). Vaccine communication in the age of COVID-19: Getting ready for an information war. *Journal of Communication in Healthcare, 13*(2), 73-75. https://doi.org/10.1080/17538068.2020.1778959

Scotland, J. (2012). Exploring the philosophical underpinnings of research: Relating ontology and epistemology to the methodology and methods of the scientific, interpretive, and critical research paradigms. *English Language Teaching, 5*(9), 9-16. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v5n9p9

Scull, W. R, Harbour, C., & Keonghee, T. H. (2020). Community colleges through the human resource organizational frame. *Development and Learning in Organizations, 34*(2), 45-48. https://doi.org/10.1108/DLO-09-2019-0218

Searle, N. S. (2007). Baylor College of Medicine's support of Tulane University School of Medicine following Hurricane Katrina. *Academic Medicine, 82*(8), 733-744. https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0b013e3180d0964f

Seeger, M. W., Sellnow, T. L., & Ulmer, R. R. (2003). *Communication and organizational crisis*. Greenwood Publishing Group.

Selingo, J. J., Cheng, S., & Clark, C. (2017). *Pathways to the university presidency: The future of higher education leadership*. Deloitte's Center for Higher Education Excellence. https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/insights/us/articles/3861_Pathways-to-the-university-presidency/DUP_Pathways-to-the-university-presidency.pdf

Seltzer, R. (2020, September 9). Who leads colleges after COVID-19? *Inside Higher Ed*. https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/09/09/what-college-presidents-say-about-leading-covid-19-era

Seymour, M., & Moore, S. (2000). *Effective crisis management: Worldwide principles and practice*. Sage.

Sheard, G., Kakabadse, A. P., & Kakabadse, N. K. (2011). Organisational politics: Reconciling leadership's rational-emotional paradox. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 32*(1), 78-97. http://doi.org./10.1108/01437731111099292

Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information, 22*(2004), 63-75. https://doi.org/10.3233/EFI-2004-22201

Shim, K., & Yang, S. U. (2016). The effect of bad reputation: The occurrence of crisis, corporate social responsibility, and perceptions of hypocrisy and attitudes toward a company. *Public Relations Review, 42*(1), 68-78. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2015.11.009

Siegal, N. (2006). Iowa College Town Reeling in Wake of Tornado Strikes. *The New York Times*, p. A9. https://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/15/us/iowa-college-town-reeling-in-wake-of-tornado-strikes.html

Sigelman, L., Sigelman, C., & Walkosz, B. (1992). The Public and the paradox of leadership: An experimental analysis. *American Journal of Political Science, 36*(2), 366-385. https://doi.org/10.2307/2111482

Simmons, E. H. (2022, January 13). Leading during an extended crisis. *Inside Higher Ed.* https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2022/01/13/chief-academic-officer-shares-leadership-lessons-pandemic-opinion

Simon, J. (1963). The politics of the Morrill Act. *Agricultural History, 37*(2), 103-111. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3740782

Skinner, N. A. (2019). The rise and professionalization of the American fundraising model in higher education. *Philanthropy & Education, 3*(1), 23-46. https://doi.org/10.2979/phileduc.3.1.02

Smircich, L., & Morgan, G. (1982). Leadership: The management of meaning. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 18*(3), 257-273. https://doi.org/10.1177/002188638201800303

Smith, J. M., & Willingham, M. (2019). *Cheated: The UNC scandal, the education of athletes, and the future of big-time college sports.* Potomac Books.

Sokol, C. (2020, June 23). EWU faculty senate votes no confidence in college president. *HeraldNet*. https://www.heraldnet.com/northwest/ewu-faculty-senate-votes-no-confidence-in-college-president/

Sommer, C. (1994, February 2). Colleges tally up earthquake damage. *The Los Angeles Times*, p. 2. https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/colleges-tally-up-earthquake-damage/docview/282207830/se-2?accountid=15053

Sommer, S. A., Howell, J. M., Hadley, C. N. (2016). Keeping positive and building strength: The role of affect and team leadership in developing resilience during an organizational crisis. *Group & Organizational Management, 41*(2), 172-202. https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601115578027

Spector, B. A. (2015). Carlyle, Freud, and the great man theory more fully considered. *Leadership, 12*(2), 250-260. https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715015571392

Speck, B. W. (2010). The growing role of private giving in financing the modern university. *New Directions for Higher Education, 2010*(149), 7-16. https://doi.org/10.1002/he.376

Spellings. (2006). *A test of leadership: Charting the future of U.S. higher education.* U.S. Department of Education. https://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/SpellingsReport.pdf

Stocum, D. L. (2013). *Killing public higher education: The arms race for research prestige*. Academic Press.

