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Academic backgrounds, career paths and presidential success: a mixed methods study of State University of New York presidents

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ACADEMIC BACKGROUNDS, CAREER PATHS AND PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESS: A MIXED METHOD STUDY OF STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK PRESIDENTS

by

Kishmar A. Best

A Dissertation
Submitted to the University at Albany, State University of New York
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Abstract

Higher education in the United States has grown from a single course designed to educate administrators and faculty to serve within colleges and universities, to a robust field of study with hundreds of graduate programs across the country. Despite a lengthy body of research on college and university presidents, there is little to no research that demonstrates the efficacy of higher education programs to prepare their graduates to serve as presidents. Additionally, an anticipated leadership shortage is on the horizon, as the current generation of presidents nears retirement age. It is important to learn more about the backgrounds of current presidents and to ascertain if there is a relationship between those backgrounds and success in the presidential role.

This study used a mixed methods research design, collecting qualitative data (academic backgrounds and career paths) from the curriculum vitae of presidents within the State University of New York (SUNY) and quantitative data (measures of institutional performance) from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Chi-square analyses were implemented to test if a relationship existed between highest earned degree, discipline of highest earned degree, career path and presidential success (measured by changes in enrollment, graduation rate, retention rate, bachelor’s degree completion rate and endowment) during each president’s tenure. Additional analyses were conducted to identify if any relationships existed between presidential backgrounds and the following variables: institution type, immediate prior role, state vs. local appointment, reason for departure and length of tenure.

There was no statistically significant evidence of a relationship between highest degree earned and presidential success, as measured by change in enrollment, retention rate, graduation rate and endowment during each president’s leadership. The study also found no statistically significant evidence of a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and
presidential success, as measured by change in enrollment, retention rate, graduation rate and endowment during each president’s leadership. Finally, there was no statistically significant evidence of a relationship between career path and presidential success, as measured by enrollment, retention rate, graduation rate and endowment during each president’s leadership. However, study found evidence of a relationship between a president’s highest earned degree and their career path. Findings also provided evidence of a relationship between the discipline of a president’s highest earned degree and their career path. Lastly, the study provided evidence that highest earned degree, discipline of highest earned degree and career path each have a relationship to the type of institution a SUNY president was appointed to lead.

Findings provide valuable information for a wide range of higher education stakeholders, including graduate program faculty, higher education graduate students, aspiring college/university presidents, board of trustees, and executive search firms/committees. Future research should explore a larger sample of presidents or another particular set of institutions. The study’s research questions may also be investigated using qualitative methods to learn more about president’s perceptions of their backgrounds. Finally, further investigation of the relationships identified in the study, and using other measures of presidential success would be insightful.

Keywords: presidential success, academic backgrounds, career path, college and university presidents
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the lineage of women in my family. Your sacrifices, perseverance and strength have allowed generations to dream for more. This achievement would not have been possible without the work ethic and resilience you have instilled in me and I am grateful and honored to carry your legacy.
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Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... ii
Dedication ....................................................................................................................... iv
Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ v
Chapter 1: Introduction ................................................................................................. 1
Problem Statement ......................................................................................................... 3
Purpose of the Study ....................................................................................................... 4
Research Questions ....................................................................................................... 5
Rationale ......................................................................................................................... 6
Significance ..................................................................................................................... 7
Chapter Two: Literature Review .................................................................................... 8
Doctoral Education & Graduate Study ........................................................................... 8
Higher Education Graduate Programs ......................................................................... 12
College and University Presidents .............................................................................. 16
The State University of New York (SUNY) .................................................................. 24
Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 28
Chapter 3: Research Methods ....................................................................................... 30
Research Questions ....................................................................................................... 31
Conceptual Framework ................................................................................................. 32
Research Approach & Design ....................................................................................... 34
Population & Sampling ................................................................................................. 36
Data Collection .............................................................................................................. 36
Data Analysis ................................................................................................................ 39
Validity ......................................................................................................................... 42
Summary ......................................................................................................................... 44
Chapter 4: Findings ....................................................................................................... 44
Sample ............................................................................................................................ 45
Academic Backgrounds ............................................................................................... 45
Career Path ...................................................................................................................... 48
Academic Background & Career Path .......................................................................... 49
Measures of Presidential Success ................................................................................ 56
Academic Backgrounds & Success ............................................................................ 57
Career Path & Success ................................................................................................. 77

vii
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Additional Analyses</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: Discussion</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Background And Career Path</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Analyses</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Research</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epilogue</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1: Introduction

Higher education became a part of a university curriculum in 1893, when G. Stanley Hall offered a course at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts (Goodchild, 1996). Hall created the course to educate and prepare administrators and faculty to serve within colleges and universities. Today, higher education in the United States has grown into a robust field of study. A demographic analysis of higher education graduate programs found that their missions focused on producing leaders for educational institutions rather than developing faculty or teaching (Jenson, 2013) and have been designed to meet the evolving needs (serving diverse student populations, executive leadership preparation) of future leaders in the field. Harris (2007) also writes that “As ever increasingly complex organizations, colleges and universities need prepared professionals who can assume leadership. Higher education programs provide these leaders and have done so historically”. Despite the focus of these programs, Freeman and Kochan (2012) note that research on leadership preparation within these programs is lacking.

Though the body of literature on college and university presidents is extensive, there is little research that examines the efficacy of graduate programs in higher education in preparing individuals to be successful college presidents. As the role of college president continues to become increasingly demanding and complex, the demographics of those currently serving in these roles indicate that a wave of retirements is on the horizon (Selingo, Chheng & Clark, 2017). Quinn (2007) previously discussed the pending leadership crisis, noting that, “the well-documented leadership crisis in higher education is not limited to single levels of leadership, such as the presidency, nor is it limited to particular institution types such as the community college. Rather, there is a shortage of qualified leadership candidates in many different areas of academe and, due to recent estimating retirement rates for administrators, this shortage may soon
worsen”. This anticipated widespread leadership vacuum highlights the need to learn more about the preparation and backgrounds necessary for future leaders to fill these roles successfully. However, it is unclear whether or not higher education graduate programs are adept at preparing successful presidents, which is the focus of this study.

The State University of New York (SUNY) is the largest comprehensive university system in the United States, comprised of sixty four campuses that include community colleges, technical colleges, university colleges, research universities and more. The system enrolls over half a million students and has over three million alumni. (Leslie, O’Brien, Schutte, & Zimpher, 2010). SUNY’s wide array of colleges and universities provide a unique context within which to address the research questions. According to Steck (2006), “New York contains the largest and most diverse higher education system in the country. No other state encompasses public and private sectors of such distinction and variety” (p. 290). The SUNY system is particularly diverse as a public system, given both its size and the mixed nature of its institutions – unlike some states which have a public community college system, state college system, and university system. Additionally, there is a need for further scholarly inquiry focused on the nation’s state higher education systems. Clark, Leslie and O’Brien (2010) write that, “Even though fifty state systems have driven the American higher education experiment in mass higher education and their combined students, faculty, and staff outnumber the population of most countries, their history is little studied” (p. xvi). The authors go on to note that despite SUNY’s size and accomplishments, it has a startling low profile within scholarly and policy literature. As public higher education continues to face challenges such as declining state support, shifting demographics and questions of their value, colleges and universities will require capable and well prepared leadership. To ensure the current and future stewardship of these institutions, it is
imperative to ascertain the optimal preparation for the presidency, and the first step is to learn more about the backgrounds of those individuals holding these roles now.

Problem Statement

Higher education graduate programs are ostensibly designed to prepare individuals to hold leadership roles within colleges and universities. Harris (2007) wrote that “As ever increasingly complex organizations, colleges and universities need prepared professionals who can assume leadership. Higher education programs provide these leaders and have done so historically (p. 42). However, it is unclear whether or not these programs actually prepare their graduates for successful leadership, more specifically at the level of college president. As the current generation of college and university presidents near retirement age, and the college presidency continues to grow into a more complex and demanding role, higher education may soon face a leadership crisis. Selingo, Chheng & Clark (2017) noted that little had changed since an American Council on Education study in 1986 that showed college presidents tended to be white men in their fifties. Moving to the present day, presidents are getting older and staying in the role for shorter lengths of time. MacTaggart (2017) also called for a new generation of presidents prepared to lead under disruptive circumstances, as the current group is largely in their sixties, and presidents can no longer expect to be appointed to lead adequately funded and stable institutions. A key step to filling these roles will be to identify the ideal academic and career backgrounds that prepare successful presidents.

This study sought to uncover the academic backgrounds and career paths of college and university presidents, specifically current and immediate past (non-interim) presidents of institutions within the SUNY system. The study also explored the relationship between academic and career backgrounds to success in the role of president, in order to examine the efficacy of
higher education graduate programs in preparing successful presidents. This research shed
important light into the preparation of college presidents and inform the pipeline of individuals
seeking to fill these crucial roles.

**Purpose of the Study**

This mixed methods study identified the academic and career backgrounds of current and
immediate past (non-interim) SUNY presidents. Next, the study investigated whether a
relationship existed between those backgrounds success in the role of president, measured by
enrollment, retention rate, graduation rate, bachelor degree completion rate and institutional
endowment. The study utilized a convergent parallel mixed methods design, in which qualitative
and quantitative data is collected separately and concurrently, analyzed separately and then
merged together for interpretation. Qualitative data was collected from curriculum vitae and used
to capture the academic backgrounds (highest earned degree/discipline of highest earned degree)
and career paths (professional roles leading to the presidential appointment) of current and
immediate past (non-interim) SUNY presidents. Quantitative data collected from the Integrated
Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) captured key metrics of institutional
performance, which this inquiry used to conceptualize presidential success. The IPEDS data was
used to identify changes in the institutional metrics of enrollment, retention rate, graduation rate,
bachelor degree completion rate and institutional endowment throughout each president’s tenure.
Additionally, data was analyzed to identify any relationship between academic background,
career path and each metric of institutional performance. Both qualitative and quantitative data
were collected in order to compare the two forms of data and provide greater insight into the
problem than would be obtained by either type of data separately.
**Research Questions**

This mixed methods study sought to answer the following research questions:

*Research Question 1:* What are the academic backgrounds of current and immediate past (non-interim) State University of New York (SUNY) presidents, specifically their highest earned degree and the discipline of their highest earned degree?

*Research Question 2:* What are the career paths of current and immediate past (non-interim) State University of New York (SUNY) presidents?

Additional research questions build on the findings of the central research questions and examine the relationship between the academic and career backgrounds of SUNY presidents to success in the role of president, as conceptualized as institutional performance.

*Research Question 3:* Is there a relationship between the academic backgrounds and career paths of current and immediate past (non-interim) State University of New York (SUNY) presidents?

*Research Question 4:* Is there a relationship between the academic backgrounds of current and immediate past (non-interim) State University of New York (SUNY) presidents and their success in the role of president, as measured by enrollment, retention rate, graduation rate, bachelor degree completion rate and institutional endowment?
Research Question 5: Is there a relationship between the career paths of current and immediate past (non-interim) State University of New York (SUNY) presidents and their success in the role of president, as measured by enrollment, retention rate, graduation rate, bachelor degree completion rate and institutional endowment?

Rationale

The rationale for this study stemmed from the need to learn more about the academic and career backgrounds of successful college and university presidents. As the current generation of presidents retire, these vacancies must be filled with qualified individuals prepared to lead within an uncertain environment for higher education. Lastly, there is a gap in empirical literature about college presidents, that examines if there is a relationship between academic background and career path to presidential success. There is also a need to establish whether or not higher education graduate programs are successful at accomplishing their stated goals. It is important to determine if higher education graduate programs are educating and preparing senior leadership, particularly within a current landscape of accountability and fiscal uncertainty. These programs must be able to demonstrate that their learning and post-graduate outcomes are being achieved.

The rationale for the context and population for the study, SUNY presidents, stemmed from the lack of current scholarly work focused on SUNY and a need to learn more about this particular group of college presidents. SUNY also offers a variety of institutional types and community settings to explore. A deeper understanding of these campus presidents will be informative to a wide range of constituents associated with public higher education in New York and the nation.

The findings of this research provide guidance for the work of higher education faculty, researchers and program directors as they design programs that prepare individuals for leadership
within higher education. Findings may also inform aspiring college presidents, board of trustees, executive search firms and other stakeholders that contribute to the selection of presidents.

**Significance**

The study is significant due to its potential to inform and impact higher education in the United States, both presently and looking toward the future, as it rapidly changes and evolves. The nation’s colleges and universities will require strong leadership to address a variety of challenges including rising costs and uncertain revenues, global competition, and rapid technological advances (Goldstein, Miller, & Courson, 2014). Additionally, as the nation and the student bodies of higher education institutions become increasingly diverse, it is important to diversify the ranks of leadership. Birnbaum and Umbach (2001) suggest that colleges and universities groom promising presidential candidates from underrepresented backgrounds by making them aware of the traditional requirements for the presidency and providing encouragement for their aspirations. An important step would be to “…uncover and correct any vestiges of the ‘chilly climate’ experienced by many women and people of color as they attempt to advance along the administrative career ladder (p. 214)”. By 2024, approximately 44% of college students will be of color (Gagliardi, Espinosa, Turk and Taylor 2017). Higher education institutions in the United States have a great deal of work to do in providing pathways for people of color and women, if they desire for the college presidency to reflect the diversity of their student body. As the current generation of college presidents nears retirement, it is imperative to replenish those ranks with individuals from diverse backgrounds who have the academic preparation and professional experience to be successful. This study further informs stakeholders and identifies pathways that currently lead to the college presidency.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

This study intends to fill specific gaps within empirical literature by investigating the academic backgrounds and career paths of college presidents within State University of New York, and then exploring if there is a relationship between those backgrounds and presidential success. This chapter provides a review of scholarly literature on four topics: i) doctoral education and graduate study, ii) higher education graduate programs, iii) college and university presidents and iv) the State University of New York (SUNY). The review of these topics serves to provide context and demonstrate the need for this research.

The purpose of doctoral education is discussed, including the motivations of individuals who choose to pursue the doctorate and specific challenges within education and higher education doctoral programs. The focus then shifts to higher education graduate programs, providing a brief history and overview of the current landscape, then discussing questions surrounding the mission and purpose of these programs. Next, literature on college and university presidents is presented to establish the current state of research regarding academic backgrounds and professional pathways to the role, before delving into questions surrounding the future of the college presidency. Lastly, the chapter outlines the history, mission and accomplishments of the State University of New York before concluding with a description of the study and how it contributes to the literature on the aforementioned topics.

Doctoral Education & Graduate Study

As the highest academic credential within a particular discipline, a doctoral degree represents a significant achievement. According to Stewart, Frasier, Sims and Denecke (2005), the doctorate is “…designed to prepare a student to become a scholar: that is, to discover,
integrate, and apply knowledge, as well as to communicate and disseminate it” (p. 1). Individuals pursue doctoral degrees for a variety of reasons. The literature on motivations to pursue doctoral study reveals several common themes. Hinkle, Iarussi, Schermer and Yensel (2014) investigated the motivations of students who pursued doctorates in Counselor Education and Supervision in the United States (CES) using Q methodology (a systematic study of participant perspectives via ranking or sorting of statements) to gather information from 35 students, counselor educators and practitioners. Four motivational themes emerged: to be a professor, professional status & security, to be a clinical leader, and to achieve success for their families and communities.

Ingram (2016) looked at factors considered by African American male doctoral students when deciding to pursue a doctoral degree. Participants completed a profile questionnaire of background information and additional data was collected via semi-structured interviews developed to explore their understanding and obtain descriptions of their lived experiences. Three main factors were identified: faculty encouragement, a desire to improve societal conditions for African Americans and to be an agent of change. Templeton (2016) researched the relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, the provocation to undertake doctoral study, dropout and the act of re-enrolling to complete a research doctorate. Findings were drawn from the author’s personal experiences and motivations and those of three others to undertake doctoral studies and the motivations to return after dropping out. Intrinsic motivations for learning ranged from family influence in academia, to positive experiences and fulfillment in school to intellectual stimulation. Extrinsic motivations ranged from the obtaining of research skills, social prestige, desire to be a professor and earning a higher income. Moreno and Kollanus (2013) researched the motivation of graduate students to pursue doctorates in computer science in addition to motivations in relationship to two different types of program models, the
traditional European model and the North American model. Interviews of 63 doctoral students from two universities, one in Finland and the other in Austria, identified 5 main motivational drivers. These drivers were academic career goals, professional development, career changes, employment opportunities and personal fulfillment. Additionally, students within the more structured North American model emphasized the value of a PhD for their career more than the students in the traditional European style programs, and emphasized their enjoyment of academic work or personal fulfillment.

Wellington and Sikes (2006) explored the motivations of students who chose to pursue professional doctorates at the University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom. The researchers collected data from 29 students and found that they sought professional development, personal satisfaction/intellectual challenge and job security. Leonard, Becker and Coate (2005) investigated the motivations of students in the United Kingdom to pursue doctoral study and their perceptions of the benefits gained and costs accrued from their experience. From a sample of 89 students, 87 out of 89 believed that obtaining a doctorate degree was worthwhile and 86 out of 89 stated that knowing what they know now, they would complete the degree again. Motivations to pursue doctoral study included personal development, intellectual interest, prestige/accomplishment, research experience, a job promotion. Hawkes (2016) also studied why students sought professional doctorates in the United Kingdom, to ascertain if student motivations aligned with the goals of education policymakers (who promoted professional doctorates as a way to address skill gaps). Participants listed personal, professional, research & learning related factors as their motivations in addition to career factors. Career factors included pressure within the field of education to hold a doctorate.
Tarvid (2014) explored the motivations of Latvian college graduates who decided to pursue PhDs, distributing online surveys to PhD students and candidates from 14 universities in Latvia and received 306 responses. The student’s motivations to obtain a PhD included career prospects, social status, better salary, availability of a scholarship and a saturation of bachelor & and master’s degree holders on the labor market. Of the respondents who mentioned labor market motivations, 50% were employed at a higher education institution, and described a PhD as necessary for advancement and a higher salary. Wiegerova (2016) explored the motivations for students who pursue doctoral degrees in the Czech Republic, interviewing 10 students who were also worked at universities. Students shared personal/academic development and a well-paying career in addition to external (fulfillment of someone else’s ideas, role model influence, financial income) and internal motives (desire to research, to be an expert in one’s field, desire to extend the student life) as motivation to obtain a doctorate.

Doctoral education is a key period of development for a scholar and professional. Brown (2008) states that graduate school plays a key role in structuring the mind and how one interprets and legitimizes facts, while Gardner (2009b) describes doctoral education as both personally and professionally transformative. Academic disciplines also offer unique sources of socialization and development for graduate students. According to Gardner (2009a) “Disciplines have their own particular qualities, cultures, codes of conduct, values, and distinctive intellectual tasks that ultimately influence the experiences of the faculty, staff, and, most especially, the students within their walls” (p. 386). There is debate (that falls beyond the scope of this research) as to whether education should be recognized as a traditional academic discipline. Nonetheless, education is a well-developed field of study with established graduate programs. Shulman, Golde, Bueschel and Garabedian (2006) write that 6,500 education doctorates are awarded
annually in the United States, but the field has “struggled to strike a balance between the practice of education and research in education” (p. 26), and to design doctoral programs that meet the needs of diverse student populations. They go on to describe education doctoral students as older, having careers prior to enrolling into a doctoral program, and typically pursuing the degree on a part time basis while continuing to work full-time. Walker and Yoon (2016) agree that education graduate students are unique, and the experiences of its graduate students usually not comparable to those of other doctoral students. Perry (2015) discussed The Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate, an initiative created to aid schools of education in defining their degree offerings and avoid “becoming increasingly impotent in carrying out their primary missions, the advancement of knowledge and the preparation of quality practitioners” (p. 57). Education doctoral programs face internal challenges centered on the quality and intent of their doctoral programs. Lastly, Guthrie (2009) believed it unrealistic for educational administration programs to both transmit knowledge and to prepare individuals for practice and research.

The research on motivations for doctoral degrees reveal that professional development, career advancement and employment opportunities are consistent drivers for students to pursue the doctorate, across multiple disciplines. It is imperative for education doctoral programs to demonstrate that they are successful in producing graduates who are prepared for scholarship and practice. This is particularly true for higher education graduate programs who are tasked with training the next generation of higher education scholars, administrators and leaders.

Higher Education Graduate Programs

According to Goodchild (1996), the first academic program for higher education as a field of study was launched in 1893 by G. Stanley Hall, who designed a curriculum to educate a new generation of faculty and administrators at universities in the United States. Goodchild
(2002) defined higher education as “sophisticated knowledge about and research on colleges, universities, and related postsecondary institutions, as well as the professional skills used by those people who work in them” (p. 303) and went on to state that the purpose of higher education graduate programs is to “educate and train professionals for administrative, faculty, student life, and policy analyst positions in the country’s approximately 4000 postsecondary institutions” (p. 303).

Higher education graduate programs have grown tremendously in number and scope since their inception, as the number of higher education institutions has increased in the United States. Jensen (2013) conducted a demographic study of higher education programs in the United States and found that 161 institutions offered a graduate degree related to higher education administration. The majority of mission statements contained language focusing on producing leaders within education institutions and systems rather than faculty development or teaching.

Harris (2007) conducted a review of higher education graduate programs and found that 94% were housed within schools of education, 73% at public institutions, and they predominantly offered three specializations: administration/management, college student personnel and community colleges. Additionally, the majority of the programs offered a PhD or EdD but not both and 89.5% of programs offered a master’s degree. Higher education programs are also available in non-traditional formats that cater to subsets of students who are professionally established and seek a credential specifically for professional advancement.

Forthun and Freeman (2017) conducted an analysis of executive higher education programs in the United States that featured cohort models and online and evening/weekend coursework offerings. They recommended that institutions invest in these programs in order to prepare leaders for cabinet level positions in anticipation of leadership shortages in higher education due
to retirements of the baby boomer generation. According to Nadler and Miller (2007), about half of higher education programs recruit students nationally while the other half compete and recruit locally. The authors concluded that higher education programs must better outline their marketing goals and strategies to fall in line with other fields and disciplines.

