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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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A Qualitative Case Study on the Hiring Practices of the President at a Four-Year Public
University in Alabama

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Clifton Skeeter Sellers

March 2021

Dedication

For my two daughters, Sarah Lynn and Jessie Lawrence, I dedicate this dissertation to you as a testament of what can be achieved through faith in God, dedication, and hard work. Remember that anything is possible with God at the center of your life. May you both realize the power in education and use it to serve as trailblazers in your own right. I love you to the moon and back and will always be there to cheer you on.

To my father, Lonnie Sellers, thank you for always believing in me and pushing me to pursue my dreams and always being there for me no matter what. To my family and friends, for the belief that no matter what road you grow up on that anything is possible. Finally, to my wife, Morgan, for making me believe that I can run through a brick wall no matter the circumstances. Without any of these people none of this is possible.

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To my brother, Scott Jeffreys, you have been with me every step of the way; through our ups and downs you have always been an inspiration. My motivation to complete my dissertation would not have even existed without your support and friendship. My success is a direct result of your drive, encouragement, and constant reminding that I can do anything through Christ.

To my Dad, Lonnie Sellers, thank you for teaching me what hard work looks like and what it means to be there for the ones you love. This dissertation is a testament to you saying yes to a little baby boy when you did not have to. True family is not defined by a DNA test, but instead by love. Thank you for showing up for me and believing in me more than I believe in myself.

Finally—and most importantly—to my three little ladies, my daughters, Sarah Lynn and Jessie Lawrence, and wife, Morgan. You inspire me every single day. I hope that this dissertation serves as an example for you that hard work always pays off. I also hope that you realize the impact you can have by challenging yourself to strive for more than you could ever dream of. I love you more than I could have ever imagined.

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Abstract

The topic of this dissertation was the hiring practices of college and university presidents. This particular study focused on a rural college in the Southeast United States and perceived governance as it pertains to selecting a president to lead the institution. This qualitative study utilized a case study format to answer the question of the relationship between hiring a university president and the influence of governing board members, key faculty and staff, student/alumni leaders, and individuals that have the knowledge or were associated with the hiring practices of the university president at a rural university in the southeast United States. Data were collected through a series of interviews and the use of historical documentation such as board minutes and newspaper articles.

Keywords: chief executive officer, college and university presidents, leadership, board of directors, superintendents

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	ii
Abstract.....	iv
List of Tables	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Leadership Is Important	4
Leadership Impacts Student Achievement.....	6
Statement of the Problem.....	8
Purpose of the Study	8
Research Questions.....	9
Definition of Key Terms.....	9
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	11
Leadership.....	11
Process of Leadership	13
Chief Education Officers	14
Leadership Is Important	14
Leadership Impacts Student Achievement.....	16
Turnover at the Superintendent Level.....	18
Chief Executive Officers.....	19
Overview of Board of Directors Research.....	21
Developing the Construct of Board Governance	21
Major Governance Theoretical Perspectives	23
Recent Research on the Board of Directors.....	24
CEO Role in Nonprofit Organizations.....	26
College and University Presidents.....	27
Pressures Impacting College and University Presidents.....	28
Legislative Funding	29
Tuition Increases	30
Student Access	30
Changing Demographics.....	31
Conclusion	32
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	33
Research Questions.....	34
Research Design and Methodology	34
Participants.....	36
Population and Sample	36
Materials and Instruments.....	37
Interview Questions	38

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures	38
Researcher Role	40
Ethical Considerations	41
Assumptions.....	42
Limitations	43
Delimitations.....	43
Summary	43
Chapter 4: Results	44
Interview Processes and Emerging Themes	44
Initial Coding	46
Secondary Coding and Themes	47
Theme 1: Key Factors	48
Theme 2: Shared Influence	50
Theme 3: Succession Planning	52
Theme 4: Recommendations.....	53
Findings Related to News Articles	55
Findings Related to Board Minutes	56
Summary	56
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations	57
Interpretation and Implications of the Findings.....	58
Recommendations for Action and Further Study	61
Conclusion	62
References.....	63
Appendix A: Research Site IRB Approval	77
Appendix B: ACU IRB Approval.....	78
Appendix C: Research Study Solicitation Letter	79
Appendix D: Interview Protocol.....	80

List of Tables

Table 1. Five-Phased Cycle for Analyzing Data	45
Table 2. Interviews.....	46
Table 3. Initial Coding Pass	46
Table 4. Second Pass Through Initial Coding	47
Table 5. How the Themes Connect to the Research and Findings	61

Chapter 1: Introduction

U.S. higher education will soon face a significant set of internal and external factors that will affect how organizations choose their presidents. First, the current generation of college/university presidents is nearing retirement age, and a new generation of leadership will enter the executive office (Perrakis et al., 2011). Second, following a predicted historical trend, public postsecondary educational institutions continue to be burdened with reductions in state-legislated appropriations and funding (Kleinman & Osley-Thomas, 2014; Perna et al., 2017). State appropriations are the most substantial part of a public institution's revenues (Li, 2017; McKeown-Moak, 2013). Third, declining on-campus student enrollment is impacting four-year or above public master's colleges and universities that are struggling to compete with larger research-based institutions.

All these issues present a challenge to governing boards and postsecondary institutions in selecting their next higher education chief executive. Budget issues such as funding decreases, declining student enrollment, and the overall increases in the costs of providing education require the president to be astute at finance, fund-raising, student affairs, college athletics, and a multitude of other functions that support higher education (Jones & Wellman, 2010). It will be important for colleges and universities to have a set of guidelines and tools to use in finding the right chief executive officer (CEO) who fits their specific context. To examine the potential factors associated with choosing the right college president, the following study examines the single case of a university in the southeast United States, an institution affected by the current challenges facing higher education institutions and a college president who will soon be in transition. This presents a perfect opportunity to examine a sitting president's perspective at a regional institution of higher education that shares many of the same institutional factors with

other four-year or above public master's colleges and universities, such as Arkansas Tech University, Auburn University of Montgomery, Alabama A&M University, and Troy University (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2017).

This college is a small, rural, Division II institution of higher education founded in the 1800s and located in the southeast United States. The undergraduate on-campus enrollment population is approximately 2,000 students, with an online student body of about 2,400 students as of fall 2017. The organization employs nearly 150 faculty and 300 staff, according to the university's website in 2018. According to the most up-to-date data, approximately 40% of on-campus undergraduate students identify as Black/African American, 45% Caucasian, Non-Hispanic, 3% Hispanic/Latino, 3% Other/Multiracial, 5% Asian, and 4% Race/Ethnicity Unknown.

The college's primary consumers are students who come from disenfranchised backgrounds and socioeconomic disparity in the Black Belt region. The Black Belt stretches across multiple states from Texas to Maryland. However, the clear majority of the region is focused in the deep southern states of Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. This college is situated in the geographic center. Due to its location and the surrounding economic hardships of the region, many students who attend the university come from disenfranchised backgrounds and socioeconomic disparity. Sixty-five percent (65%) of the fall 2017 entering first-year student cohort identified as a first-generation student (According to the university's website in 2018).

The current president has surpassed the average tenure of 4.2 years and is over the average age of presidents considering retirement. This president came into a situation where the former president spent a majority of the institution's reserves, leaving the budget depleted. An interim president served a year tenure before the current president took over the role, which

resulted in an agenda being pushed by the interim president and resources being consumed only to be changed by the current president. The cost of recruiting and hiring a president coupled with the expected return on investment of the highest-paid individual at a regional public institution of higher education (i.e., the university president) provides a substantial reason to research the insights of governing board members, key faculty and staff, student/alumni leaders, and individuals that have the knowledge or were associated with the hiring practices of the university president at this particular college.

Carver (2010) defined the role of a CEO as the chief hired person who is appointed and held accountable to the board of directors to not only drive organizational agendas but perform at an optimal level. Literature has shown a significant link between CEO performance and organizational performance (Brown, 2005). Some scholars believe that effective board measures and systems are linked to effective organizational performance (Hodge et al., 2011). Therefore, hiring the CEO of an organization, or in our case university president, is a significant decision for the board that can impact the organization for many years (Carver, 2010; Cornforth, 2001).

Due to the CEO's significant effect on the successful performance of an organization, dismissal or any other loss of a sitting president could cause the organization to become unbalanced (Carver, 2010; Cornforth, 2001; Medley & Akan, 2008). This highlights the need for clear succession planning that allows for a more rapid transition of CEO. Although some scholars have examined CEO succession planning, the literature is lacking evidence from examining the role of the governing board members, key faculty and staff, student leaders, and individuals who have the knowledge or were associated with the hiring practices of the university president in succession planning (Boroff et al., 2015, as cited in Jennings, 2018). Upon further review of the literature, a few scholars focused on family businesses (Chen et al.,

2016; Collins et al., 2016). Still, other scholars examining the for-profit sector found problems with existing succession plans and overall dissatisfaction (Hooijberg & Lane, 2016; Zhang & Rajagopalan, 2010). Several researchers have stated the importance of hiring a CEO, and noting how crucial it is to look past social norms and focus on the organization's sustainability and the vision of the stakeholders being served (Lawal, 2012; Medley & Akan, 2008). Examining the hiring practices of university presidents in higher education, particularly at this college, is vital because of the significant role that the position plays in organization (university) success.

Leadership Is Important

Numerous scholars have written about leadership, but the importance of leadership needs context. Does the quality of leadership impact on success or failure? Leadership, as it is presented, has been studied in numerous organizations. Collins (2001) took a case study approach that ultimately led to him writing *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... and Others Don't*. In this research, Collins searched for factors that made an average organization become an exceptional organization by asking this question. Can a good company become great and, if so, how?

Collins (2001) created a list of 1,435 Fortune 500 companies and analyzed their stock returns between 1965 and 1995. Through the use of financial performance metrics, over the 30 years this list of 1,435 companies on the Fortune 500 list was reduced to 19 companies that met the criteria established to define a financially good or great company. After that, the researchers determined 11 companies that would participate from the group of 19; these 11 were companies that belonged to a single business field instead of companies from a variety of sectors. The researchers also selected 17 new firms as a direct comparison. Eleven of these received the

classification of good-to-great companies, and six were companies that had not shown sustained earnings.

The findings that Collins (2001) presented were evident in 100% of the group that was good-to-great, and only 30% of the companies in the comparison firms. The framework that was created to summarize the findings identified in the good-to-great companies showed a build-up before a breakthrough because of three factors: disciplined action, disciplined thoughts, and disciplined people. All of these companies had one thing in common, a leader who possessed a set of traits and identifiable behaviors that catapulted the companies into success financially.

