

THE UTILITY PLAYERS: UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS' DECISIONS TO HIRE OR
NOT TO HIRE CHIEFS OF STAFF

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To my daughter, Florence: I may never climb Mount Everest, but this comes close. Find what you love and do it well – your Mom and I are here for you. To my wife, Kate: thank you for your unending love, support, time, patience, listening, and encouragement. There’s no way I could have done this without you, and I owe you a debt of gratitude and time that I can never repay. Thank you for letting me embark on this journey – this is dedicated to you and Florrie. To my Mom and Dad: thank you for your unending encouragement and support. To my Dad: I wish you could have seen this to completion and that we could have been “doctors” together. To my Brothers: A preacher, a trust manager, and an academic walk into a bar... Thanks for your love and support.

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ABSTRACT

Large public R1 university presidents in the United States lead highly complex institutions, face ambiguous issues on a daily basis, and have little time to dwell on decision making while embodying a complex and evolving role. Presidents' needs include efficiency, trust, confidants, and constant information flow through their offices. To address these needs, presidents may consider hiring a chief of staff. This qualitative study using a case study methodology examines the perceptions of six recently retired university presidents and why they did or did not hire a chief of staff to help them. Three presidents who did have a chief of staff and three presidents who did not have a chief of staff were interviewed for this study to better understand how they described the necessity of hiring a chief of staff as well as factors that influenced their decision to hire a chief of staff. Findings from this study can help presidents better understand the needs of their difficult roles and how they may address them through the hiring of a chief of staff. Additionally, findings may help chiefs of staff understand what presidents require of them should they desire to pursue the job.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The role of the American college president has evolved in complexity and responsibility over the past several decades from a traditional role via a faculty pathway to a more contemporary one, including leaders from the business world (Gearhart et al., 2020; Jacobs 2020; Nelson, 2000; Nelson, 2007; Prator, 1963; Sanaghan et al., 2008). Responsibilities of university presidents also increased over the centuries since the first American college president, Henry Dunster, took office at Harvard in 1640 (Harvard Office of the President, 2025; Prator, 1963). This is due in large part to the increase in university size and complexity (Martin, 2021). In its early days in the late 1600s, Harvard enrolled approximately 600 students whereas Yale enrolled 415 in the late 1700s (Prator, 1963). Harvard now enrolls over 7000 students while large public universities can enroll over 70,000 (Best Colleges, 2023).

Older Literature on University Presidents

Older literature states the role of the university president had its roots in English and Scottish universities where connections to religious institutions were common (Prator, 1963). Presidents were sometimes clergy members stepping into their roles to lead universities from religious institutions. As an example, the University of Tennessee's first president, Samuel Carrick, took office in 1794 with a background as a Presbyterian minister and physician (Creekmore, 2018). Presidents evolved from minister presidents in the early days of American universities into the modern example seen now that encompasses various political, social, and educational issues while grappling with

changes in technology (Gearhart et al., 2020; Nelson, 2000). Sanaghan et al. (2008) reported that presidents enter their office from various sources and organizations both inside and outside the university realm, "from small or large institutions, with flat or complex organizational structures" (p. 67).

A Complex and Evolving Role

The increase in responsibility of university presidents has also led to an increase in the complexity of the structures surrounding the role and an increased need for executive support. According to Bargh, et al. (2000), universities became more complex because of their, "increasingly complex relations with a growing number of stakeholders" (p. 14). Gearhart et al. (2020) later affirmed this by noting, "the role must be responsible to multiple constituencies at every hour of the day and every day of the week" (p. 62). University leaders must interact with a large and diverse audience with varying needs (Gearhart et al., 2020; Shaw, 1999). The duties of the office of the president evolved from four basic categories, according to Prator (1963), which include "superintending, facilitating, developing, and leading" (p. 37) the university. Prator (1963) also noted a heavy faculty focus for university presidents in the past making the faculty the largest constituent with less regard for alumni, government, student, or development relations. However, the modern university president was the opposite with faculty not understanding the president's role very well and with the president being so externally focused on alumni, government, and development relations that they did not connect well with internal audiences (Gearhart et al., 2020). Outside relationships maintained by the president were previously seen as public relations, whereas now they are an integral part

of their duties (Jacobs, 2020). Further confusing these needs, Hollander (2013) argues that presidents should be more focused on fundraising as a primary strategy.

Another indicator of the evolution of the role of the president from simpler times into its current complex state was addressed in the requirements from the University of California's presidential search held in the 1960s (Prator, 1963). While the committee stated that alumni, legislative, student, faculty, and public relations duties were akin to a more modern presidency, it also stated that the role should be held by a man in great health, be married with children, and "be a man with respect for and understanding of religious ideas and ideals" (Prator, 1963, p. 86). Again, the university president role has evolved significantly since this time (Gearhart et al., 2020).

Nelson (2007) reported that the "presidency remains a highly significant and highly rewarding post [...] that is enormously complex and demanding [...] with significant potential and realized influence on campus and in society" (p. xiv). Additionally, Nelson (2007) stated that presidents were "politicians both on and off the campus, managing public relations, administering academic bureaucracies, and spending inordinate amounts of time fund-raising" (p. xv) with the latter currently being the most important.

Newer Literature on University Presidents

More recent literature affirmed the same range of backgrounds for presidents as Gearhart et al. (2020) noted that, "Coming from fundraising and political backgrounds, coming from the private sector and big business, state and federal public agencies, and even individuals coming from student affairs and enrollment management" (p. 62).

Today's president includes those from the "private sector, public service, politics, and even the military" (Gearhart et al., 2020, p. 63). As such, "the roster of college presidents is more diverse today than at any other time in history" (p. 63).

Faculty may prefer a president from a traditional academic pathway while trustees may prefer someone from the business world (Lombardi, 2013). This reflects a shift in preference for the background of presidential prospects in higher education. Gearhart et al. (2020) indicated that the composition of faculty has also evolved into a more complex group than it was in the past noting, "... the diversification of the faculty body means that the president is less well equipped to even understand, appreciate, and advocate for the experiences of so many different types of faculty members" (p. 64). This indicates a strong need for presidents to understand their faculty, however, Gearhart et al. (2020) also found that faculty may not fully understand the president's role, too. This indicates a strong need for presidents to communicate well about what it is they are doing.

Fisher and Koch (2004) indicated a move toward more entrepreneurial presidents. Nelson (2007) stated that the "span of duties of college presidents and the constantly changing situations they face are without question profound" (p. 169) comparing the role of the president to that of a corporate CEO. While universities are increasingly compared to business organizations, Bargh et al. (2000) noted that, "many of the corporate organizations with which they are being compared are characterized by extreme volatility" (p. 13). Additionally, leading those business-like universities can be characterized as being harder to lead (Martin, 2021). Conversely, universities "are characterized by longevity" (Bargh et al., 2000, p. 13) which indicated some limits to the

similarities between universities and corporate organizations. Bargh et al. (2000) observed that universities of the past differed from corporations in the ways they handled complexity through decentralization of structures. However, modern universities have ultimately aligned more closely with corporations. As such, the advancement of the role and its ever-increasing levels of responsibility have become the norm in higher education (Gearhart et al., 2020).

Public higher education in recent decades has seen a shift in administrative structures and roles from more traditional academic roles to those more closely aligned with business and government sectors (Jacobs, 2020). Jacobs (2020) also presented a trend of university leaders toward more corporate influences with "presidents looking more like CEOs, and institutions looking more standardized organizationally" (p. 38).

Some presidents bring academic or outside business leadership experience before taking on the chief executive role on campus. Thomas (2015) noted how many presidents attend leadership summits like the Kellogg NAFEO MSI Leadership Program or the Harvard Institutes for Higher Education (HIHE) to build their leadership skills. While Thomas (2015) did not dive into the components of those programs, it is noted that they are beneficial to university executives.

University presidents may also engage with a wide variety of tasks throughout their day that include many facets of university life and operations (Thomas, 2015). University presidents must wear numerous hats overseeing academics, faculty, facilities, athletics, state governments, alumni, fundraising, and, most importantly, students, but much of their time is spent working closely with their cabinet (Thomas, 2015).

Complex Presidential Office Structures

The increase in complexity of the presidential role includes changes in the size of administrative staff structures, the types of positions held, communication strategies on social media, more involvement with government relations, and alumni (Nelson, 2000; 2007). Presidents must now provide answers for "politically charged academic bureaucracies [...] raise enormous resources [...] be concerned about maintaining educational quality [...] and confront vocal, at times increasingly less civil, critics inside and outside the academy" (Nelson, 2000, p. 7). As a result, the contemporary university president needs more support to achieve university goals. However, older literature indicated presidents must exercise caution in having too many staff members on their teams (Walker, 1979). According to Walker (1979), presidents in universities may "become separated from intimate personal contact with the faculty and students" (p. 116) because they have so much staff around them that they are unable to stay in contact with others. This is at odds with the needs of the modern university president (Gearhart et al., 2020; Jacobs, 2020; Martin, 2021).

University presidents are often stretched thin with little time and attention for responsibilities to government relations, alumni, development, faculty, staff, and, most importantly, students (Jacobs, 2020). These responsibilities require numerous relationships that may be too difficult to maintain by one person alone. Sanaghan and Lohndorf (2018) emphasized the importance of leaders seeking "help and advice" (p. 5) despite the incorrect assumption that seeking help shows weakness. As such, university presidents need assistance. University presidents simply cannot be everywhere at once

and require assistance from stand-ins and right-hand assistants. Additionally, universities are rich with resources designed to help leaders grow, from faculty experts to systems designed to help leaders. As such, presidents in higher education have numerous helpful resources at their disposal (Sanaghan & Lohndorf, 2018). Having the right support structures in place and at the ready is important to their success.

Information Flow

As information flows through the university structure into and out of the president's office, those who hold information in the president's office also wield power. Regarding information flow through the president's office, Sanaghan and Lohndorf (2018) stated that a properly formed staffing and administrative structure around the president is crucial to this end as it deals with the ways information moves through the president's office. Additionally, Sanaghan and Lohndorf (2018) noted the importance of genuine trust whereas presidents should avoid surrounding themselves with "yes" people and sycophants.

Shaw (1999) noted that, "in a large and complex higher education environment where information seems to create itself daily, it is impossible to know about everything that's going on" (p. 80). Trachtenberg (2009) affirmed the idea noting that presidents simply cannot absorb everything that comes their way. Relationship building also hinges on good communication between those involved (McDermott & Courtney, 2023). Sharing information through good communication channels is important to a close working relationship between the president and their staff. Shaw (1999) found that the university president is "one who's juggling many priorities at once - can absorb only so

much information, there has to be a support system in place" (p. 81). Shaw (1999) also stated that the right staff must be in place to support the president focusing on those "who are quick to assess a situation, who know the right people to call" and those "who can summarize efficiently" (p. 81). Furthermore, Walker (1979) stressed the importance of communication and information exchange noting that presidents should not keep secrets but "communicate, communicate, communicate" (p. 195) because "problems are caused by what people *don't* know" (p. 195, emphasis in original). Martin (2021) affirmed the need for communication by noting presidents "are required to have excellent communication skills with a variety of campus stakeholders" (p. 104).

A Need for a Confidant

Presidents are in need of trusted confidants to help them discuss ideas, concerns, and problems they may face in their roles (Sanaghan & Lohndorf, 2018; Thacker & Freeman, 2021). Thacker and Freeman (2021) found that "trusted mentors and confidants who are unafraid to challenge thinking and inject new perspectives are crucial to presidential success" (p. 647). University presidents, and leaders in general, need close confidants they can trust and rely on to share sensitive or personal information (Sanaghan & Lohndorf, 2018). Another need for confidants is that presidents often fail because they failed to ask for help (Sanaghan, & Lohndorf, 2018). These confidants:

... Are deeply trusted and honest individuals who will provide constructive feedback, advice, and wise council, and develop an ongoing relationship. These are authentic allies who will listen carefully, push back on ideas, help develop

insight, and act as sanctuaries when the inevitable storms hit. (Sanaghan & Lohndorf, 2018, p. 26)

This points to a clear need for a university president to have a position at their side who can act as a confidant and trusted advisor.

Problem Statement

According to Trachtenberg (2009), the presidential assistant, now evolved into the chief of staff role, is a necessity in higher education as the president “is completely unequipped to deal with *all* problems and *all* comers *all* the time” (p. viii, emphasis in original). This points to a need for a specialized position like a chief of staff role to help alleviate some of the burdens caused by the overwhelming workload of the president; however, research on the university chief of staff role is lacking (Jacobs, 2025). While Jacobs (2020) stated the need for presidents to have a chief of staff, research remains unclear why or whether the role is necessary from the point of view of presidents who hire them. Understanding how university presidents view the necessity of the chief of staff role is underreported in the literature. While the chief of staff role has been examined in military, business, and government contexts, the chief of staff role is a more recent development in higher education and remains largely unexamined in any great depth in this context in the literature (Birnbaum, 1989; Hood, 2017; Jacobs, 2020, 2025; Vroom, 1983). There is a certain level of ambiguity associated with presidential assistant roles as well indicating an inherent ability of a presidential assistant to embrace the ubiquitous and vague “other duties as assigned” job description (Curchack, 2009). Some presidents choose to have an advisor in the role of a chief of staff, but not all do (Hood,

2017; Jacobs, 2020; Trachtenberg, 2009). The chief of staff role is a “critical position” (Jacobs, 2020, p. 38) for higher education presidents; however, it is unclear why some presidents choose to hire them and some do not. Also unclear is the nature of the antecedents that contribute to the decision to hire a chief of staff. Jacobs (2020) argued that literature addressing the emergence of the chief of staff role in higher education is limited. As more presidents adopt the chief of staff role, more research should be conducted to better understand why they do or do not hire them. The burgeoning prevalence of the position within higher education institutions is a clear signal for further studies focusing on the role.

Research Questions

Two research questions will guide this study:

- RQ1: How do university presidents describe the necessity of hiring or not hiring a chief of staff?
- RQ2: What factors influence the decision by presidents to hire or not to hire a chief of staff?

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study that uses a case study methodology is to examine how university presidents describe the necessity of hiring a chief of staff. This study will also address factors that contribute to the decision-making process of university presidents when hiring a chief of staff. The purpose of this study will be accomplished through six case studies that include interviews with retired university presidents who did and did not hire a chief of staff during their tenure.

Significance of the Study

This study aims to enhance the understanding of leadership and hiring choices for university presidents, especially surrounding the chief of staff role. This is important because of the increasingly complex nature of universities and the roles of those who lead them. Additionally, findings from this research will add to the literature by further defining the chief of staff role and its evolving impact on higher education. This study aims to contribute to the body of literature relating to higher education executive leadership as well through insight into the chief of staff role in higher education which has been limited in recent years (Jacobs, 2020, 2025). While the role has been studied in other contexts, for example the military and public office, it has not been scrutinized as much in higher education (Jacobs, 2020). This study seeks to shed light on the importance of the chief of staff role to higher education chief executives and elucidate why some choose to hire or not to hire a chief of staff. Additionally, it will add to the higher education governance literature by providing information for governing boards and trustees to advise new or existing presidents in shaping their cabinet structures. This study will also help boards, faced with hiring a new university president, expand on helping presidents transition into their new roles, hire the right senior staff, and better understand their institutions.