However, though higher education as a field of study (and subsequently its graduate programs) has made great strides, there remain unanswered questions and room for improvement. Wright (2007a) discussed the state of higher education as a field of study and its progress towards becoming an academic discipline. The researcher concluded that additional insight and hard data is required to determine how well higher education programs prepare leaders for work in the field. Orr (2015) observed a 48% increase in university-based doctoral educational leadership programs from 1993-2003 but noted that this growth has come with questions of program purpose and quality. Card, Chambers and Freeman (2016) commented that there is no accepted knowledge base for higher education and research based teaching materials are limited. The researchers reviewed and compared the curriculums of PhD and EdD programs in the United States that offered concentrations related to higher education such as higher education leadership, student affairs, and community college leadership. After collecting data through questionnaires of higher education program directors, they found a clear and consistent core curriculum for EdD programs but not for PhD programs. The researchers concluded by calling for further study into the purpose of higher education programs and how they prepare students. A study by Bray (2007) previously explored the status of a core curriculum in higher education graduate programs by surveying program directors. Master’s degree programs typically required coursework on student development/student affairs, history of higher education, administration and assessment while doctoral programs required additional research.
and methods courses. Bray recommended further research into programs structure, requirements and core texts within higher education programs. Poda (2007) addressed student learning assessment in higher education graduate programs, advocating for all constituents (students, faculty and administrators) to play an active role and for programs to develop clear missions, established outcomes and comprehensive plans to assess both. Keim (2007) conducted a review of higher education programs identified as exemplary by 120 randomly selected faculty members nationwide and concluded that programs should focus on the recruitment of top faculty and establish curriculums that balance theory, research and practice in order to be successful.

Looking towards the future for higher education graduate programs, Wright (2007b) argued that higher education must take greater responsibility to communicate its mission and value to all constituents. She went on to state that higher education programs must better define the skills and competencies they provide and integrate technology and global perspectives to better prepare education leaders. Freeman (2012) reviewed the role and value of higher education leadership preparatory programs in order to provide recommendations for policy and practice to enhance their effectiveness. One of the key recommendations was to implement methods to assess student learning. He concluded by stating that, “Although higher education programs prepare potential higher education administrators, faculty, and policy makers, it is not generally known how they prepare leaders better for higher education leadership in comparison with their other disciplinary counterparts” (p. 5).

This conclusion has serious implications for the credibility and viability of higher education programs. Among the other areas of improvement and questions surrounding higher education programs (quality, core curriculum, assessment of learning, established base of knowledge), the ability of these programs to produce graduates prepared to serve as leaders
within higher education institution is particularly important. It is also noteworthy that 40% of college and university presidents have earned a doctoral degree in education or higher education (Freeman, 2011). These graduate programs must be able to definitively demonstrate that they are adept at preparing graduate students to be successful in higher education leadership roles.

**College and University Presidents**

The presidency is an appropriate place to investigate the effectiveness of higher education graduate programs in preparing leaders to serve within colleges and universities. Cohen and March (1974) describe the college presidency as “the highest status position that one can reach within the academic community. It is the end of a natural chain of promotion within an academic organization” (p. 16). According to Wessel and Keim (1994), the college presidency in the United States began at Harvard College in 1640 with the selection of Henry Dunster to lead the institution. Since then, the role of a president in colleges and universities has changed dramatically due to the demands of the field and society. Selingo, Chheng and Clark (2017) detail the evolution of the college presidency from the 1800s (typically a faculty member or clergyman who both taught and ran the institution) to the present (multidimensional individuals tasked with building partnerships and navigating academic & external constituents).

The preparation of presidents is an important area of inquiry as the field of higher education is expected to soon face a shortage of qualified individuals to assume the role. Ekman (2010) found that only 30% of chief academic officers, traditionally a stepping stone for the presidency, aspire to be college presidents due to the increasingly external orientation of the role. Additionally, the mass retirements of baby boomers will create a leadership vacuum, which may present an opportunity to diversify the ranks of institution leadership (Cook 2012). Perrakis, Galloway, Hayes and Robinson-Galdo (2010) noted that the United States, “lacks enough
qualified, interested, and prepared individuals to assume the number of presidential positions that will open once the current generation of college and university presidents retire” (p. 57). Travis and Price (2013) conducted a review of the literature on the job preparation and satisfaction of college and university presidents and found that the experiences and careers of presidents varied and paths were not well defined. They also commented that “a growing concern of many academic stakeholders is the preparation of college and university presidents to be effective leaders” (p. 2).

In light of the uncertainty around the next generation of college and university presidents, it is prudent to learn more about the academic backgrounds and professional paths of individuals who currently serve in the position. Literature on the topic provides some insight. Cohen and March’s (1974) seminal work explored the American college presidency, both the role and individuals who occupy it. They established a normative career path to the presidency, typically consisting of an academic appointment, followed by promotions to department chair, dean, academic vice president or provost and finally president. Moore, Salimbene, Marlier and Bragg (1983) studied the administrative careers of academic deans and presidents, developing career trajectories by establishing a series of sequential, commons roles that begin with a fixed entry point and culminate in a fixed top position. A questionnaire requesting biographical & employment items in addition to job characteristics and opinions on issues facing administration received responses from 162 presidents (and 647 deans). They found that the Cohen and March’s (1974) normative presidential path was only accurate when variations were permitted, and identified 15 variations of the career pathway. Lastly, the research identified the most common entry point (a faculty appointment) and called for further research to explore additional variables such as institutional type to learn more about presidential career trajectories.
Wessel and Keim (1994) sought to determine the career patterns of college presidents at private, doctoral granting, comprehensive and liberal arts colleges in the United States. They surveyed a sample of 291 presidents and collected work histories, tracing back to the first position outside of higher education or the 9th previous position. Wessel and Keim identified two career ladders leading to the presidency: the academic career pattern (faculty appointment, department chair, academic dean, academic vice president & president) and the administrative career pattern (extensive administrative experience, starting at mid-level and moving up until the presidency). 69% of presidents in the sample fell within the academic career pattern, while 31% fell within the administrative pattern. Lastly, 14 variations of the academic path and 7 variations of the administrative path were identified. Birnbaum and Umbach (2001) further developed to the line of inquiry on the professional path to the presidency. From a sample of over 2,200 presidents, Birnbaum and Umbach identified four paths to the presidency (scholar, steward, spanner, stranger) within two overarching professional trajectories (traditional and non-traditional). Scholars, synonymous with the normative path developed by Cohen and March (1974), are individuals with full time teaching experience within higher education who arrived at the presidency after successive administrative roles with increasing responsibility. Stewards are presidents who never taught within higher education and moved into the presidency after lengthy administrative careers. Both scholars and stewards are considered traditional presidents. Spanners are presidents who maintained a professional commitment to both higher education and other types of institutions/organizations throughout their career. Strangers are presidents who moved directly into the role from non-academic positions such as the military or political and have no previous experience in higher education. The researchers found that 89% of presidents followed the traditional path, for which the normative degree is a PhD or EdD. Lastly, they
recommended that aspiring presidents earn a PhD within the arts & sciences, gain full time teaching experience early in their careers and develop an administrative career with positions of increasing responsibility.

Looking closer at presidential paths outside of the traditional academic hierarchy, Woollen (2016) sought to gain insight on the career histories of six women college presidents who self-described their path as nontraditional. Through semi structured interviews, the presidents shared that their credentials and experiences were primarily questioned by faculty (who valued the academic route) and described an “entrepreneurial spirit” that guided them throughout their careers. They also spoke of the importance of understanding relationships and embracing additional responsibilities along the way. Risacher (2004) examined the extent to which college presidents with backgrounds in student affairs displayed the characteristics of effective presidents, seeking to test the viability of non-traditional paths. 45 presidents with former experience as a senior student affairs officer (SSAO) responded to a nationwide questionnaire and it was determined that they shared the characteristics of effective presidents. Two exceptions were that SSAO presidents were more likely to agree to being warm and affable and they are more likely to enjoy “stirring things up”. Risacher’s work provides reassurance to student affairs professionals with presidential career aspirations and also strengthens the case for SSAOs to be considered for presidential roles. Delabbio and Palmer (2009) explored the perspectives of college and university presidents from non-academic backgrounds in addition to those of the boards of trustees who hired them and chief academic officers who worked with them. The researchers interviewed these constituent groups, seeking to learn more about the opportunities and challenges experienced by individuals who transitioned to the university presidency from a career outside of academia. They found that the normative academic career
path is no longer the only or most preferred path to the presidency, and higher education leaders are expected to forge partnerships, develop an institutional vision and possess strong communication skills, financial acumen and political savvy. Themes that arose regarding nontraditional presidents included: an existing connection to the institution or mission, valuable non-academic experiences and skills, strong leadership teams to supplement the skillset of the president and the need to develop patience with the slow pace shared governance and academic decision making.

The growing complexity of higher education and questions around the pipeline of future college and university presidents make the preparation of college presidents an important topic to explore. Selingo, Chheng and Clark (2017) surveyed over 150 sitting presidents, conducted in-depth interviews with 24 presidents, and received over 800 presidential curriculum vitae seeking to provide a roadmap for how higher education can prepare and select the next generation of presidents. As higher education institutions face financial and demographic challenges, traditional pipelines to the presidency are in question, as many provosts lack the skill set or motivation to serve as a president. The researchers found that presidents viewed their role differently depending on the type of institution in which they served and the pathways for prospective presidents are increasingly complex, fragmented and overlapping. Recommendations for practice include providing training & leadership development for prospective leaders, be willing to look beyond traditional pathways, gain a better understanding of the president’s job among search committees and align short term tactics with long term strategies. They conclude by stating that “a wave of departures is expected to come among presidents over the next few years. Where their successors will come from remains a key question for governing boards and other key stakeholders on campuses” (p.20). Fleming (2010) also recommended improvements
for the search for and selection of presidents. In a study examining the faculty perceptions of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors of college presidents, Fleming surveyed over 500 faculty members across the United States and found that normative patterns exist for presidents that structure and regulate their day to day behaviors. One suggestion for practice was the development of a curriculum for future academic leaders and socialization to the normative structures guiding the profession.

Goldstein, Miller and Courson (2014) interviewed 14 sitting presidents to learn their thoughts on the state of higher education and challenges for the field, both in the present and future. The presidents described challenges such as rising costs and uncertain revenue streams within an environment of global competition and pressure to keep pace with technology. They also discussed the value proposition of higher education being under attack, outdated business models and disinvestment from state governments. Lastly, the presidents described higher education as being at a significant turning point with the current climate calling for “…a visionary, inspirational new leader, able to lead the cabinet, trustees, and entire campus community in new directions. He or she bears the pressure of paradigm change”(p. 6).

McTaggert (2017) echoes those conclusions, calling for future presidents to be enterprise leaders in order to successfully navigate their institutions. Enterprise leadership is defined as “the vigorous exercise of authority in guiding an institution through a comprehensive adaptive process that positions it to prosper in a competitive, fast changing environment” (p. 2). McTaggert highlighted a need to cultivate a new generation of leaders given that the current group of college presidents is nearing retirement age and concluded saying that the role of president is becoming more challenging but also more important. As mentioned above, Ekman (2010) also discussed the anticipated leadership crisis facing higher education institutions,
highlighting the lack of interest from current chief academic officers to assume the presidency. There has been an increase in the number of presidents with experience as non-academic vice presidents and backgrounds in business, government and the military. Ekman expressed concern about this trend, citing a need to ensure that the next generation of higher education leaders understand the core values of the field.

Ideally, higher education graduate programs would play an important role in socializing institutional leaders for work in the field, whether to serve as faculty, administration or leadership within colleges and universities. However, the body of literature specifically connecting higher education graduate programs and presidential preparation is limited. Freeman and Kochan (2012b) sought to understand the role of higher education doctoral programs in preparing presidents to address issues of assessment and accountability. They explored university president’s perceptions of the degree to which their doctoral programs prepared them for the presidency. Drawing from the American Council on Education’s survey of college presidents, the researchers collected data from 2,148 presidents (891 with terminal degrees in education or higher education). They found that presidents with education or higher education doctorates felt more prepared for accountability, assessment and enrollment management issues but less prepared for fundraising responsibilities. Freeman and Kochan (2012a) examined university president’s perception of the role of their academic doctoral program as it related to preparation for the presidency. The researchers noted that there is little to no empirical evidence which demonstrates that higher education graduate programs prepare higher education administrators better than other disciplines and little research on their value in preparing individuals for the presidency. Presidents revealed that their doctoral training developed their competencies in interpersonal development, personal attributes, management, and communications and identified
fundraising as an area for which they were not well prepared. Freeman and Kochan recommended that future research explore the perspectives of other institutions other than universities. A later study by Freeman and Kochan’s (2013) also called for further inquiry along the lines of institutional type. They sought to identify core knowledge and competencies needed for executive level leadership in higher education, as perceived by university presidents. A sample of 13 university presidents with degrees in higher education identified areas of essential knowledge (higher education history, higher education finance, complex cognitive thinking) and essential competencies (assessment/accountability, enrollment management, strategic planning, fundraising, writing to multiple audiences, speaking to multiple audiences, interpersonal skills) required for success as a president.

Hartley and Godin (2009) analyzed the career pathways, education and demographic characteristics of first time presidents at independent colleges and universities in the United States. The researchers used longitudinal data obtained from reports on the American college presidency produced by the American Council on Education from 1986 to 2006. They found that in comparison to the overall body of college presidents, independent college presidents were less likely to have previously been a chief academic officer, less likely to enter the presidency from outside of higher education and less likely to have been hired from within the institution they lead. In regards to education, 21% of presidents in the study earned their highest degree within the humanities or fine arts, while 35% earned their highest degree in education or higher education. Lastly, presidents in the study held an average age of 59, and were more likely than the national average to a woman but less likely to be a person of color. The study is one of the few that looks at both the professional path and educational background of college presidents. It also focuses the topic by looking through the lens of one particular type of institution.
These conclusions have implications both for higher education graduate programs and for the next generation of college presidents. Research on college president background and development typically focus on professional pathways to the role or academic preparation but not both. Additionally, there is a lack of empirical work exploring any connection between professional paths, academic backgrounds and success in the role of president. There is an important role for higher education graduate programs to play in developing the next generation of college and university leaders. However, it remains unclear whether these programs provide the best academic preparation for an aspiring president. This study sought to test the efficacy of higher education graduate programs in preparing college presidents. Lastly, there is a gap in the literature on presidential academic backgrounds and career path by various institutional types. Analyzing colleges and universities in the State University of New York (SUNY) allows for the examination of multiple institution types and provides nuanced and informative conclusions.

The State University of New York (SUNY)

Founded in 1948, the State University of New York (SUNY) is the largest comprehensive university in the United States. SUNY has awarded over 3 million degrees, enrolls approximately 440,000 students and employs 87,000 faculty. The university is comprised of 64 campuses that include a variety of institutions including universities, community colleges, technology colleges, medical schools and specialized campuses for optometry, ceramics, fashion, maritime training and forestry (Clark, Leslie & O’Brien, 2010). An 18 member (15 appointed by the governor) Board of Trustees provides oversight for SUNY and appoints the chancellor and senior administrative staff, who in turn manage the daily and strategic operations of the system (Dangler & Harris, 2018). The Board of Trustees also approves tuition rates and educational policy, allocates state funds, and administers labor contracts. However, individual campuses
manage their daily operations and hiring. Campus presidents are selected by their respective college councils and recommended to the SUNY board of trustees for appointment. Presidents are responsible for operating their campuses within the budget guidelines established by the trustees (Dangler & Harris 2018).

New York was among the last states to form a university system, as public higher education was seen as a threat to the many long-standing private institutions. Before SUNY was established, 32 public colleges existed in New York, acting independently and without coordination or statewide policy. Meanwhile, thousands of New York residents left the state every year to attend public institutions elsewhere. SUNY was initially created as a supplement the private colleges and universities that already existed in the state. In its infancy, SUNY was inhibited by an informal prohibition on raising private funds, which forced SUNY institutions operate without the support of endowments (Applebome 2010). Key events sparked tremendous growth for the university, including the passage of the GI Bill, the baby boomer generation seeking college education in droves, and the election of Nelson Rockefeller (a strong advocate for SUNY) as governor (Clark, Leslie & O’Brien, 2010). According to the Office of University Affairs and Development (1985), SUNY earned accreditation from Middle States Association during the 1950s and established the Research Foundation of the University, “a separate corporation empowered to receive funds from public and private resources and expend them for research or related purposes at the campuses” (p. 5).

In 1964, SUNY’s enrollment exceeded 150,000 students and the state legislature approved the creation of SUNY Construction Fund. This public benefit corporation became the
largest construction program in the history of American higher education. By the late 1960s, SUNY was well established. Steck (2006) described SUNY’s institutional profile at this juncture as “...a statewide system, comprehensive in its offerings; it was administered by an autonomous board of trustees appointed by the governor; health care education was enlarged; graduate and professional schools were expanded; four centers for graduate and professional education and research were created; former teachers colleges were converted to colleges of arts and sciences; a vast network of community colleges was expanded; a policy of free and then low tuition sealed an egalitarian commitment to access” (p. 293). SUNY is unique among state universities in that the system resides within the executive branch of government. While the legislature provides some oversight and accountability, the governor is the key policy maker for public higher education. The executive branch establishes budgetary and policy priorities, directs negotiations with faculty and unions, and articulates values/strategic direction for the state (Steck 2006).

SUNY has continued to thrive and be impactful in the present day. The system has established a strong academic and research reputation. Discussing the state of SUNY at its 60th anniversary, Leslie, O’Brien, Schutte and Zimpher (2016) stated that “Its research grants totaled almost a billion dollars annually, and the national reputation of several campuses indicated an increase in the quality of teaching, research productivity, and service that was the envy of many other state-supported systems” (p. 294). The system’s individual campuses each have unique histories and play important political, economic and social roles within their local communities. These institutions create jobs, stimulate consumer spending and drive real estate values (Dangler & Harris 2018). This reflects the vision of early trustees who rejected the concept of a flagship campus and believed in the benefits of a system with wide geographical reach across the state (Steck 2006). Former chancellor Nancy L. Zimpher described SUNY’s scope and impact saying,
“In many communities, a SUNY campus is the largest employer. No New Yorker is more than thirty miles from a SUNY campus, and our online learning consortium, Open SUNY, is now the largest in the world” (Leslie, O’Brien, Schutte & Zimpher, 2016, p. viii). Economic development was a strong focus during Zimpher’s leadership of SUNY (Applebome 2010). Zimpher strongly advocated for SUNY to serve the people and regions of the state and believed that “SUNY is supposed to bring doctors, nurse and teachers into underserved urban and rural neighborhoods, and create a wellness network to establish statewide health goals and programs in areas like obesity, smoking cessation and the prevention of chronic disease. It is supposed to do groundbreaking research in renewable energy and work with the state’s Smart Grid consortium to drive down energy costs” (p. 4.)

Due to its size, funding and economic impact, SUNY is an important political subject in the state. The system is often vulnerable to budget cuts, as the university is discretionary and has an alternative source of funding (tuition) that other state agencies lack (Steck 2006). SUNY constituents must fight for their budget like other agencies, particularly, since significant disinvestments in the 1980s. SUNY presidents play a key role in the financial stability of their institutions, serving as public spokespersons, advocates, and fundraisers. If the nationwide trend of declining state support for higher education continues, the president’s role will only become more important.

Despite SUNY’s rapid growth and achievements, Clark, Leslie & O’Brien (2010) write that “...SUNY sits low on scholars’ and New Yorkers’ horizons. Its late start, its low athletic profile, and the rich array of well-known private colleges and universities in New York, all contribute to a relative lack of scholarship on SUNY” (p. 314). The authors go one to note that the SUNY 60th Anniversary Scholarly Conference held in April 2009, “...was inspired by the
deeply felt need by the SUNY community that its history had to be told and preserved for future
generations of scholars and students” (p. 321). Faculty, administrators, students and others
gathered to celebrate the system’s accomplishments, offer critical examination, and stimulate
future scholarly interest in SUNY.

This study answers the call for scholarly work focused on SUNY, by identifying the
academic backgrounds and career paths of current and immediate past (non-interim) presidents
in the system. Selingo, Chheng and Clark (2017) argue that the college presidency is currently in
a state of change and that institutions are uncertain about the skill sets, backgrounds and training
future presidents will need to thrive. A clear picture of the individuals who current lead SUNY
institutions will provide important guidance to those responsible for filling these roles in the
future.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the motivations for and the role of graduate education,
specifically doctoral degrees. Common motivations for doctoral education include intellectual
growth, professional development and career advancement. Individual academic disciplines
provide their own socialization, training and development for graduates; preparing them to be
scholars within their field. Education doctoral programs seek to prepare researchers, practitioners
and leaders within education. Though there are questions surrounding the effectiveness of higher
education graduate programs, their stated mission and purpose is to prepare individuals to serve
as scholars, faculty, administrators and leaders within higher education institutions. However, it
is not clear that higher education graduate programs are more effective at preparing graduates for
roles within colleges and universities than other disciplines. As higher education faces an
impending crisis of leadership and questions of where the next generation of presidents will
come from, it is imperative to learn more about how well higher education programs prepare
graduates to lead colleges and universities. It is also important to learn more about the backgrounds and preparation of presidents that current serve the nation’s colleges and universities.

This study focuses on current and immediate past (non-interim) presidents within SUNY, in order to learn more about their academic backgrounds and career path to the presidency, and explore if there is a relationship between these variables and presidential success. It will present a necessary analysis to supplement existing literature. Previous studies on college presidents have not explored any relationship between backgrounds and success in the role. Selingo, Chheng and Clark (2017) write that presidential transitions stagnate the growth of an institution as presidential searches can take months and newly hired presidents typically undergo listening tours and strategic planning before taking action. This makes it crucial to appoint presidents who are prepared for the role and the right fit for their institutions. The analysis of academic background, career path, and presidential success will be used to explore the efficacy of higher education graduate programs to prepare individuals for leadership as college and university presidents. Higher education program graduates have typically filled lower and middle management roles but these individuals have begun to ascend to upper management roles, including the presidency, in recent years (Freeman, 2012).

The context and population of the study is also necessary as SUNY has not received significant scholarly attention, despite being the largest state university system in the United States. SUNY has also faced questions of purpose and mission throughout its existence. Former Chancellor Thomas H. Hamilton advocated for a mission focused on the democracy of excellence, the idea that education can help any person, regardless of socioeconomic background. In Hamilton’s 1959 inaugural address, he stated that, “The issue facing the people
of the state and Albany policymakers is whether this remains the mission they want to fulfill or whether, in a society that looks to private means to social ends, the university shall be simply a utilitarian service provider” (Steck 2006, p. 326). In the current landscape of higher education, public colleges and universities continue to face questions of their value, declining state funding and demographic trends that threaten enrollment. SUNY is no exception and strong presidential leadership will be necessary to articulate value of these institutions, lead advocacy for public resources/private fundraising, and creating strategic directions to ensure the continued success of the system’s campuses.

Findings will likely spark future research, such as comparing the perceptions of presidents on how their different education backgrounds/career paths impacted their presidential effectiveness, or how varying backgrounds & professional paths are perceived/value by search committees and board of trustees during the hiring process. Higher education graduate program faculty and administrators will gain insight on necessary changes to their curriculum & pedagogy. Lastly, findings will inform professional development practices for presidents, aspiring presidents and constituents responsible for selecting presidents.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

This chapter outlines the research methods implemented to conduct this study, which sought to identify the academic backgrounds and career paths of current and immediate past (non-interim) State University of New York (SUNY) presidents, and to explore any relationship between those backgrounds and career paths to presidential success. The research design, sampling method and participant criteria is detailed in addition to the procedures for data collection and data analysis. The chapter then discusses concerns of reliability and validity and how those concerns were addressed.
Research Questions

This mixed methods inquiry sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the academic backgrounds of current and immediate past (non-interim) SUNY presidents, specifically their highest earned degree and the discipline of their highest earned degree?

