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## **“From an Elephant Into a Ballerina:” The Future of Higher Education from Senior Leaders at Public Very High Research Institutions**

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“From an Elephant Into a Ballerina:” The Future of Higher Education from Senior Leaders at  
Public Very High Research Institutions

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Higher Education

by

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## Abstract

The purpose for conducting the study was to identify how Very High Research university senior leaders at public institutions in the United States described their vision of the future of higher education over the next 25 years. Specifically, the study provided an opportunity for university chancellors and presidents to describe their versions of what the future holds for higher education and how they are preparing for that future.

A vision for the future included senior leader's perspectives on three elements of the university: the university's mission and purpose, academics, and student services. Their experience in higher education combined with their place in the hierarchy of the postsecondary system gave them a more complete perspective to understand the macro picture of where they have been, where they are, and where they might be going. Contemplating where higher education is moving is critical to its success (Cornish, 2004). The study used the framework of Future Studies to structure this exploration. Using phenomenography, the study provided an opportunity for the participants to articulate their vision and how they are preparing for the future. The study focused on the participants collective vision of the future thereby necessitating the need for the phenomenographic method. The acceleration of change from advancements in technology along with economic and health issues like Covid-19 brought the continued need to explore the future, and the field of higher education is no exception.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction to the Study

### Context of the Problem

When considering the future of higher education, a common thought has been to think about the different internal components of a university. That includes the students, faculty, staff, administrators, and others connected intimately to these institutions, such as parents of students, family of employees, and even politicians. However institutions are impacted from the inside and it is important to consider the broader context around them. The Covid-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine, and the highest rate of inflation in almost 40 years set the stage for higher education in the United States in 2022 (Bresnick, 2022; Copley & Douthett, 2020; Dennis, 2021; Johnson et al., 2022; Moody, 2022; Seltzer, 2022). The shift over the last decade from all these things and more has changed higher education. Universities are being forced to adjust to the changing world around them. Some community colleges and small liberal arts schools are closing while mega-universities are thriving (Barshay, 2022), such as public Very High Research universities which are managing amidst this crisis and chaos of time. So, what does this mean for the future of higher education?

A good place to start thinking about the future of higher education is the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic has changed the landscape of higher education and could be an appropriate case study on Plato's phrase, "the true creator is necessity, who is the mother of our invention" (Jowett, 2017, p. 369). The more common version of this saying is that necessity is the mother of invention. There were many needs and necessities that brought about a reformation of what higher education can look like. The spring semester of 2020 brought a chain reaction of effects from the needs creating synchronous and asynchronous classrooms almost overnight (Adler, 2021; Dennis, 2021; Johnson et al., 2022). Students, faculty, staff, and administrators all



shifted to engage with each other and students in a new and different ways. This brought about change where now the degree gap narrowed as more students completed their degrees, and some attribute this to the elimination of standardized testing allowing the pool of applicants to colleges and universities to be diversified (Johnson et al., 2022).

Many community and liberal arts colleges saw a decline in enrollment, while public and elite institutions experienced record enrollment for the second year in a row (Adler, 2021; Johnson et al., 2022). The disparity of enrollment trends suggests that some institutions found ways to thrive in an environment of shrinking college-going aged student populations and that others struggled to remain open. Some types of institutions more than others are starting to see some impacts on enrollment from the looming demographic/enrollment cliff projected to start about 2026 (Campion, 2020; Harvey, 2021a).

The invasion of Ukraine by Russia is another global issue that impacted higher education in the US (Bresnick, 2022; Seltzer, 2022). Current US students in higher education are connected to the conflict in a way that was not possible a generation ago through social media and the internet (Bresnick, 2022). Students have real-time access to the war. This has in turn resulted in students protesting and condemning the war, has impacted student enrollments from the Ukraine, and many institutions have chosen to issue formal statements condemning the war and announcing solidarity with the people of Ukraine (Bresnick, 2022; Seltzer, 2022). The Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, a collective made up of more than 500 college presidents, proposed the United States government issue Temporary Protected Status and Special Student Relief for citizens and students of Ukraine living in the United States (Seltzer, 2022). This would help protect the visa status of over 1,700 Ukrainian international students residing in the US (Seltzer, 2022). The American Council on Education issued a

statement urging political officials to be flexible concerning Ukrainian students and to try to avoid politicizing the students (Seltzer, 2022). Colleges such as the University of Connecticut, Marshall University, University of Buffalo, and MIT are among some of those which have worked to raise awareness and support (Bresnick, 2022; Seltzer, 2022).

In March of 2022, the national inflation rate was at its highest since April 1981 (Moody, 2022). Many institutions were able to stave off raising tuition during the Covid-19 pandemic, but their efforts have been mediated by this rising inflation. The cost of utilities, food, and many other resources required to operate universities have risen significantly. Universities are feeling the impact from inflation in multiple ways and are also subsequently feeling the need to pay employees a higher salary. To increase their fiscal resources, institutions are opting to raise tuition, with many institutions raising their tuition rate 2-8% this year alone (Moody, 2022).

Higher tuition rates and overall costs can cause students to take out higher student loans to attend college and live while pursuing their degree (Robb, 2017). Many students hope for the government to implement new student loan forgiveness options to avoid being overcome with debt (Moody, 2022; Robb, 2017). The current student loan cycle is of government subsidized loans for students who cannot afford to attend college, which in turn indirectly provides additional funding to higher education institutions. The model put the burden on the students with a ripple effect for the greater US economy (Robb, 2017). President Biden announced a new student loan forgiveness program in August of 2022, but it was blocked in the courts until 2023 (Minsky, 2022; White House, 2022).

Additionally, the high cost of higher education is not sustainable if a college education is to be a reality for many Americans. Students cannot work part time jobs to pay for their college education anymore (Perna, 2010). Some schools like Southern New Hampshire University and

Arizona State University have shifted instructional delivery models to online platforms, creating new larger distance education program that many students, non-traditional and traditional alike take advantage of to access undergraduate degrees (Blumenstyk, 2018). Other institutions without the capacity to reduce tuition or to focus on national rather than regional markets have little room to modify their financial practices and face closure. Subsequently, institutions such as the University of Florida, Mississippi State University, and Clemson University are working to identify what part of their financial portfolio they can reduce to financially prosper in the current and future economy so students can afford to attend their institutions (Harvey, 2021a).

These are some of the most salient external factors influencing the future of higher education in the US. Senior leaders operate in this context making decisions daily that will impact the long-term future of their universities. Their elevated perspective provides insight to the many facets of these problems, providing a way to prepare for a future that will soon be the present.

### **Statement of the Purpose**

The purpose for conducting the study was to identify how Very High Research university senior leaders at public institutions in the United States described their vision of the future of higher education over the next 25 years. Specifically, the study provided an opportunity for university chancellors and presidents to describe their vision of what the future holds for higher education and how they are preparing for that future. The vision for the future included senior leader's perspectives on three elements of the university: the university's mission and purpose, academics, and student services. Their experience in higher education combined with their place in the hierarchy of the post-secondary system gave them an elevated or more complete perspective to understand the macro picture of where they have been, where they are, and where

they might be going. Contemplating where higher education is moving is critical to its success (Cornish, 2004).

The study used the framework of Future Studies to structure its exploration. Future Studies is a concept that started in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century with forward thinking individuals such as H. G. Wells (1932) who called it “Foresight” and Ossip K. Flechtheim (1999) who used and coined the term “Futurology.” Future studies saw an expansion of interest in the 1960s (Cornish, 2004). The acceleration of change from advancements in technology along with economic and health issues like Covid-19 brings the continued need to explore the future, and the field of higher education is no exception.

### **Statement of Research Questions**

The study used the following research questions to guide the study.

1. What general trends did college leaders describe as critically impacting all higher education over the next 25 years?
2. How did senior leaders perceive the mission and purpose of Very High Research Universities changing over the next 25 years?
3. How did senior leaders in Very High Research Universities describe their perceptions for the future of academic programs over the next 25 years in higher education?
4. How will services to students change over the next 25 years at Very High Research Universities as seen through the perspective of senior leadership?
5. How did college leaders describe their preparation for the 25-year trends they have described?

## **Definitions**

The study defined Very High Research Universities according to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. A Very High Research University is also known as an R1 level doctoral university (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2022). These institutions awarded a minimum of 20 research/scholarship doctoral degrees or a minimum of 30 professional practice doctoral degrees in 2 of their programs (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2022). There are 107 universities classified as Very High public doctoral four year or above institutions (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2022). Some of them include Texas A & M University-College Station, Florida State University, and Montana State University (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2022).

The term ‘senior leader’ is defined as a president or chancellor of a university. When a university system has more than one affiliated university, each institution has a chancellor as the senior executive. A single institution has a president. University systems have presidents, but they are over the whole system. So, in a case of an interview with a senior leader at a university inside a system (e.g., University of Texas system), the study refers to the chancellor. In cases where these terms might be reversed, every effort will be made to clarify this difference.

Future refers to the time periods after the present. The study looked forward beyond tomorrow and into the next quarter century of higher education.

The senior leader’s vision was their perspective on the future of higher education. Their vision was how they see the areas of mission, academics, student services, and more at public Very High Research institutions. This created a picture of higher education at this type of university.

## **Assumptions**

This study accepted the assumption that the perspective of senior leaders at public Very High Research institutions vision for the future is valuable to others. Another aspect of that is believing senior leaders have knowledge and expertise about higher education and the future that can be translated into a vision. This led to the assumption that anyone (senior leaders, the author, readers, or the public) can think about the future in a critical way. The study also assumed that knowing the future has relevance to planning for the allocation and investment of state and public resources for higher education.

So, envisioning the future is connected to the framework that supports the study. Future studies explore deeply the science of the future, including what might or could happen (Ziauddin, 2010). It argues that knowing the future does matter, and the study worked to support its claims by using this exploratory, descriptive method. Connected to the concept of the future mattering, the study accepted the assumption that the future will be different than the present. Lastly, there was an assumption that these senior leaders had the ability to talk about, and articulate, things that might make them uncomfortable (i.e., change).

## **Delimitations and Limitations**

The study was limited by the time for research and information. As noted here, the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a time of accelerated change. In the time it took to complete the project, more shifts have occurred in higher education. The study did its diligence to stay as relevant and current as possible while acknowledging the limitation of time and space.

Coming out of the Covid-19 pandemic was a limitation because these pandemic-related changes to the system of higher education are still in flux. In some ways, this was what the study inquired about, but being amid the shift from the pandemic limits perspective. Rapid

technological innovation was an effect of the pandemic but also a limitation to the study because it is impossible to predict the next innovation that will thrust more change and adaptation on universities. The ‘enrollment cliff,’ that is the decreased number of available individuals who could potentially enroll in higher education, and reportedly due to the decreased birth rate during the 2007-2009 recession is coming and will likely cause another shift, including who is targeted for enrollment because there will be fewer traditional age students in the population.

Universities are preparing for this change in enrollment, but it was a limitation on the timing of the study that the ‘cliff’ will not arrive until approximately 2025. In addition to this is the limitation of including public Very High Research universities. Although this population includes 107 institutions, when considering all higher education in the country, it is quite small. Then narrowing the possible participant pool to geographical regions accessible to the author reduced the number greatly. These institutions, at the core of their missions, focus on research related activities; this attention to research is valuable, but many institutions have incredible success and civic value by placing their emphasis on teaching. Therefore, the reports from senior leaders at Very High Research Universities may not have foretold the same future for comprehensive, teaching universities.

The potential struggle for participants to be truthful was a limitation. These leaders are trained to carefully construct their communication to protect themselves and their institutions. While the interview guide sought to obtain answers for the research questions, there was a risk that the participants would not go beyond superficial, obvious answers.

These limitations led to the delimitation to make any generalizations from the study with caution. The results, although telling, do not necessarily apply, in general, to community

colleges, private universities, liberal arts colleges, technical institutions, online universities, for profit institutions, and as mentioned, comprehensive teaching universities.

### **Importance of the Study**

The data and findings from the study have the potential to benefit students, parents, faculty, staff, and the greater citizenry of the country. The vision of the future identified here from senior leaders in higher education impacts everyone the higher education system touches both directly and indirectly. The web of connection to these institutions is intricate and touches almost every component of society in some form. Therefore, the importance of the impact from the decisions these senior leaders make, and how they justify these decisions based on their vision of the future, cannot be overstated.

The experience and expertise of the voices of the higher education leaders in the study also speaks volumes to increasing the knowledge and understanding of trends in higher education. The distraction of day-to-day issues can take away from the larger picture of where higher education is moving. The experience from the perspective of senior leaders gives insight into the future and there is much to be learned. The conversation for the future of higher education allows all stakeholders to be more active participants in the process of determining the future. The study updates an ongoing conversation about the future of academic programs, student populations, and many other parts of university experiences.

The collective perspective of senior leaders is valuable with decades of experience in higher education and an average tenure as president of a university about 7 years, college presidents and leaders have ‘been there and done that’ or consulted with others who have experience (Wilde & Finkelstein, 2021). They know how to acquire the information needed to decide, and their perspective at the top of the institution allows for sight in ways others at the



faculty or college level may not share (Hendrickson et al., 2013). Knowing presidents are leading the decision making at their institutions, understanding their perspective becomes critical to future of higher education with an impact on all its stakeholders. There is trickle-down impact from their leadership on policy that shapes institutions in practical ways having short- and long-term effects.

The study benefits those working with students by bringing the vision from senior leaders to faculty on college campuses. Instead of an oppositional stance where faculty fight for resource and agency, understanding the perspective of the vision of the future of higher education can enable a new partnership between university administration and faculty. Presidents communicate institutional priorities when they step into their role, through public speaking events, and in their strategic plans. However, the study specifically emphasized their perspective on the next 25 years. Their collective vision for this time shapes policy and practice decisions and higher education. So, while faculty are in classrooms with students imparting knowledge and their expertise, they need to know about the vision of these presidents because it shapes the world where they work. Staff working with academic programs will find this study valuable because presidential vision shapes the way programs are prioritized on college campuses. For example, if a president sees student success programs as a key part of the future for their institution, then budgetary decisions may back up that vision.

Policy makers need to be informed about presidential perspectives because it can help or hinder their own vision for these public four-year institutions. Aligning vision and timing can reduce friction as institutions and policy makers work to enable the future of their schools and state. Presidents' perspective on issues from inside higher education informs policy makers to allow more communication and attainment of mutual goals. Just like faculty and staff, policy

makers have an opportunity to understand this perspective and vision. Instead of residing in a place of defense, the results of this study allow for partnership and can produce better outcomes for all involved in higher education.

Senior leaders have an inside perspective on the higher education system that no one else does. This is very valuable and allows them to give insight in a way that provides depth and breadth from the inside out. Their vision opens a door to understanding key information for the next 25 years in higher education at public Very High Research institutions. Considering the present to prepare for the future is an integral step in a discovery process for success.

### **Conceptual Framework of the Study**

The study was situated within the conceptual framework of what Edward Cornish (2004) termed ‘Futuring.’ This is the most modern iteration of a concept in development for the past century. H. G. Wells (1932) preferred the term ‘Foresight,’ and Ossip Flechteim called it ‘Futurology’ in his book *History and Futurology* (Ziauddin, 2010). Futuring, Foresight, Futuristics, Futurology, and the most academically accepted term, ‘Future Studies’ are all addressing the study of current trends to forecast future developments (O’Toole, 2017; Ziauddin, 2010). Future Studies experts strongly suggest the avoidance of the older term ‘Futurism’ due to its connection with the far-right fascist radical art movement (Ziauddin, 2010). There is great debate about the terminology for contemplating the future. Ziauddin (2010) gave an in-depth perspective on this issue and defined the concept of Future Studies. Ziauddin explained that predictions and forecasts do not provide knowledge of the future, but instead can suggest possibilities (Ziauddin, 2010). This is the purpose of using Future Studies for current research. Cornish (2004) wrote, “The goal of futuring is not to predict the future, but to make it better” (p. 7).

The name can be misleading, but Future Studies is about the future and about the present because if the focus is only on predictions; it is unlikely a viable plan for action will form (Ziauddin, 2010). Ziauddin also acknowledged the role of the past in decision making for the future since the past is wrapped into the present.