Collins' (2001) research aimed at the private sector and for-profit companies, while in 2005, Collins did a follow-up to his original work that shed light on social sectors. In this follow-up, Collins stated the thought in the creation of significant social sectors was to treat them more like a business was incorrect. Furthermore, Collins (2001) noted the framework presented in his book was for greatness, not principles of business, which can be applied to the social sector. Collins (2001) concluded that authentic leadership may be more significant in the social sector than in the private sector. Even though Collins (2001) made this claim, there is no demonstration on the importance of leadership in the social sector, particularly in education.

Higher education has become a volatile sector over the last several decades. Manning (2013) described higher education as “uncontrollable, unpredictable, and full of opportunity” (p. 137). Harris et al. (2015) shifted focus to economic, demographic, and competitive changes to highlight the new challenges in the field of leadership. Manning (2013) described higher education as “organized anarchy” (p. 11), “characterized by goal attainment that is problematic, technology deployment with gaps, and organizational participation that is fluid” (p. 14). University presidents are faced with situations that require real-time decisions that impact

multiple populations on a daily basis, contrasting traditional practices of finite solutions based on longtime analysis or perpetual statuses of indecision. Understanding leadership at the superintendent level will help to provide context on the impact of leadership in an educational setting and offers a parallel to higher education presidency.

Leadership Impacts Student Achievement

The book *School District Leadership That Works* presented the results of a metaanalysis of 17 studies that were conducted between 1970 until 2005 and involved 2,817 school districts that accounted for 3.4 million students' achievement scores (Waters & Marzano, 2009). Waters and Marzano examined the influence of superintendents on student achievement in specific school districts and examined traits that led to being an effective superintendent. Their research identified four major findings that relate to superintendents.

First was the belief that district-level leadership influences student achievement. They found 14 reports describing the relationship between student achievement and leadership. Waters and Marzano (2009) examined the impact of district-level leadership on student achievement. These findings gave the researchers reason to believe that a change in direction in the superintendent's ability to lead by just a small percentage had a massive positive impact on student achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2009).

Second, Waters and Marzano (2009) examined school autonomy. These findings showed a positive correlation between student achievement and leadership autonomy at the school level. Five district-level leadership characteristics emerged having a statistically significant correlation to student academic achievement from Waters and Marzano (2009):

1. Goal-setting process.
2. Nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction.

3. Board alignment and support of district goals.
4. Monitoring goals for achievement and instruction.
5. The use of resources to support goals.

These characteristics provide context on leadership having an impact on the education sector and the importance of quality leaders in education.

Waters and Marzano (2009) also explored school autonomy to the point of finding that school-level autonomy increased student achievement. Upon further review, when site-based management was introduced, student achievement decreased. These two events were a subject of Waters and Marzano's research to try and figure out how school-level leadership autonomy had a positive impact on student achievement while a decrease in student achievement was noticed when site-based management was introduced. This provides a view into what type of leadership styles impact individuals and units within a school organization.

The most significant finding by Waters and Marzano (2009) was a positive correlation between the longevity of the superintendent and student academic performance. To provide clarification on the finding, Waters and Marzano (2009) used Chris Whittle's book *Crash Course* (2005), in which he compared the leadership of Microsoft, Dell, Federal Express, and General Electric with superintendents. Whittle (2005) cited the stability of urban operations in Kansas City and New York City in comparison to these corporations. The average tenures of superintendents were significantly shorter than the successful company leaders. Whittle believed these companies were successful because of the stability.

These findings have significant consequences for the broader domain of leadership and support the claim that school leadership at the CEO level matters significantly. Although Waters

and Marzano (2009) are only focusing on leadership at the superintendent level, it should be a concern for anyone who cares about education at all levels.

Statement of the Problem

This particular college, and other schools like it, lack clear presidential succession plans, and an appropriate mechanism for determining leadership styles and backgrounds is needed for success at this university and others. Contributing to this factor is the disconnect between boards, and the use of faculty, staff, and students in providing insights in making presidential hiring decisions. This research will be helpful for the governing board in leadership and hiring practices at this particular university to streamline the recruitment process of future presidents. Also, the results should provide some level of transferability to similar Carnegie-class universities that might be hiring university presidents and need to find an appropriate fit for their culture, minimize wasting precious university resources, and perhaps use this information to plan for potential pitfalls in the process.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this case study was to examine the data and provide context on the hiring practices of university presidents. The reason for conducting this research was to study and assess the effectiveness of current procedures used to recruit/hire presidents in higher education. More specifically, this study sought to ascertain the influences of governing boards on hiring decisions of the president at a rural, Division II institution of higher education located in the southeastern region of the United States, and to determine the effect faculty, staff, and students have on selecting presidents.

Research Questions

To further research the process of hiring university presidents, I utilized three research questions. These questions were the foundation of my data collection, including interviews and document analysis. These research questions were based on closing the gap in the literature in relation to hiring university presidents.

Q1. What are the institutional processes associated with selecting a new president and what preparations are being made in anticipation of having a president leave very soon?

Q2. What institutional actors have the most influence on the decision process?

Q3. Are these processes the best approaches to selecting a college president?

These questions were answered through the use of document analysis and 25 interviews with governing board members, key faculty and staff, student/alumni leaders, and individuals who had the knowledge or were associated with the hiring practices of the university president at this college. This research provides a basis for other institutions in the same and different Carnegie classification to conduct their own studies.

Definition of Key Terms

This section provides operational definitions of the important terms used in the study. For this purpose, the following terms are defined accordingly:

Chief executive officer (CEO). The highest-ranking administrator of an organization who is responsible for the overall vision and outcome of the organization as directed by the board of directors.

Governing board. Group of individuals who are responsible for overseeing the workings of college, universities, and their foundations.

Superintendent. The highest-ranking administrator of a K-12 school system.

University president. The highest-ranking administrator of a college who reports directly to the institution's governing board or to a system president.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The primary purpose of this case study was to examine and provide context on the hiring practices of university presidents. The reason for conducting this research was to study and assess the effectiveness of the current procedures used to recruit/hire presidents in higher education. More specifically, this study sought to ascertain the influences on governing boards in decisions about hiring a president at a rural, Division II institution of higher education located in the southeastern region of the United States.

Chapter 2 offers a review of the literature that represents the framework for this case study. The following review of the literature first introduces relevant research on chief executive officers (CEO). The first section focuses on the background of leadership theory. The next section includes a look into superintendents and CEOs. Following this section, the review of literature delivers information on college and university presidential pressures that signify a need for proper recruitment and succession planning from governing boards. The review of the literature concludes with a chapter summary.

Using various databases, such as the Abilene Christian University Library, a university library, and Google Scholar, I was able to access scholarly journals to complete this literature review. Keywords and phrases used in the search were *CEO, retention, succession planning, recruitment, college and university presidents, pressures, faculty, staff, leadership theories, and governing boards*.

Leadership

According to Lehman (2015) and Hoffman (2008), since the early 1900s there have been several proposed concepts attempting to define and distinguish between different leadership styles, including servant, democratic, and transformational. Lehman (2015) went on to state that

this research has taken scholars a multitude of directions in the search to define leadership. This portion will look to build a foundation on leadership theory by examining where it began, how it has evolved, and how scholars in the United States view it.

The great man theory was developed by Thomas Carlyle in the 1900s and was a commonly accepted theory of influence (Hoffman, 2008). Carlyle (1993) stated that men were born with strong leadership qualities as inherent abilities and that the environment did not play a role in these qualities. The great man theory associates individuals in history who influence change and eventually become heroes (Lehman, 2015). This theory remained a dominant force of leadership philosophy during its period and sparked a conversation and further research on leadership (Hoffman, 2008).

As the 1920s approached, the focus on heredity as the main component of leadership persisted. To determine the traits needed under particular conditions, researchers started to observe people's leadership methods and the level of importance when it came to certain situations (Hoffman, 2008). The influence of the great man theory ended in the 1940s, when theorists began looking at the relationship between leader and follower. Group activities were a substantial focal point because they provided interactions between leaders and their followers (Northouse, 2015). The 1960s gave way to an approach that focused on organizational behavior, mainly when groups were organized by individuals to accomplish a set of organizational objectives (Northouse, 2015). This period led to the definition of leadership that Burns (1978) identified. Burns was responsible for determining the process of people with certain motives and values mobilizing to accomplish goals, whether it be together as a group or individually in association with leaders and followers. This work completed by Burns helped to form the transformational leadership theory (Hoffman, 2008).

There was a significant increase relating to leadership research from scholars in the 1980s (Northouse, 2015). Out of this increase came a variety of definitions relating to leadership.

Northouse (2015) acknowledges four common themes during this period, including:

- *Do as the leader wishes*, which is followers abiding by what the leader would like them to do.
- *Influence*, where researchers examined how leaders motivated followers without being manipulative.
- *Traits*, because of the leadership-as-excellence movement, this was brought back to the forefront.
- *Transformation* as studied by Burns.

Process of Leadership

Burns (1978) defined leaders as individuals who influence followers to serve in a way that will further both the leaders' and followers' motivation and values in pursuit of a particular goal. Northouse (2015) was in the same school of thought when he defined leadership as an act or behavior, and specific ways that leaders use to invoke change in an individual or group. These scholars both use a definition that involves the process of an individual or group behaving in a certain way that leads to change. A multitude of adjectives have been used to attempt and define a technical approach to leadership (Leithwood et al., 2004). These examples include democratic, instructional, servant, and collaborative, to name a few (Lehman, 2015). Whichever approach is selected, leadership is defined as the ability to motivate a group or individual to accomplish a particular goal (Burns, 1978; Northouse, 2015).

The leadership process is a two-way relationship that uses communication effectively. Northouse (2015) gave insights that leadership is a "phenomenon that resides in the context of

the interactions between leaders and followers and makes leadership available to everyone” (p. 8). The context of leadership directly relates to the role of a president in a college or university setting. Measuring the success of a leader’s ability to communicate can be done through examining the interest and actions of subordinates as they work and collaborate toward achieving a common goal of the institution/organization (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997). Heifetz and Laurie (1997) stated that communicating the “big picture” as it relates to challenges that occur, regulating distress, discipline issues, and acting as a safeguard to all stakeholders in the organization is the ultimate responsibility of a leader. These conclusions have significant consequences for the broader domain of leadership in higher education. As we move through this review of the literature, we will examine research in regards to leadership at the superintendent level, a position that has a similar impact to that of a college or university president.

Chief Education Officers

When it comes to the topic of superintendents, most of us will readily agree that they are considered to be CEOs of school districts (Sternke, 2011; Thomas, 2001). This individual is in charge of leading entire school districts and is a massive parallel to a college and university president. Dungy (2010) acknowledged the importance of leadership in this statement:

“Leadership is necessary for any human society; thus, a leadership void will not exist for very long before someone steps up to lead, either by popular acclaim, selection, or self-appointment” (p. xiv).