2. What are the career paths of current and immediate past (non-interim) SUNY presidents?

Additional research questions built on the findings of the central research questions and examined if a relationship exited between the academic and career path of SUNY presidents and their success in the role of president, as conceptualized as institutional performance.

3. Is there a relationship between the academic backgrounds and career paths of current and immediate past (non-interim) SUNY presidents?

4. Is there a relationship between the academic backgrounds of current and immediate past (non-interim) SUNY presidents and their success in the role of president, as measured by enrollment, retention rate, graduation rate, bachelor degree completion rate and institutional endowment?

5. Is there a relationship between the career paths of current and immediate past (non-interim) SUNY presidents and their success in the role of president, as measured by enrollment, retention rate, graduation rate, bachelor degree completion rate and institutional endowment?
Conceptual Framework

This research applies the scholar/steward/spanner/stranger model created by Birnbaum and Umbach (2001) as a conceptual framework to study current and immediate past (non-interim) State University of New York (SUNY) presidents. Birnbaum and Umbach’s research explored the professional career paths of college and university presidents in the United States. The research questions guiding the study were: 1) what are the alternative career paths followed by college presidents? 2) Is there a relationship between career path and institutional type? 3) Is there a relationship between the career path and personal characteristics of a president’s?

Birnbaum and Umbach operationalized the concept of presidential career path using the eight trajectories created based on yes or no responses to the following three questions: 1) Had the president previously served one year or more as a full time faculty member in an institution of higher education?, 2) Was the president’s position immediately before the presidency in an institution of higher education?, 3) Was the president’s next to immediate position before the presidency in an institution of higher education? Each president was organized into 4 career paths within two categories, traditional and non-traditional, as seen in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. Career paths. This figure illustrates the career pathways of college and university presidents](image)

**Traditional Presidents**

- Scholar
- Steward

**Non-Traditional**

- Spanner
- Stranger
The traditional category consisted of presidents “whose professional trajectory suggests a continued commitment to higher education” (Birbaum & Umbach, 2001, p. 205). Within the traditional category were presidents described as “scholars” and “stewards”. Scholars are individuals with full time teaching experience within higher education and whose two most recent professional roles were before the presidency were within higher education. This group corresponds with the answers yes/yes/yes to the operationalization questions. Stewards are individuals with no full time teaching experience within higher education but whose two most recent roles prior to the presidency were within higher education. These individuals moved into the presidency role after administrative careers in higher education and correspond with the answers no/yes/yes to the operationalization questions.

**Non-Traditional Presidents**

The non-traditional category consisted of presidents with careers that alternated between higher education and non-higher education roles or has no previous higher education experience prior to the presidency. Presidents in this category were described as “spanners” and “strangers”. Spanners maintained significant commitments to both higher education and other institutions and/or organizations throughout their career. They correspond with the answers yes/no/yes, no/no/yes, yes/yes/no, no/yes/no & yes/no/no to the operationalization questions. Lastly, strangers moved into the role of president from non-academic positions (for example business, politics, military etc.) and held no previous experience within higher education. This group corresponds with the answers no/no/no to the operationalization question.

Birnbaum and Umbach’s study provided important insight into the professional pathways leading to the college and university presidency. Their work also shed light into the relationship
between type of degree earned and the type of institutions that presidents lead. This current study built on the research of Birnbaum and Umbach to take their research a step further. It sought to explore if there is a relationship between academic background and career path to success in the role of president. The study also investigated if there was any relationship between an individual’s academic background and their career path to the presidency. Lastly, this research explored the effectiveness of higher education graduate programs to prepare graduates the highest levels of executive leadership at colleges and universities.

Though there is ample research on college and university presidents overall, literature focusing on the presidents of institutions within the State University of New York (SUNY) is virtually non-existent. There is also little to no research that examines if there is a relationship between the academic background and career path of a president and their success in that role. This study contributes to the body of research on college and university presidents, provided valuable insight that informs the pipelines to these roles, and provides guidance both for individuals seeking to serve as presidents and stakeholders charged with appointing presidents.

**Research Approach & Design**

This study followed a mixed methods research approach. Within a mixed methods research approach, the researcher collects and analyzes both qualitative and quantitative data, integrates or links the two forms of data within the study procedures and frames these procedures within a philosophical worldview or theoretical lens (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 5). The pragmatist paradigm, which is typically associated with mixed methods research, focuses on the consequences of research and is primarily concerned with the question being asked rather than the methods, and the use of multiple methods of data collection to inform the topic under study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).
There are four basic designs for mixed methods research: convergent parallel design, explanatory sequential design, exploratory sequential design and embedded designs. According to Creswell & Plano Clark (2011), each design is suited for a different purpose, rooted in different philosophical assumptions, and includes specific procedures. A convergent parallel design “occurs when the researcher uses concurrent timing to implement the quantitative and qualitative strands during the same phase of the research process, prioritizes the methods equally, and keeps the strands independent during analysis and then mixes results during the overall interpretation” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 71). Procedures for a convergent parallel design consist of collecting quantitative and qualitative data (concurrently but separately), analyzing both sets of data separate and independently from each other, merging the results at the point of interface and interpreting the extent to which the two sets of results converge, diverge, relate or combine to create deeper understanding of the topic (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

This mixed methods study followed a convergent parallel design to uncover the academic backgrounds and career paths of current and immediate past (non-interim) State University of New York (SUNY) presidents and to explore if a relationship existed between those academic backgrounds & career paths to presidential success. The mixed methods research approach allows for the combination of quantitative and qualitative data, which provides a more complete understanding of the research problem than either method alone. The convergent parallel design was chosen to guide the study as it is efficient (quantitative & qualitative data are collected simultaneously), intuitive, and grants access to the tools of both quantitative & qualitative techniques. The study collected and analyzed both qualitative and quantitative data to address the research questions. Next, the two sets of findings were merged to provide an interpretive analysis and comprehensive/descriptive summary of the data.
Population & Sampling

This study used a non-random, purposive sampling method to identify participants. Neuman (2011) writes that, “Purposive sampling is appropriate to select unique cases that are especially informative” (p. 268). The goal of this sampling method is to obtain all possible cases that fit a particular criterion. The overall population for this research was current and immediate past (non-interim) presidents of colleges and universities within the State University of New York (SUNY). In order to identify participants, the researcher reviewed the website for SUNY system administration to identify the campuses within the system. Then, campus websites were reviewed to identify presidents, and to collect contact information.

The selection criteria was as follows:

1. Participant is currently employed as the president of a college or university within SUNY
2. Participant is the immediate past (non-interim) president of a college or university within SUNY

Data Collection

Qualitative Data, Academic Backgrounds & Career Paths

Merriam (2002) outlines three major sources of data within qualitative research (interviews, observation and documents) and advises that a data collection strategy should be determined by the question of the study and which will provide the best information to answer that question. Bowen (2009) describes document analysis as a form of research in which documents are interpreted to give voice and meaning to the topic of inquiry. Documents are an efficient method to gather data as they are typically an accessible and reliable source of data. Lastly, documents may be used either as a primary method of data collection or as a compliment to other methods. There are three main types of documents: public records, personal documents
and physical evidence/artifacts. Personal documents are defined as first person accounts of an individual's actions, experiences and beliefs (O’Leary, 2014).

The qualitative data for the study was collected via document analysis of curriculum vitae (CV). The CVs of current and immediate past (non-interim) State University of New York (SUNY) presidents were reviewed to gain insight on their academic backgrounds (highest earned degree & discipline of highest earned degree discipline) and career backgrounds (scholar/steward/spanner/stranger) leading to the presidency. Curriculum vitae are first person, comprehensive summaries of career and academic achievement provided detailed and rich data to address the research questions. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research calls for collecting data within the natural setting and Merriam (2002) writes that, “The strength of documents as a data source lies with the fact that they already exist in the situation; they do not intrude upon or alter the settings in ways that the presence of the investigator might” (p. 13). Using presidential CVs allowed the researcher to collect the necessary academic and career background data as it currently existed, with minimal intrusion and time commitment to participants (an important detail since college presidents have many demands for their time and attention).

Quantitative Data, Presidential Success

Evaluating the success of a college president is not easy, as success is subjective and may be dependent on a wide range of factors, many outside of a president’s control. Bornstein (2003) writes that “Success in a presidency is hard to measure, and different constituents may have different expectations and standards by which they hold the president accountable” (p. 18). However, the literature on college presidents offers some guidance. Cohen & March (1974) outlined evidence of presidential success as described by presidents themselves. This evidence
included the following: fiscal (financial status of the institution), educational program (range or quality of education offerings), growth (physical plant, student body, faculty size), quiet (no student or faculty demonstrations or serious disruptions), quality of faculty (good or improved faculty), quality of students (good or improved students), respect of faculty, respect of students and respect of community (p. 44). Gagliardi, Espinosa, Turk & Taylor (2017) queried college presidents on the legitimacy of performance measures, asking them to score 11 separate measures ranging from student outcomes to securing research dollars. Presidents of public institutions ranked retention rates, graduation rates and minority student outcomes as the most legitimate performance measures, while US News & World Report rankings and awarded research grants were ranked as the least legitimate. Presidents of private institutions ranked retention rates, graduation rates and minority student outcomes as the most legitimate performance measures and agreed with the public institution leaders that US News & World Report rankings and awarded research grants were the least legitimate. Bornstein (2005) surveyed over 1300 presidents of 4 year institutions about their positions, backgrounds, and views on various issues confronting higher education. 75% of the 750 responses believed that colleges and universities should be more accountable for educational outcomes. They also named strong leadership ability, interpersonal skills, strong vision & fundraising as attributes of a successful president. Donnelly (1995) described 4 presidents characterized as successful, each of whom had served at least 15 years at the helm of their respective institutions. Each institution had maintained their enrollment in times of increased competition for students, strengthened academic programs, maintained or improved physical plant.

The literature implies that institutional performance is an acceptable measure of presidential success. Though imperfect and limited in scope, institutional performance provides a
measurable and objective method to evaluate a subjective concept. This research utilized enrollment, retention rate, graduation rate, bachelor degree completion rate and endowment to operationalize presidential success. The study observed changes in each measure of institutional performance during each president’s tenure as an indicator of a successful or unsuccessful tenure. More specifically, the research examined whether each institutional measure increased, decreased or remained the same during a president’s tenure. The study collected this data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), the primary source of postsecondary data collection for the National Center for Education Statistics.

**Data Analysis**

Creswell & Plano Clark (2011) write that data analysis in mixed methods research consists of analyzing qualitative data using qualitative methods and quantitative data with quantitative methods, before analyzing both sets of data using techniques that mix the data and results. Convergent parallel design procedures call for the separate qualitative and quantitative strands to be mixed during the final step of the research, after both have been collected and analyzed separately. This final step (mixing during interpretation) sees the researcher merging the results of each strand and “looking for convergence, divergence, contradictions, or relationships between the two databases” (p. 116).

**Thematic Analysis**

Though not as well-known as other qualitative analyses such as narrative or grounded theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006), thematic analysis (TA) is “... is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (p. 6)” that is appropriate for a wide range of theoretical perspectives and research focuses. It is useful as a method because it works with a wide range of research questions, can be used to analyze different types of data and both small
and large data sets and us sufficient to produce both data driven or theory driven analysis (Clark & Braun, 2013). Aronson (1995) outlines the overall steps that encompass thematic analysis. These steps are collecting the data, identifying and classifying patterns within the data, combining patterns into themes, building an argument for choosing the themes (via literature) and constructing a coherent storyline that shares findings and develops an interpretive understanding of the research topic. According to Clarke and Braun (2014), thematic analysis may be used inductively (where analysis is driven by the content of the data) or deductively (where data is analyzed through an established theory or concept). Additionally, they note that the final product/summary provides a rich description of a dataset that can identify key themes and patterns at the surface (semantic) or hidden (latent) level. Morphew and Hartley’s (2006) research provides an example of thematic analysis of data collected via documents. The researchers used thematic analysis to analyze patterns of difference within college and university mission statements and explore the relationship between rhetoric and institutional type. After reviewing over 300 mission statements from a representative sample of 4 year colleges in the United States, the researchers were able to code 118 distinct elements that appeared within them.

The qualitative strand of the study was analyzed using thematic analysis. The researcher analyzed the curriculum vitae of the SUNY presidents in the sample deductively, based on the conceptual framework of Birnbaum and Umbach (2001), and coding for patterns and themes at the semantic (explicit) level. Analysis began once the first curriculum vitae was collected, as Merriam (2002) recommends that qualitative data analysis be conducted simultaneously with data collection. This approach allows the researcher to make adjustments along the way and test emerging concepts, themes, and categories against subsequent data.
Guided by the work of Clarke and Braun (2014), the researcher followed the procedures for thematic analysis. The researcher fully immersed themselves into the data, reading and re-reading each item to become familiar with the content and note data points relevant to the research question. The next step was to generate initial codes from the data, identifying features of interest to the analysis. From here, the researcher began to organize the codes into potential themes, and considered the relationships between and within them. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), a theme identifies a meaning or pattern across the dataset and provides insight into the research question. It is important for a theme to stand alone, but also work together to form a coherent overall picture. Themes there then reviewed to ensure that they captured the most important aspects of the data, were relevant to the research questions, and were coherent and clearly defined. Next, the researcher defined and named each theme. Braun and Clarke (2006) advise that the name of each theme should be simple and capture the essence of what data it captures. Lastly, the final analysis was refined and fully drafted, in order to tell the story produced from the data.

Merging and Interpretation

The quantitative strand of the study encompassed the institutional performance measures of enrollment, retention rate, graduation rate, bachelor’s degree completion rate and endowment. Using IPEDS, the data for each metric was collected for the tenure of each SUNY president in the sample. The researcher used data from the first complete academic year following the presidential appointment to either the fall 2017 semester (for current presidents) or the academic year of a president’s departure (for immediate past presidents).

Once the academic backgrounds and career paths of the presidents in the sample were coded into groups, guided by the conceptual lens of Birnbaum and Umbach (2001), the groups
were analyzed in comparison to the institutional performance metrics in order to evaluate the success of the presidents within these groups. The two types of data are equally important to address the study’s purpose and to develop a more complete understanding (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Statistical testing was implemented to merge the two sets of data and to address the research questions. The chi-square test of independence allows a researcher to test the independence of two categorical variables (Levine, 2008, p. 477). The study used chi-square testing to uncover whether a statistically significant relationship existed between the following variables: highest degree earned/career path, discipline of highest degree/career path, highest degree earned/institutional type, discipline of highest degree earned/institutional type and between career path/institutional type. The final two research questions were also addressed using the chi-square test. Each institutional metric (enrollment, retention rate, graduation rate, bachelor’s degree completion rate and endowment) was observed at two points, the first full academic year following appointment and either the full academic year of departure or fall 2017.

**Validity**

Maxwell (2013) defines validity as the credibility or correctness of a description, conclusion, explanation or interpretation and describes two specific threats that a study must address; researcher bias and reactivity. Researcher bias entails the selection of data according to the researcher’s existing theory, goals or preconceptions or the selection of data that simply stand out to the researcher. Reactivity is the influence of the researcher on subjects or setting of the study. O’Leary (2014) advised to consider two key issues when specifically using documents, bias and latent content. One should be aware of potential bias on the part of the document’s creator/author and the researcher. Latent content refers to the style, tone, agenda, facts or opinion that may exist within the document beneath the surface of the text.
The researcher is a doctoral student at a SUNY university and an administrator within the higher education field. This meant that several of the research participants were familiar to the researcher and it was feasible for bias to creep into the study based on existing preconceptions, knowledge or opinions. To address this potential bias, the researcher used strategies drawn from the literature on research methods. The first strategy was to utilize rich data to establish the validity of findings and conclusions. Maxwell (2013) describes rich data as being detailed and varied enough to provide a full and revealing picture of the topic in question. The researcher emphasized using direct quotations and thick descriptive data from the text of the presidential CVs to support and guide all coding. CVs serve a specific purpose; to outline academic and career accomplishments. The researcher reviewed the CVs for that purpose only, and avoided drawing any conclusions beyond academic and career accomplishments, in an effort to limit potential bias. It is possible, but unlikely, that the CVs contained false information about the education and career paths of the presidents. Latent content bias was deemed to be non-issue since the documents were only reviewed for the “surface level” data of education and career accomplishments rather than any underlying information.

Due to the methods of data collection and the nature of the inquiry reactivity was not anticipated to a major threat to validity. The researcher did not seek data on experiences or opinions, but rather objective data about the academic background and career paths of the participants. This data was collected via documents, a method with low interaction between the research and participants. Institutional performance data (enrollment, retention rate, graduation rate, bachelor’s degree completion rate and endowment ) was collected from a public and reputable third party source (IPEDS) rather than from institutions or participants themselves. Maxwell (2013) also advises to ask others for feedback on conclusions to identify biases,
assumptions and check for flaws in logic or methods. This study will be conducted under the supervision of a committee comprised of faculty members and experienced researchers. The committee provided feedback on methods and conclusions throughout the duration of this research.

**Summary**

Using a mixed methods research design, this study sought to identify if a relationship existed between the academic background and career path of college and university presidents within SUNY, and their success as measured by institutional performance. The study also sought to explore the efficacy of higher education graduate programs in preparing individuals to serve as college presidents and to identify the academic and career backgrounds of presidents within SUNY. Data from the curriculum vitae of participants and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System was collected and analyzed in order to address the research questions. This chapter outlined the methods used to implement this study, including the conceptual framework and research design, procedures for sampling, data collection and analysis. The chapter also described threats to validity, including bias and reactivity, and the methods used to address them.

**Chapter 4: Findings**

This chapter presents the findings of this study, organized according to the research questions. First, the academic and career backgrounds of SUNY presidents are identified, addressing the first two research questions. Next, the results of hypothesis testing are presented to address the remaining research questions. The chi square test of independence was implemented to determine if there was evidence of a relationship between the following variables: academic background (highest earned degree & discipline of highest earned degree)
and career path, academic background (highest earned degree & discipline of highest earned degree) and success, and career path and success. Finally, findings from additional analyses are presented to provide further insight into the backgrounds and tenures of the presidents in the sample.

Sample

The sample of the study was comprised of 95 individuals who currently serve as presidents, or are the immediate past presidents of colleges and universities within SUNY. Of the 64 campuses within SUNY system, 7 institutions (medical schools and statutory colleges) were excluded from the study to ensure an equitable analysis. The 95 participants were sampled from the population of 114 presidents (current and immediate past) of the 57 remaining campuses. Interim and acting presidents were excluded, as individuals in these roles typically serve in a placeholder role, providing short term leadership and stability. Of the 95 participants, 52 are current presidents and 43 are immediate past presidents.

Academic Backgrounds

Research Question 1: What are the academic backgrounds of current and immediate past (non-interim) State University of New York (SUNY) presidents, specifically their highest earned degree and the discipline of their highest earned degree?

Highest Earned Degree

Initial Coding. The highest earned degrees of presidents in the sample were coded into the following groups, illustrated in Figure 2: Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Doctor of Education (EdD), Master’s and Professional Doctorate. The master’s degrees included three Master of Arts (MA) and one Master of Architecture (M.Arch). The professional doctorates included one
Doctor of Optometry (OD), one Doctor of Medicine (MD), one Doctor of Divinity (DDiv), one Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS), one Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA), one Doctor of Public Administration (DPA) and six Juris Doctors (JD). Of the 95 presidents in the sample, 57.9% (55) held a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) as their highest earned degree, 23.2% (22) held a Doctor of Education (EdD), 12.6% (12) held a Professional Doctorate and 6.3% (6) held a Master’s degree.

**Terminal Education Coding.** Next, the highest earned degrees of presidents in the sample were coded into the following groups, illustrated in Figure 3: Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Master’s degree, Professional Doctorate and Terminal Education. The Terminal Education group encompassed all PhDs in education or higher education and all EdDs in education or higher education. Of the 95 presidents in the sample, 43.2% (41) held a terminal education degree, 37.9% (36) held a PhD, 12.6% (12) held a professional doctorate and 6.3% (6) held a master’s degree as their highest degree.

**Terminal Higher Education Coding.** Finally, the highest earned degrees of presidents in the sample were coded into the following groups: Doctor of Education (EdD), Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Master’s degree, Professional Doctorate and Terminal Higher Education. The Terminal Higher Education group encompassed all EdDs and PhDs focused on higher education. Of the 95 presidents in the sample, 32.6% (31) held a terminal higher education degree, 44.2% (42) held a PhD, 4.2% (4) held an EdD, 12.6% (12) held a professional doctorate and 6.3% (6) held a master’s degree as their highest degree.

**Discipline of Highest Earned Degree**

**Initial Coding.** The disciplines of the highest earned degrees for the presidents in the sample were coded into the following groups: Business, Education, Higher Education, Humanities & Fine Arts, Law, Medicine, Religion & Theology, STEM (Science, Technology,
Engineering & Mathematics) and Social Sciences. From the sample of 95 SUNY presidents, 33.6% (32) earned their highest degree in Higher Education and 10.5% (10) in Education. Additionally, 18.9% (18) of presidents held their highest degree in the Social Sciences, 15.8% (15) in STEM, 9.5% (9) presidents held a degree in the Humanities & Fine Arts, 6.3% (6) presidents in Law. Finally, 3.2% (3) held degrees in Medicine and 1.05% (1) each in Business and Religion & Theology.

**Terminal Education Coding.** Next, the disciplines of the highest earned degrees for the presidents in the sample were coded into the following groups: Business, Terminal Education, Higher Education (master’s degree), Humanities & Fine Arts, Law, Medicine, Religion & Theology, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics) and Social Sciences.

From the sample of 95 SUNY presidents, 43.2% (41) earned their highest degree in Education (EdD or PhD). Additionally, 18.9% (18) of presidents held their highest degree in the Social Sciences, 15.8% (15) in STEM, 9.5% (9) presidents held a degree in the Humanities & Fine Arts, 6.3% (6) presidents in Law. Finally, 3.2% (3) held degrees in Medicine and 1.05% (1) each in Business, Religion & Theology and Higher Education (master’s).