Stogdill, R. M. (1948). Personal factors associated with leadership: A survey of the literature. *Journal of Psychology, 26*, 35. https://doi.org/10.1080/00223980.1948.9917362

Swanson, R., & Smith, A. B. (2020). COVID-19 and the cutting of college athletic teams. *Sport in Society, 23*(11), 1724-1735. https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2020.1804106

Taber, K. S. (2013). *Classroom-based research and evidence-based practice: An introduction* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Tandberg, D. A. (2013). The conditioning role of state higher education governance structures. *The Journal of Higher Education, 84*(4), 506-543. https://doi.org/10.1353/jhe.2013.0026

Taylor-Bianco, A., & Schermerhorn, J., Jr. (2006). Self-regulation, strategic leadership and paradox in organizational change. *Journal of Organizational Change Management, 19*(4), 457-470. https://doi.org/10.1108/09534810610676662

Tekniepe, R. J. (2014). Linking the occupational pressures of college presidents to presidential turnover. *Community College Review, 42*(2), 143-159. https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552113516671

Thacker, R. S., & Freeman, S. (2019). Avoiding derailment: Symbolic leadership and the university presidency. *International Journal of Leadership in Education,* 1-21. tandfonlin.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13603124.2019.1631388?journalCode=tedl20

Thelin, J. R. (2011). *A history of American higher education* (2nd ed.). Johns Hopkins University Press.

Thelin, J. R. (2013). Success and excess: The contours and character of American higher education since 1960. *Society, 50*(2), 106-114. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-013-9630-8

Thelin, J. R. (2017). *American higher education: Issues and institutions*. Routledge.

Thelin, J. R. (2019). *A history of American higher education* (3rd ed.). Johns Hopkins University Press.

Thomas, J. C., & Young, S. (2011). Wake me up when there's a crisis: Progress on state pandemic influenza ethics preparedness. *American Journal of Public Health, 101*(11), 2080-2082. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2011.300293

Thompson, G., & Vecchio, R. P. (2009). Situational leadership theory: A test of three versions. *The Leadership Quarterly 20*(5), 837-848. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2009.06.014

Tierney, W. G. (2007). Averting the nuclear option. *Academe, 93*(4), 49-51.

Tienda, M. (2013). Diversity ≠ inclusion: Promoting integration in higher education. *Educational Researcher, 42*(9), 467-475. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X13516164

Tilak, J. B. G. (2008). Higher education: A public good or a commodity for trade? *Prospects, 38*, 449-466. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-009-9093-2

Toth, R. C. (2011). The Orangeburg Massacre: A case study of the influence of social phenomena on historical recollection. *Journal of African American Studies, 15*(4), 469-486. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12111-010-9125-2

Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight "big-tent" criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 16*(10), 837-851. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410383121

Trower, C., & Eckel, P. (2019, June 27). The pivotal – and pivoting – partnership. *Inside Higher Ed.* https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2019/06/27/need-improve-partnership-between-boards-and-presidents-opinion

Uhl-Bien, M., Riggio, R. E., Lowe, K. B., & Carsten, M. K. (2014). Followership theory: A review and research agenda. *The Leadership Quarterly, 25*(1), 83-104. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2013.11.007

University of Texas at Austin. (2020, September 23). *UT board of regents chairman Eltife congratulates president Jay Hartzell* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cdr9SQ6DUiU

Urick, A., Carpenter, B. W., & Eckert, J. (2021). Confronting COVID: Crisis leadership, turbulence, and self-care. *Frontiers in Education, 6,* 1-11. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2021.642861

Van Vugt, M., Hogan, R., & Kaiser, R. B. (2008). Leadership, followership, and evolution: Some lessons from the past. *The American Psychologist, 63*(3), 182-196. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.6.3.182

Vasileiou, K., Barnett, J., Thorpe, S., & Young, T. (2018). Characterising and justifying sample size sufficiency in interview-based studies: Systematic analysis of qualitative health research over a 15-year period. *BMC Medical Research Methodology, 18*(148). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-018-0594-7

Virginia Union University. (2021, May 26). *VUU 2021 board of trustees announcement* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8pu84BpH1Is

Vroom, V. H., & Yetton, P. W. (1973). *Leadership and decision-making*. University of Pittsburg Press.