Leadership Is Important

Numerous scholars have written about leadership, but the importance of leadership needs context. Does the quality of leadership impact on success or failure? Leadership, as it is presented, has been studied in numerous organizations. Collins (2009) took a case study

approach that ultimately led to him to write *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... and Others Don't*. In this research, Collins searched for factors that made an average organization become an exceptional organization by asking the following question: Can a good company become great and, if so, how?

Collins (2001) created a list of 1,435 Fortune 500 companies and analyzed their stock returns between 1965 and 1995. Through the use of financial performance metrics, over the 30 years this list of 1,435 companies on the Fortune 500 list was reduced to 19 companies that met the criteria established to define a financially good or great company. After that, the researchers determined 11 companies that would participate from the group of 19; these 11 were companies that belonged to a single business field instead of companies from a variety of sectors. The researchers also selected 17 new firms as a direct comparison. Eleven of these received the classification of good-to-great companies, and six were companies that had not shown sustained earnings.

The research began with document coding of articles and other publications from the group of selected companies. Categories such as leadership, organizing arrangements, and vision were among 11 coding items utilized. Then, researchers conducted a thorough analysis of the company financials looking for characteristics such as firm financial strength, divestitures and acquisitions, industry performance, and layoff impact. Lastly, a round of interviews with board members and senior leadership provided context to the situation. Because of the evidence collected, this empirical data provided Collins (2001, p. 10) with enough to formulate a theory. The findings that Collins presented were evident in 100% of the group that was good-to-great and only 30% of the companies in the comparison firms. The framework that was created to summarize the findings identified in the good-to-great companies showed a build-up before a

breakthrough because of three factors: disciplined action, disciplined thoughts, and disciplined people. All of these companies had one thing in common, a leader who possessed a set of traits and identifiable behaviors that catapulted the companies into success financially.

Collins' (2001) research aimed at the private sector and for-profit companies. In 2005, Collins did a follow-up to his original work that shed light on social sectors. In this follow-up, Collins stated the thought in the creation of significant social sectors was to treat them more like a business was incorrect. Furthermore, Collins (2001) noted that the framework presented in his book was for greatness, not principles of business, and, therefore can be applied to the social sector. Collins then goes on to conclude that authentic leadership may be more significant in the social sector than in the private sector. Even though Collins (2005) has made this claim, there is no demonstration from the researcher on the importance of leadership in the social sector, particularly in education. Understanding leadership at the superintendent level will help to provide context on the impact of leadership in an educational setting.

Leadership Impacts Student Achievement

The book *School District Leadership That Works* was a metaanalysis of 17 studies conducted between 1970 and 2005 that involved 2,817 school districts and accounted for 3.4 million students' achievement scores (Waters & Marzano, 2009). Waters and Marzano wanted to find out what influence superintendents of these districts had in regards to student achievement and what traits led to being an effective superintendent. Their research identified four major findings that relate to superintendents.

The first finding that the researchers found cemented the belief that district-level leadership influences student achievement. The metaanalysis by the scholars found 14 reports that provided information about the relationship between student achievement and leadership.

The exact correlation was .24, and there was a 95% confidence interval. Through the identification of the independent and dependent variable, Marzano and Waters were able to analyze the findings, the independent variable being district-level leadership, and the dependent variable being student achievement. These findings gave the researchers reason to believe that a change in direction at the superintendent's ability to lead by one standard deviation would impact student achievement by 9.5 percentile points (Marzano & Waters, 2009).

The second research question addressed by Marzano and Waters (2009) was regarding school autonomy. These findings showed a positive correlation of .28 with student achievement and leadership autonomy and the school-level. Five district-level leadership characteristics emerged, having a statistically significant correlation to student academic achievement from Marzano and Waters (2009):

1. Goal-setting process.
2. Nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction.
3. Board alignment and support of district goals.
4. Monitoring goals for achievement and instruction.
5. The use of resources to support goals.

These characteristics provide context on leadership having an impact on the education sector and the importance of quality leaders in education.

Marzano and Waters (2009) also explored school autonomy to the point of finding a positive correlation of .28 between school-level autonomy and student achievement. Upon further review, when site-based management was introduced, there was a negative correlation found that decreased student achievement. These two events were a subject of Marzano and Waters' research to try and figure out how school-level leadership autonomy had a positive

impact on student achievement while a decrease in student achievement was noticed when site-based management was introduced. This provides a viewpoint of what type of leadership styles impact individuals and units within a school organization.

The final point plays a massive factor in this case study, and that is the examination of the superintendent's tenure and the impact on student achievement. The researchers presented a weighted average correlation of .19 from the two studies at a .05 level of significance. This suggested a positive correlation between the longevity of the superintendent and student academic performance (Waters & Marzano, 2009). To provide clarification on the finding, Waters and Marzano used Chris Whittle's book *Crash Course* (2005), where he compared the leadership of Microsoft, Dell, Federal Express, and General Electric and superintendents. Whittle (2005) cited the stability of urban operations in Kansas City and New York City in comparison to these corporations. The average tenures of superintendents were significantly shorter than the successful company leaders. Whittle believes these companies were successful because of the stability.

These findings have significant consequences for the broader domain of leadership and the fact that there is a statistical study that supports the claim that leadership matters. Although Marzano and Waters were only focused on leadership at the superintendent level, it should have concerned anyone who cared about education at all levels. Numerous studies support that leadership makes a huge difference in organizational success.

Turnover at the Superintendent Level

Understanding the turnover of superintendents at the school district level will provide a foundation for research into the impact of turnover at the university president level. Grissom and Andersen (2012) explained the importance of turnover at the superintendent level by saying:

“The importance of the district superintendent and the potential consequences of superintendent exits make understanding the factors that drive superintendent turnover a key topic for empirical research” (p. 1148). The longevity of superintendents is very similar to college and university presidents at six years (Finnan et al., 2015). There are a variety of reasons these high-level administrators leave their positions. Among these reasons, there are conflicts with the boards and a desire to pursue new challenges that come in as the top reasons for superintendents vacating positions (Kowalski et al., 2011). Grissom and Andersen (2012) conducted research using data collected through surveys sent to board members and superintendents to gather employment data on superintendents in the California Department of Education. There were 99 superintendents who stated they had left their position for the following reasons: 40% left due to retirement, 2% were terminated, 27% resigned to pursue another job, and 18% quit for other purposes. Taking a closer look, the turnover of superintendents had an association with the characteristics of a challenging environment, including student poverty. The relationship between a community’s wealth and turnover is something that presents potential issues. There is evidence present that shows turnover higher in the areas that would benefit significantly from leadership stability and the opportunities for sustainability that associate with it (Grissom & Andersen, 2012). With instability being present top-level positions in education, turnover, and the impact that turnover has on the educational landscape, understanding how these individuals are recruited and retained is crucial to the future of educational leadership and future generations of students.

Chief Executive Officers

There has been an increased focus on governing boards' involvement in managing firms despite the barriers faced through a lack of information that impact the board’s decision making (Boivie et al., 2016; Withers et al., 2012). Eventually, there will be a need for succession

planning in a company's life cycle, and planning the execution of the succession process comes with substantial consequences (Finkelstein et al., 2009; Quigley & Hambrick, 2014). There have been several studies that look at the immediate impact of succession without focusing on the ongoing process. In that same breath, we do not know how boards impact the process, and there is a lack of research-grounded best practices to fall back on (Finkelstein et al., 2009). Without these best practices in place, it proves difficult for a company to identify and obtain CEO talent.

The lack of information leaves boards facing a critical decision of selecting the CEO while relying on vital information to come from the outside. These challenges can lead to massive constraints placed on the board despite having motivated board members (Boivie et al., 2016). This time of adversity shows the need for systems and processes in place to make selection decisions. In one case, there was a board that chose only one candidate, electing to overlook a recommendation letter that reflected poorly on the successor, who ultimately failed in the role of CEO (Wright & Schepker, 2015). With the expected return on investment from this position, this type of oversight can be detrimental to an organization.

To avoid a gap in leadership, firms will select an interim CEO to serve as a leader until the role is permanently filled. Mooney et al. (2014) stated the selection of an interim CEO has a higher probability of occurring when a CEO resigns within the first three years of service. This speaks to the line of thought that firms sometimes delay starting the succession process. The problem that firms face is that interim CEOs are considered to be in response to negative firm performance or reactions from investors (Ballinger & Marcel, 2010; Gangloff et al., 2014). Furthermore, an examination into formalized succession planning in the private sector as it pertains to the higher education setting is needed to help form best practices.

Overview of Board of Directors Research

Berle and Means (1932) were among the first to explore how corporations were constructed as social institutions, as they discussed how corporations are governed by a board of directors who represent the interests of the community. Fama and Jensen's (1983) seminal paper covering the beginning of corporate governance introduced the concept of separating control and ownership. Owners are comprised of shareholders and community members who delegate authority to a board of directors, who then pass control on to a chief executive for operating decisions. Eells (1960) was the first to discuss the term *corporate governance*, but literature on nonprofit governance did not surface until almost three decades later (Carver, 2010). Carver (2010) stated that corporations could be classified as social constructs established under economic titles such as for-profit, nonprofit/charitable, and governmental purposes.

Developing the Construct of Board Governance

A corporate entity exists as a social construct that empowers a group of people to come together and act as a collective person to carry out business goals. The board of directors serves as the primary decision maker for carrying out these business goals, but reserves the right to delegate the accountability of this task to a CEO. Corporate literature has historically focused on the formal structure of this relationship in terms of law and finance rather than taking a more in-depth look at the depth of the relationships that exist due to the social construct of a particular organization. In other words, the role of the board and the relationship between the CEO and the governing board is in need of further research (Ahrens & Khalifa, 2013; Beck, 2014; Berle & Means, 1932).

The United States Internal Revenue Service (IRS) rules and state laws require a board of directors for corporations. Corporations serve as social institutions, and the governing boards are

not a natural entity but a social construct (Berle & Means, 1932; Carver, 2010). The environment, conditions, and culture for an entity are determined by those who create the social construct. There has been little documentation on the human side of how a board operates, with most of the literature focusing on the formal legal structure of a board of directors. This is due to access to boards because of the sensitivity of the information being communicated. However, some researchers seek to answer the questions on the link between the organization and the board.

The board has the legal power of being the authority that governs the organization. In addition to the legal requirements, the other reasons that a board of directors exists are for ethical and practical purposes. The governing directors are asked by the state to have a moral, legal, and fiduciary responsibility to help fulfill the organization's mission. A for-profit organization classifies the individuals who hold the governing board accountable as shareholders, who receive distributions of revenues/net profits. Seeking a definition for this in the nonprofit sector proves to be slightly harder. Nonprofits receive a favorable tax treatment by the IRS because they serve for the good and to benefit the community and public interest. This creates an obligation for nonprofits to make sure that whatever they receive is used for the public good. The accountability of nonprofit boards falls in the expectations of organizational performance (Carver, 2010).

