

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 388 145

HE 028 688

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 TITLE Profiles of Private, Four-Year College and University Presidents in the United States.
 PUB DATE 91
 NOTE 27p.
 PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Characteristics; Biographical Inventories; Church Related Colleges; *College Presidents; Higher Education; Institutional Characteristics; National Surveys; *Private Colleges; Profiles

ABSTRACT

This study focused on profiles of private, four-year college and university presidents in the United States. A stratified random sample of 291 presidents was drawn for the study from a total pool of 873. In January and March, 1991 a pilot-tested survey instrument was mailed and 276 responses were received. The "typical" president was found to be a Caucasian male who began the presidency at age 47, had served for 8 years, and was presently age 55. He was married, a Protestant, and had earned a doctoral degree from a private college or university in the field of education. The data were stratified by type of institutional control and Carnegie classifications which revealed statistically significant differences among different types of institutions. For instance, presidents of Protestant colleges were more likely to be male, married, Protestant, and to have attended a public university for their highest earned degrees. They were more likely to be African American than were presidents of other types of institutions. Presidents of Catholic institution had a greater probability of being older, female, single, and were older at appointment. Presidents from doctorate-granting institutions tended to be older, male, Caucasian, and older at appointment. (Contains 25 references and 5 tables.) (JB)

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**Profiles of Private, Four-Year College
and University Presidents in the United States**

by

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1991

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Abstract

This study focused on profiles of private, four-year college and university presidents in the United States. The "typical" president was found to be a Caucasian male who began the presidency at age 47, had served for eight years, and was presently age 55. He was married, a Protestant, and had earned a Ph.D. from a private college or university in the field of education. The data was stratified by type of institutional control (i.e., independent, Protestant, Roman Catholic) and Carnegie classifications (Doctorate-Granting Institutions, Comprehensive Colleges and Universities, Liberal Arts Colleges). Statistically significant differences were found among the different types of institutions.

**Profiles of Private, Four-Year College
and University Presidents in the United States**

In 1640 Henry Dunster was elected as the chief officer at Harvard college (Prator 1963). Since that time much has been written about college and university presidents. This study focused on the profiles of the private, four-year college and university presidents in the United States.

Literature Review

Schmidt (1957), in his study of the liberal arts college, said that "the most important individual in the early college was the president" (p. 103-4). "In many ways, the early college president was the college. Its identity became a reflection of his character, leadership, and personal success" (Kauffman 1980, p. 5). Cowley (1980) stated that one could "name a great American college or university, and you will find in its history a commanding leader or leaders who held its presidency. Name an institution with a brilliant but now-withered past, however, and you will probably have little difficulty in identifying the weak headmen presidents who have blocked its progress" (p. 70). The destiny of the American people may have been shaped to a greater extent by the leadership of major American colleges and universities than by any other similar group of leaders in business, religion, or politics.

Interest in profiles of college presidents has theoretical underpinnings in the work of Taussig and Joslyn (1932) and Warner and Abegglen (1955). Their principal purpose was to study vertical occupational mobility of the business elite, much of which is the product of more general social factors such as profiles of personal characteristics. Chief executive officers in American higher education have also been the object of much study. As early as the 1920s Kruse and Beck (1928) and Rainey (1929) reported profile characteristics on college presidents.

Since that time demographic characteristics of college presidents have been reported by various researchers (Arman 1986; Atwell 1980; Carbone 1981; Cohen & March 1986; Dyson 1978; Ferrari 1970; Green 1988; Hodgkinson 1971; Kunkel 1948; Moore 1983; Moore, Twombly, & Martorana 1985; Prator 1963; Runkel 1987; Sternecker 1980; Vaughan 1986; Warren 1938). While the college and university presidency is so diverse that it is extremely difficult to generalize about the individuals who occupy the position, Carbone (1981) stated that the data in the literature would allow one to project that the "typical" college president was a caucasian, married, Protestant man in his mid-fifties. He was first appointed as a college president in his mid-forties, and had served for 8-10 years. He had an earned doctorate, most probably in the field of education.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to determine a demographic profile of college presidents at private, doctorate-granting institutions, comprehensive universities and colleges, and liberal arts college in the United States.

The Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (Carnegie Foundation for Advancement of Teaching 1987) was used to identify the institutions by Carnegie classification (that is, Doctorate-Granting Institutions, Comprehensive Colleges and Universities, Liberal Arts), and the types of institutional control (that is, independent, Protestant, Roman Catholic) were determined from The HEP . . . Higher Education Directory (Higher Education Publications 1990). Presidents of the colleges and universities from territories and possessions of the United States were excluded, leaving a population of 873 presidents. A stratified random sample of 291 presidents, one-third of the population, was drawn for the study.