Wake Forest University. (2021, May 7). *May 7, 2021 announcement from President Nathan Hatch and the board of trustees* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EkCjexHSZw0

Watkins, P. (1989). Leadership, power and symbols in educational administration. In J. Smyth (Ed.), *Critical perspectives on educational leadership* (pp. 7-26). Routledge.

Weerts, D. J. (2016). From covenant to contract: Changing conceptions of public research universities in American society. *The Good Society, 25*(2-3), 182-208. https://doi.org/10.5325/goodsociety.25.2-3.0182

Weick, K. E. (1979). Educational organizations as loosely coupled systems. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 21*(1), 1-19. https://doi.org/10.2307/2391875

Weick, K. E. (2000). Educational organizations as loosely coupled systems. In M. C. Brown, II (Ed.), *Organization & governance in higher education* (5th ed., pp. 36-49). Pearson Custom Publishing

Weick, K. E., & Quinn, R. E. (1999). Organizational change and development. *Annual Review of Psychology, 50*(1), 361-386. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.50.1.361

Westmoreland, A. (2020, March 20). *Coronavirus update: A message from Samford University President Andrew Westmoreland* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NVBm1V3jTy0

White, M. D., & Marsh, E. E. (2006). Content analysis: A flexible methodology. *Library Trends, 55*(1), 22-45. https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2006.0053

Whitford, E. (2021, June 10). Spring enrollment takes a plunge. *Inside Higher Ed*. https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/06/10/final-spring-enrollment-numbers-show-largest-decline-decade

Whitney, D. (2010). *Appreciative leadership: Focus on what works to drive winning performance and build a thriving organization*. McGraw-Hill.

Wingspread Group. (1993). *An American imperative: Higher expectations for higher education. An open letter to those concerned about the American future. Report of the Wingspread Group on Higher Education.* Johnson Foundation, Inc. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED364144

World Health Organization. (2020, March 11). *WHO Emergencies Press Conference on Coronavirus Disease Outbreak* [Virtual Conference Transcript]. Accessed 14 February 2021. Retrieved from https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/transcripts/who-audio-emergencies-coronavirus-press-conference-full-and-final-11mar2020.pdf?sfvrsn=cb432bb3_2

Xu, D., & Jaggars, S. S. (2014). Performance gaps between online and face-to-face courses: Differences across types of students and academic subject areas. *Journal of Higher Education, 85*(5), 633-659. https://doi.org/10.1353/jhe.2014.0028

Zumeta, W., Breneman, D. W., Callan, P. M., & Finney, J. E. (2012). *Financing American higher education in the era of globalization*. Harvard Education Press

APPENDIX A

EMAIL TO SOLICIT PARTICIPATION

SUBJECT: Special Invitation to Participate in Presidential Research Study

Dear President _____,

My name is Sean Schofield, and I am a Ph.D. candidate at William & Mary conducting a dissertation study about the reflections of college presidents' responses to COVID-19. This study is important because there is little (if any) research on the candid reflections of presidents' leadership responses to the crisis.

I need your help. Please fill out the 2-minute Qualtrics Survey (Linked HERE).

If you choose to participate in the second portion of the study (and are selected):

- I will request that you furnish a copy of your CV via email
- I will provide you with the Bolman & Deal Leadership Questionnaire (which you can complete in under 10 minutes)
- I will schedule a 1-hour follow-up Zoom interview, at your convenience, between now and November 15

In gratitude for your participation in this important research, I will provide you with detailed findings at the conclusion of the research study.

I greatly appreciate your time, and truly hope you will agree to be a part of this study.