Delimitations of the Study

This study will be delimited to higher education presidents and chancellors focused on the decision-making process around hiring or not hiring a chief of staff at large public Carnegie designated Research 1 institutions. This study will not include private institutions, community colleges, or smaller public institutions. Hiring decisions at public universities are subject to myriad public accountability laws unlike private institutions, thus, impacting how presidents form their cabinets. The transparency required for public institutions will aid in the research process. Therefore, delimiting the study to public universities will best support the research questions for this study. While policies surrounding public accountability will not be examined in this study, their impact on public institutions as opposed to private institutions must be noted. Hiring decisions at private institutions may not be subject to the same policies for accountability as those at public institutions, policies which could impact hiring decisions and selecting staff for the president's office and cabinet. In this light, examining public institutions will best produce findings pertinent to the research questions for this study.

Definition of Terms

This study utilizes several terms which are defined here. These terms are used interchangeably which is noted.

University, College, Campus, or University System

For the purposes of this study, the terms *university*, *college*, *campus*, or *university system* refer to higher education institutions in the United States. A *university system* is the overarching organization that may contain multiple university or college campuses

under its purview and is often referred to as the state system of higher education (Law Insider, 2023b). University systems also typically refer to the singular main public university system within a state; however, some states operate more than one university system. In states with more than one university system, a more specific system name is used.

President and Chancellor

The terms *president* or *chancellor* refer to the chief executive of a university campus or university system office that oversees a campus or set of campuses (Law Insider, 2023a). These terms are used interchangeably in university systems and campuses where one may be a president and the other may be chancellor and vice versa. In this study, these terms may be used interchangeably and, where necessary due to the specific structure of a campus or system, will be noted. Often both a university system and campus have a president or chancellor in the chief executive role, respectively.

Executive Leadership and Executives

The term *executive leadership* or *executives* refer specifically to the highest office holder on a campus or a university system such as a president or chancellor, a provost, vice president, and the chief of staff or similar cabinet-level roles.

Cabinet

The term *cabinet* refers to the president's cadre of close advisors and *executive leadership* on the campus usually consisting of vice presidents, a provost, and the chief of staff position.

Chief of Staff

The term *chief of staff* refers to the role held by a presidential assistant at a higher education institution. Presidential assistants may take many forms and be referred to by many names including special assistant to the president, secretary, chief of staff, or otherwise (Curchack, 2009; Hood, 2017; Jacobs, 2020). Given the nuances of these roles and their evolution into the chief of staff position, this study specifically focuses on the chief of staff role and will not use these terms interchangeably. If the use of a specific presidential assistant role other than chief of staff is warranted in the discussion, it will be noted.

Social Power, Power Dynamics, and Power

Social power will also be discussed here, but terms associated with the topic will be defined in depth in the literature review. Social power is the potential of an agent to influence a target (French & Raven, 1959). The terms *power dynamics*, *social power*, and *power* will be used interchangeably where needed in this study. They refer to the relationship between two people (agent and target, respectively) or a person and a group of people (agent and target, respectively) and how those agents wield influence over their targets (French & Raven, 1959).

Informational Power

Informational power will also be used in this study and indicates the power an agent has when they possess information that a target does not. Additionally, it is the ability to influence the target using information. Raven (1993) defined informational

power as being, “based on the information, or logical argument, that the influencing agent could present to the target in order to implement change” (p. 235).

Organization of the Study

This study follows a traditional five-chapter dissertation format. Chapter 1 introduces the study, addresses the research problem, significance, purpose, research questions used in the study, delimitations, terms used, and the organization of the study. Chapter 2 includes a literature review of the chief of staff role and its current state, social power, and the theoretical framework. Chapter 3 covers the research methods of the study, research design, research questions, setting, population, data collection procedures, analysis procedures, and conclusion. Chapter 4 focuses on the findings of the study. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the findings, conclusions, discussion, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 1 will serve as the literature review for this study. This chapter will focus on the role of university presidents and their decision making, perceptions of the necessity of hiring certain personnel to their cabinet, factors that help the president or chancellor decide whether to hire a chief of staff, and contexts that influence their decision making. The chapter will begin with an overview of the search process and end with a discussion of the theoretical frame used in the study, French and Raven's (1959) bases of social power framework, with a focus on informational power.

The Search Process

The search process for the literature discussed in this study was extensive. I gathered resources from multiple sources including books found at my university library, articles, and books via online resources, and through the purchase of books that could not be found either online or in person at the library.

Library searches focused on peer-reviewed literature found in academic journals and books. The University of Tennessee, Knoxville's library utilizes an extensive online search tool dubbed OneSearch. Literature was gathered using various combinations of keywords including but not limited to the following: *university president*, *chief of staff*, *use of power*, *social power*, and *informational power*. Sources found online through the university library were stored in a personal account provided by the library and organized using the built-in keywording system.

Google Scholar was also utilized in a similar fashion with the varying combinations of the same keywords: *university president*, *chief of staff*, *use of power*, *social power*, and *informational power*. Using my university Google account, I stored search results in categories relating to *university presidents*, *use of power*, *chiefs of staff*, and others using the built-in tagging and sorting features on Google Scholar.

PDFs of academic articles and books were gathered from the university library and Google Scholar. They were stored locally on my computer and backed up in various places both locally on hard drives and in the cloud. PDFs were annotated using comments and highlights and backed up again. The filenames used for each digital document were named using the author's names and publication date for ease of organization. A reference list using these articles was built using an Excel spreadsheet with articles listed in alphabetical order. This also allows me to track which articles have been used in this document at a glance. A citation manager was not used because I prefer my methods to relying on a dedicated citation application to manage the resources.

Articles and books relating to foreign universities not based in the United States were examined for relevance and universal applicability to university presidential leadership, the chief of staff role, and informational power. If they proved irrelevant, they were stored as backup information in case they proved useful later.

Reference lists of annotated articles were examined for sources relevant to this study and explored through further library and Google Scholar searches. As I found sources relevant to the study, I examined their sources and explored them further, if warranted.

University Presidents' Decision Making

Early research from Birnbaum (1989) and Vroom (1983) found a lack of research on leadership in higher education. An exception was Cohen and March's (1986) focus on university presidents and the ambiguity that accompanied their roles. Now, however, more recent work from Enke (2014) indicated that research on leadership in higher education is abundant. Birnbaum (1989) reported that studies of higher education institutions are difficult because of systems such as shared governance and "conflicts between professional and administrative authority, unclear goals, and other properties unique to normative, professional organizations" (pp. 125-126). As such, perceptions of leadership in higher education are different than in other organizations because of models like shared governance (Birnbaum, 1989). Shared governance also requires that presidents understand and support faculty while faculty should equally know the presidency and its nuances (Gearhart et al., 2020).

Middlehurst et al., (2009) stated that research on higher education institutions also struggle to keep up with the constantly evolving nature of universities. This implies a need for continual research focusing on higher education leadership. Additionally, universities are highly complex organizations that generate a variety of products or initiatives, are funded in various ways, and are subject to equally complex regulations (Middlehurst, et al., 2009). As such, presidents must navigate increasingly complex universities (Hempsall, 2014; Martin, 2021). As universities continue to evolve, the types of leadership and decision-making necessary for their success evolve as well. Harris et al. (2022) continued this thought by noting that university presidents' jobs have evolved

since their inception, are increasingly shorter in length, and are yet increasingly complex in structure due to the shorter average length of presidents' tenure. Higher education has also increased in complexity over the last several decades (Harris et al., 2022; Martin, 2021).

Birnbaum (1989) interviewed presidents at 32 colleges and universities using semi-structured interviews focusing on their definitions of leadership and what it meant to them. Many gave textbook responses where their statements differed from their actions (Birnbaum, 1989) because they relayed what they felt they should say instead of what they did. In other words, they believed one thing and did another. Presidents identified several leadership theories as crucial to their roles with no single one being more prominent (Birnbaum, 1989). Birnbaum (1989) found that, "good leadership was seen as being related to what people actually did, with particular emphasis upon clarifying goals and providing support and motivation for people to achieve those goals" (p. 133). Leaders were found to be "responsible for deciding the directions in which an institution should move and for coordinating the structures and processes to help it get there" (Birnbaum, 1989, p. 133). Birnbaum (1989) also found that leaders felt they had social power at their disposal to be able to meet goals. Furthermore, presidents have both formal and informal power at their disposal to foster better relationships with faculty constituents (Gearhart et al., 2020).

Regarding the role of the president and what they can accomplish under their power, Cohen and March (1986) stated that, "the presidency is an illusion" (p. 2) and that "decision making in the university seems to result extensively from a process that

decouples problems and choices and makes the president's role more commonly sporadic and symbolic than significant" (p. 2). They also noted that, "decision making under ambiguity is common in complex organizations" (p. 3). Hollander (2013) echoed this and stated that universities have "ambiguous criteria for successful leadership because of complex, multitask goals that can present a range of conflict demands on leaders" (p. 312).

University presidents are also at the helm of "organized anarchies" (Cohen & March, 1986, p. 2) meaning that they run organizations with "problematic goals... unclear technology... and fluid participation" (p. 3). Additionally, presidents have responsibilities to both on- and off-campus constituencies that require considerable dedication of time and careful attention to the delegation of roles through their deputy leaders (Hollander, 2013). The presidency is also demanding and requires near-total dedication from the individual in the position (Nelson, 2013) implying a need for efficiency. These qualities make the university an organization that is as challenging to run as president as it is to understand as president (Cohen & March, 1986). Critically, Hollander (2013) noted that presidents must, "be able to confront ambiguous situations with insufficient information" (p. 320). Harris et al. (2022) also affirmed that universities involve ambiguous decision-making processes for their leaders. Harris et al. (2022) contended that higher education institutions are "idiosyncratic" (p. 80) and the result of unique circumstances that lead to their structures and development over time. This reinforces the thought that universities are complex and nuanced institutions. This further

reinforces the complex nature of universities and the requisite complex talents and abilities of those who lead them.

The size of a university and its funding or endowment have a great impact on its requirements for effective leadership as well (Cohen & March, 1986). These qualities directly impact how university presidents make decisions. Specifically, university presidents were traditionally focused on four areas: operating budget, policy, tenure, and planning (Cohen & March, 1986). However, the president is not the dominant force in those decisions (Cohen & March, 1986) with the authors stating that, "it is unlikely that we can determine how much power the American college president has or should have" (p. 115).

Davies et al. (2007) found that British universities require more business-like approaches to their leadership in addition to more collegial traditions found in higher education. Thomas (2015) suggested that some presidents bring academic or outside business leadership experience before taking on the chief executive role on campus while many attend leadership summits like the Kellogg NAFEO MSI Leadership Program or the Harvard Institutes for Higher Education to build their leadership skills. Sanaghan and Lohndorf (2018) extolled the benefits of executive coaching in higher education as a more recent development for leadership help as well. As noted earlier, trustees may prefer presidential candidates from a business background or one with an entrepreneurial spirit (Fisher & Koch, 2004; Lombardi, 2013). Whereas, in the past, it was common for presidents to rise from the Provost position or other high-ranking positions in the university, increasingly more presidents are coming from outside the academic realm

(Patton, 2014). This indicates a possible constant need for change in the ways university presidents lead and who they choose to join them in the process. That is, at least from the perspective of British universities, the roles of presidents and the institutions they govern are subject to constant change (Davies et al., 2007).

It should be noted, however, that Hollander (2013) contradicted these by suggesting that presidents who do not come from academic backgrounds may have a harder time working with faculty since they do not share common experiences. Harris et al. (2022) added that, “by understanding faculty culture, institutional leaders can better understand their own faculty, and faculty members can better understand one another” (p. 93). Harris et al. (2022) also added that presidents must be “first among equals” (p. 282) with faculty indicating not only the benefits of rising through faculty ranks but also their relationship with faculty. Interestingly, Goodall (2009) found that university leaders with research expertise helped their institutions achieve better research quality which would imply stronger faculty relationships.

Finally, some studies on university presidents indicate a lack of female leadership in top roles for a variety of reasons (Schneider et al., 2019; Shepherd, 2017). Males, particularly white males, have traditionally occupied the majority of top leadership positions. Schneider et al. (2019) cited that female university leaders only occupy 15.4% of university leadership positions. Shepherd (2017) indicates a lower percentage, 11%, of female leaders in institutions of higher education in the United Kingdom.

Presidents' Perceptions of the Need for Cabinet Personnel

Nelson (2007) made a clear call for presidents to willingly accept help leading to more trust and support from their teams. Sanaghan and Lohndorf (2018) also suggested presidents should surround themselves with capable partners they can trust else they risk derailment. Taylor (2023) found that presidents need to establish strong senior leadership teams "who were effective communicators, had a collaborative approach to work, and were trustworthy" (p. 78). This indicates a need to hire skilled, trustworthy talent that specializes in communication and collaboration to comprise the president's cabinet. What roles those people may fill are ultimately up to the president and their complex needs. As such, a president would hire cabinet members to cover basic functions such as academics, finance, government relations, and information technology, but others may be needed depending on the size of the university, its funding, the personality and preferences of the president, and institutional culture. Successful cabinets work well together, providing crucial information and decision-making processes (Eckel, 2017).

A sample of four public R1 universities in the United States yields cabinet structures of different types but mostly with the same roles, albeit with differing names: communications, finance and administration, advancement, research, chief of staff, diversity and engagement, athletics, information technology, safety, human resources, student affairs, and others (Office of the Chancellor, 2023; University Administrative Structure, 2023; University of Georgia Office of the President, 2023; University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2023). Roles such as Vice President of Diversity and Engagement, for example, may fall under varying titles or be nonexistent based on the

political climates of the states in which they reside (INSIGHT Staff, 2023). Additionally, Stearns (2015) suggested that administrative cabinets consist of academics and infrastructure which includes “facilities, personnel or human resources, information technology, safety and risk management, budget and accounting” (p. 77).

Fisher (1984) noted that the “administration should be viewed as mission oriented, dynamic, and enlightened” (p. 74). Interestingly, the author included that the administration “should seem unified” (p. 74) and “under its charismatic president’s inspired direction” (p. 74) suggesting a certain personality type of a university president to be successful. Additionally, Fisher (1984) posited that “the president’s job is to always appear inspired, despite any personal feelings to the contrary” (p. 74). This is an interesting requisite for university presidents in that it implies keeping appearances or the illusion that all is well with the university. Fisher (1984) also found that cabinet members have three choices for interacting with the president under optimal conditions: “support the president, change his or her mind, or resign” (p. 75). Despite the personality traits for university presidents put forth by Fisher (1984), the author concluded that presidents should select cabinet members of greater intelligence and specific expertise than that of the president. Any alternative would potentially lead to failure.