The researcher developed a survey instrument. A panel of experts, comprised of university professors skilled in the development and design of questionnaires, was consulted about the readability and understandability of the instrument. A pilot test was also conducted that included presidents who were not a part of the study. Based on the comments received, appropriate revisions were incorporated into the design of the survey.

The data were collected between January and March, 1991. Two hundred seventy-six (276) usable responses were received, which yielded a usable response rate of nearly 95 percent. The respondents were from 47 states and the District of Columbia. Using the Carnegie classifications, 63 percent (n=173) of the respondents were from Liberal Arts colleges, representing 32 percent of the population. Twenty-eight percent (n=79) of the respondents were from Comprehensive Universities and Colleges, representing 30 percent of the population. Nine percent (n=24) of the respondents were from Doctorate-Granting Institutions, representing 30 percent of the population. Forty-two percent (n=116) of the respondents were from Protestant institutions representing 27 denominations. Presidents from independent institutions represented 37 percent (n=103) of the responses, and 21 percent (n=57) were from Roman Catholic institutions.

Findings

Data were collected on fourteen specific profile variables (that is, exact position title, gender, racial/ethnic origin, age, age at appointment, years in position, marital status, religious preference, highest earned degree, field of study for the highest earned degree, institutional control (public/private) for institution of highest earned degree, institution where doctoral degree was earned, year doctoral degree was earned, and type of earned doctoral degree). These data are reported in this section.

Exact Position Title - Among the chief executive officers in private colleges and universities 98.6 percent were called "President." The remaining 1.4 percent were called "Chancellor." At Roman Catholic colleges, all chief executive officers were titled "President." At Doctorate-Granting institutions, 8.3 percent of chief executive officers were titled Chancellor.

Gender - Slightly more than 81 percent of presidents were male and 18.9 percent were female (table 1). There was a statistically significant difference in the gender of private, four-year college presidents when compared among types of institutional control. The highest concentration of male presidents were at Protestant institutions (93.1 percent), and the highest percentage of female presidents were at the Roman Catholic institutions (40.4 percent). The Doctorate-Granting institutions had a larger percentage of male presidents (95.8 percent) than did the Liberal Arts Colleges (77.3 percent). However, a statistically significant difference did not exist among the Carnegie classification categories.

Insert table 1 here
(Table 1 is at the end of the manuscript)

Racial/Ethnic Group - The presidents of private, four-year colleges and universities were predominantly caucasian (table 2). Only 5.8 percent of the respondents were Afro-American, 1.1 percent of the presidents were Native-American, less than one percent were Mexican-American, and less than one percent were Asian-American. All of the presidents at Doctorate-Granting institutions were caucasian. There existed no statistical differences between either of the comparison groups.

Insert table 2 here
(Table 2 is at the end of the manuscript)

Age - The average (mean) age of private, four-year college presidents was 55.0. The age range was from 38 to 70 years of age. There was no statistically significant difference among the types of institutional control.

However, there was a statistically significant difference among the Carnegie classifications. Presidents of private, four-year Liberal Arts colleges tended to be younger (54.0) than their counterparts at Doctorate-Granting and Comprehensive institutions (57.6).

Age at Appointment - The average (mean) age at appointment to the presidency was 47. The range for age at appointment was 28 to 65 years of age. Statistically significant differences were found among the Carnegie classifications. The age at appointment of presidents at Doctorate-Granting institutions (51.3) was significantly higher than that of the Liberal Arts Colleges (46.3). No statistically significant difference existed among the types of institutional control.

Years in Office (Tenure) - The average years served (tenure) in office was eight. The range was from 0 to 26 years. No statistically significant differences existed among either comparison group.

Marital Status - Over 75 percent of all private, four-year college and university presidents were married (table 3). Slightly more than 21 percent were single (13 percent were a member of a religious order and 8.3 percent were never married), and 3.3 percent were divorced, widowed, or separated. Statistically significant differences existed between the types of institutional control, since over 95 percent of Protestant college presidents were married and 79 percent of Roman Catholic college presidents were single. There were no statistically significant differences among the Carnegie classifications.

Insert table 3 here
(Table 3 is at the end of the manuscript)

Religious Preference - Nearly two-thirds of all private, four-year college presidents considered themselves Protestant (table 4). Nearly 28 percent of the presidents were Roman Catholic, 3.6 percent were Jewish, and 2.9 percent did not claim a religious preferences. There were statistically significant differences in religious preference among the types of institutional control and Carnegie classifications types. At Doctorate-Granting institutions 37.5 percent of the presidents were Protestant, 37.5 percent were Roman Catholic, and 12.5 percent were Jewish. Slightly more than 42 percent of the presidents at Comprehensive institutions were Roman Catholic.