Warmly,
Sean Schofield

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Leading in Crisis:

College & University Presidents' Reflections on Their Response To COVID-19

Purpose of the Study

This study, entitled Leading in Crisis: College & University Presidents' Reflections on Their Response To COVID-19, employs a phenomenological study to understand the experiences of college presidents leading through the pandemic, especially focused on how college presidents feel about their leadership response to the COVID-19 pandemic on their campus over a year later. It is my hope to understand what influence COVID-19 had (if any) on leadership choices, as well as understand the landscape and actors that presidents relied on for information, and from whom political pressure or support was applied.

Importance of Your Participation

Although public campus statements and reports abound from college and university presidents across America, candid reflections about leadership choices are currently unreported. The goal of this study is to develop an understanding of the influences and reflections of COVID-19 responses by college and university presidents, as well as the influence on leadership style or choice. As crises have become more common in higher education, engaging in college or university president reflections on leadership choices during a crisis may provide insight for crisis leadership research.

Who is the Researcher?

This study is being carried out to fulfill the dissertation requirement for a Doctor of Philosophy in Higher Education Administration within the William & Mary School of Education Educational Policy, Planning & Leadership (EPPL) program. The researcher is a W&M doctoral candidate who is also a full-time professional staff member at Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

How You Were Selected

First, I obtained a list of all non-profit colleges and universities from the National Center for Education Statistics IPEDS database. You were then identified as a college or university president serving in a public or private 4-year institution in one of the included states.

What I Will Request of You

- I will first send a brief demographic survey via email to learn more about you and your institution.
- I will then conduct one interview, via Zoom, at a time of your preference between October 2021 and November 2021.
- The interview will take approximately 60 minutes to complete, and will include questions aimed at responding to the primary research questions of this study, which are:
    - Research Question 1: How did college presidents at four-year institutions of higher education in three mid-Atlantic states determine what to prioritize throughout their pandemic response?
        - Sub-Question A: What type of information did the presidents rely on in determining their priorities?
        - Sub-Question B: What stakeholders did the presidents solicit to obtain information and help determine campus priorities?
    - Research Question 2: In reflecting on their decisions from March 2020 – November 2021, how do the participating presidents describe the ways that their leadership approach influenced their actions?

    - Sub-Question A: How, if so, did the college presidents studied alter their typical leadership approach and choices in the presence of a pervasive crisis?
    - Sub Question B: How do the college presidents studied anticipate leading during a crisis will shape their leadership in the future?
- With your permission, I would also like to record the interview to provide a transcript which I will code. I will be using randomly generated pseudonyms for this study, and any data with personally identifiable information will be redacted or removed prior to submitting this paper for publication. Once transcribed, all interview recordings will be destroyed.

Additional Information

Please know that:

- The confidentiality of your personally identifying information will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law.
- Your name, institutional information, and other identifiable information will be known only to the researcher through the information that you provide and through a web content analysis of publicly available data.
- Neither your name nor any other personally identifiable information will be used in any presentation or published work without prior written consent.
- The Zoom recordings of the interviews described above will be erased after the study is complete and/or if you opt-out of the study at any point.
- You may refuse to answer any questions during the interview if you so choose. You may also terminate your participation in the study at any time. To do so simply inform the interviewer(s) of your intention. Neither of these actions will incur a penalty of any type.
- Your participation in this study is completely voluntary.
- There is no compensation for participating in this study.
- A summary of the results of the study will be sent to you electronically once they are complete.

- There are no foreseeable risks in study participation.

How Can You Contact Me?

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact the interviewer:

Sean Schofield (smschofield@email.wm.edu) or at c: (908) 295-5530

If you have additional questions or concerns regarding your rights as a study participant or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact anonymously if you wish, the faculty committee chairperson, Dr. Pamela Eddy at 757-221-2349 or at peddy@wm.edu, or Dr. Jennifer Stevens at 757-221-3862 (jastev@wm.edu), chair of the William & Mary committee that supervises the treatment of study participants.

By checking the "I agree to participate" response below, then signing and dating this form, you will indicate your voluntary agreement to participate in this study and confirm that you are at least 18 years of age. You may either digitally sign by typing your full name in the participant space provided and adding the date, or wet sign, scan and return the document to me via email.

