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Leaders Wanted! The Skills Expected and Needed for a Successful 21st Century Historically Black College and University Presidency

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Abstract

This study examines the 21st-century Historically Black College and University (HBCU) presidency. First, we gathered information on the skills needed for the 21st century HBCU president. Then, we examined the background of future HBCU presidents. Through an analysis and discussion of the responses of current HBCU presidents, trustees,[1] and presidential search consultants, we determined what skills are pertinent for HBCU presidential hopefuls to attain. Lastly, we made recommendations, based on our findings, regarding the skills needed for HBCU presidential aspirants to not only reach the presidency but to perform well upon doing so.

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Higher education in the United States is complicated and vast. There is not an overarching system of higher education as in most countries. Instead, the United States offers public, private, and for-profit institutions—roughly 4,000—that boast a variety of missions, are of various levels of selectivity, and range from very small (100) to over 100,000 students. The college and university president is a staple role of leadership in higher education, both practically and symbolically. He or she leads the institution and is the living logo for it. Increased attention has been paid to this position in recent years as many presidents in the baby-boomer generation are expected to retire within the next decade (ACE, 2012; Burton, 2003; Keith, Brodie, & Banner, 2005). Particular interest has emerged in the presidency within the Historically Black College and University (HBCU) sector—a sector of education, defined by the federal government in 1965, with a historical legacy of uplifting and empowering African Americans (Gasman, 2007). Much like the rest of the higher education landscape, HBCUs are experiencing the challenge of the graying of the presidency (ACE, 2012). However, presidents at HBCUs tend to be older, on average, than their Predominantly White Institution (PWI) counterparts and also experience turnover at a quicker rate (Freeman & Gasman, 2014). The pairing of these two issues draws necessary attention to how new leaders will be identified for institutions that serve a population crucial in establishing a globally competitive workforce and strengthening the national economy. In addition, issues such as board relations, high turnover, lack of resources, and a shift to outcomes-based funding models all play a role in how future HBCU presidents will be prepared and identified (Fort, 2013; Schexnider, 2013; Wilson-Mbajekwe, 2006).

Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs)[2] will prove critical to ensuring that the United States reaches its 2020 college degree attainment goals set forth by President Obama's administration. More specifically, HBCUs play a crucial role in providing access to low-income, first-generation students as well as being among the top producers of Black graduates. It is imperative that the sustainability and efficiency of HBCUs be a priority. Identifying and preparing high-performing presidents will be key in accomplishing said sustainability. A key part in guaranteeing the high performance of HBCUs is ensuring current and future leadership are well equipped and well prepared to lead. In order for this to occur, the skills needed for a successful HBCU presidency must be identified and understood. Because of the important role of HBCUs in the preparation of global leaders, as well as degree attainment for low-income, first-generation, and African American students, and the dearth of literature pertaining to the decision-making around the selection process of HBCU presidents, we think it is important to investigate this important subset of college and university presidents.

Although there has not been a lack of individuals who are interested in serving as presidents at HBCUs, questions remain regarding the preparation of aspirants (Freeman & Gasman, 2014). Recently appointed presidents have come from a diversity of backgrounds including the public and private sectors, with an increasing number being women (ACE, 2012; Burton, 2003; Keith et al., 2005). Little is known regarding the perspectives of those who have the primary responsibility of participating in the decision-making and selection process of HBCU presidents. As authors, we think it is important to hear these leaders' voices and consider them alongside existing research on the college presidency (Freeman & Gasman, 2014). This information will also be useful to aspiring HBCU presidents, search firm consultants, scholars, and those generally concerned with the advancement of the HBCU academic sector.

Given the lack of attention in research on college presidents to the HBCU community, the objective of this study was to uncover the perspectives of HBCU presidents, board chairs, and search firm consultants[3] regarding the background, skills, and attributes that future HBCU presidents will be expected to have. The research question that guided this study was:

Research Question 1: What skills will future HBCU presidents need to have in order to be successful and effective leaders?

In this article, we gathered information on the skills needed for the 21st-century HBCU president. Then, we examined the background of future HBCU presidents. Through an analysis and discussion of the responses of current HBCU presidents, trustees, and presidential search consultants, we determined what skills are pertinent for HBCU presidential hopefuls to attain. Last, we made recommendations, based on our findings, regarding the skills needed for HBCU presidential aspirants to not only reach the presidency but to perform well upon doing so.