Insert table 4 here
(Table 4 is at the end of the manuscript)

Highest Earned Degree - The doctorate is the highest earned degree held by 90.9 percent of the presidents at private, four-year colleges and universities. Slightly more than 7 percent of the presidents held a master's degree as their highest earned degree, and only 1.8 percent held a bachelor's degree as their highest earned degree.

Field of Study for Highest Earned Degree - A total of 29 major areas of study were identified for the highest earned degree. In order to simplify the process, the majors were categorized into seven general fields of study (that is, education, philosophy/theology, social sciences, fine arts/languages, hard sciences, business/law, other fields). Using these general fields of study, the highest concentration of majors was in the field of education (table 5). Nearly 26 percent of all private, four-year college presidents held their highest earned degree in the field of education. Also, 23 percent of the presidents obtained their highest earned degree in philosophy/theology, and 21.2 percent in the social sciences. A statistically significant

difference existed among the Carnegie classification types due to the high percentage of presidents at the Doctorate-Granting Institutions who had studied a hard science (29.2 percent) or business/law (20.2 percent) for their highest earned degree.

Insert table 5 here
(Table 5 is at the end of the manuscript)

Institutional Control (Public/Private) for Institution of Highest Earned Degree - Among the presidents of private, four-year colleges and universities 60.4 percent attended private institutions of higher education for their highest earned degree. The remaining 39.6 percent attended public institutions. A statistically significant difference existed among the Carnegie classifications since nearly 88 percent of the presidents of Doctorate-Granting institutions graduated from private institutions, compared to 53 percent of the presidents from Liberal Arts colleges.

Institutions where the Doctoral Degree was Earned - Ninety-seven institutions of higher learning were reported as the alma mater for the doctoral degree. Twelve of the presidents had received a doctoral degree from Harvard University. The University of Chicago, Yale University, and Columbia University each had graduated 11 of the presidents. Ten presidents had received doctorates from the University of Michigan and eight from Michigan State University. The remaining 76.6 percent of the presidents received their doctoral degree from one of 91 other institutions of higher learning.

Year Doctoral Degree was Earned - The highest number of doctoral degrees were awarded from 1970 to 1974, when 67 of the presidents (27.3 percent) received a doctoral degree. During the years 1960-1964, 19.5 percent of the presidents received a doctorate, and from 1965-1969, 21.1 percent of the presidents received a doctoral degree. Nine of the

presidents (3.7 percent) had received a doctoral degree since 1985.

Type of Earned Doctoral Degree - The type of doctorate most often received was the doctor of philosophy degree (Ph.D.), which had been earned by 67.2 percent of the presidents. The education doctorate (Ed.D.) was received by 12.8 percent, and 6.2 percent received a theology doctorate. The remaining doctorates were in medicine, law, business, or science.

Discussion

The "typical" private, four-year college or university president in the United States was found to be a caucasian male who began his presidency at age 47, had served for eight years, and was presently age 55. He was generally married and a Protestant. He had earned a doctor of philosophy degree from a private institution in the field of education.

The demographic profile of private, four-year college and university presidents in the United States, as presented in this study, is consistent with the historical profile of college and university presidents at various types of institutions of higher education as presented by the authors listed in the literature review. This is especially interesting when considering societal and educational changes that have taken place since the beginning of the century. However, it is important to remember that when demographic characteristics of any group of people are developed the focus is on the "typical" characteristics of the group. As in the case of the private, four-year college and university presidents in the United States, the focus is on uniformity, not on individuality. Therefore, although the reader was provided with typical characteristics of the presidents, individual profiles differ from the norm.

Different types of institutions of higher education require leaders who have qualities and personal traits which fit the needs of the specific institutions. Even though it is true that the "typical" private, four-year college president in the United States was not unlike that

revealed in earlier studies, there existed statistically significant differences between private, four-year presidents when compared among types of institutional control (that is, independent, Protestant, and Roman Catholic) and Carnegie classifications (that is, Doctorate-Granting Institutions, Comprehensive Universities and Colleges, and Liberal Arts Colleges).