_____ I agree to participate.

_____ I do not agree to participate.

A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep.

Signatures

Participant: ____ Date: ___________

Researcher: ____ Date: ______

APPENDIX C

(PRE-INTERVIEW) SURVEY

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. Please respond to the prompts in this survey so I may get to understand more about the influence of COVID-19 on your institution and priorities. Before providing responses to this survey, you will be prompted to provide informed consent to participate in this survey, which will be used in educational research. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to me directly at smschofield@email.wm.edu or at (908) 295-5530.

1. The goal of this study is to obtain candid reflections of college and university presidents on their response to COVID-19. Your participation will remain confidential to the extent supported by law, and your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw participation in this study at any time, even without reason. By clicking yes below, you agree that you consent to these terms and wish to continue.
    a. Yes, I consent to be a part of this study
    b. No, I do not consent to be a part of this study
2. How long have you served in your current presidency?
    a. 0-3 years
    b. 4-8 years
    c. More than 8 years
3. Please rate the magnitude of change you have experienced in leading your institution since March 2020.
    a. I have experienced no change or very little change
    b. I have experienced moderate change

c. I have experienced a considerable amount of change

d. I have experienced complete change

4. Thinking about your presidency **before the pandemic**, please rank the following presidential tasks from the task that took the most attention, to the task that took the least attention

    a. Budget & Financial Management
    b. Fundraising
    c. Management of Senior Officials
    d. Governing Board Relations
    e. Enrollment Management

5. Thinking about your presidency **during the pandemic**, please rank the following presidential tasks from the task that took the most attention, to the task that took the least attention.

    a. Budget & Financial Management
    b. Fundraising
    c. Management of Senior Officials
    d. Governing Board Relations
    e. Enrollment Management

6. What stakeholder voices were most influential on decision-making **during the pandemic**? (Please select all that apply)

    a. Students
    b. Faculty
    c. Staff

d. External Political Figures

e. Alumni

f. External Business Partners

g. Governing Board

h. External Community Members

i. Health or Medical Advisors

j. Other (please fill in)

7. Would you be willing to volunteer to take the Bolman & Deal Leadership Questionnaire and participate in a 1-hour Zoom follow-up interview? (Not all who volunteer will be selected to participate).

    a. Yes – My email address is: (fill in email address). (*Email addresses will be saved in a password protected document and utilized as the only connection between a participant and their pseudonym*.)

    b. No

APPENDIX D

BOLMAN & DEAL LEADERSHIP QUESTIONNAIRE

(AS PROVIDED BY LEE BOLMAN)

Form S-4 Your name:____________________

LEADERSHIP ORIENTATIONS (SELF)

This questionnaire asks you to describe your leadership and management style.

I. **Behaviors**

You are asked to indicate *how often* each of the items below is true of you.

Please use the following scale in answering each item.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Always

So, you would answer '1' for an item that is never true of you, '2' for one that is occasionally true, '3' for one that is sometimes true of you, and so on.

Be discriminating! Your results will be more helpful if you think about each item and distinguish the things that you really do all the time from the things that you do seldom or never.

1. _____ *Think very clearly and logically.*

2. _____ *Show high levels of support and concern for others.*

3. _____ *Have exceptional ability to mobilize people and resources to get things done.*

4. _____ *Inspire others to do their best.*

5. _____ *Strongly emphasize careful planning and clear time lines.*

6. _____ *Build trust through open and collaborative relationships.*

7. _____ *Am a very skillful and shrewd negotiator.*

8. _____ *Am highly charismatic.*

9. _____ *Approach problems through logical analysis and careful thinking.*

10. _____ *Show high sensitivity and concern for others' needs and feelings.*

11. _____ *Am unusually persuasive and influential.*

12. _____ *Am able to be an inspiration to others.*

13. _____ *Develop and implement clear, logical policies and procedures.*

14. _____ *Foster high levels of participation and involvement in decisions.*

15. _____ *Anticipate and deal adroitly with organizational conflict.*

16. _____ *Am highly imaginative and creative.*

17. _____ *Approach problems with facts and logic.*

18. _____ *Am consistently helpful and responsive to others.*

19. _____ *Am very effective in getting support from people with influence and power.*