Since World War II, we have developed improved techniques for forecasting, such as trends projection, computer simulation of alternative futures, and the creation of analytical models useful in dealing with multidimensional problems (Creager, 1972, p. 62)

The future of higher education is tied to the decisions of today. Higher education in the US along with its government and industries have a practical stake in the future being built now (Creager, 1972). The interest of all constituents in higher education goes further than projecting what future enrollment will be for universities or trying to determine the resources needed to run the institutions, a prominent concern is student development (Creager, 1972). Students face a world of accelerating change. Their education provides a foundation to be able to participate in the version of society where they can contribute in a healthy way that leads to beneficial building in their lives and the lives of others. Using Future Studies to understand the forward movement ultimately provides for student's needs (Creager, 1972).

The various approaches to the field include the pluralizing from the singular Future to Futures Studies. Ziauddin (2010) writes about this, and Gidley's work actualizes it through the plurality of Futures Studies (Gidley et al., 2009; World Futures Studies Federation, 2023). Gidley developed a taxonomy of five paradigmatic approaches to Futures Studies including: empirical-positivist, critical-normative, cultural-interpretive, empowerment-activist, and integral/transdisciplinary (Gidley et al., 2009; World Futures Studies Federation, 2023). These

represent the different approaches in the field of Future studies, expressing the various epistemological and ideological perspectives (World Futures Studies Federation, 2023). The approaches can be used independently or combined depending on the context for research (World Futures Studies Federation, 2023).

The study was not lobbying for reinvention for the sake of reinvention in higher education, but rather, a considerate foundation for the preparation of what will come to higher education making use of all available tools. “There is a continuing need for the monitoring of processes and practices in higher education with evaluation of both immediate and long-range outcomes” (Creager, 1972, p. 63). Future Studies enables the anticipation of risks and opportunities that could happen, and it provides time to decide what to do (Cornish, 2004). Future Studies can also help, “develop worthwhile and achievable long-term goals, along with reasonable strategies for attaining them.” (Cornish, 2004, p. 6).

Future studies literature from the past century has emphasized the increasing pace of change or the accelerating change of the world (Cornish, 2004; Creager, 1972; Wells, 1932; Ziauddin, 2010). To make wise decisions about all facets of higher education, it is critical to understand the changes taking place. Understanding trends in higher education and the world around it will prepare the process for decision making. “We have enormous opportunities to improve our future, and we also can avoid many potential problems if we are willing to look ahead” (Cornish, 2004, p. 7). Future studies go beyond a general knowing about the present to a systematic approach for future preparation by foremost considering trends. Therefore, the macro perspective of higher education for the future should focus on trends in higher education from the past and present to prepare for the future. Developing futuring skills will sharpen the ability

to assess the probabilities, anticipate consequences, and choose ever-wiser courses of action that can lead to the best possible future (Cornish, 2004).

## **Chapter 2 Review of the Related Literature**

The purpose for this review of related literature is to understand the research contributing to the future of higher education at four-year public Very High Research institutions. The chapter is divided into four major sections. The first section covers 2 large populations on university campuses by reviewing literature on students and faculty. The next section covers research on the mission and purpose at institutions in the United States. Then a section on university senior leadership focusing on the college presidency helps bring in literature related to the population for interviews in this study. The last section reviews literature on the topics of trends and the future of higher education. The primary focus was on peer reviewed research articles reporting relevant studies related to the research, but other sources such as reports, books, government statistics, and credible reviews have also been included in a limited capacity.

The author started by searching the University of Arkansas library database, consulting ProQuest, EBSCOhost Academic Search Complete, Wiley Online Library, Sage Journals Premier, ResearchGate, and Google Scholar seeking as an exhaustive review as possible. The literature presented is the culmination of several years of research in databases based off some of the following search terms: trends in higher education, future of higher education, change in higher education, mission and purpose higher education, academic preparation students higher education, student success higher education, enrollment cliff higher education, test optional enrollment higher education, university presidential preparation for the future, college students united states, who are college students in the united states.

Each search was limited by time 2010-2023 and type of material (i.e., articles, peer-review). The 2010 date limitation produced results that included publications from the 2008 recession and the impacts on education and the economy, and it also included several years of

work before the Covid-19 pandemic. Although it pushes back a little beyond a decade of previous publications, this period in the 21<sup>st</sup> century gives the review of related literature the breadth and depth needed for this expansive topic.

## **Students and Faculty**

### ***Students***

This section covers who college students are by examining the latest statistical information on them. The review of related literature on students and the future of higher education focuses on some of the challenges current students face as they work to earn their degrees. Starting with the financial hurdle many students face, moving into how to prepare students for college in a way that leads to higher rates of degree completion, and a new approach to admissions through the popularization of the test-optional admissions movement. Any semblance of standardization in the college experience is continuing to decrease for students, and there are positive and negative aspects of the issue (Bennett, 2022; Hines, 2017). This literature helps bring some of the most relevant work related to students for the study to the forefront.

The Institute of Education Sciences National Center for Education Statistics reports from Fall 2009 to 2020 show that undergraduate enrollment in postsecondary institutions shrank by 9% from 17.5 million to 15.9 million (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022b). A change in recruited student demographics suggests that these losses will be recovered during the 2020 to 2030 time period to increase by 8% to 17.1 million students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022b). The Education Data Initiative, a small team of researchers dedicated to translating complex data into navigable information report that 73% of students attend public higher education institutions with 60.9% of them attending on a full-time basis (Hanson, 2022).

Nearly a fifth of these students, 19.4%, are Hispanic for a 455.9% increase since 1976, and the female college student population has seen an increase of 98.1% since 1947 (Hanson, 2022).

This indicates that the student population in higher education is increasingly becoming more diverse, but this varies among institution type. Black students are not increasing their participation in higher education enrollment as much as Hispanic students, comprising 11% of the enrollment at four-year public institutions (see Figure 1; National Center for Education Statistics, 2022a).

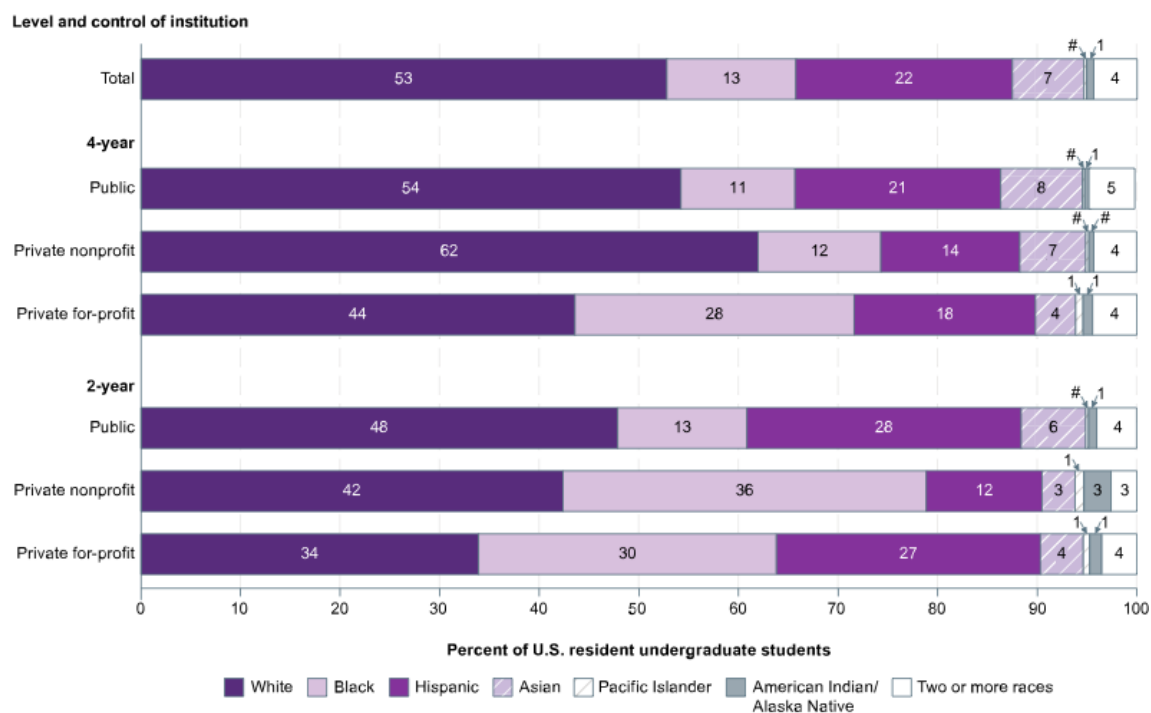


Figure 1. *Undergraduate Student Demographics* Percentage distribution of US resident undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by level and control of institution and student race/ethnicity for Fall 2020 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022a).

Records show that college enrollment peaked for public four-year institutions in 2010 at 13.1 million students (see Figure 2) and enrollment is projected to decline through the at least the 2026; as a result of the 2008 economic crisis and subsequent lower birthrates (Hanson, 2022;



Copley & Douthett, 2020). The age, ethnicity, race, and gender of students are projected to continue shifting in coming decades (Hanson, 2022; Copley & Douthett, 2020). There will be fewer traditional aged students forcing institutions to work to draw in a more diverse age range (Copley & Douthett, 2020).

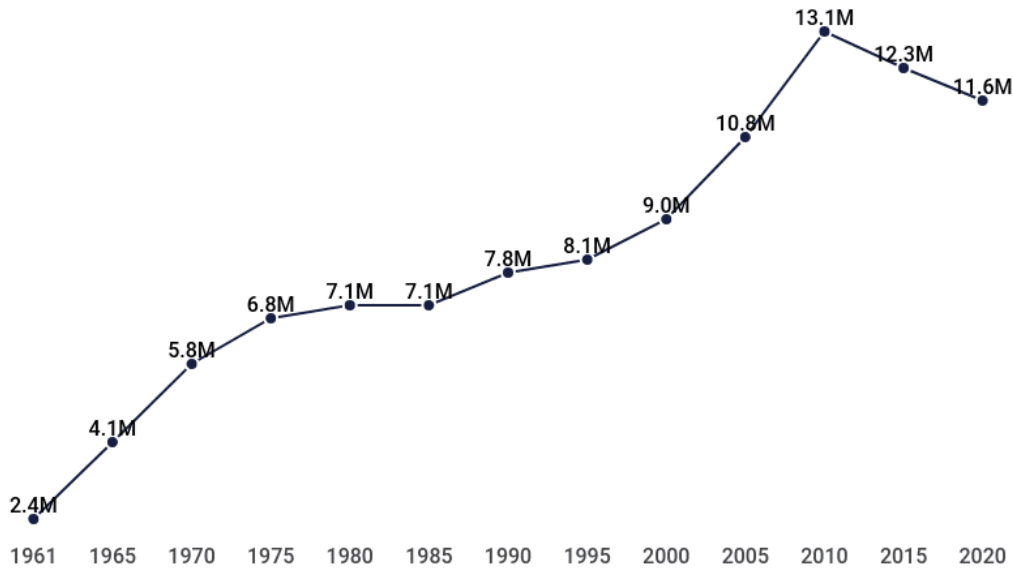


Figure 2. *Full-time Enrollment* (Hanson, 2022).

Knowing who college students are through their demographics profile is not the whole story. Students are multi-faceted and are busier than previous generations (Robb, 2017; Thelin, 2019). Although there are other studies on the impact of financial stress on college students, such as Archuleta et al. (2013) and Joo's et al. (2008), the following study was chosen as an example of literature for review because it is more recent, and it reinforces results consistent with previous work. Robb (2017) explored the impact of financial stress on students' well-being. The study found a clear connection between financial stress for students and their persistence behavior. Whether credit card or student loan debt, students are struggling financially, and the

cost of college continues to rise, adding more weight to an already heavy financial burden of many students trying to earn a degree.

Data for the study were collected from students at a major Midwestern university in the spring semester of 2014 with a strategy to sample more higher classification students who had likely accumulated more student debt and felt the stress of their financial situation in more salient ways than students at the freshmen level. Robb surveyed 2,654 students with 476 of them responding for an 18% response rate. The final sample used for the study was 324 surveys that were fully completed. Survey results showed that financial stress had a significant impact on student well-being, and this result provided institutions with supporting data to create more education on managing finances in college to try and relieve the burden of debt on students.

There were several limitations to the study. Surveying students at 1 institution with a sample bias for a greater proportion of White and female students reduced generalizability. Then loan data were self-reported from students, and the household dynamics cannot be explored in more detail. The survey did not question if loans were taken out by students or their parents. Implications of the study included a need for further development of programming and analysis to determine more effective means for student well-being and outcomes. A large portion of students would benefit from programs that teach general budgeting skills, including how to navigate their tenure in college with limited resources. Other education programs that focus on improving self-efficacy, reducing stress, and building confidence in financial decisions would be beneficial to student well-being and financial attitudes.

Research related to college preparation has attempted to determine how institutions can support students with programs like those mentioned in Robb's 2017 study or prepare students ahead of time while they are still in high school. College student success begins before

enrollment, and Nuñez's (2019) work adds to the literature showing practical steps that can be taken for students to set correct perspectives and increase chances for success before stepping foot in a college classroom. Nuñez reported that student expectations can be influenced through the strategic use of media. Student success programs can have a positive impact on college student retention rates, and student engagement in these programs is crucial for degree completion. Nuñez drew the connection between student expectations and high attrition by using a series of interviews with high school students as a case study. The interview was followed by showing, "various forms of fictional college media with observation data, which was then followed by another round of interviews" (p. 144). The media shown included "Rudy," "Gilmore Girls," and "A Different World" working to go beyond traditional stereotypical media to using media that discusses imposter syndrome or the how involved parents should be in a student's transition into college life.

The interviews produced five themes: "I don't watch live TV," "I don't have time," "College is gonna be tough," "Knowing more makes things less stressful in general," and "You want to make friends." Although the participants agreed that the media from the study taught them about some aspects of college, the lessons learned varied depending on their values (Nuñez, 2019). For example, 1 participant focused more on the social aspects of the media and enjoyed watching the friendship between 2 Latina students in "Halls of Ivy" but learned that moving out beyond familiar friendships can be a beneficial part of the college experience. Another participant found an increase in knowledge about available resources such as the existence of resident advisors in college and was made more aware of the difference in how students can use time in college by doing homework and hobbies between classes.

The most significant finding from the Nuñez study was the importance for students to make a connection with characters in the media, and the most impacting lessons learned involved observing the various struggles of other students. This gave the students an opportunity to take a passive part in conversations and see how the situation for students (in the media) was handled, producing reflection the students could apply in their own experience. The limitation of the study was not providing a group discussion after taking in the media because the group discussion could have strengthened the reflective nature of the process for students. Strategically using this type of media could address fears and concerns from high school students. Teachers could help reduce stress and fear from students by integrating movies, TV episodes, or novels for students to discuss in strategic conversations.

College preparation could come through an increased awareness of the reality of the higher education experience, but it has also historically come through years of preparation for standardized exams to qualify for entrance into college (Lofaro, 2022). Examination into this practice has produced questions from inside and outside the higher education community and caused institutions to reevaluate requirements for admission. This new admissions policy practice has impacted the way high school students prepare for college and can aid in changing the demographics of students in higher education (Bennett, 2022; Lofaro, 2022). Some schools started exploring the idea to use ACT and SAT scores as an option as a response to new data reporting that those standardized tests were biased (Bennett, 2022). Bennett explored which test-optional policies impact application and enrollment behaviors from students. Bennett's study used data from multiple sources resulting in comparative quantitative analysis on test-optional admissions for private 4 year institutions during the 2001-2002 through 2015-2016 academic years. The institutions were divided into early and late adopters, producing 99 institutions in the

first category and 118 in the second, and Bennett excluded institutions that were not traditional 4 year bachelor's institutions.

The study reported an increase of 10.3% to 11.9% in the number of underrepresented racially/ethnically minoritized (URM) students who enrolled after test-optional policies were introduced. Test-optional policies can increase diversity in undergraduate student populations at selective institutions (Bennett, 2022). However, more research needs to be done to move beyond selective institutions to understand the broader implications of adopting test-optional admissions policies for public institutions. Bennett's study and the supporting previous literature showed an increase in representation, but it was not enough for "transformative change" (Bennett, 2022, p. 207).

Test-optional admissions policies are a part of the movement to increase access for a more diverse group of students in higher education (Lofaro, 2022). Many US institutions have decreased the importance of standardized tests like the ACT and SAT in recent decades, and the Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the process (Lofaro, 2022). Lofaro examined 2 lines of research: (a) Do test-optional policies help institutions achieve higher enrollment, increased diversity in the student population, and academic quality objectives? (b) Do test-optional policies increased representation for URM students?