Among the types of institutional control, the presidents that lead Protestant colleges tended to have a greater likelihood to be male, married, and to have attended a public school for his highest earned degree. He was Protestant and had a higher probability of being Afro-American than the presidents of independent or Catholic colleges. This is probably a reflection of the demographics of church memberships. The presidents of Catholic institutions of higher education had a greater probability of being female and single. The reason so many of Catholic presidents are single is because many of them (that is, priests and nuns) are members of a religious order. The Catholic presidents were most likely to profess a Catholic faith, be older in age, and be older in age at appointment to the presidency than their peers at Independent or Protestant colleges and universities.

Among the Carnegie classifications, the presidents from Doctorate-Granting institutions had a greater tendency to be male, caucasian, older in age, and older in age at appointment. They were also more likely to be Jewish or Catholic, have their highest earned degree in a hard science or business/law, and have attended a private university for their highest earned degree than their contemporaries at Comprehensive or Liberal Arts colleges. The profile of the president is probably a reflection of the "typical" faculty member at these colleges and universities.

Why do these differences exist among presidents of private, four-year college and university presidents? They exist in part because of the fact that different types of institutions of higher education search for and select presidents who have unique qualities and personal traits which fit the needs of their institution. When boards of trustees search for a leader for

their institutions they desire an individual that will "fit" the unique demands for leadership of that institution. Often they search for presidents with specific demographic profile characteristics.

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TABLE 1

Gender of Private, Four-Year College Presidents in the United States

| Gender | Institutional Control | | | | Carnegie Classification | | | | | | | | | |
|--------|-----------------------|------------|----------------|-----------|-------------------------|----------------------------|--------------|-------|----|-------|----|-------|-----|-------|
| | Independent | Protestant | Roman Catholic | All Types | Doctorate Granting | Comprehensive Institutions | Liberal Arts | | | | | | | |
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | | | | | | |
| Male | 81 | 79.4 | 108 | 93.1 | 34 | 59.6 | 223 | 81.1 | 23 | 95.8 | 67 | 84.8 | 133 | 77.3 |
| Female | 21 | 20.6 | 8 | 6.9 | 23 | 40.4 | 52 | 18.9 | 1 | 4.2 | 12 | 15.2 | 39 | 22.7 |
| Total | 102 | 100.0 | 116 | 100.0 | 57 | 100.0 | 275 | 100.0 | 24 | 100.0 | 79 | 100.0 | 172 | 100.0 |

 $\chi^2 (2, N = 275) = 28.195, *p = .000000075$
 $\chi^2 (2, N = 275) = 5.705, p = .058$

TABLE 2

Racial/Ethnic Group of Private, Four-Year College Presidents in the United States

| Racial/Ethnic Group | Institutional Control | | | | | | Carnegie Classification | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|-------|------------|-------|----------------|-------|-------------------------|-------|--------------------|-------|----------------------------|-------|--------------|-------|
| | Independent | | Protestant | | Roman Catholic | | All Types | | Doctorate Granting | | Comprehensive Institutions | | Liberal Arts | |
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Caucasian/White | 93 | 90.3 | 106 | 91.4 | 56 | 98.2 | 255 | 92.4 | 24 | 100.0 | 77 | 97.5 | 154 | 89.0 |
| Black/Afro-Amer. | 7 | 6.8 | 9 | 7.8 | 0 | 0.0 | 16 | 5.8 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 2.5 | 14 | 8.1 |
| Amer. Indian/Native Amer. | 2 | 1.9 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 1.8 | 3 | 1.1 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 3 | 1.7 |
| Hispanic/Mexican-Amer. | 1 | 1.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 0.4 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 0.6 |
| Oriental/Asian | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 0.9 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 0.4 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 0.6 |
| Total | 103 | 100.0 | 116 | 100.0 | 57 | 100.0 | 276 | 100.0 | 24 | 100.0 | 79 | 100.0 | 173 | 100.0 |

$$\chi^2 (8, N = 276) = 9.771, p = .281$$

$$\chi^2 (8, N = 276) = 7.978, p = .436$$

TABLE 3

Marital Status of Private, Four-Year College Presidents in the United States

| Marital Status | Institutional Control | | | | Carnegie Classification | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------|----------------|-----------|-------------------------|----------------------------|--------------|-------|----|-------|----|-------|-----|-------|
| | Independent | Protestant | Roman Catholic | All Types | Doctorate Granting | Comprehensive Institutions | Liberal Arts | | | | | | | |
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | | | | | | |
| Married/Living with Mate | 87 | 84.5 | 111 | 95.7 | 10 | 17.5 | 208 | 75.4 | 19 | 79.2 | 52 | 65.8 | 137 | 79.2 |
| Single (member of a religious order) | 6 | 5.8 | 1 | 0.9 | 29 | 50.9 | 36 | 13.0 | 3 | 12.5 | 14 | 17.7 | 19 | 11.0 |
| Single (never married) | 6 | 5.8 | 1 | 0.9 | 16 | 28.1 | 23 | 8.3 | 2 | 8.3 | 13 | 16.5 | 8 | 4.6 |
| Divorced | 3 | 2.9 | 1 | 0.9 | 2 | 3.5 | 6 | 2.2 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 6 | 3.5 |
| Widowed | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 1.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 0.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 1.2 |
| Separated | 1 | 1.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 0.4 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 0.6 |
| TOTAL | 103 | 100.0 | 116 | 100.0 | 57 | 100.0 | 276 | 100.0 | 24 | 100.0 | 79 | 100.0 | 173 | 100.0 |