20. _____ *Communicate a strong and challenging sense of vision and mission.*

21. _____ *Set specific, measurable goals and hold people accountable for results.*

22. _____ *Listen well and am unusually receptive to other people's ideas and input.*

23. _____ *Am politically very sensitive and skillful.*

24. _____ *See beyond current realities to generate exciting new opportunities.*

25. _____ *Have extraordinary attention to detail.*

26. _____ *Give personal recognition for work well done.*

27. _____ *Develop alliances to build a strong base of support.*

28. _____ *Generate loyalty and enthusiasm.*

29. _____ *Strongly believe in clear structure and a chain of command.*

30. _____ *Am a highly participative manager.*

31. _____ *Succeed in the face of conflict and opposition.*

32. _____ *Serve as an influential model of organizational aspirations and values.*

II. **Leadership Style**

This section asks you to describe your leadership style. For each item, give the number "4" to the phrase that best describes you, "3" to the item that is next best, and on down to "1" for the item that is least like you.

1. My strongest skills are:

_____ a. *Analytic skills*
_____ b. *Interpersonal skills*
_____ c. *Political skills*
_____ d. *Ability to excite and motivate*

2. The best way to describe me is:

_____ a. *Technical expert*
_____ b. *Good listener*
_____ c. *Skilled negotiator*
_____ d. *Inspirational leader*

3. What has helped me the most to be successful is my ability to:

_____ a. *Make good decisions*
_____ b. *Coach and develop people*
_____ c. *Build strong alliances and a power base*
_____ d. *Energize and inspire others*

4. What people are most likely to notice about me is my:

_____ a. *Attention to detail*
_____ b. *Concern for people*
_____ c. *Ability to succeed, in the face of conflict and opposition*
_____ d. *Charisma.*

5. My most important leadership trait is:

_____ a. *Clear, logical thinking*
_____ b. *Caring and support for others*
_____ c. *Toughness and aggressiveness*
_____ d. *Imagination and creativity*

6. I am best described as:

_____ a. *An analyst*
_____ b. *A humanist*
_____ c. *A politician*
_____ d. *A visionary*

III. **Overall rating**

Compared to other individuals that you have known with comparable levels of experience and responsibility, how would you rate yourself on:

1. Overall effectiveness as a **manager**.

1	2	3	4	5
Bottom 20%		Middle 20%		Top 20%

2. Overall effectiveness as a **leader**.

1	2	3	4	5
Bottom 20%		Middle 20%		Top 20%

IV. **Background Information**

1. Are you: ____Male ____Female

2. How many years have you been in your current job? _____

3. How many total years of experience do you have as a manager? _____

APPENDIX E

PERMISSION TO ADMINISTER THE BOLMAN & DEAL LEADERSHIP QUESTIONNAIRE

RE: Requesting Permission to Utilize the Bolman & Deal Leadership Questionnaire External Inbox ×

lee@bolman.com via messagingengine.com 10:36 PM (11 minutes ago)
to me

Sean,

Thanks for your kind words and for your interest in the Leadership Orientations Instrument.
For research, I recommend using the longer instrument which you can find (along with some methodological information) at:
https://newsite.leebolman.com/leadership-orientations/

The shorter version of the instrument (which is section B of the longer one) has methodological limits because it uses what psychologists refer to as an ipsative scale. I see it as more useful for educational than research purposes.

I'm happy to give you permission to use the instrument. The one request we make is that you provide us with a link to or copy of any report or thesis that you produce which includes data from our instrument.

Best wishes.

Lee Bolman

APPENDIX F

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROMPTS

During your ____ years of tenure at ______, a lot has happened in higher education. The purpose of my research is to understand your experiences as a college president during the COVID-19 pandemic. I would like to ask you questions which will prompt you to engage in reflection of the influences on your choices as a leader, the method by which you made choices, and the challenges that you faced as a leader during the most significant health crisis of our time.