Lofaro used data from the National Center for Education Statistics' Integrated Post-Secondary Educational Data System (IPEDS) and *US News and World Report (USNWR)* for a sample of 1,681 4 year degree-granting institutions in the US. The data ranged from 2008-2009 to 2015-2016 for an 8 year longitudinal study. Results showed adopting test-optional policies can help institutions with increasing diversity in their student population and produce a stronger representation from URM students. Test-optional policies have been associated with, "enhanced

institutional outcomes, namely increased one-year full-time retention rates” (Lofaro, 2022, p. 11). Future research in this area will be important so that institutions can understand the impact on all student populations across institution types, and more data from the broader use of test-optional policies should be available in coming academic years due to the increased practice during and following the Covid-19 pandemic (Lofaro, 2022).

### ***Faculty***

Another population at the core of the higher education experience are faculty members. This is a broad category including different levels of professors, full-time non-tenure track faculty, part-time non-tenure track faculty, lecturers, and more. This section requires historical context. Understanding some of the history of faculty will help inform the future through related literature. The professionalization of faculty becoming known as experts in their field, participating in professional organizations, and publishing research in national association journals began at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Thelin, 2019). The desire to secure academic freedom and prioritize research motivated a group of professors at Johns Hopkins University to form the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) in 1913 (Park et al., 2011). The creation of this organization was part of a response to overburdened teaching loads and fear for being fired due to conflicts with university presidents and others in positions of power over faculty like state legislatures, trustees, alumni, and administrators (Park et al., 2011; Thelin, 2019).

Faculty at most universities had their largest, “gains in income, power, prestige, and protections between 1945 and 1970” (Thelin, 2019, p. 310). Thelin noted that this was a time of prosperity for the professorate, and it laid a foundation for a job market ripe with opportunity, but also unanticipated popularity that created a situation where it was not unusual for hundreds

of applicants to apply for a tenure track position (Ehrenberg, 2012; Thelin, 2019). The struggle between different types of faculties and the institution is not new, and it impacts all involved on campuses. Ehrenberg (2012) wrote that full-time faculty have declined about 80% since 1970, moving to 53% of all faculty in 2007. Using adjuncts and graduate students along with faculty who are often part-time has more than doubled from 1975 to 2007 (Ehrenberg, 2012). The changes in “faculty composition, expenditure allocation, pedagogy, technology, and differential tuition,” with looking at, “how they are distributed across higher education sectors, and their implications” (Ehrenberg, 2012, p. 195 ).

Like Thelin, Ehrenberg brought up the issue of the increase in number of people obtaining a doctorate. One tenure track job posting can attract over a hundred applications (Marcus, 2022). Ehrenberg (2012) argued that everyone loses with the increased use of non-tenure track faculty because they are often overworked, underpaid, and this not only impacts their quality of life but also the students’. Multiple studies have shown a correlation with the increased use of non-tenure track faculty in full-time or part-time roles leading to a decrease in persistence and graduation at 4 year institutions (Ehrenberg, 2012; Griffith & Altinay, 2020; Griffith & Sovero, 2021; Shaker, 2013). This is limited largely to research institutions. “When a four-year academic institution increases its use of either full-time, non-tenure track faculty or part-time faculty, its undergraduate students’ first-year persistence rates and graduation rates decrease” (Ehrenberg, 2012, p. 200).

In 2003 the number of non-tenure track positions was reported to increase by 58.6% with the number of tenure track lines at all US higher education institutions falling to 41.4% (Hendrickson et al., 2013). The rate of hire for contingent faculty also started increasing at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Delbanco, 2012; Ehrenberg, 2012; Hendrickson et al., 2013; Shaker,

2013). Part-time faculty at public 4 year institutions rose to 43.9% and tenure/tenure-track lines have decreased down to 39% (Hendrickson et al., 2013).

Delbanco (2012) reported similar numbers to Ehrenberg, writing that in 1975 almost 60% of faculty were full-time tenure track but by the early 2000s the number had declined to about 35%. Four-year public research universities have slowly changed the composition of their faculty investing in non-tenure track teaching faculty over tenured research focused faculty (Bok, 2017; Delbanco, 2012; Ehrenberg, 2012; Hendrickson et al., 2013; Maxey & Kezar, 2016). The annual American Association of University Professors report shows that more than half of faculty in the US work on a contingent contract. This is about 3 out of 5 faculty on contingent appointments as of fall 2020 (AAUP, 2022).

Griffith and Sovero's (2021) research on how faculty gender and contract status impact student grades bring up critical aspects of the issue. The uncertainty faculty face in the stability of their jobs can influence decisions with students, and they found it common for some faculty to grade students' work less rigorously making for higher class averages and GPAs (Griffith & Sovero, 2021). "There is growing evidence that average grades at universities have been increasing by about 0.15 grade points per decade for the last 35 years" (Summary & Weber, 2012, p. 97). Work needs to be done to determine the cause of the increase, but it has been suggested that due to part-time faculty wanting to maintain their jobs results in attempts to make students happy with higher grades.

The quantitative approach to researching the effects of faculty gender and contract status informs Griffith and Sovero (2021) along with Summary and Weber (2012) to conclude that the increased use of non-tenure track faculty is part of the cause for increased grade point averages. An increasing number of employers report a growing gap between student's perception of their



level of preparedness to enter the workforce and the reality of it. Grades are becoming less of an indicator and this influences public perception of the value of a college degree (Altbach, 2016; Bok, 2017; Ehrenberg, 2012).

Some teaching loads at 4 year research institutions for traditional tenure track appointments, such as at the University of Arizona, have been 40% teaching, 40% research, and 20% service, but this varies widely among institutions (*Faculty Workload Distribution | University of Arizona Faculty Affairs*, n.d.). A 2010 report from the American Association of University Professors with statistics updated in 2014 indicated that teaching intensive appointments have largely moved to 100% teaching non-tenure track faculty, and this has had significant consequences for students and faculty (AAUP, 2010). There are lower levels of campus involvement in governance and activities from faculty who only teach, and a larger burden of service requirement on tenure track faculty to who must carry the increased load as this weight has shifted (AAUP, 2010). The increased use of non-tenure track faculty has created an imbalance on an outdated system (AAUP, 2010). Tenure track faculty's added experience with research and teaching built into the position allows time to invest in their field of knowledge and means fewer students to manage. Some in higher education are putting their hope in faculty unions to try and recover power lost over time with the decrease in tenured positions (Bucklew et al., 2012; Clawson, 2013; Fiorito et al., 2011).

Porter's (2013) study using a national survey of presidents and faculty senate leaders measured the level of shared governance at 341 public universities (Porter, 2013). Findings from the study showed unionization greatly increases faculty influence with institutional decision-making, including salary and other aspects of faculty appointments (Porter, 2013). The literature shows faculty often unionize as a response to dissatisfaction with institutional policies, such as

tenure, academic freedom, salary, and overall workload (Bucklew et al., 2012; Porter, 2013). The increased use of non-tenure track faculty in recent years has meant an increase in union participation. “Currently, over 430,000 faculty members and graduate students at more than 500 institutions and 1,174 campuses are represented by collective bargaining agreements” (Bucklew et al., 2012, p. 374).

Porter (2013) reiterated the functionality of faculty unions to improve low salaries and give stronger weight to faculty voices for university decision-making. The power of a faculty union is in the ability to strike. Administrators want to save face and try to avoid strikes, and it works in their favor that “the ability of faculty to strike is limited at most universities” with public sector employees being permitted to strike in only 9 states (Porter, 2013, p. 1193). Administrators in these states are more likely to make concessions, but negotiations for them can be long-term.

Further support for the success of unions working on behalf of faculty was shown in Porter’s (2013) study. A survey on faculty governance was sent to presidents and faculty leaders with responses from at least 1 at each of the 341 public four-year institutions. The results of the survey showed that these unions have a positive effect for faculty influence at their institutions, and faculty voices carry more weight concerning salary scales, appointments for academic positions, tenure and promotion, teaching loads, and curriculum content.

The desire to preserve and improve the situation of faculty has prompted a new affiliation between 2 labor unions to expand bargaining power and unite more faculty across higher education in the US The Association of American University Professors and the American Federation of Teachers finalized their joint union with a vote on June 18, 2022, joining the forces of almost 316,000 academic employees (AFT Communications Staff, 2022; Marcus, 2022). The

AFT president, Randi Weingarten said, “this partnership is game-changing for the promise and potential of higher education” (AFT Communications Staff, 2022, p. 1). The unions named their latest campaign “a new deal for higher education” harkening FDR’s highly successful New Deal campaign to help pull the country out of the Great Depression (*New Deal for Higher Education*, n.d.). The lack of faculty job stability and security, compensation, and numbers showing that some instances of up to 419 applicants for a single faculty position all could be indicators that the situation for faculty is dire and in need of a *new deal* (Marcus, 2022; *New Deal for Higher Education*, n.d.).

In addition to concerns that have resulted in higher union participation, faculty members also face a number of challenges that have arisen as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic. Full of unanticipated change required for faculty, the effects are still being discovered. Unlike, the projected enrollment cliff or the increasing cost of higher education, universities and colleges were unable to anticipate the Covid-19 pandemic. Institutions suffered massive financial losses from 2019 and 2020 tuition revenue ranging from \$1.1 million to \$13.5 million (Kirk-Jenkins & Hughey, 2021). While schools have been preparing for the 2025 enrollment challenge, the drastic drop in enrollment due to the pandemic resulted in a 2.5% decrease in enrollment at about 400,000 students (Kirk-Jenkins & Hughey, 2021).

Weyandt et al. (2020) used an online survey of 303 participants to “investigate the relationship among anxiety, depression, impulsivity, health behaviors, and mindfulness among faculty members from universities located in the northeastern region of the US during the early outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic” (p. 535). This shows factors beyond workload influencing the status of faculty in the US. Weyandt limited the study to faculty in the northeastern US where the Covid-19 Pandemic began and was experienced in an extreme nature. The study found,

“statistically significant associations for faculty regarding self-reported anxiety and depression symptoms and elements of mindfulness and impulsivity” (Weyandt et al., 2020, p. 539). Results from the study continue to show the burden female faculty bear inside the system, which was exacerbated by the pandemic with higher reports from female faculty of anxiety. They also reported lower levels of self-care, specifically poorer eating habits, sleeping, and an increased use of alcohol and marijuana during the Covid-19 lockdown (Velez-Cruz & Holstun, 2022; Weyandt et al., 2020).

Another change for faculty combines many aspects of higher education by looking at ‘technostress’ largely induced from the pandemic. Boyer-Davis and Berry wrote that at the onset of the pandemic about 55% of faculty had never taught an online course. Many faculty were not required to incorporate learning management systems, like Blackboard or Canvas, prior to the pandemic, and 6 in 10 reported being uncomfortable and inexperienced with learning management systems and other classroom technology. The lockdown led to on-the-job training with unfamiliar technology and fewer resources to help faculty, all contributing to burnout (Boyer-Davis & Berry, 2022; Velez-Cruz & Holstun, 2022). Accelerated advancement of technology requires regular adaptation and change from faculty. The pandemic added new pressure heightening the need for change and increasing techno-distress for many faculty.

Changes in technology-enhanced learning such as Hybrid-flex and flipped classrooms, learning management systems, applications, artificial intelligence and machine learning, smartboards, clickers, virtual reality, robots, game learning, tablets, mobile technologies, video conferencing, and smart, connected devices have expanded faculty roles and magnified the knowledge, skills, and abilities

required by them in order to teach within the 21<sup>st</sup> century digital age (Boyer-Davis & Berry, 2022, p. 4).

Boyer-Davis and Berry's Technostress Creators scale was distributed at 2 different times in the pandemic, Spring/Winter of 2020 (N=307) and 2021 (N=94) (2022). The scale broke down technostress into five subcategories: techno-overload, techno-invasion, techno-complexity, techno-insecurity, and techno-uncertainty. The results showed an initial increase in technostress, but the second distribution of the survey showed a reduction in aspects of technostress like perceptions of computerphobia by almost 20% (Boyer-Davis & Berry, 2022). Overall, the study showed the pandemic initially increased technostress but revealed a larger problem of its existence prior to the pandemic.

### **Mission and Purpose**

The rhetoric of mission and purpose statements shapes higher education and it is different across institution types and mediums (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). Authors in this section of the review of related literature analyze mission statement rhetoric in viewbooks, websites, and through publications like *US News and World Report* (Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Taylor & Morphew, 2010; Saichaie & Morphew, 2014). Another approach to the aspect of purpose for institutions in higher education is the analysis of an individual rhetoric. This review looks at an article examining the use of W.E.B. Du Bois' rhetoric as a means of uplift for the Black community and other populations (Wendling, 2018). Then the section concludes with analysis of a popular conception of purpose in higher education with Pasquerella's (2019) approach to the purpose through democracy and citizenry.

## ***Mission***

Morphew published a series of articles in partnership with various other authors on the mission and purpose of higher education from 2006 to 2014. Morphew and Hartley (2006) explored what institutions say and mean in their mission statements across the Carnegie Classification of institution types. Authors randomly selected over 300 mission statements from the internet of 4 year institutions in the US and coded the statements, identifying 118 distinct elements across the sample of mission statements.

Their findings revealed important information about the distinctions between institution types and how mission statements reflect this difference. First, the designation of private versus public was a more important factor in determining mission statement elements than the Carnegie Classification, and second, the institutions commitment to diversity or a liberal arts education appeared frequently across all the institutions. Lastly, there was a prevalence of the use of “service” in the mission statements directly or through the mention of civic values. The authors noted that while there are themes of service and emphases on diversity and similar terms, the 118 distinct elements across the almost 300 statements show a lack of repetition and a distinction in the wording for each mission statement. Ultimately, the study reported that the mission statements signal specific values to their constituents, and most of the statements were humble and practical in nature. Aspirational elements like being “the best” were rare, and institutions used their mission statements to communicate service and utility to their constituents.

Morphew’s next publication in the series focused on mission and purpose is the least relevant to this work but worth mentioning because it ties into the larger body of work to paint a whole picture. Hartley and Morphew (2008) conducted a content analysis of viewbooks, focusing on if these themes were different by institution type. This is very similar to the previous

work in 2006 on mission statements. In addition to the themes, they analyzed content looking for messages being communicated to students about the academic purposes of higher education (Hartley & Morpew, 2008).

The authors systematically identified, classified, and tabulated the symbols, images, and messages from viewbooks of 48 four-year US institutions. This broke down to 24 public and 24 private institutions with 15 research universities, 16 comprehensive universities, and 17 baccalaureate colleges represented in the sample. There was a diversity of missions in the sample with members of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, Council on Public Liberal Arts Colleges, the 568 Presidents' Group, and Association of American Universities represented. The sample included 23 states, and all of this provided the authors with a diverse sample of viewbooks.

The authors noted the lack of diversity and representation in all the viewbooks, noting the idyllic version of higher education depicted across the whole sample. Six thematic areas were revealed through the content analysis: institutional context/campus features (examples: great location, campus landmarks, diversity of the student body), academics/faculty (examples: low student/faculty ratio, chance to study abroad, student/faculty interaction), co-curricular opportunities (examples: students having fun, residence life, varsity and intramural sports), admissions and financial aid (examples: how to visit campus, presence of scholarships, admissions requirements), value of an education (examples: successful alumni, validation through external rankings or guidebooks), and the purpose of higher education (examples: preparing students for a job, formative/developmental). A significant point they made regarded the use of viewbooks to commodify college choice instead of reinforcing the purpose of college as a public service to individual students and society. Hartley and Morpew reported that the

viewbooks stood in conflict with the stated mission of these institutions and wanted future research to inquire about the lack of continuity.

In the third article of the series, Taylor and Morpew (2010) built on the previous work from Morpew and Hartley (2006) to better understand how baccalaureate colleges identify and represent themselves. An important finding in this research was that the colleges sampled had statements that differed depending on the source of where they are communicated. An example is a college that would have a mission statement locally on their website but would have their mission statement worded in a different way for *US News and World Report*. All of Morpew's work pointed out that the consistency that institutions omit defining characteristics about themselves, instead, prioritizing homogenous content in their mission statements and viewbooks. Taylor and Morpew concluded the homogenous nature of the mission statements combined with the conflicting wording could cause a lack of confidence in these institutions because they claim to offer 1 thing when they may well be offering something very different (Taylor & Morpew, 2010).

