The Status of Women Leaders in Utah Higher Education: A 2021 Update

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In 2014, the Utah Women & Leadership Project (UWLP) released a research and policy brief titled, “The Status of Women Leaders in Utah Education,”\(^1\) and in 2017 an update brief was published.\(^2\) These reports focused on the status of women’s leadership in both K–12 and postsecondary education across the state of Utah. This brief provides an update for 2021, focused only on the higher education portion of the previous briefs. The purpose of this brief is to determine what, if any, progress has been made in women’s leadership within Utah’s higher education sector, including public and the two largest private institutions, as well as technical colleges, which were combined with the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) in July 2020\(^3\) to form the Utah Board of Higher Education (UBHE). This brief compares Utah data with national data and reviews the applicable literature. Comparisons will also be drawn by looking at Utah’s data from 2014, 2017, and 2021.

Much of the national data used in this brief comes from the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR) and the American Council on Education (ACE). CUPA-HR monitors trends, explores emerging workforce issues, conducts research, and promotes strategic discussions among colleges and universities, while ACE mobilizes the higher education community to shape effective public policy. Both organizations have contributed toward progress for women in leadership in higher education across the nation and abroad. Systemwide and institutional position-specific data for Utah were obtained by collecting information from websites or contacting key individuals at each college or university.

**Setting the Stage**

For this report, we analyzed data from Utah colleges and universities. More specifically, the degree-granting public colleges and universities analyzed within the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) were Dixie State University (DSU), Salt Lake Community College (SLCC), Snow College (SC), Southern Utah University (SUU), University of Utah (U of U), Utah State University (USU), Utah Valley University (UVU), and Weber State University (WSU). The private higher education institutions analyzed were Brigham Young University (BYU) and Westminster College (WC). In Utah, research-focused institutions included BYU, U of U, and USU. Regional institutions included SUU, DSU, WSU, UVU, and WC, while the two-year colleges were SLCC and SC. The eight Utah technical colleges analyzed included Bridgerland, Davis, Dixie, Mountainland, Ogden-Weber, Southwest, Tooele, and Uintah Basin.

In terms of setting the stage nationally, the 2020 CUPA-HR\(^4\) report indicated that women held 52% of senior leadership positions across the US compared to 50% in 2017. Although seemingly at parity, the percentage of representation did vary on the position held as well as the type of institution and its status (e.g., research-intensive institutions are considered high status). The report\(^5\) also stated that women held 36% of senior leadership positions in associate-level community colleges, a significant decline from the percentage we reported in 2017 (43%). In 2020, Inside Higher Ed\(^6\) reported that although the number of women in administration was rising, they still faced significant seniority and pay disparities.

Furthermore, the 2020 CUPA-HR report\(^7\) examined the pipeline for president and provost positions by gathering data on the previous position and place of employment prior to their current appointment. This report found that, in the pipeline to key leadership roles in higher education, 69% of presidents and 46% of provosts were hired from outside the institution, while only 31% of presidents and 54% of provosts were promoted within their institution. According to research,\(^8\) this pattern may explain why women still hold less than 40% of executive leadership roles; women are more geographically bound then men. The rising trend in Utah to hire talent from outside the state may especially negatively impact the pipeline to leadership for women in higher education who live in Utah.

This research and policy brief is organized by position: State Board of Higher Education, Presidents, Cabinet Members, Chief Academic Officers and Vice Presidents, and Academic Deans. These sections will be followed by offering implications and opportunities for the Utah higher education community.

**State Board of Higher Education**

State-level governance is typically composed of individuals who are elected or appointed; thus, these roles are not directly associated with the leadership pipeline for women in higher education. However, the decisions made by these governing bodies impact the status of women’s leadership around the state. Usually, each state has a governing body that oversees higher education, and these are composed of regents, education board members, or chancellors (see Ohio and Delaware for exceptions).

**National:** Based on information collected from each state’s governing board websites, national data show women comprise 39.8% of governing bodies, which is an increase from the percentage we reported in both 2017 (33.5%) and 2014 (29.3%). States with high representation for women include
Colorado (71.4%), Connecticut (63.6%), Idaho (62.5%), New York (62.5%), and North Dakota (60%). States with low representation for women include Arkansas (10%), Oklahoma (11.1%), Mississippi (16.7%), Louisiana (18.8%), and North Carolina (20%).