1. Please tell me a bit about your institution.
2. Describe the early days of the unfolding of the pandemic.
    a. What were your thoughts about how this would influence your institution and higher education?
    b. Who did you engage with to learn more in the early days of the pandemic?
    c. What were the earliest actions that you remember taking?
3. As you contemplated the campus response to the pandemic, what resources did you prioritize to understand the impact of COVID-19?
    a. Impact on the institution
    b. Impact on students
    c. Impact on faculty and staff
    d. Impact on the community or region
4. What were your earliest concerns about COVID-19?
    a. For the campus and health of the college/university
    b. For students and families

c. For the faculty and staff (including all different types of employees)

d. For the higher education community

e. For your immediate community or region

5. Did your concerns or priorities change during the pandemic, and if so, how?

   a. Early in the pandemic (March 2020)

   b. Summer/Fall 2020 (planning for the fall semester)

   c. Spring 2021 (commencement, more full return to campus)

   d. Currently (with Delta variant)

6. Describe how the campus community was involved in decisions regarding the pandemic

   a. In what ways did members of the campus community support you?

      i. Trustees

      ii. Administrators

      iii. Faculty

      iv. Students

      v. Media

      vi. Politicians or other elected officials

   b. In what ways did members of the campus community challenge you?

      i. Trustees

      ii. Administrators

      iii. Faculty

      iv. Students

      v. Media

      vi. Politicians or other elected officials

7. What were your top priorities as a president before COVID-19?
8. How would you describe your leadership style or approach?
    a. In what instances does this approach serve you best?
    b. How has your approach to leadership changed over time?
9. How do you see your approach to leadership after a year and a half of COVID-19?
10. How did your response to COVID-19 lean on your past experiences and leadership strategy?
    a. What prepared you best for this leadership challenge?
    b. What do you wish you would have known in advance?
11. What did you learn about yourself (personally and professionally) as a result of leading through the COVID-19 pandemic?
    a. How (if at all) did you view your role as a leader changing?
    b. How (if at all) did your style of engaging with followers change during the pandemic?
12. Upon its conclusion, what do you feel higher education leaders should take away from this pandemic?
    a. How does this thinking inform how you will develop leaders at your college in the future?
    b. What should state and national leadership development programs do differently based on your advice?
13. Is there anything that I didn’t ask that you would like to state for the record, to help others understand your experience?

APPENDIX G

RESEARCH QUESTION CROSS WALK TABLE

Research Question	*Supporting Data*	*Interview Prompt(s)*
RQ1: How did college presidents at four-year institutions of higher education in three mid-Atlantic states determine what to prioritize throughout their pandemic response?	• Analysis of reports (e.g., financial, COVID dashboards, board & community reports and press releases.	• 2. Describe the early days of the unfolding pandemic. • 3. As you contemplated the campus response to the pandemic, what resources did you prioritize to understand the impact of COVID-19? • 4. What were your earliest concerns about COVID-19? • 5. Did your concerns or priorities change during the pandemic, and if so, how?
SQ1a: What type of information did the presidents rely on in determining their priorities?	• Review of CDC, state, and local health district guidelines and information. • Analysis of reports (e.g., COVID dashboards, press releases)	• 5. Did your concerns or priorities change during the pandemic, and if so, how? • 6. Describe how the campus community was involved in decisions regarding the pandemic.
SQ1b: What stakeholders did the presidents solicit to obtain information and help determine campus priorities?	• Student communication • Media reports (on and off campus) • COVID dashboards	• 5. Did your concerns or priorities change during the pandemic, and if so, how? • 6. Describe how the campus community was involved in decisions regarding the pandemic.
RQ2: In reflecting on their decisions from March 2020 – November 2021, how do the participating presidents describe the ways that their leadership	• Review of strategic plan	• 7. What were your top priorities as a president before COVID-19?