The research went on to note that there is difficulty among nonprofits to pinpoint ownership, but primarily the board is focused on moral ownership of nonprofits. Whether it be nonprofit or for-profit, the CEO is the individual employed to be held accountable by the board as a principal to the owners. There is a clear link to the importance of the interaction provided by

the governing board between the organization and the broader community of owners (Carver, 2010).

Major Governance Theoretical Perspectives

Agency theory can be traced back to Berle and Means' (1932) concept of incentivizing management based on organizational performance and thereby increasing the value of an organization. Eisenhardt (1989) put agency theory in terms of dividing labor between actors pursuing different goals. An example of this would be the board of directors and management. The boards' concern is the results (what the organization's potential achievement is), and management focuses on the operational means to achieve these results. Once the board determines what needs to be delivered, the CEO or executive director is then asked to manage the process toward these goals and objectives.

When taking a look at the literature surrounding stakeholder theory, Freeman (1984) defined *stakeholders* as a variety of individuals or groups who have a common interest in the achievements of an organization. Most of the literature is skewed toward for-profit corporations and defines stakeholders like suppliers, employees, customers, or consumers. Resource dependency theory is another theoretical perspective that examines how external relationships can impact the processes of an organization.

Hillman et al. (2009) acknowledged that the resource dependence perspective provided by Pfeffer and Gerald (2003) served as a fundamental piece for the resource dependency theory. Two divergent views regarding organizational change merged to form the foundations of resource dependency. These two views consisted of one that emphasized external environments (Thompson, 1967) and another aspect that emphasized power and politics (Emerson, 1962). Focus on maintaining and developing funding sources is vital to daily operations in the nonprofit

sector. Because of this dependence on funding sources (government and private), nonprofits seek to find people with both affluence and influence to serve as board members. There is an emphasis placed on needing connections to the government to help when lobbying for support. All of these factors, such as power and resources, serve a purpose when constructing a board of directors.

Recent Research on the Board of Directors

In both the nonprofit and for-profit sectors, *governance* is usually defined as the mechanism that a board of directors uses to ensure that fiduciary responsibility is met by the organizations' employees (Cornforth & Brown, 2013). The board members act as trustees on behalf of the other stakeholders to ensure the institution is serving in an upright manner. In states where corporations are chartered, board members are challenged with a code of conduct and fiduciary responsibilities to the organization in which they serve. Most current research done on nonprofit governance is focused on formal structures, such as board demographics, of the governing board (Roberts et al., 2005). Pettigrew (1992) emphasized that it is not enough to understand the governance knowledge of what a board is comprised of, but we also need to look at what they accomplish. This sparked a surge of research on what boards do; however, these scholars continued to limit the view to board characteristics instead of looking at actual methods (van Ees et al., 2008). During the 1990s and early 2000s, most research on governance was based in Europe through the use of qualitative and descriptive methods. Consequently, these studies did not provide enough information to form generalizations about onboarding processes (Christensen & Westenholz, 1999; McNulty & Pettigrew, 1999). Psychological frameworks such as group norms, cohesiveness, and cognitive conflict later came into play thanks to theoretical research from Huse (2005) and Forbes and Milliken (1999).

Agency theory leads the theoretical framework when it comes to comprehending board working processes, behaviors, and performance. Agency theory is used in “a majority of the nation and states” for the legal outline of nonprofit governance (Renz & Andersson, 2014, p. 21). Huse et al. (2011) observed that agency theory accounted for approximately 54% of the scientific literature between 1989 and 2009. Agency theory supports research into governance as it pertains to the CEO-board relationship. The board is an agent that represents other stakeholders, and the CEO is the individual who is an agent for the board (Bernstein et al., 2016). The CEO is given the responsibility of creating a strategic plan and formal organizational model while receiving part of the boards’ authority to carry out these tasks (Ferkins et al., 2005). Bosse and Phillips (2016) asserted that during the recruitment and hiring process, the self-interest of the CEO might be restricted by “norms of reciprocity and fairness” (p. 276). These norms are usually conveyed during the hiring and recruiting process of CEOs (McKinney et al., 2011).

Donaldson and Davis (1990) introduced the stewardship theory as an alternative to agency theory. Davis et al. (1997) and Cornforth (2001) presented us with the concept of stewardship theory being used as a tool to align the CEO and the board. This theory helps us to understand why an individual would work in the nonprofit sector when there is more financial gain to be had in the private sector. Nevertheless, the stewardship theory focuses on the relationship between agents and principals. In this study, the principals would be the board of directors, and the agents would be the university president. Organizational behaviors and structures are studied in stewardship theory and agency theory. The theorists that follow the stewardship school of thought anticipate individuals behaving in a socially responsible manner on both sides. Part of this relates to how the values and environment of an organization foster prosocial behaviors (Davis et al., 1997). To evaluate prosocial behavior, researchers look at the

quality of the partnership between the agent and the principal. In a nonprofit setting, such as a college or university, behaviors can be steered through the pursuit of doing good for others.

Resource dependence can be defined as resources (information, financial, and physical) that are obtained by a corporation (Pfeffer & Gerald, 2003). There is an expectation from owners/investors for a return on investment of these resources (Carver, 2010). The board of directors plays a part in the exchange and control of external resources (Pfeffer & Gerald, 2003). The board of directors is challenged with critical decisions to ensure the development of relationships. CEO succession planning is a crucial part of the business strategy and the longevity of an organization because of the CEO's knowledge and the relevance of the position.

CEO Role in Nonprofit Organizations

Carver (2010) defined the role of a CEO as the chief hired person who is appointed and held accountable to the board of directors to not only drive organizational agendas but to perform at an optimal level. Literature has shown a significant link between CEO performance and organizational performance (Brown, 2005). Some scholars believe that effective board measures and systems are linked to effective organizational performance (Hodge et al., 2011). Therefore, hiring the CEO of an organization, or in our case university president, is a significant decision for the board that can impact the organization for many years (Carver, 2010; Cornforth, 2001).

Due to the importance of the CEO's performance as it relates to the successful performance of an organization, when a long-term CEO is dismissed for any reason, it is known to cause an unbalance in the organization (Carver, 2010; Cornforth, 2001; Medley & Akan, 2008). Formulating a succession plan such as the selection process for determining which internal and external candidates will be selected for interviews can provide substantial help. Although some scholars have examined CEO succession planning, they have fallen short in

reviewing the role of the board of directors, faculty, staff, and students in succession planning and selecting the new CEO in the higher education sector (Boroff et al., 2015, as cited in Jennings, 2018). Upon further review of the literature on this research, a few scholars focused on family businesses (Chen et al., 2016; Collins et al., 2016). The scholars who focused on the for-profit sector found problems with existing succession plans and overall dissatisfaction (Hooijberg & Lane, 2016; Zhang & Rajagopalan, 2010). Several researchers have stated the importance of hiring a CEO, and it is crucial to look past social norms and focus on the organization's sustainability and the vision of the stakeholders being served (Lawal, 2012; Medley & Akan, 2008). Examining the hiring practices of university presidents in higher education, particularly at this university, is vital because of the significant role that the position plays in organization (university) success.

College and University Presidents

According to the 2017 American College President Study (ACPS), roughly 58% of college presidents are over the age of 60. Among these presidents, 44% state that there is a lack of time to think and reflect, which is a key frustration. This survey identified budget/financial management, fund-raising, managing a senior team, board relations, and enrollment management as the areas that occupy the bulk of a college president's time. Gagliardi et al. (2017) stated the following:

Today's college and university presidents understand the need for institutions to become more dynamic and efficient. They recognize that the success of a new generation of leaders will hinge on the development of holistic resource strategies and a commitment to diversity and inclusion. More presidents will have to double down on data-informed decision making to guide their institutions through transformational change. (p. 10)

The need for a dynamic president has led to every two out of three presidents being hired through the utilization of search consultants. This is in the wake of fluctuating worker tenure among U.S. workers. Between 2000 and 2014, there has been the most substantial increase in average job tenure in the United States among workers. This claim is supported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (U.S. Department of Labor) that shows a median job tenure increasing from 3.5 years to 4.6 years before settling in 2016 at 4.2 years (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). This provides context into what we are looking at in terms of college presidents, where there was a significant increase of workers before a slight decline between 2014 and 2016.

Although average job tenure of workers in the United States was increasing between the years of 2000 and 2012, there was a significant decline in tenures of college presidents between 2006 and 2011 (American Council on Education, 2007, 2012; Monks, 2012). These statistics set the stage for the need to study succession planning and retention in higher education.

Several factors are considered when discussing the shorter tenures of college presidents. The first one to consider is how the position has increased in complexity and evolved (American Council on Education, 2007, 2012; Song & Hartley, 2012; Tunheim & McLean, 2014). There have been studies done, including Carey (2014), Eddy (2012), Jones and Jackson (2014), and Tekniepe (2014), that agree the role and position of college president has transformed in terms of responsibilities and complexity.

Pressures Impacting College and University Presidents

A gap in the preparedness for the position of college president, faculty and staff pressures, student population and governing board members, and positional strain have been identified as some of the significant factors in the decline of presidential college tenures in the

last half decade (McNair, 2015; Song & Hartley, 2012; Tekniepe, 2014; Trachtenberg et al., 2013). Understanding what struggles and hurdles a university president faces is critical to establishing a baseline for what to look for when developing a succession plan and strategy for assessment.

Legislative Funding

There is a significant difference between state legislative appropriations and funding for public four-year institutions, and the cost of attending a public four-year institution (Browning, 2013; Hemelt & Marcotte, 2016; Kerkvliet & Nowell, 2014; Kim & Ko, 2015). The College Board (2018) reported, “In 2015-16, appropriations per Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) student were 11% lower in inflation-adjusted dollars than they were a decade earlier and 13% lower than they were 30 years earlier.” State appropriations are typically the most significant portion of a public institution’s revenue (Bruckner, 2017; Eaton et al., 2016; Kim & Ko, 2015). Conversely, state legislatures have continued to decrease public college funding exponentially between 2000 and 2015 (Doyle, 2013; Sav, 2016; Spencer & Hensly, 2015). The dwindling amount of state financial resources available to American public colleges and universities has significantly burdened the modern college student and serves as a barrier to student access to public higher education. The recession of 2008 hit the United States hard, and public higher education institutions were no exception. While there has been a measly 3% increase in per-student funding in 38 states in the last year, there is still a long way to go before public institutions can once again rely on government appropriations. This lack of funding has resulted in 46 of the 50 U.S. states spending less per student than before the 2008 financial crisis (Saving Public Higher Education, 2016). As legislative appropriations and funding have decreased per FTE student, colleges and universities are forced to pass on the rising costs directly to the student through

higher tuition and fees. This leads to plenty of pressures for university presidents to be ready to handle these issues.