**Terminal Higher Education Coding.** Finally, the disciplines of the highest earned degrees for the presidents in the sample were coded into the following groups: Business, Education, Terminal Higher Education, Higher Education (master’s degree), Humanities & Fine Arts, Law, Medicine, Religion & Theology, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics) and Social Sciences. From the sample of 95 SUNY presidents, 32.6% (31) earned their highest degree in Higher Education (EdD or PhD) and 10.5% (10) in Education. Additionally, 18.9% (18) of presidents held their highest degree in the Social Sciences, 15.8% (15) in STEM, 9.5% (9) presidents held a degree in the Humanities & Fine Arts, 6.3% (6)
presidents in Law. Finally, 3.2% (3) held degrees in Medicine and 1.05% (1) each in Business, Religion & Theology and Higher Education (master’s).

**Career Path**

*Research Question 2: What are the career paths of current and immediate past (non-interim) State University of New York (SUNY) presidents?*

The career paths of presidents in the sample were coded into the following groups, according to the conceptual framework of the study: Scholar, Steward, Spanner and Stranger. As previously noted, scholars are individuals with a full time faculty background and whose previous two roles before the presidency were within higher education. Stewards are individuals with no faculty experience and whose previous two roles before the presidency were within higher education. Spanners are individuals who have maintained significant commitments to both higher education and at least one other industry throughout their career. This encompasses one or more professional role outside of higher education or a professional shift to higher education from another industry (or the inverse). Lastly, strangers are individuals with no previous higher education experience before being appointed to the presidency.

Within the sample of SUNY presidents, 57.9% (55) followed the Scholar career path to the presidency and 31.6% (30) followed the Steward path. Only 7.4% (7) presidents followed the Spanner path to their presidential appointment and just 3.2% (3) arrived ascended to the role via the Stranger route. The vast majority of the sample (89.5%, 85) followed a career path considered “traditional” (scholar/steward) while only 10.5% (10) followed a “non-traditional” (spanner/stranger) pathway.
Academic Background & Career Path

Research Question 3: Is there a relationship between the academic backgrounds and career paths of current and immediate past (non-interim) State University of New York (SUNY) presidents?

Highest Earned Degree & Career Path

Initial Coding. The highest earned degrees of the 95 presidents that comprised the sample were organized according to the career path of each president (see table). Within the 55 presidents holding a PhD, 78.2% (43) followed the scholar path to the presidency, while 16.4% (9) followed the steward path and 5.5% (3) followed the spanner path. There were no presidents that followed a stranger pathway while holding a PhD. Of the 22 presidents holding an EdD, 63.6% (14) followed the steward path to the presidency, 27.3% (6) followed the scholar path and 9.1% (2) followed the spanner path. There were no presidents that followed a stranger pathway while holding an EdD. Among the 12 presidents holding a professional doctorate, 41.7% (5) were steward-presidents, 33.3% (4) were scholar-presidents, 16.7% (2) were spanners and 8.3% (1) was a stranger-president. Finally, presidents with master’s degrees were evenly distributed (2 each, 33.3%) among the scholar, steward and stranger paths. There were no presidents that followed a spanner pathway while holding a master’s degree.

Next, a chi-square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine the relation between highest earned degree and career path. The relationship between these variables was statistically significant, \( X^2 (0, N=95) = 43.895, p<0.01 \). Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between highest earned degree and career, variables are independent) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between highest earned degree and career, variables are not independent) was accepted. There is sufficient evidence of a relationship...
between the highest earned degree of a president in the sample and their career path to the presidency.

**Terminal Education Coding.** Next, the highest earned degrees of the 95 presidents that comprised the sample were organized according to the career path of each president (see table). Of the 41 presidents holding a terminal education degree, 53.7% (22) followed the steward career path, 41.5% (17) followed the scholar path and 4.9% (2) followed the spanner path. Among the 36 presidents holding a PhD, 88.9% (32) were scholar-presidents, 8.3% (3) were spanner-presidents and 3.1% (1) was a steward-president. Among the 12 presidents holding a professional doctorate, 41.7% (5) were steward-presidents, 33.3% (4) were scholar-presidents, 16.7% (2) were spanners and 8.3% (1) was a stranger-president. Finally, presidents with master’s degrees were evenly distributed (2 each, 33.3%) among the scholar, steward and stranger career paths. There were no presidents that followed a spanner pathway while holding a master’s degree.

Next, a chi-square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine the relation between highest earned degree and career path. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (9, N=95) =48.930, p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between highest earned degree and career, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between highest earned degree and career, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between the highest earned degree of a president in the sample and their career path to the presidency.

**Terminal Higher Education Coding.** Finally, the highest earned degrees of the 95 presidents that comprised the sample were organized according to the career path of each
Of the 31 presidents that held a terminal higher education degree, 64.5% (20) followed the steward career path, 32.3% (10) followed the scholar career path and 3.2 % (1) followed the spanner career path. Four presidents held an EdD as their highest degree, with 50% (2) following the steward career path and 25% (1) each following the scholar and spanner pathway. There were 42 presidents that held a PhD as their highest degree, 90.5% (38) of whom followed the scholar career path, 7.1% (3) followed the spanner career path and 2.4% (1) followed the steward path. Among the 12 presidents holding a professional doctorate, 41.7% (5) were steward-presidents, 33.3% (4) were scholar-presidents, 16.7% (2) were spanners and 8.3% (1) was a stranger-president. Finally, presidents with master’s degrees were evenly distributed (2 each, 33.3%) among the scholar, steward and stranger career paths. There were no presidents that followed a spanner pathway while holding a master’s degree.

Next, a chi-square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine the relation between highest earned degree and career path. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, \( \chi^2 (12, N=95) = 61.667, p>0.01 \). Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between highest earned degree and career, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between highest earned degree and career, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between the highest earned degree of a president in the sample and their career path to the presidency.

**Discipline of Highest Earned Degree & Career Path**

**Initial Coding.** The disciplines of the highest earned degree of the 95 presidents that comprised the overall sample were organized according to the career path of each president. There were 32 presidents that earned their highest degree in higher education. In this group,
65.6% (21) followed the steward career path, 31.3% (10) followed the scholar path and 3.1% (1) followed the spanner path. There were no presidents with a higher education disciplinary background that followed the stranger path. Ten presidents held their highest earned degree in education, with 70% (7) following the scholar path, 20% (2) following the steward path and 10% (1) following the spanner path to the presidency. There were no presidents with an education disciplinary background that followed the stranger path. Eighteen presidents held their highest earned degree in the social sciences. Among this group, 77.8% (14) followed the scholar path, 16.7% (3) followed the spanner path and 5.6% (1) followed the stranger path. There were no presidents with a social science disciplinary background that followed the steward path to the presidency. There were 15 presidents with their highest degree in a STEM field and all of them followed the scholar career path. Nine presidents held their highest degree in the humanities and fine arts. In this group, 66.7% (6) followed the scholar path, 22.2% (2) followed the steward path and 11.1% (1) followed the stranger path. There were no presidents with a humanities and fine arts degree that followed the spanner career path. Six presidents held their highest earned degree in law. Within this group, 66.7% (4) followed the steward path, and 16.7% (1) each followed the scholar and stranger path. There were no presidents with a law degree that followed the spanner path. Three presidents held their highest earned degree in medicine, with 66.7% (2) following the scholar path and 33.3% (1) following the steward path. There were no presidents with a degree in medicine that followed the spanner or stranger career paths. Finally, one president each earned their highest earned degree in religion & theology and business and they both followed the spanner path.

Next, a chi-square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine the relation between discipline of highest earned degree and career path. The relationship
between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (24, N=95)=75.159$, $p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and career, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and career, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between the discipline of highest earned degree and career path to the presidency.

**Terminal Education Coding.** The disciplines of the highest earned degree of the 95 presidents that comprised the overall sample were organized according to the career path of each president. There were 41 presidents that held a terminal education degree. In this group, 53.7% (22) followed the steward career path, 41.5% (17) followed the scholar path and 4.9% (2) followed the spanner path. One president held their highest earned degree in higher education (master’s) and they followed the steward pathway. Eighteen presidents held their highest earned degree in the social sciences. Among this group, 77.8% (14) followed the scholar path, 16.7% (3) followed the spanner path and 5.6% (1) followed the stranger path. There were no presidents with a social science disciplinary background that followed the steward path to the presidency. There were 15 presidents with their highest degree in a STEM field and all of them followed the scholar career path. Nine presidents held their highest degree in the humanities and fine arts. In this group, 66.7% (6) followed the scholar path, 22.2% (2) followed the steward path and 11.1% (1) followed the stranger path. There were no presidents with a humanities and fine arts degree that followed the spanner career path. Six presidents held their highest earned degree in law. Within this group, 66.7% (4) followed the steward path, and 16.7% (1) each followed the scholar and stranger path. There were no presidents with a law degree that followed the spanner path. Three presidents held their highest earned degree in medicine, with 66.7% (2) following the
scholar path and 33.3% (1) following the steward path. There were no presidents with a degree in medicine that followed the spanner or stranger career paths. Finally, one president each earned their highest earned degree in religion & theology and business and they both followed the spanner path.

Next, a chi-square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine the relation between discipline of highest earned degree and career path. The relationship between these variables was statistically significant, $X^2 (24, N=95)=68.657, p<0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and career, variables are independent) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and career, variables are not independent) was accepted. There is sufficient evidence of a relationship between the discipline of highest earned degree and career path to the presidency.

**Terminal Higher Education Coding.** The disciplines of the highest earned degree of the 95 presidents that comprised the overall sample were organized according to the career path of each president. There were 31 presidents that held a terminal higher education degree. Within this group, 64.5% (20) followed the steward career path, 32.3% (10) followed the scholar career path and 3.2 % (1) followed the spanner career path. Ten presidents held their highest degree in education. Among them, 70% (7) followed the scholar path, 20% (2) followed the steward path and 10% (1) followed the spanner path. No presidents with an education disciplinary background followed the stranger path. One president held their highest degree in higher education (master’s) and they followed the steward career path. Eighteen presidents held their highest earned degree in the social sciences. Among this group, 77.8% (14) followed the scholar path, 16.7% (3) followed the spanner path and 5.6% (1) followed the stranger path. There were no
presidents with a social science disciplinary background that followed the steward path to the presidency. There were 15 presidents with their highest degree in a STEM field and all of them followed the scholar career path. Nine presidents held their highest degree in the humanities and fine arts. In this group, 66.7% (6) followed the scholar path, 22.2% (2) followed the steward path and 11.1% (1) followed the stranger path. There were no presidents with a humanities and fine arts degree that followed the spanner career path. Six presidents held their highest earned degree in law. Within this group, 66.7% (4) followed the steward path, and 16.7% (1) each followed the scholar and stranger path. There were no presidents with a law degree that followed the spanner path. Three presidents held their highest earned degree in medicine, with 66.7% (2) following the scholar path and 33.3% (1) following the steward path. There were no presidents with a degree in medicine that followed the spanner or stranger career paths. Finally, one president each earned their highest earned degree in religion & theology and business and they both followed the spanner path.

Next, a chi-square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine the relation between discipline of highest earned degree and career path. The relationship between these variables was statistically significant, $X^2 (27, N=95)=75.733$, $p<0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and career, variables are independent) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and career, variables are not independent) was accepted. There is sufficient evidence of a relationship between the discipline of highest earned degree and career path to the presidency.
Measures of Presidential Success

The study conceptualized presidential success using measures of institutional performance. The chosen measures of success were enrollment, retention rate, graduation rate and endowment. Each measure of success was captured at the onset of the presidential tenure (using the academic year following their appointment) and compared to the conclusion of the presidential tenure (the academic year of their departure). Fall 2017 was used as the endpoint for presidents still currently in office. Success was evaluated by examining whether each measure improved/grew, declined or remained the same under each president’s leadership. Unfortunately, complete institutional data was not available for some presidents (due to lack of IPEDS records or tenures less than one year), leading to sample sizes smaller than the overall sample of 95. The sample sizes for each measure of success are as follows: enrollment (n=80), graduation rate (n=59), retention rate (n=59) and endowment (n=49).

Enrollment

Of the 80 presidents for which enrollment was evaluated, there was enrollment growth under the leadership of 41 (51.3%) presidents while there was enrollment decline under the leadership of 38 (47.5%). One president’s enrollment remained the same throughout their leadership.

Retention Rate

Of the 59 presidents for which retention rate was evaluated, there was an improvement in retention rate under the leadership of 25 (42.4%) and a decline under the leadership of 28 (47.5%). Six presidents (10.2%) saw no change in retention rate under their leadership.

Graduation Rate
Of the 59 presidents for which graduation rate was evaluated, there was an improvement in graduation rate under the leadership of 39 (66.1%) and a decline under the leadership of 16 (27.1%). There was no change in the graduation rate of under the leadership of 4 (6.8%) presidents.

Endowment

Of the 49 presidents for which endowment was evaluated, there was endowment growth under the leadership of 42 (85.7%) presidents and a decline in endowment under the leadership of 7 (14.3%) presidents.

Academic Backgrounds & Success

Research Question 4: Is there a relationship between the academic backgrounds of current and immediate past (non-interim) State University of New York (SUNY) presidents and their success in the role of president, as measured by enrollment, retention rate, graduation rate and institutional endowment?

Highest Earned Degree & Enrollment

Initial Coding. The 80 presidents in the sample for enrollment were organized according to their highest earned degree. Among the 47 presidents holding a PhD, 51.1% (24) saw enrollment growth under their leadership and 48.9% (23) saw an enrollment decline. Eighteen presidents held an EdD, of which 50% (9) saw an enrollment decline, 44.4% (8) saw enrollment growth, and 5.6% (1) saw no change in enrollment under their leadership. There were 10 presidents with a professional doctorate, 70% (7) of which saw enrollment growth and 30% (3) of which saw a decline in enrollment under their leadership. Five presidents with a master's
degree included 60% (3) that saw an enrollment decline and 40% (2) that saw enrollment growth under their leadership.

Next, a chi-square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine the relation between the highest earned degree and enrollment. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (6, N=80) = 5.270, p > 0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between highest earned degree and enrollment, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between highest earned degree and enrollment, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between highest earned degree and success as measured by enrollment.

**Terminal Education Coding.** The 80 presidents in the sample for enrollment were organized according to their highest earned degree. Thirty-five presidents held a terminal education degree, from which 48.5% (17) saw enrollment growth and 48.5% (17) saw an enrollment decline, with 2.9% (1) experiencing no change in enrollment during their tenure. Among the 30 presidents holding a PhD, 50% (15) saw enrollment growth and 50% (15) saw an enrollment decline. Ten presidents held a professional doctorate, with 70% (7) experiencing enrollment growth and 30% (3) experiencing enrollment decline. Lastly, of 5 presidents holding a master’s degree, 40% (2) saw enrollment growth and 60% (3) saw enrollment decline.

Next, a chi-square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine the relation between the highest earned degree and enrollment. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (6, N=80) = 3.010, p > 0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between highest earned degree and enrollment, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between highest earned degree
and enrollment, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between highest earned degree and success as measured by enrollment.

**Terminal Higher Education Coding.** The 80 presidents in the sample for enrollment were organized according to their highest earned degree. Twenty-six presidents held a terminal higher education degree and 46.2% (12) saw enrollment growth, 50% (13) saw an enrollment decline and 3.8% (1) saw no change in enrollment during their tenure. Among 35 presidents holding a PhD, 51.4% (18) experienced enrollment growth while 48.6% (17) experienced a decline. Ten presidents held a professional doctorate, with 70% (7) experiencing enrollment growth and 30% (3) experiencing enrollment decline. Of 5 presidents holding a master’s degree, 40% (2) saw enrollment growth and 60% (3) saw enrollment decline. Lastly, 4 presidents held an EdD, with 50% (2) overseeing enrollment growth and 50% (2) overseeing enrollment decline.

Next, a chi-square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine the relation between the highest earned degree and enrollment. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (8, N=80) = 3.877, p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between highest earned degree and enrollment, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between highest earned degree and enrollment, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between highest earned degree and success as measured by enrollment.

**Discipline of Highest Earned Degree & Enrollment**

**Initial Coding.** The 80 presidents in the sample for enrollment were organized according to the discipline of their highest earned degree. There were 27 presidents with their highest earned degree in higher education. 48.1% (13) saw growth in enrollment under their leadership, 48.1% (13) saw an enrollment decline and 1 (3.7%) had no change. Nine presidents earned their
highest degree in education, 55.5% (5) of whom saw enrollment growth and 44.4% (4) saw an enrollment decline. There were 14 presidents with their highest degree in STEM and 50% (7) saw enrollment growth while 50% (7) saw a decline in enrollment. Fourteen presidents earned their highest degree in the social sciences, among which 42.9% (6) saw enrollment growth under their leadership and 57.1% (8) saw a decline in enrollment. Of the 8 presidents with a disciplinary background in the humanities and fine arts, enrollment grew under 62.5% (5) presidents while enrollment declined under 37.5% (3). Four presidents earned their highest degree in law, 25% (1) saw enrollment growth and 75% (3) saw enrollment decline. Three presidents earned their highest degree in medicine, and all of them experienced enrollment growth under their leadership. Finally, 1 president earned their degree in religion & theology and they experienced enrollment growth during their leadership.

Next, a chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine the relation between discipline of highest earned degree and enrollment. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (14, N=80)=7.851, p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and enrollment, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and enrollment, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and success as measured by enrollment.

**Terminal Education Coding.** The 80 presidents in the sample for enrollment were organized according to the discipline of their highest earned degree. Thirty-five presidents held a terminal education degree, of which 48.6% (17) experienced enrollment growth, 48.6% (17) experienced enrollment decline and 2.9% (1) experienced no change in enrollment. There were
14 presidents holding a degree in STEM, with 50% (7) experiencing an enrollment decline and 50% (7) experiencing enrollment growth. Fourteen presidents held their highest degree in the social sciences, with 57.1% (8) experiencing a decline in enrollment and 42.9% (6) experiencing enrollment growth. Among eight presidents with a degree in the humanities and fine arts, 62.5% (5) saw enrollment growth while 37.5% (3) saw an enrollment decline. Of 4 presidents with a degree in law, 75% (3) saw a decline in enrollment while 25% (1) saw enrollment growth. Three presidents with degrees in medicine all oversaw enrollment growth. Finally, one president each held a degree in higher education (master’s) and religion & theology. Both of these presidents experienced enrollment growth.

Next, a chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine the relation between discipline of highest earned degree and enrollment. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (14, N=80)=8.067, p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and enrollment, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and enrollment, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and success as measured by enrollment.

**Terminal Higher Education Coding.** The 80 presidents in the sample for enrollment were organized according to the discipline of their highest earned degree. Twenty-six presidents held a terminal higher education degree, with 46.2% (12) overseeing enrollment growth, 50% (13) overseeing enrollment decline and 3.8% (1) saw no enrollment change. Nine presidents held their highest degree in education, with 55.6% (5) experiencing enrollment growth and 44.4% (4) experiencing an enrollment decline. Fourteen presidents held a STEM degree, with 50% (7)
experiencing enrollment decline and 50% (7) experiencing enrollment growth. Fourteen presidents held their highest degree in the social sciences, with 57.1% (8) experiencing a decline in enrollment and 42.9% (6) experiencing enrollment growth. Of eight presidents with a degree in the humanities and fine arts, 62.5% (5) saw enrollment growth while 37.5% (3) saw an enrollment decline. Among 4 presidents with a degree in law, 75% (3) saw a decline in enrollment while 25% (1) saw enrollment growth. Three presidents with degrees in medicine all saw enrollment growth. Finally, one president each held a degree in higher education (master’s) and religion & theology. Both of these presidents experienced enrollment growth.

Next, a chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine the relation between discipline of highest earned degree and enrollment. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (16, N=80)=9.017$, $p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and enrollment, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and enrollment, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between the discipline of highest earned degree and success as measured by enrollment.

**Highest Earned Degree & Retention Rate**

**Initial Coding.** The 59 presidents in the sample for retention rate were organized according to their highest earned degree. Among 34 presidents that held a PhD, 44.1% (15) saw the retention rate increase, 44.1% (15) saw a decrease in retention rate and 11.8% (4) saw no change in the retention rate under their leadership. Seventeen presidents held an EdD, with the retention rate decreasing under 47.1% (8) and increasing under 41.2% (7) of presidents. The retention rate remained the same under 11.8% (2) of presidents holding an EdD. Among the 5
presidents holding a professional doctorate, the retention rate decreased under 60% (3) presidents and increased under 40% (2) presidents. Lastly, 3 presidents held a master’s degree, 66.7% (2) of whom saw a decreasing retention rate and 33.3% (1) of whom saw an increase in the retention rate.

Next, a chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine the relation between highest earned degree and retention rate. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (6, N=59) = 1.515, p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between highest earned degree and retention rate, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between highest earned degree and retention rate, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between highest earned degree and success as measured by retention rate.

**Terminal Education Coding.** The 59 presidents in the sample for retention rate were organized according to their highest earned degree. Among 28 presidents with a terminal education degree, 42.9% (12) saw an increase in the retention under their leadership, 50% (14) saw a decline and 7.1% (2) experienced no change. Twenty-three presidents held a PhD as their highest degree. In this group, 43.5% (10) saw an increase in retention rate, 39.1% (9) saw a decrease and 17.4% (4) saw no change. Of 5 presidents holding a professional doctorate, 40% (2) saw an increase and 60% (3) saw a decrease in retention rate. Finally, among 3 presidents that held a master’s degree, 33.3% (1) saw an increase in retention rate and 66.7% (2) saw a decrease.

Next, a chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine the relation between highest earned degree and retention rate. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (6, N=59) = 3.091, p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between highest earned degree and retention rate, variables are independent) was
accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between highest earned degree and retention rate, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between highest earned degree and success as measured by retention rate.

**Terminal Higher Education Coding.** The 59 presidents in the sample for retention rate were organized according to their highest earned degree. Among 20 presidents holding a terminal higher education degree, 45% (9) saw an increase in retention rate, 45% (9) saw a decrease and 10% (2) saw no change. Twenty-seven presidents held a PhD, with 44.4% (12) overseeing an increase in retention rate, 40.7% (11) overseeing a decrease and 14.8% (4) seeing no change. Of 5 presidents holding a professional doctorate, 40% (2) saw an increase and 60% (3) saw a decrease in retention rate. Four presidents held an EdD, with 3 experiencing a decrease in retention rate and 1 experiencing an increase. Finally, among 3 presidents that held a master’s degree, 33.3% (1) saw an increase in retention rate and 66.7% (2) saw a decrease.

Next, a chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine the relation between highest earned degree and retention rate. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (8, N=59) =3.524, p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between highest earned degree and retention rate, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between highest earned degree and retention rate, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between highest earned degree and success as measured by retention rate.

