

# Stories from the Summit Trail: Leadership Journeys of Senior Women in Higher Education

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STORIES FROM THE SUMMIT TRAIL:  
LEADERSHIP JOURNEYS OF SENIOR WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Kelly Hannum  
Shannon Muhly  
Pamela Shockley-Zalabak  
Judith S. White

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Today, as in decades past, Americans are recovering from a major recession, looking toward growth, inclusion and cohesion to strengthen our nation's economic, social and civic future. At the same time, thousands of accredited colleges and universities, the majority of which were hit particularly hard with budget reductions between 2007 and 2013, are preparing to educate millions more Americans in the years ahead, as our nation's population grows from 316 million to over 400 million by 2050 (United States Census Bureau, 2012).

For the past century, the diversification of academic leaders to reflect the changing gender and ethnic composition of college and university students has lagged far behind the growth of women and minority students on our campuses. Dr. Lynn Gordon (1990), Professor Emerita of History at the University of Rochester, documented that in 1870, 11,000 women were enrolled in higher education, representing 21% of all students in college. Today, an estimated 60% of college and university students are women and 37% are students of color. In contrast, the number of female and minority presidents in America's colleges and universities is woefully underrepresented at an estimated 26% and 13% respectively (Cook & Kim, 2012).

The evidence over many decades is clear: women are excellent leaders of our colleges and universities. Think about the stellar accomplishments of Nancy Cantor, Waded Cruzado, Drew Gilpin Faust, Juliet García, Mildred García, Muriel Howard, DeRionne Pollard, Donna Shalala, and Nancy Zimpher to name just a few of the small number in office today! Further, our nation's students need role models with deep knowledge of their cultures, histories and communities at all levels of the academy who reflect their genders, races and ethnicities. What better time to recruit top-tier, competent, confident women and minorities from the ranks of our nation's faculty, department chairs, deans and other positions to take the helm at the highest levels of our institutions? Dramatic change is needed and the time is now.

Stories from the Summit Trail provides guidance for our efforts. This new research from HERS, the University of Colorado Colorado Springs, and the Center for Creative Leadership documents the leadership journeys of 35 women presidents, chancellors, provosts and vice presidents. Their stories offer a clear path forward for colleges, universities and policy leaders at the local, state and federal levels to make significant changes in the number of women – especially women of color – who are positioning and positioned right now to enter these top academic jobs. Progress to diversify the top ranks of leadership has been slow, and we must change course. The results of this study call upon all of us – women and men – to think deeply about and take action to recruit differently, to hire differently, and to support differently those women who will, in turn, elevate our nation's human capital to far higher levels than in decades past.

Our nation needs more women to lead our institutions and to bring connection between collaboration and competition. We need to develop legions of mentors to identify and cultivate diverse female talent who will govern, lead and manage our institutions, to help these new leaders tackle the toughest problems imaginable. We must have more senior women available to share lessons learned with younger women, so they are not left to find the trail alone.

As we reflect on the remarkable contributions of the courageous women who are leading right now, together we can leverage the time ahead of us to have a greater impact on our students, our institutions, our communities, and our nation than ever before. It is essential that governing boards, college and university leaders, foundation and business CEOs, and policymakers take time to read this report and join the call to action. America cannot wait any longer to diversify its top ranks with the bold and thoughtful steps proposed in this report. Our nation's future is at stake and we need leaders who understand what is at risk, who will pursue new directions for higher education and who will take action to ensure that education will drive our civic, social and economic prosperity for the 21st century.

# Stories from the Summit Trail: Leadership Journeys of Senior Women Leaders in Higher Education

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With support from TIAA-CREF, a collaborative team of researchers from HERS—Higher Education Resource Services, the University of Colorado Colorado Springs, and the Center for Creative Leadership conducted and analyzed interviews with 35 senior level women leaders in higher education about their journey to the top and their experience of being a leader. Much of what we learned echoes themes consistent with multiple streams of research and reinforces that the experiences of women leaders are filled with trade-offs. In an era in which higher education needs a larger and more diverse cadre of leaders to face the challenges ahead, our findings indicate grounds for optimism and provide insight into how to better support women throughout their leadership journey.

In order to prepare women, and those supporting them in the journey to senior leadership, it is important to identify the barriers women leaders are likely to face so that these barriers can be anticipated, reduced, and surmounted. It is equally critical to understand the sources of support, so that support can be sought and maximized. In some cases, seemingly small acts of encouragement were enough to spur women into higher levels of leadership. The Table below provides a list of the Barriers and Supports we identified from our interviews.

BARRIERS TO LEADERSHIP	SUPPORTS TO LEADERSHIP
Different Expectations for Men and Women Discouragement and Sabotage Lack of Opportunity and Support Not Having a Leadership Identity	Encouragement and Support Formal Development Experiences Having a Role Model Early Leadership Experiences

One often reads about the challenges and pressures senior leaders face, especially women leaders. There are undoubtedly negative aspects of being a senior leader. There are also many positive and compelling aspects of the role. It is critical to help women develop systems and strategies to minimize or cope with the negative, while simultaneously understanding and embracing the positive aspects of these opportunities. The Table below provides a list of the Negative and Positive aspects of being in a senior leadership role identified from our interviews.

NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF THE ROLE	POSITIVE ASPECTS OF THE ROLE
Time Demands of the Job Scrutiny and Criticism Pressure of Ultimate Accountability Isolation Broad Scope of the Job Not Fitting In - Not Being Heard	Making an Impact Power, Authority, and Autonomy Being a Role Model Broad Scope of the Job Having an Influence

# Stories from the Summit Trail: Leadership Journeys of Senior Women Leaders in Higher Education

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, *continued*

The women leaders we interviewed saw the impact that women at the top can make. That experience motivated these leaders to work through the challenges they faced. Part of what made confronting barriers and negative aspects worth the effort was the importance of influencing change and making a difference. Women of color were even more likely to report contributing a vital, and often missing, voice in decision-making as a positive aspect of their leadership.

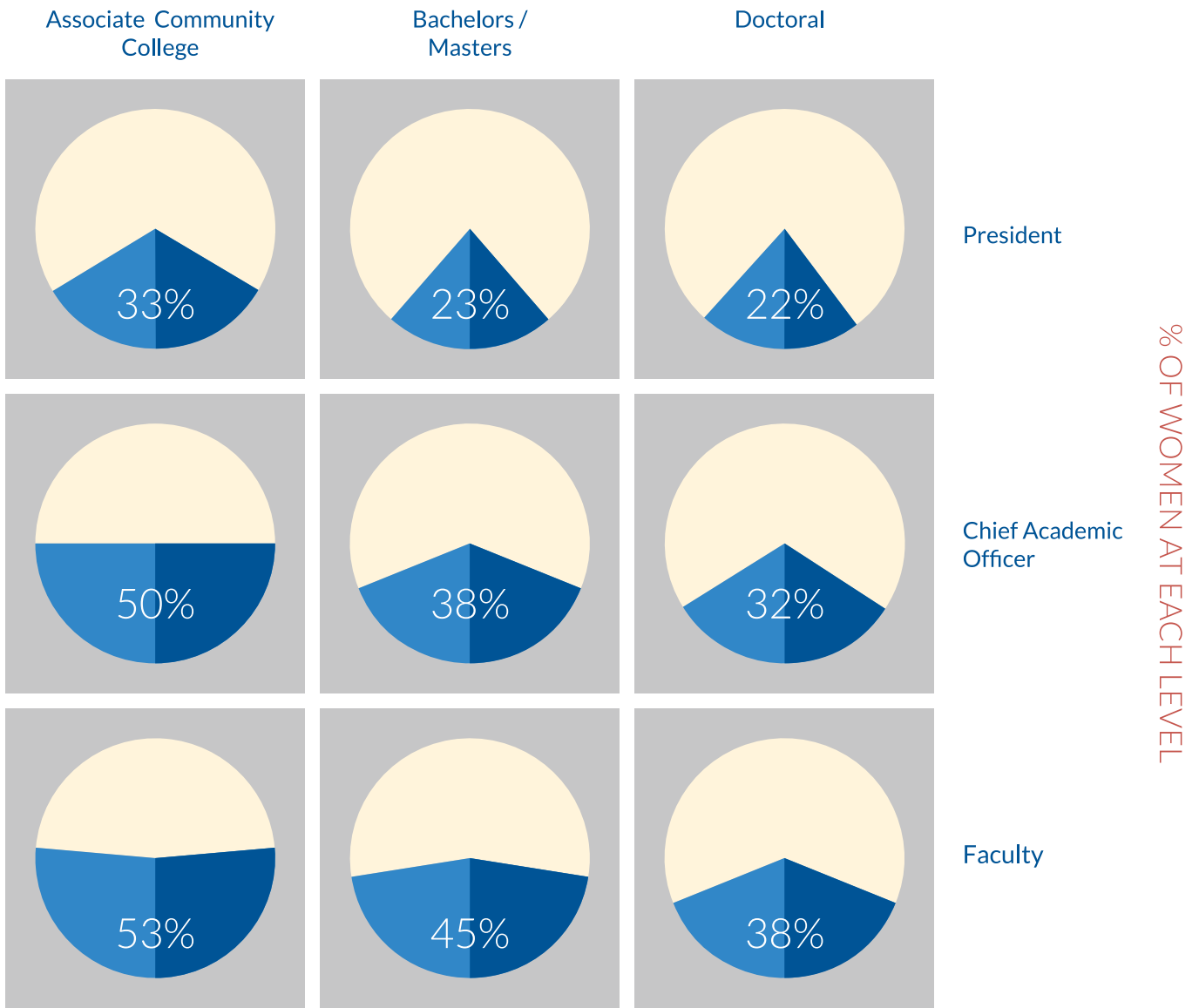
Yet, as one woman observed, higher education is increasingly “...more politicized and personalized.” High visibility roles often bring women a distinctive and gendered version of criticism and scrutiny. For women of color, the criticism often had racial overtones as well. Expecting higher levels of criticism and scrutiny and having strategies for addressing and coping with it are critical for women leaders; as is questioning criticism and scrutiny that is rooted in and perpetuates negative stereotypes.

It is noteworthy that the percentage of women in top leadership roles decreases as the prestige and resources of the institutional type increase. Personal choices cannot fully account for the steep slope from 33% women presidents at community colleges to 22% at doctoral institutions. Statistics illustrated in the infographic on page 5, taken from *Benchmarking Women's Leadership in the United States 2013* (Colorado Women's College, 2013), indicate that women's entry into these academic leadership roles is already curbed through lower access to tenured faculty positions – 53% at community colleges and only 38% at doctoral universities.

Current presidents and chancellors, boards of trustees and higher education associations have important roles to play in supporting more inclusive and effective leadership at senior levels. The need to develop and retain talented leaders from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives is not a women's issue; it is an institutional imperative affecting everyone. Senior leadership that reflects only a narrow part of our population is not likely to yield the most beneficial results for our communities and industries.

A gathering of women presidents and chancellors and other women leaders in higher education discussed the findings in this research report at the HERS Summit in Denver, April 10-12, 2014. They concluded that the time had come for collective effort to create a culture of advancement and ascent for women of all backgrounds. Their agenda of what aspiring women leaders can do, what institutional leaders can do, and what organizations and associations can do, is set out in the “Trail Guides” that conclude the report.

## TYPE OF INSTITUTION



\*Colorado Women's College. (2013). *Benchmarking women's leadership in the United States 2013*. Denver, CO: Colorado Women's College.

<http://womenscollege.du.edu/benchmarking-womens-leadership/index.html>



STORIES FROM THE SUMMIT TRAIL:  
LEADERSHIP JOURNEYS OF SENIOR WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION

# Stories from the Summit Trail: Leadership Journeys of Senior Women Leaders in Higher Education

## OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH

### Seeking New Leaders for the New Terrain of Higher Education

Fundamental changes are underway in higher education. Student enrollment is growing, student demographics are increasingly more diverse, and expectations for education have never been higher. The cost of earning a degree is increasing with new business models in higher education shifting the cost from societal responsibility to individual and family responsibilities. The types of institutions offering an advanced degree are changing (for example, more for-profit as well as online institutions). Technologies are changing what is taught as well as how teaching and learning are accomplished.

While these many transitions are occurring, higher education is also experiencing a significant period of turn-over as an unusually high number of presidents and chancellors are reaching retirement. As institutions seek new leaders, they must find individuals capable of creating new visions for addressing these turbulent times. Much research and practical experience have shown that greater diversity in organizational leadership provide broader perspective, increased creativity, and enhanced performance (Joy, Carter, Wagner, & Narayanan, 2007). This insight is prompting many to look for ways to diversify the cadre of presidents for higher education as retirement openings are filled. These efforts, however, will require significant changes from the record of recruiting and selecting presidents and chancellors over the past decade. The period since 2006 has seen very small gains in the number of women presidents and some decrease in the number of ethnic minorities selected for these roles

(Cook & Kim, 2012). If higher education is to make the critical transitions necessary for the future, we must change our leadership development practices.