Tuition Increases

According to the College Board (2018), “Average published in-state tuition and fees in the public four-year sector increased by \$300 (3.1% before adjusting for inflation), from \$9,670 in 2016-17 to \$9,970 in 2017-18” (p. 3). Historical data shows that “between 2007-08 and 2017-18, published in-state tuition and fees at public four-year institutions increased at an average rate of 3.2% per year beyond inflation, compared with 4.0% between 1987-88 and 1997-98 and 4.4% between 1997-98 and 2007-08” (College Board, 2018). In other words, state appropriations simply are not rising to match the increase in student enrollment in higher education and the rising costs of university operations.

The decline in state funding and an increase in tuition has resulted in students of low- to mid-income families assuming the responsibility of paying for higher education (Alon, 2011; Heller, 2013; Lovenheim & Reynolds, 2011). Mettler (2014) further confirms this shift by stating it is apparent that more financially needy students are increasing in numbers, and state colleges are failing to adjust. A greater understanding of key leaders’ motives and the factors that go into tuition increases could help public higher education maintain student access without damaging the financial bottom line.

Student Access

The decrease of state funding and the rising cost of tuition have limited student access to higher education (Mettler, 2014; Pulcini, 2018). The term *access* as it pertains to higher education is defined as “educational institutions and policies ensure—or at least strive to ensure—that students have equal and equitable opportunities to take full advantage of their

education” (Glossary of Education Reform, 2014, para. 1). According to Hearn et al. (2016), public colleges and universities have not kept pace with tuition and fee increases. Over the past few decades, this has resulted in the priority shifting to higher-income students who can provide relief to better help institutions achieve financial success, thus hampering access for lower socioeconomic students (Hearn et al., 2016; Wang, 2013).

Furthermore, students’ access to higher education has been impacted by strategic enrollment practices. Wang (2013) described strategic enrollment practices as a plan to help offset the loss of state support through the recruitment of higher socioeconomic students. As a result, students who do not fall into these higher socioeconomic backgrounds are forced to seek other sources of funding for their education. The College Board (2018) reported: “In 2015-16, 47% of federal Pell Grant recipients were dependent students; almost three-quarters of these students came from families with incomes of \$40,000 or less, including 38% with family incomes of \$20,000 or less” (p. 7). This level of impact on lower socioeconomic students’ access to higher education provides more reason for further research. This is something that governing boards must keep in mind when selecting or preparing a candidate for the presidency.

Changing Demographics

Demographic forces have impacted the college-bound population of students pursuing higher education. The main influx of students on college campuses includes Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, and students from South and Central America. Coupled with the rise in fertility rates among non-Hispanic Blacks and Hispanics, changes in demographics have led to the number of White infants only being slightly higher than non-White infants. In response, college and university presidents have made a point to recruit and support students from these underrepresented populations to meet organizational goals (Grawe, 2018).

Studies show the financial crisis of 2008 started a downward trend in fertility rates that have now turned into a decade of low and declining fertility rates. The Centers for Disease Control reported the total fertility rate fell 16% below what is needed to replace the population through reproduction alone (Martin et al., 2018). The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) forecasts a massive decline in the number of high school graduates through the mid-2020s, meaning a year-by-year decline in the number of prospective students (Seltzer, 2016). Institutions must be creative in how they are finding solutions to meet the decline in perspective students that goes beyond new recruitment strategies (Grawe, 2018). These demographic challenges, and how to meet them, is something that college and university presidents must answer over the next decade.

Conclusion

Little research has been done on four-year public university presidential hiring practices. Several researchers have focused on board of director characteristics and presidential qualities. However, there is a gap in the role that faculty, staff, and students play in the hiring practices in higher education. This qualitative case study sought to gain access to the hiring process at the this university through conducting interviews. Due to the impending crisis of presidential turnover in higher education and a lack of literature on proper hiring/succession guidelines, using staff, faculty, and student input shows the need for exploratory research. The research intention is to provide a framework for planning for presidential turnover and succession, then using this information to provide a foundation for future research at higher education institutions. Chapter 3 will include a discussion of how the research methods chosen are a fit for the study and the method used to close the gap in the literature.

Chapter 3: Research Method

As the literature suggests, clear succession planning for future presidents is a nebulous process and presents a significant challenge to college communities in selecting chief executive officers (CEOs) who have the required leadership styles and backgrounds for success at this specific university. It appears there is a disconnect at the rural university between the hiring practices of boards and the involvement of faculty, staff, community members, alumni, donors, and student insights in making presidential hiring decisions. The results of this study can inform the governing boards in designing a succession and recruitment plan. Also, this will aid universities in similar situations and decrease the possibility of wasting valued university resources.

The primary purpose of this case study was to examine the current context of the hiring processes of university presidents. The research included the assessment of the effectiveness of current procedures that are used in the recruiting methods of hiring presidential candidates in higher education. Specifically, this study sought to discover the influences that governing boards, faculty, staff, community members, alumni, donors, and students have on the hiring decisions of the president at a Division II, rural institution of higher education located in the southeastern region of the United States. Chapter 3 focuses on how a case study approach, with focal points on collecting interviews, board minutes, and news articles, is used to examine the hiring procedures at this university as it relates to the influence of the governing boards.

This chapter outlines the methodological procedures for the study, which includes population, setting, research materials and methods, and the systems for data collection and analysis. In addition, I have included methods for examining trustworthiness, the researcher's

role, ethical considerations, and the limitations/delimitations. Chapter 3 concludes with a summary of the methodology of hiring or recruiting procedures for presidential candidates.

Research Questions

To further research the process of hiring university presidents, I utilized three research questions. These questions were the foundation of my data collection, including interviews and document analysis. These research questions were based on closing the gap in the literature in relation to hiring university presidents.

Q1. What are the institutional processes associated with selecting a new president and what preparations are being made in anticipation of having a president leave very soon?

Q2: What institutional actors have the most influence on the decision process?

Q3: Are these processes the best approaches to selecting a college president?

These questions were answered through the use of document analysis and 25 interviews with governing board members, key faculty and staff, student/alumni leaders, and individuals who have the knowledge or were associated with the hiring practices of the university president. This research will provide a basis for other institutions in the same and different Carnegie classification to conduct their own studies.

Research Design and Methodology

The design followed Merriam (2009) and Yin (2016) as a basic qualitative case study. The study seeks to understand the human experience through data collection via semistructured interviews and narratives of participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). I chose this approach to gather rich, detailed information from the participants, both written and verbal. Generalizability is not the goal of qualitative research, but this study triangulated three or more sources of data to capture validity, credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability in the research

process. I used the constant comparative process to analyze data until there are no new concepts, the data are saturated, resulting in themes between concepts or sets of concepts (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Yin, 2016). Constant comparative methods provide clarity and, ultimately, an understanding of the participants' experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Merriam, 2002).

My research paradigm is constructivist-interpretive (Maxwell, 1996; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2016). Denzin and Lincoln (2013) noted that three constructivist paradigms assume three levels of interpretation; multiple realities exist, the knowers and researcher co-create understanding, and "analytical realism" exists in the natural setting, they go on to state that "all knowledge is contextual and partial" (p. 348). Scholars agree the basic qualitative research methodology is a solid approach in seeking to understand the experiences of the participants. Through open-ended discovery, the research can use qualitative research to understand the "participants' understanding of the phenomenon of interest" (Merriam, 2009, p. 23). This approach provides the researcher with a process for seeking an answer to the research question through interpretation. The process involves learning about the participants' experiences as it relates to the presidential hiring practices.

Bryant and Charmaz (2013) noted that research participants should have or had an experience with the phenomena or know the information regarding the research topic. Therefore, the participants in this study included governing board members, key faculty and staff, student/alumni leaders, and individuals who have the knowledge or were associated with the hiring practices of the university president at this college to "produce a good qualitative sample" (Bryant & Charmaz, 2013, p. 232). The 25 participants included individuals who had the richest experiences in relation to the hiring process of the university president position.

Participants

Yin (2016) suggested that the researcher be deliberate when selecting participants in order to yield relevant and information-rich data. The participants of this study included governing board members, key faculty and staff, student/alumni leaders, and individuals who have the knowledge or were associated with the hiring practices of the university president at this university. These participants had direct knowledge of the phenomena to ensure the study had dependable information to answer the research question. The aim was to ensure participants described their context and their world in order to guide both the researcher and reader of the study. This study followed Creswell's (2012) thought process that social science research, particularly qualitative research, should seek to share knowledge and inspire action. This research gave meaning to and answered the research question of the participants' involvement in the hiring practices of the university president and sought to provide a foundation for future research.

Population and Sample

This study's population was drawn from governing board members, key faculty and staff, student/alumni leaders, and individuals who had the knowledge or were associated with the hiring practices of the university president at this university. The primary inclusion criterion for this study was that participants had knowledge of the university's hiring practices or might benefit from participation in the hiring practices. The contrast was important when determining improvements. Also, participants were in a position that they might have reasonable success for selecting a president who will have an impact on the success of the university.

The sampling strategy was purposeful with a focus on governance as well as a focus on the process. It is assumed there is a culture of shared governance when selecting a university

president; however, that is not structurally the case. The governing board has legal authority in selecting presidents. The other groups mentioned above represent the majority and are impacted by the governing board's decision, and therefore they were included with an eye on improving or criticizing the process. The participant pool would be incomplete if we only focused on governing boards.

Materials and Instruments

Participants received instructions prior to scheduling interviews that outlined the process. This included a request for professional documents, such as a resume and a bio for each participant. Participants representing various constituencies and a variety of experiences related to the hiring practices of the university president provide the primary data pool. Yin (2016) stated that through combining data, the levels of validity increase, as one approach makes up for the weaknesses of the other approaches. Interview data were triangulated with other key documentation to strengthen overall research credibility (i.e., board minutes, articles, other interviews). Participant narrative documents were used to inform the interview process and provide triangulation in credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability in the research and for additional questions that needed to be asked in the interview.

According to Yin (2016), "Qualitative interviews often yield rich data from open-ended questions through conversational modes of interviewing" (p. 141). With this in mind, the interview questions were formulated to allow participants to provide their unique perspective without any leading from the investigator. Although the interview questions were numbered, the researcher followed Merriam's (2002) advice that interviews should be guided by "a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions should be determined ahead of time" (p. 13). Yin (2016) recommended using close-ended

questions or doing a structured interview only as a follow-up after the interview to account for unanticipated views or accounts that were uncovered. This also gave the researcher an opportunity to look for similarities shared by participants. Interviewing as a research method is recognized by theorists and methodologists as a preferred strategy in qualitative research (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Yin, 2016).