Literature Review

This literature review addresses the HBCU presidency, HBCU presidential skills, and the characteristics and grooming of HBCU presidents. Through this review, we provide an understanding of the current research landscape pertaining to HBCU leadership in addition to the areas where research is needed.

The HBCU Presidency

The characteristics of the HBCU president have changed over time. In the past, HBCU presidents suffered from stereotypes of being autocratic and

rigid (Gasman, 2011; Hamilton, 2002; Wagener & Smith, 1993; Whiting, 1991). This stereotyping has often been made with little evidence and void of context (Gasman, 2011; Minor, 2004; Willie et al., 2006). The existing body of literature on HBCU presidents and leadership is minimal (Freeman & Gasman, 2014). Although there is still much to learn and understand about this group, we do know some information about this population.

Universally, college and university presidents are expected to raise money, have strong programs, and have philosophical positions on key higher education issues (Keller, 1983). More than half of the presidents at HBCUs (54%) have been in their offices between 6 and 15 years. For the same tenure span, 48% of the presidents at PWIs have been at the same jobs (Nichols, 2004). Nichols (2004) highlighted the unique characteristics that are needed of HBCU leadership and governance. He stated that presidents of private colleges need to be effective at fundraising while those at state colleges need to be effective in federal and state government circles to ensure that the policies put into place are beneficial. This is true for leadership at most institutional types (Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin, 2005). HBCUs, however, must be able to be effective and skilled in this area while attempting to inform and work through historically constructed lenses of their institutions being inferior and outdated (Gasman, 2011). HBCUs, whether private or public, must have leadership that can both advocate and generate funding. Leaders cannot afford to focus on one skill over the other. Public policies often affect all HBCUs, regardless of their being public or private. It is important that current and future HBCU presidents be able to effectively communicate with faculty, students, administrative staff, support staff, community organizations, alumni, policy makers, and other stakeholders in their institution's community (Evans, Evans, & Evans, 2002; Nichols, 2004). Current and forthcoming HBCU presidents must balance HBCU traditions and create a contemporary defining role in higher education for their institutions (Minor, 2008).

HBCU Presidential Skills

Freeman and Gasman (2014) found that the unique challenges that HBCU leaders face necessitate a specific skill set. HBCUs are not monolithic and span various Carnegie Classifications,[5] such as community colleges, liberal arts colleges, and doctoral research institutions. The unique tie that binds them together is the expressed mission to serve Black students. A few studies examine the skills leaders of these institutions need to have to be successful. Buchanan (1988) surveyed HBCU presidents, and they expressed the importance of being a visionary, leading in a crisis, developing an

administrative team, providing strategic foresight, working with multiple constituencies, mentoring and developing other leaders, and securing external funding. And Herring (2010) found that presidents need to have the skills to address such challenges as recruiting and retaining students, managing their time, keeping campus morale high, leading change, and balancing their institutional budgets.

Freeman and Kochan (2012a) also found that 21st-century presidents need to develop knowledge in the areas of the history of higher education, self-awareness regarding their public image, and be able to deal with ambiguity. Competencies associated with a successful presidency include being able to assess and hold a leadership team accountable and being able to speak and write to multiple audiences in diverse venues. It is important that potential presidents display these skills and competencies prior to assuming an HBCU presidency. Intentional grooming and mentoring is an essential element for potential HBCU presidency as they develop the skills expected for that position.

Characteristics and Grooming of HBCU Presidents

In a recent study, Freeman and Gasman (2014) gathered information on the background of current HBCU presidents and inquired whether these presidents are mentoring others for future presidencies. Freeman and Gasman interviewed 10 presidents in this qualitative study. Each of the 10 presidents said that they were grooming young people for the job of president. Of note, the male HBCU presidents tended to groom men and the women tended to groom women for the job. Those individuals being groomed were in their late 30s and early 40s and had held several academic positions. Most of the presidents were grooming between two and three people at a time. Grooming and mentoring activities included professional introductions, job shadowing, problem-solving sessions, fundraising shadowing, and personal and professional advice. All of the presidents shared that HBCU presidents have to have specific attributes, including confidence, the ability to take risks, organization, the ability to inspire, and strong negotiating skills. Although these presidents acknowledged that these attributes cannot always be learned, they did feel that the competencies needed to be a successful president could be gleaned from experiences and grooming.