This study, *Stories from the Summit Trail: Leadership Journeys of Senior Women in Higher Education*, is our effort to contribute to new practices for women of all backgrounds. The research reported here was undertaken to determine what lessons could be gained from a diverse group of women leaders who have achieved presidencies or who have moved into roles from which they aspire to presidencies. What were their experiences on the Summit trail and how might other women be encouraged and aided in negotiating this ascent? From systematic interviews with thirty-five women leaders—20 white women and 15 women of color—our research reports on the barriers they experienced or observed facing women in leadership roles, as well as key sources of support to sustain them and other women leaders. Their stories reveal vividly what these women saw as both the negative dimensions and positive rewards of their lives as leaders—and why for almost all of those interviewed, they chose to seek the leadership role and to stay the course despite its demands. These women are the sort of senior leaders needed now to provide the creative solutions in this period of transition. They are also valuable guides for those we want to reach the leadership summit in the decade ahead.

# Stories from the Summit Trail: Leadership Journeys of Senior Women Leaders in Higher Education

## Collecting Stories from the Summit Trail

Our research team conducted and analyzed interviews with 35 senior-level women in higher education. Interviewees were identified by tapping into the professional networks of the Chancellor at a major Midwestern University and the Executive Director of a leadership development institute for women in higher education. A snowball sampling technique was used to identify additional women to be interviewed. All women were assured that the information they shared would be kept confidential. Interviews were conducted face-to-face whenever possible, but the majority of interviews were conducted over the phone.

We made efforts to gather information from a diverse and representative sample within this set of interviews. We made a special effort to interview women of color in order to gather sufficient data to determine if white women and women of color have different experiences or perspectives related to senior leadership roles and what it takes to reach that level. Twenty of the interviewees were Caucasian; with the remaining 15 interviewees identifying as African American (9), Latina (1), Native American (2), Latina & Native American (1) or Other (2). An Asian/Pacific Islander president was interviewed following the initial interviews and data analysis. Her perspectives are incorporated in examples but not in the statistical data.

Another important element for the sample was collecting responses from women who were at the level of President, Chancellor or System Head and from women in other senior roles,

generally in the presidential cabinet level. In terms of their organizational level, 15 were Presidents/Chancellors (two being emeritae), 10 were Vice Presidents/Vice Chancellors, five were Provosts, with the remaining five falling into other senior leadership roles, such as Dean of Faculty, Chief Diversity Officer or Treasurer etc. We also made an effort to interview women who led in different academic settings. Fourteen participants were employed by Public Universities, with the remaining women representing a variety of institution types including Private Liberal Arts Colleges, Community Colleges, Private Universities, Tribal, Technical, Public, and Private Colleges, an Arts College, or a Board of Regents. Additional information about the demographics of the sample group, as well as our interview protocol, is provided in the appendices.

Four members of the research team read all the interview summaries and proposed and discussed themes from interviews; 15 themes emerged for coding. Other researchers systematically and independently reviewed interviews to identify passages of text related to the 15 identified themes. From this coding we identified themes to pursue based partly on the level of inter-rater agreement, but also on the desire to provide a balanced overview by focusing on the dichotomies of positive and negative stories that emerged. With this approach in mind we report on two sets of overarching themes: Barriers to Leadership and Supports for Leadership; Negative Aspects of Being in a Leadership Role and Positive Aspects of Being in Leadership Role.

# Stories from the Summit Trail: Leadership Journeys of Senior Women Leaders in Higher Education

## Preparing for the Challenges and Savoring the Accomplishments

Our analysis then focused on these two sets of trade-offs. The first set of themes examines the barriers to and supports for leadership roles. The women we interviewed shared stories about experiences that provided them with support on their leadership journey as well as stories of the barriers or roadblocks they faced along the way. The second set of themes focused on the negative and positive aspects of being in a senior leadership role within higher education. Interviewees were asked, and shared examples, about the advantages and disadvantages of being a senior leader. We then coded responses into sub-themes to better illustrate the positive and negative aspects of being in a leadership role. While in some ways the theme of “balancing trade-offs” would appear to be well covered in the literature related to women’s leadership, most such discussions focus on the negative impact of dealing with choices. Emerging women leaders very much need more reports describing the satisfactions of exercising senior leadership and the positive results of withstanding the frequently described challenges (White, 2012).

We then examined the relationship between the categories within each thematic area and the racial categorization of the women in our sample. This is not to suggest that either white women or women of color are homogenous groupings, but rather to determine albeit at a crude level, if women of color and white women have different experiences and perspectives of their

leadership journey. Within this set of interviewees, we found three areas with statistically significant differences between white women and women of color. They are the Barriers of Scrutiny and Criticism and Lack of Opportunity and Support, and the Positive Aspect of Leadership related to Having an Influence. In all cases women of color reported higher rates of experience with the category as compared to white women. Interestingly while women of color were more heavily represented in the non-president group, we found no statistically significant difference when we analyzed the groups by positional level. Acknowledging that our sample did not allow for a deep level of analysis across different ethnic and racial groups, these analyses still confirm a core finding of previous research about the intersectionality of race and gender. Frequently women of color and white women may be encountering the “same things” and also be experiencing the impacts differently (Edmundson, Bell, & Nkomo, 2001). Attention to these distinctions is needed to increase the number of women from a diverse range of backgrounds bringing their skills and perspectives to top positions.

# Stories from the Summit Trail: Leadership Journeys of Senior Women Leaders in Higher Education

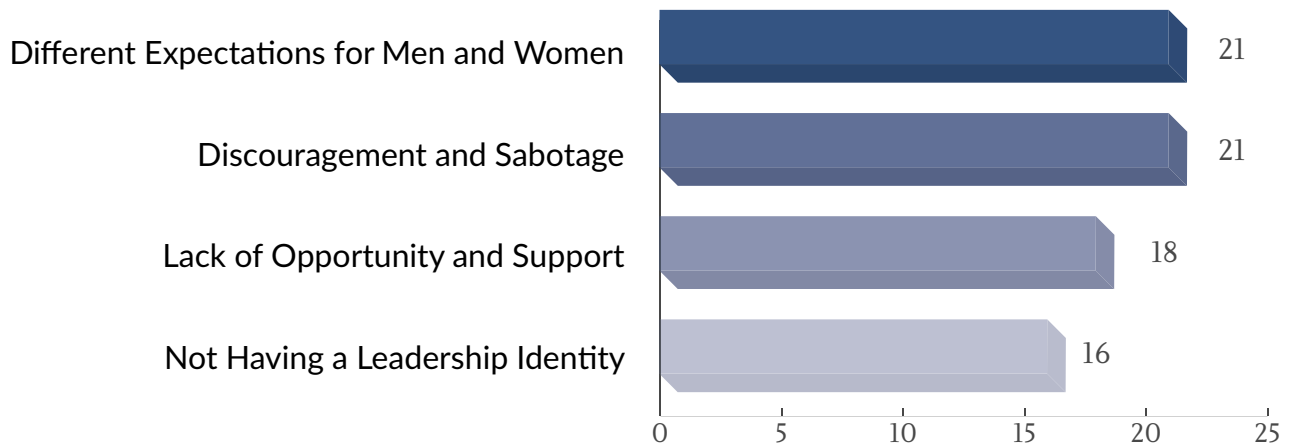
## Creating New Trail Guides

We set out to learn from women at the most senior levels of institutions of higher education what their journey to the top was like and about their experience of being a leader in higher education today. Much of what we learned echoes themes consistent with multiple streams of research to reinforce that women continue to face gendered challenges on their leadership journey and give voice to stories that are both uplifting and disheartening. Their reflections provide guidance—and ultimately inspiration—for women who undertake the stresses and opportunities of higher education leadership today. The picture that emerges from their interviews is challenging, realistic, and finally affirming. For women and men who share the mission of diversifying higher education leadership at this time of historic change, their lessons are indispensable. Shared with women presidents and chancellors gathered in Denver in April 2014, the research findings prompted a conversation that concluded the time had come for a collective effort to create a culture of advancement and ascent for women of all backgrounds. That agenda of what aspiring women leaders can do, what institutional leaders can do, and what organizations and associations can do, is set out in the “Trail Guides” that conclude this report.

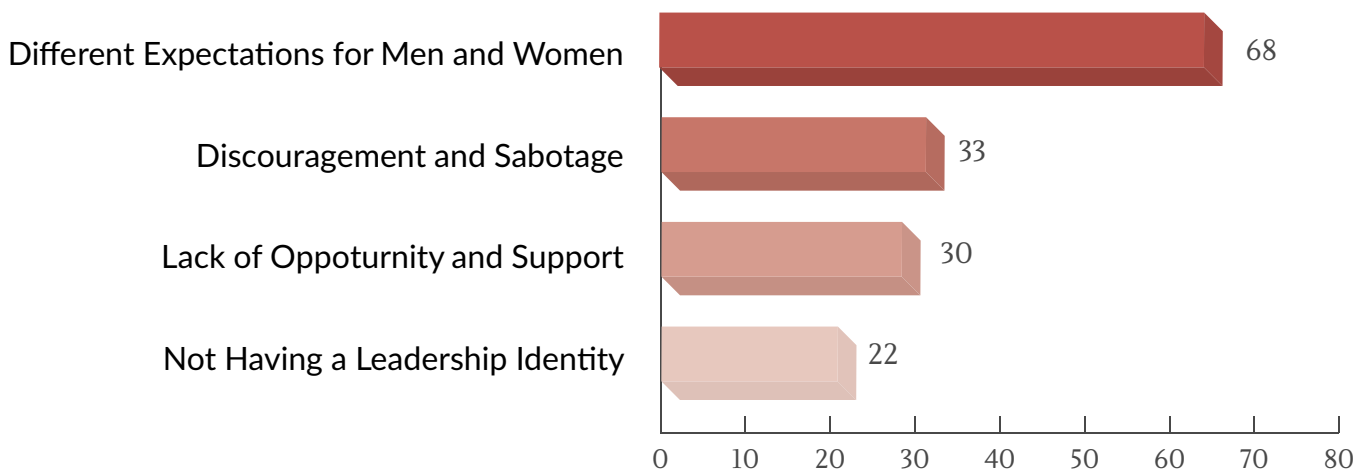
## BARRIERS TO LEADERSHIP ROLES

Four barriers to leadership roles emerged as sub-themes: Different Expectations for Men and Women, Discouragement and Sabotage, Lack of Opportunity and Support, and Not Having a Leadership Identity. The top two barriers mentioned (by 21 interviewees in both cases) were Different Expectations for Men and Women and Discouragement and Sabotage. While the same number of interviewees shared stories of these two barriers, far more passages were coded concerning Different Expectations for Men and Women. It was mentioned more than twice as often as any other barrier category.

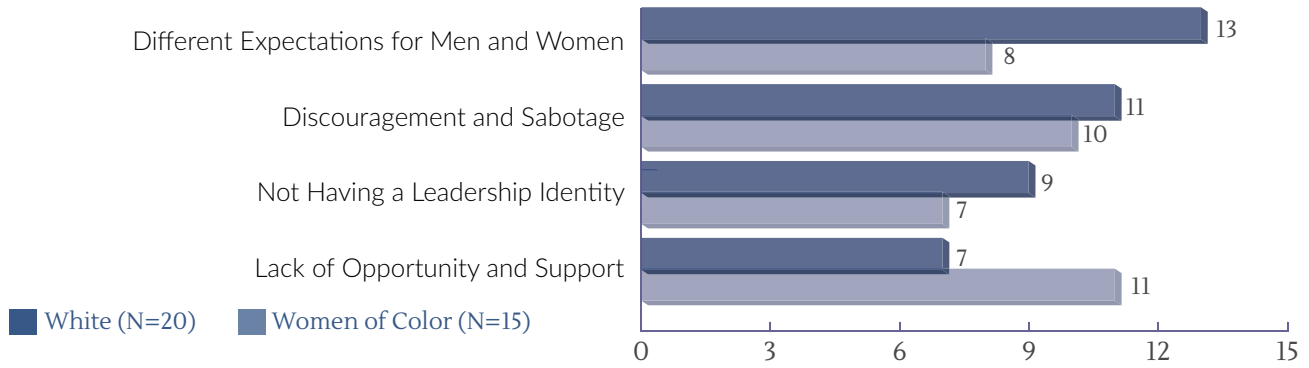
### Number of Women Mentioning the Type of Barrier Listed



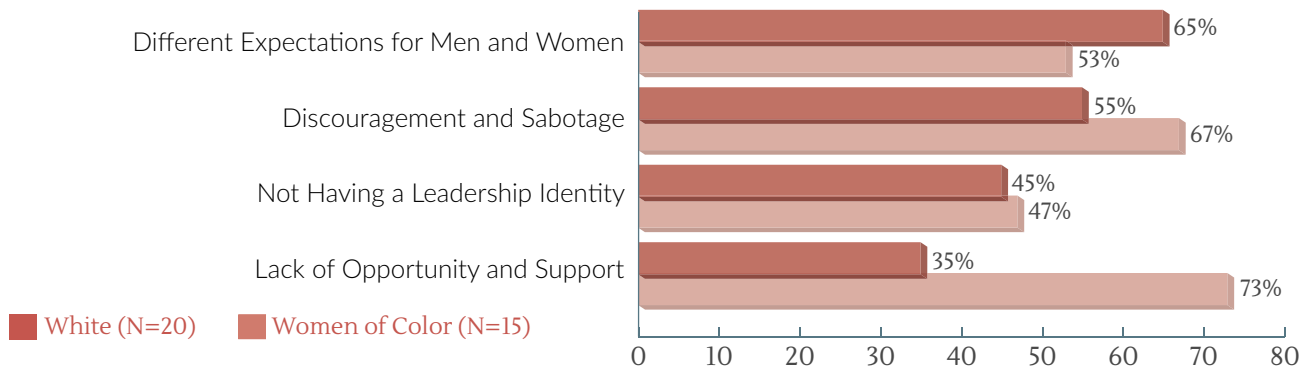
### Number of Passages Coded as the Barrier Listed