Utah: Utah’s State Board of Higher Education is tied for 15 of 50 states in terms of the percentage of board members who are women. It is composed of 44% women, which is above the national average (39.8%). The change in membership in July 2020 increased Utah’s representation of women, which was 31.6% in both 2014 and 2017.

Presidents

National: The 2020 CUPA-HR report stated that women comprised 33% of college and university presidencies, with 35.3% at public and 29.7% at private colleges and universities. In attempting to find comparison data for technical colleges, the 2017 ACE report indicated that 36% of presidents are women in associate-level colleges, and the 2020 CUPA-HR data reports 44.4% of its associate institution presidents are women. Although this institutional classification does not include all technical colleges, it is the best available national measurement. The most recent report by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) in 2016 stated that women comprise 30% of those in the president or CEO position. Almost no data are available on the status of women leaders in technical colleges.

Utah: In Utah, 50% of the degree-granting colleges and universities currently have women as presidents, but this varies by institutional characteristics. Four of the eight degree-granting public colleges and universities (SLCC, U of U, USU, and UVU) have presidents who are women (up from 25.0% in 2017 and 12.5% in 2014). This includes a president of a two-year college (SLCC), one of four regional institutions (UVU), and both research institutions (U of U and USU). One of two private colleges and universities (WC) has a woman as president as well. In addition, only one of eight technical colleges (Dixie) has the presidential role filled by a woman (12.5%). Overall, in 2021 Utah ranks higher than the national average for women presidents of colleges and universities, not including technical colleges, where Utah is far below the national average.

Boards of Trustees or Directors

National: Corporate data from a 2020 study by Kramer and Adams noted that boards that are comprised of at least 30% women provide a space for meaningful contributions from women; however, data from higher education boards shows otherwise. Women tend to be excluded from key decision-making positions on critical subcommittees (e.g., executive committees) even when those boards are composed of more than 30% women. In the same study of 29 higher education institutions, women accounted for an average membership of 28% on the governing boards of colleges and universities, a decrease in percentages we previously reported in 2014 (30.2%) and in 2017 (28.4%). However, we expect that a broader national study would find at least a slight increase. No national data is available for technical college boards of trustees or directors.

Utah: The public and private degree-granting colleges and universities sampled in Utah have boards comprised of 41.1% women, with USHE colleges and universities having more women on boards (46%) than the two private institutions (31%). Research-intensive institutions have the lowest percentage of women serving as trustees (34.8% overall, with USU at 41.7%, U of U at 27.3%, and BYU at 14.3%). Regional institutions have 47.1% of women trustees: SUU (60%), WSU (54.5%), DSU (50%), UVU (45.5%), and WC (39.3%). Two-year colleges include fewer women on boards than regional institutions do, but they have more than research-focused institutions do (45.5% overall, with SLCC at 58.3% and SC at 30%). Overall, the percentage of women serving on boards of trustees decreased from 38.3% in 2017 to 33.6% in 2021.

Utah technical colleges have the lowest percentage (23.1%) of women trustees or directors, with Ogden-Weber at 36.4%, Mountainland at 31.3%, Bridgerland at 30.8%, T ooele at 25%, Davis at 20%, Uintah Basin at 20%, Dixie at 10%, and Southwest at 7.7%. In 2017, we reported that 24.0% of governing board positions on technical campuses were filled by women, so the present data show a slight decrease.

In key board leadership positions, women in Utah serve as chair at a rate of 33.3% (compared to 29.8% in 2014 and 35.3% in 2017) and as vice chair at 38.9% with variation based on institutional characteristics. At the eight public degree-granting colleges and universities, women are less likely to be chairs of the board (30%) and more likely to be vice chair (50%). No research-intensive institutions had women as chairs of the board, but one of the three (U of U) had a woman serving as vice chair. Regional institutions had fewer women serving as chair (20%, WC) and significantly more women serving as vice chairs (80%, DSU, SUU, UVU, and WSU). Both two-year colleges have women chairs and men in the vice chair role. One of the two private institutions has a woman serving in the chair role, but neither has a female vice chair. For technical colleges, three women are serving in the chair role and two in the vice chair position. No boards had women in both the chair and vice chair role. All other institutions had both a woman and man serving in leadership roles except USU and BYU, which have men serving in both board leadership positions.