Freeman and Gasman (2014) suggested that the tendency for HBCUs to recycle presidents as well as the disproportionate presence of long-term leaders was problematic. They were encouraged that grooming of future presidents is taking place, but concerned that it is not systematic and would benefit from deeper thought and commitment. Moving forward, more must

be understood about the leadership styles, challenges, triumphs, and decision-making processes of HBCU presidents. An increased understanding of the HBCU presidency will aid in an increased understanding of selecting an HBCU leader.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that helped to guide and inform our analysis in this article was Charan, Drotter, and Noel's (2001) Leadership Pipeline Model. Originally developed as a theory to help corporate leaders facilitate the professional growth and development of staff, this model introduces six career passages or pipeline turns that help organizations in succession planning. Passage 1 says that an employee moves from managing oneself to managing others. Passage 2 then states that the manager develops skills in such a way in which to take on the enhanced responsibility of managing other managers. In Passage 3, the expectation is that the managers hone their skills to the extent that they not only manage others but also serve as functional managers. Whereby, they develop skills to lead in areas that are outside of their original areas of expertise. In Passage 4, the expectation is that the managers make the transition from only focusing on managing certain functions to managing various business functions. This stage is important because the manager is expected to think more strategically across functional areas and to take into account the long-term benefits of decisions for the organization. The next passage is from business manager to group manager. The manager at this level views issues holistically, evaluating strategy, and coaching managers. And the last transition is from group manager to enterprise manager (CEO/president). The focus of this management transition focuses on visionary and global thinking. Important skills include developing a strong leadership team and inspiring the entire organization. This level is the hardest level to prepare for because the focus is not on skill development but a change of mind-set and values.

This model is helpful in shaping questions for a social sector such as higher education. In this study, we focused on the final two passages of Charan et al.'s (2001) Leadership Pipeline Model: Passage 5 becoming a group manager (vice president) and Passage 6 becoming an enterprise manager (college/university president). Passage 5 is directly applicable to this study as it helps us understand the critical skills, knowledge, attributes, and experiences that a potential president must obtain before assuming an HBCU presidency. Passage 6 in the model provides us with an understanding of expectations of chief executive officer and the transition in mind-set and values. And this phase also emphasizes succession planning as a strategic imperative.

Method

The study used qualitative interviews to collect data. We chose qualitative interviews because they enabled us to achieve an in-depth understanding of the perspectives of current presidents, search consultants, and board members affiliated with HBCUs regarding the future of the Black college presidency. This research approach helped us to probe beneath the surface and gain rich context regarding the current and future state of the HBCU presidency (Zach, 2006).

The participant population for this study was current presidents, search consultants, and board members affiliated with HBCUs. These groups of individuals were chosen as the participant population because they are integral to the stakeholders in the hiring process of new presidential leadership at Black colleges and have participated in searches in some capacity in the past. To identify an adequate sample, we reviewed the U.S. Department of Education's White House Initiative on HBCUs listing of 105 member colleges and universities. From there, we contacted the offices of the presidents of these institutions and requested their participation in the study along with asking them to provide names and contact information for board members and search consultants who would be willing to serve as participants. Then each president was sent an email and called by telephone to invite him or her to participate in the study. Once the initial contact was made, a follow-up email was sent and a call by telephone was made to confirm the time of the interview with each participant.

Twenty-one individuals participated in the study. The participants included 16 current presidents, three board members, and two presidential search consultants. All interviews were conducted by phone. These open-ended interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes. Digital recorders were used for data collection purposes. An interview script was used throughout the interview process. Copious and detailed notes were taken along with an audio recording of each interview. Summary notes were recorded directly following each interview. The presidents' reactions and comments and the interviewers' preliminary thoughts on the emerging themes were recorded in the log as subscribed by Miles and Huberman (2014).