### ***Purpose***

Wolff's (1969) models of a university structure the purpose of modern higher education into 4 categories seeing the university as a sanctuary of scholarship, training camp for the professions, social service station, and an assembly line for establishment man. None of these models represent actual institutions but an ideal living in the minds of higher education stakeholders (Wolff, 1969). These purposes influence institutional decision-making and shape the foundation of higher education.

The public purpose of higher education has been debated asking if it is civic, personal, or both (Lagemann & Lewis, 2012). There was a decline in the civic commitment to higher



education starting after the Civil War, with a perception that values and character development needed to be separate from the classroom (Lagemann & Lewis, 2012). The 20<sup>th</sup> century brought new philosophy and questions about the purpose of higher education, and 1 article stood out with an examination of it through the educational philosophy of W. E. B. Du Bois (Wendling, 2018). Wendling studied Du Bois' educational philosophy inquiring about his belief in the civic mission of higher education and its ability to uplift the Black community. The same emphasis on service and civic participation as the purpose of higher education has been seen in prior literature (Wendling, 2018). This emphasis applies beyond the Black community to create uplift in other communities. "Du Bois understood the emancipatory and uplifting power education can bring to self and society", and the increasing emphasis on access through student success can be seen in Du Bois' uplifting (p. 292).

As a follow up to previous work on mission and purpose of higher education Saichae and Morpew (2014) approached purpose in the final study of their line of research with a more modern lens when they examined "the textual and visual elements on the websites of 12 colleges and universities" discussing the debate about the purpose and outcomes of higher education in the US (p. 499). The sample used websites from four different Carnegie Classifications with the study using the following group names: Big 10, Elite, Southern Colleges, and Public Regional. Data from the webpages of each institution for the study included the institutional home page, the about page, webpage describing admissions, webpage describing academic majors, and the webpage describing the financial requirements and offerings from the institution. The study covered several institution types, it also left out others (i.e., community colleges, HBCUs, and military academies), thus limiting the generalizability of the results from analysis.

The author's analysis produced 6 themes including: academics, campus aesthetics, fine arts, intercollegiate athletics, student life, and value (Saichae & Morpew, 2014). Consistent with Morpew's previous work, the study reported that institutions portray college life in a generic way showing active, attractive students relaxing in residences and in other cocurricular activities. There was a lack of diversity with an absence of nontraditional, unhappy, or overweight students, and there was a lack of diversity in class, gender, race/ethnicity, or sexual orientation among the students. The websites reinforced the discourse of higher education as a product with focus on outcomes associated with higher education like job-relevant skills or the ability of graduates to improve their financial status. The websites rarely made, "references to educational, intellectual, and spiritual development" (p. 522). Instead, there was a focus on social efficacy and mobility with a consistent theme of social mobility throughout the website sample.

Institutions portrayed themselves in homogenous ways and chose to de-emphasize specific mission and purposes in exchange for showing students in idealized settings, enjoying extracurricular activities with a college experience focused on preparing them for their career. The message of institutions to students through mission statements, viewbooks, and websites reinforced the theme of "What can school do for me, regardless of what it does for others?" (p. 524). This theme communicated college was about the "pursuit of a credential rather than the pursuit of knowledge" (p. 524).

Pasquerella was appointed president of the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU) in 2016, after serving multiple decades in higher education as a faculty member and administrator (American Association of Colleges and Universities, 2022). She wrote an article focusing on the transition of emphasis in American higher education from preparing students to be global citizens and imbuing them with a sense of social and personal

responsibility for the democracy they live and participate in higher education as a means for employment and social mobility (Pasquerella, 2019).

There was a dissonance between the projected purpose of higher education and the reality of it on college campuses (Pasquerella, 2019). A series of national reports showed rapid decline in public confidence in higher education where 51% of American adults believed college education was valuable, and young adults between the ages of 18 and 29 were more likely to question the value and purpose of an undergraduate degree than those of other age groups. It is possible institutions of higher education will not be the only ones with an ability to issue credentials that demonstrate career readiness and the sustainability of higher education in the US depends on its ability to, “demonstrate the ways in which we are preparing students for lifelong learning in the context of the workforce” (p. 3). Students need to be engaged and collegiate learning needs to be intentional about connecting curriculum to career preparation while helping students maximize cost saving measures available and position them for success in and out of the classroom (Pasquerella, 2019).

### **The College Presidency**

Presidents and chancellors have the power to shape institutions through the application of their vision through leadership in short- and long-term projects (Campion, 2022; Clark, 2017). This section begins with understanding the presidency of modern higher education and moves to literature discussing how these presidents will be required to lead through specific upcoming challenges at their institutions. The job of college presidents has shifted just as much, if not more than students and faculty (Mrig & Sanaghan, 2018). This review of related literature shows who the modern president is and what they face in the future of higher education.

Clark (2017) wrote a report, “Pathways to the university presidency: The future of higher education leadership” to learn how the role of college presidents and chancellors was being transformed, why it was being transformed, and what the future could look like for university leadership. This review of related literature prioritized this report because of the intersection related to the topic studying university presidents and their future. Their future is intertwined with the future of higher education. These presidents are stakeholders like faculty and staff, and this report helps the reader know who presidents are now and who they will be in the future.

University presidents are accountable to a wide array of stakeholders from students and faculty to parents and legislators, many of whom are very involved in the higher education experience (Clark, 2017). This report reviewed the qualities of past presidents and their role at institutions and compared it with the changes in expectations and leadership of university presidents in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Clark, 2017). The study was done by Deloitte’s Center for Higher Education Excellence and Georgia Tech’s Center for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Universities by using surveys, interviews, and an analysis of presidential CVs (Clark, 2017). The survey was sent to 1,031 presidents of 4 year institutions, with 165 presidents completing it for a 16% response rate (Clark, 2017). There were 112 presidents at private institutions and 51 at public institutions (Clark, 2017). The CV analysis used 840 publicly available documents from institutional websites and professional social media sources (Clark, 2017).

Results showed that there was a difference in the way presidents thought about higher education, with veteran presidents seeing it “as a collegial, intellectual community where they are the academic leader” and new presidents seeing “themselves through a financial and operational lens, as a leader who needs to get things done despite the collaborative nature of campuses” (p. 9). One president of a large public research university shared the top three pieces

of advice to someone wanting to move into a university presidency: seek breadth and depth of experience, look outward beyond the walls of the institution and higher education, and try to acquire experience with managing finances on a large scale. Capacity to understand budgets for institutions was also described as important because modern presidents are highly involved in fundraising and financial planning (Clark, 2017).

The report drew attention to the challenges for these presidents with pressure to think short term from day 1 in their role. Board members and other stakeholders want to see results, and it can stifle long term plans out of a need to produce results quickly. Institutions want transformational leaders and that requires someone with a multi-faceted capability to achieve short-term results while working to accomplish long-term goals. Institutions need to remove the idea of a certain *type* for presidents, and someone in the role is required to have the skills of an entrepreneur, politician, and academic all wrapped into 1 (Clark, 2017).

Clark reported about presidents, and another aspect of them to review is the role they play inside institutions. In a report from focus groups and organizational meetings with senior leaders at universities, Mrig and Sanaghan (2018) wrote about four unforgiving paradoxes that leaders in higher education must confront and then recommend four strategies to address these. The first paradox was although higher education institutions are struggling to sustain themselves, they are continuing to invest in existing systems hoping to hold out until something shifts in their favor (Mrig & Sanaghan, 2018). The second paradox is the way institutions are managing the educational model undermines its relevance and value (Mrig & Sanaghan, 2018). The third paradox is that higher education needs a fast change, but there are limitations to the capacity with current decision making and governance models that are not built for quick innovation. And fourth paradox was that research clearly shows the value of an undergraduate degree is

increasing, but the public perspective of the value is decreasing, filled with skepticism and questions.

Recognizing these problems, Sanaghan and Mrig presented a multi-faceted set of strategies for presidents to move higher education forward, and the first of these was centered around student success. Student success can produce financial resources that institutions need and grow support from constituents at the same time. The second strategy was to leverage faculty who already embrace the change needed for institutions. The third strategy was to look for other areas of innovation inside and outside of higher education. Then the fourth strategy was to invest in leadership at institutions, developing capacity for strong leadership in the administration to support the change.

Some change came in the form of reduced state funding for institutions and college presidents, so they had to invest more and become skilled at budgeting, financial management, and fundraising (Shields, 2021). Shields (2021) study examined the “perceptions of Oklahoma public comprehensive university presidents about their roles in budgeting, financial management, and fundraising” (p. 38). The study had 7 OPCU (Oklahoma public comprehensive university) presidents participate through interviews that produced 9 themes seen below in Figure 3.

1. Oversight is the president’s role in budgeting, and shared governance is the president’s role in financial management.
2. The president is viewed as the face of fundraising for the university and/or the chief fundraiser for the university.
3. Most presidents relied upon informal and on-the-job training regarding budgeting, financial management, and fundraising.
4. Surround yourself with subject matter experts whom you trust.
5. Having incremental experience in budgeting, financial management, and fundraising prior to becoming president was instrumental to their success in these areas.
6. Friend raising, presidential colleagues, and shared experiences are an invaluable part of the president’s role in budgeting, financial management, and fundraising.
7. On-the-job training and their previous role prior to becoming president was crucial to their success as president in the roles of budgeting, financial management, and fundraising.

8. Among their duties, roles and responsibilities, OPCU presidents spend most of their time on budgeting, financial management, and fundraising.
9. It depends on the time of year as to how much time each OPCU president spends on budgeting, financial management, and fundraising.

Figure 3. *OPCU President Interview Themes* (Shields, 2021).

The presidents saw themselves as the face of their institution, main contact for major donations, and the chief fundraiser. The previous experience they had in budgeting, financial management, and fundraising proved critical to their success (Shields, 2021). The interviews also reported that the following personal characteristics were needed:

being a good people person, caring about people, being disciplined, being ethical, being good with your personal finances, having integrity, relationship management, social management skills, having a strong work ethic, being trustworthy, and being able to make tough financial decisions (p. 48).

College presidents of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are required to be renaissance men and women. Financial expertise and strong personal character are not the only qualities of a modern college president. There is a strong legal dimension to the position as well (Breux et al., 2021). The legal system and higher education system are tied together, and the college president liaises between them navigating the nuance of social and political polarization. Free speech, the First Amendment, censorship, academic freedom, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), Title IX, and other important issues from state legislatures and the public all touch different stakeholders that college presidents must lead and communicate with (Breux et al., 2021). The criteria for college presidents were broad and integrating it with their leadership is key to the future of higher education.

The next article married the topic of leadership with a frequently written about topic, the projected decline in traditional aged college students, known in short as the “enrollment cliff”

(Campion, 2020, p. 542). The Great Recession of 2008 impacted higher education at the time, but a new type of impact is coming, and leaders are looking for how to prepare as the enrollment cliff draws closer (Campion, 2020). Not all institution types will be impacted in the same way with regional institutions projected to see a decline in enrollment and elite institutions an increase. Campion encouraged leaders to “know who you serve” and “spend time identifying characteristics of your student population” to maximize recruitment (p. 542).

Part 2 of the provided resources for leaders to address the needed changes required to prepare for the enrollment cliff of 2026. Campion implored leaders to re-design programs, increase services, and increase institutional reach to potential students. Reinforcing the need to adapt and change, Campion addressed the “new decision-making process” of young adults in the new generation (p. 113). The perspective that college is too expensive, not valuable, or worth it is more common than before, and the number of students considering college has decreased by 23% since the spring of 2020. Institutions need to communicate their value and the value of the degree they offer to potential students and stakeholders. The progress of higher education in the US has become synonymous with larger enrollments, increased numbers of faculty, and expansion of campus facilities (Harvey, 2021a). Standing at the edge of the demographic decline provides an opportunity to survey the problem and plan, and there is the potential to change for the better and for institutions to emerge stronger and be able to serve students better for decades to come (Harvey, 2021a).

Knowing the risk factors for institutions is part of the preparation to plan, and geography is a large determining factor in the level of impact on an institution (Harvey, 2021b). For example, the Mountain and West South-Central census divisions are projected to grow while large portions of the eastern two-thirds of the US are likely to see double-digit losses in potential



students. The change in college student demographics is projected to shift the state of higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and college presidents are at the center strategically shaping their institution's response. The reduction in the traditional college student population could have a dramatic impact on institutions, and Harvey's research pointed out that students usually remain close to their home and do not travel over 60 miles to attend college. Presidents will have to assess their potential population and potentially shift their target student population to sustain their institutions. Another demographic risk factor is institution type with elite institutions projected to grow but regional and community colleges could see between 7% and 14% losses. Harvey wrote that, "the value of a college education is already widely being questioned, and any erosion will intensify demographic impacts" (p. 17). Other risk factors for leaders to consider include accessibility and attitude.

All these risk factors were compiled to create a graph showing level of threat low to high and capacity to respond low to high for different types of institutions dependent on their various risk factors (Harvey, 2021b). Once a type of university is plotted, leaders can translate the risks into strategies. Harvey created four quadrants as conceptual planning contexts: Transform for institutions with high level of threat and low capacity to respond, Imagine for institutions with low level of threat and low-level capacity to respond, Mobilize for institutions with high level of threat and high-level capacity to respond, and Enhance for institutions with low level of threat and high capacity to respond. Each one has its own recommendation for how leaders can move forward to enable their institution to plan and Harvey ended with 1 final resource for leaders, a sample risk factor checklist. Harvey (2022) also shared a recent Pew Research survey reported that people in the US are having even fewer children than before, and first-year enrollments fell by almost 10% (Harvey, 2022). American higher education is going to confront change through

the demographic enrollment and an increasingly stronger demand from the public for change to the traditional model of higher education.

While the enrollment cliff is significant, there are other issues on the minds of presidents in higher education. The American Council on Education produced a report in the fall 2021 term with data from 230 college and university presidents who identified their most pressing concerns (*2021 Fall Term Pulse Point Survey of College and University Presidents*, n.d.). This is the latest in the series of annual reports produced from this organization.

The survey presented presidents with 19 issues and asked they select the most pressing five, and the mental health of students was rated the highest for the sixth time in a row in this survey with 73% of presidents ranking it in their top five issues. The second most pressing issue was concern over enrollment numbers for the next academic term, and the third was the mental health of faculty and staff. The fourth most pressing issue selected was the long-term financial viability of their institution, and the fifth and final most pressing items ranked in the survey tied with one being institutions retaining current faculty and or staff and the other racial equity issues. 76% of presidents at public four-year institutions rated student mental health as worse than the previous academic year, and the proposed solution was to hire more staff.

### **Trends and the Future**

Articles on trends and the future of higher education were plentiful, but most of the were not studies but reviews or opinion pieces from professionals in higher education. This section covers the most relevant and related literature starting with predictions about trends to give perspective on where experts believed higher education would go and where it is now (Flynn & Vredevoogd, 2010). Other trends covered were institutions changing resources producing innovative uses of space on campuses (McDonald, 2013). Another study discussed the trend of

alternatives to traditional models of higher education with credential programs, short courses, and certifications (Rosendale, 2017). The trend of mega-universities and the massification of higher education is also occurring (Altbach, 2016; Gardner, 2019). The future of higher education hinges on adaptability, and institutions who can put best practices to work through new pedagogical practices and technology will rise to the top in terms of sustainability and success (Akour & Alenizi, 2022; Crow & Dabars, 2020; Halabieh et al., 2022).

***Trends***

Flynn and Vredevoogd (2010) reported 12 predictions about what trends would affect higher education in the year 2015 from a roundtable of representatives in higher education. The participants were from research universities, state colleges, community colleges, private institutions, and design schools. The data presented in the report is representative of the conversation happening in higher education and is a strong sample of factors influencing its future (Flynn & Vredevoogd, 2010). The list of emerging trends follows in Figure 4.

1. Globalization will influence and shape all aspects of teaching and learning.
2. The wide range of ability, preparedness, background, opportunity, and motivation of higher education students will require more varied and holistic approaches to inclusive learning.
3. The demand for more experiential, outside learning opportunities will require faculty to respond thoughtfully and proactively.
4. Colleges and universities will be expected to deliver more education in less space—to increase their learning per square foot.
5. Advancements in technology will drive ongoing changes in all aspects of college and university life and offer new opportunities to enhance and broaden learning experiences.
6. Interdisciplinary learning will become increasingly common and popular.
7. Students will take much greater control of their own learning as proactive producers and managers of their own learning solutions, materials, and portfolios.
8. The average age of students will continue to rise; the mix of cultures, ages, and learning styles will become increasingly varied and rich.
9. Competition for students and resources will force colleges and universities to sharpen their brands and identities and to distinguish themselves in new ways.
10. Colleges and universities will become increasingly important parts of regional economic development, both in creating growth and taking advantage of it.