Presidential Cabinets

National: The 2020 CUPA-HR report provides an approximation of gender distributions of presidential cabinets, which shows women in 37.3% of senior institutional posts. Although the data are not an exact representation of cabinets...
composition, the report provides a reasonable estimation of women in cabinet-level positions nationally.

**Utah:** When support positions were removed from consideration, women comprise 37.4% of cabinets (a significant increase from 27.4% as reported in 2017 and 23% in 2014) in degree-granting colleges and universities in Utah. WC tops the list with 70% of presidential cabinet members being female, followed by SC at 57.1%, U of U at 46.7%, UVU at 40%, and BYU, SLCC, USU, and WSU at 28.6%. SUU (16.7%) and DSU (12.5%) are ranked at the bottom.

Within Utah’s technical colleges, Davis and Dixie both have 50% of cabinet positions filled by women, followed by Mountainland and Uintah Basin at 33.3%, Ogden-Weber, Tooele, and Southwest at 25%, and Bridgerland at 20%.

### Chief Academic Officers

**National:** The 2020 CUPA-HR report maintains that 44% of chief academic officers (CAO) at colleges and universities nationally are held by women, compared to what we reported in 2017 (42%) and in 2014 (39.3%). An ACE’s 2018 report found that the CAO position is a key stepping-stone for women to advance to the presidency. Nationally, it is typical for women to be strongly represented at the assistant or associate CAO roles.

**Utah:** In Utah, 20% of CAO positions are held by women (down from 25% in 2014 and 2017), which falls below the national level (44%). One of the two private institutions (WC) has a woman CAO, and one of the two-year institutions (SC) does as well, but none of the research-intensive or regional institutions have a woman serving in that role. Hence, two (SC and WC) of eight (25%) CAOs of USHE institutions are women, which is the same as reported in both 2014 and 2017. Four of eight technical colleges (Bridgerland, Davis, Mountainland, and Uintah) have women CAOs, which is only slightly lower than the national average of 53.1% for associate degree-granting institutions.

In terms of assistant or associate CAO roles, Utah’s leadership pipeline has many highly prepared women leaders in higher education (25% to 54.5%), yet most institutions still fall below the national average (50%), with only UVU (75%), Dixie (66.7%), and USU (57.1%) exceeding it. Research-intensive and regional institutions demonstrate the biggest gaps, with 54.5% and 43.8% of women in these positions, respectively, and no women in the CAO role. As previously mentioned, one of the two-year institutions has a woman CAO, but only 25% of the ACAO posts are held by women.

### Vice Presidents

**National:** The CUPA-HR 2020 study reported that 40% of vice presidents (VP) in postsecondary institutions are female, while ACE reported 39%. Nationally, women fill 52% of the vice president roles at associate degree-granting institutions.
at 40% and USU at 28.6%) or two-year institutions (27.3% overall, with SLCC at 33.3% and SC at 20%).

In terms of women in assistant or associate academic dean roles, 51.5% are filled by women, with both public and private institutions at 45.5% overall (WC at 50% and BYU at 45.2%). Research-intensive institutions have 57.8% women in these positions, with the U of U at 62.8% and USU at 39.1%. Regional institutions have 43.3% women in these roles overall, with WSU at 66.7%, DSU at 50%, UVU at 30%, and SUU with 0%. Of the two-year institutions, only SLCC has these roles, with 41.7% filled by women.

Data Summary

Table 1 provides an overview of the top positions examined by gender nationally, across all Utah institutions of higher education (public/private degree-granting and technical colleges), and only degree-granting institutions within Utah (public and two largest private). Overall, there are 45 females (36%) and 80 males (64%) serving in the most senior positions across all Utah public and private higher education institutions. Within degree-granting institutions (public and two largest private) there are 34 females (37.4%) and 57 males (62.6%). This represents an increase from 2017 (30%) in the percentage of women in top postsecondary posts around the state.