Following the initial interview, we reviewed the transcript and audio recording and constructed follow-up questions tailored to the individual presidents. These follow-up questions were used for the purposes of member checking and data validation. Follow-up questions were distributed via email. We did not conduct follow-up interviews with the participants as their hectic schedules hardly allowed for the initial interview we secured. Wolfe (2010) defined member checking as "a term used to determine the

trustworthiness of the data analysis" (p. 12). By using member checking, the presidents were able to review the notation from the previous interview to ensure that they correctly reflected the presidents' feelings and responses (Creswell, 1998; Wolfe, 2010). After coding the data, we engaged in what Patton (2002) described as analyst triangulation. This form of triangulation allows for the use of multiple (two or more) analysts to evaluate the study's findings. The study also used the traditional scientific research criteria perspective. The traditional scientific research criteria approach generally emphasizes rigorous and systematic data collection procedures, using multiple coders and calculating intercoder consistency to demonstrate the validity and reliability of theme analysis (Patton, 2002).

We think it is important to provide information acknowledging research bias. Three of the four researchers in this study have extensive relationships with HBCUs and their leaders. And one of us has attended and was employed at an HBCU during the time of data collection. All 105 HBCU presidents were invited to participate along with search firm consultants and board presidents who were identified as working with various HBCUs on presidential searches. The interviews were semistructured and focused on the potential background of future HBCU presidents and the skills they will need to possess. Our findings were triangulated with literature on the HBCU leadership and the college and university presidency and compared with statistical trends of presidential selections within the HBCU and general higher education sector.

Limitations

Due to the nature of qualitative research, generalizability is not possible. Instead we sought to uncover information that might be transferable. Although we attempted to include as many women participants as possible, only two participants identified as women (one president and search consultant). The inclusion of voices of woman presidents at HBCUs in research studies has been a challenge for various researchers. One of the reasons for this limitation could be a lack of trust of outside researchers and how the data that are collected will be used (Freeman & Gasman, 2014).

Findings and Discussion

We asked the participants what skills they thought HBCU presidents had to possess in order to lead HBCUs successfully into the future. Some of their answers are consistent with the literature on presidential leadership; however, much of their commentary was specific to HBCUs, and the unique culture and circumstances that they believe exist at these institutions. The seven

skills mentioned most by participants and explored below were vision, communication, fundraising, entrepreneurial disposition, the ability to understand and negotiate with faculty, board management, and collaboration. We share the detailed responses regarding the importance of these skills. In order to more fully understand and contextualize the findings, we have woven it together with our discussion. This strategy provides immediate context, comparison with the literature, and also notes how our work complements or differs from existing research.

Vision

HBCU presidents must have the ability to change agents and visionaries. This skill was often the first and foremost mentioned among those we interviewed. As Charan et al. (2001) suggested in Passage 6 (enterprise manager/ president) of the Leadership Pipeline Model, the values of the president must shift from one who just thinks strategically but engages in vision casting and viewing things from a global perspective. According to one president,

> It's not a job, it's a ministry. HBCUs were historically led by ministers and I think that leading an HBCU is redeeming, transformative and you need to be able to communicate to a larger audience that HBCUs are important. Early HBCU presidents saw their mission as being beyond just serving a population of young men and women who came in the door, they were going to become change agents and be able to transform.

Although this president defines change agent abstractly, other presidents were more concrete, specifically connecting presidential vision with goals and plans. One president noted, "Presidents need to be visionaries. They need to be able to set goals, plan and follow through." A search committee consultant agreed stating, "Presidents of HBCUs need to be visionary leaders, people who can begin to see what the future holds, prepare the institution for it and be able to get others to buy into that vision."

Literature echoes that future HBCU leadership will need to be innovative and entrepreneurial in nature (Gasman, 2009; Gasman, Wagner, Ransom, & Bowman, 2010; Nichols, 2004). These leaders will also need to establish credible and prestigious personas in the African American community, which will aid in garnering support (Gasman, 2009; Gasman et al., 2010; Seymour, 2008).

Another president discussed the delicate steps that one has to take around the idea of vision—avoiding being too rigid and seen as not being collaborative:

When you interview for a presidency, people always ask "What's your vision?" While presidents should have a vision, it is dangerous for people to come into an institution with a vision without consulting and talking with people at the institution. Presidents have to show at least a semblance of listening and seeking input.