Regarding vice presidents, Fisher (1984) encouraged presidents to hold their cards close to their chest, so to speak, and never divulge their innermost thoughts and feelings. Should they get beyond that point of guarded innermost thinking, they should consider resigning. Furthering this thought, Fisher (1984) noted that having an executive vice president, considered in this context as the “number two” in the organization, is an option

only when a president's "internal effectiveness is exhausted" (p. 82) but they are not quite ready to move on to another position. That said, the ideal choice for this role "would be a trusted and able associate of long standing" (p. 83).

Regarding a presidential assistant, Fisher (1984) suggested someone who appears as an authority and can represent the president, but in no terms is a threat to other vice presidents. The role acts as a professional confidant that can withstand the unguarded thoughts and opinions of a normally restrained president. Echoing the encouragement that presidents hold their cards close to their chest, Fisher (1984) indicated that the presidential assistant and secretary "are the only persons on campus who really know the president" (p. 84). Thacker and Freeman (2021) echoed this through their assertion that presidents need trusted confidants to effectively do their jobs. This infers a close working relationship between the president and their closest assistant. The president needs someone who they can be brutally honest with while using them to distill and vet their best and worst ideas before they leave the president's office.

Decision Factors in Hiring a Chief of Staff

Presidents are often overwhelmed, overextended, and overcommitted to the requirements of their role as university chief executive. They do not have the time or energy to attend to all the important parts of their jobs. Nelson (2013) and Thomas (2015) argued that presidents are essentially "on" all the time and have little time for anything else besides their presidential duties. Whereas in the past presidents might take time to relax over the summer break, they can no longer afford that luxury (Nelson, 2013; Thomas, 2015). University presidents are also under the constant watchful eye of the

public and are often held to higher standards than others in the public realm, even when that can sometimes be unrealistic or overly critical (Thomas, 2015).

Despite the size of their university or its funding levels, presidents across the board all experience this same level of over-extended existence with attention spans thinned by duties owed to on- and off-campus constituents (Cohen & March, 1986; Hollander, 2013). Additionally, presidents are very busy with many duties and responsibilities but, “do not seem to do much about them” (p. 126) regarding efforts to alleviate those strains and that “presidents may be doing almost anything at almost any time” (p. 140). This is the direct result of the incorporation of extra ambiguity into the role (Cohen & March, 1986; Harris et al., 2022). Cohen and March (1986) suggested that, unless the presidents’ growing responsibilities change, they will continue to need help. This points to the need of a well-structured administrative cabinet and a close confidant and assistant such as a chief of staff. Nelson (2013) argued that the presidency deals with the same things today that it dealt with at the founding of American universities over two hundred years ago albeit on a much different scale and with the help of senior staff. Given this growth in scale, Everage (2023) found that presidents need chiefs of staff to remain effective. Furthermore, in a study about university presidents across the globe, Liu et al. (2020) noted that executive assistants are integral for presidents in terms of keeping objectives and duties on track. These all point to a president’s need for help beyond their typical cabinet structures.

The chief of staff role is similar in name and function to others like *special assistant to the president*, *liaison to the president*, and *executive assistant* (Jacobs, 2020),

however, this study focuses on university presidents and why they did or did not hire someone with the specific title *chief of staff*. Jacobs (2025) noted that the chief of staff role has only recently evolved into the “complex functionality” (p. 162) that it embodies today and that research on the role is lacking. Aside from a few recent dissertations, Jacobs’ work is one of only a handful of resources available that cover the chief of staff role as it exists today in universities (Everage, 2023; Hood, 2017; Jacobs, 2020, 2025). Chancellors and presidents were chosen because they are the chief executives of a university campus and have the potential to wield great power and bear witness to use of power at high levels in the university hierarchy. Chiefs of staff were chosen because of the fluidity of their roles depending on the needs of their executives. Chiefs of staff are typically direct reports to presidents or chancellors yet often may also have direct reports themselves (Hood, 2017). Chiefs of staff also interact with many top administrators on a campus while simultaneously acting as representative for the chief executive to those lower in the reporting structure (Everage, 2023). Therefore, they are witness to power use in many areas of the campus administrative structure.

The chief of staff role has also evolved into a high-level cabinet position, serving as the right hand of the president and often one of the highest paid positions on campus (Hood, 2017; University of Tennessee System, 2025). This evolution stems from the less encompassing beginnings as a presidential assistant and into the increasingly complex needs of the modern presidency (Jacobs, 2020). The chief of staff role has also grown to include large and diverse portfolios of work, including the somewhat nebulous responsibility categories, according to a review of chief of staff job postings and research.

This positions the chief of staff role as a utility player, to use a baseball term, on the president's cabinet not only taking on duties the president does not have time for but also addressing the ever-increasing ambiguity that comes with the president's role. Regarding ambiguity, Kretoivics (2019) noted that, "leaders and individuals seeking powerful positions, especially within higher education, need to have a high tolerance for ambiguity" (p. 88). Higher education leaders must also embrace ambiguity when leading their teams (Kretoivics, 2019). The chief of staff usually leads the staff in the president's office while working closely with other cabinet members but also serves as a utility player that can step into roles and projects without formal definition or precedence.

The need for the chief of staff role also points to the nimbleness required to run a modern university. Jacobs (2020) found that chiefs of staff cover a wide range of responsibilities including "policy and government relations, compliance oversight, crisis management, COVID response leadership, budgetary management, and a ubiquitous category of 'management of special projects'" (p. 40). While older literature may discuss the complexity of the presidents' role coupled with the need for structure, the chief of staff role has evolved to respond to more modern needs as illustrated by Jacobs (2025). Presidents' calendars are full, the job is lonely, and it is impossible to manage time without assistance (Jacobs, 2025). Additionally, the chief of staff role deals with complexity and productivity while acting as a confidant (Jacobs, 2025).

Chief of staff job postings frequently include language like a "manager of special projects" or "special initiatives" under the university president. Jacobs (2020) found that this is a, "catch-all for advancing the president's agenda" (p. 40) emphasizing the

flexibility and adaptability required for the job. In addition to this, the chief of staff role spreads across numerous areas and if the position is eliminated, the duties are shared among a diverse group (Jacobs, 2020). The chief of staff also helps distill and disseminate information that is too vast for the president to take on alone (Jacobs, 2020). This frees the president to focus on other duties like government relations, alumni, and donor development.

The presidential assistant role similar to a chief of staff position and can be used interchangeably depending on institutional needs and context. Often, presidential assistants are found at higher level Carnegie-classified institutions; hold degrees in humanities, social sciences, and education; interact with board chairs and board members more often than other cabinet-level positions; have been in higher education longer than other presidential assistant positions; and are male (Curchack, 2009). The presidential assistant also fills in as a pinch hitter, to again use a baseball term, when universities undergo restructuring that leaves gaps in administrative structures or authority (Curchack, 2009). Jacobs (2025) noted that presidents and chiefs of staff should also “complement each other with their skills” (p. 173) indicating that presidents should hire based in part on their deficiencies as leaders.

Chiefs of staff are ultimately responsible for managing the time and attention of their executive. Jacobs (2025) argued that presidents should have reporting staff that help them avoid “spending energy on time-consuming tasks” (p. 159) affirming a need for efficiency in the office of the president. That is, the chief of staff is responsible for ensuring efficient use of their president’s time while also ensuring that the truly important

items make it to their president's ears in the appropriate manner. In this way, the chief of staff could be considered an arbiter of not only importance and time but ultimately of information. Chiefs of staff often think in line with their presidents which is essential to the role (Jacobs, 2025).

Presence is another balancing act that the chief of staff and president must coordinate together. The president's busy schedule and finite amount of time to spend on duties require that others speak on their behalf and be present on their behalf when necessary (Jacobs, 2025). This is especially true for presidential assistants like the chief of staff. Carver (2013) warned against a lack of presence in a description of presidential derailments at universities. Presidents and chancellors must not be absent as it implies a lack of care and focus on the job. The presence of a chief of staff during times when the president cannot be present is important for several reasons. That presence can represent the president's interest in the meeting especially if they are unable to attend. On the other hand, the presence of a chief of staff coupled with the absence of the president can send the signal that whatever issue is at stake is not important enough for the president to attend. This can lead to credibility issues for the chief of staff as they can be seen by others, especially faculty, as a lackey and not a true collaborator. This can also lead to credibility issues for the president if they are not seen as taking issues seriously enough. Jacobs (2025) noted that it is also incumbent on the president to clearly communicate the chief of staff's role, so constituents understand that what the chief of staff does is essential to their president's success.

A search of recent chief of staff position listings included numerous job duties. These attributes indicate a wide variety of expectations of the chief of staff role requiring a flexible, adaptable, diplomatic, organized, responsible, resilient, and tenacious person (Jacobs, 2020). The chief of staff role can encompass a wealth of responsibility and variety in its portfolio. Based on nine recent chief of staff job postings found through a web search, a number of specific job duties can be found. These chief of staff duties as denoted by recent job descriptions are described in Table A1

Chief of staff duties as denoted by recent job descriptions (see Appendix A) (Agnes Scott College, 2023; Allen University, 2023; Berry College, 2023; Central State University, 2023; Schenectady County Community College, 2023; University of Bridgeport, 2023; University of North Texas Health Science Center, 2023; University of Wisconsin Eau Claire, 2023; Whitman College, 2023).

Nelson (2007) argued that university presidents can be compared to corporate CEOs. Jacobs (2020) noted a trend of university leaders toward more corporate influences with “presidents looking more like CEOs, and institutions looking more standardized organizationally” (p. 38). Jacobs (2020) also found that, “the literature regarding the genesis of these positions in higher education is severely limited, but in talking to individuals holding the chief of staff title at various institutions in the southeast part of the US, there is a history at their institutions of having such a role” (p. 39). Jacobs (2025) later maintained that literature on the chief of staff role in the context of higher education is limited. Trachtenberg (2009) also found that the chief of staff role is necessary because presidents cannot do everything. Everage (2023) found that presidents

said they would be ineffective without a chief of staff. This points to a need for the chief of staff role to help alleviate some of the burdens caused by the overwhelming workload of the president, but, again, research on this is lacking (Hood, 2017; Jacobs, 2020, 2025). While some research states the need for a chief of staff (Everage, 2023; Jacobs, 2020), it is unclear why or if the role is necessary from the point of view of presidents who hire them.

The chief of staff role in higher education is essential due in part to the importance of communication and information sharing to and from the chief executive. The chief of staff also helps equip the president to address the complex problems they may face (Jacobs, 2020). This is because successful communication is a requirement of a successful president (McNaughtan & Pal, 2019; Taylor, 2023). The chief of staff often serves as the initial draft writer of presidential communications acting as the first person the chief executive consults with new ideas before including others in the process (McNaughtan & Pal, 2019). McNaughtan and Pal (2019) also found that when a university chief executive faced a simple issue, they worked with their communications team, but when the issue was complex, the chief executive first went to the chief of staff and then on to their executive team. This indicates a more complex communications process involved at the presidential level which may require additional help in the form of a chief of staff. Additionally, Jacobs (2025) posited that there exists “an insatiable presidential need for information to do the job” (p. 159) indicating the high amount of information that flows to and from the presidential office. Jacobs (2025) also argued that university presidents must know about every aspect of campus to better do their jobs,

however, that is equally difficult to do thus requiring the proper hiring of subordinates to assist.

Aside from communications, the chief of staff role can help provide presidents with institutional knowledge (Harris et al., 2022; Jacobs, 2025; Taylor, 2023). Harris et al. (2022) argued that institutional knowledge, a key factor to the success of presidents who are new to an institution, comes from those associated with the university who are also steeped in its history and operation. Harris et al. (2022) also argued that it is the board of trustees that should form a group of supporters with institutional knowledge to act as guides to a new president as they navigate their new institutions. Taylor (2023) built on this by noting presidents should have a good relationship with their board to make hiring decisions easier during their tenure. In practice, Jacobs (2025) found that chiefs of staff often come as internal hires already possessing institutional knowledge. As such, presidents look to chiefs of staff for their institutional knowledge particularly around future change implementation (Jacobs, 2025). Additionally, Carver (2013) stated that “the customs, practices, values, and attitudes that evolve among constituents of a particular university must be recognized and respected by the chief executive officer of the organization” (p. 57) indicating the importance of the chief of staff as institutional knowledge holder for their executive.

The chief of staff also acts as a confidant to the president working together with them and informing them during the communications process (Jacobs, 2020, 2025; McNaughtan & Pal, 2019). The president should feel free to share innermost thoughts and ideas with their chief of staff as they pertain to the work at hand. This implies a

strong form of trust between the president and their chief of staff. Everage (2023) found that building relationships and trust with chiefs of staff as a foundational and important aspect of presidents' needs.

The proximity to vital information coming from the president paired with the chief of staff's ability to act on that information points to the presence of informational power within the chief of staff role. As such, this study only focuses on informational power and does not examine the other five types of social power as put forth by French and Raven (1959). The chief of staff role encompasses both the handling of the president's office as well as distilling data and ensuring offices are properly connected and the president receives the best information (Hood, 2017). The chief of staff can also provide presidents with a closeness in relations that presidents otherwise lack due to the solitude of the role, despite being surrounded by executives and staff (Jacobs, 2025).

In a study focused on both U.S. and U.K. higher education leaders, Hemsall (2014) found that modern effective leadership should be focused on building relationships instead of relying on top-down structures. Trust and emotional intelligence were some of the most important factors to university presidents in Hemsall's (2014) study. Echoing this, Taylor (2023) found a need for collaboration and trust in the president's office.

The literature addressing the chief of staff role in higher education is limited (Hood, 2017; Jacobs, 2020, 2025). While other studies have examined the qualities of those who embody the role of the chief of staff (Hood, 2017), none have addressed the discrepancy between those who choose to hire a chief of staff and those who do not and

why they may or may not do so. However, Jacobs (2020) argued that the chief of staff is critical for presidents to properly manage their time and focus on the most important matters that come across their plates. Presidents do not have time or capacity to process the information that comes across their desks (Jacobs, 2020). Given this, the chief of staff role can help with information flow and time management.

Helping with time management, information flow, and allocation of tasks indicates that the chief of staff position is essential to the functioning of a university president, but research addressing why a president deems one necessary is lacking. Jacobs (2020) noted that prospective chiefs of staff “may be well served through professional roles in strategic communications, public relations, brand management, governmental relations, or general counsel in higher education settings” (p. 42). These skills may contribute to the needs of university presidents. The chief of staff role, in general and across different types of organizations from higher education to the corporate world, is essential as executives need an administrative structure in their organizations that allow for the day-to-day operation of what happens in the office.

Presidents also need to focus on managing their time well (Ciampa, 2020; Jacobs, 2025). Ciampa (2020) stated regarding the chief of staff position that, “this system ensures that leaders make the most of their limited time, that information arrives at the right point in their decision-making process, and that follow-up happens without their having to check” (n.p.). This points to a need for trust and efficiency in the president’s office. Jacobs (2025) also noted chiefs of staff can “protect and extend the time and energy of the president” (p. 180) highlighting the importance of efficiency and

effectiveness in the president's role. Given this, chiefs of staff are involved in information exchange and follow-up with their chief executives indicating a level of informational power possessed by the chief of staff. In addition to time management, the control of information flow into and out of the president's office is essential to its proper functioning (Jacobs, 2020, 2025).