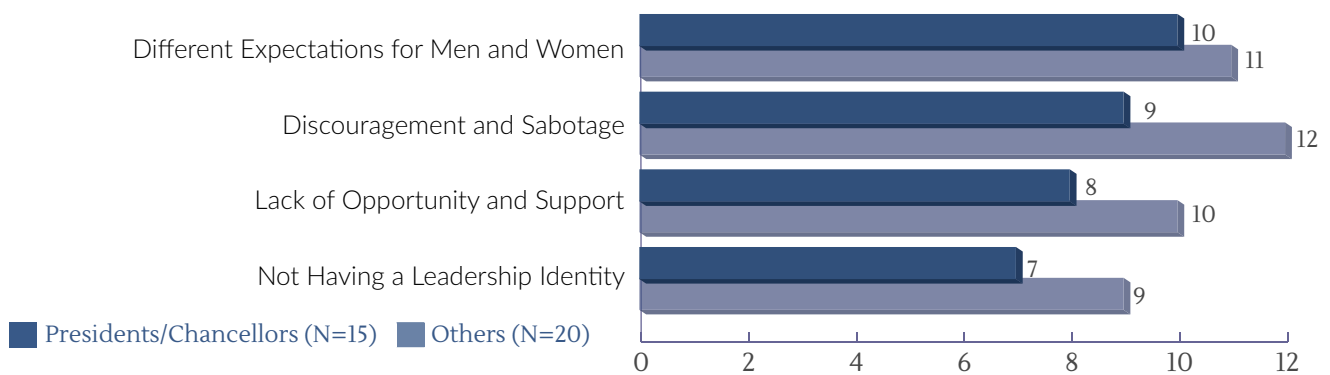
## Number of Women (by race) Mentioning Barrier Listed



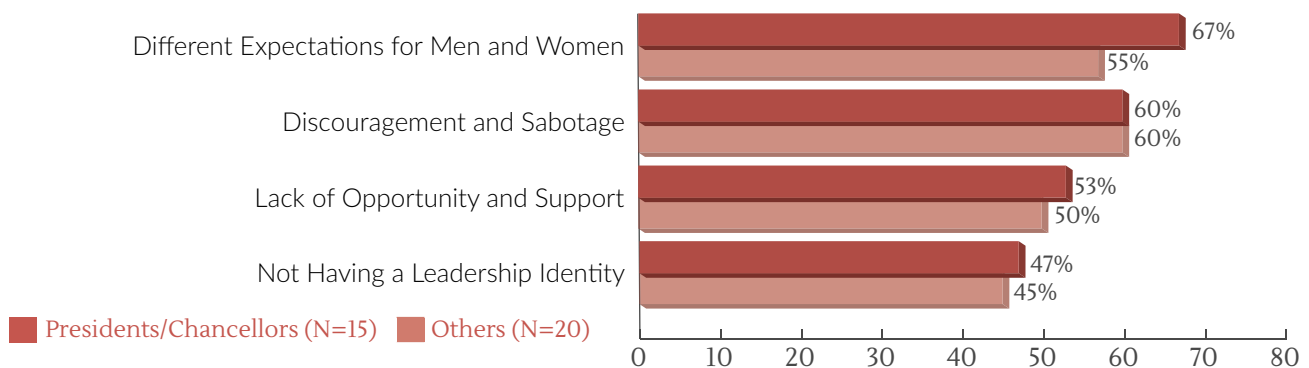
## Percentage of Women (by race) Mentioning Barrier Listed



## Number of Women (by level) Mentioning Barrier Listed



## Percentage of Women (by level) Mentioning Barrier Listed



## Different Expectations for Men and Women

The most frequent barrier mentioned was the continuing experience of Different Expectations for Men and Women seeking the highest levels of leadership roles. The expectations and standards referenced in the interviews were at times held by the women themselves, in other cases were held by other individuals or were perceived as being general social norms. One such norm was the sense that women did not match the traditional standard of “being presidential.” Interviewees told of being tested by colleagues or direct reports while men were assumed to be competent. There appears to be an underlying expectation that women will be passive and follow orders whereas men might challenge those orders. Some of the women in the study were especially aware that their abilities related to finances, facilities, and athletics were questioned, while men with similar backgrounds were presumed qualified in these areas. Women spoke about not pursuing leadership positions because they saw other women leaders being criticized in ways that would have been less likely for a man. Because of the perception that women do not fit the leadership mold or will not be able to do the job, women reported having to work harder and do better in order to be seen as a leader and to get promoted.

Many women spoke about the experiences of being questioned about whether they would be able to do the job well considering that they are also mothers. It is no surprise that women in our society are often still expected to carry out most of the care giving roles, but it was surprising that so many women felt the pressure to not pursue a leadership role because of the concerns of what it would do to the family dynamic. It was clear that these women felt that they were being held to a different standard than many of their male colleagues.

*“ I remember when Margaret Thatcher was prime minister of England. The story was there was a little boy who was asked what he wanted to do when he grew up. Would he want to be the prime minister? His response was, ‘No, that’s a woman’s job.’*

*“I think as a woman if you have a strong voice and you have a strong opinion, you’re questioned. And if it’s a man doing that, they have the floor and it’s okay.”*

*“ It’s harder because, again, of the social norms, the expectation that women need to be there for their children. Men need to be there, too, but a man who has a job where he has to travel a lot, has less of an impact than a woman who has a job where she has to travel a lot.”*

*“I think men get away with not-very-collegial behavior without paying as high a price as women pay.”*

*“ After she left, you did hear, ‘Well, she was a woman.’ You do hear that. ‘We tried a woman once that didn’t work out,’ that kind of thing. That, I think, is still on the tips of people’s tongues when women fail... Women are expected to be nicer, smile-ier, more nurturing, etc. etc.*



## Discouragement and Sabotage

Discouragement and Sabotage was a theme that illustrated visible unsupportive tendencies from people in these women's lives. These types of barriers were both subtle as well as direct discouraging comments from family members, colleagues, bosses, and others. While some comments seemed to be well intentioned, they often times still served to dissuade women from taking on a leadership role because "once people get discouraged... they don't come back for a long time." Behaviors included examples of not providing a reference or support when asked, because leadership opportunities were seen as a waste of time (e.g. You should be happy in your current role, there's no reason to be ambitious). In some cases, efforts to sabotage the woman's career were mentioned. Stories of sabotage included immediate bosses who tried to keep women from leaving (outright discouragement) or providing marginal references because the boss needed the skills of the woman, colleagues criticizing the woman to donors or trustees, and not being given important facts from peers when in difficult decision making circumstances.

*"The person that discouraged me was, like I said, an executive recruiter, who said, 'Well, I don't know. You haven't come up to the Provost rank. You haven't come through the academic side of the house. Do you have publications? Oh, that's going to be a hard push for you.' Then my little balloon was deflated."*

*"She was fired for no reason and it was very visible. She had the resiliency to continue and to pick herself up. I think that happens all the time."*

*"I've had push back because of my gender and people very blatantly would say to me, either, 'An African American can't lead me. What do you know? Why are you here?' Or, 'You're only here because of affirmative action.'"*

*"This was before I became a dean and she was my dean - it was a woman, and I went to her because I wanted to apply for a deanship. And she said, 'Oh, you will not do well as that. You should not apply for that.'"*

## Lack of Opportunity and Support

While the reports of Discouragement and Sabotage were about direct actions that served as barriers, the passages associated with Lack of Opportunity and Support included descriptions of passive behaviors that got in the way of women moving into, or advancing in, leadership roles. Women of color were statistically significantly more likely to describe lack of opportunity and support than were white women. Stories associated with this code were about women working hard and doing very well, but not being offered or asked to apply for leadership roles. Stories also described men being well networked which afforded access to opportunities, or men being assumed to be ready to move into a leadership role while a woman who was just as qualified, was often overlooked. Some of the stories we gleaned from the interviews reinforce that there remains an assumption that men will advance into leadership roles and that women will not—either because they would not fit or because there is a sense that women are not ambitious and therefore would have no interest in leadership roles. Regardless of the underlying reasons, the result appears to be that women are still not seen as—or supported in becoming—senior level leaders.

## Not Having a Leadership Identity

Not Having a Leadership Identity focuses on stories of women limiting themselves because they do not see the possibility of being in leadership roles or do not see the possibility of being a leader without adopting a personal style that is not authentic for them. Passages included references of self-doubt or holding oneself back. Not seeing women in leadership roles was enough to make women pause, either because it gave the impression that either the role was not available to them or created doubt about whether a woman could perform in the role.

*“And then I think that the same opportunities are not there or presented to women as often as they may be presented to men. And there exists, sometimes overt, sometimes subtle, discrimination, I think, in the job market.”*

*“I did, sometimes, feel that opportunities were not provided or embraced because of being a woman – because of a vision that, you know, women – you can be an associate dean, but you can’t really be a dean. Or, you can be a VP but a presidency is just not, you know, what women should be in.”*

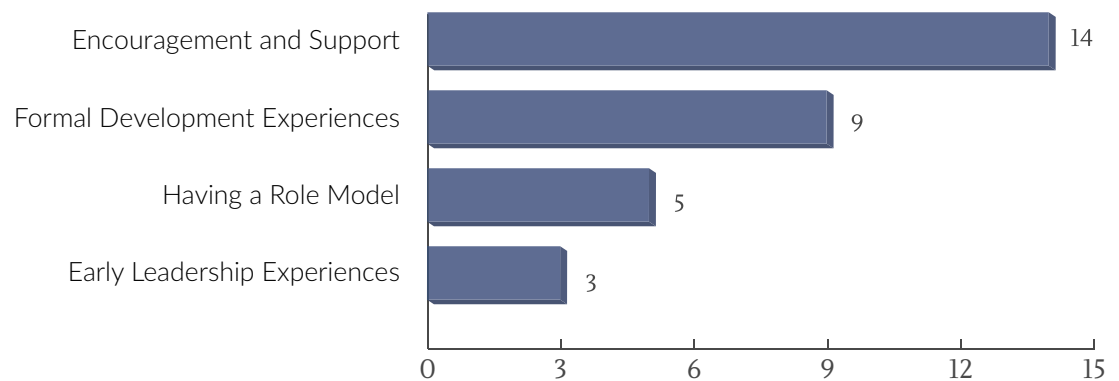
*“So I think in your own mind, you can be limited in what you think is possible if you don’t see role models or see people that look like you in those positions.”*

*“I think it’s our nature to doubt ourselves. And so I think a large percentage of it is us doubting our own capabilities. I’m not saying there are not ceilings, but sometimes we don’t get in the game to know if there is a ceiling.”*

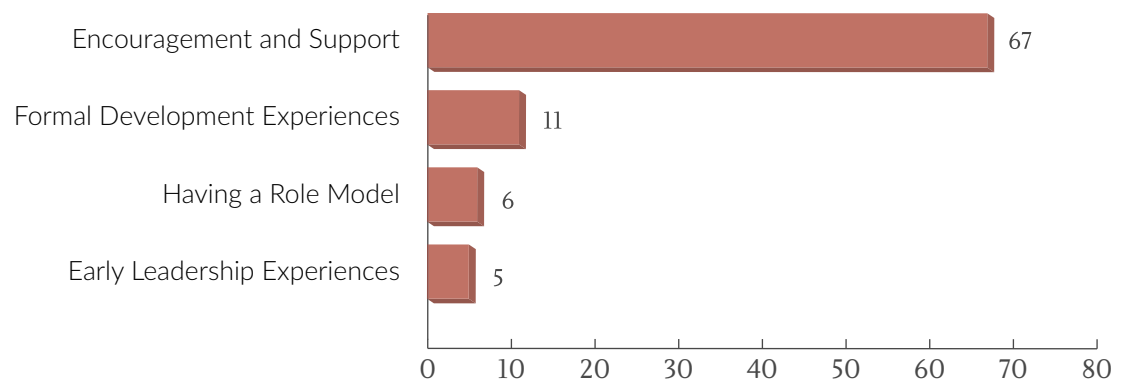
## SUPPORTS FOR LEADERSHIP ROLES

Four themes emerged from the interviews relating to the types of support these women received throughout their careers: Encouragement and Support, Formal Development Experiences, Having a Role Model, and Early Leadership Experiences. The most frequently coded sub-category was Encouragement and Support with 67 occurrences. Fourteen participants, over 40%, mentioned the importance of receiving support and encouragement from mentors and their networks, while over 25% of women leaders discussed the positive impact of going through a formal development program.