11. The structures of educational institutions and the types of employment relationships between them and faculty will continue to multiply; inequities among faculty will cause tensions.
12. Accountability and assessment tools will continue to become common in defining institutional effectiveness.

Figure 4. *12 Views on Emerging Trends in Higher Education* (Flynn & Vredevoogd, 2010).

Each of the trends provides a possibility for challenges and opportunities in higher education looking forward (Flynn & Vredevoogd, 2010). 21<sup>st</sup> century literature on this topic centers around the use of studies like this one to plan and prepare for the future of higher education (Flynn & Vredevoogd, 2010; McDonald, 2013).

McDonald reported five trends for higher education noting that institutions face continued reduction in state appropriations, and an efficient use of space is critical (McDonald, 2013). This trend will help produce a functional campus with the resources available, and a focus for institutions on efficiency will cause a shift from new construction to better utilization of existing space. The second trend he identified was a focus on team-based learning. “Team-based learning, problem-based learning, SCALE-UP (Student Centered Active Learning Environment, Undergraduate Program) classrooms, and MIT’s TEAL (Technology Enabled Active Learning) classrooms” have been gaining traction (McDonald, 2013, p. 2). The third trend was simulation and innovation centers being used for a wider array of courses and programs. The fourth was transdisciplinary learning because institutions are seeing the benefits for student’s future careers from exposure to multiple disciplines. And the fifth trend is renovation of sports facilities. This is related to the increased need for efficiency in space on campuses and helps further sustainability goals for institutions at the same time. Renovation instead of new construction helps institutions preserve history and tradition through continued use of facilities. McDonald’s work shows how necessity shapes the innovation of institutions.

Rosendale (2017) conducted a study examining the employers' perceptions of MOOCS (massive open online courses) against more traditional forms of post-secondary education like bachelor's degrees. Some institutions use MOOCS as a gateway into bachelor's degree programs, but most people see them as outside standard higher education. The rising cost of higher education caused the public to consider other ways to become educated. For a time MOOCS looked like they could be a good alternative option, but they are not as popular as they used to be. Other forms of post-secondary education are trending, and Rosendale's (2017) work exemplifies this through its examination of employer's perception of MOOCS. The study reports on literature related to the topic along with survey data from a sample of employers (Rosendale, 2017). The data showed employers preferred traditionally educated employees over alternative forms of education like MOOCs or micro-credential programs (Rosendale, 2017). MOOCs do not represent a threat to higher education, but an addition to a myriad of other continuing education offerings for potential job applicants (Rosendale, 2017).

Massification and the rise of mega-universities are another trend in higher education (Altbach, 2016; Gardner, 2019). Schools like Southern New Hampshire, Western Governors and Arizona State University have enrollments increasing due to improvements in technology for distance learning (Gardner, 2019). These schools put an emphasis on recruiting non-traditional students like adults over the age of 25 who work full-time jobs. Competency-based education where students can earn credit outside of the classroom helps degree progress, and the marrying of non-traditional students with non-traditional college experiences is proving to be a successful union. Mega-universities are filling the need for "practical, convenient, and inexpensive" ways to earn a college degree (p. 1).

These institutions are capitalizing on the thousands of students who have earned college credit but could not navigate a way to complete their degree in a traditional way (Gardner, 2019). Degrees from mega-universities carry more credibility with employers, making these institutions more successful than the use of MOOCs (Gardner, 2019). The trend goes beyond online distance education for the masses to changing how institutions see potential students, and Arizona State University is an example of this with their utilization of the new term “universal learner” instead of non-traditional student (p. 6). These institutions believe higher education is not limited to traditional aged students but that anyone can access higher education throughout their lifetime.

### ***Future***

There is a large body of literature with opinions on the future of higher education, and James (2021) and Knight & Drysdale (2020) offer examples of this type of work. The gap in this type of literature over this topic is wide, proving the need for this study. This section will discuss 2 articles and one book to review literature and inform the reader on the state of knowledge about the future of higher education.

Crow and Dabars (2020) book advocated that the future of higher education depends on institutions embracing access and a high standard of excellence as complementary instead of oppositional (Crow & Dabars, 2020). Reconceptualization, innovation, and an ability to leave behind old systems of higher education that keep institutions locked into models of elitism are the future (Crow & Dabars, 2020). The Fifth Wave of higher education wants to move beyond the top 5% of graduating high school students to the top 25% (Crow & Dabars, 2020). Crow and Dabars argues that traditional higher education systems put false limitations on student access and changing the foundation of how institutions operate will open the door to the next era of higher education in America. Their focus is moving the system beyond tradition and into a new

era of sustainable practices that integrate technology in a way that increases accessibility for more students (Crow & Dabars, 2020). The future of higher education is a reformation of the system.

Another approach to the future was examined through current educational problems and solutions by Halabieh et al. (2022). Their study used an analysis of literature to identify 12 institutions of higher education as models for the future of all higher education. The authors searched 6 databases with 2 different search engines with the help of research librarians at 3 institutions to produce an exhaustive list as possible for literature relevant to the topic. The review produced over 3,000 documents, and the authors narrowed the data down to 172 documents for analysis. The purpose of the study was to find current and best practices in, “curriculum development, pedagogical frameworks, implementing the science of learning, and new methodologies and innovations” (p. 3).

Eight US institutions met the criteria for exemplary institutions including Minerva University, Paul Quinn College, College of the Atlantic, Hampshire College, Antioch College, Arizona State University, Bryn Mawr University, and Alverno College. The best practices these institutions exemplified included: use of science in learning (Minerva University and Bryn Mawr College), university graduates and career-relevant skills (Paul Quinn College, Minerva University, Alverno College, Hampshire College, and Antioch College), financial accessibility (Minerva University, Paul Quinn College, and Antioch College), student health and well-being (College of the Atlantic, Minerva University, and Paul Quinn College), admissions transparency (College of the Atlantic, Minerva University, and Paul Quinn College), geographic accessibility (Paul Quinn College, Arizona State University, and Hampshire College), attrition and inequities retention (Paul Quinn College, Bryn Mawr College, Arizona State University, and Alverno

College), and technological infrastructure (Minerva College and Arizona State University) (Halabieh et al., 2022).

These institutions represent a group of institutions using best practices outside the traditional college rankings who were evaluated on relevant trends impacting the future of higher education (Halabieh et al., 2022). Institutional leaders should look at what is happening on these campuses to actualize best practices on their own campuses. The authors wrote “we must be bold enough to reimagine education from the ground up, to fight the inertia of ‘this is the way we have always done it’” (p. 13). Institutions must consider ways to incorporate innovation as a practice, address inaccessibility preventing students from earning degrees, overcome technological access barriers for students, continue to support student mental health and well-being, and give students more agency about their college experience. They argued that the future of higher education hinges on continued improvement in these areas.

Akour and Alenezi’s (2022) study looks at the digital transformation of higher education from the Covid-19 pandemic. The study brings together information from the Covid-19 pandemic and the new digital era of higher education (Akour & Alenezi, 2022). Student’s lives continue to increasingly become more digital and the higher education sector is no exception. Pedagogical practices have changed in response to increased use of technology in higher education. The accessibility of information increases the ways learning can engage students with more activity, collaboration, asynchronous and adaptive learning, or experiential and learning customized to individual students. New modes of instruction and learning environments are surfacing in higher education each year. The authors see the need for higher education to be more flexible in the future by integrating a wider variety of experiences through different mediums for students. Technology will play a large role in the reformation and future of higher



education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Akour and Alenezi see it as a short-term sacrifice to make the changes in institutional systems now for long term gain available for all stakeholders.

With the cost of higher education continuing to grow, alternatives have become more popular. Short courses, micro-credentials, certificate programs, competency-based programs, social media-based courses have all grown more in use and credibility over recent years, showing no sign of stopping (Akour & Alenezi, 2022). The outcome of better economic circumstances for students is not as certain as it used to be, making these alternative more popular. The digital transformation of higher education should aid in its long-term success while simultaneously increasing the success of its students.

### **Chapter 3 Research Methods**

This chapter explains the methodology for the study where the purpose was to identify how Very High Research university senior leaders at public institutions in the United States described their vision of the future of higher education over the next 25 years. Using phenomenography, the study provided an opportunity for the participants to articulate their vision and how they are preparing for the future. The study focused on the participants collective vision of the future thereby necessitating the need for the phenomenographic method. This chapter explains the research design, subjectivity statement and membership role, data generation, data analysis, reciprocity and ethics, and trustworthiness and rigor.

#### **Research Design**

Qualitative research studies “things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 3). The purpose was to seek understanding and knowledge instead of trying to quantify data gathered, qualitative research seeks to interpret the data through various methods like narrative inquiry, phenomenography, or ethnography. Qualitative research approaches a subject with an open hand and open mind. Research done in this way can bring clarity and understanding to the topic at hand and the results produced can lead to increased capacity for the researcher and participants of a study.

In her Qualitative Research course, Jordan (2022) explained that qualitative researchers are bricoleurs, change agents, interpreters, artists, and scientists. She went on to share that they embody a questioning stance, are careful observers, have comfort with writing, they are critically reflexive, think inductively, and have a high tolerance for ambiguity (Jordan, 2022). So, inquiring of presidents about their perspective on the future of higher education is a good fit for

qualitative research. I wanted to hear their stories and perspective and discover how their vision influences higher education. Then examine how these aspects combined contribute to the larger picture for the phenomena of the future of higher education.

My ontological position aligned the most with relativism. Lincoln and Guba (2000) wrote that relativism is a perspective where there is no single truth or reality, truth is constructed. This is the driver behind my epistemology of constructivism. I chose to conduct my research through interviews because I believed the data was constructed by my participants' perspectives. Each of them held a unique perspective and truth to share on the topic. All of them were valid. The interactions through interviews and journal entries brought a unique knowing to my data that I would not have access to if I had the same participants fill out a survey where I then quantified the data. I worked to approach interactions as open as possible to be able to experience the interviewee's perspective with as little of my influence. Recording their perspective was my highest priority.

Phenomenography was the type of qualitative research used in the study. Phenomenographical studies are common in educational research, and are, "the empirical study of the different ways in which people think of the world" (Bowden et al., 1992, p. 263; Gammon-Pitman, 2021). Phenomenography is a research orientation studying the lived experiences and conceptions of people (Marton, 1986; Sin, 2010). This method helps discover the qualitative ways people experience, conceptualize, realize, and understand various aspects of phenomena in the world around them (Bowden et al., 1992; Richardson, 1999). The subjects for the study were university presidents or chancellors who were the senior most administrators charged with the operation of their campus. The interview protocol asked questions centered around their experiences, concepts, and understanding of the future of higher education. The

following diagram helps explain the relationship between the researcher, aspect of the world/phenomena, and the subjects of the study.

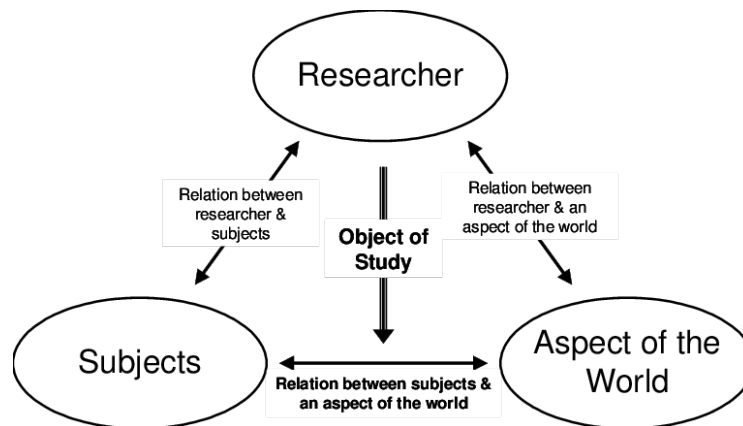


Figure 5. *Phenomenography Diagram* depicting the relationship between the researcher, aspect of the world (the future of higher education), and the subjects of the study (presidents and chancellors) (Mann et al., 2007).

### **Subjectivity Statement and Membership Role**

I often tell my students that a university is a place full of limitless potential. Higher education can offer its students many things, but to maximize its potential one needs to understand its mission, purpose, and future. I started thinking about this 20 years ago as a sophomore in college. At the time, I was going through a period of reflection to determine my major, and in doing so I started asking myself why am I getting a degree? I felt that would be part of the driver for finishing and a determiner of where I went in my career. Ultimately, I decided to be a communication major because of my passion for people and their relationships.

I have been passionate and inquisitive my whole life. I spent hours talking to the people in my life like my grandmother, who I called Memaw, as a young girl. I asked her many questions about her life, and I never stopped asking. I valued what she had to say, her experience, her story, and I knew I would learn from her life. As I grew my interest in people

went beyond the boundaries of my family. My inquisitive nature became a part of my identity. I was hungry for people, stories, and life beyond what I knew growing up.

My father and mother are the only ones in their families to earn a bachelor's degree. Their experience in higher education changed their lives and mine. It set off a chain reaction of expectations that college was what you do after high school. My parents felt the benefits in their life from earning a degree and emphasized the same could be true in my life. The message of higher education as a place of limitless potential was the culture of my raising. Both my parents valued it, and they made sure I did too.

As a faculty member, I care about my students, who they are and who they will become. My caring is not limited to students. All the people who make up the university system from faculty to administrators and those in-between, are impacted by the shape and movement of higher education in the United States. It is a dynamic system with far reaching impacts as it changes over time. So, from my perspective it is worth asking where it has been, where it is, and where it is going.

As a full time, non-tenure track faculty member in the communication department, I want to share my passion for public speaking, interviewing, small group communication, and more with students. I want to help them become better public speakers, more effective small group members, and be better citizens. Part of my purpose in what I do is to build a better world one student at a time. Small daily decisions like this come together to impact the collective direction of higher education.

I think my relationship as a faculty member can be a limiting factor to my research, but my hope is as I revisit the reality of my place inside the system it will give me greater insight. I hope that pursuing perspectives for the future of higher education will give me perspective of my

place in the system. I have an insider's perspective, 100% emic. I have relationships with people in the system at every level, and I am invested.

My hope is any contribution to this research I can give will be worthwhile, and I will learn through the process. I believe in lifelong learning. Discovering others' perspectives on the future of higher education is important and a part of the journey inside the system to tap the limitless potential that awaits.

## **Data Generation**

### ***Participants***

My participants were presidents at public Very High Research Universities. They were able to give the most accurate perspective because of their position inside the higher education system. It was the most beneficial to delimit the research to presidents over utilizing other university senior leaders for consistency in their experience and position at each institution. I emailed an invitation to participate in the study to my participant pool (see Appendix C). Interviews were conducted in person when possible and over the telephone if not available for an in-person interview. All participants and their institutions were given pseudonyms to maintain their anonymity and protect their privacy.

My data were generated in person utilizing a five question semi-structured interview guide working toward saturation (see Appendix E). Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested heterogeneous samples of in-depth interviews start with five participants and continue until saturation is reached. Glaser and Strauss defined saturation by writing, "no additional data are being found whereby the (researcher) can develop properties of the category" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 65).

The participants were chosen through a narrowing process starting with the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education List of Public Four Year or Above Doctoral Very High Research Activity Institutions. This list contained 107 (see Appendix A) institutions so more criteria were needed to narrow the perspective list of participants. The next criteria focused on accessibility due to the author's geographical limitations. So, the participant pool was limited to plains, southeast and southwest reducing the possible institutions down to 24 (see Appendix B). The last criterion for participants was their tenure as a senior leader. The average college president is in the position for about 7 years (Wilde & Finkelstein, 2021). Focusing the sample population a little below the average to five years in their appointment helped include newer leaders who had been able to formulate the vision for their institutions, formulate a strategic plan, and institute parts of it as potential participants. I sent an email invitation to these participants and the first 5 who responded were interviewed.