Jacobs (2025) provided a modern take on informational power and its relationship with the chief of staff role in universities. This helps better understand the context of informational power around the university president and chief of staff roles within a university. Jacobs (2025) noted that the chief of staff can have power including the “pre-vetting of information” (p. 161) before it reaches the president's ears. This implies a sense of informational power in that the chief of staff decides what the president hears from a critical direct report. Additionally, Jacobs (2025), in a study that included a survey of 12 chiefs of staff, found that chiefs of staff, “are skilled communicators, possess strong emotional intelligence, and the ability to deliver bad news” (p. 169). This also points to chiefs of staff as wielders of informational power. Most importantly, Jacobs (2025) implied that chiefs of staff may wield informational power because they act as a “repository of information from campus colleagues” (p. 173) indicating the wealth of information that chiefs of staff possess. The need for someone to help distill information for the president is salient as Nelson (2013) argued that presidents cannot distill all the information at their disposal and often have to make decisions and move on with little time for reflection or remorse. Additionally, Nelson (2013) reiterated the need for presidential help in that they have so much to do and so little time to do it. Nelson (2013)

emphasized this stating, "In short, presidents need to save themselves, or to rely on others to save them, or both" (n.p.).

Higher education's unique structures including varied funding sources, shared governance and oversight, students and curriculum, and accreditation require a different leadership approach than that of the military or public service sectors. Those that execute the role of chief of staff in higher education certainly approach their duties differently than those of military or public service chiefs of staff. Additionally, Jacobs (2025) found that "there is no single way to deploy a chief of staff" (p. 164) indicating that the ways presidents use the role is varied and dependent on institutional needs as well as the individual leadership needs of the hiring president. Jacobs (2025) also found through interviewing some chiefs of staff that they perceive their roles as being utilized differently by different presidents with no universal mold for the role.

The chief of staff role has grown precipitously in its complexity, large portfolio, and the level of service it provides university presidents. Jacobs (2020) argued that the role is, "essential on college campuses primarily due to the enormous workload and pressing demands and responsibilities of the president. The president cannot be everywhere at once so having a trusted representative or liaison is necessary" (p. 42). However, not all presidents choose to have a chief of staff, and it is unclear why. It is also not clear what leadership qualities, political and environmental factors, and power dynamics that are associated with those who hire a chief of staff. Through this study, I seek to investigate why some university presidents choose to have a chief of staff, why

they may not, and how that decision making process ties to their need for assistance with sharing information.

Contexts and Decision Making

The size of a campus and its financial health influence how presidents spend their time. Cohen and March (1986) found that presidents of large-sized high-wealth universities spend more time traveling than presidents of smaller low-wealth universities. Presidents of large schools may be more administrative in nature while presidents of smaller schools may be more entrepreneurial in nature. Presidents also spend more time with academic administrators at large schools than at small ones, but large school presidents are more in touch with the academic side of the organization than those at small schools (Cohen & March, 1986).

The complex nature of higher education institutions along with their shared governance structures may present challenges for researchers. As such, attempting to apply business leadership literature to higher education institutions may not be completely appropriate considering their structural intricacies (Middlehurst et al., 2009; Vroom, 1983). Vroom (1983) stated that higher education institutions are unique in their structure in that they consist of a wide variety of professionals with specialized skill sets along with faculty, particularly tenured faculty, who can conduct research on a broad variety of topics that are appealing to them. The aspects of shared governance in public higher education institutions are also unique to higher education.

University Presidents and Power

Birnbaum (1989), in a study of university presidents' definitions of leadership, indicated that, "most presidents, however, described leadership from the perspectives of power and influence, and behavior" (p. 128). One study indicated that presidents see use of power as social power or social exchange with most respondents indicating that social power was their main form of persuasion (Birnbaum, 1989). While it is recognized that presidents use *social* power, Thacker and Freeman (2021) recognized that presidents can also utilize *symbolic* power. With either, it is recognized that the presidency is a powerful position on campus. However, Cohen and March (1986) warned against searches for the most powerful person on campus or searches for the locus of true decision-making power implicating them as fruitless and misguided. Hollander (2013) also noted that administrators must rely on "consultation rather than coercion as a model of operation" (p. 319) if they desire success working with faculty, students, and administrators with coercion being one form of power. These indicate different ways that power is utilized and perceived regarding the university presidency.

Leaders in higher education institutions wield power in many ways. Gearin (2017) noted that the establishment of power is important to new higher education presidents lest their social power bases decline into coercive or reward tactics as a means of getting things done. This could negatively affect a leader's long-term ability to stay in power (Gearin, 2017). Cohen and March (1986) stressed the hollowness of power held by university presidents. They may wield power because of their position at the top of the institution, but ultimate decision-making power takes place elsewhere in the institution.

Birnbaum (1988) found that presidents ultimately have little influence over outcomes because of other factors that play a part in decision making processes in higher education. In this case, power and leadership are not closely linked.

Birnbaum (1989) found that university presidents often referred to leadership behaviors in association with attaining institutional goals. This is vision and getting people to understand vision is dependent upon clear communication and use of informational power (Elias, 2008). University presidents have been found to be goal-oriented in their use of influence as well (Birnbaum, 1989). Birnbaum (1989) studied university presidents and their type of institution regarding how they used power. Despite noting the results were “suggestive only” (p. 130), the author found that those at four-year institutions “were more likely... to define leadership in power/influence terms than were presidents of universities or community colleges” (p. 130). This indicates possible differences in leadership styles between institution types. Birnbaum (1989) found that university presidents embody various leadership styles and approaches, which can seem obvious, but further found that those with “rich understandings of the many roles they play” (p. 135) may be more effective in their leadership.

Cohen and March (1986) presented an additional aspect to power when they addressed university presidential leadership. They found that the ability of the president to act powerfully is dependent upon both their own perception of power and on the self-perception of their own powerfulness (Cohen & March, 1986). This reflects that of French and Raven (1959) and their position that power is ultimately determined by the target and not solely the agent. Cohen and March (1986) stated that, “if he acts as a

‘strong’ president, he exposes his weakness” (p. 116) which reflect French and Raven’s (1959) thoughts on coercive power. Cohen and March (1986) argued, “power, the interpretation of power, and the assessment of individual leadership behavior” (p. 116) should be taken into context with the American ideology of egalitarianism. In higher education institutions, presidents or chancellors, the chief executives of a campus, often wield more power than anyone else in the organization. The fact that they have power, however, often goes unquestioned without much debate. They also have the potential to overestimate their power earlier in their tenure than later (Cohen & March, 1986). This indicates a self-perceived reduction in power as their tenure advances.

Theoretical Frame: French and Raven’s Bases of Social Power

Power and leadership are defined in many ways by many different people (Birnbaum, 1988; French & Raven, 1959; Goodwin, 2018; McCroskey & Richmond, 1983; Northouse, 2016; Pierro et al., 2013; Raven, 1965; Yukl, 2013). Northouse (2016) found that power and leadership are related because, "leadership is part of the influence process" (p. 10), is "synonymous with leadership" (p. 10) and defines power as "the capacity or potential to influence" (p. 10). Social power, as described by French and Raven (1959) and Raven (1965) is more nuanced. Raven (2008) defined social power as, "the potential for such influence, the ability of the agent or power figure to bring about such change, using resources available to him or her" (p. 1). Birnbaum (1988) defined power as, "the ability to produce intended change in others, to influence them so that they will be more likely to act in accordance with one's own preferences" (p. 12). Birnbaum (1988) also pointed out the importance of power across many types of organizations.

Raven (2008) noted that, "influence is clearly socially dependent" (p. 2). McCroskey and Richmond (1983) defined power as, "the capacity to influence another person to do something he/she would not have done had he/she not been influenced" (p. 176). How that power is exercised is dependent on the type of power involved and the type of leader wielding it. The potential for influence, which is ultimately determined by the target in many uses of power, has been overlooked in at least one recent study using French and Raven's (1959) framework (Kovach, 2020).

Northouse (2016) made the distinction that power and leadership are often associated with one another but there are, "no explicit theories in the research literature about power and leadership" (p. 10) and that "power has not been a major variable in theories of leadership" (p. 11). This is an important distinction when comparing leadership and power because it points to the fact that they are difficult to define as a pair and there is a lack of literature that successfully combines the two (Northouse, 2016). This also points to the need for studies that examine how leaders, especially in higher education, use power to achieve their goals as well as a gap in the overall literature covering these two themes.

Power is defined in an assortment of ways with the consensus being that power is one person's ability to influence another (Birnbaum, 1988; French & Raven, 1959; Goodwin, 2018; McCroskey & Richmond, 1983; Northouse, 2016; Pierro et al., 2013; Raven, 1965; Yukl, 2013). While there are several recent business and leadership studies that cover French and Raven's (1959) social power bases (Bruni-Bossio & Kaczur, 2022; Randolph & Kemery, 2011), little has been dedicated to the examination of that

framework in higher education institutions (Birnbaum, 1989; Middlehurst et al., 2009; Vroom, 1983).

Tauber (1986) also found that, the effective use of power, a little-investigated concept at the time, “is crucial to providing leadership in educational settings” (p. 256). Vroom (1983) noted that leadership studies typically focus on military and business realms and not higher education.

Regarding power, Kretoivics (2019) noted that people confuse power with manipulation and that “power is not good or bad, it is how, and for what purpose(s) it is used that *makes it so*” [emphasis in original] (p. 28). Kretoivics (2019) also found that “effective leadership was equated with the effective use of power and the effective use of power is doing the right thing for the right reasons” (p. 28) suggesting a moral requirement of effective leadership.

The Bases of Social Power

This study will analyze chief of staff hiring decisions by presidents of higher education institutions using case studies framed by French and Raven (1959) and Raven's (1965) social power bases with a focus on informational power. While it is important to study the other five bases of power in this context, this study focuses only on informational power because of the potential for copious amounts of information that flows in and out of a president's office. These power bases have evolved considerably over the past 60-plus years (Elias, 2008; Erchul & Raven, 1997; French & Raven, 1959; Gearin, 2017; Hinkin & Schriesheim, 1989; Koslowsky et al., 2001; Martin, 1978; Nesler et al., 1999; Pierro et al., 2008; Pierro et al., 2012; Podsakoff & Schriesheim, 1985;

Raven, 1965; Raven, 1993; Raven, 2008; Raven et al., 1998; Schriesheim et al., 1991; Tauber, 1986). It is known that French and Raven (1959) and Raven's (1965) social power bases have been used in leadership literature, particularly as it has focused on use of power by leaders in general, but little qualitative research has been focused on higher education leadership using this theoretical framework (Gearin, 2017; Goodall, 2009). Northouse (2016) added to this by noting that there are, "no explicit theories in the research literature about power and leadership" (p. 10) when discussing French and Raven's (1965) bases of social power framework. This points to a gap in the literature and a lack of theories surrounding the combination of power and leadership.

Recent studies that utilized French and Raven (1959) and Raven's (1965) framework vary widely in nature by subject, methodology, and approach (Bruni-Bossio, & Kaczur, 2022; Elias, 2007; Fay et al., 2021; Gearin, 2017; Goodall, 2009; Gould, 2000; Gregory, 2017; Nesler et al., 1999; Özaslan, 2019; Randolph & Kemery, 2011; Taucean et al., 2016). The most recent studies focused on higher education while also using French and Raven (1959) and Raven's (1965) framework are predominantly quantitative in nature, using surveys as data collection tools (Elias, 2007; Goodall, 2009; Gould, 2000; Nesler et al., 1999; Taucean et al., 2016). Quantitative studies focusing on French and Raven's (1959) framework have been plentiful, but more qualitative studies that focus on the use of power by university presidents are needed.

Other authors focus on leadership styles and use French and Raven's framework but do not assess how those bases of social power are specifically used by leaders in higher education (Elias, 2008; Reiley & Jacobs, 2016; Tauber, 1986). Tauber (1986)

stated that, "the effective use of power, a little-investigated concept, is crucial to providing leadership in educational settings" (p. 256). While Tauber (1986) focused on teacher and student relationships in grade school, the dynamic is still applicable in higher education settings. This also points to a need for further study in this area.

A variety of research methods have been used to analyze higher education leaders' experiences including phenomenology, case studies, grounded theory, narrative and discourse analysis, and quantitative analysis in many forms (Calma, 2015; Channing, 2020; Gearin, 2017; Huang, 2012; Juntrasook et al., 2013; Nehls, 2012; Özaslan, 2019; Read & Kehm, 2016; Rolle et al., 2000; Thacker & Freeman Jr, 2021; Wei & Xing, 2022). Yukl (2013) noted that quantitative methodologies have been the norm for studying power while the use of surveys are the preferred tool to gather relevant data. Many educational leadership studies in K-12 and higher education as well as studies on perceptions of power in education in general utilized a phenomenological approach (Gearin, 2017; Özaslan, 2019; Rolle et al., 2000; Thacker & Freeman Jr, 2021). Gearin (2017) used phenomenology along with French and Raven (1959) and Raven's (1965) social power taxonomy to study campus presidents. Other studies utilizing French and Raven (1959) and Raven's (1965) social power taxonomy to examine leadership in higher education are quantitative or mixed methods in nature and comprised of surveys (Elias, 2007; Goodall, 2009; Gould, 2000; Nesler et al., 1999; Taucan et al., 2016). Among those, Gould's (2000) was a doctoral dissertation. Nehls (2012) used a qualitative case study design to examine the effects of presidential transitions during the employment of financial campaigns at their universities.

Huang (2012), in an unpublished doctoral dissertation, used a case study design, framed by French and Raven's (1959) and Raven's (1965) bases of social power to study how leaders who are women of color use power in their roles in higher education. Huang (2012) found that, “having a strong sense of self developed from parental and spousal/partner influence helped them buffer the challenges of racism, sexism, and homophobia in the academy” (p. 348).

Gearin (2017) used phenomenology and French and Raven's framework to study campus presidents' leadership styles finding that change processes are hard for first-time presidents of universities. Gearin (2017) also indicated that board of trustees and recruiters charged with finding new presidents should keep in mind the informational needs of new presidents in terms of understanding their new campus. Failing to fully disclose information to new presidents regarding their role may result in derailment or “unanticipated challenges once in the post, leaving the presidents ill-prepared for leadership” (Gearin, 2017, p. 571).

Gregory (2017) studied K-12 educators using narrative inquiry and French and Raven (1959) and Raven's (1965) framework with subjects submitting autobiographical narratives that were coded and analyzed for themes. Gregory (2017) studied trust relationships in K-12 schools through the collection of public-school educators' autobiographical stories that discussed their conceptions of power use. Gould (2000), in a doctoral dissertation, used quantitative analysis and surveys to examine faculty perceptions of department head use of power as defined by French and Raven (1959) and Raven (1965).