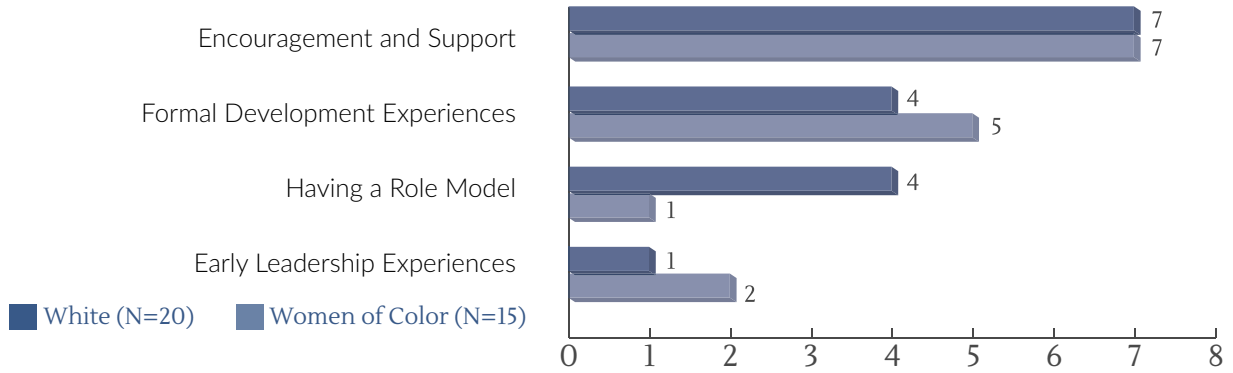
### Number of Women Mentioning Support Listed



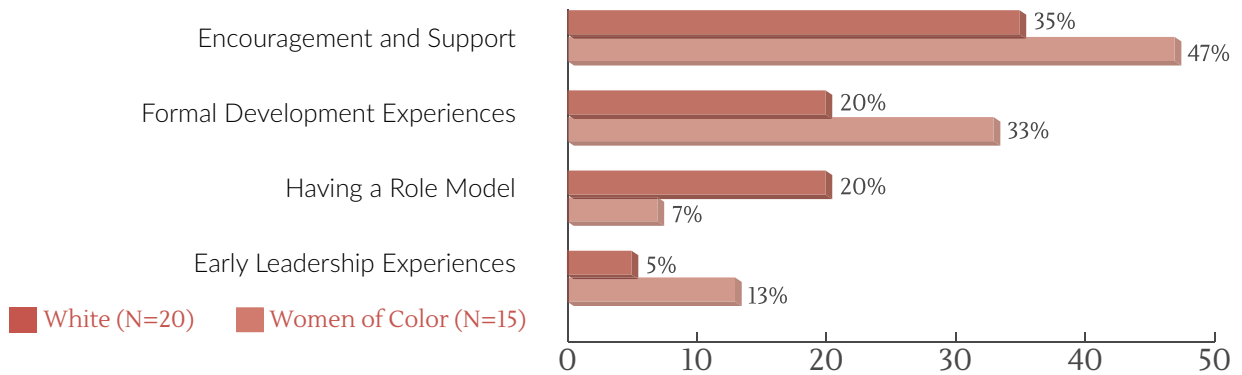
### Number of Passages Coded as the Support Listed



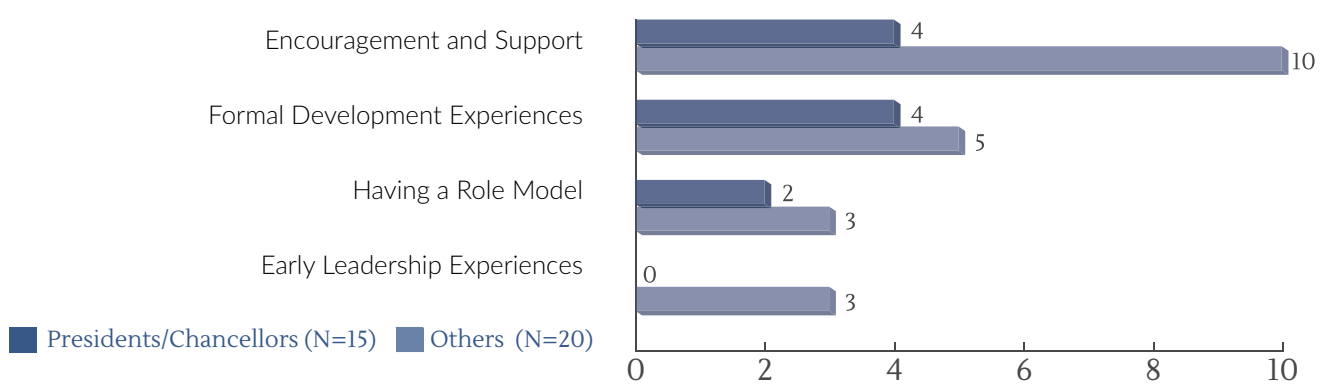
## Number of Women (by race) Mentioning Support Listed



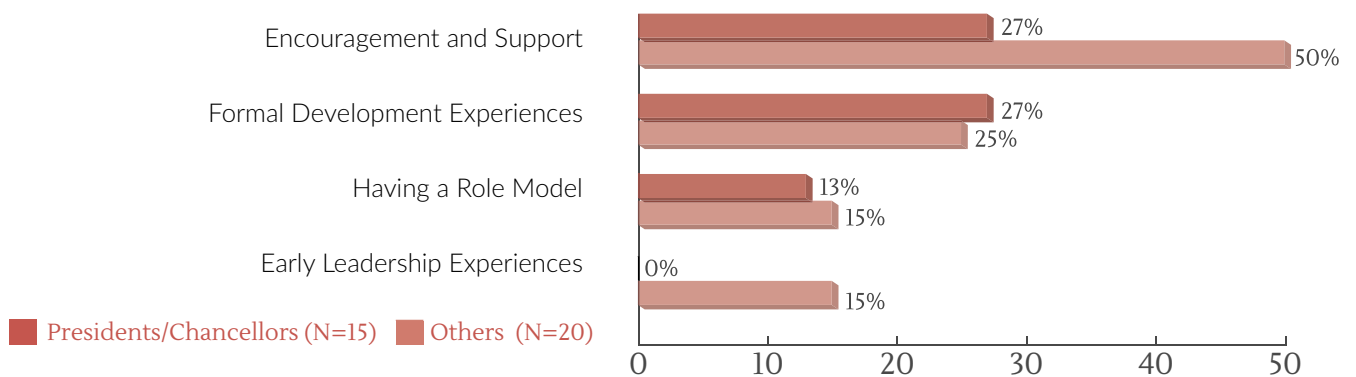
## Percentage of Women (by race) Mentioning Support Listed



## Number of Women (by level) Mentioning Support Listed



## Percentage of Women (by level) Mentioning Support Listed



## Encouragement and Support

Being the largest category in the general support category with 67 occurrences, this category includes discussion of support or encouragement received from others in the beginning or during their career. This can include support or encouragement from family members, colleagues, bosses or anyone that believed in them or helped them achieve something greater. Naturally, mentorship was a large component of this category and there were many stories of someone encouraging, nominating, or coaching these women through something that they might not have attempted on their own. This sub-theme also referenced networks that these women had and were able to go to for advice and support.

## Formal Development Experience

Roughly a third of the women (11) mentioned a Formal Development Experience that shaped who they are today. The experience of the program itself and the content of the program helped define success, ability, and confidence for many of these women.

*“He kind of said, ‘What do you mean, you don’t know if you can do this kind of job? Look what you’ve done. Da, da, da.’ So that was my first experience of having a mentor. It was a very important experience.”*

*“But, actually, for me, I think the most helpful are the small networks. Because, as you know, you can’t talk to anyone on your campus. So I have four other people that I call regularly for advice and to be able to vent.”*

*“Then, after working with him for a short period of time, he basically came to me and said, I think that you should start applying for Deanships. You’re clearly ready. This is clearly where your talents lie.”*

*“I really, really think that the experience I had with HERS was very key in helping me to move forward in obtaining my dean’s position as well as this position. Because it really helped me to understand my skill set, it helped me to understand what I could bring to the table. It helped me to understand how to navigate difficult situations.”*

*“I went to a female leadership institute called Kaleidoscope – it’s in California. And it was absolutely wonderful. I did that right after I became a dean and it really helped me to reinforce the things that I did well and to really work on the areas that I needed to work on and improve upon.”*

## Having a Role Model

Five women we interviewed mentioned having a person or event in their lives whom she learned from by observing. These could be positive or negative experiences that these women observed, often times learning what not to do based on observing others and learning the lessons before making the mistake themselves. On the other hand, Having a Role Model who displayed the possibilities of success and who achieved success regardless of the barriers, demonstrated to these women that it is possible for them as well. Having role models and being able to learn from the experiences of others was often a turning point that showed these women how to treat, or not treat, others and how to create the career they wanted for themselves.

*“ So they did these things called fireside chats, where you actually got to see and hear through the personal side of the presidents’ lives. And that was really, very important to me. Because, at the time, I had babies and seeing these women who had children, had husbands, had families, and who were still able to be accomplished presidents. I don’t think I realized at the time how critically important that was for me to be able to see that.”*

*“I think it is amazing to see what people do unconsciously and to be able to learn those lessons before you do them yourself. It’s a good thing.”*

*“ And when I was coming through fortunately I saw people like me that were doing the kinds of things that I thought I could do and so that was very, very helpful to me.”*

## Early Leadership Experiences

Three women we interviewed shared stories of experiences that happened while growing up or before entering into a formal leadership role that taught them about leadership at a very young age. These early experiences such as student council or board experience, having to play a parent role while still a child, or having teachers or professors who encouraged leadership early, gave these women the confidence they could succeed at the next challenge. If it had not been for these Early Leadership Experiences or early encouragements, these women claim that they might not have had the confidence to pursue such great heights.

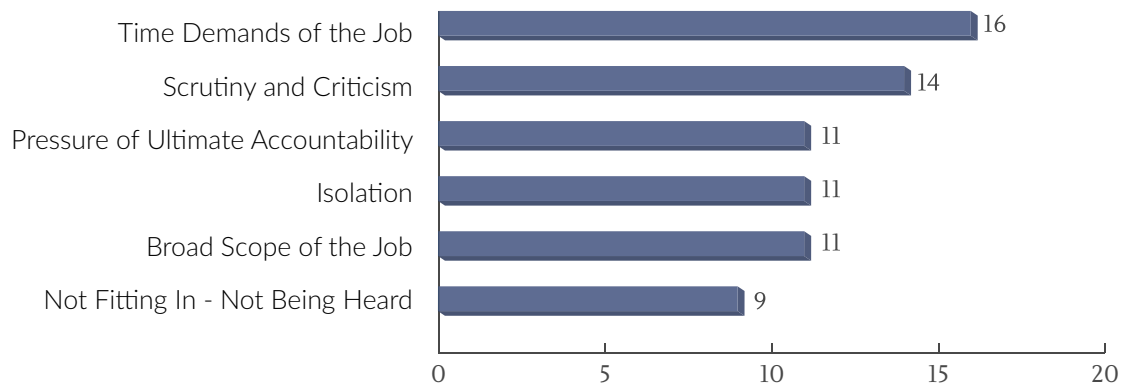
*I started off in a leadership role at the age of 9 so, ... So it wasn't new for me. It was the way that I operated, the way that I chose to look at life. And I think that came directly from the kind of teachers that I had in grade school."*

*"It goes back to - I can definitely think of my 5th grade teacher who happened to be female and she was very, very encouraging for me to take the lead in different things, to demonstrate leadership. Also, my 7th and 8th grade teacher was the same and that happened to be a male. He was very encouraging and inspiring and who always pushed me to the forefront. I think that was sort of the framework of really how I looked at leadership. I didn't look at it as something that I needed to think about. It was just something - that's the way I was supposed to do things."*

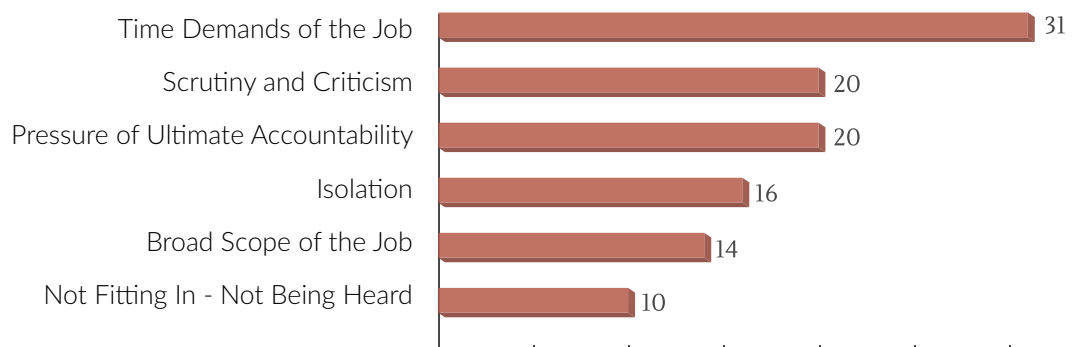
## NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF BEING IN A LEADERSHIP ROLE

The discussion of negative aspects associated with taking on a leadership role revealed six general themes: Time Demands of the Job, Scrutiny and Criticism, Pressure of Ultimate Accountability, Broad Scope of the Job, Isolation, and Not Fitting In-Not Being Heard. Notably, pressures associated with the intense time demands of the leadership role were mentioned by 45% percent of the participants interviewed, and accounted for 18% of the total references coded in this category. Forty percent of women interviewed mentioned being singled out for criticism or being the target of intense scrutiny as being a negative aspect of their leadership role and, though mentioned by fewer participants, references coded in this sub-category accounted for well over a quarter (27%) of the total. Women of color were even more likely than white women to note the experience of Scrutiny and Criticism. Eleven women discussed challenges related to the Broad Scope of the Job, Isolation, or managing the Pressure of Ultimate Accountability, with references coded into those categories representing 12%, 14%, and 18% of total references respectively. The challenge of Not Fitting In - Not Being Heard was discussed by 9 women interviewed, a quarter of total participants, but only represented 9% of total references. While the difference in proportion of respondents by race was not statistically significant, it is still important to note that women of color mentioned this negative aspect of being in a leadership role more so than white women did.