**Discipline of Highest Earned Degree & Retention Rate**

**Initial Coding.** The 59 presidents in the sample for retention rate were organized according to the discipline of their highest earned degree. There were 20 presidents with their highest earned degree in higher education. In this group, 45% (9) of presidents saw an increase in
retention rate, 45% (9) saw a decrease and 10% (2) saw no change in retention rate under their leadership. Among the 12 presidents with disciplinary backgrounds in the social sciences, retention rates increased under 50% (6), decreased under 41.7% (5) and remained the same under 8.3% (1). Eleven presidents earned their highest degree in the STEM fields. Of this group, 45.5% (5) saw an increase in retention rate, 36.4% (4) saw a decrease in retention rate, and 18.2% (2) saw no change during their leadership. Eight presidents earned their highest degree in education, with the retention rate decreasing under 62.5% (5) and increasing under 37.5% (3). Five presidents earned their highest degree in the humanities and fine arts. Three presidents (60%) saw a decrease in retention rate, 20% (1) saw an increase and retention remained the same under 20% (1). There were 2 presidents with a background in medicine, and 50% (1) each an increase in retention rate while the other saw a decrease. Only one president earned their highest degree in law and the retention rate decreased under their leadership.

Next, a chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine the relation between discipline of highest earned degree and retention rate. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (12, N=59) = 5.164, p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and retention rate, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and retention rate, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and success as measured by retention rate.

**Terminal Education Coding.** The 59 presidents in the sample for retention rate were organized according to the discipline of their highest earned degree. Among 28 presidents holding a terminal education degree, 42.9% (12) saw an increase in retention rate, 50% (14) saw
a decrease and 7.1% (2) saw no change. Of 12 presidents with a degree in social sciences, 50% (6) saw an increase in retention rate, 41.7% (5) saw a decrease and 8.3% (1) saw no change. Within the 11 president with a degree in STEM, 45.5% (5) saw an increase in retention rate, 36.4% (4) saw a decrease and 18.1% (2) saw no change. Sixty percent (3) of 5 presidents with a degree in the humanities and fine arts saw a decrease in retention rate, 20% (1) saw an increase and 20% (1) saw no change. Among two presidents with a degree in medicine, one saw their retention increase while the other saw a decrease. One president with a degree in law saw a decrease in retention rate.

Next, a chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine the relation between discipline of highest earned degree and retention rate. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (10, N=59) =4.158, p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and retention rate, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and retention rate, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and success as measured by retention rate.

**Terminal Higher Education Coding.** The 59 presidents in the sample for retention rate were organized according to the discipline of their highest earned degree. Among 20 presidents with a terminal higher education degree, 45% (9) saw an increase in retention rate, 45% (9) saw a decrease in retention rate and 2 saw no change. Within 8 presidents that held an EdD, 37.5% (3) saw an increase in retention rate and 62.5% (5) saw a decrease. There were 12 presidents with a degree in the social sciences. In this group, 50% (6) saw an increase in retention rate, 41.7% (5) saw a decrease in retention rate and 8.3% (1) saw no change. Eleven presidents held a
degree in STEM, including 45.5% (5) that saw an increase in retention rate, 36.4% (4) that saw a decrease and 18.2% (2) that saw no change. Of 5 presidents holding a degree in the humanities and fine arts, 60% (3) that saw an increase saw a decrease in retention rate, 20% (1) saw an increase and 20% (1) saw no change. Among two presidents with a degree in medicine, one saw their retention increase while the other saw a decrease. One president with a degree in law saw a decrease in retention rate.

Next, a chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine the relation between discipline of highest earned degree and retention rate. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (12, N=59) =5.164, p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and retention rate, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and retention rate, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and success as measured by retention rate.

**Highest Earned Degree & Graduation Rate**

**Initial Coding.** The 59 presidents in the sample for graduation rate were organized according to their highest earned degree. There were 34 presidents who held a PhD as their highest earned degree. Among this group, 67.6%(23) saw an increase in graduation rate under their leadership, while 29.4% (10) saw a decrease and 2.9% (1) had no change. Seventeen presidents held an EdD as their highest earned degree. The graduation rate increased under 76.5% (13), decreased under 11.8% (2) and remained the same under 11.8% (2). Five presidents held a professional doctorate. Within this group, the graduation rate increased under 40% (2), decreased under 40% (2) and stayed the same under 20% (1). Lastly, of the 3 presidents with
master’s as their highest degree, the graduation decreased under 66.7% (2) and increased under 33.3% (1).

Next, a chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine the relation between the highest earned degree and graduation rate. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (6, N=59) = 7.726, p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between highest earned degree and graduation rate, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between highest earned degree and graduation rate, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between highest earned degree and success as measured by graduation rate.

**Terminal Education Coding.** The 59 presidents in the sample for graduation rate were organized according to their highest earned degree. Twenty-eight presidents held a terminal education degree. In this group, 64.3% (18) saw an increase in graduation rate, 28.6% (8) saw a decrease and 7.1% (2) saw no change. There were 23 presidents holding a PhD, 78.3% (18) of whom saw an increase in graduation rate, 17.4% (4) that saw a decrease and 4.3% (1) that saw no change. Among 5 presidents holding a professional doctorate, 40% (2) saw an increase in graduation rate, 40% (2) saw a decrease and 20% (1) saw no change. Three presidents held a master’s degree, with 66.7% (2) overseeing a decrease in graduation rate and 33.3% (1) overseeing an increase.

Next, a chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine the relation between the highest earned degree and graduation rate. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (6, N=59) = 6.090, p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between highest earned degree and graduation rate, variables are
independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between highest earned degree and graduation rate, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between the highest earned degree and success as measured by graduation rate.

**Terminal Higher Education Coding.** The 59 presidents in the sample for graduation rate were organized according to their highest earned degree. Twenty presidents held a terminal higher education degree. This group included 65% (13) presidents that saw an increase in graduation rate, 25% (5) that saw a decrease and 10% (2) that saw no change. Among 27 presidents that held a PhD, 74.1% (20) saw an increase in graduation rate, 22.2% (6) saw a decrease and 7.4% (2) saw no change. Four presidents held an EdD as their highest degree. Within this group, 75% (3) saw an increase in graduation rate and 25% (1) saw a decrease. Among 5 presidents holding a professional doctorate, 40% (2) saw an increase in graduation rate, 40% (2) saw a decrease and 20% (1) saw no change. Three presidents held a master’s degree, with 66.7% (2) overseeing a decrease in graduation rate and 33.3% (1) overseeing an increase.

Next, a chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine the relation between the highest earned degree and graduation rate. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, \(X^2 (8, N=59) =6.075, p>0.01\). Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between highest earned degree and graduation rate, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between highest earned degree and graduation rate, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between highest earned degree and success as measured by graduation rate.
Discipline of Highest Earned Degree & Graduation Rate

Initial Coding. The 59 presidents in the sample for graduation rate were organized according to the discipline of their highest earned degree. There were 20 presidents with their highest earned degree in higher education. In this group, the graduation rate increased under 65% (13), decreased under 25% (5) and remained the same under 10% (2). Eight presidents earned their highest degree in education. Five presidents (62.5%) with education degrees saw an increase in graduation rate while 37.5% (3) saw an increase. Twelve presidents earned their highest degree in within the social sciences. Among these presidents, 75% (9) saw their graduation rates increase, 16.7% (2) saw them decrease and 8.3% (1) remained the same. Eleven presidents earned their highest degree in a STEM discipline. In this group, 72.7% (8) of them saw an increase in graduation rate, 18.2% (2) decreased and 18.2% (2) stayed the same. There were 5 presidents with a disciplinary background in the humanities and fine arts, 40% (2) of which saw an increase and 60% (3) of which saw a decrease. Two presidents earned their highest degree in medicine, with 50% (1) each seeing an increase and a decrease in graduation rate under their leadership. Finally, one president earned their highest degree in law the graduation rate increased under their leadership.

Next, a chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine the relation between the discipline of highest earned degree and graduation rate. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (12, N=59) =6.333, p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and graduation rate, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and graduation rate, variables are not independent)
was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and success as measured by graduation rate.

**Terminal Education Coding.** The 59 presidents in the sample for graduation rate were organized according to the discipline of their highest earned degree. Twenty-eight presidents held a terminal education degree, with 64.3% (18) seeing an increase in graduation rate, 28.6% (8) seeing a decrease and 7.1% (2) seeing no change. Twelve presidents held a degree in the social sciences, with 75% (9) seeing an increase in graduation rate, 16.7% (2) seeing a decrease and 8.3% (1) seeing no change. Eleven presidents held STEM degree, with 72.7% (8) overseeing an increase in graduation rate, 18.2% (2) overseeing a decrease and 9.1% (1) seeing no change. Among 5 presidents with a degree in the humanities and fine arts, 60% (3) saw a decrease in graduation rate and 40% (2) saw an increase. Two presidents held a medicine degree, with 1 each (50%) seeing a decrease and increase in graduation rate. Finally, one president with a degree in law experienced an increase in graduation rate.

Next, a chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine the relation between the discipline of highest earned degree and graduation rate. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (10, N=59) = 5.156$, $p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and graduation rate, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and graduation rate, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and success as measured by graduation rate.
**Terminal Higher Education Coding.** The 59 presidents in the sample for graduation rate were organized according to the discipline of their highest earned degree. Among 20 presidents holding a terminal higher education degree, 65% (13) saw an increase in graduation rate, 25% (5) saw a decrease and 10% (2) saw no change. There were 12 presidents with a degree in social sciences. Among this group, 75% (9) saw an increase in graduation rate, 16.7% (2) saw a decrease and 8.3% (1) saw no change. Eleven presidents held a degree in STEM, 72.7% (8) of whom saw an increase in graduation rate, 18.2% (2) of whom saw a decrease and 9.1% (1) saw no change. Eleven presidents held their highest degree in education. In this group, 62.5% (5) saw an increase in graduation rate and 37.5% (3) saw a decrease. Five presidents holding a degree in the humanities and fine arts encompassed 60% (3) that saw a decrease in graduation rate and 40% (2) that saw an increase. Of presidents with a degree in medicine, one each (50%) saw an increase and decrease in graduation rate. One president with a degree in law saw an increase in graduation rate during their tenure.

Next, a chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine the relation between the discipline of highest earned degree and graduation rate. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (12, N=59) = 6.333$, $p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and graduation rate, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and graduation rate, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and success as measured by graduation rate.
**Highest Earned Degree & Endowment**

**Initial Coding.** The 49 presidents in the sample for endowment were organized according to their highest earned degree. There were 31 presidents that held a PhD as their highest earned degree. Among this group, 83.9% (26) saw endowment growth and 16.1% (5) saw endowments decline under their leadership. Eleven presidents held an EdD as their highest earned degree. In this group, endowments grew under 81.8% (9) and declined under 18.2% (2). Five presidents held a professional doctorate as their highest degree and endowments grew under all of them. Finally, 2 presidents held a master’s as their highest degree. Both of these presidents oversaw endowment growth under their leadership.

Next, a chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine the relation between highest earned degree and endowment. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, X² (3, N=49) =1.389, p>0.01. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between highest earned degree and endowment, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between highest earned degree and endowment, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between highest earned degree and success as measured by endowment.

**Terminal Education Coding.** The 49 presidents in the sample for endowment were organized according to their highest earned degree. Twenty presidents held a terminal education degree. Among this group, 75% (15) presidents saw their endowments grow and 25% (5) saw their endowments decline. There were 22 presidents with that held a PhD, 90.9% (20) of whom saw enrollment growth and 9.1% (2) saw an enrollment decline. Five presidents with professional doctorates all saw endowment growth and 2 presidents with a master’s degree both saw endowment growth.
Next, a chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine
the relation between highest earned degree and endowment. The relationship between these
variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (3, N=49) =3.527, p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis
(no relationship between highest earned degree and endowment, variables are independent) was
accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between highest earned degree
and endowment, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a
relationship between highest earned degree and success as measured by endowment.

**Terminal Higher Education Coding.** The 49 presidents in the sample for endowment
were organized according to their highest earned degree. Fourteen presidents held a terminal
higher education degree, 78.6% (11) of whom saw endowment growth and 21.4% (3) saw an
endowment decline. There were 26 presidents that held a PhD. In this group, 84.6% (22) saw
endowment growth and 15.4% (4) saw endowment decline. All 5 presidents that held a
professional doctorate saw endowment growth. Two presidents held an EdD, both of whom saw
endowment growth. Two presidents held a master’s degree and both saw endowment growth.

Next, a chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine
the relation between highest earned degree and endowment. The relationship between these
variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (4, N=49) =2.109, p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis
(no relationship between highest earned degree and endowment, variables are independent) was
accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between highest earned degree
and endowment, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a
relationship between highest earned degree and success as measured by endowment.
Discipline of Highest Earned Degree & Endowment

**Initial Coding.** The 49 presidents in the sample for endowment were organized according to the discipline of their highest earned degree. There were 14 presidents with higher education as the discipline of their highest earned degree. Among these presidents, endowments grew under 78.6% (11) and declined under 21.4% (3). Six presidents held their highest degree in education. In this group, 66.7% (4) oversaw endowment growth and 33.3% (2) oversaw endowment decline. There were 12 presidents with their highest degree in social science, 91.7% (11) of whom oversaw endowment growth and 8.3% (1) oversaw a decline in endowment. Ten presidents held their highest degree in a STEM discipline. Within this group, 90% (9) saw their endowment grow while 10% (1) oversaw a decline. Four presidents earned their highest degree in the humanities and fine arts and endowments grew under all of their tenures. Three presidents earned their highest degree in medicine and all of them oversaw endowment growth.

Next, a chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine the relation between discipline of highest earned degree and endowment. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (5, N=49) =4.025, \ p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and endowment, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and endowment, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and success as measured by endowment.

**Terminal Education Coding.** The 49 presidents in the sample for endowment were organized according to the discipline of their highest earned degree. Twenty presidents held a terminal education degree. Among this group, 75% (15) saw endowment growth and 25% (5)
saw an endowment decline. Among 12 presidents with a degree in the social sciences, 91.7% (11) saw endowment growth and 8.3% (1) saw a decline in endowment. Of 10 presidents with a degree in STEM, 90% (9) saw endowment growth and 10% (1) saw an endowment decline. Four presidents held a degree in the humanities and fine arts, all of whom saw endowment growth. Three presidents held a degree in medicine, all of whom saw endowment growth.

Next, a chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine the relation between discipline of highest earned degree and endowment. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (4, N=49) =3.539, p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and endowment, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and endowment, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and success as measured by endowment.

**Terminal Higher Education Coding.** The 49 presidents in the sample for endowment were organized according to the discipline of their highest earned degree. Fourteen presidents held a terminal higher education degree. In this group, 78.6% (11) saw endowment growth and 21.4% (3) saw an endowment decline. Among 12 presidents with a degree in the social sciences, 91.7% (11) saw endowment growth and 8.3% (1) saw a decline in endowment. Of 10 presidents with a degree in STEM, 90% (9) saw endowment growth and 10% (1) saw an endowment decline. Six presidents held a degree in education, with 66.7% (4) overseeing endowment growth and 33.3% (2) overseeing endowment decline. Four presidents with a degree in the humanities and fine arts and 3 presidents with a degree in medicine all saw all saw endowment growth.
Next, a chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine the relation between discipline of highest earned degree and endowment. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (5, N=49) = 4.025, p > 0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and endowment, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and endowment, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and success as measured by endowment.

**Career Path & Success**

*Research Question 5: Is there a relationship between the career paths of current and immediate past (non-interim) State University of New York (SUNY) presidents and their success in the role of president, as measured by enrollment, retention rate, graduation rate and institutional endowment?*

**Career Path & Enrollment**

The 80 presidents in the sample for enrollment were organized according to their career path. There were 49 presidents that followed the scholar career path, 28 (57.1%) of which saw enrollment growth under their leadership and 21 (42.9%) saw an enrollment decline. Twenty two presidents followed the steward path, 12 (54.5%) that saw an enrollment decline, 9 (40.9%) that saw an enrollment decline and 1 (4.5%) that saw no change in enrollment under their leadership. Six presidents followed the spanner career path, with 4 (66.7%) experiencing enrollment growth and 2 (33.3%) experiencing enrollment decline. Finally, 3 presidents followed the stranger path, all of whom saw enrollment decline under their leadership.
Next, a chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS Statistics to examine the relation between career path and enrollment. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (6, N=80) = 7.690, p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between career path and enrollment, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between career path and enrollment, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between career path and success as measured by enrollment.

**Career Path & Retention Rate**

The 59 presidents in the sample for retention rate were organized according to their career path. There were 33 presidents that followed the scholar career path. The retention rate decreased under 16 (48.5%) presidents and increased under 13 (39.4%), while staying the same under 4 (12.1%) presidents. Nineteen presidents followed the steward path. The retention rate increased under 9 (47.4%) presidents, decreased under another 9 (47.4%), and stayed the same under 1 (5.3%). Five presidents followed the spanner path. The retention rate increased under 2 (40%), decreased under another 2 (40%), and remained the same for 1 (20%). Finally, 2 presidents followed the spanner path and 1 (50%) each saw the retention rate increase and increase under their leadership.

Next, a chi square test of independence was performed using the SPSS statistics to examine the relation between career path and retention rate. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (6, N=59) = 1.536, p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between career path and retention rate, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between career path and retention rate, variables are independent) was rejected.
variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between career path and success as measured by retention rate.

**Career Path & Graduation Rate**

The 59 presidents in the sample for graduation rate were organized according to their career path. Among the 33 scholar presidents, 21 (63.6%) saw an increase in the graduation rate under their leadership, 11 (33.3%) saw a decrease in graduation rate and 1 (3.0%) saw no change. Of the 19 steward presidents, the retention rate increased under 13 (68.4%), decreased under 4 (21.1%) presidents and remained the same under 2 (10.5%) presidents. There were 5 spanner presidents, 4 (80%) of whom saw an increase and 1 (20%) saw no change under their leadership. There were 2 stranger presidents, and the retention rate increased under 1 (50%), while decreasing under the other.

Next, a chi square test of independence was performed using the SPSS statistics to examine the relation between career path and graduation rate. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (6, N=59) = 5.242, p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between career path and graduation rate, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between career path and graduation rate, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between career path and success as measured by graduation rate.

**Career Path & Endowment**

The 49 presidents in the sample for endowment were organized according to their career path. There were 31 scholar presidents and endowments grew under 27 (87.1%) and declined under 4 (12.9%). Twelve steward presidents included 10 (83.3%) that led endowment growth and 2 (16.7%) that led declines in endowment. Among 4 spanner presidents, 3 (75%) saw
endowment growth whole 1 (25%) saw their endowments decline under their leadership. Finally, there were 2 stranger presidents who both saw endowments grow under their leadership.

Next, a chi square test of independence was performed using the SPSS statistics to examine the relation between career path and endowment. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (3, N=49) = .812, p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between career path and endowment, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between career path and endowment, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between career path and as measured by endowment.

**Additional Analyses**

Additional analyses were conducted to learn more about SUNY presidents; the experiences/development leading to the presidential appointment, the types of institutions they lead, the length of their presidential tenures and finally their reasons for departing the president role. Next, the study explores if there is a relationship between the academic backgrounds and career path of SUNY presidents to the following variables: immediate prior role, professional development, institution type, length of tenure, state vs. local operation and departure.

**Immediate Prior Role**

The presidents in the sample were coded in groups according to the professional roles they held immediately prior to the SUNY presidency. Of the 95 presidents in the sample, the most common immediate prior role was chief academic officer (54.7%, 52), followed by administrative vice president (22.1%, 21). There were 10 SUNY presidents (10.5%) who moved into their role from a presidency at another institution, 5 (5.3%) who served in a leadership role external to higher education and 3 (3.2%) who transitioned from leadership roles within a state
university system. Finally, 1 SUNY president (1.1%) each transitioned to the presidency from an academic dean role or an administrative dean role and 2 (2.1%) that were members of the faculty in their immediate prior role.

**Highest Earned Degree & Immediate Prior Role**

**Initial Coding.** The immediate prior roles of presidents in the sample were coded into groups according to the highest earned degree of each president. Among the 55 presidents holding a PhD, 65.5% (36) were chief academic officers prior to the SUNY presidency, 14.5% (8) were administrative vice presidents, 10.9% (6) transitioned from another college/university presidency, 3.6% (2) came from a leadership role within a state system, 3.6% (2) came from a faculty role and 1.1% (1) from an academic dean role. There were 22 presidents that held that EdD. Among this group, 50% (11) entered the SUNY presidency from a chief academic officer role, 36.4% (8) from an administrative vice president role and 13.6% (3) from another college/university presidency. Twelve presidents held professional doctorates as their highest degree, with 41.7% (5) coming from an administrative vice president role, 33.3% (4) from a chief academic officer role, 16.7% (2) from an external leadership role and 8.3% (1) from a leadership role in a state university system. Finally, six presidents held a master’s degree as their highest degree, 50% (3) entered the SUNY presidency from external leadership roles and 16.7% (1) each from the following roles: chief academic officer, administrative dean and college/university president.

A chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS statistics to examine the relationship between highest earned degree and immediate prior role. The relationship between these variables was statistically significant, $X^2 (21, N=95) = 61.165, p<0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between highest earned degree and immediate prior role, variables
are independent) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between highest earned degree and immediate prior role, variables are not independent) was accepted. There is evidence of a relationship between the highest earned degree of a president in the sample and their immediate prior role to the SUNY presidential appointment.

**Terminal Education Coding.** The immediate prior roles of presidents in the sample were coded into groups according to the highest earned degree of each president. Among 41 presidents holding a terminal education degree, 51.2% (21) transitioned to the SUNY presidency from a chief academic officer role, 23.5% (12) from an administrative vice president role, 14.6% (6) from another college presidency, 2.4% (1) from a faculty appointment and 2.4% (1) from a leadership role within a state university system. Thirty-six presidents held a PhD as their highest earned degree. In this group, 72.2% (26) were a chief academic officer immediately prior to being appointed a SUNY presidency, 11.1% (4) were an administrative vice president, 8.3% (3) were a college president, 2.8% (1) transitioned from an academic dean role, 2.8% (1) from a faculty role and 2.8% (1) from a leadership role in a state university system. Twelve presidents holding professional doctorates included 41.7% (5) that were administrative vice presidents, 33.3% (4) that were chief academic officers, 16.7% (2) that held external leadership roles and 8.3% (1) that held a leadership role within a university system. Lastly, among 6 presidents with a master’s degree, 50% (3) held external leadership roles prior to the presidency, and 16.7% (1) each served as a college president, administrative dean and chief academic officer immediately prior to the SUNY presidency.

A chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS statistics to examine the relationship between highest earned degree and immediate prior role. The relationship between these variables was statistically significant, \( X^2 (21, N=95) = 61.394, p<0.01 \). Thus, the null
hypothesis (no relationship between highest earned degree and immediate prior role, variables are independent) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between highest earned degree and immediate prior role, variables are not independent) was accepted. There is evidence of a relationship between the highest earned degree of a president in the sample and their immediate prior role to the SUNY presidential appointment.