Interview Questions

1. What factors do you believe should be used in determining who to select for a university president?
2. What plans are currently underway in succession planning in anticipation of the current president's potential departure?
3. How much should faculty and staff attitudes, needs, and desires play into the hiring process?
4. How much influence should top administrators and board members play into the decision to hire the latest president?
5. What was/would be your involvement in the hiring process of the university president?
6. What methods did/would you use to make your voice heard during the hiring process?
7. How much do you think your thoughts were/would be weighed when hiring the president?
8. What suggestions would you make to improve the process of hiring a university president?

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Yin (2016) provided a five-phased cycle for analyzing data: "compiling, disassembling, reassembling (and arraying), interpreting, and concluding" (p. 185). I collected data using two

methods, interviews and document reviews. I used the five-phased cycle to analyze the data on all participants, documents, and other artifacts. Document analysis preceded the interview phase in order to gain insight and background for the researcher. I compiled documents and performed all the phases of the Yin (2016) method.

I also transcribed data from the interviews using notes and recordings. Compiling involves conducting interviews, collecting articles, and other data sources. Disassembling involves coding the information and collecting and looking for common themes. Reassembling involves identifying patterns, context analysis, and comparisons. Interpreting involves looking for completeness, fairness, credibility, value, and description of the information. Concluding involves considering future research, new concepts, substantive proposition, and generalization for broader situations.

Recurring words, phrases, concepts, and other repeated items in the data that proved useful were categorized. I used generic coding to interact with the data collected to provide a more substantial discovery of what the data reveals. The initial coding process included in vivo along with process coding. Saldaña (2016) stated that gerunds and verbs in coding “tell more about the human condition and reveal what may be going through the minds of participants than nouns” (p. 78). I used eclectic coding throughout the second wave of coding, which included process, focused, and concept coding to produce more categories of data codes.

The use of pattern and theoretical coding in the third wave provided themes as Saldaña’s text outlines. These forms of coding allowed the categories to unite, which helped support the discovery of the core categories that produce the primary themes from the raw data (Saldaña, 2016). Using an interpretive, constant comparison process to determine the major categories, done through a series of compiling, disassembling, and reassembling data, I was able to perform

data analysis that resulted in themes and concepts. This study had two sources of data that included qualitative interviews and document analysis. Creswell (2012, p. 184) stated that data analysis involves collecting through “insight, intuition, and impression based on asking general questions and developing an analysis from the information supplied by the participants.” This process was completed through numerous rounds until no new information could be produced from the data. Charmaz (2014) described coding as a critical link that exists between data collection and seeking the meaning of the data.

Researcher Role

This qualitative study was conducted by a single researcher. The role of the research is to gather the data and then objectively interpret the data. Creswell (2012) provided reasoning for research to conduct qualitative research that is “because a problem or issue needs to be explored” (p. 47). There was a focus put on being mindful of the study’s purpose and the importance of the role of the researcher. Because of the interpretive nature of qualitative research, there is potential for bias (Creswell, 2012).

I waited until all interviews were conducted before transcribing, thus maintaining a fresh perspective; however, I used analytic memos for information that proved useful to the study. The reasoning for this approach was to not come to conclusions that could lead to bias and narrow thinking toward other participants’ experiences. I used a journal to capture thoughts following each interview and then used Saldaña’s text to approach each participant’s interview as a singular, unique event. Saldaña (2015) challenged researchers to use qualitative metacognitive thinking, which required “hyperawareness within social environments for observing” and avoiding “just thinking but, knowing how to think and knowing how to know” (p. 5). Saldaña (2015) went on to state that in order to achieve metacognitive thinking, a researcher must “push

yourself or take your thinking one step further by reflecting on the study's interrelated connections to other concepts and their implications for big-picture ideas" (p. 5). The interview was made up of open-ended questions. These questions were made to give the participants a chance to share context about themselves that related to the hiring practices of the university president.

Ethical Considerations

It is my responsibility to establish credibility through the design, implementation, and execution of the research design (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell, 2012). Yin (2016) stated that "a credible study is one that provides assurance that [the researcher] properly collected and interpreted the data, so that the findings and conclusion accurately reflect and represent the world that was studied" (p. 85). Qualitative research is done in a natural setting and is by nature both interpretive and emergent (Yin, 2016). There are four components that Yin (2016) deem as critical for strengthening the credibility of a study, which include "trustworthiness, triangulation, validity, and rival thinking" (p. 87). Creswell (2012) provided the terms *structural corroboration*, *consensual validation*, and *referential adequacy*, suggesting that one of the roles of qualitative research is to "seek confluence of evidence that breeds credibility that allows us to feel confident about our observations, interpretations, and conclusions" (p. 246).

The research deployed a method provided by the recommendations of Yin (2016) to establish credibility exhibiting trustworthiness, and that is to "seek discrepant evidence" and to keep a "skeptical attitude" (p. 90) throughout the entire research process. I considered different point of views, assumptions, biases, actions, and views, and took a holistic approach to qualitative thinking. Through a focus on the triangulation of data and a continual sense of skepticism or rival thinking, I sought to establish credibility. The researcher sought to use

identified safeguards that would lead to transferability, validity, and dependability. The study, along with its participants and results, provided value to the body of literature through a selection process that employed inclusion criteria and constant comparative data analysis.

Validity is used as a tool to establish credibility by creating a valid research study that has properly analyzed the data and provided results that will help gather conclusions that are accurate as they related to the real world of the studied participants (Yin, 2016). I used triangulation to provide congruency and clarity as the data were interpreted throughout the various cycles of collection through the use of literature, peer reviews, and theory. Triangulation, which is the method of intersecting different reference points to substantiate or “verify a procedure, piece of data, or finding” (Yin, 2016, p. 87), was vital to the research strategy that the researcher had chosen and demonstrated the dependability and credibility of the study.

I demonstrated the authenticity and acknowledgment of contextualizing what was being studied to meet the requirement of trustworthiness. Patton (2002) advocated the use of triangulation by stating, “triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods. This can mean using several kinds of methods or data, including using both quantitative and qualitative approaches” (p. 247). The topic researched gave me the opportunity to increase literature on leadership, particularly educational leadership.

Assumptions

The following assumptions were made about this study:

- The participants would provide honest responses to the interview questions.
- The participants would agree to finish the entire interview process once started.
- The participants would provide answers that were beneficial to the research and be fully cooperative.

Limitations

This study was conducted as a single-site case study. This means the results may not be generalizable to the whole population of colleges and universities because of the nature of the methodology. The research aimed to provide transferability and be used for studying other colleges and universities, starting with those in the same Carnegie class. It is recommended that more research would be required to extend this information to institutions in different Carnegie classes.

Delimitations

This study was delimited by the research questions and the inclusion criteria of the participants. The participants were all associated with the university located in the southeast United States. The size of the study was a limiting factor because it was based on a single location and there were only 10 participants.

Summary

There was an outlined plan using a theoretical foundation from recognized theorists and methodologists in the qualitative research realm. I completed doctoral-level courses that provided a solid foundation for conducting qualitative research. Copious amounts of reading, research, and reflection related to qualitative research was done for this study. This provided a substantial amount of credibility for conducting this study as well as for explaining the results. Qualitative research provides a stage for the participants to not only speak but to be heard and understood, and for the truth to be explored from a holistic approach.

Chapter 4: Results

As the researcher of the applied dissertation, I intended to investigate the process as it relates to hiring practices for the university president at a rural, four-year public university in the Southeast. The main goal was to determine how faculty, staff, students, and board members influence the selection of the university president. This research will be helpful for the governing board in leadership and hiring practices at this particular university to streamline the recruitment process of future presidents. Once the data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed for meaning, specific themes emerged related to these three research questions:

Q1. What are the institutional processes associated with selecting a new president and what preparations are being made in anticipation of having a president leave very soon?

Q2: What institutional actors have the most influence on the decision process?

Q3: Are these processes the best approaches to selecting a college president?

Interview Processes and Emerging Themes

I wanted to include in my study faculty, staff, students, and board members to get a well-rounded view of the hiring process. After receiving IRB approval, I began reaching out to the participants at the university in which my case study was being conducted. I was able to retrieve contact information from the university directory. These participants were individuals who had been part of pre- or postprocesses in hiring the university president. This approach proved effective and secured 19 participants. Demographics of the participants included seven faculty members, nine staff members, one student, and two board members.

Upon receiving the participants' consent forms, I scheduled a virtual interview time using Zoom. Each participant had the interview questions sent to them prior to the interview. The interviews were an average of 30 minutes in length, and I used a semistructured approach. I also

collected articles relating to the hiring of the president and obtained the board minutes from the time period when the president was interviewed and hired.

I then used Yin's (2016) five-phased cycle for analyzing data: Saldaña (2016; Table 1).

Table 1

Five-Phased Cycle for Analyzing Data

Phase	Method	Results
Compiled	Semi "compiling, disassembling, reassembling (and arraying), interpreting, and concluding" (p. 185, Table 1). I compiled the interviews, articles, and board minutes for review. I then proceeded to code the interviews, looking for common themes that emerged from the participants' responses. The initial coding process included in vivo along with process coding. Saldaña (2016) stated that gerunds and verbs in coding "tell more about the human condition and reveal what may be going through the minds of participants than nouns" (p. 78). I used eclectic coding throughout the second wave of coding, which will included process, focused, and concept coding to produce more categories of data codes. The use of pattern and theoretical coding in the third wave provided themes, as Saldaña's text outlines. These forms of coding allowed the categories to unite, which helped support the discovery of the core categories that produced the primary themes from the raw data (collection	19 interviews; seven faculty members, nine staff members, one student, and two board members; 2 years of board minutes; several articles
Disassembled	In vivo; eclectic coding; pattern and theoretical coding	produced categories such as characteristics, frustrations, clear process, insufficient representation, future leadership, and insight themes
Reassembled	Interpretive, constant comparison process; data analysis	
Interpret	Triangulation with other sources	Data found to be fair, credible, and of value
Conclude	Analysis of findings	future research, new concepts, substantive proposition, and generalization for broader situations

The interviews ranged in time and length by participant type. Table 2 provides a full breakdown of the interviews.

Table 2

Interviews

Participant type	Total words	Total minutes
Faculty	2,564	177
Staff	2,861	201
Board Member	1,838	94
Student	431	27
TOTAL	7694	499

Initial Coding

Through the initial coding pass, I discovered some patterns through the interviews that related to each type of participant, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Initial Coding Pass

Participant type	Initial code
Faculty	Not heard, has thoughts
Staff	Minimal involvement, unclear process
Board member	Committee approach, clear process
Student	No involvement, trust others

This initial round found the faculty had several thoughts on the hiring of the university president, but it was obvious they all were not heard because of the approach the university used. The university used a committee approach that is the standard for most presidential searches, but it fails to account for all parties affected by the hire. This pattern continued with the staff themes,

where they felt unclear about the process and had minimal involvement in the entire activity. The student participant decided that involvement was not necessary for them and they needed to trust the individuals in charge of the search. The board members felt the process was executed well and it was clearly communicated to all those affected.