### Number of Women Mentioning the Negative Aspect Listed

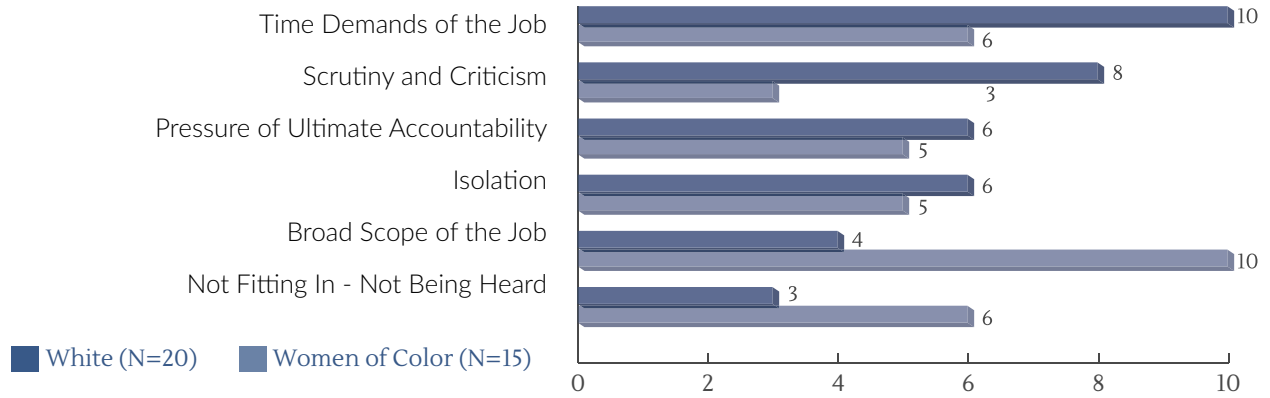


### Number of Passages Coded as the Negative Aspect Listed

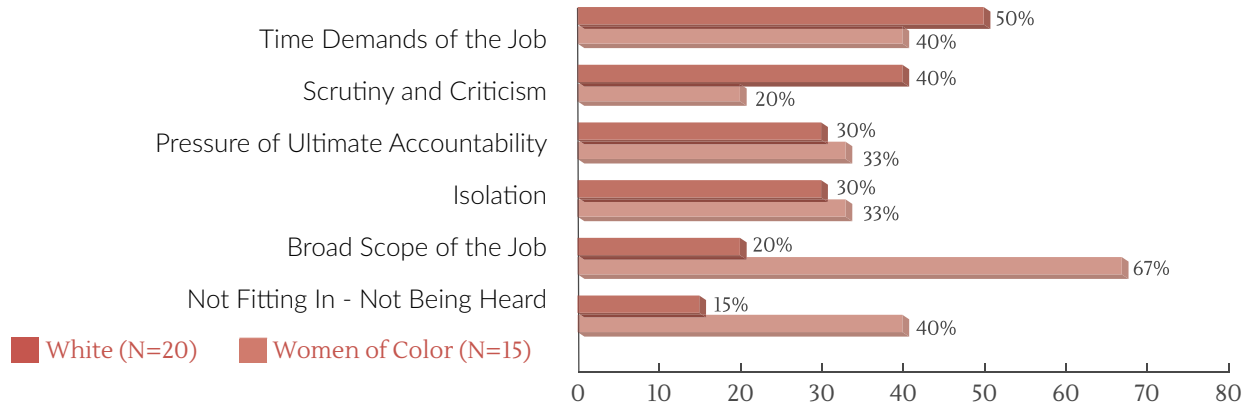




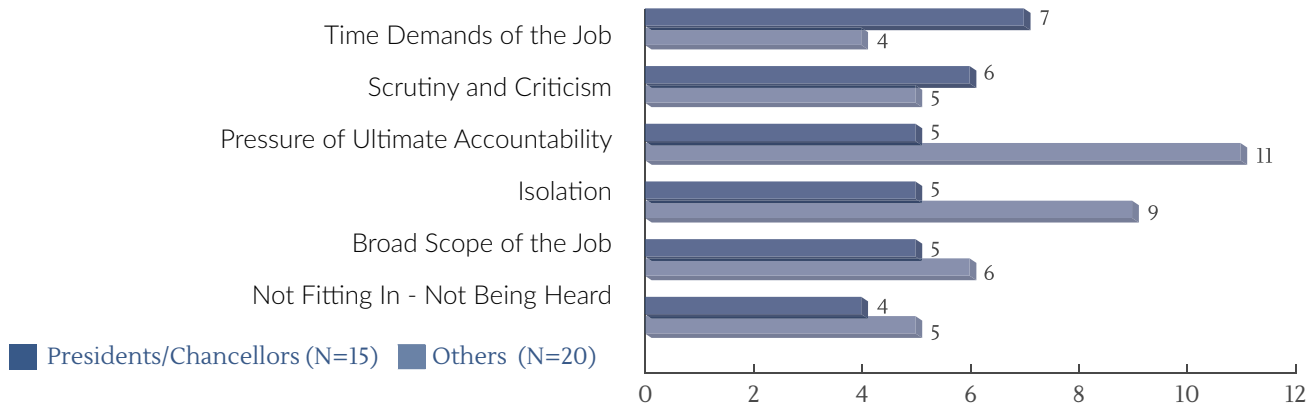
## Number of Women (by race) Mentioning the Negative Aspect Listed



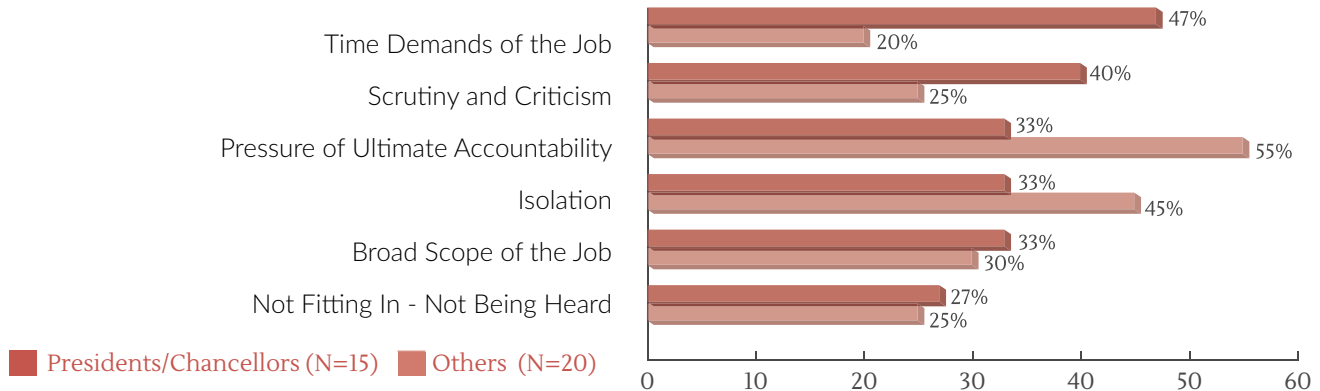
## Percentage of Women (by race) Mentioning the Negative Aspect Listed



## Number of Women (by level) Mentioning the Negative Aspect Listed



## Percentage of Women (by level) Mentioning the Negative Aspect Listed



## Time Demands of the Job

Nearly half of the women interviewed (16) cited managing the long hours of the job and the stress of the time needed to manage multiple roles as negative aspects of their role. While these pressures are surely part of the position for male presidents, the discussion of the Time Demands of the Job highlighted another way in which expectations are often different for women and men. Many women recognized that female presidents tend to have to play more roles than male presidents. If children are involved, the care giving role falls to the mother more often than not. On the other hand, male partners of women presidents may be less accepted as proxies for them in campus roles than wives of male presidents. This feeling of always being “on,” the culmination of extra roles, familial pressures, and a lack of personal time encapsulate the most common time demands and work-life balance challenges facing women in higher education.

*“These top positions are just exhausting; you have to be prepared for that.”*

*“There is no division between me and my work. I am my work. My work is me. I don’t have a separate life, really. And I’m okay with that. I’m always on. If I’m in the community, even if it’s Saturday and I’m going down to the coffee shop. I know I’m still a Provost and I have to, you know, be that person.”*

*“When you - the other women that I know who are presidents or who have been presidents of institutions - and I asked them about their husbands’ participation, they will say, ‘My husband did very little. He might have come to one or two events in the year.’ Where men I’ve talked to - their wives are expected to be, in a sense, at every event right at their side, actually, how would you say, socializing and soliciting, almost, in a way.”*

## Scrutiny and Criticism

The second most commonly shared negative aspect facing senior women leaders in higher education is the inescapable spotlight in which they face Scrutiny and Criticism. Some interviewees felt they were being perpetually watched and targeted for criticism, often in quite personal forms. Other women we interviewed stated that they feel people are incessantly watching in anticipation that they will inevitably fail. This causes a situation where women regularly have not only their decisions but also their credentials and experience questioned. Moreover, the women felt when they were criticized they had to address the criticism in a way that a male would not. As a result, these leaders frequently stated the need to “toughen up” in order to be credible. However, in toughening up, they were also open to other forms of criticism such as being too tough or heartless. It is important to note that women of color reported Scrutiny and Criticism at a statistically significant level more often than their white female counterparts.

*“I think part of what I’ve found sometimes, and it could be from women colleagues as well as men, you feel that by becoming successful there were a lot of people that were envious of that and they were sort of watching out for you to make a mistake to – I think that’s even more so for women of color.”*

*“Because you put yourself out there for criticism. And you have to know that everybody is not going to like you. And not only, with women, are they going to attack your leadership style but they’re going to talk about what you wear. They’re going to talk about if you’re looking tired, your hair color.”*

## Pressure of Ultimate Accountability

Being at the highest level of decision making and thereby facing the Pressure of Ultimate Accountability for difficult choices is an issue that nearly a third of our sample experienced as a negative aspect of being in a leadership role. The 11 women who discussed this issue often cited the pressure of having to make the “final say” and being accountable for everything within an institution, as a negative aspect of the job. Especially during this period of more limited financial resources, difficult decisions can include responsibility for both immediate funds and long entrusted assets of their institution. The women in the interviews also referenced occurrences of having to take responsibility for an outcome or mistake even if they were not directly responsible or even aware of the matter.

*“When the bad things happen, you’re right there in the thick of things and you have to make some tough, tough decisions and that’s always difficult. Especially when it impacts peoples’ livelihood or their sense of worth. Those are tough days.”*

*“And just the real stresses – when you realize that if there’s a murder on your campus, you’re the one who deals with it. If there is some protest by students or faculty or the community about something you’re always in the paper – on the front line. And, the old joke about what is difference between a chancellor and a chancellor emeritus – well, the chancellor emeritus doesn’t mind opening the paper in the morning.”*

## Isolation

A negative challenge that faces senior women in higher education is Isolation, generally described as a reduction or lack of contact with social and professional networks. This is partly because there are few women in top leadership roles, but also because of the nature of the role. Interviewees cited either a lack of or drastically reduced amount of interaction with students. Colleagues sometimes viewed their decision to seek and accept senior administrative roles in higher education as going to the “dark side”; therefore these women shared that relationships suffer once attaining their position because they were no longer welcome in familiar peer groups. Relatedly, the interviewees said it is a challenge to form new relationships or spend time with people because it could be seen as inappropriate or playing favorites. Furthermore, the inability to share information because it is confidential leaves women leaders feeling isolated. Finally, the sentiment of feeling “lonely at the top” is often compounded by others’ lack of trust in those occupying top positions.

“And I have found in my time here that it’s just very difficult to forge genuine relationships because I find that, I mean I collaborate with a lot of people, and I get along with a lot of people, but... my genuine friendships are not here. It’s too hard to have a genuine reciprocal friendship because people usually want something.”

*“Well, there are many. You know, it’s true what they say. It gets lonelier at the top. I think the circle of people that you actually, how can I say, can bond with and connect with starts to shrink.”*

## Broad Scope of the Job

The Broad Scope of the Job was mentioned as a negative aspect, particularly in terms of the stress and pressure of having multiple, and sometimes competing, roles within the institution. Additionally, the stress is compounded by having to balance the range of accountabilities that comes with top leadership roles. It should be noted the broad scope of the job also was mentioned as a positive with varied experiences and perspectives providing development and enjoyment. A frequent response from the women we interviewed was the inability to focus because of the constant juggling of multiple roles within the institution. Not only do these women have pressure to study and stay up-to-date on a variety of areas so they can speak to them as needed, they also feel responsible for understanding and representing everyone's voice (students, staff, community, etc.). There is pressure to connect with people in a way that keeps them happy and healthy. Our interviewees also shared the challenge of "continually" being pulled in different directions by groups with differing goals. Dealing with both petty and critical issues occurred almost simultaneously. Learning how to manage these "pulls" effectively and appropriately also is part of the challenges women in higher education face. While men presidents also must handle multiple roles, women face the added pressure of more intense scrutiny and criticism as they address conflicts among various constituencies.