**Terminal Higher Education Coding.** The immediate prior roles of presidents in the sample were coded into groups according to the highest earned degree of each president. Thirty-one presidents held a terminal higher education degree. In this group, 45.2% (14) served as a chief academic officer immediately prior to SUNY, 35.5% (11) served as an administrative vice president, 16.1% (5) were a college president and 3.2% (1) held a state university system leadership role. Among 42 presidents that held a PhD, their immediate prior roles to joining SUNY were: 71.4% (30) chief academic officer, 11.9% (5) administrative vice president, 7.1% (3) president, 4.8% (2) faculty and 2.4% (1) system leadership. Twelve presidents holding professional doctorates included 41.7% (5) that were administrative vice presidents, 33.3% (4) that were chief academic officers, 16.7% (2) that held external leadership roles and 8.3% (1) that held a leadership role within a university system. Among 6 presidents with a master’s degree, 50% (3) held external leadership roles prior to the presidency, and 16.7% (1) each served as a college president, administrative dean and chief academic officer immediately prior to the SUNY presidency. Four presidents held an EdD, with 75% (3) transitioning from a chief academic officer role and 25% (1) serving as a college president before joining SUNY.

A chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS statistics to examine the relationship between highest earned degree and immediate prior role. The relationship between these variables was statistically significant, \( X^2 (28, N=95) = 67.847, p<0.01 \). Thus, the null
hypothesis (no relationship between highest earned degree and immediate prior role, variables are independent) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between highest earned degree and immediate prior role, variables are not independent) was accepted. There is evidence of a relationship between the highest earned degree of a president in the sample and their immediate prior role to the SUNY presidential appointment.

**Discipline of Highest Earned Degree & Immediate Prior Role**

**Initial Coding.** The immediate prior roles of presidents in the sample were coded into groups according to the discipline of each president’s the highest earned degree. There were 32 presidents who earned their highest degree in higher education. In this group, 43.8% (14) entered the presidency from a chief academic officer role, 34.4% (11) came from an administrative vice president role, 15.6% (5) transitioned from another college/university presidency, 3.1% (1) came from a leadership role within a state university system and 3.1% (1) served as an administrative dean. Ten presidents earned their highest degree in education, including 70% (7) who were chief academic officers, 10% (1) administrative vice president, 10% (1) faculty member and 10% (1) president. Eighteen presidents held their highest degree within a social science field. Among these presidents, 72.2% (13) entered the SUNY presidency directly from a chief academic officer role, 11.1% (2) from an administrative vice president role, 5.6% (1) from a college/university president role, 5.6% (1) from a faculty role and 5.6% (1) from a leadership role outside of higher education. There were 15 presidents with their higher degree in a STEM field. Within this group, 66.7% (10) were chief academic officers immediately prior to the presidency, 13.3% (2) were college/university presidents, 6.7% (1) was an academic dean, 6.7% (1) was an administrative vice president and 6.7% (1) held a leadership role within a state university system. Nine presidents earned their highest degree in the humanities and fine arts, with 44.4% (4)
transitioning from a chief academic officer role, 22.2% (2) from a leadership role outside of higher education, 22.2% (2) from an administrative vice president role, and 11.1% (1) from a college/university presidency. Six presidents with their highest degrees in law included 33.3% (2) from a chief academic officer role, 33.3% (2) from an administrative vice president role, 16.7% (1) from a leadership role outside higher education and 16.7% (1) from a leadership role within a state university system. Three presidents earned their highest degree in medicine. In this group, 66.7% (2) were chief academic officers immediately prior to the SUNY presidency and 33.3% (1) was an administrative vice president. One president earned their highest degree in religion and theology and served in a leadership role outside of higher education immediately prior to taking a SUNY presidency. Finally, one president earned their highest degree in business, and they entered the presidency from an administrative vice president role.

A chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS statistics to examine the relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and immediate prior role. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (56, N=95) = 60.524$, $p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and immediate prior role, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and immediate prior role, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between the discipline of a president in the sample's highest earned degree and their immediate prior role to the SUNY presidential appointment.

**Terminal Education Coding.** The immediate prior roles of presidents in the sample were coded into groups according to the discipline of each president’s the highest earned degree. Forty-one presidents held a terminal education degree. Within this group, the immediate prior
roles are as follows: 51.2% (21) chief academic officer, 29.3% (12) administrative vice
president, 14.6% (6) president, 2.4% (1) system leadership and 2.4% (1) faculty. Among 18
presidents with a degree in the social sciences, their immediate prior roles are as follows: 72.2%
(13) chief academic officer, 11.1% (2) administrative vice president, 5.6% (1) faculty, 5.6% (1)
external leadership and 5.6% (1) president. Fifteen presidents with a STEM degree included the
following immediate prior roles: 66.6% (10) chief academic officer, 13.3% (2) president, 6.7%
(1) academic dean, 6.7% (1) administrative vice president and 6.7% (1) system leadership.

Among 9 presidents with a degree in the humanities and fine arts, there were 44.4% (4) who
transitioned from a chief academic officer role, 22.2% (2) that transitioned from an
administrative vice president role, 22.2% (2) from external leadership roles and 1 who served as
a college president immediately prior to joining SUNY. Six presidents degrees in law included
33% (2) who were formerly administrative vice presidents, 33% (2) former chief academic
officers, 16.7% (1) from a leadership role (external to higher education) and 16.7% (1) from a
leadership role in a state university system. Among three presidents with a degree in medicine,
66.7% (2) were a chief academic officer and 33.3% (1) was an administrative vice president. One
president with a business degree served as an administrative vice president immediately prior to
taking a SUNY presidency, one president with a degree in higher education (master’s degree)

served as an administrative dean and one president with a degree in religion and theology served
in a leadership role external to higher education.

A chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS statistics to examine the
relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and immediate prior role. The
relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, \( X^2 (56, N=95) = 146.555, \)
p>0.01. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between discipline of highest earned degree
and immediate prior role, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and immediate prior role, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between the discipline of a president in the sample’s highest earned degree and their immediate prior role to the SUNY presidential appointment.

**Terminal Higher Education Coding.** The immediate prior roles of presidents in the sample were coded into groups according to the discipline of each president’s the highest earned degree. Thirty-one presidents that held a terminal higher education degree included the following immediate prior roles: 45.2% (14) chief academic officer, 35.5% (11) administrative vice president, 16.1% (5) president and 3.2% (1) leadership role in a state university system. Within the 18 presidents with a degree in the social sciences, their immediate prior roles are as follows: 72.2% (13) chief academic officer, 11.1% (2) administrative vice president, 5.6% (1) faculty, 5.6% (1) external leadership and 5.6% (1) president. Fifteen presidents with a STEM degree included the following immediate prior roles: 66.6% (10) chief academic officer, 13.3% (2) president, 6.7% (1) academic dean, 6.7% (1) administrative vice president and 6.7% (1) system leadership. Among 10 presidents with their highest degree in education, 70% (7) served as a chief academic officer prior to the SUNY presidency and 10% (1) each formerly served as an administrative vice president, faculty member and college president before joining SUNY. Nine presidents with a degree in the humanities and fine arts, included 44.4% (4) who transitioned from a chief academic officer role, 22.2% (2) that transitioned from an administrative vice president role, 22.2% (2) from external leadership roles and 1 who served as a college president immediately prior to joining SUNY. Six presidents degrees in law included 33% (2) who were formerly administrative vice presidents, 33% (2) former chief academic officers, 16.7% (1) from
a leadership role (external to higher education) and 16.7% (1) from a leadership role in a state university system. Of the three presidents with a degree in medicine, 66.7% (2) were a chief academic officer and 33.3% (1) was an administrative vice president. One president with a degree in religion and theology served in a leadership role external to higher education immediately prior to joining SUNY and another president with a business degree previously served as an administrative vice president. Finally, one president with a degree in higher education (master’s degree) served as an administrative dean.

A chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS statistics to examine the relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and immediate prior role. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, \(X^2 (63, N=95) = 153.739, p>0.01\). Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and immediate prior role, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and immediate prior role, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between the discipline of a president in the sample’s highest earned degree and their immediate prior role to the SUNY presidential appointment.

**Career & Immediate Prior Role**

The immediate prior roles of presidents in the sample were coded into groups according to the career path of each president. Among the 55 presidents that followed the scholar path, 70.9% (39) were chief academic officers immediately prior to assuming the SUNY presidency. Six scholar presidents (10.9%) were administrative vice presidents, 3.6% (2) were faculty, 1.8% (1) was an academic dean and 1.8% (1) held a leadership role within a state university system immediately before their SUNY presidential appointment. Thirty presidents followed the steward
career path. Within this group, 43.3% (13) came from an administrative vice president role, 30% (9) from a chief academic officer role, 13.3% (4) transitioned from another college/university presidency, 6.7% (2) previously held a leadership role in a state university system and 1 (3.3%) president each came from an administrative dean role and a leadership role from outside of higher education. There were 7 spanner presidents, 57.1% (4) of which entered the SUNY presidency from a chief academic officer role, 28.6% (2) from an administrative vice president role and 14.3% (1) assumed the presidency from a leadership role outside of higher education. Finally, 3 presidents followed the stranger path and all of them entered the SUNY presidency from leadership roles outside of higher education.

A chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS statistics to examine the relationship between career path and immediate prior role. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (21, N=95) = 80.440, p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between career path and immediate prior role, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between career path and immediate prior role, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between the career path of a president in the sample and their immediate prior role to the SUNY presidential appointment.

**Length of Tenure**

The length of tenure for each president in the sample was determined by calendar years. For past presidents, length of tenure was determined using the month and year of appointment through the month and year of departure. For current presidents, length of tenure was determined using the month and year of appointment through fall 2017. The mean length of tenure for all presidents in the sample was 7.8 years, with a median length of tenure of 5.75 years. Standard
deviation for length of tenure was 7.51 years. The minimum tenure was 0 and the maximum
tenure was 42, producing a range of 42

**Highest Earned Degree & Length of Tenure**

**Initial Coding.** The length of tenure for presidents in the sample were coded into groups
based on their highest earned degree. There were 28 presidents with a PhD as their highest
earned degree. The average length of tenure for this group was 4.43 years with a standard
deviation of 4.79. Sixteen presidents with an EdD as their highest degree had a mean length of
tenure of 3.53 years, with a standard deviation of 2.85. Six presidents with a professional
doctorate served an average of 12 years, with a standard deviation of 7.8 years. Finally, two
presidents with a master’s as their highest degree, served as president for an average of 8.38
years, with a standard deviation of 11.84.

**Terminal Education Coding.** The length of tenure for presidents in the sample were
coded into groups based on their highest earned degree. There were 41 presidents holding a
terminal education degree. Among this group, the average length of tenure was 7.91 years with a
standard deviation of 7.95. Thirty-six presidents holding a PhD had a mean tenure of 6.54 years
with a standard deviation of 6.07. Among 12 presidents holding a professional doctorate, the
average length of tenure was 11.69 years with a standard deviation of 9.82. Lastly, 6 presidents
holding a master’s degree had an average length of tenure of 6.83 years with a standard deviation
of 5.92.

**Terminal Higher Education Coding.** The length of tenure for presidents in the sample
were coded into groups based on their highest earned degree. Thirty-one presidents held a
terminal higher education degree as their highest degree. In this group, the average length of
tenure was 8.55 years with a standard deviation of 8.85. Forty-two presidents held a PhD, and
had an average length of tenure of 6.48 years with a 5.73 standard deviation. Four presidents held an EdD and had an average length of tenure of 5.69 years with a 4.96 standard deviation. Among 12 presidents holding a professional doctorate, the average length of tenure was 11.69 years with a standard deviation of 9.82. Lastly, 6 presidents holding a master’s degree had an average length of tenure of 6.83 years with a standard deviation of 5.92.

**Discipline of Highest Earned Degree & Length of Tenure**

**Initial Coding.** The length of tenure for presidents in the sample were coded into groups based on the discipline of their highest earned degree. There were 32 presidents with the discipline of their highest earned degree in higher education. These presidents had a mean length of tenure of 8.8 years, with a standard deviation of 8.82 years. Ten presidents with their highest earned degree in education had a mean length of tenure of 5.93 years, with a standard deviation of 3.81. Eighteen presidents with their highest degree in the social sciences had a mean length of tenure of 6.21 years, with a standard deviation of 6.66 years. There were 15 presidents with an academic background in STEM. These presidents had a mean tenure of 6.63 years, with a standard deviation of 4.92. Nine presidents with their highest degree in the humanities and fine arts served a mean length of tenure of 7.25 years, with a standard deviation of 5.4 years. Six presidents earned their highest degree in law had a mean length of tenure of 13.96 years, with a standard deviation of 13.26 years. Three presidents with a background in medicine served a mean length of tenure of 7.25 years, with a standard deviation of 3.19 years. One president with their highest degree in business had a tenure of less than one year, while one president with their highest degree in religion & theology had a tenure of 18 years.

**Terminal Education Coding.** The length of tenure for presidents in the sample were coded into groups based on the discipline of their highest earned degree. Forty-one presidents
held a terminal education degree, and had an average tenure of 7.91 years with a standard
deviation of 7.95. Eighteen presidents held their highest degree in the social sciences, with an
average length of tenure of 6.21 years and a standard deviation of 6.66. Fifteen presidents with
degrees in STEM had an average length of tenure of 6.63 years with a standard deviation of 4.92.
Nine presidents held their degree in the humanities and fine arts, with an average tenure of 7.25
years and a 5.40 standard deviation. Six presidents with a disciplinary background in law had an
average length of tenure of 13.96 years and a 13.26 standard deviation. Three presidents held a
degree in medicine, with an average length of tenure of 7.25 years and a 3.19 standard deviation.
One president with a business degree has served less than one year, one president with a degree
in higher education (master’s degree) served 16.75 years and one president with a degree in
religion and theology served 18 years.

**Terminal Higher Education Coding.** The length of tenure for presidents in the sample
were coded into groups based on the discipline of their highest earned degree. Thirty-one
presidents held a terminal higher education degree, and had an average length of tenure of 8.55
years with a standard deviation of 8.85. Ten presidents held their highest degree in education,
with an average tenure of 5.93 years with a 3.81 standard deviation. Eighteen presidents with a
degree in the social sciences served an average length of tenure of 6.21 years with a standard
deviation of 6.66. Among 15 presidents with degrees in STEM, the average length of tenure was
6.63 years with a standard deviation of 4.92. Nine presidents held a degree in the humanities and
fine arts, and served an average tenure of 7.25 years with a 5.40 standard deviation. Six
presidents with a disciplinary background in law had an average length of tenure of 13.96 years
with a 13.26 standard deviation. Three presidents with a degree in medicine served an average
length of tenure of 7.25 years with a 3.19 standard deviation. One president with a business
degree has served less than one year, one president with a degree in higher education (master’s degree) served 16.75 years and one president with a degree in religion and theology served 18 years.

**Career Path & Length of Tenure**

The length of tenure for presidents in the sample were coded into groups based their career paths. There were 55 presidents who followed the scholar career path. These presidents had a mean length of tenure of 7.67 years, with a standard deviation of 5.95 years. Thirty steward presidents had a mean length of tenure of 8.56 years, with a standard deviation of 10.16 years. Seven spanner presidents had a mean length of tenure of 5.29 years, with standard deviation of 6.61 years. Finally, 3 presidents that followed the stranger pathway had a mean length of tenure of 8.42 years, with a standard deviation of 5.9 years.

**Institution Type**

The presidents in the sample were coded in groups according to the type of institutions they oversaw. The types of institutions within the sample were university center/doctoral degree granting institutions, university colleges, technical colleges and community colleges. Of the 95 presidents, 9 led university center/doctoral degree granting institutions, 24 led university colleges, 15 led technical colleges and 47 led community colleges.

**Highest Earned Degree & Institution Type**

**Initial Coding.** The institution types led by presidents in the sample were coded into groups according to each president’s highest earned degree. Among the 47 presidents leading community colleges, 42.6% (20) held an EdD as their highest degree, 36.2% (17) held a PhD as their highest degree, 12.8% (6) held a professional doctoral as their highest degree and 8.5% (4)
held a master’s degree as their highest degree. Within the 24 presidents leading university colleges, 79.2% (19) held a PhD, 16.7% (4) held a professional doctorate and 4.2% (1) held a master’s degree. There were 15 presidents leading technical colleges. In this group, 80% (12) held a PhD as their highest degree, while 13.3% (2) held an EdD and 6.7% (1) held a master’s degree. Finally, 9 presidents leading university centers/doctoral granting institutions, included 77.8% (7) holding a PhD and 22.2% (2) holding professional doctorates.

A chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS statistics to examine the relationship between highest earned degree and institution type. The relationship between these variables was statistically significant, $X^2 (9, N=95) = 27.455, p<0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between highest earned degree and institution type, variables are independent) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between highest earned degree and institution type, variables are not independent) was accepted. There is evidence of a relationship between the highest earned degree of a president in the sample and the type of institution that they lead.

**Terminal Education Coding.** The institution types led by presidents in the sample were coded into groups according to each president’s highest earned degree. Among the 47 presidents leading community colleges, 66% (31) held a terminal education degree, 12.8% (6) held a professional doctorate, 12.8% (6) held a PhD and 8.5% (4) held a master’s degree. Twenty-four presidents led university colleges, with 62.5% (15) holding a PhD, 16.7% (4) holding a professional doctorate, 16.7% (4) holding a terminal education degree and 4.2% (1) holding a master’s degree. Fifteen presidents led technology colleges. In this group, 53.3% (8) held a PhD, 40% (6) held a terminal education degree and 6.7% (1) held a master’s degree. Of the 9
presidents leading university centers/doctoral degree granting institutions, 77.8% (7) held a PhD and 22.2% (2) held a professional doctorate.

A chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS statistics to examine the relationship between highest earned degree and institution type. The relationship between these variables was statistically significant, \(X^2 (9, N=95) = 33.835, p<0.01\). Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between highest earned degree and institution type, variables are independent) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between highest earned degree and institution type, variables are not independent) was accepted. There is evidence of a relationship between the highest earned degree of a president in the sample and the type of institution that they lead.

**Terminal Higher Education Coding.** The institution types led by presidents in the sample were coded into groups according to each president’s highest earned degree. Among 47 presidents leading community colleges, 55.3% (26) held a terminal higher education degree, 17% (8) held a PhD, 12.8% (6) held a professional doctorate, 8.5% (4) held a master’s degree and 6.4% (3) held an EdD. Twenty-four presidents led university colleges, with 70.8% (17) holding a PhD, 16.7% (4) holding a professional doctorate, 8.3% (2) holding a terminal higher education degree and 4.2% (1) holding a master’s degree. Fifteen presidents led technology colleges, with 66.7% (10) holding a PhD, 20% (3) holding a terminal higher education degree, and 6.7% (1) each holding an EdD and a master’s degree. Of the 9 presidents leading university centers/doctoral degree granting institutions, 77.8% (7) held a PhD and 22.2% (2) held a professional doctorate.

A chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS statistics to examine the relationship between highest earned degree and institution type. The relationship between these
variables was statistically significant, $X^2 (12, N=95) = 37.245, p<0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between highest earned degree and institution type, variables are independent) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between highest earned degree and institution type, variables are not independent) was accepted. There is evidence of a relationship between the highest earned degree of a president in the sample and the type of institution that they lead.

**Discipline of Highest Earned Degree & Institution Type**

**Initial Coding.** The institution types led by presidents in the sample were coded into groups according to the discipline of each president’s highest earned degree. The 47 presidents leading community colleges included presidents with the following discipline backgrounds: 57.4% (27) higher education, 10.6% (5) education, 10.6% (5) humanities and fine arts, 6.4% (3) law, 6.4% (3) social sciences, 4.3% (2) STEM, 2.1% (1) business and 2.1% (1) medicine. The 24 presidents leading university colleges included presidents with the following discipline backgrounds: (33.3% (8) social sciences, 16.7% (4) humanities, 16.7% (4) STEM, 12.5% (3) law, 8.3% (2) education, 8.3% (2) higher education and 4.2% (1) religion and theology. Among the 15 presidents leading technical colleges, 33.3% (5) earned their highest degree in the social sciences, 26.7% (4) earned their highest degree in a STEM discipline, and 20% (3) each in education and higher education. Five (55.6%) of the 9 presidents leading university centers/doctoral degree granting institutions earned their highest degree in a STEM discipline. Two (22.2%) earned their highest degree in medicine and the final 2 (22.2%) in the social sciences.

A chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS statistics to examine the relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and institution type. The relationship
between these variables was statistically significant, $X^2 (24, N=95) = 63.344$, $p<0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and institution type, variables are independent) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and institution type, variables are not independent) was accepted. There is evidence of a relationship between the discipline of the highest degree earned by a president in the sample and the type of institution that they lead.

**Terminal Education Coding.** The institution types led by presidents in the sample were coded into groups according to the discipline of each president’s highest earned degree. The 47 presidents leading community colleges included presidents with the following discipline backgrounds: 66% (31) terminal education, 10.6% (5) humanities and fine arts, 6.4% (3) social sciences, 6.4% (3) law, 4.3% (2) STEM, 2.1% (1) medicine, 2.1% (1) business, 2.1% (1) higher education (master’s degree). The 24 presidents leading university colleges included presidents with the following discipline backgrounds: 33.3% (8) social sciences, 16.7% (4) terminal education, 16.7% (4) humanities and fine arts, 16.7% (4) STEM, 12.5% (3) law and 4.2% (1) religion and theology. Among the 15 presidents leading technical colleges, 40% (6) held a terminal education degree, 33.3% (5) held a degree in the social sciences and 26.7% (4) held a STEM degree. Of the 9 presidents leading university centers/doctoral degree granting institutions, 55.6% (5) held a STEM degree, 22.2% (2) held a degree in the social sciences and 22.2% (2) held a degree in medicine.

A chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS statistics to examine the relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and institution type. The relationship between these variables was statistically significant, $X^2 (24, N=95) = 59.188$, $p<0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and institution type,
variables are independent) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and institution type, variables are not independent) was accepted. There is evidence of a relationship between the discipline of the highest degree earned by a president in the sample and the type of institution that they lead.

**Terminal Higher Education Coding.** The institution types led by presidents in the sample were coded into groups according to the discipline of each president’s highest earned degree. The 47 presidents leading community colleges included presidents with the following discipline backgrounds: 55.3% (26) terminal higher education, 10.6% (5) education, 10.6% (5) humanities and fine arts, 6.4% (3) social sciences, 6.4% (3) law, 4.3% (2) STEM, 2.1% (1) medicine, 2.1% (1) business, 2.1% (1) higher education (master’s degree). The 24 presidents leading university colleges included presidents with the following discipline backgrounds: 33.3% (8) social sciences, 16.7% (4) STEM, 16.7% (4) humanities and fine arts, 12.5% (3) law, 8.3% (2) terminal higher education, 8.3% (2) education, 4.2% (1) religion and theology. Among the 15 presidents leading technical colleges, 33.3% (5) held a degree in the social sciences, 26.7% (4) in STEM, 20% (3) held a terminal higher education degree and 20% (3) held a degree in education.