Communication

Another common theme focused on the ability to communicate with a diverse group of individuals. Charan et al. (2001) suggested when one earns a leadership position at Passage 6, he or she must be able to use a variety of communication tools to inspire his or her whole organization. All of the participants indicated that communication entailed qualities such as flexibility, versatility, accessibility, and ability to interact in various and diverse groups.

Diverse audiences. The ability to communicate with various constituencies is very important in being an effective HBCU president. According to a president of a large HBCU,

I've learned through lots of experience, good and not so good, you have to be an excellent communicator. You have to know how to communicate the message and also how to interpret the message so that people accept it. You have to be able to speak and listen. Interacting with constituents who do not always agree with each other, such as trustees, students, alumni and those within the community was also mentioned as essential. A president has to be like a politician.

The politics on campus are essential in terms of learning how to navigate them (Freeman & Kochan, 2013). According to several presidents, "A president has to understand the on-campus politics—the relationships with faculty, staff and students." Minor's (2004) work supports the idea that creating an atmosphere of shared governance and ground-up as well as top-down communication will aid presidents in learning more about their organizations.

Transparency. There were other, less frequently mentioned qualities that are associated with communication skills. One president emphasized transparency, stating, "There should be a quality of openness, honesty, and transparency." HBCU leaders find themselves battling negative stereotypes that paint pictures of them as autocrats and fiscally irresponsible (Gasman, 2011; Wagener & Smith, 1993). The ability to be transparent will aid in changing that perception. Another aspect of good communication is delegation that one president described, "You also have to know how to delegate authority and

responsibility. Good presidents have the ability to delegate authority and responsibility and yet still hold people accountable."

Social media. The theme of communication extends beyond those stakeholders most immediately related to the HBCU community. Interestingly, even though HBCU presidents participate in social media at a lower rate than presidents of majority institutions (Gasman & Bowman, 2011), most of the presidents we interviewed did see the value of strong communication skills in this era of new media. One president insisted, "Presidents need to have an understanding of how to engage the media, particularly social media." He was concerned that too many of his contemporaries were not engaging effectively or were resistant. Another president framed the issue this way:

> Presidents may or may not use social media themselves but they have to understand it in terms of how it can be applied to the institution as it relates to the various facets of operating a college or university. These areas include recruitment, retention, communication with faculty, communication with alumni and donors, and talking with external stakeholders.

Increased technology and new media is just one aspect of the rapidly changing environment that HBCU presidents encounter. Many college presidents across higher education are using technology and social media to engage with constituents and to communicate with the larger community—HBCU leadership must follow suit (Gasman & Bowman, 2013). As an example, one president said, "You have to understand that the curriculum is changing as is the way we deliver it." Some presidents placed an emphasis on understanding a broader context, both geographically and temporally. "You have to have a handle on globalization and technology. You have to understand the world at large."

Governmental relations. Respondents also stressed communication with policy makers overall, with a president noting, "Presidents need to be politically aware and know how to navigate state legislatures and Congress." Another added, "You have to understand the political arena that involves elected officials, governors, state senators, and congressional delegation members. Presidents need to be able to make an effective case for continued support of their institutions." Although there are many levels of government involved in setting policy, the bulk of public higher education funding and activity takes place at the state level (Bowen et al., 2005). Simultaneously, smaller regional institutions have to compete for state funding and attention, and often suffer (Bowen et al., 2005; Kane & Orszag, 2003). It is within this group of regional

public institutions that many public HBCUs are found. Willie et al. (2006) found that 29% of public HBCU leaders reported that relations with legislators and political officials occupied a significant amount of time. Therefore, for HBCU presidents, particularly public HBCU presidents, being able to be politically savvy is a much-needed skill for success.

Fundraising

One of the most frequent skills mentioned by those we interviewed were fundraising and funding expertise. For the past 20 to 25 years, college and university presidents have had to make fundraising an essential part of their job, taking them off campus more often than in the past (Freeman & Kochan, 2013). According to a search committee consultant, "The president is becoming more of an external position. Fundraising skills are essential. Yes, they have to have academic knowledge but they must be able to connect with their alumni and with their constituents." Charan et al. (2001) suggested that a transition in mind-set is needed when someone makes the transition into Passage 6 becoming an enterprise manager (college/university president). In this case, a person is moves from merely being concerned nominally with fundraising to having the function be a core and essential expectation within their job.