*Having to shift your mindset...this morning you are talking to IT people, and then someone from finance comes in and then someone from the community comes in and each time it's a shift of conversation, a shift of knowledge that I have to have in order to be able to ask the right questions."*

*"One of the other disadvantages is trying to be all things to all people - and that your constituents are not just your faculty, you're also responsible to the students, I'm responsible to my board of trustees, I'm responsible to the community."*

## Not Fitting In - Not Being Heard

Not Fitting In - Not Being Heard is a negative challenge facing women in higher education. Women often cited they are missing out on opportunities because they aren't naturally part of the "good ol' boys" network. This situation not only causes a feeling of not fitting in but creates a circumstance of missing out on decisions that have been made without the woman because she physically wasn't there when the decision was made. By the same token, women are not feeling heard. A commonly shared occurrence from the interviewees was the sentiment that a woman can say something, but until a man says it, it isn't noted or considered a good idea. Even with a chair and a voice at the table, women in higher education—women of color in particular—still feel ignored.

*“There’s still that good-old-boy situation where you can see where there are other meetings that are going on, but you’re not invited to that one. You see them all walk out of the room and they come in and then they make a statement. Wait a minute. Time out. When did that decision get made? Let’s talk about that one. But you already know that the decision has been made.”*

*“You can bring your voice to the table... The disadvantage is your voice may or may not be heard because there are other, stronger, male connections and voices at the table.”*

*“I was at a meeting - a month and a half ago - and I made a suggestion for how the group ought to go a certain kind of way. About two minutes later, a man - white man - said - sort of referencing what I had said - supporting what I had said. A third guy commented and then said, 'You know, I totally agree with the man.' It was as if nobody had heard me.”*

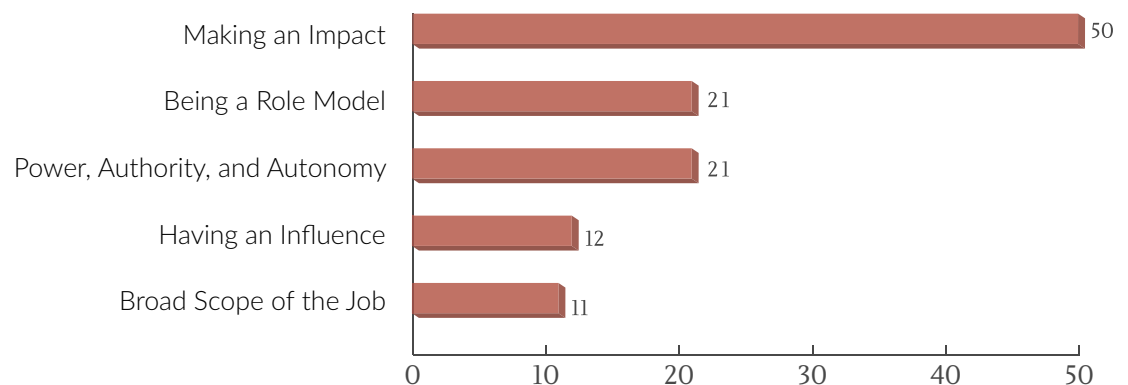
## POSITIVE ASPECTS OF BEING IN A LEADERSHIP ROLE

Our analysis showed that our interview participants generally identified five key positive aspects associated with their leadership positions: Making an Impact; Power, Authority and Autonomy; Being a Role Model; Broad Scope of the Job; and Having an Influence. Making an Impact and exercising Power, Authority, and Autonomy were the primary sub-categories that emerged. Eighty percent of interviewees (28) identified their ability to make an impact or create positive change through their leadership role as a positive aspect of their position, and references to this positive aspect accounted for over half (53%) of the total number of codes in this category; over twice as many as the second most frequently mentioned aspect Power, Authority, and Autonomy. In fact, Making an Impact was the most frequently discussed category for all of the interviewees—eclipsing all other negative or positive categories.

### Number of Women Mentioning the Positive Aspect Listed

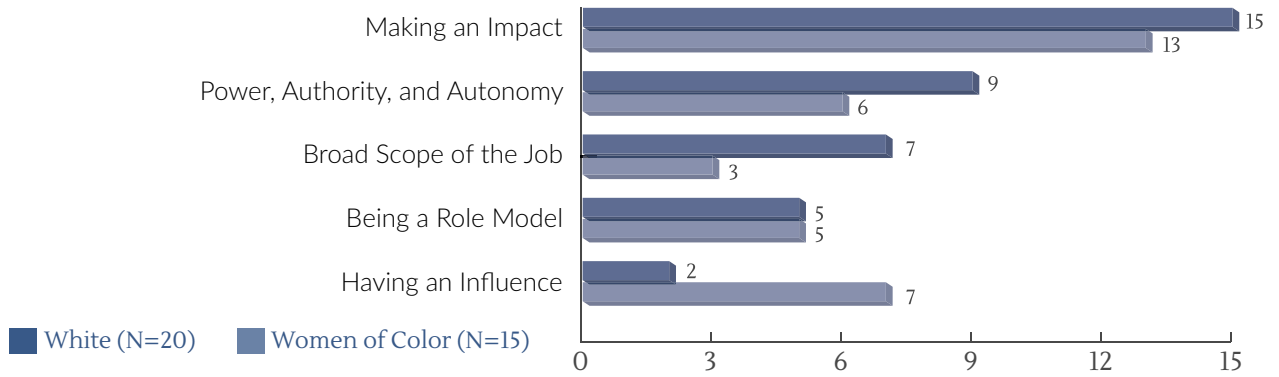


### Number of Passages Coded as the Positive Aspect Listed

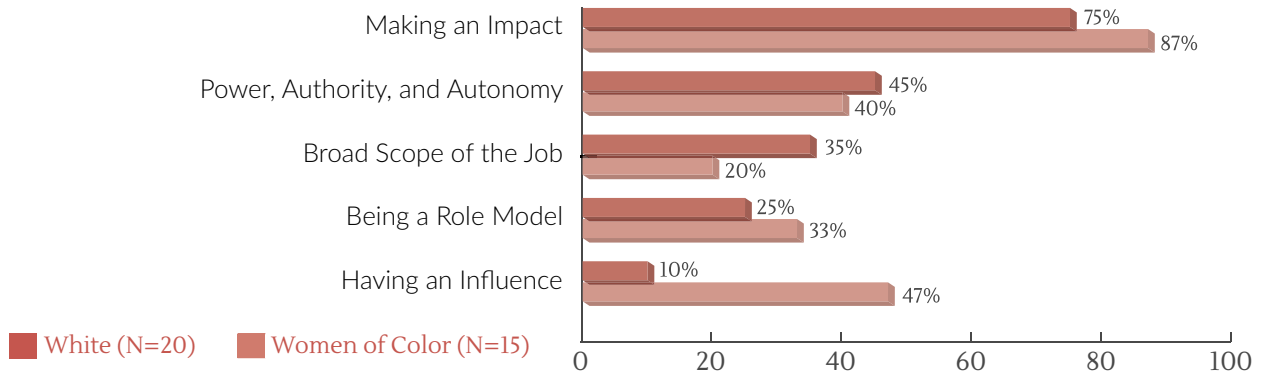




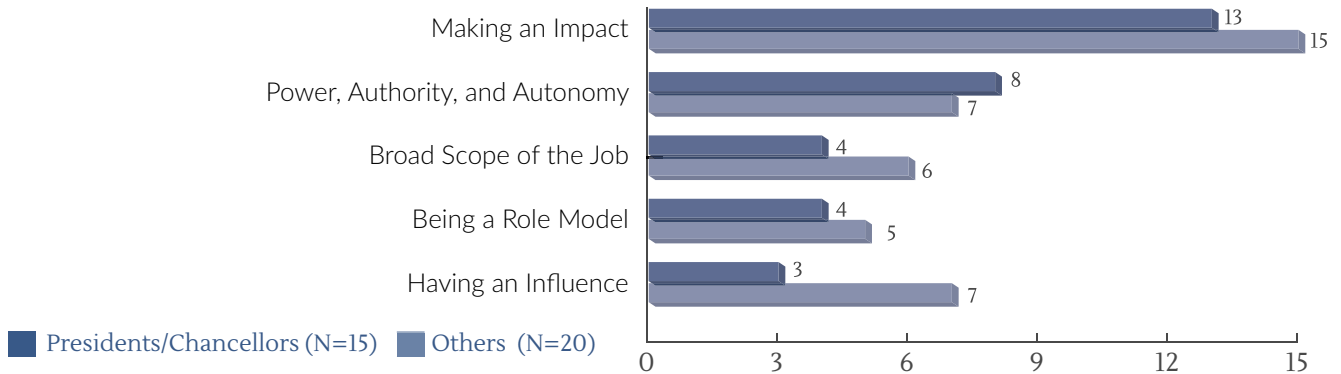
## Number of Women (by race) Mentioning the Positive Aspect Listed



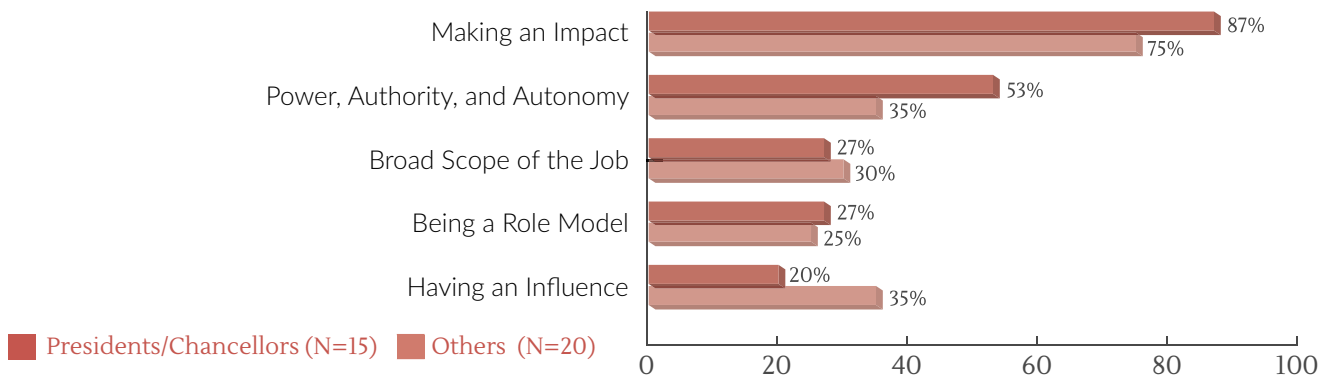
## Percentage of Women (by race) Mentioning the Positive Aspect Listed



## Number of Women (by level) Mentioning the Positive Aspect Listed



## Percentage of Women (by level) Mentioning the Positive Aspect Listed



## Making an Impact

A large percentage of these senior women, 80% of the interviewees, reported that Making an Impact in some fashion or being able to create positive change was the most positive aspect of being in a leadership role. Making an Impact can include changing someone's path for the better by opening doors and helping them through the journey. Encouraging faculty members and students, engaging in discussions about higher education policy, and starting or changing initiatives at the institutional level all are examples of how they were able to make a difference and create change. Repeatedly these women spoke about how terrific it felt to empower and educate students, faculty, and board members; to build connections or opportunities for others; and then to see the fruits of those opportunities in terms of real and lasting change.

*“After I got into administration, I realized that I was getting more enjoyment out of supporting junior faculty in my department and watching them achieve than sitting in my office writing the next book.”*

*“The ability to be creative and to innovate and then on the flip side to be able to see the impact that it has and say, Okay, I did this the right way. This is what I should have done.”*

*“I think in all of my leadership roles, one of the things that I embraced was the notion of being an agent of change – trying to make things – improve things – make them better for the WHOLE INSTITUTION – which, then, of course – affects your faculty, and your staff, and your students.”*

## Power, Authority, and Autonomy

Interviewees mentioned benefits associated with having a clear and formal role and the authority that comes with a senior leadership position. The clarity of the role allowed these women to have the sufficient power to make and execute decisions. Most of these women made the transition from an informal role to a formal one and noted the difference of others' behaviors towards them after the transition. Some of the women we interviewed, particularly those in the senior-most roles, mentioned that as a senior leader they were not ignored as much or questioned as often and that was seen as a huge advantage. Also included in this category were those instances where the leader spoke about the advantage of being in a role that provided significant influence, both personal and formal.

*“ People know your role and there is some history to it. It is more than personal influence. There is also a formal acknowledgment that people have entrusted certain types of responsibilities to you. So that part just isn't questioned.”*

*“There is a very clear level of authority that I have here. So it's that type of thing. It's power. And it takes some things off the table for negotiation.”*

*“ At one o'clock today I am going to the physical plant employees and I know they're working hard and I know we can't increase their salaries. But, I can give them some paid time off to reward them for their hard work. I can do that with the stroke of a – you know, waving a magic wand. And, nobody else can do that. I can make things right.”*

## Being a Role Model

Ten women in our sample expressed how crucial it was for them to be a mentor to other women who were interested in coming into higher education or who were trying to advance. By reflecting on their own experiences, many women felt that it was their responsibility to support other women along their journey in order to encourage them to move into higher education leadership. Part of Being a Role Model or supporting others is making sure protégés don't feel discriminated against or ensuring that certain stereotypes don't keep them from advancing. These women nurtured budding leaders and provided them with opportunities, such as recommending them for a position, or providing personal and professional support or mentorship. These women leaders recognized the importance of educating others and building connections and networks for them in order for more doors to be opened.