 $\chi^2 (10, N = 276) = 153.915, *p = .00001$
 $\chi^2 (10, N = 276) = 17.699, p = .060$

TABLE 4

Religious Preference of Private, Four-Year College Presidents in the United States

| | Institutional Control | | | | | | Carnegie Classification | | | | | | | |
|----------------|-----------------------|-------|------------|-------|----------------|-------|-------------------------|-------|--------------------|-------|----------------------------|-------|--------------|-------|
| | Independent | | Protestant | | Roman Catholic | | All Types | | Doctorate Granting | | Comprehensive Institutions | | Liberal Arts | |
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Protestant | 63 | 62.4 | 113 | 97.4 | 3 | 5.3 | 179 | 65.3 | 9 | 37.5 | 45 | 57.7 | 125 | 72.7 |
| Roman Catholic | 19 | 18.8 | 3 | 2.6 | 54 | 94.7 | 76 | 27.7 | 9 | 37.5 | 33 | 42.3 | 34 | 19.8 |
| Jewish | 10 | 9.9 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 10 | 3.6 | 3 | 12.5 | 0 | 0.0 | 7 | 4.1 |
| None | 8 | 7.9 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 8 | 2.9 | 2 | 8.3 | 0 | 0.0 | 6 | 3.5 |
| Greek Orthodox | 1 | 1.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 0.4 | 1 | 4.2 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| TOTAL | 101 | 100.0 | 116 | 100.0 | 57 | 100.0 | 274 | 100.0 | 24 | 100.0 | 78 | 100.0 | 172 | 100.0 |

 $\chi^2 (8, N = 274) = 204.041, *p = .000001$
 $\chi^2 (8, N = 274) = 39.070, *p = .0000048$

TABLE 5

Field of Study for Highest Earned Degree of Private, Four-Year College Presidents in the United States

| Field of Study | Institutional Control | | | | | | Carnegie Classification | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|-------|------------|-------|----------------|-------|-------------------------|-------|--------------------|-------|----------------------------|-------|--------------|-------|
| | Independent | | Protestant | | Roman Catholic | | All Types | | Doctorate Granting | | Comprehensive Institutions | | Liberal Arts | |
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Education | 14 | 13.7 | 40 | 34.8 | 17 | 29.8 | 71 | 25.9 | 2 | 8.3 | 27 | 34.2 | 42 | 24.6 |
| Philosophy/Theology | 20 | 19.6 | 30 | 26.1 | 13 | 22.8 | 63 | 23.0 | 7 | 29.2 | 19 | 24.1 | 37 | 21.6 |
| Social Sciences | 30 | 29.4 | 20 | 17.4 | 8 | 14.0 | 58 | 21.2 | 2 | 8.3 | 15 | 19.0 | 41 | 24.0 |
| Fine Arts/Languages | 14 | 13.7 | 7 | 6.1 | 8 | 14.0 | 29 | 10.6 | 0 | 0.0 | 8 | 10.1 | 21 | 12.3 |
| Hard Sciences | 15 | 14.7 | 7 | 6.1 | 6 | 10.5 | 28 | 10.2 | 7 | 29.2 | 5 | 6.3 | 16 | 9.4 |
| Business/Law | 7 | 6.9 | 9 | 7.8 | 5 | 8.8 | 21 | 7.7 | 5 | 20.8 | 5 | 6.3 | 11 | 6.4 |
| Other Fields | 2 | 2.0 | 2 | 1.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 4 | 1.5 | 1 | 4.2 | 0 | 0.0 | 3 | 1.8 |
| TOTAL | 102 | 100.0 | 115 | 100.0 | 57 | 100.0 | 274 | 100.0 | 24 | 100.0 | 79 | 100.0 | 171 | 100.0 |

 $\chi^2 (12, N = 274) = 25.058, p = .015$ $\chi^2 (12, N = 274) = 29.474, *p = .0033$