approach influenced their actions?	• Review of pre-COVID-19 communications • Review of student and constituent media and communications	• 8. How would you describe your leadership style or approach? • 9. How do you see your approach to leadership after a year and a half of COVID-19? • 10. How did your response to COVID-19 lean on your past experiences and leadership strategy?
SQ2a: How, if so, did the college presidents studied alter their typical leadership approach and choices in the presence of a pervasive crisis?	• Review of press releases • Review of reports to the board • Articles in alumni newsletters or other campus communications	• 8. How would you describe your leadership style or approach? • How do you see your approach to leadership after a year and a half of COVID-19? • 11. What did you learn about yourself (personally and professionally) as a result of leading through the COVID-19 pandemic? •
SQ2b: How do the college presidents studied anticipate leading during a crisis will shape their leadership in the future?	• Review of publications (e.g., Inside Higher Ed, Chronical of Higher Ed) for presidential reflections • Review of leadership reflections and reports (e.g., National Student Clearinghouse, IHE special report) • Review of presidential communications	• 10. How did your response to COVID-19 lean on your past experiences and leadership strategy? • 11. What did you learn about yourself (personally and professionally) as a result of leading through the COVID-19 pandemic? • 12. Upon its conclusion, what do you feel higher education leaders should take away from this pandemic?

	(via YouTube and other social mediums)	

Appendix H

Emergent Themes and Codes Table

Theme	Codes
Reflections	Fear and Discomfort
	Honest Self-Awareness
	Earliest Awareness of Potential Crisis
	Lessons Learned
	Sole Responsibility for Decisions
	Hope/Optimism
	Positive Outcomes
	Increased Collaboration
	Work-Life Balance
	Decisions showcase values
	Leadership Development Experiences
	Support
	Challenge
	Challenging Higher Ed Held beliefs
	Courage/Self-confidence
	Need for quick decisions
Challenges Resulting from COVID	Ambiguity
	Imperfect Situation
	Broader Implications from Choices
	Transmissibility (COVID on Campus)
	Social Justice
	Competing Priorities
	Return to Campus
	Student Accommodations
	Mistrust for Administration
	Pre-Pandemic Priorities
	Abundance of Misinformation
COVID Response Tactics	Earliest Action
	Preparedness
	Decision-making without precedence
	Covid on Campus
	Decisive Action
	First Source of Information Sought

	Expert-Seeking
	2-Way Communication
	Decision --> Action
	Priorities
	Benchmarking
	Collective > Individual
	inspire hope
	Bring people together
4 Frames & Multi-Frame Approach	Structural Frame
	Human Resource Frame
	Political Frame
	Symbolic Frame
	Multi-Frame Thinking
Role of a President	Driving Consensus
	Voice of Reason
	Financial Management
	Fundraising
	Management of Senior Officials
	Enrollment Management
	Planning & Strategy
	Board Relations
	Stakeholders
	Communication
Characteristics of a Successful Leader	Transparency
	Learning from Past Experiences
	Quick Analysis
	Life-Long Learner
	Visionary
	Collaborative Skills
	Courageous
	Level-Headed
	Resilient
	Versatile
	Humble
	Provide Direction

VITA

Sean M. Schofield

EDUCATION

William & Mary	**Williamsburg, VA**
Ph.D., Education Policy, Planning, & Leadership	*May 2022*
Montclair State University	**Montclair, NJ**
M.A., Counseling (Student Affairs/Higher Education)	*May 2012*
Montclair State University	**Montclair, NJ**
B.A., Family & Child Studies (Family Services)	*January 2009*

PROFESSIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION EXPERIENCE

Muhlenberg College	**Allentown, PA**
Executive Director, Career Services	*May 2021 – present*
William & Mary (Raymond A. Mason School of Business)	**Williamsburg, VA**
Associate Director, Graduate Business Career Advising	*February 2019 – May 2021*
William & Mary (Cohen Career Center)	**Williamsburg, VA**
Assistant Director, Business Careers	*November 2017 – February 2019*
William & Mary (Cohen Career Center)	**Williamsburg, VA**
Assistant Director, Internships	*May 2015 – November 2017*
Montclair State University	**Montclair, NJ**
Adjunct Faculty, Family & Child Studies	*May 2012 – May 2015*
Montclair State University	**Montclair, NJ**
Internship Coordinator & Career Advisor	*January 2010 – March 2013*

PUBLICATIONS & HONORS

Passed Comprehensive Examination *with Honors* — Fall 2020

Kim, K. H., & Schofield, S. (2018). Empowering women in higher education and beyond. In S. Thompson & P. Parry (Eds.), *Exploring campus diversity: Case studies and exercises*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.