Table 1. Percentage of Women in Top Positions in US, All Utah Higher Education, and Degree-Granting Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Position</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>All Utah (with Technical)</th>
<th>Degree-Granting</th>
<th>Utah</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Board of Higher Education</td>
<td>39.8%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>33.0%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustee21</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
<td>33.6%</td>
<td>41.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President’s Cabinet</td>
<td>37.3%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Academic Officer/Provost</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate/Assistant CAO</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate/Assistant Vice President</td>
<td>53.0%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Dean</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate/Assistant Academic Dean</td>
<td>53.0%</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>52.0%</td>
<td>36.0%</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1 compares the Utah public and private degree-granting institution percentages over time from all three briefs. This figure does not include data for technical colleges because the 2014 and 2017 briefs did not.
Overall, since 2017, Utah has made progress in the number of women serving as college and university president, while provost positions have decreased. Female representation has slightly increased on boards of trustees, as chairs of those boards, and in the composition of presidential cabinets at public institutions. Representation on the Utah Board of Higher Education has increased to 44% women, up from 31.6% in both 2014 and 2017, while increasing in the overall percentages of vice presidents and academic deans in public degree-granting colleges and universities around the state.

Salaries

The 2017 ACE Pipeline Report found that the pipeline for higher education leadership is preparing women at a greater rate than men. What does this mean? As women are earning more than half the doctorate degrees across the US, they are more prepared than ever to lead. However, this report also found that at every rank and in every institution type, except two-year private institutions, men are paid more than women by $13,874 at public institutions and $18,201 at private institutions. This is consistent with a 2020 CUPA-HR report that found women leaders are generally paid less than men. Interestingly, the report also found that women presidents are less likely to be married and have children than are men.

Across USHE’s eight degree-granting institutions CUPA-HR 2020 salary reports showed that men out earn women by 8%, or $16,396, across top administrative positions. Salary information for Utah’s private institutions was not available. Figure 3 shows the ratio between women’s and men’s median salaries, with 1.00 representing men’s salaries.

Figure 3: National Ratio of Female Median Salary to Male Median Salary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chief Academic Officer/Provost</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate/Assistant CAO</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate/Assistant VP</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Dean</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate/Assistant Dean</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Current Efforts

Several initiatives and programs hosted by a variety of entities within Utah are working to provide training and development, networking, resources, and other types of support for women who work and lead within postsecondary settings within the state.

Conclusions

Research has shown that most people do not fully realize the value of having women in key leadership positions in institutions of higher education; however, it matters on many fronts. Research findings continue to demonstrate that diverse and inclusive leadership teams produce more creative, innovative, productive, and effective results, which makes gender inclusivity in postsecondary educational settings both critical and timely. In response to recent events, more schools, colleges, and universities are setting goals toward improving overall organizational performance through increased diversity, and gender diversity is considered a key component. This is supported by research that underscores how new pathways to better decision making have been forged through women’s diverse leadership styles and their focus on inclusiveness and cooperation.

In 2021, USHE, the Utah Board of Higher Education, and leaders of all types of postsecondary institutions have a rare
opportunity to change the leadership landscape of Utah, helping to bolster Utah’s workforce and economy, and, most importantly, to open pathways for its community members to pursue a better quality of life. As the COVID-19 pandemic and social unrest of 2020 demonstrated, it is critical that Utah make timely progress with women’s leadership, particularly with women of color, so that leadership teams can address the dynamically changing higher education landscape for the benefit of Utah’s diverse population.

Higher education institutions in Utah and across the United States will continue to face challenges, and strong women leaders with outstanding capabilities are needed to help meet these challenges. Therefore, it is imperative to the future of Utah that we prepare and support more women in educational leadership positions. Both women and men benefit by seeing women in leadership roles. Normalizing women leaders provides diverse role models for faculty, staff, and students. It is critical that Utah leaders and residents encourage and prepare all talented individuals to take up the challenge of becoming leaders within the state’s educational system.

5 CUPA-HR. (2020).
7 CUPA-HR. (2020).
9 CUPA-HR. (2020).
12 The Council on Occupational Education (COE) (https://council.org), which provides national accreditation to technical colleges, had no data available on administrative positions in technical colleges across the nation. What little is available comes from reports from individual institutions. The American Technical Education Association (ATEA) does not post reports or have available data on member institutions.

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