French and Raven's Bases of Social Power

French and Raven's (1959) defined five bases of social power: reward, coercive, referent, legitimate, and expert power. Raven (1965) later added informational power as a sixth base which was originally dismissed by John French and was not included in their 1959 publication. French felt it had not been fully developed at that point (Raven, 1965) and, initially, was not included in the original bases of power produced by French and Raven (1959). It was not until Raven later convinced French that this type of power deserved its own category. Raven (1993) admitted that he was "not able to convince French that the term 'power' was appropriate. (Apparently, my own informational power was insufficient in this case)" (p. 232).

French and Raven (1959) illustrated the dyadic relationship involved in the use of power by an *agent*, the one who wields power, and *target*, the recipient of those efforts. Those terms, *agent* and *target*, will be used throughout this study. It should be made clear, however, that French and Raven (1959) did not limit *agent* to a single person but defined it to include "a role, a norm, a group or a part of a group" (p. 151). They also indicated that the *target* is always a single person (French & Raven, 1959). This study, however, focuses on higher education chief executives' hiring decisions and how those may be influenced by informational power.

French and Raven (1959), noting their original five types of power, indicated that "the stronger the basis of power, the greater the power" (p. 165). Conversely, they noted that exceeding a power base's range of power will lead to its ultimate reduction. While the other bases of power enjoy a more limited range of power, referent power has the

most of the group and is allowed wide latitude in how it is used (French & Raven, 1959). Raven (1965) found that more than one source of power may be in action at any given time and the leader could choose which one to use, but it is unclear if it is possible to use all the bases of power at the same time without some undermining others.

Shetty (1978) argued that French and Raven's (1959) power bases are not independent of one another and often influence one another and their effectiveness. Shetty (1978) also pointed to contingency factors such as manager, subordinate, and organizational characteristics as having influence over which type of power is most appropriate in each situation. Additionally, Shetty (1978) indicated that, "multiple sources of power imply that almost anyone in an organization may possess influence" (p. 184). While this study focuses on higher education presidents, this indicates that lower-level employees such as presidential assistants or chiefs of staff have tremendous informational power and can control the flow of information to superiors and their subordinates (Shetty, 1978).

Overview of Types of Social Power

Reward Power

Reward power addresses a leader's ability to reinforce good behavior with good rewards. That power increases with the target's perception that the leader can grant rewards (French & Raven, 1959). The more reward power is used, the stronger the attraction of the target to the leader. Resistance of the target to the leader also decreases with the increased use of reward power.

Coercive Power

Coercive power addresses how a leader can punish bad behavior if the target fails to comply with the leader's influence attempt. This requires surveillance on the part of the leader. The more coercive power is used, the less the target is attracted to the leader; however, if the target perceives the coercion is legitimate, the attraction will decrease less. Resistance of the target to the leader increases with the increased use of coercive power indicating that coercive tactics should be used sparingly, or at the very least, strategically. The same also applies to the legitimacy of the coercion. If the target feels the coercion is warranted, they will exhibit less resistance to the leader. Coercive power along with reward power also require a level of surveillance by the leader to ensure the target is complying. Surveillance is not required for legitimate, referent, and expert power. Coercive and reward power are also what Raven (1965) referred to as "public-dependent influence" (p. 373) given the surveillance requirement. Raven (2008) also found that, "influence is clearly *socially dependent*" (p. 2, emphasis in original) suggesting there is a relationship between the target and the leader that is required for the leader to properly wield power.

Legitimate Power

Legitimate power, which French and Raven (1959) noted is the most complex of the bases of power, is based on the leader's authority in their role. This type of power is also dependent on the target's values which the leader has the legitimate right to influence and that the target is obligated to accept (French & Raven, 1959). It should be made clear that French and Raven (1959) did not ascribe legitimate power to holding a particular

position in all cases. French and Raven (1959) further detailed this by stating, “legitimacy involves some sort of code or standard, accepted by the individual, by virtue of which the external agent can assert his power” (p. 159).

Referent Power

Referent power is earned by the leader and can be considered as respect by followers or a willingness of the followers to obey the leader based on their respect and admiration for them. French and Raven (1959) found that referent power is about the target identifying in some way with the leader through a feeling of "oneness" (p. 161) or "a desire for such an identity" (p. 161). The more the target feels that association, the more powerful the referent power can be. Additionally, the target may not be aware of the leader's referent power over them indicating that this base of power may involve some level of subconscious association or desire to emulate.

Expert Power

Expert power refers to the way a specialist on a topic wields their power (French & Raven, 1959). Its strength is defined by the target's acknowledgement that the leader is an expert in a given area. This type of power, like the others, depends on the target's perception of the leader and their ability to embody that power (French & Raven, 1959).

Informational Power

Informational power evolved from French and Raven's (1959) original five bases of social power. It was included as a sixth base of social power in 1965 by Raven (1965) and is the key theoretical framework used in this study. Raven (1993) even admitted to a dearth of personal informational power over his colleague, French, when initially

pitching the additional power type as he was initially unable to convince French to include the topic in their original research. Despite this, Gaski (1986) suggested that information power should be included with reward or expert power instead of standing on its own.

Informational power relates to raw information conveyed by an agent to a target. Raven (1965) indicated that, "informational influence, arising from the content of a communication, becomes independent of the influencing agent, but depends on cognitive changes in the influence" (p. 381). *Informational influence* is used interchangeably with *informational power*. Additionally, Erchul and Raven (1997) defined informational power as such: "Informational power, or persuasion, is based on the information, or logical argument, that the influencing agent presents directly to the target in order to implement change" (p. 151). This indicates that the information is focused not only on the content of the message but its ability to enact cognitive change in the target. Erchul and Raven (1997) clarified that informational power is different from the other five types of power in that it is more about the communication aspect or "message rather than from characteristics of the agent" (p. 151). Additionally, McCroskey and Richmond (1983) stated that, "the use of power requires communication" (p. 177) further tying power use to the exchange of information.

The target, in this situation, evaluates the "content of the message" (Erchul & Raven, 1997, p. 151) and whether it is "highly useful and relevant to his or her situation" (p. 151). Again, this type of power is less about the people wielding it and more about the content of the message and how useful it can be to the recipient. The unique advantage

that informational power holds over other types of social power is that it neither requires surveillance nor does it require that the target like the agent (Erchul & Raven, 1997). Informational power may require that the target understands the information being conveyed but does not require surveillance and has "fewer negative side effects" (Erchul & Raven, 1997, p. 151). Additionally, Elias (2008) discussed a key point about the responsibility associated with wielding informational power and whether others understand the organization's vision and "whether employees are growing and learning in their jobs" (p. 278). This ultimately is the responsibility of a chief executive: ensuring that those under their leadership understand their vision. This also assumes that communication is a key factor in helping followers understand a leader's vision.

Further, Koslowsky et al. (2001) found that informational power held the highest amount of power for both the agents and targets in a study focusing on nursing supervisors (agents) and their nurses (targets). This indicated a differentiation from the other types of power in terms of how much power it wields. Kessler (2010) contended that informational power is wielded through the control of information as well as expert power. The former, informational power, being a positional type of power, "such as the power of a CEO who has access to special sources of information" (p. 542) while the latter, expert power, is based on that agent's expertise. However, Hunt (2015) noted that, while some scholars couple informational power with expert power as French once did, others, like Raven, believe it is its own source of power. Hunt (2015) argued Raven's informational power should have been included in the original group put forth by French and Raven.

Direct versus indirect informational power.

Informational power can be divided into two sub-types: direct and indirect informational power (Elias, 2008; Erchul & Raven, 1997; Raven, 1992). Indirect information presentation can be more effective in certain circumstances especially if it comes from a lower power individual attempting to influence a higher power individual (Erchul & Raven, 1997). A subordinate influencing a superior is a good example of the effective use of indirect informational power. An example of indirect informational power includes a subordinate indirectly telling their superior what to do. Erchul and Raven (1997) noted that a subordinate trying to influence a superior with indirect informational power may have more success than one using direct informational power. Direct informational power, however, is as it seems – a clear directive from an agent to a target. Indirect informational power may also come in the form of Socratic questioning as opposed to giving directives especially when a subordinate is engaging with a superior (Erchul & Raven, 1997). While Erchul and Raven (1997) described informational power in the context of school consultations, the qualities of this type of power, such as the ability of a subordinate to influence a superior, are not limited to that context.

Influencers must think about the costs of their attempts at influence. The same goes for leadership as it does for power. Actions may incur some kind of cost. According to Erchul and Raven (1997), there are costs associated with the various types of social power. Informational power requires time and effort while coercion requires monitoring of the target to ensure compliance. Informational power does not require monitoring to ensure compliance. Once informational power is exerted or exchanged, it is free from the

agent's control unlike other types of power that require monitoring. Elias (2008) stated that, political power, as an example, "can be exerted through the use of positive expert and/or informational (direct or indirect) power" (p. 273). Raven expanded on the original six bases of social power dividing each into sub-categories after seeing how others expanded the taxonomy in other ways (Elias, 2008). This response explains, in part, the origin of direct and indirect informational power.

Expansion of the bases of power framework

In a study examining grade schoolteacher consultants, Erchul and Raven (1997) greatly expanded French and Raven (1959) and Raven's (1965) six bases of social power partly in response to the call for more sound methodological approaches to studying the framework (Podsakoff & Schriesheim, 1985). Erchul and Raven (1997) also acknowledged Martin (1978) as the progenitor of notoriety surrounding French and Raven's (1959) bases of social power with his publication which likely inspired others to use the model in studies on power. Erchul and Raven (1997) argued for the influence of the original six bases of social power but offered an expansion of those bases through the application of sub-categories to each resulting in 14 total categories. For coercion and reward power, they applied both impersonal and personal variants which detail whether the target feels that the coercive or reward power was used in a personal or impersonal way. Legitimacy was further broken down into four new categories including formal legitimacy, legitimacy of reciprocity, legitimacy of equity, and legitimacy of dependence. Expert and referent power were broken into pairs with both positive and negative

applications of each. Information was broken into two forms of direct and indirect information (Erchul & Raven, 1997).

Raven et al. (1998) further studied 11 of the 14 expanded bases of power in response to Podsakoff and Schriesheim's (1985) call for better tools to analyze the framework. Podsakoff and Schriesheim's (1985) study looked at the original six bases of power with the expanded development of reward, coercion, and legitimate power as put forth by Erchul and Raven (1997). Raven et al. (1998) further expanded on the taxonomy by including both soft and harsh power bases finding an association between job satisfaction and the use of soft power bases using their Interpersonal Power Inventory (IPI) developed to better examine use of the social power bases. Pierro et al. (2012) expanded on soft and harsh power bases noting the high and low needs of cognitive closure associated with both.

Raven et al. (1998) acknowledged the possibility of overlap between powerbases and the use of multiple power bases that form "unique constellations of bases" (p. 309) rather than individual bases of power. The study found overlaps between bases of power, which they note as unsurprising, however, the overlaps occurred within types of soft (expert and information power) and hard (reward, coercion, and legitimate) bases of power. Raven (2008) echoed this by noting many studies using the social power bases framework only focus on one or two bases of power at a time leaving the door open to the idea of all bases of power being used like the constellations of power noted earlier. That said, Raven (2008) cautioned against the use of all forms of power because one may ultimately end up undermining another in its deployment.

Gearin (2017), in a phenomenological study of the bases of power, acknowledged French and Raven's (1959) individual bases of social power may be considered too narrow because leaders may embody more than one source of power at a time. What is not clear, however, is the impact of a utilization of all the bases of power at the same time, though it seems they would possibly conflict with one another if employed in such a way. Raven et al. (1998) concluded their study on social power by noting that more discussion around perceptions of power and objectives prior to, during, and after influence attempts is needed while also acknowledging the difficulty in pursuing such a study because of its inherent complexity.

Elias (2007) used the IPI developed by Raven et al. (1998) to study university students' perceptions of their professors' use of power finding that they preferred soft power significantly more as opposed to harsh power. Pierro et al. (2008) used the IPI to study power use in the Italian military. Elias (2008) stressed that the expanded 14 bases of power have not been examined in the literature to any great extent calling for more studies on the expanded bases to be conducted in the future. They also indicate the benefit of the expanded model and the IPI as well as their application to future studies in a variety of fields. While Elias (2007, 2008) examined quantitative studies using the IPI and expanded 14 bases of power, more could be done using qualitative methodologies with those updated tools.

While French and Raven (1959) and Raven's (1965) bases of social power have expanded significantly over time, further qualitative studies need to be developed using this framework. Scant research has contributed to the body of literature investigating use

of power by higher education administrators using the French and Raven (1959) and Raven (1965) six bases of social power framework. Even the tools developed to analyze the framework like the IPI are quantitative in nature pointing to a greater need for qualitative analysis.

Critiques of the bases of social power framework

Podsakoff and Schriesheim (1985) provided a critique of studies that test French and Raven's (1959) bases of social power noting that many contain methodological issues that are in contrast with other studies on leadership. The authors noted that other studies that use French and Raven's (1959) bases of power typology tend to focus on benevolent use of types of power like reward power and do not consider potentially malevolent uses of positive types of power like reward power. That is, a type of power like reward power which can be seen in a positive light, can also be used in a negative way. Podsakoff and Schriesheim (1985) also indicated a need for future studies using the social power bases because the current literature, up to that point, focused primarily on social psychology and industry. Birnbaum (1989) and Vroom (1983) supported this claim by noting that studies using French and Raven's (1959) power bases have focused on military, business, and government agencies while excluding higher education.

Schriesheim et al. (1991) continued the call for a revision of tools to evaluate use of power using French and Raven's (1959) power taxonomy. Schriesheim et al. (1991) further indicated the pitfalls of "single-item and ranking measures [that] have serious psychometric shortcomings and that they produce distorted results in field-collected data" (p. 106). As such, the dominant methodology for analyzing French and Raven (1959) and

Raven's (1965) bases of social power is quantitative in nature, somewhat problematic, and has data that is lacking trust (Hinkin & Schriesheim, 1989; Podsakoff & Schriesheim, 1985; Schriesheim et al., 1991). This not only indicated a need for better quantitative measures to analyze the social power bases but implies that qualitative measures have largely been ignored in the literature up to this point. Additionally, Yukl and Tracy (1992) applied their own definitions of similar types of power further confusing the application of French and Raven (1959) and Raven's (1965) taxonomy.