In the words of one president, "Presidents have to spend about 50% of their time fundraising." Another president noted,

> The number one thing that a president has to know how to do is raise money. The president has to be skilled enough that he or she can hire someone to do it or raise the funds themselves. And, even if you hire someone, you have to be involved in closing the deal and sometimes opening it.

This is a major skill HBCU presidential hopefuls should acquire as research has pointed out that many HBCUs often have neither the infrastructure nor tools necessary to have effective capital campaigning (Nichols, 2004). However, when certain Black colleges were afforded the tools to have stronger development officers, trained staff, technical staff, and professional staff, they have been able to dramatically increase advancement and alumni giving (Gasman et al., 2010).

Presidents need to be savvy in understanding basic funding operations (or structures) as well:

> HBCUs need people who can put their hands in people's pockets, and I don't just mean fundraising in the sense of appoint individuals and foundations but also the interface with government because increasingly a piece of the pie is the money that comes to us directly from government.

One president shared, "Some presidents get tripped up by funding from so many sources—state and federal budgets combined." He elaborated,

> You can be the best academician in the world but if you don't understand that the bottom line for your job as president is to always be looking at the funding source and looking at how monies are being expended the business will eventually go out of the business.

Presidents need a recognition and understanding of the political and financial environments within which higher education exists today.

Entrepreneurial Disposition

Entrepreneurial skills were also mentioned. According to a board chair, "HBCU presidents have to be more entrepreneurial and engage in public/private partnerships." Likewise, several presidents agreed with one of the board chairs' statement. "I think presidents will need to be entrepreneurial in the future. We need to be innovative." Another added,

> HBCUs need someone who can bring an entrepreneurial spirit to and approach to the institutions because business as usual is not going to work. You have to be open to trying new things and partnering with different entities to get things done.

Overall, HBCU presidents shared, "Presidents must be able to reach beyond the university campus and have the ability to win over people and to enhance relationships to grow the campus."

Possess the Ability to Understand and Negotiate With Faculty

Presidents must understand faculty, academic freedom, and shared governance. Most of the presidents that we interviewed stated that they respected the role of faculty and understood how it differed from that of administration. In one president's words, "Faculty members provide intellectual resources that are essential to the mission of the institution . . . No institution can be better than its faculty." Another president explained how the academic side of the university was very different for him, as he had come from student affairs,

> I worked in student services and taught a few classes but did not understand the whole academic process and how it worked. If you don't have the necessary support systems in place then you can't educate students. You need to understand academic freedom and disciplinary differences.

Minor (2005) noted that shared governance was considered important to a majority of faculty and administration at HBCUs. In fact, one of the major issues often discussed in HBCU leadership literature is that of shared governance (Nichols, 2004; Phillips, 2002; Pope & Miller, 1998). It is clear that to be successful, future HBCU presidents must know how to engage and support faculty. Charan et al. (2001) encouraged leaders who ascend to the Level 6 passageway to hone the skills of being able listen to, learn from, and inspire various constituents of their organization. This is definitely a prerequisite for leaders who want to serve as chief executive officers at HBCUs. One president explained the nuances of understanding faculty and their role at the institution:

> Presidents have to understand the role of governance and leadership of the institution as opposed to a supervisory or management role. I would much rather have people follow me because they see me as a leader trying to move them or lead them in the right direction as opposed to thinking that I'm just there to supervise them or stand over them and give them orders. That is an old model that should not exist anymore.

Board Management

Although not mentioned by all presidents that we interviewed, some presidents pointed to board management as an important skill to have in order to make sure the college or university runs smoothly. A president of a public HBCU stated, "I think the ability to work effectively with a governing board is vital. You have to realize that some of your board members are political appointees and they may just be on your board because they are donors." A search committee consultant recommended that presidents teach, advise, and strengthen their boards in subtle ways, "Presidents have to have an understanding of what boards do and how they may go about helping to strengthen the boards." Taylor et al. (1996) emphasized this point that in order for what they call the "new work" of the board to work, there has to be a sense of teamwork—internally and with the president. This approach will lead to a productive board and effective decision-making.