Of the 9 presidents leading university centers/doctoral degree granting institutions, 55.6% (5) held a STEM degree, 22.2% (2) held a social sciences degree and 22.2% (2) held a degree in medicine.

A chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS statistics to examine the relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and institution type. The relationship between these variables was statistically significant, $X^2 (27, N=95) = 63.469, p<0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and institution type, variables are independent) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship
between discipline of highest earned degree and institution type, variables are not independent) was accepted. There is evidence of a relationship between the discipline of the highest degree earned by a president in the sample and the type of institution that they lead.

**Career Path & Institution Type**

The institution types led by presidents in the sample were coded into groups according to the career path of each president. Within the 47 presidents leading community colleges, 53.2% (25) followed the steward path, 36.2% (17) followed the scholar path, 8.5% (4) followed the spanner path and 2.1% (1) followed the stranger path. Among the 24 presidents leading university colleges, 76.2% (19) followed the scholar path, 12.5% (3) followed the steward path and 1 each (4.2%) followed the spanner and stranger path. 15 presidents led technical colleges, with 66.7% (10) following the scholar path, 13.3% (2) following the spanner path, 13.3% (2) following the steward path and 6.7% (1) following the stranger path. Lastly, all 9 of the presidents leading university centers’/doctoral degree granting institutions followed the scholar career path.

A chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS statistics to examine the relationship between career path and institution type. The relationship between these variables was statistically significant, $X^2 (9, N=95) = 25.713$, $p<0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between career path and institution type, variables are independent) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between career path and institution type, variables are not independent) was accepted. There is evidence of a relationship between career path of a president in the sample and the type of institution that they lead.
State vs. Local Appointment

The 95 presidents in the sample were coded in 2 groups according to the method by which they were appointed. Within SUNY system, community college presidents are appointed by the board of trustees from each individual community college. These local board of trustees (or college councils) lead the presidential search and appoint a final candidate. Appointments must then be approved by SUNY system administration. Conversely, system administration retains more control over the search, selection and appointment of presidents for the non-community college institutions within SUNY. This distinction will be characterized in this study as “state vs. local appointment”. Within the sample, 47 (49.5%) presidents were locally appointed vs. 48 (50.5%) presidents that were state appointed.

Highest Earned Degree & State vs. Local Appointment

Initial Coding. The method of appointment (state vs. local) for presidents in the sample were coded into groups according to the highest earned degree of each president. Among the 48 state appointed presidents, 79.2% (38) held a PhD as their highest earned degree, 12.5% (6) held a professional doctorate, 4.2% (2) held an EdD and 4.2% (2) held a master’s degree. Of the 47 locally appointed presidents, 42.6% (20) held an EdD as their highest earned degree, 36.2% (17) held a PhD, 12.8% (6) held professional doctorates and 8.5% (4) held a master’s degree.

A chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS statistics to examine the relationship between highest earned degree and state vs. local appointment. The relationship between these variables was statistically significant, $X^2 (3, N=95) = 23.404, p<0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between highest earned degree and state vs. local appointment, variables are independent) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between highest earned degree and state vs. local appointment, variables are not independent)
was accepted. There is evidence of a relationship between the highest earned degree by a president in the sample and the method (state vs. local) by which they were appointed to lead a SUNY institution.

**Terminal Education Coding.** The method of appointment (state vs. local) for presidents in the sample were coded into groups according to the highest earned degree of each president. Forty-one presidents held a terminal education degree, with 75.6% (31) locally appointed and 24.4% state appointed. There were 36 presidents that held a PhD. Among this group, 83.3% were state appointed and 16.7% (6) were locally appointed. Among 12 presidents with professional doctorates, 50% (6) were state appointed and were locally appointed. Six presidents held a master’s degree, 66.7% (4) of whom were locally appointed and 33.3% (2) of whom were state appointed.

A chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS statistics to examine the relationship between highest earned degree and state vs. local appointment. The relationship between these variables was statistically significant, $X^2 (3, N=95) = 27.415, p<0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between highest earned degree and state vs. local appointment, variables are independent) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between highest earned degree and state vs. local appointment, variables are not independent) was accepted. There is evidence of a relationship between the highest earned degree by a president in the sample and the method (state vs. local) by which they were appointed to lead a SUNY institution.

**Terminal Higher Education Coding.** The method of appointment (state vs. local) for presidents in the sample were coded into groups according to the highest earned degree of each president. Thirty-one presidents held a terminal higher education degree. In this group, 83.9%
were locally appointed while 16.1% (5) were state appointed. Among 42 presidents holding a PhD 81% (34) were state appointed and 19% (8) were locally appointed. Twelve presidents holding professional doctorates were evenly split, with 50% (6) each state appointed and locally appointed. Six presidents held a master's degree, with 66.7% (4) locally appointed and 33.3% (2) state appointed. Four presidents held EdDs, with 75% (3) being locally appointed and 25% (1) being state appointed.

A chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS statistics to examine the relationship between highest earned degree and state vs. local appointment. The relationship between these variables was statistically significant, \( X^2 (4, N=95) = 31.981, p<0.01 \). Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between highest earned degree and state vs. local appointment, variables are independent) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between highest earned degree and state vs. local appointment, variables are not independent) was accepted. There is evidence of a relationship between the highest earned degree by a president in the sample and the method (state vs. local) by which they were appointed to lead a SUNY institution.

**Discipline of Highest Earned Degree & State vs. Local Appointment**

**Initial Coding.** The method of appointment (state vs. local) for presidents in the sample were coded into groups according to the discipline of each president’s highest degree. Of the 48 state appointed presidents, 31.3% (15) earned their highest degree in the social sciences, 27.1% (13) in a STEM field, 10.4% (5) each earned their highest degree in education or higher education, 8.3% (4) in humanities and fine arts, 6.3% (3) in law, 4.2% (2) in medicine and 2.1% (1) in religion and theology. Among the 47 state appointed presidents, 57.4% (27) earned their highest degree in higher education, 10.6% (5) in education, 10.6% (5) in the humanities and fine
arts, 6.4% (3) in law, 6.4% (3) in the social sciences, 4.3% (2) in STEM, 2.1% (1) in medicine and 2.1% (1) in business.

A chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS statistics to examine the relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and state vs. local appointment. The relationship between these variables was statistically significant, $X^2 (8, N=95) = 33.629, p<0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and state vs. local appointment, variables are independent) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and state vs. local appointment, variables are not independent) was accepted. There is evidence of a relationship between the discipline of a president in the sample’s highest earned degree and the method (state vs. local) by which they were appointed to lead a SUNY institution.

**Terminal Education Coding.** The method of appointment (state vs. local) for presidents in the sample were coded into groups according to the discipline of each president’s highest degree. Of 41 presidents holding a terminal education degree, 75.6% (31) were locally appointed and 24.4% (10) were state appointed. Eighteen presidents held a degree in the social sciences. In this group, 83.3% (15) were state appointed and 16.7% (3) were locally appointed. There were 15 presidents holding a STEM degree, 86.7% (13) of whom were state appointed and 15.4% (2) of whom were locally appointed. Nine presidents held a humanities and fine arts degree with 55.6% (5) locally appointed and 44.4% (4) state appointed. Six presidents held a law degree, with 50% (3) locally appointed and 50% (3) state appointed. Of 3 presidents with a degree in medicine, 66.7% (2) were state appointed and 33.3% (1) was locally appointed. One president each held a degree in business and higher education (master’s), both of whom were locally appointed. Finally, one president with a degree in religion and theology was state appointed.
A chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS statistics to examine the relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and state vs. local appointment. The relationship between these variables was statistically significant, $X^2 (8, N=95) = 30.260$, $p<0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and state vs. local appointment, variables are independent) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and state vs. local appointment, variables are not independent) was accepted. There is evidence of a relationship between the discipline of a president in the sample’s highest earned degree and the method (state vs. local) by which they were appointed to lead a SUNY institution.

**Terminal Higher Education Coding.** The method of appointment (state vs. local) for presidents in the sample were coded into groups according to the discipline of each president’s highest degree. Thirty-one presidents held a terminal higher education degree, with 83.9% (26) locally appointed and 16.1% (5) state appointed. Eighteen presidents held a degree in the social sciences with 83.3% (15) state appointed and 16.7% (3) locally appointed. There were 15 presidents holding a STEM degree, 86.7% (13) of whom were state appointed and 15.4% (2) of whom were locally appointed. Ten presidents held a degree in education, with 50% (5) each state appointed and locally appointed. Nine presidents held a humanities and fine arts degree with 55.6% (5) locally appointed and 44.4% (4) state appointed. There were 6 presidents holding a law degree, 50% (3) locally appointed and 50% (3) state appointed. Among three presidents with a degree in medicine, 66.7% (2) were state appointed and 33.3% (1) was locally appointed. One president each held a degree in business and higher education (master’s), both of whom were locally appointed. Finally, one president with a degree in religion and theology was state appointed.
A chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS statistics to examine the relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and state vs. local appointment. The relationship between these variables was statistically significant, \( X^2 (9, N=95) = 33.730, p<0.01. \) Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and state vs. local appointment, variables are independent) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and state vs. local appointment, variables are not independent) was accepted. There is evidence of a relationship between the discipline of a president in the sample’s highest earned degree and the method (state vs. local) by which they were appointed to lead a SUNY institution.

**Career Path & State vs. Local Appointment**

The method of appointment (state vs. local) for presidents in the sample were coded into groups according to the career path of each president. Of the 48 state appointed presidents, 79.2% (38) followed the scholar path, 10.4% (5) followed the steward path, 6.3% (3) followed the spanner path and 4.2% (2) followed the stranger path. Among the 47 locally appointed presidents, 53.2% (25) followed the steward path, 36.2% (17) followed the scholar path, 8.5% (4) followed the spanner path and 2.3% (1) followed the stranger path.

A chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS statistics to examine the relationship between career path and state vs. local appointment. The relationship between these variables was statistically significant, \( X^2 (3, N=95) = 21.820, p<0.01. \) Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between career path and state vs. local appointment, variables are independent) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between career path and state vs. local appointment variables are not independent) was accepted. There is evidence of a
relationship between career path of a president in the sample and the method (state vs. local) by which they were appointed to lead a SUNY institution.

**Departure**

There were 43 past presidents within the sample, allowing for an analysis of the reasons for their departure from a SUNY presidency. Among the 43 past presidents, 62.8% (27) left their role due to retirement. Eleven presidents (25.6%) resigned from their role to assume another college/university presidency, coded in this study as “opportunity.” Two presidents (4.7%) resigned from their role under controversy. This included facing public complaints from faculty, union leadership and students or allegations of corruption/financial impropriety with institution resources. One president (2.3%) resigned due to health reasons, one president (2.3%) resigned due to personal reasons and one president (2.3%) resigned for an unknown reason that was not made public.

**Highest Earned Degree & Departure**

**Initial Coding.** The reasons for departure for the 43 past presidents in the sample were coded according to their highest earned degree. Among the presidents with a PhD, 55.5% (15) left their role due to retirement, 33.3% (9) left their role for another presidential opportunity and 11.1% (3) resigned from their role. All 6 of the past presidents holding an EdD as their highest degree left their presidency due to retirement. Six past presidents held professional doctorates, with 66.7% (4) leaving due to retirement and33.3% (2) leaving for another presidency. There were 4 past presidents with a master’s degree as their highest degree, 50% (2) of whom resigned their role and 50% (2) of whom vacated their presidency due to retirement.

A chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS statistics to examine the relationship between highest earned degree and departure. The relationship between these
variables was statistically insignificant, \(X^2 (15, N=43)= 26.278, p>0.01\). Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between highest earned degree and departure, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between highest earned degree and departure, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between a past president in the sample’s highest earned degree and the reason that they departed their SUNY presidential appointment.

**Terminal Education Coding.** The reasons for departure for the 43 past presidents in the sample were coded according to their highest earned degree. 20 past presidents held a terminal education degree. In this group, 75\% (15) departed the role due to retirement, 2\% (4) left due to opportunity and 5\% (1) resigned. Among 13 presidents holding a PhD, 46.2\% (6) retired from the role, 38.5\% (5) left the role for another presidency and 15.4\% (2) resigned from the role. Six presidents held professional doctorates, with 66.7\% (4) retiring from the role and 33.3\% (2) leaving due to opportunity. Finally, of 4 presidents holding master’s degrees, 50\% (2) resigned from the presidency and 50\% (2) left due to retirement.

A chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS statistics to examine the relationship between highest earned degree and departure. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, \(X^2 (6, N=43)= 10.093, p>0.01\). Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between highest earned degree and departure, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between highest earned degree and departure, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between a past president in the sample’s highest earned degree and the reason that they departed their SUNY presidential appointment.
**Terminal Higher Education Coding.** The reasons for departure for the 43 past presidents in the sample were coded according to their highest earned degree. Thirteen presidents held a terminal higher education degree, 76.9% (10) of whom departed the role due to retirement, 15.4% (2) left for another opportunity and 7.7% (1) resigned. There were 19 presidents holding a PhD, 52.6% (10) left the role due to retirement, 36.8% (7) departed for another opportunity and 10.5% (2) resigned. Among 6 presidents holding professional doctorates, 66.7% (4) retired from the role and 33.3% (2) left due to opportunity. There were 4 presidents holding master’s degrees, 50% (2) resigned from the presidency and 50% (2) left due to retirement. Finally, one president holding an EdD left the role due to retirement.

A chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS statistics to examine the relationship between highest earned degree and departure. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (8, N=43)= 10.027$, $p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between highest earned degree and departure, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between highest earned degree and departure, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between a past president in the sample’s highest earned degree and the reason that they departed their SUNY presidential appointment.

**Discipline of Highest Earned Degree & Departure**

**Initial Coding.** The reasons for departure for the 43 past presidents in the sample were coded according to the discipline of their highest earned degree. There were 13 past presidents that earned their highest degree in higher education. Among this group, 76.9% (10) left their role due to retirement, 15.4% (2) left to assume another presidency and 7.7% (1) resigned. Seven presidents earned their highest degree in education, with 71.4% (5) retiring from the presidency.
and 28.6% (2) leaving for another presidency. There were 7 presidents with a disciplinary background in the social sciences, 71.4% (5) who vacated their role due to retirement and 28.6% (2) that resigned. Seven presidents earned their highest degree in a STEM field. In this group, 57.1% (4) left for another presidency, 28.6% (2) resigned from their role and 14.3% (1) left due to retirement. Five presidents earned their highest degree in the humanities and fine arts. 80% (4) of these presidents vacated their role due to retirement and 20% (1) left to take another presidency. Three presidents earned their highest degree in law, with 66.7% (2) retiring from their role and 33.3% (1) leaving for another presidency. Finally, 1 president with a disciplinary background in medicine left their role to take another presidency.

A chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS statistics to examine the relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and departure. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (30, N=43) = 29.593, p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and departure, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and departure, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between the discipline of a past SUNY president’s highest earned degree and the reason that they departed their presidential appointment.

**Terminal Education Coding.** The reasons for departure for the 43 past presidents in the sample were coded according to the discipline of their highest earned degree. Twenty presidents held a terminal education degree, with 75% (15) departing via retirement, 20% (4) leaving the role for another opportunity and 5% (1) resigning. Among 7 presidents with degrees in STEM, 57.1% (4) left their role to pursue another presidency, 28.6% (2) resigned and 14.3% (1) retired.
There were 7 presidents with degrees in the social sciences, with 71.4% (5) leaving the role due to retirement and 28.6% (2) resigning. Five presidents earned degrees in the humanities and fine arts. In this group, 80% (4) retired and 20% (1) departed for another opportunity. Of 3 presidents with a law degree, 66.7% (2) retired and 33.3% (1) left to for another opportunity. One president with a degree in medicine departed due to opportunity.

A chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS statistics to examine the relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and departure. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (10, N=43) = 13.367, p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and departure, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and departure, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between the discipline of a past SUNY president’s highest earned degree and the reason that they departed their presidential appointment.

**Terminal Higher Education Coding.** The reasons for departure for the 43 past presidents in the sample were coded according to the discipline of their highest earned degree. Thirteen presidents held a terminal higher education degree, with 76.9% (10) leaving via retirement, 15.4% (2) departing for opportunity and 7.7% (1) resigning from the role. Seven presidents held an education degree, with 71.4% (5) leaving via retirement and 28.6% (2) leaving due to opportunity. Among 5 presidents with a degree in the humanities and fine arts, 80% (4) retired and 20% (1) departed for opportunity. Among 7 presidents with degrees in STEM, 57.1% (4) left their role to pursue another presidency, 28.6% (2) resigned and 14.3% retired. Seven presidents with degrees in the social sciences included 71.4% (5) leaving the role due to
retirement and 28.6% (2) resigning. Among 3 presidents with a law degree, 66.7% (2) retired and 33.3% (1) left to for another opportunity. One president with a degree in medicine departed due to opportunity.

A chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS statistics to examine the relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and departure. The relationship between these variables was statistically insignificant, \( X^2 (12, N=43) = 16.929, p>0.01 \). Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and departure, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and departure, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between the discipline of a past SUNY president’s highest earned degree and the reason that they departed their presidential appointment.

**Career Path & Departure**

The reasons for departure for the 43 past presidents in the sample were coded according to their career path. There were 28 past presidents that followed the scholar career path. Among this group, 57.1% (16) left their role due to retirement, 28.6% (8) left to accept another presidency and 14.3% (4) resigned from their role. Twelve past presidents followed the steward path, with 75% (9) leaving the role due to retirement and 25% (3) resigning to accept another presidential appointment. Two past presidents followed the stranger path, with 50% (1) retiring from the role and 50% (1) resigning. Finally, 1 past president followed the spanner career path, and vacated their role due to retirement.

A chi square test of independence was performed using SPSS statistics to examine the relationship between career path and departure. The relationship between these variables was
statistically insignificant, $X^2 (15, N=43) = 3.866, p>0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis (no relationship between career path and departure, variables are independent) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (there is a relationship between career path and departure, variables are not independent) was rejected. There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between a past SUNY president’s career path and the reason that they departed their presidential appointment.

**Summary**

In this chapter, the results of both qualitative and quantitative analyses were presented to address each of the five research questions. Qualitative methods were used to identify and analyze the academic backgrounds and career paths of SUNY presidents. Quantitative methods were used to examine and test if relationships existed between academic background, career path and success (as defined by the metrics of enrollment, graduation rate, retention rate and institutional endowment). The findings of additional analyses (immediate prior role, length of tenure, institution type, state vs. local appointment and reason for departure) were also presented to provide further insight into the backgrounds and presidencies of the individuals in the sample.

The first section identifies the academic backgrounds of the 95 SUNY presidents. The highest earned degree of among SUNY presidents were as follows: 1) doctor of philosophy (PhD), 2) doctor of education (EdD), 3) master’s degree and 4) professional doctorate. Within the sample, 43.2% (41) of presidents held a terminal education degree (PhDs in education or higher education or EdD in education or higher education) and 32.6% (31) held a terminal higher education degree (EdD or PhD focused on higher education). The discipline of SUNY president’s highest earned degrees were: 1) Business, 2) Education, 3) Higher Education, 4) Humanities & Fine Arts, 5) Law, 6) Medicine, 7) Religion & Theology, 8) STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics) and 9) Social Sciences.
Next, the career paths of SUNY presidents were identified as: 1) scholars, 2) spanners, 3) stewards and 4) strangers. Within the sample 57.9% of presidents followed the scholar career path, 31.6% followed the steward path, 7.4% followed the spanner path and just 3.2% (3) followed the stranger path. Most of the sample (89.5%) followed a traditional career path (scholar/steward) and 10.5% followed a “non-traditional” (spanner/stranger) pathway.

In terms of academic background and career path, the study found evidence of a relationship between a president’s highest earned degree and the career path that they followed to the presidential appointment. Additionally, there was evidence of a relationship between the discipline of a president’s highest earned degree and their career path.

Exploring academic background and success, the study found insufficient evidence of a relationship between the highest earned degree and presidential success, as measured by enrollment, retention rate, graduation rate and endowment. The study also found insufficient evidence of a relationship between the discipline of highest earned degree and presidential success, as measured by enrollment, retention rate, graduation rate and endowment. In regards to career path and success, the study found insufficient evidence of a relationship between career path and presidential success, as measured by enrollment, retention rate, graduation rate and endowment.

The most common immediate prior role to SUNY presidential appointment was chief academic officer (54.7%), followed by administrative vice president (22.1%). Approximately 10% of presidents transitioned to SUNY from another presidency, while 5.3% served in a leadership role external to higher education and 3.2% transitioned from leadership roles within a state university system. Finally, presidents also transitioned from a faculty appointment (2.1%), an academic deanship (1.1%) and an administrative deanship (1.1%). The study found evidence
of a relationship between a president’s highest earned degree and the role that they held immediately prior to the presidency. However, there was insufficient evidence of a relationship between discipline of the highest earned degree and immediate prior role or career path and immediate prior role.

Overall, presidents in the sample served a mean length of tenure of 7.8 years. Coded by degree, mean length of tenures ranged from 3.53 (presidents with EdDs) to 12 years. Viewed by discipline of highest earned degree, mean lengths of tenures ranged from less than one year to 13.96 years. By career path, mean lengths of tenures ranged from 5.29 years (spanner presidents) to 8.56 years (steward presidents). Standard deviation for length of tenure was high relative to the mean across all coding, indicating that the tenures presidents served varied greatly rather than being clustered around the mean.

There is evidence that highest earned degree, discipline of highest earned degree and career path each have a relationship to the type of institution that a president oversees. Additionally, there is evidence that highest earned degree, discipline of highest earned degree and career path each have a relationship to the method by which presidents were appointment (state vs. local). Lastly, there is insufficient evidence that highest earned degree, discipline of highest earned degree or career path have a relationship to the reason for the departure of past SUNY presidents.

The following chapter will provide a discussion and analysis of the findings. It will also contextualize the findings within the literature on the topic, discuss implications and limitations of the study, before concluding with suggestions for future research.
Chapter 5: Discussion

This study was conducted to investigate one central question. Is there a relationship between a college president’s background and how successful they are in this key role? Despite the importance of a college president and the myriad of studies addressing this population, the central question has not previously been addressed. Focusing on college and university presidents within the State University of New York (SUNY), this study tested whether a relationship existed between a president’s academic background (highest earned degree and discipline of highest earned degree), career path and success as measured by changes in enrollment, retention rate, graduation rate and endowment during a president's tenure. The study also explored the effectiveness of higher education graduate programs in preparing individuals to serve at the highest level of leadership within colleges and universities. Lastly, the study also investigated whether there was a relationship between a SUNY president’s academic background, career path and the following: professional role immediately prior to appointment, the type of institution they oversee, the length of time they serve as president, whether they were state or locally appointed to the college presidency and the reason that they departed the role of president.