The interviews, reflexive journaling with thick description of observations during the interviews, and all relevant documents and artifacts that emerged during the research process provided needed triangulation for the data. The reflexive journaling included observational field notes from each campus visited. Then personal reflection before and after each interview, making note of aspects of the interviews that could not be captured in the moments as I took notes from answers to the interview guide questions, like nonverbal communications (i.e., facial expression, body posture, use of space). The interviews allowed me to listen to the perspectives and information of the presidents from my population. The interviews took place in the office or conference room of each participant to provide an environment where they were comfortable and private. I asked open-ended questions that allowed participants to shape the perspective shared

but help the data collected align with the intended goal of the research to understand their perception of the future of higher education. The interview guide is listed in Appendix E.

Questions for the interview guide were derived from studying the related literature on my topic. Each question was worded to produce content to answer the research questions for the study. The interview guide was pilot tested on presidents adjacent to my sample population before the interviews occurred so any needed edits or additions took place before the interviews.

My journal entries recorded observations from the interviews, being intentional to write down my perception of nonverbal communications like tone, pauses, body language, and facial expressions. Each journal entry was written immediately after the interview to provide the most salient sample of observation possible. Field notes help inform the journal entries. Field notes were recorded before and after the interviews. The field notes recorded details from the environment on each campus along with any other relevant information in preparation for each interview. Lastly, I collected any recommended additional documents from participants (i.e., strategic plans) and all other documents for communication between myself and the presidents, the universities, and other relevant artifacts that surfaced along the way to give a wholistic picture of all data generated during the study.

### ***Data Analysis***

My analysis engaged, “in the general process of developing a description, analyzing [my] data for themes, and providing an interpretation of the meaning of [my] information” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 490). I focused on “identifying broad patterns” in my data (Hays & Singh, 2011). The essence of my study was looking at the phenomena of university presidents’ perspective of the future of higher education. I wanted them to share their perspective in our interviews using thick rich description of their experiences, insights, and opinions on the future



of higher education (Hays & Singh, 2011). The experience over their careers shapes their perspectives and then their reality where they operate to make decisions that impact the future of higher education. I offered a compilation of my notes to interview participants providing an opportunity for them to correct or adjust anything communicated in the interview.

The notes from the interview guide were uploaded into word processing software for digital manual coding and systematization of the process to increase rigor of the study. I read through each body of notes before beginning the coding process. The emphasis was on a collective conception of the vision of the future of higher education from the presidents. So, care was taken to focus on collective categories that were organized into themes. “A conception has two intertwined aspects: the referential aspect, which denotes the global meaning of the object conceptualized; and the structural aspect, which shows the specific combination of features that have been discerned and focused on” (Sin, 2010, p. 315).

I looked for these aspects in the data so I could interpret the conceptions of the presidents. Then I utilized peer review to check for bias in my coding. The reviewer conducted an individual analysis, coding for themes present in the data. I compared the results to ensure correct themes were identified. Thematic analysis provided clear sight of the conceptions communicated by the participants, and I produced findings for their vision of the future of education through it.

The context of these presidents shapes their perspective. Nothing should be taken for granted or assumed about them. It was also important to examine my status as an insider/outsider with the research (Hays & Singh, 2011). I am an insider as a part of the higher education system but an outsider being a faculty member and not an administrator, more specifically in the office of the president. So, I have both emic and etic perspectives. Although, I could be considered an

insider in both my roles when compared to someone doing research outside academia. In the microcosm of the university, it is my experience through talking to others in the university setting, that an administrator (president) does not see a faculty member as someone who can share their perspective. My ability for reflexivity is critical to this line of research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### **Reciprocity and Ethics**

There are several potential ethical dilemmas for the study. First, my proximity being a faculty member on a public Very High Research University campus. I mitigated this by ensuring I do not have any relationship with the presidents I interviewed for the study. Another ethical/moral issue was the president's requirement to reflect on their perspective while amidst being in that role. I made it clear to them that I only wanted what they could give. I did not know their level of thought behind these issues until I interviewed them. I asked about it from several vantage points to encourage the presidents to think, and I believe member checking through sharing my notes helped allow them to communicate clearly about their thoughts concerning the future of higher education. Sending my notes after the interview gave them time to process their thoughts on the topic.

In terms of reciprocity, I offered my participants a greater sense of self-worth, self-concept, and opportunity to contribute to the greater conversation about where their field is moving. Knowing they have value and are more than their single role at a university provided personal importance and value. It is important to know someone wants to hear what you have to say. Lastly, I offered my research to them once compiled and completed.

## **Trustworthiness and Rigor**

According to the Sage Encyclopedia of Educational Research, Measurement, and Evaluation, “trustworthiness refers to an overarching concept used in qualitative research to convey the procedures researchers employ to ensure the quality, rigor, and credibility of a study...” (Frey, 2018, p. 2). It is both an aim and a practice (Frey, 2018). My study used triangulation and participant validation/member checking for trustworthiness and rigor (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). My data triangulation included interview notes, field notes, and participant-observer journaling with thick description.

Member checking for the study involved follow up communication and probing questions for the participants to ensure the message being sent was the message I received as appropriate. I returned my notes from the interview for review by each participant to ensure accuracy. This is an important part of the phenomenographic method. The study was inquiring about their perception, so it was critical for me to rigorously pursue the confirmation of understanding concepts. Lastly, I used member checking by allowing the participants to review the notes and adjust or add to any of their responses as they have more time to process their thoughts (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). My own perspective was tracked as I journaled through the process, sharing my ongoing journey inside higher education as a faculty member and student. I must identify my, “own biases, preferences, preconceptions,” and reflect on my, “relationship to the respondent, and how the relationship affects participants’ answers to questions” (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 121).

While I acknowledge, time is real, my priority was the pursuit of this knowledge in a method that does the topic justice. Phenomeographic research is more accepted than ever, and I intend to push the framework to its limits in service to my topic, myself, and higher education.

The layers of my project prove my dedication to rigor and my deep desire to discover the 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective on the future of higher education.

Phenomenography began as a descriptive approach for the study of people's conceptions about different aspects of phenomena in their context (Sin, 2010). This method aligned with my study because the phenomena of the future as a concept through the vision of university senior leaders is an important part of higher education in the United States. This method is continuing to grow in its use for qualitative research, and this study is part of that movement (Sin, 2010). Quantitative research on US presidents in higher education is accessible, and the study used qualitative research to bring a deeper level of understanding about the future of higher education over the next 25 years through this specific perspective.

## **Chapter 4 Findings and Results**

Higher education in the US is sitting in a changing context. Events like the Covid-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine, and economic crisis have accelerated the change. Preparing for the future means incorporating it into conversation and planning. The findings and results of the study show president's perspectives for the next 25 years with the following themes being identified in the data to help increase understanding about the future: the value proposition, reform, access, identity, partnership, looking externally to adjust internally, flexibility, personalization, mental health crisis, and strategic plans. The chapter will use a summary of the study, then move to the interview guide and data collection results, data analysis and conclude with a chapter summary.

### **Summary of the Study**

Universities are being forced to adjust to the changing world around them and public Very High Research Universities are managing, in some cases very well, in this time. The perspective of these institutions that are performing well is important for several reasons, including that they are the institutions that are creating the template for the future of higher education. Therefore, the purpose for conducting the study was to identify how Very High Research university senior leaders at public institutions in the United States describe their vision of the future of higher education over the next 25 years.

The study provided an opportunity for university chancellors and presidents to describe their vision of what the future holds for higher education and how they are preparing for that future. This vision for the future incorporates senior leader perspectives on 3 elements of the university: the university's mission and purpose, academics, and student services. These leaders' experiences in higher education combined with their place in the overall landscape of the higher education industry gave them an elevated and perhaps more complete perspective to understand

the macro picture of where they have been, where they are, and where they might be going. Contemplating and projecting the future of higher education is critical to its continued success (Cornish, 2004).

The data and findings from the study have the potential to benefit students, parents, faculty, staff, and the greater citizenry of the country. The vision of the future impacts everyone the higher education system touches both directly and indirectly. The experience and expertise of the voices of the higher education leaders in the study also speak to increasing the knowledge and understanding of trends in higher education. The conversation for the future of higher education allows all stakeholders to be more active participants in the process of determining the future. The study updated an ongoing conversation about the future of academic programs, student populations, and many other parts of university experiences.

I chose to conduct the study using an interview strategy because I believed the data were constructed by my participants' perspectives. Each of them held a unique perspective and truth to share on the topic. Phenomenography was the type of qualitative research method used in the study. Phenomenographical studies are common in educational research, and are, "the empirical study of the different ways in which people think of the world" (Bowden et al., 1992, p. 263; Gammon-Pitman, 2021). Phenomenography is a research orientation studying the lived experiences and conceptions of people (Marton, 1986; Sin, 2010). This method helps discover the qualitative ways people experience, conceptualize, realize, and understand various aspects of phenomena in the world around them (Bowden et al., 1992; Richardson, 1999). The subjects for the study were university presidents or chancellors who are the senior most administrators charged with the operation of their campus. The interview protocol asked questions centered around their experiences, concepts, and understanding of the future of higher education.

## **Interview Guide and Data Collection Results**

Data collection occurred over a period of 3 weeks with 4 in person and 1 phone interview. I invited 24 presidents to participate through email correspondence (see Appendix C). There were 12 who responded no with 11 of them saying their schedules were too busy and one saying they had a policy against interviews of this nature. There were 5 who did not respond and 7 who said yes. Two of the 7 were unable to coordinate an interview. Once the participants agreed to interview, I sent a follow up email coordinating time and sharing relevant documents, informed consent (see Appendix D) and travel information before arriving for the interviews.

I interviewed 5 presidents using a 5-question interview guide to gather data (see Appendix E). None of the interviews were recorded to reassure participants of their anonymity. I printed the interview guide and took notes by hand as they answered each question. The guide was 6 pages long with an introductory page to gather basic information about the date and time of the interview along with several questions to develop familiarity with the participants. I thanked each participant and asked if they were ready to begin the process. I also asked if they had any questions for me before we started with my questions. This regularly led into inquiries about my interest in the topic, progress in my degree, and where I hoped to go after I completed my doctorate. I kept my answers friendly but brief to keep the focus on the interview and not me.

Each interview lasted about an hour, with the shortest being 35 minutes and the longest being 80 minutes, with the length of each listed in Table 1. I used reflexive journaling after each interview to write down any additional observations and information I was not able to note in the interview guide. I reviewed my notes to make sure I could read them. Then I transitioned them into a digital format. The next step was to move the interview content to a spreadsheet for clear

organization with color coding and line numbering. This is the file I sent to member check with my participants.

I gave each participant a copy of my notes from the interview in a spreadsheet and asked that they review it making note of any adjustments that they felt was appropriate. The spreadsheet format made it easy for them to note a request of excluding lines or content. Two participants requested minor changes to their documents, but none of it changed the meaning of their responses. My last contact with each participant was sending a thank you note with a small University of Arkansas Razorback themed token of appreciation for them to remember the experience. Validation of my analysis was obtained through peer review with an academic colleague. The feedback shared requested minimal changes and confirmed the meaning and analysis of data.

### **Data Analysis**

Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity. The participant information is presented in Table 1. Two presidents from the sample began their career outside higher education. One spent several decades in private industry and the other a short time working for the federal government. Three of the participants went directly into professorial positions after earning their doctorates. Then those 3 participants took a traditional path moving through the ranks inside different institutions to eventually become the head of institutions.

The participants have a wide variety of education backgrounds including agriculture, law, education, and business. Two of the participants started non-profit foundations to invest and give back to their communities. Their dedication to these causes can be seen in policy they choose to emphasize on their campuses. All the participants have wives, children, and grandchildren.



Table 1. *Participant Information*

Interview Order	Pseudonym	Time in Office	Length of Interview	Location	Approximate Student Population
1	President Glen	9 years	45 minutes	In office	29,000
2	President Warren	13 years	60 minutes	In office	34,000
3	President Bradley	5 years	35 minutes	Over phone	28,000
4	President Curtis	10 years	75 minutes	Conference room	23,000
5	President Stuart	15 years	80 minutes	Conference room	16,000

Research Question 1: What general trends did college leaders describe as critically impacting all higher education over the next 25 years? There were 3 themes from the data for this question. The theme of reform stood out as the larger umbrella theme from the value proposition and access. Value and access are part of the reforming for higher education.

***The Value Proposition***

The value proposition is a change in value of higher education in the US. The data and my reflective journaling had reoccurring notes about the shift in how different stakeholders value higher education. Three of the 5 presidents spoke about their concern for value. President Glen said, “We have lost the support of the public.” President Warren’s first words in his response to the question were, “The value of higher education is being questioned more than in any other lifetime before,” and President Stuart said, “In the shorter term we have to improve upon our messaging of the value of higher education.” They elaborated about the concern for the public perception of a college degree with the rising cost of higher education having a negative impact

on it. President Glen shared that in 1980, 95% of the public believed higher education to be good, and now 50% of the public believes it is good. They are concerned about this downward trend and how it is impacting their institutions and higher education.

### ***Reform***

Another theme identified was the need to reform higher education in the US through alternative approaches and innovation. President Glen said, “We have to fundamentally reinvent ourselves...change is needed” and President Warren said “Education is going to have to reimagine itself in terms of relevancy in terms of its region.” The presidents spoke about investing in certificate programs and micro-credentials as they see this as a type of an investment in alternatives to the traditional 4-year bachelor’s degree program to adapt to the changing world around them and serve their students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. President Bradley added “Everyone needs to dramatically increase the amount of certificates and alternatives they offer.”

Presidents also spoke of continuing to explore, or ‘reform’ the ways that academic content is delivered. They spoke about increasing the investment in online programs as part of an overall reform. President Bradley said, “One of the things our institution is doing and a trend across the US is becoming more, providing more remote and independent study not in the classroom.” Bradley noted that they are making an attempt to respond to student needs and demands in this way, adapting delivery so that content is available when and where students want to access it. President Curtis talked about “individualized learning and mixed modalities,” asking students, “what do you want and tailor that” to them. He also talked about how students are different than 20 years ago, stressing that their “needs are different.”

## *Access*

The presidents interviewed also described making higher education more accessible as a key to their future success. They saw increasing access to higher education by working to make it more affordable, offering a wider variety of degrees, certificates, and programs, and delivering all of this with an increased use of online and mixed modalities of teaching will help students. Three of the presidents specifically spoke about the enrollment/demographic cliff where the student population is going to change. They wanted to increase access to a wider population of students to help offset the reduced number of traditional aged students, but also to increase access for all students and to assure a sustainable future for their own institutions. President Glen remarked that the demographic cliff along with other economic issues are coming and will significantly impact higher education. He said the future is moving to “trans-institutional” education with students have more access to higher education. This means students will access their higher education from more than one institution, having an option to use the higher education system like a buffet. President Warren said the “cost structures” of higher education and lack of “accessibility are causing problems. We need to be flexible in the type of education we offer. We need to be more responsive to education, like credentials, certificates. If we don’t do it, industry will.”

President Bradley was specific and direct in his comments about changing demographic patterns, saying that there will be a “smaller pool of traditional age students” in the next 25 years. One strategy to combat this, he described, is to “focus on working with adults with some or no college to complete their degrees.” He also said we “need to target nontraditional students for universities and state to be successful.” President Stuart’s response aligned with this, as he

said “we need to go after new markets, people with credits not credentials. We have to find new resources.”

### ***Question 1 Answer***

The presidents interviewed for the study had numerous comments and statements about elements critically impacting the future of higher education over the next 25 years. They noted that the lack of public trust and faith in higher education means that institutions must focus on re-establishing the value they bring to their students and graduates. Institutions must also explore how they are operating and must be willing to ‘reform’ what they are doing and how they are doing it, including making more use of personalized learning and short-term credentials. And importantly, these presidents see increasing accessibility as critical to institutional survival in the future. This accessibility includes not only better serving traditional students with better prices and personalization, but also expanding potential student markets to new areas, such as stressing adult learners, first generation students, and students with long-term incomplete degrees.

Research Question 2: How did senior leaders perceive the mission and purpose of Very High Research Universities changing over the next 25 years? The themes of identity and partnership were evidenced in the data for this question. Each president showed strong confidence in the identity of his institution and a willingness to partner with stakeholders to continue to take higher education farther into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These themes were not similar to each other or represented in the first themes identified for question 1.