Secondary Coding and Themes

I then made a second pass through the initial coding to further identify key terms that capture what the participants were stating and that I used to identify themes (see Table 4).

Table 4

Second Pass Through Initial Coding

Participant type	Secondary code
Faculty	Influence
Staff	Transparency
Board member	Communication
Student	Awareness

The second pass identified further that the participants wanted to be involved in the process. There were competing views on the overall transparency of the process and the involvement of all those affected by a presidential hire. This leads to the point that the presidential hiring process needs to be reviewed to ensure completeness of the process, especially because of the ramifications of a good and bad hire. Using an interpretive, constant comparison process to determine the major categories, done through a series of compiling, disassembling, and reassembling data, I was able to perform data analysis that resulted in themes and concepts. After that, I reassembled these into patterns, context analysis, and comparisons. Upon interpretation, I found the data fair, credible, and of value. I will use Chapter 5 to consider future research, new concepts, substantive propositions, and generalizations for broader

situations. The emerging themes include key factors, shared influence, succession planning, and recommendations.

Theme 1: Key Factors

All the participants gave insight into what they believed to be key factors in selecting a university president. Whether they were a board member, faculty member, staff member, or student, they all gave insight into key factors. This finding helped to identify what these key actors believed to be important when selecting the next president. Regardless of position, these participants gave insight in their answers to the qualities that they value in leadership of a university. One faculty participant said the following when asked about key factors that should determine who to select as the president:

First and foremost, I believe that leadership is the most crucial factor in selecting a university president. As the face of the institution, the president must be comfortable interacting with a diverse and broad range of constituencies, such as students, faculty, staff, alumni, parents, government officials, business and industry leaders, etcetera. The president must be a bridge between multiple worlds and the institution. An effective leader brings together those with different perspectives and diverse backgrounds and rallies them around a common cause—in this situation, the purpose is the advancement of the university.

I also strongly believe that academic credentials and business experience are a must. The primary purpose of a university is to provide a high-quality education to the next generation of students. Effective university presidents must have a strong understanding of academia, research, and practice. Ideally, a university president would have significant insight into establishing curricula, measuring academic success, and

innovation in research and educational application. In addition, a university president must have a strong business acumen to effectively manage the complexities of overseeing a large “company” with a significant workforce and large consumer base. A university is a business. A university must generate strategic plans, establish financial goals, hire and maintain superior faculty and staff, fundraise, etc. While the primary mission of every university is to promote learning, this is heavily dependent on the financial standing of the university and its ability to achieve a healthy financial status.

A president must be personable. A president must be empathetic and sympathetic to a myriad of issues while maintaining a high and visible level of values and morals. While many CEOs can sit in their “ivory tower” and manage a company, a university president must utilize a “Lincoln-style” of leadership and be “among the people” to truly understand issues and build a strong organizational foundation.

The majority of the participants, regardless of role, shared key factors that included academic experience, character, transparency, and proven track record. Another faculty participant spoke to these factors with this response regarding key characteristics of a president:

A proven record of success, people person, portrays a positive image, aware of the importance of a balanced budget, innovative, supportive of faculty and staff, good listener, team player, willing to make changes, willing to go against the norm, and fair.

This was further confirmed by a staff participant’s response:

I believe the president of the university should be chosen on factors including someone who has a proven track record to be able to handle the demands and make crucial decisions that a president will face. Another factor would be for the president to have a

passion for the institution that he would be leading. A third factor of the president should be great communication skills, one-on-one as well as speaking in front of groups.

There were over 20 key factors that emerged from the 19 interviews that I conducted. These factors gave insight into expectations of the participants as it relates to what they find important in the role of the university president. These ranged from education, experience, confidence, adaptability, fund-raising, and many more. The array of factors that each participant found important did not correlate to the amount of input they had in the actual selection of the university president. These key factors were represented by all respondents regardless of position.

Theme 2: Shared Influence

Shared influence was an overarching theme throughout all 19 interviews whether the participant believed there should be more influence among key actors or not. Some interviewers believed there should be representation from all stakeholders, while others put more of an emphasis on using an outside party. The participants were asked how much faculty and staff attitudes, needs, and desires play in the hiring process, and the responses varied from not at all to a great deal. More than one participant stated that faculty and staff should play a “major role” in the hiring process of the next president. While one staff member stated:

I think it is fair for faculty/staff to have a voice and a role to some degree in the hiring process, but you have to be careful. The position of the university president is a very vital position. So many factors play into hiring a university president.

A board member affirmed this statement by responding “heavily, but not exclusively. Faculty and staff should be a part of the process in formulating qualifications. However, faculty and staff should not be involved in the politics of the decision as to who is hired.” The participants were

then asked to share insights into the influence of top administrators and board members in the decision to hire a president, where one faculty member responded with the following:

I believe that the opinion of faculty/staff and students during a presidential search should carry a significant amount of weight. Top-level administrators and board members should seek to gather a quality candidate pool of diverse applicants and then trust the search committee process. Board members do not engage in the day-to-day operations of a university. Top-level administrators are not “in the trenches” and may be blind to certain areas for growth and development at the institution. Top-level administrators, and board members, should be able to provide feedback on candidates to the search committee.

One staff member remarked that they “believe top administrators and board members are ultimately who the overall decision falls on. They should listen to concerns from those under them and ultimately pick the best person to fit the university.” Another board member stated that “board members should have a strong influence on hiring a president. Hiring and firing a president is one of the key roles of serving as a board member.”

A major part of this theme was whether or not each participant thought their voice was heard during the presidential hiring process. Most participants felt like their voice was heard during the process, while some felt like they had no say at all. The involvement level varied from no involvement to serving on the hiring committee. More than half of the respondents had no involvement when it came to the selection of the university president. More than half of the participants also stated that they made no effort to make their voices heard.

There is a mixed message of the level of shared influence that is needed to select and hire a university president. While there was a majority of noninvolvement, most of the participants stated that there should be some level of shared influence among all key stakeholders. This was

either through an open forum or top administrators seeking out the opinions of the stakeholders. The data suggest that there is an argument for what level of shared influence should be deployed when going through a hiring process.

Theme 3: Succession Planning

Participants were asked, “What plans are currently underway in succession planning in anticipation for the current president’s potential departure?” There was a mix of answers ranging from no involvement to not worrying about the plan. The common thread among all participants is a lack of knowledge of a clear plan should the president decide to leave. The answers varied based on which key stakeholder (student, faculty, staff, or board member) gave the response. One board member acknowledged the fact that the president would be leaving when stating, “None, of which I am aware. However, our board understands that our president will be looking at retirement in the next five years.” Another board member had the following answer:

The current president has several years left on his contract and I am happy with the job he is doing. As such, I think we are too far away to plan a potential departure or transition plan. Also, I believe the current president intends to retire from the institution. In other words, we do not anticipate him leaving for another position at another university.

There were different responses when it came to staff members. One staff member responded:

I am not in a position that would be developing such plans. However, as an employer, I do believe there should always be a list of possible candidates that you could start with if you lose an employee. The president position would be no different.

This is a parallel to the board members’ comments that stated that there was no need for a plan. Another staff member spoke that they “have heard rumors that someone is being groomed but are not sure.” Multiple staff members were not sure if there was a plan at all.

The student participant referred to the board when they responded, “When the board meets, they will vote on what criteria is needed to upload the application to higher education job sites. The board of trustees must meet and vote on a potential applicant.” A staff member agreed with this line of thinking when they said the following:

This is above my pay grade, but I like to believe that the board of trustees is always looking to the future to plan what will happen to a university. Hopefully they are tracking alumni who are in the field and curating relationships with the others who they believe would be a fit to the university.

These different stakeholders have a wide variety of opinions as it comes to the succession plan for the future of the university. While the stakeholders were all different in their opinions, they all seemed invested in the process based on the other answers. It was interesting to see the level of confidence between board members and other stakeholders.

Theme 4: Recommendations

Almost all the participants had recommendations when asked, “What suggestions would you make to improve the process of hiring a university president?” One faculty member said that they would:

Ensure that the search committee is appropriately staffed with a diverse population that is representative of all university stakeholders. Include local business leaders and government officials with strong ties to the institution. Be as transparent as possible with the public during the search process and issue regular updates on the process.

Another faculty member said:

Ensure that the faculty senate president has a direct involvement all along the way.
Provide a forum by which faculty and staff can participate in surveys related to the

process and also provide a forum by which the faculty and staff can have Q&A sessions with the top candidates and then provide their feedback via their faculty and staff senate presidents to the Board of Trustees.

This was confirmed by a different faculty member when they stated to “have open interviews with faculty, staff, and student groups.” Further, the recommendations continued when a faculty member suggested that “the process should be a joint one, where all persons potentially affected by the hiring of a new university president have a voice in the process.”

The staff suggested that “all possible candidates be considered inside and outside the university, counsel should be sought from an expert outside the university and the university political circle, and there should be a consensus among senior leadership.” Another staff member said:

The best process to ensure that everything is done right is to bring in a firm that can conduct the search and then also do the interviews. I think this is the best way to remove any inherent bias that may exist toward a candidate that a board or administrators may already be familiar with.

One staff member confirmed the involvement of all stakeholders when they stated that “several different hiring committees to sit in on the beginning stages of the interview process. From student body to faculty and staff and even members of the community.” This theme continued when one staff member suggested that the university:

allow the faculty and staff an outlet to present their concerns and suggestions on important factors for the position. Not necessarily let them have a say in picking the person but allowing them to feel a sense of being heard on important issues. I think this will make it easier for an incoming president to win them over and get the entire

university pulling in the same direction. The student supported a similar line of thinking, stating that there should be involvement from top administration and board members to avoid bias.

One board member stated the following in regards to this question:

I believe the process used was effective. A search firm was hired to help attract candidates. I think hiring the search firm to assist with the process is important because you have the peace of mind in knowing you have done all that can be done to attract the best possible candidates. Also, the search committee went into the process without any preconceived notions of who would be the next president.

In my view, the most effective way to make the process work well is to make the job appealing to the highly qualified candidates. This work is done while the current university president is in office. If everyone works to ‘raise the bar’ during the current administration, the hiring process will go more smoothly during the next transition because the applicant pool will get stronger with each transition.

The last board member followed this response with stating that “the Board should take suggestions from faculty, staff, students, alumni, and supporters on the parameters and qualifications for a president. This is one decision where a mistake cannot be made.” There is a consensus that there is improvement to be had in the process of selecting the university president.