Findings of the study provide important insights into the academic and professional preparation of college and university presidents, while affirming the efficacy of higher education graduate programs in preparing individuals for executive level roles. Lastly, the findings are informative for a variety of stakeholders involved in the search, appointment and evaluation of college presidents.
Academic Background And Career Path

The first research question sought to determine the highest earned degrees held by current and immediate past presidents within SUNY and the disciplines of those highest earned degrees. This study found that 81.1% of SUNY presidents held a PhD or EdD, 12.6% held a professional doctorate degree and 6.3% held a master’s degree. Additionally, the highest degrees held by SUNY presidents most commonly fell within education/higher education (44.2%), social sciences (18.9%) and STEM (15.8%). These findings align closely with prior research conducted by Gagliardi, Espinosa, Turk and Taylor (2017) in a report published by the American Council on Education (ACE). The report surveyed 1,596 presidents across the United States and found that in 2016, 79.5% of presidents held a PhD or an EdD and the top fields of study for their highest degrees were in education or higher education (41.1%), social sciences (14.2%), humanities & fine arts (11.3%).

The second research question sought to determine the career paths of current and immediate past presidents within SUNY. Among SUNY presidents, 89.4% followed a traditional career path (57.9% scholar-presidents and 31.6% steward-presidents) to the presidency and 10.5% followed a non-traditional path (7.4% spanner-presidents and 3.2% stranger-presidents). These findings show little variation from Birnbaum and Umbach’s research in 2001, which utilized data from 2,297 college and university presidents across the nation in 1995, and found that 89% of presidents followed a traditional path (spanner and steward). In 1974, Cohen and March described the career path to the presidency as “…a fairly defined ladder with a relatively large number of rungs. Moreover, it is like other hierarchical career paths in that the accepted sign of success is promotion” (p. 23). Moore, Salimbene, Marlier and Bragg (1983) wrote that presidential careers typically involve education and professional experiences across multiple
institutions. However, the researchers noted that as the role of higher education institutions continue to change, the experiences expected and sought after by institutions for their leaders will continue to change. Over thirty years later, SUNY institutions still greatly prefer to appoint presidents who ascend through traditional pathways, as the numbers of spanner-presidents (7.4%) and strangers-presidents (3.2%) are miniscule in comparison to their colleagues with traditional backgrounds. However, Woollen (2016) notes that there is no evidence within the literature on presidential effectiveness that individuals with the traditional career background possess the most ideal experiences and skill sets. Delabbio and Palmer (2009) found that non-traditional presidents can bring specific skills that are attractive to trustees such as fundraising, political savvy or financial acumen. They go on to say that outside talent can be valuable as long as there is a good fit between the non-traditional leader and the institution’s mission. Selingo, Chheng and Clark 2017 recommended that colleges and universities develop willingness to look beyond traditional backgrounds to fill the next generation of presidential vacancies. They cautioned that this requires a public and transparent search process to ensure buy-in from institutional stakeholders. SUNY trustees and other stakeholders may want to consider looking outside of the traditional pathways for potential presidents. If and when they do, it will be imperative to strive for an alignment of skillset, background and experiences to the needs and mission of each institution.

**Relationship Between Academic Background and Career Path**

The next research question investigated whether or not a relationship existed between the academic backgrounds of current and immediate past SUNY presidents and their career paths. This study found evidence of a relationship between a president’s highest earned degree and the
career path that they followed to the presidential appointment. There was also evidence of a relationship between the discipline of a president’s highest earned degree and their career path.

SUNY presidents that held an EdD were more likely to have followed the steward career path (63.6%), while SUNY presidents holding a PhD were more likely to have followed the scholar career path (78.2%). SUNY presidents holding a terminal higher education degree (EdD or PhD focused on higher education) were more likely to have followed the steward career path (64.5%), holding successive administrative roles within higher education before being appointed to the presidency. Birnbaum and Umbach (2001) also determined that the EdD or PhD is the “normative” degree for traditional pathways to the college presidency.

The majority of presidents (57.9%) within SUNY followed the scholar career path. Among these scholar-presidents, 18.2% had a higher education disciplinary background. This 18.2% represents higher education faculty that eventually ascended to the presidency. Freeman (2016) wrote that higher education program graduates should be sought after for senior level administrative roles and as higher education policy advisers. The author argued that higher education program graduates should be viewed as experts and social scientists that inform the field of higher education and lamented that the expertise of higher education program faculty does not typically inform decision making on college campuses. Perry (2015) found that higher education faculty typically focus on teaching and research within their profession, merely serving at institutions of higher education rather than working for higher education. Higher education faculty possess a wealth of knowledge and expertise that they can bring to administrative and executive roles within colleges and universities. It is unclear why there are not larger numbers of “higher education scholars” serving as college and university presidents. There may be a lack of interest in the role (perhaps the desire to remain objective/removed from
the object of their academic studies?), barriers within the administrative pathway or perhaps they are not viewed as viable candidates by trustees and other stakeholders.

**Relationship Between Academic Background, Career Path and Success**

The final two research questions sought to uncover if a relationship existed between the academic background of a SUNY president and their success in the role of president and/or the career path of a SUNY president and their success in the role of president. The study found no statistically significant evidence of a relationship between highest degree earned and presidential success, as measured by change in enrollment, retention rate, graduation rate and endowment during each president’s leadership. The study also found no statistically significant evidence of a relationship between discipline of highest earned degree and presidential success, as measured by change in enrollment, retention rate, graduation rate and endowment during each president’s leadership. Finally, there was no statistically significant evidence of a relationship between career path and presidential success, as measured by enrollment, retention rate, graduation rate and endowment during each president’s leadership. This research demonstrates that academic background and career path do not necessarily lead to a successful president as measured by the aforementioned indicators of institutional performance. However, success for a university president is an ambiguous concept. Cohen and March (1974) described the president of a university as “...a skidding automobile. The marginal judgements he makes, his skill, and his luck may possibly make some difference to the survival prospects for his riders. As a result, his responsibilities are heavy. But whether he is convicted of manslaughter or receives a medal for heroism is largely outside of his control” (p. 203). The literature on college presidents lacks empirical work on presidential effectiveness and McGoey (2007) notes that “...identifying the
criteria on which to measure a college or university president’s effectiveness can be difficult” (p. 86).

This study used institutional performance to conceptualize success based on the perspectives of presidents and necessary activities of successful presidents as determined by a review of literature on the topic. Bornstein (2005) surveyed over 1300 presidents of four year institutions and found that 75% of 750 respondents believed that they should be accountable for educational outcomes. The author also wrote that fundraising allows presidents to identify priorities and provides the resources to achieve their agenda, making it crucial to fulfilling institutional missions and goals. Donnelly (1995) interviewed four presidents deemed as successful, who each served terms of at least fifteen years, and were able to maintain or increase their enrollment, develop new academic programs and improve the physical plant on their campuses. Cohen and March (1974) interviewed presidents and administrators from 42 institutions, asking them to name a current president they deemed successful and to provide evidence of that success. Responses describing a successful president fell into three categories (constituency oriented items, institution building/entrepreneurial items and functional/administrative items) and included fiscal improvement, growth of the student body, lack of disruptions on campus and respect of students, faculty and the local community.

This study provided an important step into investigating what experiences contribute to the development of a successful president. It also raises an important question of how presidents should be evaluated and what exactly constitutes “presidential success”. According to Selingo, Chheng and Clark (2017), the current higher education environment requires leaders who can skillfully navigate a variety of stakeholders through periods of rapid change.
Additional Analyses

Approximately 76% of SUNY presidents held positions as a chief academic officer (54.7%) or an administrative vice president (22.1%) immediately prior to their presidential appointment. Another 10% transitioned to their role following a prior college presidency (10%). Among all college and university presidents nationwide, Gagliardi, Espinosa, Turk and Taylor (2017) found that 85% of current presidents held a position within higher education immediately prior to their current role (42.7% were chief academic officers, 23.9% were presidents and 16.3% were senior campus executives). The 15% from outside of higher education was comprised of individuals that served in business, non-profit organizations, elected officials, K-12 education administration and various clergy.

SUNY presidents within the sample served a mean length of tenure of 7.8 years, slightly longer than the average term served by the presidents of colleges and universities nationally (Gagliardi, Espinosa, Turk and Taylor, 2017). Although mean tenures are similar when comparing SUNY presidents to presidents across the country, it is important to note the high standard deviation within SUNY; the current and immediate prior presidents of SUNY institutions ranged from less than 6 months to over 30 years.

This research provided evidence that highest earned degree, discipline of highest earned degree and career path each have a relationship to the type of institution a SUNY president was appointed to lead. The majority of SUNY presidents whose highest degree is in either education or higher education lead a community college (76.2%). Additionally, among presidents that held an EdD, 90.9% lead community colleges. This affirms the findings of Gagliardi, Espinosa, Turk and Taylor (2017), who found that among community colleges nationally, 68.2% held their highest degree in education or higher education. Birnbaum and Umbach (2001) also found that
the majority of presidents holding an EdD lead community colleges and concluded that aspiring presidents may find their opportunities limited by educational and career choices. Similarly, individuals aspiring to a presidential appointment within SUNY should pay close attention to the academic backgrounds and career pathways that align with the type of institution they desire to lead. Someone aspiring to lead a community college should pursue doctoral degrees in education or higher education and follow the administrative career path. Someone seeking to lead a doctoral degree granting or university college should earn a PhD rather than an EdD, earn that degree in a STEM field or the social sciences, and follow the faculty/scholar career path.

The study did not find evidence of a relationship between degree, discipline or career path and the reason that past presidents left their role. The two most common reasons that past presidents departed was retirement (62.8%) or to assume a presidency at another institution (25.6%). It is difficult to ascertain specific causes behind a retirement. These causes could range from positive (retirement after a long and successful tenure), negative (“forced” into retirement amid controversy or difficulties) or relatively neutral/unrelated to performance (death, illness, personal or family reasons). Cohen and March (1974) note that few presidents are outright dismissed and there are usually a mix of push and pull between president and environment.

Implications

These findings can inform a wide range of stakeholders including higher education graduate program faculty, higher education graduate students, aspiring college/university presidents, board of trustees, and executive search firms/committees. The PhD and EdD were the earned degrees most highly represented in the sample of SUNY presidents. Additionally, the vast majority of individuals appointed to lead SUNY institutions followed a traditional career pathway. Individuals who have higher education career backgrounds, either as a faculty member
or administrator, appear to be highly valued by the SUNY stakeholders who appoint presidents. As the higher education landscape continues to evolve, SUNY institutions should continuously evaluate the skills and expertise that individuals with non-traditional degrees and career paths may bring to the table. Presidents with normative academic and career backgrounds may continue to fit SUNY’s needs, but specific institution contexts may benefit from a leader bringing a different approach.

Presidents in the sample with academic backgrounds in education or higher education who followed administrative career paths, typically led community colleges. Higher education graduate program curriculums should reflect this reality and include coursework and research focused on community college leadership for all of their students. There should also be discussion about the differing missions of various institution types (research, access, etc.) and the role of the president in supporting those missions. Graduate programs seeking to prepare college and university leaders should identify the types of skills and knowledge needed to fulfil these roles in different institutional contexts.

In general, individuals aspiring to lead an institution within SUNY should plan to acquire a doctorate within education/higher education, the social sciences or a STEM field (depending on the type of institution they would like to lead) and to follow a traditional career pathway within the academic hierarchy (faculty or administration). This study allows for a deeper understanding of the role that academic background and career path play in the preparation of a college president, confirms that higher education graduate programs prepare individuals for executive level leadership, and identifies various existing pathways through which individuals may arrive at a presidency.
Limitations

This study had two major limitations that must be addressed. These limitations were i) a lack of access to the research participants and ii) the difficulty of conceptualizing and operationalizing presidential success. The study’s limitations strongly influenced the methods and procedures used.

Lack of access to the research participants was not completely unforeseen, as college presidents have many demands for their time. However, the lack of access made it necessary to use documents and public records to as data sources. It was impractical to conduct qualitative interviews, limiting the scope of data available for analysis, triangulation and follow up of initial findings. Sample size and sample context was also limited (focusing only on presidents within SUNY). As a result, findings may not be generalizable beyond SUNY, though many align with previous research with larger populations and capture several pertinent trends.

Next, the challenge of measuring and studying the vague and ill-defined concept of presidential success also limited the study. In an effort to conceptualize presidential success into measurable variables, the study settled on a limited number of metrics that could only partially capture one aspect of a president's leadership (institutional performance). Additionally, various stakeholders on a college or university campus (students, faculty, local community, board of trustees etc.) may evaluate a president using very different measures. One constituency may deem a particular president to be successful, while another may deem the same president a failure. There are a number of forces outside of a president’s control (the economy, political climate etc.) that may influence the outcomes of a particular leader’s tenure. How well a president responds to major public incidents, catastrophes or controversy may also greatly impact the perception of their success. Institutional context also plays a role. A president may be
appointed for a specific purpose (to stabilize, to transform/turn around, grow enrollment) or because of a particular strength (business acumen, crisis management, fundraising) and should be evaluated on those terms above other measures. Lastly, a successful president’s policies and/or actions may not bear immediate fruit, and be reflected in observable changes during their tenure. One example of this “lag” would be one president cultivating relationships and laying groundwork for a major financial donation that does not actually occur under their leadership.

Evaluating a university president solely on measures of institutional performance is a limited and narrow criteria for success; one that may not fully capture the impact of particular president’s leadership and contribution. The study’s small scope and reliance on documents/public records (due to lack of access to the participants) limit its generalizability and depth. However, the limitations of the study do not invalidate its findings, rather they provide important context. The limitations also demonstrate the challenges of addressing this topic (and population), and reveal opportunities for future research.

Future Research

The study’s findings (and its limitations) prompt a number of questions for future research. It would be informative for the topic to be addressed with a larger (and perhaps broader) sample of college and university presidents to learn more about the patterns that emerged but not statistically insignificant. A larger sample size would allow these patterns to be explored and tested further. Another route for future research would be to include presidents from other state university systems, or to perhaps focus on a different set of institutions, such as historically black colleges and universities.

A researcher with greater access to participants should explore the study’s research questions using qualitative methods, specifically semi-structured qualitative interviews. The
perceptions of college presidents regarding if and how their academic backgrounds and career paths prepared them to lead a higher education institution is also fertile ground to explore.

Further investigation of the academic backgrounds and career paths of presidents would also be useful. For example, one should explore the institutions (by institution type, ranking, selectivity etc.) where presidents earned their degrees and/or worked throughout their career paths, and look for relationships to success.

This study established the existence of a number of relationships (degree and career, discipline and career, degree and immediate prior role, degree and institution type, discipline and institution type, career and institution type, degree & state vs. local appointment, discipline and state vs. local appointment and career and state vs. local appointment). Future research should explore the nature of these relationships, using qualitative methods to uncover more about how academic backgrounds and career paths influence presidents.

This study strived to create an objective measure of presidential success by using measures of institutional performance. However, presidential success is ambiguous and may be evaluated a number of different ways. There is still work to be done in terms of testing the relationship of academic background and career path to other measures of presidential success. Future research could explore other potential success indicators such as measuring student satisfaction, the relationship with faculty and administrative staff, campus climate and managing crises. Another approach to evaluate a president’s success would be a longitudinal analysis, comparing current presidents to their predecessors (going further back than only the immediate prior president). One could also delve deeper into specific scenarios and institutional environments and attempt to measure success based on performance compared to expectations of a president at their appointment. For example, a president may be appointed to be a
transformative leader and change the course of the institution while another may be appointed to bring stability or to raise money/address fiscal challenges. Finally, research that investigates the perceptions of multiple stakeholders and how they evaluate whether or not a president is successful would greatly add to the conversation on this topic.

Summary

This chapter provided an in-depth discussion of the study’s findings, framing them within the greater body of literature on college and university presidents. The study used a mixed methods design in an attempt to determine if there was a relationship between academic background, career path and presidential success. The study also sought to determine if higher education programs are preparing graduates to serve in leadership roles within higher education institutions.

Findings indicate that there is no statistically significant relationship between the highest earned degree, discipline of higher earned degree or career path of a president within SUNY and their success as measured by enrollment, retention rate, graduation rate, bachelor degree completion rate and institutional endowment. However, the study demonstrated a number of statistically significant relationships and identified several trends among current and immediately past presidents within SUNY. Presidents holding an EdD were more likely to have followed an administrative path to the presidency and more likely to lead a community college than any other institution type. Presidents holding a PhD were more likely to have held a faculty appointment and risen through the academic hierarchy. In terms of disciplinary background, presidents with a higher education doctorate were more likely to have been appointed after an administrative career path. Additionally, community colleges within SUNY were more likely to be led by presidents that held their highest degree in higher education.
This final chapter also outlined the limitations of the study and its findings, examined their implications and identified the stakeholders that will be informed by the research and provided a number of directions for future research. The study sought to address key questions about the individuals who serve as college and university presidents. The higher education landscape in the United States will likely continue to become increasingly challenging and competitive. Qualified and prepared college presidents will be even more essential to the stability and success of our colleges and universities.

**Epilogue**

At the time of this writing, the United States has become the epicenter of the global COVID-19 pandemic, leading all other nations in cases and deaths. State and local governments have issued stay at home orders, closed schools and non-essential businesses, virtually shutting down their economies to combat the spread of the virus. Colleges and universities across the United States have responded to the pandemic by sending students home, shifting their courses and services to an online format wherever possible and allowing employees to work remotely.

From a public health standpoint, these measures appear to be warranted and reasonable to combat a dangerously contagious and deadly pathogen with no known vaccine or treatment. However, the economic consequences have been (and will likely continue to be) severe. The nation faces rising unemployment, stagnant consumer spending, a volatile stock market and greatly reduced GDP. The economic downturn and extended uncertainty may prove to be an existential threat to many colleges and universities. Already facing declining enrollments and uncertain revenues, a disruption of this size and scope will greatly impact higher education and exacerbate a number of underlying problems in the field. In the aftermath of the current crisis,
we may see yet another shift in the skills and experiences sought after to fill presidential vacancies.

This study demonstrated that SUNY presidents tend to have traditional academic backgrounds, both in terms of their education and career paths. Perhaps SUNY will begin to seek presidents from outside of higher education with strong business credentials, either academically or professionally, who have strong records of fundraising and/or educational restructuring. As higher education continues to face significant challenges and questions, college and university presidents will be looked upon for answers and stewardship through crisis. This period of disruption will highlight the importance of strong presidential ability and leadership.
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Appendices

Appendix A: SUNY FOIL Request, February 2019

Hello,

My name is Kishmar Best and I am a PhD candidate at the University at Albany. My research explores the academic and career backgrounds of college and university presidents. I am writing to request the SUNY memorandum for the appointment of each current campus president (including the memo, biography and curriculum vitae) within the system.

An example of what I am seeking can be found here: https://www.suny.edu/about/leadership/board-of-trustees/meetings/webcastdocs/Tab01_Morris%20Appointment.pdf.

Please let me know if you need any further information to grant this request.

Sincerely,
Kishmar A. Best
PhD Candidate
Department of Educational Policy and Leadership
University at Albany
Hello,

My name is Kishmar Best and I am a PhD candidate at the University at Albany. My dissertation research explores the academic and career backgrounds of college and university presidents. I am writing to request a copy of current president (First Name, Last Name)’s curriculum vitae, in addition to a copy of the immediate past president, (First Name, Last Name)’s curriculum vitae.

Please let me know if you need any further information to grant this request.

Sincerely,
Kishmar A. Best
PhD Candidate
Department of Educational Policy and Leadership
University at Albany
Appendix C: Coding, Highest Earned Degree

https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/usnei/us/edlite-structure-us.html

Highest Earned Degree

Bachelor’s Degree
The bachelor’s degree may be defined as “An award that normally requires at least 4 but not more than 5 years of full-time equivalent college-level work. This includes all bachelor’s degrees conferred in a 5-year cooperative (work-study) program. A cooperative plan provides for alternate class attendance and employment in business, industry, or government; thus, it allows students to combine actual work experience with their college studies. Also includes bachelor’s degrees in which the normal 4 years of work are completed in 3 years.” (National Center for Education Statistics)

Master’s Degree
The master’s degree is the first graduate-level qualification, or second cycle degree, in the U.S. higher education system. Master’s degrees may be considered terminal professional degrees in some fields, such as the fine arts, or they may be considered as second degrees that may or may not lead to PhD studies. In some subjects, such as the behavioral and natural sciences, it is increasingly common practice to proceed directly from the bachelor’s degree to enrollment in PhD studies without being required to earn a master’s degree. In these subjects, the master’s degree is often considered unimportant for professional purposes except as an intermediate qualification that students may petition for in cases where they need such a degree for employment purposes.

Doctor of Education (EdD)/ Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
The research doctorate, or the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) and its equivalent titles, represents the highest academic qualification in the U.S. education system. While the structure of U.S. doctoral programs is more formal and complex than in some other systems, it is important to note that the research doctorate is not awarded for the preliminary advanced study that leads to doctoral candidacy, but rather for successfully completing and defending the independent research presented in the form of the doctoral dissertation (thesis).

Professional Doctorate
First-professional degrees represent a category of qualifications in professional subject areas that require students to have previously completed specified undergraduate coursework and/or degrees before enrolling. They are considered graduate-level programs in the U.S. system because the follow prior undergraduate studies, but they are in fact first degrees in these professional subjects. HOLDERS of first-professional degrees are considered to have an entry-level qualification and may undertake graduate study in these professional fields following the award of the first-professional degree. Several of these degrees use the term “doctor” in the title, but these degrees do not contain an independent research component or require a dissertation (thesis) and should not be confused with PhD degrees or other research doctorates.
Appendix D: Coding, Discipline of Highest Earned Degree

Discipline of Highest Earned Degree
Education
Higher Education
Business
Humanities & Fine Arts
Law
Medicine
Religion & Theology
Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM)
Social Science
Appendix E: Coding, Career Path

Career Paths
Scholar
Full time teaching experience in higher education (faculty appointment)
Previous two roles before current presidential appointment within higher education

Steward
No full time teaching experience in higher education (faculty appointment)
Previous two roles before current presidential appointment within higher education

Spanner
Maintain significant commitments to both higher education & other types of institutions/organizations (how the framework determines)
One or more full time role outside of higher education OR one or more “shift” from higher education to another industry/area or vice versa

Stranger
No previous higher education experience before current presidential appointment
Previous two roles before current presidential appointment outside of higher education (business, military, politics etc.)
Tables and Figures