### ***Identity***

The presidents interviewed in the study claimed to have a strong understanding of their institution’s mission and purpose, and this shaped a strong identity of their institution. President Curtis’ response to this question led him to a field trip from the conference room to his office

where important documents regarding the land grant and institutional mission are hanging on the wall. He shared about the history of the institution. The first words from his answer to this question were it, “doesn’t change.” He said “the mission doesn’t change. How we do it changes.” Bradley shared “we are a land grant for the state. Our mission is to support the state and people. As a land grant university, we are here to serve the people of our state.” President Warren said “we understand our mission.” So, 3 out of the 5 presidents started their answer by affirming their identity. Showing they know who they are and what they are supposed to do was paramount to the second part of the question asking about change. President Glen said they need to “reassert the land grant purpose and reinstate the nature of the institute.” This implied a divergence from the mission but an awareness to work back toward it because of a deep understanding of their identity as a land grant institution. I noted that all 5 presidents felt strongly about who their institution was and what it needed to do in my journals. All of them stood firm in an unshakable identity of their institution. President Glen’s desire to reform higher education was from a need to come back to the mission and purpose because of drift.

### ***Partnership***

All 5 presidents shared aspects of working with different constituents as vital to the future success of their institutions. This could be referred to as “partnership” and includes working with industry, students, the public, and the world around them. Partnership is an awareness of another party, a desire to work with them, and acting on that desire to communicate for the work to take place and change the relationship. President Stuart said “we are highly ranked for partnership with industry. I think more of that needs to happen. We need to serve public interests.” President Glen acknowledged the concern about jobs from students and parents saying “universities need to adapt to student needs.” President Warren reiterated the importance of partnering with

industry by saying that their mission and purpose is “determined by what the state needs.” The partnership is not only about ‘who’ but also ‘how.’ President Bradley said that his institution “need[s] to be more involved, more accessible.” These comments reinforced those from earlier in the interview, as he went on to say

we are opening branch campuses in areas of the state that have challenging access to higher education. Not everyone can leave and come away to attend school. We are trying to be more accessible financially. It’s an important part of the way we are evolving.

The change that leaders stressed was that by using an increased number of partnerships with external bodies, there can be both greater accessibility for different groups of stakeholders, including students and industry.

### ***Question 2 Answer***

As senior leaders perceived the mission and purpose of their institutions, they reinforced that the mission and purpose do not and will not change, but that how they go about fulfilling this mission and purpose will change. Noting the need for innovation in delivery and types of programs offered, they all stressed that their goal is to meet both student and stakeholder needs. They will continue to uphold their unique identities by stressing their historical founding rationale, but through a growing use of partnerships, particularly with external stakeholders, they must increasingly find new ways to meet their goals that have been laid out for them.

Research Question 3: How did senior leaders in Very High Research Universities describe their perceptions for the future of academic programs over the next 25 years in higher education? The themes of looking externally to adjust internally and exercising flexibility with stakeholders and as an institution were represented through the data for this question. These

themes were not like each other, or prior themes identified in the data. Although, the flexibility discussed is part of the reform for higher education identified in the first question.

### ***Looking Externally to Adjust Internally***

The first theme that arose from the data focused on how academic programs must have an external point of reference to be modified and evolve internal to campus. President Bradley encapsulated this theme by saying we “need to be more aligned with employers, making sure that we are listening to their needs.” President Stuart concurred with the idea, saying we “have to constantly see what is going on in broader society and see what the needs are, have to be sensitive to what the public needs.” Focusing on employer/industry needs and what the public needs or wants is going to shape academic programs in the future, and each president suggested that this is already happening. President Glen said “we are either going to be changed or be in charge of the change.” This aligned with the idea that the world around institutions has changed and that there needs to be a response to remain relevant or of value to stakeholders. There was a clear emphasis on industry from the respondents and the importance of university-industry relationships. President Bradley said “making sure we are providing the talent they are expecting” is important. He added that when asked, higher education leaders and faculty say that there is about a 90% effectiveness for students graduating with the knowledge needed for a career and being career ready; however, employers respond differently, saying it is closer to about 20%. The external focus is helping institutions adapt, and this requires flexibility.

### ***Flexibility***

President Glen said we “need to turn the university from an elephant into a ballerina.” This description indicates a need for higher education to be flexible, adaptable, and a good partner to stakeholders. President Glen specifically discussed how higher education needs to

“dance with the world” around it and inside it. The next 25 years will be an opportunity for institutions to change into a better partner if it can fluidly move, meaning, being adaptable in both content and structure. Too many aspects of higher education have been difficult to navigate and change, including the curriculum. President Warren said there was a “big bugaboo causing problems,” when he was appointed at his institution. “It was hard to change your degree plan. So, they changed it from college run to a centralized system. Now students can make better degree progress or shift degree plans in a more functional way.” Empowering students and giving them more access to their own options helped to move their graduation rate from about 71% to 87%.

The flexibility participants discussed was not only about how to change, but what to change and the willingness by all involved to do it. President Bradley said another mission of ours is “developing new modules of knowledge for students.” He added, “I think we need to rethink the units of measure we provide knowledge. We need new modules that have commercial value that people can obtain knowledge in and are recognized.” This included both the idea of the traditional ‘credit hour’ as well as degree titles. President Stuart continued the theme by saying the “delivery models need to change. Can’t take traditional model, need night classes, weekend programs.” This kind of change requires flexibility by all involved, including faculty and staff.

### ***Question 3 Answer***

Senior leaders described their perceptions for the future of academic programs over the next 25 years as needing to consider the world outside of higher education, and as President Glen said, institutions “need to restructure the way we are siloed.” Presidents in the study all indicated that higher education must become increasingly flexible and consistent in linking their actions to the desires of the world around them. This includes employers, government, the public, parents,



and students. All the presidents also spoke about the need for offering more than traditional degrees and rethinking historical measures of learning. Some of the institutions in the study had already started offering alternative credential programs (i.e., health care and engineering) and making use of innovative and different instructional delivery methods. This means the use of more courses and programs in online or executive formats, and it also means finding and using different formats for learning. This also includes offering courses with an emphasis for nontraditional students with options for night and weekend classes.

Research Question 4: How will services to students change over the next 25 years at Very High Research Universities as seen through the perspective of senior leadership? Personalization and the mental health crisis were themes identified from the data for this question. Both were derived from a deep concern and consideration from the presidents for students to thrive instead of struggle at their institutions. These student-centered themes were different from previous themes identified but are part of a collective focus to center higher education around its students.

### ***Personalization***

President Glen said that institutions “need to become personal.” We “need to turn the university from an elephant into a ballerina.” He went on to share how institutions needs to dance with their stakeholders with grace, care, and a flexibility that meets the needs of the partner. Two other presidents gave specific examples of how they see the personalization of higher education changing. President Bradley said “as we help 30-year-old moms, we might need day care centers instead of sororities. We have to be able to adapt to serve working adults.” President Curtis gave a specific example from his institution, sharing about a result from a survey he did for staff on campus. “One need was childcare for staff. So, we have that now.” A major emphasis for President Curtis has been meeting the needs of students, faculty, and staff at

his institution. He is making it personal for their institution by understanding the needs and providing solutions for them. This principle is seen through President Stuart’s remark that, “student affairs is going to have to be personal.” Personalization also meant creating customized solutions for individual students instead of relying on mass-scaled services. This will not only serve students better and help them be successful, but it will help recruit and retain new types of students, such as the 30-year-old working mother referenced by President Bradley. Another way institutions are personalizing services is through providing individualized mental health and counseling services.

***Mental Health Crisis***

The second theme that resulted from the data for this question was the mental health crisis of students occurring on college campuses. This was the top concern expressed by presidents in the study about their students. Presidents Bradley and Warren both used the phrase, “mental health crisis,” stressing the intensity of the issue for each of them. The table below shows the way each President discussed this significant issue.

Table 2. *Mental Health Crisis Quotes*

President	Mental Health Crisis Quote
Glen	“We need to be concerned about safety and that students can find their place.”
Warren	“The most challenging issue is supporting student mental health. We have a serious mental health crisis. Supporting students’ mental health and sense of belonging is a growing emphasis and need.”
Bradley	“...need to be able to provide more mental health services for our students. We are having a mental health crisis. More students are seeking out services. We have increased the services but are losing ground the need is growing faster than we can respond.”

Curtis	“There is a large need for mental health services. We have increased access to services through online access that is the same level of service as in person mental health services for students. The number of students who need counseling has increased. We have worked to increase services and cut down the time students have to wait to be seen.”
Stuart	“Student affairs is going to have to be personal. Mental health is a big issue. This generation is a much more dependent one. They are needier, maybe it was a way they were raised. They need more counseling, advising now than in the past. Students were more independent and now they are not sure what to do. They need help.”

***Question 4 Answer***

University presidents see services to students changing over the next 25 years through an increased personalization of services for students. The personalization is a direct result of the need to accommodate current and new types of students, but also due to the unique challenges students face. Presidents stressed that the mental health of students is a major concern for them, and providing the right kinds of personalized counseling and support is critical to their campuses long term success. These changes suggest repositioning the higher education institution into a student-centered approach.

Research Question 5: How did college leaders describe their preparation for the 25-year trends they have described? Strategic plan was the theme identified from the data for this question. All the data related to this theme with no other collective content being salient enough to create a theme. This theme is the culmination of the others as evidence of the president’s desire to act and embrace the change of the next 25 years.

## *Strategic Plans*

President Glen said “I don’t believe in strategic planning. I believe in strategic action.” Despite his rebuff of the word ‘planning,’ he had a clear vision for how to move his institution forward in a direction that he saw appropriate and needed. He shared his goals and plans by saying

working to partner with other national leaders in the online space to help us rapidly advance our online offerings. Working on the mental health front to provide psychiatric services to students all over the state. Working to help develop an online consultation model for students that will be consistent, same high quality as on campus services. We are, through the online program, working to make the university more accessible and flexible for nontraditional students, both for online and face-to-face programs. We are working for more ways to make our program more affordable.

President Stuart said “we are thinking about it and trying to adapt. This is a big ship, and it takes a while to turn.” President Curtis talked about his new strategic plan that he is about to launch. He said “we are not good at sitting still here. As a leader you have to be good at building a team.” Part of his plan is to surround himself with great staff who can support the university and help make the plans a reality. President Stuart also thought that part of the answer to planning success was who he surrounded himself in the office. He said, “I try to populate positions with bright creative young people who can help make decisions.” He wants new fresh ways of approaching problems and values other ways of seeing things. President Glen’s response was direct and broad saying “we are changing.” Then he acknowledged the difficulty of the change process by saying “there are a lot of speed bumps to change. We need a more robust way to

implement change.” Reflecting on the state of preparation for the future, President Warren said “we are better prepared administratively than academically. We are trying to get flexibility on how to charge tuition. Trying to get more policy flexibility as new opportunities come around.” President Warren did not want the limitations of the current system to hold his institution back. He spoke about the new path he helped create for faculty on their campus.

We worked hard to develop a professional track for faculty. This is moving away from the tenure system and acknowledging faculty who make it their career to teach in higher education but outside the boundaries of the traditional model. We see more people interested in professional track. We see faculty that don’t want to be pigeonholed in a certain discipline.

#### ***Question 5 Answer***

Leaders described their preparation for the 25-year trends they have described through planning, specifically planning strategically. These plans include multiple points of action, with some being the continued traditional efforts on campuses to help students, faculty, and staff thrive and some were identified as new approaches with a thoughtful consideration that not all constituents are the same. A successful future for higher education institutions focuses on learning about new differences among students, faculty, and staff, and then working to provide for them. This is happening through practical things such as on campus childcare along with philosophical approaches to being open to change, whatever the change might look like. This adaptability is crucial to the sustainability of these institutions.

#### **Chapter Summary**

The study included interview data from 5 sitting college presidents who were interviewed about their perceptions of the future of higher education. Data were organized into a

spreadsheet and coded for thematic analysis. Ten themes were identified in the data, including Value Proposition, Reform, Access, Identity, Partnership, Looking Externally to Adjust Internally, Flexibility, Personalization, Mental Health Crisis, and Strategic Plans. Each theme was connected to one of the study's research questions. Overall presidents described the importance of flexibility and adaptation as necessary elements for the future of higher education institutions.

## **Chapter 5 Conclusions and Recommendations**

There is importance in studying the future of higher education. By understanding how college presidents see the future unfolding for their institutions and all higher education, institutional leaders and policy makers will be better equipped to prepare for this new world of higher education. The study examined the future of higher education through the perspective of senior leaders at Very High Research institutions, typically called ‘presidents’ or ‘chancellors.’ Although there is a wide variety of writings and literature related to the topic, there have not been studies specifically situated in this time and place and using the expertise and lived experiences of leaders such as those interviewed in the study. Analysis of the interview data provided for an identification of ten themes that answered 5 research questions. The chapter provides a summary of the study and why it was conducted, conclusions drawn from the data analysis, recommendations for further research and practice, a discussion of the findings and the research process, and concludes with a chapter summary.

### **Summary of the Study**

Institutions are being forced to change as the world around them changes. The Covid-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine, high inflation along with the increased cost of higher education, and a shifting student population all influence the future of higher education (Adler, 2021; Bresnick, 2022; Copley & Douthett, 2020; Dennis, 2021; Johnson et al., 2022; Moody, 2022; Perna, 2010; Seltzer, 2022). The purpose for conducting the study was to identify how Very High Research university senior leaders at public institutions in the US described their vision of the future of higher education over the next 25 years. The study provided a forum for university presidents to describe their vision of what the future holds for higher education at their institutions and beyond, and how they are preparing for this future. The interview protocol included questions

about the future of higher education through their perspective, specifically focusing on the mission and purpose of higher education, academic programs, and student services. This type of focus is important to understanding and preparing for what might become of higher education, and broadly, the contemplation of where higher education is moving is critical to its success (Cornish, 2004).

The study used the conceptual framework of Future Studies to structure its inquiry. The research questions for the study were: 1. What general trends did college leaders describe as critically impacting all higher education over the next 25 years? They saw a decrease in the value of higher education, the need for major reforms to the system, and part of the reform needs to be increased access. 2. How did senior leaders perceive the mission and purpose of Very High Research Universities changing over the next 25 years? Partnership with stakeholders and industry will drive the how of staying true to their strong identity as public land grant institutions who have an unchanging mission and purpose but need to adapt how they accomplish it in the new century. 3. How did senior leaders in Very High Research Universities describe their perceptions for the future of academic programs over the next 25 years in higher education? Academic programs will be shaped through looking outside the institutions to industry and the larger economy. A new level of flexibility will be required for these schools to adapt to the needs of students faster and better. 4. How will services to students change over the next 25 years at Very High Research Universities as seen through the perspective of senior leadership? Student services will become more personal shaping the new students experience to be highly hands on for university staff, administrators, and faculty. The mental health crisis will require institutions to invest even more in resources for students as they increasingly struggle. 5. How did college leaders describe their preparation for the 25-year trends they have described? Presidents rely on



articulating their preparation through strategic planning, taking those plans and making them a reality over years of hard work and investment.

This study included in-person interviews with 5 college presidents at Very High Research Universities. None of the interviews were recorded to reassure the participants of their anonymity. Each interview used a 5-question, semi-structured interview guide and took approximately an hour. Reflexive journaling, member checking, and peer review of data were used to triangulate the data analysis. All participants were assigned pseudonyms to facilitate discussion of the data while ensuring an inability to know their identity. A total of 10 themes were identified through the analysis of the data: The Value Proposition, Reform, Access, Identity, Partnership, Looking Externally to Adjust Internally, Flexibility, Personalization, Mental Health Crisis, and Strategic Plans.

## **Conclusions**

The first conclusion from the data was that the presidents were aware and concerned about the decreasing value of higher education in the US. It impacts the support of their institutions from politicians, parents, students, and the public. The future of higher education hinges on its value, and these leaders are trying to shift it by increasing access and reforming the system. This is a large system with large institutions, and President Stuart summarized this sentiment by saying, “this is a big ship, and it takes a while to turn.” All the presidents were actively working to make significant changes to increase access through affordability and types of programs, but it will take time.

The second conclusion was that college presidents perceived a strong need to know and confirm with actions the identity and mission of their institutions. The presidents were confident in the mission and purpose of their institution with many remarking how it does not change.

Instead, the emphasis was how they accomplish the mission and purpose changes. The strength of their institutional identity provides an innovative path to how institutions can achieve their mission and purpose over the next 25 years. Part of the innovation is an increased partnership with all stakeholders. Institutional leaders care more now than ever about the perception of students, parents, politicians, and the public. Building and maintaining that relationship is the future of higher education.

The third conclusion was that college presidents perceived that they must look externally for relevance in their academic programs and that these programs must be more flexible than ever before. Although the institutions that participated in the study all reported enrollment growth, presidents stressed that future growth will be predicated on external partnerships and that this external focus will guide much of their decision-making.