Raven (1993) agreed with Podsakoff and Schriesheim's (1985) constructive criticisms and their assessment that issues with single-item and ipsative measures are problematic. In response to this, the Power/Interaction Model of Interpersonal Influence (P/IMII) was developed (Raven, 1993). Later, an updated model is referred to as the Interpersonal Power Inventory (IPI) (Raven et al., 1998) which sought to address shortcomings of other assessment tools up to that point and did not meet the standards set by the original definitions of the six bases of power. Koslowsky et al., (2001) found the IPI to be a valid quantitative tool for assessing use of power. Up to this point, researchers had developed their own tools and definitions for measuring how power was used which led to a fracturing of studies using the framework and an apparent need for consistency (Raven, 1993). The P/IMII is a good first step toward examining the bases of social power as they are used by a leader and received by a target. Raven (1993) examined the leader's:

...motivations, assessment of his or her power-related resources, examination of cost and benefits for their usage, selection of a power strategy, implementation of

various stage-setting and preparatory devices to enhance the selected power strategy, and review of the success or failure of the power strategy. (p. 246)

Raven (1993) also found the tool used a similar approach for the target of influence from their perspective. It seems beneficial that one of the two original authors of the social power bases framework developed a tool to better analyze it, but it is curious that it took over 30 years for it to be developed. While the P/IMII and IPI are proven quantitative tools that have been used to examine French and Raven's (1959) power bases, more could be done in the qualitative realm (Koslowsky et al., 2001).

Critiques of the bases of social power structure have led to its evolution from six original bases of power to numerous bases over the decades. Informational power has evolved into multiple forms and will be used as a framework for this study. Studies focused on higher education that use the French and Raven framework are limited, especially with informational power. Furthermore, studies using power frameworks that focus on university presidents are scarce. This study seeks to contribute to the body of literature focused on university presidents and power while highlighting the rationales for hiring a chief of staff.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the literature around the chief of staff role in higher education as well as the role of social power in the form of informational power. University presidents' decision making, their needs for cabinet personnel, and their need for someone to help them navigate the increasingly complex and varied role of university president were discussed in this literature review as well. It is clear that the job of a

university president is difficult, and they need help to do it well. Chapter 3 will discuss the methods used in this qualitative study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

In Chapter 2, I presented literature relating to higher education presidents and chiefs of staff as well as decision making factors relating to the hiring of chiefs of staff. I also discussed literature relating to social power and its evolution over the decades since its inception. Guided by the research purpose, which is to examine how university presidents describe the necessity of hiring a chief of staff, I will begin this chapter with a discussion of the design rationale using a qualitative approach. This chapter will detail the research design, methodology, rationale for the study, site and participants, and data collection process for the study. The research questions that guide this study are as follows:

- RQ1: How do university presidents describe the necessity of hiring or not hiring a chief of staff?
- RQ2: What factors influence the decision by presidents to hire or not to hire a chief of staff?

Research Design and Rationale

This study will utilize a multi-case study design focusing on six former or retired university presidents and their decision-making processes surrounding whether they hired a chief of staff or not. Three cases will focus on presidents who did hire a chief of staff while the other case will focus on three presidents who did not. The study will also focus on the needs for informational power as it flows through the university administrative structure that comprises the president's office. Presidents will have been out of the job for

a maximum of ten years. More cases will be added if saturation is not met with only six cases. Data will be collected through interviews with presidents as well as media and document collection and analysis as related to what presidents mention in their interviews.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) note that qualitative and quantitative research focus on the subject's perspective while qualitative research focuses on the perspective of subjects through interviews. Qualitative research also provides “rich descriptions” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 12) which will help detail presidents’ thoughts regarding the need for a chief of staff. A qualitative study will help generate better understanding of “why” a president would choose to hire a chief of staff as opposed to simply “if” they hire one. Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that qualitative studies collect data from myriad sources which, in this case, includes interviews, document analysis, and news media coverage. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) also used the eloquent illustration of the qualitative researcher as a “bricoleur” or “quiltmaker” (p. 5) which is fitting in this research because this research will stitch together up to six different stories into a quilt that is “a pieced-together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation” (p. 5). These examples further reinforce that a qualitative approach is appropriate for a study examining president’s thought processes to understand hiring decisions around the chief of staff role.

Yin (1994) noted that researchers should consider the research questions and focus on current events instead of historical in a case study design. Given this, Yin (1994) suggested that studies using questions beginning with “how” and “why” are more

appropriate. Yin (1994) stated that a case study examines a phenomenon in its actual context which will be useful when examining hiring decisions of two university presidents regarding the chief of staff role. Multiple sources of evidence will be used to triangulate data in this study: interviews, documents, and media (Yin, 1994).

Using a qualitative approach allows for flexibility in the responses that will come from university presidents as new understandings of why they made certain hiring decisions are co-constructed with the researcher. Presidents each have their own personalities, contexts, and reasons for why they would hire a chief of staff or not. These studies are typically conducted in a “natural setting” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 181) where direct interaction and immersive settings allow the researcher to see, “them behave and act within their context” (p. 181). Once the data are winnowed, results will be collapsed into themes as is the practice for qualitative studies unlike quantitative studies (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The open-endedness of interview questions and their response further differentiates a qualitative study from that of quantitative studies which allows the researcher to interpret experiences. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), in quantitative research, theories are tested, whereas in qualitative research, the researcher is “exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). While I do not seek to gather quantitative data in this study, it would follow that a mixed methods approach, which would generate both qualitative and quantitative data, would not be appropriate here either. Mixed methods approaches also seek to gather insight beyond either qualitative or quantitative results through the combination of the two (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study focuses

solely on presidents' experiences and perspectives which will provide ample insight into their thinking when combined with document and news media analysis. Given the purpose of this study is to examine how university presidents describe the necessity of hiring a chief of staff, a qualitative approach is more appropriate.

Design

A multiple-site case study design will be used. This design includes interviews, document analysis, and media analysis that will be used to examine the hiring decisions of university presidents relating to the chief of staff role in higher education. Sites and participants will be similar which aligns with Stake's (2013) suggestion for a need for similarity with multi-case research. Despite similarities, cases are situational and the examination of those sheds light on the experience of university presidents and their decision making around the chief of staff role (Stake, 2013). Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted that case studies will allow for a deep dive into individual cases.

Three retired university presidents who hired a chief of staff and three presidents who did not hire a chief of staff will be interviewed to form their respective cases. Relevant document reviews of all presidents interviewed will be included. Individual cases include interviews, documents, media, and journal notes. Notes will be documented in a case study spreadsheet where associated codes and themes for each case are included. Following this, a within-case analysis will be conducted focusing on emergent themes. Cases will then be cross analyzed with each other to determine any comparisons that can be made (Yin, 1994). Findings will be drawn from the cross-case analysis and reported in Chapter 4 of this study. This approach is detailed in **Figure 1**.

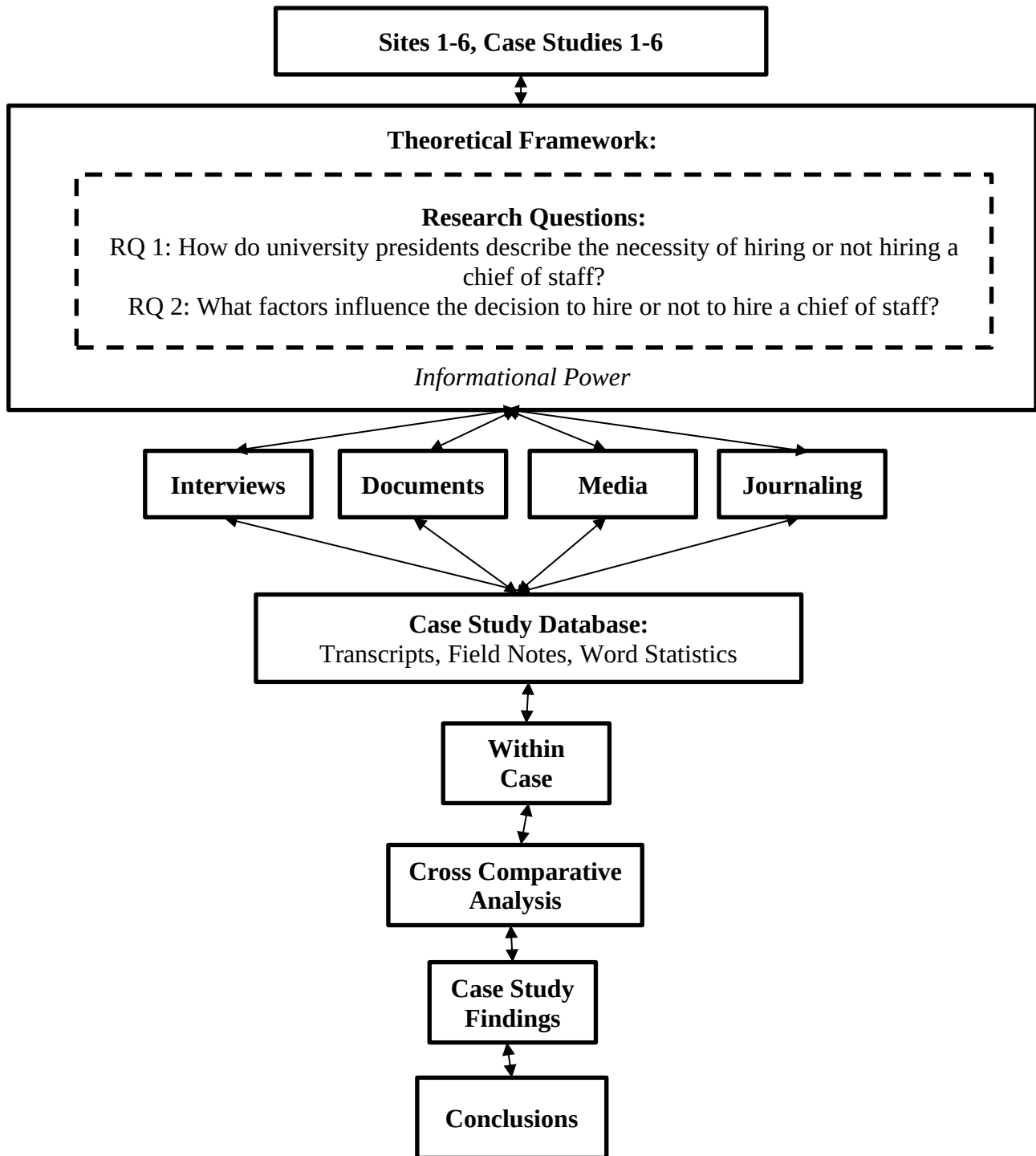


Figure 1
Multi-Site Case Study Design

Sample

Purposive sampling will be used to create a list of potential participants for the study to gather valuable data for the study (Yin, 2016). Stake (2013) noted that purposive sampling also adds variety and contribute to the “deep dive” component of multi-case study design in general. The sample will be limited to former large R1 public university presidents who have retired in the past ten years and did or did not have a chief of staff. A list of potential candidates will be generated using publicly available information through various news articles and official university press releases. The list of names, their respective institutions, and whether they had a chief of staff or not will be maintained in a spreadsheet. Once the data are gathered, it will be split into two groups: those who did hire a chief of staff and those who did not. The lists will be randomly sorted and the first subject on each will be contacted until one from each group is selected for a total of six subjects. In follow-up emails after initial contact, subjects will be asked if they had a chief of staff or not if they did not already disclose this information. Email will suffice for this type of communication and will provide a paper trail for correspondence.

Site

The sites for this study are large public Research 1 (R1) higher education institutions in the United States. Large universities are defined according to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2024) as having an enrollment of at least 10,000 students. R1 institutions are also classified by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2024) and have very high research activity. Public universities were chosen because of the transparency required in analyzing hiring

decisions due to public records requirements and accountability to the public for hiring practices and overall decision making. Private institutions are not subject to the same transparency laws making them more difficult to analyze. Additionally, large public universities typically require more robust administrative structures to handle their larger audiences which ultimately have more complex needs including whether a president may need a chief of staff (Cohen & March, 1986; Eckel, 2017; Nelson, 2000). That is, the bigger the university, the more people needed to run them; hence, having more capacity for a role like the chief of staff. Smaller universities may not have the need for, capacity for, or budget for roles like the chief of staff position.

To better understand the current state of the chief of staff role in these universities and which institutions have them, a cursory exploration of several university website administrative staff listings was conducted. As a test, I gathered a list of president names and whether they had a chief of staff at large public institutions in the Eastern United States (N = 42). Of those, less than half (n = 19) had a position with the title “chief of staff” in its administrative structure. The purpose of this exercise was to determine the commonality of the position at public universities to help me determine if targeting retired presidents would potentially yield enough numbers of those who used a chief of staff. Given this, purposive sampling will allow for the strategic selection of the cases. Campus details associated with this study are detailed in **Table A2**

Campus profiles **Participants**

Participants for this study are retired presidents of large, Carnegie-classified R1, public higher education institutions in the United States. Active university presidents

were initially considered, but elite interviewing literature suggests that gaining access to active presidents can be exceedingly difficult (McClure & McNaughtan, 2021).

Additionally, active university presidents may not be as forthcoming about hiring decisions because they are still in their roles and are therefore protective of their thought processes and decisions (McClure & McNaughtan, 2021). McClure and McNaughtan (2021) noted three considerations in interviewing elites in higher education: they present significant challenges, there is lack of discussion in qualitative coursework about the issue, and there are few resources available to scholars seeking to study elites. McClure and McNaughtan (2021) found that, "Researchers in the field of higher education may be ill equipped to navigate the challenges inherent to elite interviewing" (p. 974). A non-elite person interviewing an elite "reverses the flow of knowledge" (McClure & McNaughtan, 2021, p. 976) allowing the non-elite to better interpret how decisions are made by privileged individuals (Mason-Bish, 2019). As a researcher, I am a non-elite and therefore fall under McClure and McNaughtan's (2021) description. Gaining access to university presidents, chancellors, and chiefs of staff will be difficult given their busy schedules. Therefore, this study will focus on retired university presidents.

Given this information, retired presidents may be likely to offer up more candid assessments of their time in office. They may also have more time to reflect on their tenure and be able to offer clearheaded assessments of their time as president. Retired presidents may also be easier to access and have less hectic schedules than active presidents. While some may go on to work in other non-profit arenas, consulting, faculty, or continue as presidents at other universities, a recent survey of university presidents

found that 39% planned on retiring after stepping down from their roles (American Council on Education, 2023). This study interviewed (n = 6) former presidents and chancellors with each serving as its own case study.

Natow (2020) noted that triangulation in qualitative elite interviews is essential because elites may be deceptive or provide inaccurate information. To safeguard against potential deception, whether intentional or not, triangulation in the form of public documentation, online media, and news article analysis will be used to provide further context around responses (Natow, 2020). Additionally, Natow (2020) noted that triangulation also helps provide a larger picture of the issues at hand as well as verifying things elites may say in interviews. Interviewers should strive to conduct document research or data collection from other sources prior to interviewing so they have background information going into the interview (Natow, 2020). This helps show presidents that the interviewer has done their homework while also providing a general level of preparedness for the interview. I will contact the possible participants using an official email template approved by IRB asking to conduct an interview. An IRB-approved consent letter will be emailed to participants for them to approve. Copies will be kept in a confidential file accessible only to me on a password protected computer. To maintain anonymity, I will keep a codebook with actual names paired with given pseudonyms to be used in this study. Pseudonyms were generated using both the Random Name Generator (2024) website and personal choice. Study participant profiles are detailed in **Table A3**

Study participants' profiles**Data Collection**

Data will be collected in several ways: semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and media analysis. Each of these data collection methods are described in detail in the following sections.