*“ I remember there being a woman sitting in the front row who was from a historically black college and she looked at me and she said ‘How the hell do you have your job with all that baggage?’ That was a teachable moment because it was important for her to understand that I was a black gay woman and I was still successful. Do you know what I mean? But she had to see that it was possible. And so, we have to be willing to share all examples of what we’re doing and how we’re doing it so other people just know it is possible.”*

*“And they still say they wouldn’t have applied for this job if I hadn’t been in this place. Some of the female deans I’ve hired have said, ‘I wouldn’t have considered this job except that you were the Provost.’ It isn’t me personally. It is the idea of a woman being able to have a position of authority and success.”*

## Broad Scope of the Job

Among the 35 women interviewed, 10 referenced the positive aspects of the Broad Scope of the Job. They noted the unique opportunities that arise as part of being in the role of a senior leader that wouldn't otherwise happen if it were not for the title and position. Being in a senior role afforded these leaders connections to a broad range of people, groups, or information which allowed them to be able to see a clearer big picture. Working with the community, speaking at conferences, and interacting and learning from people like the Dalai Lama were just a few of the positive opportunities these women leaders experienced. It is important to remember that Broad Scope of the Job also was viewed by some as a negative, often linked to conflicts among some of the broad constituencies that presidents encounter.

*“Being able to make the connections, you know, beyond the university, with the community – because you’re in a position like this, you have opportunities to make connections and be involved in things that you wouldn’t ever have that opportunity – just by virtue of your position.”*

*“Plus, you’re able to meet people. You get more experiences. So that you’re more well-rounded – that you can see things from a different perspective also, that you’re never going to see.”*

*“Opportunities to learn about other cultures and other ways of – other educational systems. As a provost, I can travel to other countries and study other educational systems, other styles of leadership.”*

## Having an Influence

Having an Influence as part of their senior leadership role was mentioned more by women of color interviewees than by white women interviewees. This difference was statistically significant. Having an Influence is different from the category of Making an Impact, because this aspect was specifically related to involvement in, and engagement with, the decision making processes within their institutions. These leaders talked about the advantage of having a voice at the table and being able to represent viewpoints, constituencies or populations at the highest levels in situations where those perspectives are not always present or considered. These women spoke of how liberating it was to be involved in areas of governance from which they were previously excluded. Having the ability to be the voice for those who cannot speak in order to help create change was described as a great benefit.

*“I’m at the table. I’m hearing what’s going on throughout the whole university and therefore can be a much better strategic thinker and planner and work with the teams that I’m assigned to much more effectively because I’m hearing all this other conversation and I can see the big picture very clearly because I’m there.”*

*“So I think senior leadership role – you’re able to bring other women, other minorities up with you. That you’re able to speak for those that are in the LGBT committee. You’re able to put things in front that I don’t think I ever had the opportunity to do before. So I think that’s a real benefit.”*

*“I think the advantage of being in leadership is that you bring a different perspective and that you help those that are there to see that it doesn’t need to be the way it is. That it needs to change.”*

## ADVICE FROM THE SUMMIT TRAIL

When we asked the women in our research if they had any advice about or for women leaders in higher education, common themes emerged. Nearly every woman interviewed mentioned the importance of connecting and collaborating with others. Connecting and collaborating not only expand knowledge, but also create allies and sponsors. Thinking and working strategically to create a cabinet of mentors and advisors also was mentioned. It is important for emerging women leaders to choose mentors from multiple walks of life. Having mentors who are women is beneficial because they understand the journey, but having a male as a sounding board as well as someone younger, older or of a different race or ethnicity can provide women with multiple and diverse perspectives to understand bigger pictures and identify opportunities and connections. As one woman advised, “So you have to be political, you’ve got to be strategic. You’ve got to see the steps. You can’t be surprised, you can’t be naïve, but you have to be motivated by the right values.” Women also need sponsors – people in powerful positions who can help women navigate into senior roles. Women cannot stop there however; they must realize that for real change to occur, they must pay it forward by mentoring and sponsoring women and men; creating networks, establishing allies, and educating the next generation to bring positive change.

Other contributors suggested teaching women to get outside their comfort zone and be seen as willing to stretch themselves by asking questions and learning new things. Getting out of one’s comfort zone can mean women need to promote and advocate

for themselves by asking for help or asking for opportunities. By stepping out of what is comfortable, women are creating opportunities to achieve in arenas that would not have occurred had they not moved forward. Early and diverse leadership experiences can build and shape one’s leadership and help women be seen as leaders.

*“ I really worry about what we’re not doing to educate the next generation. And I think just continuing to grind away at those questions of well, how many women do you have in the pool... and just all those kinds of things that helped in the last 20 or 30 years to move women forward. I think we have to re-start all of those things again and just sort of bombard them with that.”*

Women need to question whether they should opt out of opportunities because they fear they cannot put their mark on the role. One interviewee suggested, “It won’t ever change until more of us have the opportunity to put our spin on it. And that’s what I would encourage people to do – to look at every opportunity to prepare yourself to be a leader and try to be as flexible as you possibly can without compromising who you are at the core.” Women need to get into these positions in order to change how these positions expect women to be; if women are thinking too narrowly then change will not happen.

Another important aspect of being narrowly focused is not realizing when it is time to move on and do something else. Women often settle in a role rather than strategizing on ways to make their

ultimate goals happen. One woman spoke about how some women seem to believe they need something extra, special or “magic” to get to the next level. Often women need to be affirmed by others before they believe they can take the next career step. Men on the other hand, tend to take the chance and go for it.

The need for resiliency was the last common theme that emerged out of advice from these 35 top women leaders. These leaders mentioned how women, in general, tend to be too hard on themselves and often internalize what others might say or do and become “personally wounded.” As this report has identified, there are people and events that can create fear and doubt along a woman’s leadership journey in higher education. According to the women interviewed, women need to display self-knowledge, maturity, and resilience if they want to be successful and effective. In sum our study participants agreed support or lack thereof can make or break a woman’s decision to become a senior leader (Young & McLeod, 2001).

While a lot of the advice was focused on the individual level, the women we interviewed also mentioned the importance of collective action in order to change policies, systems, and social norms that were perpetuating the current situation.

## Clearing Trails and Creating Guides

We shared the ideas in this report with participants at the 2014 HERS Summit For Women Presidents & Chancellors in Higher Education held in Denver, Colorado. We wanted to engage another group of top leaders in conversation about what should be done to advance women to leadership in higher education. Below is a summary of the ideas that emerged from that conversation. The suggestion that resonated most with us was the suggestion of collectively creating a culture of advancement for women. With that in mind we have organized the suggested next steps into three categories: what aspiring women leaders can do, what institutional leaders can do, and what associations and organizations can do.



## What Aspiring Women Leaders Can Do

- Seek out leadership positions as early in your career as possible.
- Think about yourself and talk about yourself as a leader.
- Talk to a variety of leaders about the challenges they face and how they address them.
- Talk to a variety of leaders about what they enjoy about being in a leadership role.
- Seek out and participate in leadership development opportunities.
- Ask to be nominated or considered for positions that help develop the broad skillset needed for leadership roles, such as budget committees and planning task forces.

## What Institutional Leaders Can Do

- Nominate women for leadership positions.
- Encourage women to seek leadership positions.
- Suggest women for accreditation teams.
- Talk about how you establish work life balance (“I’m in charge, but I am still a person, I have a life”).
- Share the positive stories about being a senior leader and the joy and benefits of being a leader.  
Focusing on sharing positive stories of making an impact.
- Help others be intentional about their leadership and think of themselves as leaders.
- Hire and showcase a broader range of leaders to encourage a broader range of role models.
- Share stories about making it through tough situations.
- Talk about the importance of personal power and resources, about the need to invest in one’s own career.

## What Organizations and Associations Can Do

- Identify specific measures and create plans and commitment for impact. Focus, for example, on getting a specific number of women on boards and working with a specific number of women already on boards to help maximize their contributions.
- Create opportunities for men and women to work together as allies to create more inclusive leadership.
- Partner with corporate and business women groups.
- Teach people about the business aspects of higher education.
- Develop mentoring programs for specific skill sets such as political savvy.
- Focus on strategic succession planning and getting women into the conversation.
- Create tools and resources for Department Chairs, Deans and others to help them identify and tap potential.
- Help Trustees better understand higher education. Connect women trustees with each other across the board to create more awareness and support.
- Make the workplaces and professional events more family friendly – stopping the tenure clock, addressing barriers to accessing leave, etc.
- At events and conferences, have affinity tables based on roles, types of institutions, topics or challenges at conferences to create opportunities to network and to share stories and advice.
- Have a system for support and advice in crisis situations, such as mentoring hotlines or networks.
- Prepare leaders to handle scrutiny and criticism. Talk about cases where people have navigated difficult situations and how they did it. Develop and use case studies to have conversations about how to handle situations in order to build confidence and generate more options for how to handle scrutiny and criticism. Provide conflict management, crisis communication, and media training.

## LAST VIEWS FROM THE SUMMIT

The wisdom of the women leaders we interviewed paints a nuanced view of women at the top of higher education institutions. The impact that women at the top can and do make motivated these leaders to work through difficult problems and circumstances. The importance of influencing change and having a voice in decision making contributed to the view of our research participants that dealing with barriers and negatives was worth the effort. These leaders painted a picture of continuing discomfort with female leadership in institutions of all types. Exclusion from informal decision making settings and outright stereotypical role expectations continue. These leaders stressed the importance of learning to cope with high visibility roles including the criticism and scrutiny associated with such roles. One woman commented higher education was increasingly “...more politicized and personalized.” Another woman suggested we must encourage other women to say “no” to limits and “yes” to choices. It is important to remember that the women of color in our work found “having an influence” to be even more important than their white counterparts. Women of color also had more negative experiences with “lack of opportunity” and “scrutiny and criticism” than their white counterparts.

In sum, much remains to be done but positive change should be celebrated. Our women leaders convinced us that excellence comes from having the very best minds leading today and for the future. We hope this report contributes to encouraging girls, young women, and women at all stages in their careers to claim and develop their leadership and to seek positions that will enable them to continue to develop and to have a meaningful and positive impact. And equally important, we hope that institutions and male leaders will continue to contribute to the changes needed in order to foster leadership talent of all people in order to build, sustain, and grow the most effective and successful institutions possible. The need to develop and retain talented leaders from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives is not a women’s issue: it is an institutional imperative.

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## Description of Sample and Method

We set out to learn from women at the senior-most levels of institutions of higher education what their journey to the top was like and about their experience of being a leader in higher education today. Much of what we learned echoes themes consistent with multiple streams of research to reinforce that women continue to face gendered challenges on their leadership journey and gives voice to stories that are both uplifting and disheartening. The experiences of women leaders, like those of most people, are filled with trade-offs. It is not all good or all bad. In our research we wanted to capture and reflect as accurate and balanced a perspective as possible.

### Sample

Using a semi-structured interview protocol, we interviewed 37 senior-level women in higher education. Two of the interviews were not analyzed because the interview quality was not sufficient for analysis, for a resulting sample of 35. The women were asked to provide demographic information via an online survey or as part of the interview. Interviewees were identified by tapping into the professional networks of the Chancellor at a major Midwestern University and the Executive Director of a leadership development institute for women in higher education. A snowball sampling technique was used to identify additional women to be interviewed. All women were assured that the information they shared would be kept confidential. Interviews were conducted face-to-face whenever possible, but the majority of interviews were conducted over the phone.

Efforts were made to gather information from as diverse and representative a sample as possible. We made a special effort to interview women of color as they are underrepresented in the population and we wanted to gather sufficient data to calculate statistics to determine if white

women and women of color have different experiences or perspectives related to senior leadership roles and what it takes to reach that level. All of the interviewees that participated had a Doctorate as their highest earned degree. The mean age of the 35 interviewees was 57.49 years (SD = 7.90). The majority (20) of interviewees were Caucasian; with the remaining interviewees identifying as African American (9), Latina (1), Native American (2), Latina & Native American (1) or Other (2). An Asian/Pacific Islander president was interviewed following the initial interviews and data analysis. Her perspectives are incorporated in examples but not in the statistical data. Twenty-three of the participants were married, three were partnered, four were single/never married, and the remaining women were widowed (1), divorced (1), or living as married (1) or did not report (2). Seventeen of the participants had at least one child, with an average of 2.2 children. In terms of their organizational level, 15 were Presidents/Chancellors (two being emeritae), 10 were Vice Presidents/Vice Chancellors, five were Provosts, with the remaining five falling into other senior leadership roles, such as Dean, Chief Diversity Officer or Treasurer etc. Seventeen of the participants had been in their current positions for 1-5 years, 10 in their current role for 6-10 years, four in the role for less than a year, and four had been in their role for longer than 11 years. Fourteen participants were employed by Public Universities, with the remaining women representing a variety of institution types including Private Liberal Arts Colleges, Community Colleges, Private Universities, Tribal, Technical, Public, and Private Colleges, an Art Institute, or a Board of Regents. Sixteen participants were employed at institutions with student enrollment between 1,000 and 9,000, seven at institutions with enrollment between 10,000 and 19,000, and five where enrollment was between 20,000 and 31,000 students. The remaining participants work at institutions where enrollment exceeds 50,000 (1) students, less than 1,000 students (4), or did not report (1).