Findings Related to News Articles

After reviewing the news articles, there was confirmation that a presidential search did take place and a candidate was selected. The article covered some of the key factors that were mentioned from the participants regarding experience, accolades, and overall ability. The articles also mentioned a nationwide search for a candidate, a hiring committee, and various campus

representatives. This helped to solidify there was some level of participation from several key actors, but did not mention student involvement.

Findings Related to Board Minutes

After reviewing the board minutes, there was no mention of involvement from faculty, staff, and students. There was no mention of open forums, surveys, or other attempts to gain knowledge or insights from key actors. This could be because there was not a necessity to talk about the process during the meeting and this was handled from the search committee that was mentioned in several interviews. These minutes did confirm there was a presidential search that resulted in the hiring of one of the candidates.

Summary

In this chapter I introduced the study, starting with a review of the research questions that were investigated. I then went into the process that was used to conduct the research and execute the case study that provided the interviews, news articles, and board minutes. Furthermore, I discussed four major themes that emerged from the case study and indicated how the data supported these themes. In Chapter 5, I will discuss the findings, implications for presidential hiring, recommendations for action and further study, and provide reflections and conclusions.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The primary purpose of this case study was to examine the data and provide context on the hiring practices of university presidents. The reason for conducting this research was to study and assess the effectiveness of current procedures that are used to recruit/hire presidents in higher education. More specifically, this study seeks to ascertain the influences of governing boards on hiring decisions related to the president at a rural, Division II institution of higher education located in the southeastern region of the United States, and to determine the influence that faculty, staff, and students have on selecting presidents. Three research questions guided this study:

Q1. What are the institutional processes associated with selecting a new president and what preparations are being made in anticipation of having a president leave very soon?

Q2: What institutional actors have the most influence on the decision process?

Q3: Are these processes the best approaches to selecting a college president?

This case study included analyses of data collected from faculty, staff, students, and board members from a four-year public university in the South. I collected this data through semistructured interviews, board minutes, and articles. I then used Yin's (2016) five-step method to analyze the data. I identified several emerging themes that helped illustrate the factors that influenced the hiring of a college president as well as key insights into the process.

This chapter presents the interpretation of the research findings and related recommendations. The specific implications of the major themes are addressed, and recommendations for action regarding hiring practices of university presidents are identified. I will finish by providing reflections and conclusions.

Interpretation and Implications of the Findings

The findings of the research bring to light the importance of involving faculty, staff, students, and board members in the hiring of a college president. The interviews showed a contrast between clear process and transparency when it comes to the approach of interviewing and selecting a college president. This case study showed that while there were several similarities between participants when it came to what they were looking for out of the process, there is still room to improve the overall involvement considering the expected return on investment of hiring a college president. Furthermore, this particular college has a president that is approaching retirement age, and the importance of succession planning was seen throughout the majority of participant responses.

According to the 2017 American College President Study (ACPS), roughly 58% of college presidents are over the age of 60. Among these presidents, 44% stated there is a lack of time to think and reflect, which is a key frustration. This survey identified budget/financial management, fund-raising, managing a senior team, board relations, and enrollment management as the areas that occupy the bulk of a college president's time. Jonathan Gagliardi, associate director of the American Council on Education's Center for Policy Research and Strategy, stated the following:

Today's college and university presidents understand the need for institutions to become more dynamic and efficient. They recognize that the success of a new generation of leaders will hinge on the development of holistic resource strategies and a commitment to diversity and inclusion. More presidents will have to double down on data-informed decision making to guide their institutions through transformational change. (ACPS, 2017, para. 8)

The need for a dynamic president has led to two out of three presidents being hired through the utilization of search consultants. This is in the wake of fluctuating worker tenure among U.S. workers. Between 2000 and 2014, there has been the most substantial increase in average job tenure in the United States among workers. This claim is supported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (U.S. Department of Labor), which shows a median job tenure increasing from 3.5 years to 4.6 years before settling in 2016 at 4.2 years (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). This provides context into what we are looking at in terms of college presidents where there was a significant increase of workers before a slight decline between 2014 and 2016.

Although the average job tenure of workers in the United States increased between 2000 and 2012, there was a significant decline in tenures of college presidents between 2006 and 2011 (American Council on Education, 2007, 2012; Monks, 2012). These statistics set the stage for the need to study succession planning and retention in higher education.

Several factors are considered when discussing the shorter tenures of college presidents. The first one to consider is how the position has increased in complexity and evolved (American Council on Education, 2007, 2012; Song & Hartley, 2012; Tunheim & McLean, 2014). There have been studies done, including Carey (2014), Eddy (2012), Jones and Jackson (2014), and Tekniepe (2014), that agree the role and position of college president has transformed in terms of responsibilities and complexity. A gap in the preparedness for the position of college president, faculty and staff pressures, student population and governing board members, and positional strain have been identified as some of the significant factors in the decline of presidential college tenures in the last half decade (McNair, 2015; Song & Hartley, 2012; Tekniepe, 2014; Trachtenberg et al., 2013). Coupled with the decline in funding, pressure to increase tuition, and

overall demographic changes, these findings show that now more than ever it is important to select the correct person to lead a university in the future. Using the four themes that have been determined through this study as a framework, there can be future research to see how to better use influence from all stakeholders at a college or university.

The findings of this study help answer the guiding research questions. These questions can be used as a baseline for further research at other institutions and provide a foundation for a broad study done around other universities. At this college, there were processes in place associated with selecting a new president, but it was unclear the preparations that were being made for when that president departed. While the board members seemed to have a great grasp on the plans, there was a common theme that other key influencers were not being clearly communicated with about the process. This leads to the second question about who had the most influence on the decision of who to hire. At this particular university, the board of directors had the final decision on who was hired, but there were key individuals selected to be a part of the process. However, it was clear while there was representation, all the participants did not necessarily feel like their voices and opinions were heard.

The final question helps determine how one defines success. If the process ending in the selection of a new college president is the determining factor, then this particular approach was successful. However, considering the implications that come along with hiring a new president (CEO) and the expected return on investment of this position, I would have to say the process needs improvement. With a lack of clear communication between all stakeholders and an apparent need for shared influence, there is room for improvement. This was shown throughout the interviews and even when analyzing supporting documentation such as news articles. Table 5 shows how the themes connect to the research and findings.

Table 5*How the Themes Connect to the Research and Findings*

Themes	Research	Findings
Key factors	American College President Study 2017 (ACPS)	The participants identified several key factors that provide context into what they are looking for in a college president.
Shared influence	Northouse (2015); Carver, 2010	It was clear that while there was representation that all the participants did not necessarily feel like their voices and opinions were heard.
Succession planning	American Council on Education, 2007, 2012; Monks, 2012	At this college, there were processes in places associated with selecting a new president, but it was unclear the preparations that were being made for when that president departed.
Recommendations	Carey (2014); Eddy (2012); Jones and Jackson (2014); Tekniepe (2014)	With a lack of clear communication between all stakeholders and an apparent need for shared influence, there is room for improvement. This was a theme in recommendations of a majority of participants.

Recommendations for Action and Further Study

This research could be applied in several real-world situations when college and universities are planning to pursue a new leader. The biggest takeaway from this study is the ability for shared influence on the process. This can be accomplished by assigning committee members to collecting information from other members of the university community, such as faculty, staff, and students. There could also be more information gathered from the key stakeholders through surveys and town hall–type meetings. Once the process begins, institutions

could consider holding open interviews of candidates to help the stakeholder's voice their concerns and be involved. Finally, having a succession plan in place is crucial, but also communicating that to stakeholders so they have confidence in the future of the institution is also important.

Further research could consider expanding the population to different levels of the Carnegie Classification. This would help display the difference based on financial status and overall availability of resources. This case study could be used to study a specific population that was included, such as faculty insights versus staff insights. In terms of succession planning, further research could examine succession plans of different universities and see where there may be room for improvement and also examine the motivations of college and university presidents to retire and their perception of how the institution should handle succession planning and replacing them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the process of planning and hiring a college or university president is one that should involve shared influence from stakeholders. Colleges and universities need to define key characteristics through a process of involving stakeholders and looking for organizational fit and an individual who will lead the university to lasting success. Also, there needs to be transparency in the succession process of a president so there is trust from all stakeholders in the future planning of the institution. Full transparency will involve recommendations from stakeholders in how to improve the overall process of hiring a new president. With the impending departure of college and university presidents around the nation, the results of this case study need to be applied now more than ever.

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Appendix A: Research Site IRB Approval

May 14, 2020

Mr. Clifton Skeeter Sellers

Re: XXX IRB Protocol #20-66, "A Qualitative Case Study on the Hiring Practices of the President at a Four-Year Public University in Alabama"

Dear Mr. Sellers:

Thank you for submitting your application for exemption to the XXX Institutional Review Board. The IRB appreciates your work in completing the proposal. Your proposal was evaluated in light of the federal regulations that govern the protection of human subjects and qualifies for exemption of review as a case study.

The IRB has determined that your proposed project poses no more than minimal risk to the participants. The information will be obtained in such a way that one's responses will not be linked to one's identity or identifying information. Moreover, accidental disclosure of the participants' responses would not have the potential to harm to the person's reputation, employability, financial status, or legal standing. For these reasons, the XXX IRB has determined that your proposed study is exempt IRB review.

Your application will expire on May 14, 2021. Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact me.

Sincerely,

XXXXXX XXXXXXXXXX

Chair, Institutional Review Board

Office of Sponsored Programs & Research The University of XXXXXXXXXXXXX

Appendix B: ACU IRB Approval

Dear Skeeter,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled (IRB# 20-070) is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects. If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable. I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth, Ph.D.

Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

Appendix C: Research Study Solicitation Letter

Hello,

My name is Skeeter Sellers, and I am a doctoral student in the Organizational Leadership program at Abilene Christian University. I am reaching out to you to invite you to participate in a study on the hiring practices of college and university presidents. This study is important as it will provide information about the hiring process and help to gain insight for governing boards to use when selecting a candidate to serve in this capacity.

Participation in this study requires that you participate in an interview. The interview will be conducted either zoom or via phone and will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes and will be accommodated to fit your schedule. Any identifying information will be removed from the final documents and analysis.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please respond to xxxxxxxxxxxx@xxxx and state, "Yes, I wish to be included."

Thank you,

Skeeter
Doctoral Student

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

1. What factors do you believe should be used in determining who to select for a university president?
2. What plans are currently underway in succession planning in anticipation of the current president's potential departure?
3. How much should faculty and staff attitudes, needs, and desires play into the hiring process?
4. How much influence should top administrators and board members play into the decision to hire the latest president?
5. What was/would be your involvement in the hiring process of the university president?
6. What methods did/would you use to make your voice heard during the hiring process?
7. How much do you think your thoughts were/would be weighed when hiring the president?
8. What suggestions would you make to improve the process of hiring a university president?