Semi-structured Interviews

While all of these will be rich sources of data, Creswell & Báez (2021) noted that interviews "likely yield the most information" (p. 132) from a subject. Interviews will take place over Zoom to not only avoid costly travel expenses to research sites, but to make the most efficient use of time on the part of the researcher and subjects. This will also make scheduling the interviews easier since they can take place online which can be conducted from anywhere. Additionally, platforms like Zoom can record interviews which include transcription functions.

Zoom, a widely used online video conferencing platform, will be used to facilitate the semi-structured interviews with subjects using audio but not video. Zoom provides the ability to record the audio conversation, provide a transcript, and, most importantly, allow for flexibility in meeting location and times. Not using video will allow for a level of anonymity in that the subject will not be seen but only heard. Additionally, conducting interviews over Zoom instead of visiting the site in person is preferred. It is unnecessary to see the study site in person because it does not impact how the data are collected and does not inform the research questions of this study. It is also unnecessary to see the subject on screen while interviewing to interpret what they are saying – therefore, Zoom will suffice. Conducting the interviews over Zoom also allows the researcher to save time and money.

Interview consent forms approved by IRB will be shared with participants prior to the interview process, electronically signed, and returned to the researcher prior to the initiation of any interviews with subjects. Interviews will last up to 90 minutes with the opportunity for follow-up interviews as needed. Transcripts from the interviews will be generated by the auto-captioning function of Zoom and reviewed for accuracy by the researcher. Corrections to the transcripts will be made where necessary, any identifying information will be anonymized and then saved into a new working document for analysis purposes. The transcript will be shared with the subject for them to review their statements for accuracy and afford them the opportunity to make corrections if needed. The original transcript generated by Zoom will be saved as a separate copy as backup and stored in a secure location. If follow-up interviews are necessary to supplement data collection, all protocols listed here will be followed. Transcripts from those follow-up interviews will be corrected where necessary, anonymized, and shared with participants to review for accuracy and make corrections where needed prior to analysis. Additionally, basic follow-up questions may be asked via email where an interview would be unnecessary.

Interview questions are derived from the literature surrounding the chief of staff role, university presidents, and informational power discussed in Chapter 2. Chief of staff traits, presidential needs, and common themes were noted, coded into themes, clustered into groups, and tabulated in list form. **Table A4**

Interview questions based on *literature themes* lists and ranks these themes. Interview questions were based on those clustered themes. Follow-up probing questions with

examples will be requested to elaborate answers to the questions in **Table A4** (see Appendix A).

Instrument Review

An instrument review was conducted using the questions listed in **Table A4** (see Appendix A) to determine if the interview structure matches the 90-minute time for interviews and if the interview questions are appropriate to address the research questions for this study. Fifteen colleagues were asked to read the instrument review to provide feedback on its structure and content. Feedback on the written instrument review were used to adjust questions and interview structure prior to conducting interviews with participants in this study. After corrections were made to the written instrument review questions, two colleagues who acted as stand-ins for university presidents were interviewed as practice using the full set of questions. These interviews were conducted both over Zoom and in person. The interviews proved difficult because neither colleague was a former university president but also had difficulty answering questions in any great length.

Additionally, a third instrument review interview was conducted using a large language model (LLM) Artificial Intelligence (AI) tool, ChatGPT 4o. ChatGPT 4o was prompted to act as a retired university president who could answer questions about why they might hire a chief of staff. This approach worked surprisingly well because the LLM was able to provide thoughtful and in-depth answers – better so than the human instrument review interviewees. This helped me address the length of the interview in relation to the questions asked as well as the potential responses that university presidents

may provide. This was also a better approach to conducting practice interviews than doing so with colleagues as the LLM was better able to respond like a university president might as opposed to my colleagues.

Instrument review interviewees will be asked the proposed interview questions listed in **Table A4** (see Appendix A) to determine if they yield required information for this study. Review participants will also be given the research questions for the study to see if they align with the interview questions being asked. Personal reflection will be conducted following the interview to see how I performed during the process and whether I need to adjust my approach prior to data collection. Participant feedback and personal reflection will be used to adjust the interview questions and timing.

Document Collection

Qualitative document collection takes many forms (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Documents will be collected through publicly available websites. Documents will be anonymized, converted to PDF form, and annotated during the analysis process. Faculty senate minutes will be gathered from faculty senate websites of respective institutions during the subject's tenure where available. Particular attention will be paid to faculty senate minutes during the president's tenure if the senate mentions the president and chief of staff role as well as if the chief of staff acted as a stand in for the president at a faculty senate meeting. University news sites will also be mined for documents or news releases relating to the chief of staff role at that university. Documents will be anonymized for both institution name and any proper nouns that could potentially identify the subjects. The original names along with pseudonyms will be noted in my private codebook

accessible only to me. Collected documents will be noted in a spreadsheet accessible only to me as well.

Media Analysis

News articles, videos, releases, and websites will be examined from local news outlets including student newspapers through searches of their respective websites for relevant terms including the president's name, chief of staff, and will be limited to the subject's tenure as president. All media documentation of this type will be collected through publicly available websites or archived library editions. Media containing quotes from presidents or chiefs of staff that shed light onto the chief of staff role will be a focus of the media collection process. Presidential or chief of staff quotes in news media will help triangulate data gathered from semi-structured interviews and documents.

Data Security

Copies of interviews, documents, media, and personal reflections will be converted to PDFs, annotated, and stored electronically with transcripts and recordings on a password protected computer. These files will also be logged on a spreadsheet and organized by case study in a case study database. All documents, recordings, transcripts, anonymized copies, and consent forms will be stored locally on a password protected computer and backed up on a hard drive which will be kept in a secure location at my private residence. Additionally, all files will be categorized and logged on a spreadsheet as suggested by Yin (2016). That information will also be stored on the secure computer and hard drive. Table A5

Research questions and data sources (see Appendix A) addresses how documents and media will be used to help answer the research questions that guide this study.

Data Analysis

Yin (2016) suggested maintaining an organized database for case study materials comparing it to “straightening your desk and organizing your files before starting on an assignment” (p. 190). To this end, I will maintain a spreadsheet noting what types of information were collected from each case study: individual interviews, news articles, and documents. Those data will be organized by case study and categorized by document and file type and then logged on the spreadsheet. Yin (2016) also referred to this type of organization as “parallel” (p. 190) to that of quantitative databases based on numbers but instead with text “ordered in some systematic manner” (p. 191) in a qualitative study. This will provide needed organization of a large set of qualitative data in this study and help me stay organized during the research process.

Semi-structured Interview Analysis

After transcripts are anonymized, each will be deductively coded and analyzed for themes using French and Raven (1959) and Raven's (1965) informational power as a framework along with literature that describes the chief of staff role. Particular attention will be paid to instances where hiring decisions were affected by a need for informational power or through an exercise of informational power. Themes will also be analyzed for commonalities with what the literature says about the chief of staff role.

A second round of inductive coding will be conducted and then compared with the deductive codes for emergent themes as suggested by Saldaña (2012). The inductive

round of coding will again review the interview transcripts and relevant documents and code them looking for new and emergent themes. Both sets of deductive and inductive codes will be compared for similar codes and will be grouped together and collapsed into shared themes for ease of analysis.

NVivo, a coding software package, will be used to code transcripts and documents for both the deductive and inductive code phases. The program allows researchers to apply codes to transcripts and documents and provides visualization tools to ease the analysis process. The software also allows the researcher to build and maintain a code book. The NVivo project files will be stored on a secured computer along with all other data associated with this research endeavor.

Document Analysis

Documents will be analyzed using keyword frequency with a key focus on any mentions of the chief of staff role. Additionally, faculty senate minutes, newsletters, news releases, or university website information will be reviewed for chief of staff participation or mentions. Particular attention will be paid to instances where the chief of staff may have been acting on behalf of the president or where the chief of staff was the author of the documents. Documents will be coded for relevant keywords associated with the chief of staff role and analyzed alongside interviews and media analysis.

Media Analysis

Local media including television, newspapers, and student newspapers, will be analyzed for university-related news relating to the chief of staff role. Media that quote the chief of staff, refer to their hiring, or where the chief of staff acted on behalf of the

president will be analyzed. Transcripts from television news media broadcasts either on live television or their associated news websites will be analyzed using inductive coding. Newspaper articles and website information will be analyzed in the same manner. Data will be triangulated with documents and interviews to see if there is alignment between the three. Media that support or negate interview statements about the chief of staff role will be noted.

Ethical Safeguards

Creswell and Báez (2021) suggested several methods for ensuring ethical safeguards are in place for the data collection and analysis phases of a study. Names of participants and sites will be anonymized using random, unrelated names selected by the researcher for the study to protect both the participants and their former institutions. Only the researcher will know the real names of participants. Results will be documented and discussed despite whether they shed the subject in positive or negative light as suggested by Creswell and Báez (2021). Additionally, as noted by Creswell and Báez (2021), data will be analyzed in an objective way to avoid “siding with participants [going native]” (p. 54). This is important in maintaining the objectivity of the study. Any potential violation of this approach will be noted in my personal journal. Informed consent documents will be shared with and signed by participants before interviews are conducted and recorded. Raw data and informed consent documents will be stored in a secure location and will be accessible only to me. Most importantly, all protocols provided by the University of Tennessee Institutional Review Board (IRB) will be followed for this study to ensure proper adherence to research requirements.

Methods of Verification

Design Tests

Yin (1994) addressed the four types of design tests for research: construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability. For construct validity, Yin (1994) suggested that researchers, "use multiple sources of evidence, establish chain of evidence, [and] have key informants review draft case study report" (p. 33). For this study, interviews, documents, news media, and a personal journal will serve as multiple sources of evidence and interviewees will be allowed to review the "draft case study report" (p. 33). This bolsters the trustworthiness of the study. Internal validity will be checked according to Yin's (1994) recommendations as well: "do pattern-matching, do explanation-building, [and] do time-series analysis" (p. 33). This will be conducted through coding and thematic analysis. External validity will be checked by using "replication logic in multiple-case studies" (Yin, 1994, p. 33) of which this study is one since it involves five case studies. Reliability will be checked using a "case study protocol" (p. 33) and a "case study database" (p. 33) as mentioned earlier. I will maintain a spreadsheet that details all relevant documents to each case study as a part of the case study database.

Triangulation will be used to build common themes between data types as suggested by Creswell and Báez (2021). This will help strengthen the dataset and analysis process. Additionally, Creswell and Báez (2021) noted that, "triangulation naturally occurs during the process of coding, in which the inquirer looks across different sources of information, such as documents, and finds evidence for themes" (p. 200). Interview

transcripts, documents, media, and a personal journal will be coded for themes and cross compared with other types of data for common themes.

Member checking will also be used to ensure the accuracy of transcripts and themes (Creswell & Báez, 2021). Transcripts of interviews will be shared with interviewees for review prior to data analysis to ensure the overall theme of what was said was accurate. Participants will be allowed to review transcripts and note corrections they feel did not accurately represent what they intended to say. Any corrections stemming from the interviewees will be noted and changed in the transcripts.

Personal Reflection Journal and Codebook

I will keep a journal during the data collection process where I will note personal observations about responses and participant behaviors or attitudes. The journal will also serve as a codebook that pairs real names with pseudonyms and will be accessible only by me. Journaling will take place during interviews in the form of notes and after interviews in the form of personal reflections about the interview process. Any obstacles or hindrances introduced through the research process such as difficulty obtaining documents or consent forms will be noted in the code book as well. The journal will be analyzed for possible relationships between observed behavior from sample and associated document and media data as a means of triangulation. If observed behavior, media, and document analysis give insight into decision making surrounding the chief of staff role by the president, it will be noted in the analysis.

Positionality

I am currently a full-time staff member in a business college at a large public R1 land-grant university in the southeastern United States pursuing a doctorate in higher education administration. I am passionate about higher education and have worked for the same institution for over a decade in various roles including some which interacted directly with the president of the state university system and their chief of staff. I have also directly interacted with the campus executive where I work and their chief of staff on several occasions.

Additionally, I have maintained a relationship with those officials, now retired or in other positions, so some of my experiences with them may bias my analysis of the chief of staff role. I plan on maintaining a journal where I document down my thoughts regarding the role to ensure I am not allowing my previous experience around the chief of staff to taint my data collection or analysis.

I have no interest in becoming a chief of staff after completing this study but am genuinely curious about power dynamics in the highest levels of higher education. As an observer of those power dynamics for over a decade and as someone directly impacted by them, I bring knowledge and experience associated with the chief of staff role. I applaud those who take on the role as it is tiresome, ambiguous, complex, and hard. While I personally embrace those things in my current role to a lesser degree, I do not aspire to take on the level of responsibility associated with the chief of staff role. Therefore, I resign myself to remain a curious observer of the role from an outside perspective.

Addressing Subjectivity

Based on personal experience working in higher education and by exposure to several different chancellors and presidents and their leadership styles, the necessity of the chief of staff role is clear to me based on those experiences. While the president or chancellor has many other cabinet members and assistants to help them, they still need one person who can filter all that information for them and keep them focused on what is important. Like the President of the United States or a high-ranking military official, the university president deals with increasingly complex decisions requiring vast amounts of information to process them properly. Attempting to wield all that informational power is too much for one person to hold thus requiring someone else to share it with them which is the chief of staff. As the chief of staff role has grown in higher education and as it is rooted in military and public service roles, I believe it has become more necessary (Jacobs, 2020). Anecdotally, I have seen other university presidents and chancellors without the role use other roles as de facto chiefs of staff and I have also seen presidents and chancellors who clearly needed a chief of staff but did not have one.

Subjectivity will be addressed by journaling about my personal experiences with higher education executive leadership and the chief of staff role. As I collect data and am reminded about personal experiences, I will journal about those as a means of keeping them from creeping into the research here. This documentation process will help ensure the data I collect is free from my personal opinions about those I have encountered during my time in higher education. This will be especially important as I structure my interview questions, conduct interviews, and analyze data because I need to remain objective. I will

be able to reference my personal experiences in my journal which I can reference whenever I suspect my personal experiences and biases are influencing the data collection and analysis processes. Additional plans for journaling the data collection and analysis processes will be discussed in Chapter 2 (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

I will also address potential subjectivity issues that may arise from my experience working in higher education by consulting with friends and colleagues who have previously held presidential or chief of staff positions in higher education. The point of this approach is to check my recollections of my experiences around presidents and chiefs of staff during my career. I do not want any assumptions I have developed about the roles to impact how I collect and analyze data from my interviews with presidents. Therefore, I will attempt to discuss those issues with my friends and colleagues when they arise. I will also document those discussions in my journal.

Worldview

I espouse a constructivist worldview which will guide this research. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), "social constructivists believe that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work" (p. 8) and that "the researcher seeks to establish the meaning of a phenomenon from the views of participants" (p. 17). It allows for a complexity of viewpoints to be revealed while the importance of those viewpoints is recognized and subjective to each person involved (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The constructivist worldview also stipulates that researchers make sense of other's meanings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I will accomplish this through interviews and

document reviews relating to presidents' hiring decisions around the chief of staff position.