The fourth conclusion was that college presidents perceived that student services will change dramatically over the next 25 years to focus on personalized services and to meet the direct needs of new and different student populations. The president perceived that to help students, they must focus more direct funding and staff in student support, specifically including mental health supports. This also includes individualized advising, counseling, and student success programs following through with students who need help academically and socially.

The fifth conclusion was that college leaders viewed strategic plans and planning as critical to their future success and relevance. The presidents in the study have been in their position for a minimum of 5 years with several of them there for 2 or 3 times that amount. They all had a clear vision for their institution and a plan to execute it. The plans are created, deployed, and revised over and over to work toward creating the type of institution that will be thriving for students, faculty, and staff.

## **Recommendations**

### ***Recommendations for Practice***

1. College leaders can use the literature review as a synopsis of what is being discussed in regard to the future of higher education. They can also use it to build understanding and knowledge regarding the future of higher education at public Very High Research Institutions. Knowing what leaders at other institutions are visioning for the future provides a resource for other leaders at their own institutions. The study shows the future of higher education is moving from silos and into increased collaboration between all stakeholders and institutions.
2. Professional associations like the American Council on Education can use study findings in conjunction with their current survey of college presidents to add breadth and depth to understanding on the topic. Findings can help to inform questions for their survey and an increased understanding of current college presidents. Other organizations like the Department of Education, Association for the Study of Higher Education, and the Higher Learning Commission could also benefit from the study results to increase their knowledge and understanding about the future of higher education.
3. Policy makers can also use study findings to guide decisions on state and federal policy for higher education institutions. The knowledge derived from the interviews can bring the trajectory of higher education into better view for policy makers whose influence greatly impacts the system.
4. Taxpayers can utilize study results to understand the institutions their money goes to support. The results of the study share perspective from the inside to those on the

outside of the system helping to better inform the public that these institutions serve.

### ***Recommendations for Research***

1. Replicating the study in the future to compare the results at 1 year, 3, and then 5 years for comparison could strengthen and clarify the themes that have been identified.
2. Accessing participants at different types of institutions (community colleges, private institutions, online only) can provide broader understanding for the future of higher education in the US and different approaches to responding to these futures.
3. Using different data collection where participants are known and not anonymous could bring more weight and credibility to the research. Participants from the study were from highly visible institutions with notoriety and prestige, but the anonymous nature of the work left no room to share details about the presidents or institutions.
4. More qualitative studies with university senior leaders could help break down the walls between institutions and their stakeholders letting the reality and not idea of higher education take stronger hold in the US.

### **Discussion**

College presidents should not be underestimated. The study showed their dedication and thoughtfulness toward helping their institutions succeed now and in the future. There is a great deal of consideration coming from them and their team of leaders to address issues in higher education. Although there were few surprises in the data, the “wow” factor from the study should be the extreme amount of care, time, and consideration from these presidents who are putting their heart and soul into their institutions. If the 5 presidents from this study are an accurate representation for others in the same position at other institutions, higher education in the US is in good hands. I went into each interview at each institution with as few expectations as possible

but consistently found the presidents and their staff eager to talk about the future and concerned about it.

The study invited 24 presidents to participate with 7 saying yes, 12 saying no, and 7 not responding. There could be a bias in the data collected with the presidents who said yes being from a population caring more about the future. It is difficult to measure, but those who agreed to participate could have different responses than those who did not want to participate or could not prioritize it in their schedules (11 of the no responses were due to busy schedules). The presidents often expressed interest in the study but an inability to accommodate time for it. The high demand on people in these positions creates a limitation of access. The presidents who did participate shared they would not have participated if I had wanted to record them. They also expressed that they likely would not have said yes if I wanted to conduct the interview over the phone or had sent a survey. There was the potential for high risk for these participants, and they seemed to be aware of it. This increased the concern that feedback during data collection was skewed by politically correct rhetoric. This limitation was somewhat confirmed with the data aligning with related literature.

I was also limited by my ability to write at the speed the presidents spoke. Recording the interviews would have been preferred or provided a different interpretation of data, but would have limited participation. Several presidents told me to stop writing and offered personal anecdotes or advice. Conducting the study over a longer time with more participants would help reduce this limitation in the data collection. The participants position of power inside their institutions made it difficult to lead them through the interview guide at times. On one hand a president needs to be certain and strong as they lead their institutions, but on the other hand, it

was a limitation as I needed them to listen to the question and answer candidly with their feedback.

These limitations are real, but they do not reduce the important effect of the exploration on the knowledge produced and its suggested possibilities for the future for higher education. “The goal of futuring is not to predict the future, but to make it better” (Cornish, 2004, p. 7). The conceptual framework for the study was the foundation for part of its importance. The study makes the future of higher education better by increasing the data available to consider and causing each of these participants to think critically about their institution’s futures. The future of higher education is tied to the decisions made today. The study shows that presidents are practicing future studies because they all have strategic plans to address problems of the present and prepare of them in the future. However, there is little to no literature to support this until now, through this study.

When each data set was reviewed alone, they did not individually communicate much ‘novel’ knowledge. However, utilizing the phenomenographic method proved beneficial with a focus on the collective. As a group, the presidents clearly communicated a message of their concern for the value of higher education, a desire to reform the system bringing greater access for students. They were driven by a strong identity as public land grant institutions who sees the need to partner with industry and the world around them for a sustainable future. They also see a need for increased flexibility and personalization to serve their students, faculty, and staff in a way that reinforces their value and helps all stakeholders succeed. Then urgent student issues like the mental health crisis are driving leaders in higher education to push the boundaries of their system to provide more services than ever before for their students. All of this is embodied in the plans in action now and the strategy of these presidents for the future.

## Chapter Summary

The future of higher education is a ballerina who can be valued, renewed, nimble, and a strong partner who can support the one they dance with across time. Each president paused as they considered 25 years in the future with President Curtis saying, “it will be transformed in 25 years” and President Stuart’s first feedback being, “that is a long time.” It can be challenging to think ahead over decades. Sometimes it is challenging just to think about tomorrow. However, the future of higher education depends on diving in even when it is difficult.

The concept of the future is abstract, the reality of it drawn closer each day, and preparation through planning and discussion is critical. Circling back to Plato’s phrase, “the true creator is necessity, who is the mother of our invention” (Jowett, 2017, p. 369). These senior leaders provided insight because they are at the helm of a what President Stuart termed a “big ship,” determining needs and inventing solutions to meet them. Today, they are having the conversations and implementing the policy that shapes higher education in the US. The future of higher education happens through them, and the study shared that future for all stakeholders in and out of higher education.

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**Appendix A: Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education List of Public Four Year or Above Doctoral Very High Research Activity Institutions**

<b>Name</b>
Arizona State University Campus Immersion
Auburn University
Binghamton University
Clemson University
Colorado School of Mines
Colorado State University-Fort Collins
CUNY Graduate School and University Center
Florida International University
Florida State University
George Mason University
Georgia Institute of Technology-Main Campus
Georgia State University
Indiana University-Bloomington
Iowa State University
Kansas State University
Kent State University at Kent
Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College
Michigan State University
Mississippi State University
Montana State University
New Jersey Institute of Technology
North Carolina State University at Raleigh
North Dakota State University-Main Campus
Ohio State University-Main Campus
Ohio University-Main Campus
Oklahoma State University-Main Campus
Old Dominion University



Oregon State University
Purdue University-Main Campus
Rutgers University-New Brunswick
Stony Brook University
SUNY at Albany
Temple University
Texas A & M University-College Station
Texas Tech University
The Pennsylvania State University
The University of Alabama
The University of Montana
The University of Tennessee-Knoxville
The University of Texas at Arlington
The University of Texas at Austin
The University of Texas at Dallas
The University of Texas at El Paso
The University of Texas at San Antonio
University at Buffalo
University of Alabama at Birmingham
University of Alabama in Huntsville
University of Arizona
University of Arkansas
University of California-Berkeley
University of California-Davis
University of California-Irvine
University of California-Los Angeles
University of California-Riverside
University of California-San Diego
University of California-Santa Barbara
University of California-Santa Cruz
University of Central Florida

University of Cincinnati-Main Campus
University of Colorado Boulder
University of Colorado Denver/Anschutz Medical Campus
University of Connecticut
University of Delaware
University of Florida
University of Georgia
University of Hawaii at Manoa
University of Houston
University of Illinois Chicago
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
University of Iowa
University of Kansas
University of Kentucky
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
University of Louisville
University of Maine
University of Maryland-Baltimore County
University of Maryland-College Park
University of Massachusetts-Amherst
University of Memphis
University of Michigan-Ann Arbor
University of Minnesota-Twin Cities
University of Mississippi
University of Missouri-Columbia
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
University of Nevada-Las Vegas
University of Nevada-Reno
University of New Hampshire-Main Campus
University of New Mexico-Main Campus
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

University of North Texas
University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus
University of Oregon
University of Pittsburgh-Pittsburgh Campus
University of South Carolina-Columbia
University of South Florida
University of Southern Mississippi
University of Utah
University of Virginia-Main Campus
University of Washington-Seattle Campus
University of Wisconsin-Madison
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Utah State University
Virginia Commonwealth University
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Washington State University
Wayne State University
West Virginia University

## Appendix B: Potential Interview Participant Institution Pool

Name
Arizona State University Campus Immersion
Clemson University
Iowa State University
Mississippi State University
North Carolina State University at Raleigh
Texas Tech University
The University of Alabama
The University of Tennessee-Knoxville
The University of Texas at Dallas
The University of Texas at San Antonio
University of Alabama at Birmingham
University of Arizona
University of Georgia
University of Houston
University of Kansas
University of Kentucky
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
University of Missouri-Columbia
University of New Mexico-Main Campus
University of North Texas
University of Virginia-Main Campus
Virginia Commonwealth University
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
West Virginia University

## Appendix C: Correspondence Soliciting Participants

Participant Name  
Title  
University  
Contact information

Month Date, 2023

Dear Dr. \_\_\_\_\_,

It is a delight to write you as I am at the dissertation phase of my doctorate in higher education. My topic is on the future of higher education through the lens of senior leaders at four-year public institutions.


I want to inquire about the future through understanding their vision for the next twenty-five years, and you are someone I hope to interview for my research. Your experience in leadership and knowledge about the higher education system are important to my research. I would like to conduct a 45-minute interview in person at your university as soon as possible.

I value your insight and experience. Your feedback through this project will help bring greater understanding and knowledge about the future of higher education in a time when many aspects of the system are shifting and changing.

All participants will be anonymous throughout all phases of my dissertation. Neither you nor your institution will be identified. I will not be recording the interviews, only taking notes. I am attaching my current CV and some sample interview questions for review.

Could I contact your office to schedule an interview with you? If possible, I would like to get these scheduled over the next week as I am working to complete my dissertation and graduate this May. I appreciate your help and consideration.

Sincerely,



Ph.D. Candidate in Higher Education  
University of Arkansas  
[REDACTED]@uark.edu / [REDACTED]

## Appendix D: IRB Consent

### Consent to Participate in Research

“From an Elephant Into a Ballerina:” The Future of Higher Education from Senior Leaders at Public Very High Research Institutions

Principal Researcher: Sarah Denison  
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Michael T. Miller

#### Invitation to participate:

You are invited to participate in a research study about the future of higher education. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are part of the target population.

#### What you should know about the study:

*Who is the Principal Researcher?*

Sarah Denison  
Candidate for a PhD in Higher Education  
University of Arkansas  
[REDACTED] / [REDACTED]@uark.edu

*Who is the Faculty Advisor?*

Dr. Michael T. Miller  
Professor Higher Education  
University of Arkansas  
[REDACTED] / [REDACTED]@uark.edu

*What is the purpose of this research study?*

The purpose of this study is to identify how Very High Research university senior leaders at public institutions in the United States describe their vision of the future of higher education over the next 25 years.

*Who will participate in this study?*

Approximately five university presidents or chancellors at public four year or above doctoral Very High Research activity institutions for midwestern and southern regions.

*What am I being asked to do?*

Your participation will require the following:

1. Participate in a ~60-minute semi-structured interview.
2. Review the notes and submit any desired feedback

*How long will the study last?*

The semi-structured interviews will each last approximately 60 minutes and take about two to four weeks to complete.

*Will I receive compensation for my time and inconvenience if I choose to participate in this study?*

No

*Will I have to pay for anything?*

No

*What are the options if I do not want to be in the study?*

If you do not want to be in this study, you may refuse to participate. Also, you may refuse to participate at any time during the study.

*How will my confidentiality be protected?*

All information will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by applicable State and Federal law. All information will be recorded anonymously.

*Will I know the results of the study?*

At the conclusion of the study, you will have the right to request feedback about the results. You may contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Michael T. Miller [REDACTED]@uark.edu or Sarah Denison [REDACTED]@uark.edu. You will receive a copy of this form for your files.

You may also contact the University of Arkansas Research Integrity and Compliance office listed below if you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or to discuss any concerns about, or problems with the research.

Ro Windwalker, CIP  
Institutional Review Board Coordinator  
Research Integrity and Compliance  
University of Arkansas  
105 MLKG Building  
Fayetteville, AR 72701-1201  
479-575-2208 / irb@uark.edu

I have read the above statement and have been able to ask questions and express concerns, which have been satisfactorily responded to by the investigator. I understand the purpose of the study as well as the potential benefits and risks that are involved. I understand that participation is voluntary. I understand that significant new findings developed during this research will be shared with the participant. By participating in this interview, I am giving my consent for my responses to be used in the research as described. I have been given a copy of the consent form.

## Appendix E: Interview guide

### **“From an Elephant Into a Ballerina:” The Future of Higher Education from Senior Leaders at Public Very High Research Institutions University of Arkansas**

Time of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been in your current position? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the professional path you took to get to this role? \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study about the future of higher education. This study is focused on you and your perspective looking at the next 25 years of your institution.**

**I am providing you with an informed consent form for you to review and sign if you agree to participate. As noted, your identity will be held in strictest confidence and your will not be linked directly or indirectly with the study findings.**

**I will utilize field notes and notes from answers to the interview guide questions.**

**Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you maintain the right to withdraw at any time.**

**Before we begin, do you have any questions?**

**Do I have your permission to begin?**

**\*Should you have any questions or concerns about this interview, please contact Sarah Denison (████████@uark.edu) or her Dissertation Director, Dr. Michael Miller (████████@uark.edu), University of Arkansas, ██████████ or ██████████.**



1. What general trends do you see critically impacting higher education over the next 25 years?

*Other elements to consider:*

- Students
  - Enrollment
  - Cost of higher education
- Faculty
  - Tenure/nontenure track
- Mission and Purpose
- The Presidency
- Trends
  - Online and Distance learning

2. How do you perceive the mission and purpose of your institution changing over the next 25 years?

*Other elements to consider:*

- Is the public perception influencing this?
  
- How has it changed looking back 25 years (1998)? 50 years (1973)?
  
- Do students, faculty, and other stakeholders have different ideas of the mission and purpose?

3. How do you see academic programs and student services changing over the next 25 years at your institution?

*Other elements to consider:*

- Student services
- Academic programs
- Student success
- Career readiness/preparation
- Have you seen a shift in the emphasis for these programs and services?

4. What are you doing to prepare for these changes?

*Other elements to consider:*

- Committees
  
- Politicians/Legislators
  
- Stakeholders
  
- Budget
  
- Shift in hiring?

5. If you could wave a magic wand and change one thing about higher education, what would it be and why?

*Other elements to consider:*

- What is standing in the way of this change?
- Is there emphasis on short-term or long-term results that influences prioritization on campuses?

**Thank you for participating in this study!**

## Appendix F: IRB Approval Letter



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**To:** Sarah Denison

**From:** Douglas J Adams, Chair IRB Expedited Review

**Date:** 02/22/2023

**Action:** Exemption Granted

**Action Date:** 02/22/2023

**Protocol #:** 2301449352

**Study Title:** “From an Elephant Into a Ballerina:” The Future of Higher Education from Senior Leaders at Public Very High Research Institutions

The above-referenced protocol has been determined to be exempt.

If you wish to make any modifications in the approved protocol that may affect the level of risk to your participants, you must seek approval prior to implementing those changes. All modifications must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have any questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact the IRB Coordinator at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or [irb@uark.edu](mailto:irb@uark.edu).

cc: Michael T Miller, Investigator