Collaboration

Those we interviewed stressed the need for collaborative leadership skills and how these skills lead to greater investment across constituencies and overall institutional success. One president told us,

> You have to be a collaborative leader. People want to be consulted. They want their voice heard. You have to consider other people's notions about what's right and what direction the university should follow. If you don't do this, the institution is going to perceive that you are jamming an agenda down their throats without conferring appropriately.

This is similar to what Charan et al. (2001) suggested; it is important to be willing to listen and learn from others within the organization. At the same time, establishing clarity about constituents' roles and responsibility was also considered important.

Further Skills

In addition to those ideas that were most common in our interviewees' responses, there were other skills that surfaced and that merit mention as they are important and are consistent with the overarching literature on college and university presidents.

Service

Presidents told us that one must be dedicated to service. One president stated, "When I came here I knew it was about service. We have gotten away from the notion of service. People who lead HBCUs have to be committed to service in a greater way than those at majority institutions." This statement corroborates with the comments of former Morehouse College president, Walter E. Massey (2006), who said, "Service is an important part of the mission and tradition of all colleges, especially historically black colleges and universities, and I believe it is a tradition we should continue" (p. 65).

Respect for Traditions

Having respect for the traditions of HBCUs was mentioned several times. While presidents thought it was essential to be innovative and entrepreneurial, they worried about new presidents losing focus. One president noted, "HBCU presidents need to think outside the box while also respecting the traditions of HBCUs. It's a delicate dance, but you can do both." Another president reminded us, "There are various schools of thought but I don't necessarily think that HBCU missions have to evolve. I think we need to drill down and really define what the mission is and how to fill whatever niche we have."

Data-Driven Decision-Making

Data are important for understanding and analyzing institutions. Both presidents and search firm consultants recommended a deep understanding of data and their use in campus decisions, especially decisions around students. One president adamantly told us, "You have to look at data and use it." According to a board chair, "You have to have a good understanding of analytics and evaluation. There is pressure on presidents to really make meaning of the data that they collect rather than merely collecting more data." Gasman et al. (2010) reiterated that HBCU leaders who not only collect data but use it to make decisions will be most successful.

Accreditation and Student Engagement

Two areas that are important to presidential success but were mentioned by only one president were accreditation and respect for students. One president told us, "Presidents must understand compliance. You don't worry about compliance until you don't have it. But an organization like the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools[6] can eat your lunch if you don't dot your I's and cross your T's." Although this is a vastly important area (Freeman & Kochan, 2012b) and can make or break a president, it was rarely mentioned. And, only the president whose background was in student services mentioned respecting students as a skill for new presidents. He said,

> I come from the student services area of the college so of course I'm always thinking about students and my focus is always on students. We spend a lot of money recruiting these students but we spend twice as much money if we let them leave and then try to get them back again.

This president was quick to tie respecting students to the overall institutional budget and expenditures.

Recommendations

Our study's participants provided great insight into the characteristics, skills, and preparation those desiring the HBCU presidency need to possess. Although the nuance of these areas is apparent from the responses, there were areas of consensus. Based on our findings, we provide the following overarching recommendations for presidents.

HBCU presidents will benefit from having a firm understanding of how to navigate fundraising for their institutions. Presidential aspirants should make sure to find opportunities to enhance and sharpen their skills in this area. This

should be limited to experiences connected not only to their occupations but also to their workshops, literature, webinars, and other professional development opportunities. Learning from current and former HBCU presidents with successful fundraising campaigns can prove beneficial. Fundraising skills cannot be only attained through relationships with presidents and attending workshops. Learning unique challenges as well as strategies from current development officers, particularly those at highly functioning HBCUs, assists in fundraising skill development. Being aware of the current giving and fundraising trends and environment across higher education as a whole and the HBCU sector in particular should be a priority (Drezner & Gupta, 2012).

Organizations and institutions interested in grooming strong leadership should consider organizing and facilitating workshops and training sessions around the area of fundraising. HBCUs should consider partnering with development and philanthropic experts in providing opportunities for current and aspiring HBCU leadership to learn and share fundraising challenges, strategies, and successes. This two-prong approach will help in providing those moving toward the HBCU presidency with the skills and experience necessary in the area of fundraising.