Current Job Title	
President/Chancellor	15
Dean	1
Consultant	1
Provost	5
Senior Program Officer	1
Treasurer	1
Vice President/Vice Chancellor	10
Chief Diversity Office and Special Assistant to the President	1
How do you identify your race/ethnicity?	
African American	9
Caucasian	20
Hispanic or Latina	1
Native American	2
Latina/Native American	1
Other	2
Type of Institution	
Art Institute	1
Board of Regents	1
Community College	3
Private College	1
Private Liberal Arts College	9
Private University	2
Public Liberal Arts	1
Public University	14
Public College	1
Technical College	1
Tribal College	1

How long have you been in your current position?	
Less than a year	4
1-5 Years	17
6-10 Years	10
11-15 years	4
Retired	1
Approximate Number of Students Enrolled	
100-900 Students	4
1000-9000 Students	16
10000-19000 Students	7
20000-31000 Students	5
50000 Students	1
Missing data	2
Approximately how many people work for your organization/institution?	
Less than 50	2
51-250	8
251-1000	14
Over 1000	11
Direct Reports	
Direct Reports 1-10	22
Direct Reports 11-20	7
Direct Reports 21-50	3
Direct Reports 100+	1

Age	
Ages 40-50	7
Ages 51-60	12
Ages 61-70	16
Relationship Status	
Divorced	1
Living as Married	1
Married	23
Partnered	3
Single	4
Widowed	1
Missing data	2
Number of Children	
C 1 Child	5
C 2 Children	8
C 3 Children	2
C 5 Children	2

In how many different organizations/institutions have you worked?	
Diff Org Work 2	1
Diff Org Work 3	3
Diff Org Work 4	8
Diff Org Work 5	8
Diff Org Work 6	5
Diff Org Work 7	1
Diff Org Work 8	6
Diff Org Work 9	1
Diff Org Work 10	1
Diff Org Work 20	1
Number of Organizational Boards Served	
Boards Served 1	6
Boards Served 2	9
Boards Served 3	8
Boards Served 4	2
Boards Served 5	2
Boards Served 7	1
Boards Served 8	2
Boards Served 12+	1

## Method

All of the interviews were professionally transcribed. Two researchers independently created summaries of each interview, organized by interview section. The two summaries were then combined into a single summary for each interview. Four members of the research team read all the summaries and proposed and discussed themes from interviews; 15 themes emerged. Based on these themes, we developed an initial codebook of the 15 themes. At least three independent coders coded each full interview transcript using an open coding approach. In this approach researchers systematically and independently reviewed interviews to identify passages of text related to the 15 identified themes. The inter-rater agreement among raters was calculated.

### Inter-rater Agreements for Initial Coding

Theme	Level of Agreement
Confronting Political Landscapes, Institutional Systems, and Gendered Expectations	0.99
Positive Aspects of being in a Leadership Role	0.99
Gendered Leadership Style	0.95
General Encouragement, Support, and/or Acceptance	0.94
Negative Aspects of being in a Leadership Role	0.93
Someone Inside the Organization at the Time of the Event Described	0.93
A Family Member Outside the Organization	0.86
Agency Self-Efficacy	0.81
Formal Development Experiences	0.80
General Discouragement, Naysaying, and Lack of Support	0.77
Task Information, Knowledge Development, Career Growth, and Task Completion	0.76
Someone (or Some Group) Outside the Organization at the Time of the Event Described	0.71
Authenticity	0.66
Role Models	0.65
Career Stalling or Limiting	0.60

Based on the initial coding we identified themes to pursue based not only on the level of inter-rater agreement, but also with the desire to provide a balanced overview by focusing on the dichotomies (e.g. positive and negative themes). We further refined the code descriptions of these areas and reexamined the interviews to confirm that we identified all the interviews' relevant passages. All of the interview passages associated with a theme were then reviewed by at least two researchers and sub-themes were identified and discussed. Codebooks were created for the following themes: Barriers to Leadership, Supports for Leadership, Negative Aspects of Being in a Leadership Role, and Positive Aspects of Being in Leadership Role. These four codebooks also included verbatim examples from the interviews to help the coders stay consistent with one another.

Our analysis then focused on these two sets of trade-offs. The first set of themes examines the supports for and barriers to leadership roles. The women we interviewed shared stories about experiences that provided them with support on their leadership journey as well as stories of the barriers or roadblocks they faced along the way. We coded the responses associated with these themes into sub-themes to better illustrate the nature of the supports and barriers. The second set of themes focused on the negative and positive aspects of being in a senior leadership role within higher education. Interviewees were asked, and shared examples, about the advantages and disadvantages of being a senior leader. We then coded responses into sub-themes to better illustrate the positive and negative aspects of being in a leadership role.

Two independent raters coded the interview passages into the sub-themes. The codes were captured and analyzed using the Nvivo software. The level of agreement between the two raters was calculated using Cohen's Kappa (K), a statistical measure which calculates agreement between rater groups while taking into account the probability that they may agree by chance, the complete values for which can be found in the tables below divided out by sub-category. The average value of Cohen's Kappa ranged from .18 to .86 across the sub-categories. Though not a universally accepted measure, a commonly used scale (Landis and Koch, 1977) considers Kappa values between .21 and .40 as indicating fair agreement; between .41 and .60 as indicating moderate agreement; between .61 and .80 indicating substantial agreement; and between .81 and .99 as indicating near perfect agreement. Any passages in the interviews on which coders did not agree were discussed in further detail by the two researchers until an agreement was reached on the appropriate coding designation. An agreement was reached in all cases, though in some instances it was agreed that the passage did not contain enough information and was instead omitted from coding.



### Cohen's Kappa for Sub-themes

	Kappa
<b>BARRIERS TO LEADERSHIP</b>	
Not Having a Leadership Identity	.47
Lack of Opportunity and Support	.46
Discouragement and Sabotage	.66
Different Expectations for Men and Women	.65
<b>SUPPORTS FOR LEADERSHIP</b>	
Formal Leadership Development	.39
Early Leadership Experiences	.86
Encouragement and Support	.80
Having a Role Model	.40
<b>NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF THE ROLE</b>	
Scrutiny and Criticism	.65
Time Demands of the Job	.79
Pressure of Ultimate Accountability	.41
Broad Scope of the Job	.37
Isolation	.66
Not Fitting In-Not Being Heard	.84
<b>POSITIVE ASPECTS OF THE ROLE</b>	
Having an Influence	.21
Making an Impact	.38
Broad Scope of the Job	.80
Power, Authority and Autonomy	.18
Being a Role Model	.67

**The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)** was used to conduct Pearson's chi-square test the independence in order to examine the relationship between the categories within each thematic area and the racial categorization of the women in our sample. Race was categorized as a dichotomous variable (e.g. white women and women of color). This is not to suggest that either white women or women of color are homogenous groupings, but rather to determine albeit at a crude level, if women of color and white women have different experiences and perspectives of their leadership journey. These analyses extend previous research about the intersectionality of race and gender. Chi-square tests of independence were also performed to examine the relation between organizational level and the categories within each thematic area. Organizational level was categorized as a dichotomous variable (e.g. President or Chancellor and women at lower organizational levels).

The only statistically significant differences (at the  $p < .05$  level) in codes were between white women and women of color, there were no significant differences between women at different organizational levels. The three codes that have statistically significant differences between white women and women of color were Scrutiny & Criticism ( $c2(1, N = 35) = 7.78, p = .005$ ), Lack of Opportunity & Support ( $c2(1, N = 35) = 5.04, p = .025$ ), and Having an Influence ( $c2(1, N = 35) = 6.03, p = .014$ ). In all three cases, women of color expressed higher frequencies as compared to white women (see Table 2 for full results).

Table 1

**Chi-squared Test Results Comparing Presidents & Chancellors with other Senior Women Leaders**

	President & Chancellors (N=15)		Other Senior Leaders (N=20)		$\chi^2$	p-value
	n	%	n	%		
<b>BARRIERS TO LEADERSHIP</b>						
Not Having a Leadership Identity	7	46%	9	45%	.010	.922
Lack of Opportunity and Support	8	53%	10	50%	.038	.845
Discouragement and Sabotage	9	60%	12	60%	.000	1.000
Different Expectations for Men and Women	10	66%	15	75%	.292	.589
<b>SUPPORTS FOR LEADERSHIP</b>						
Formal Leadership Development	4	26%	5	26%	.012	.911
Early Leadership Experiences	0	0%	3	15%	2.461	.117
Encouragement and Support	4	26%	10	50%	1.944	.163
Having a Role Model	2	13%	3	15%	.019	.889
<b>NEGATIVE ASPECTS</b>						
Scrutiny and Criticism	5	33%	9	45%	.486	.486
Time Demands of the Job	5	33%	11	55%	1.621	.203
Pressure of Ultimate Accountability	7	46%	4	20%	2.828	.093
Broad Scope of the Job	6	40%	5	25%	.895	.344
Isolation	5	33%	5	25%	.292	.589
Not Fitting In-Not Being Heard	4	26%	5	25%	.012	.911
<b>POSITIVE ASPECTS</b>						
Having an Influence	4	26%	5	25%	.012	.911
Making an Impact	13	86%	15	75%	.729	.393
Broad Scope of the Job	4	26%	6	30%	.047	.829
Power, Authority and Autonomy	8	53%	7	35%	1.176	.278
Being a Role Model	3	20%	7	35%	.945	.331

Table 2

**Chi-squared Test Results Comparing White Women with Women of Color**

	White Women (N=20)		Women of color (N=15)		X <sup>2</sup>	p-value
	n	%	n	%		
<b>BARRIERS TO LEADERSHIP</b>						
Not Having a Leadership Identity	9	45%	7	46%	0.010	0.922
Lack of Opportunity and Support	7	35%	11	73%	5.040	0.025*
Discouragement and Sabotage	11	55%	10	66%	0.486	0.486
Different Expectations for Men and Women	13	65%	8	53%	0.486	0.486
<b>SUPPORTS FOR LEADERSHIP</b>						
Formal Leadership Development	5	25%	5	33%	0.292	0.589
Early Leadership Experiences	1	5%	2	13%	0.760	0.383
Encouragement and Support	7	35%	7	46%	0.486	0.486
Having a Role Model	4	20%	1	6%	1.244	0.265
<b>NEGATIVE ASPECTS</b>						
Scrutiny and Criticism	4	20%	10	67%	7.778	0.005**
Time Demands of the Job	10	50%	6	40%	0.345	0.557
Pressure of Ultimate Accountability	8	40%	3	20%	1.591	0.207
Broad Scope of the Job	6	30%	5	33%	0.044	0.833
Isolation	6	30%	5	33%	0.044	0.833
Not Fitting In-Not Being Heard	3	15%	6	40%	2.804	0.094
<b>POSITIVE ASPECTS</b>						
Having an Influence	2	10%	7	46%	6.033	0.014*
Making an Impact	15	75%	13	86%	0.729	0.393
Broad Scope of the Job	7	35%	3	20%	0.945	0.331
Power, Authority and Autonomy	9	45%	6	40%	0.088	0.767
Being a Role Model	5	25%	5	33%	0.292	0.589

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ . Table 2

## Interview Questions<sup>4</sup>

### Background/Career Information

1. Please tell me about your current position in the organization/institution.
  - a. How did you come to be in the leadership position you are in now (e.g. did you apply, were you asked, was it something you planned, etc.?)
  - b. Did anyone encourage or recommend you become a (indicate title here – e.g. provost/president/chancellor)? \_\_\_\_\_  
If yes, at what point in your career did this occur?  
What was your relationship to that individual?
  - c. Did anyone discourage you from becoming a provost/president/chancellor?  
If yes, at what point in your career did this occur?  
What was your relationship to that individual?
  - d. As you look back over the course of your career, what do you think lead to you being in a leadership role (it could be people, or situations, or...)
  - e. What got in the way of (or was a challenge to) you getting a senior leadership role in higher education (it could be people, or situations, or...)

### Leadership

2. What are the benefits/advantages of being in a senior leadership role in higher education?
3. What are the disadvantages?
4. Do you think men and women experience different advantages or disadvantages of being in a leadership role? Describe any differences.

<sup>4</sup> These interview questions were developed by the Center for Creative Leadership, Higher Education Resource Services, and the University of Colorado - Colorado Springs as part of a collaborative research effort.

## Supports and Challenges For Women in General

5. Why do you think there are fewer women in senior leadership positions within higher education?
  - a. Some people believe that women limit their own advancement by choice. What are your thoughts about this statement?
  - b. Are there particular issues/challenges/problems/situations which cause women pause as they consider leadership positions?
  - c. Are there particular benefits/advantages/supports that are available to women as they consider leadership positions?
  - d. Do you believe that women aspiring to top leader positions face different challenges than men do? Explain.
  - e. Do you believe that women aspiring to top leader positions have different advantages than men do? Explain.
6. What are the consequences of there not being many women executive/senior leaders in higher education?
7. Have you seen individuals who have derailed (or have been forced to resign or termination or may not have progressed further in their career as expected) in higher education? If yes, what happened? (Have you experienced derailment? What happened?)

## Advice

8. What advice/suggestions do you have for increasing the number of women leaders in higher education?
  - a. What does higher education as a whole need to do?
  - b. What do higher education leaders need to do?
  - c. Should public policy play a role? Describe.