HBCUs as an institutional type and as specific institutions hold a unique history, mission, and culture. Future presidents of these institutions cannot merely respect these features; they must understand them and be knowledgeable of how to navigate and engage them in their work. It is impossible to effectively lead this set of institutions if a president does not intrinsically invest in the mission of HBCUs. HBCUs can aid in communicating their mission by being more proactive in the telling of their stories. This can be done through a variety of mediums, from websites, participating in research studies, social media, contributing op-eds to major and industry news outlets, taking part in national and international higher education conversations, and disseminating reports of data showing successes (Gasman et al., 2013). These approaches not only aid in bringing HBCUs' historical and contemporary successes to the forefront of higher education but also make this information accessible for those who may not be community insiders.

Although it is apparent that the best way for persons to understand HBCUs is to have direct experience within HBCU environments, additional opportunities for those who desire this knowledge must be created to increase the pool of knowledgeable, suitable candidates for HBCU leadership. Increased research, publications, and media representations of HBCUs that are both accurate and free of racist, inaccurate, stereotypical underpinnings will aid those outside of the HBCU sector to understand these institutions, their culture, and their unique identities (Commodore, 2014). Furthermore, organizations that look to increase leadership development in higher education must

partner with HBCUs. By doing this, persons who aspire to the college presidency will be well versed in HBCU culture.

Future Research

In this study, we gathered data to discover the skills needed for the 21st-century presidency. The research from this study is important because it provides HBCU presidential aspirants with information about the skills that individuals leading presidential searches tend to expect candidates to possess.

We recommend that future studies investigate further the role that mentoring by past and current HBCU presidents plays in the success of HBCU presidential hopefuls. Further investigation regarding the roles of higher education graduate preparation programs, leadership institutes, and workshops that were created to specifically prepare college and university leaders of color is warranted. Although we now have a better sense of the skills needed for an HBCU presidency, it is important to know the effectiveness of programs that purport to prepare these leaders for service in the HBCU context.

We want to emphasize that HBCUs need to support the work of scholars who research and address solutions that specifically shape their institutions. Solutions to the most vexing problems may never be found if those serving at these institutions are not empowered via financial resources, sabbaticals, and course releases to engage in this important work. The support and the development of higher education graduate preparation programs on HBCU campuses such as Jackson State University, Howard University, and Morgan State University will be critical in developing the next generation of scholars and practitioners armed with the tools to effectively lead and address issues having an impact on HBCUs.

Conclusion

There are many skills that future HBCU presidents need to master to be effective in this role. It will increasingly be important for them to be able to communicate the value of HBCUs to the larger public. Leaders of these institutions will need to be able to communicate their strengths in a global academic marketplace. In addition, aspiring HBCU leaders will need to be entrepreneurial in seeking funding outside of federal grants and contracts, as many of those resources are constrained. The ethical management and stewardship of financial resources will be critical to the success of these institutions, now and into the future. We believe that successful HBCU presidents will be those who not only have a healthy and sincere respect for the legacy and traditions of these great institutions but also are able to provide a compelling vision for

the institution that will make HBCUs competitive among institutions of higher learning internationally.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

Notes

1. Trustees are typically nominated by the president and confirmed by the board at private institutions and nominated and confirmed by the state's governor at public institutions. They serve a set term and their main role is to hire the president, provide monetary contributions or secure them from others, provide guidance on larger policy issues, and steward the larger financial stability of an institution.
2. Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) are defined by the U.S. federal government in various acts of legislation beginning in 1965. These institutions were either created for the express purpose of educating specific minority populations (African Americans and Native Americans) or developed based on changing demographics in the United States (Latinos and Asian Americans). MSIs include Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions, Predominantly Black Institutions, Native American Non-Tribal Serving Institutions, Native Hawaiian Serving Institutions, and Alaskan Native Serving Institutions.
3. Search firm consultants are particularly important as most individuals sought for presidencies do not apply for the position directly but instead are nominated by others or are sought out by various search firms. These organizations provide a first and sometimes second screening for institutions seeking a president.
4. Carnegie Classifications are used to differentiate the mission of institutions in the United States. All U.S. colleges are classified using this system.
5. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools is an accrediting organization and it accredits the majority of HBCUs, with the exception of those in the North, Midwest, and West.

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