Transformative and postpositivist worldviews were considered for this study but do not fit as well as the constructivist worldview. While a transformative worldview focuses on changing the lives of others, examining social issues of inequality and oppression, and marginalized populations, this study does not seek to achieve those ends (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Regarding inequality and oppression, it makes sense that power dynamics be discussed using the transformative worldview, but this study also does not focus on those dynamics.

A positivist, quantitative view would suggest that there is one answer to why a chancellor would hire a chief of staff, however, given my constructivist worldview and the personalities of the presidents interviewed for this study, positivism and quantitative approaches to this type of study are not appropriate. Creswell and Báez (2021) noted that, with the constructivist worldview, "practitioners gain understanding by interpreting participant perceptions" (p. 42) and "the role of research is to uncover these multiple views" (p. 44).

Conclusion

This qualitative study will be comprised of six case studies that include interviews and document analysis pertaining to former presidents of large public R1 universities and their hiring decisions surrounding the chief of staff role. A constructivist worldview will be applied, and the study will be framed by French and Raven's (1959) and Raven's (1965) informational power base. Data will be collected through 90-minute interviews

and, where necessary, 30-minute follow-up interviews as well as document analysis and news article collection. Transcripts and documents will be coded and analyzed for themes relating to the informational power base as well as literature surrounding the chief of staff role. Findings will be detailed in Chapter 4 of this study while discussion, implications, and recommendations will be discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This study sought to understand the hiring practices of university presidents, specifically the chief of staff position. Six former public university presidents who retired in the last ten years were interviewed for this study over the course of seven interview sessions. One former president's interview was split into two sessions. The results of their responses are discussed in this chapter. Two research questions guided this study:

- RQ1: How do university presidents describe the necessity of hiring or not hiring a chief of staff?
- RQ2: What factors influence the decision by presidents to hire or not to hire a chief of staff?

Several findings were included in this analysis and were divided into themes and sub-themes. Individual interview transcripts were analyzed for themes. Those themes were collapsed into the main and sub-themes discussed below. Those themes include the evolution of the chief of staff role, how assistants helped presidents address ambiguity and complexity, the numerous qualities desired in an assistant by presidents, how informational power was wielded, how assistants represented the president, how assistants related to other executives and faculty, how presidential spouses acted as confidants, and the reasons why some presidents may not have hired a chief of staff. This chapter begins with a discussion of the limitations of this study followed by a brief analysis of each president's professional background to provide context for their decision-making process around the chief of staff position.

Participant Professional Backgrounds

Five of the six former presidents came from academic backgrounds with faculty experience and with terminal degrees. The remaining president, also with a terminal degree, came from the private sector in the legal and banking industries. Each retired from their post as president with some remaining involved with their former institutions in varying part-time capacities including teaching, advising, alumni engagement, and development work.

Ale

Chancellor Ale came from a faculty background working his way up through faculty ranks before leading a university system campus: North State University. He was later appointed chancellor of that campus's university system and is the only system head included in this study. All others included in this study were campus presidents. Ale holds a terminal degree and served in a variety of academic roles before becoming chancellor. Ale indicated that he did not have a chief of staff and instead used a special assistant to the president. Ale took a different approach and instead preferred the title *special assistant to the president* instead of *chief of staff* for a variety of reasons.

Anderson

President Anderson came from an academic background serving multiple higher education institutions during his career and holds a PhD. Anderson served two separate institutions of higher education as president: East University and West University. Anderson also discussed his time serving as president with East University and West University during his interview since he discussed two different chiefs of staff, Carol and

Ginny, both of which are discussed here. He employed a chief of staff at both East University and West University, Ginny and Carol, respectively. His chief of staff at the West University was already serving as chief of staff during a previous administration and provided Anderson with institutional knowledge so he could better acclimate to the role. Another chief of staff that was discussed served under Anderson at East University and began her tenure in a lower-level role which later evolved into the chief of staff role under Anderson's direction. This was the result of growing trust by Anderson and the capabilities of his chief of staff. Anderson indicated that he slowly evolved the role into the chief of staff position because he wanted to build trust with other cabinet members and members of the university community first. He noted that, if he had immediately created the chief of staff role, his cabinet would not have trusted the person.

Angelos

President Angelos retired as president from a Southeast State University where the flagship campus and system are under the leadership of the same president. He did not have a chief of staff for the first 7 years as president because of financial constraints that arose from the 2008 financial crisis both for actual financial reasons and to avoid the negative perception of too many direct reports in his office at the time. He holds a PhD and rose through faculty ranks before becoming president.

President Angelos mentioned numerous qualities he desired in his chiefs of staff with the most important being organization, effectiveness, and friendship. Beyond that, and like other presidents, efficiency was a top quality he desired in his chiefs of staff. He discussed two chiefs of staff during his interview: Bella and Amanda. He also needed to

trust his chiefs of staff and keep them personally close to him. President Angelos compared his role to that of former United States President Joe Biden and his family noting, “We think of the family as [Biden’s] inner circle, and I would like to think of someone like the chief of staff as close to family.” President Angelos also recognized that his model for the chief of staff may be different for others. President Angelos detailed this thought stating, “There is no single model for the chief of staff”. He recognized that other presidential colleagues have different needs and therefore deploy the chief of staff role according to those needs.

Grey

President Grey holds a PhD and rose from an academic background serving other institutions before beginning his role as chancellor at Aqua University. He did not have a chief of staff but indicated that he should have had one after reflecting on his experience leading the institution. One reason for not hiring a chief of staff was the 2008 financial crisis and the resulting budgetary impacts on the university. Grey indicated that he kept his central administration lean to spare resources for faculty and staff.

President Grey’s most pressing need was operating efficiently as chancellor and noted a chief of staff could have helped with that. Grey also leaned on several sources outside his immediate cabinet as confidants. Those confidants were located both inside and outside the university in various roles and included a general counsel, a friend and former journalist, and other university peers.

Smith

President Smith came from a legal and banking background in the public sector before becoming president at Flatland State University. He did not see the need for a chief of staff and therefore did not have one. He relied on his executive vice president to run the university in his stead while he spent time in development and fundraising work. Smith also relied on a core group of vice presidents to help him manage the university including an executive vice president, Steve. Smith holds a law degree and did not rise through the ranks as a faculty member before becoming president like others in this study. Smith also served on the board of trustees prior to his role as president.

The top characteristics President Smith desired in his executive vice president, Steve, were efficiency, good judgment, the ability to motivate people, the ability to set broad strategies, character, and someone who knows how the president thinks. He noted of efficiency that he would take time to make decisions, but often that is not how important presidential decisions play out as decisions often must be made quickly. Smith also noted that thinking like the president is essential to a successful subordinate like an executive vice president. Smith also indicated his executive vice president, Steve, took care of many facets of his job and completed those with thoroughness which he said was, “a real asset and relief for me.”

Weir

President Weir holds a PhD, beginning his career through an academic background, serving one statewide institution throughout his professional tenure. He appointed a chief of staff and insisted on having one for several reasons while serving as

chancellor at Coastal University. He inherited his chief of staff from a previous chancellor who died suddenly. He insisted that every university CEO should have a chief of staff because of the demands of the job. While Weir indicated he did not rise through the ranks to the role as president, he did serve as academic senate chair for his campus and system. Otherwise, Weir never served as a department head, dean, provost, or vice president prior to his role as chancellor.

President Weir mentioned several attributes he desired in a chief of staff including efficiency, keeping their finger on the pulse of the university, organization, trust, confidant, the ability to work closely with a chancellor, and someone comfortable giving and receiving honest feedback. He also used his chief of staff as his “messenger of doom” to deliver bad news when needed despite later shying away from that terminology later in the interview process for this study. Having a chief of staff act as a “messenger of doom” also allowed him to save face and stay protected from potentially controversial issues. He also protected his chief of staff from faculty until the chief of staff learned more about them. All participants will be referred to as *president* for the remainder of this study since the titles can be used interchangeably. Profiles are illustrated in Table A6

President background (see Appendix A).

Evolution of the Role

Presidents Anderson and Weir noted that their chiefs of staff initially started in other lower roles before taking on the chief of staff position. Anderson’s chief of staff occupied another role when he became president while Weir took time to build trust with his. Weir noted of his chief of staff:

But as time went on, Kian took on more and more responsibilities when it was clear that he had developed a really good perspective of the university, and I felt like I could really trust him.

Weir also noted his chief of staff, Kian, did not understand faculty very well in the beginning, so Weir shielded Kian from duties involving faculty as a result. Additionally, Weir wanted a “vanilla-flavored chief of staff” in the beginning because he admitted that he did not know the extent of duties normally conducted by a chief of staff. Ultimately, Weir’s chief of staff role evolved to include the titles of *Assistant Chancellor and Chief of Staff* and later *Associate Chancellor and Chief of Staff*.

Anderson indicated of the evolution of the role, “There were four of us. That was the executive leadership team. About five years into my ten-year term, I added Ginny to that.” He also noted of his chief of staff that:

With Ginny, we defined her position because she started at a much lower level and then kind of grew and evolved into the position. ... If I had made her chief of staff the first week I was there, the leadership team probably wouldn't have accepted it. ... The fifth year she worked there, she was doing a lot of things that she couldn't have done the first year.

President Ale also noted his special assistant, Barbara, was assigned more and different responsibilities as her tenure continued. This is partially due to the evolving nature of the role, but also a result of the acclimatization of both the president and special assistant to the president over time. Additionally, President Ale often conflated the terms *special assistant to the president* and *chief of staff* during his interview with the

researcher while acknowledging that both roles served a very similar function except for their position title. While others outside of this sample may place special assistants to the president lower on the organization chart, Ale used his much the same as other presidents in this study who had chief of staff instead.

As the chief of staff role evolved for each president who had one, the need to address ambiguity and complexity grew, too. Presidents largely evolved the roles of their chiefs of staff to build trust and to acclimatize both themselves as presidents as well as their chiefs of staff to the new leadership scheme under their presidency. The need to address ambiguity and complexity is addressed in the next section.

Ambiguity and Complexity in the University

Every participant acknowledged that the complexity of universities has increased over the years, and they all required efficiency from their staff to do their job effectively. They also acknowledged that the ambiguity associated with presidential decisions was prevalent throughout their tenure. President Angelos summarized by stating:

My job was complicated both in strategy and ambiguity but also challenging in getting through the day. And my chiefs of staff were operating a little bit closer to the latter where it truly was about helping me use my time more efficiently and effectively.

Regarding ambiguity, Angelos noted that chiefs of staff operate in a “bimodal” space between ambiguity and execution:

I believe the chief of staff lives in the space between very high level helping with ambiguity and really executing. Helping the president make decisions all the way down to scheduling. Sitting in on meetings and getting me to Rotary on time.

Angelos continued by noting the complexity of his job:

They're not generally there to advise the president on ambiguous or complex matters – they certainly are welcome to, and if they have something, yes, but, they're there to keep this big lumbering, inefficient, complex, you know, I mean, universities are only a little less complicated than the Vatican.

Angelos used his chief operating officer to address ambiguous issues relating to the board of trustees and governor. He used his vice president of development to help with ambiguous issues with donors. He used his provost for ambiguous issues with faculty. He used his vice president for student affairs to help with ambiguous student-related issues. He did not use his chief of staff in those ways.

President Ale indicated that he came through the academic ranks to the presidency and that, at each level, the job got harder and more complex in terms of responsibility while the institution itself also became more complex. President Anderson echoed this by stating that the job “has become much, much harder” and has evolved from previous administrations.

As each president addressed ambiguity and complexity in their own way, it was clear that they needed help navigating a challenging and evolving university environment. Each president highlighted several qualities desired in a chief of staff,

executive vice president, or special assistant to the president. Those qualities are highlighted in the next section.

Additional Qualities Desired

Numerous additional qualities desired of a chief of staff, special assistant, or executive vice president were noted by all participants. These qualities help answer both research questions involved in this study detailing both the necessity of hiring a chief of staff along with factors influencing a decision to hire one. While responses were varied, the main quality that all participants desired of their chiefs of staff and assistants was efficiency. This is the direct result of the requirements of running a complex organization and a heightened need for efficient time management.

Other qualities desired by presidents included efficiency, trust, honesty, friendship, ability to navigate ambiguity, institutional knowledge, organization, quality character, and the ability to act as a trusted confidant. Qualities desired by each individual president are noted below. This section begins with a discussion around efficiency and how presidents discussed the theme. It continues with discussion about trust and other distinct qualities discussed by each president.

Efficiency

Efficiency was a main theme addressed by each president in this study. Presidents recognized the dire need for efficient operations in their universities due to their busy schedules, constant stream of demands, and galaxies of responsibility under their authority. Efficiency here also encompasses organization as addressed by President

Angelos. This section discusses how each president used their subordinates to more efficiently lead their universities.

President Ale noted that, because of the time constraints of the role of president, he did not have time to attend to every detail which is why his special assistant was essential. Ale was able to delegate duties to his executives stating the importance of, “Having the ability to go off on a mission and complete it without a lot of need for detail.” While this indicates trust, too, it also points to Ale’s need to quickly delegate duties and move on to more pressing decisions.

The ability to efficiently get tasks done was a quality that President Anderson indicated was important for his chiefs of staff. Given the complexity of the president’s role and lack of time to accomplish tasks or strategic initiatives, Anderson recognized the need to run his office efficiently with the help of his chief of staff both at West University and East University. Regarding interactions with his chiefs of staff, he noted:

We decide on a course of action, and I could tell her okay, this is what we need to do ... and I've got an appointment waiting in the outer office and, and when so, okay, that's off my desk, it's done and I know it's going to get done and I can go on to the next thing.

Anderson also implied trusting his chief of staff, Ginny, at East University to efficiently execute her duties:

I knew when she left my office that it was going to get done ... I didn't have to keep a list ... it made me much more efficient in terms of time ... But more so

with her: check with the provost, figure out how much he needs, check with the CFO, see if we can find the funds in the budget and move forward.

Efficiency was not just the ability for President Anderson's chiefs of staff to get things done in a timely manner, but it also saved him time to focus on other, more pressing, issues noting that, "A good chief of staff could allow me to get more than twice as much done ... you know, just huge, huge in terms of efficiency and time utilization." Anderson's chiefs of staff also helped him change gears and quickly shift between disparate duties at hand which is something he found to be one of the most challenging aspects of his presidency. Pivoting from one important meeting to another "is emotionally taxing" according to Anderson.

President Angelos indicated that perceptions of the university presidency can be misconstrued at times. He noted that people think a university president is perceived as:

...a philosopher on higher education. They have to be a banker-level financial expert. They have to give speeches on par with Lincoln and Mark Twain. They have to demonstrate sensitivity to social matters that students and faculty care about at the highest level. No, they don't. ... What you really have to do is tend to be with operational effectiveness to running the university ... don't assume the president is living with his head in the clouds only thinking about lofty issues. They need to get the job done. ... And that's why the Chief of Staff, Bella, is so important...

Effectiveness ties in with the theme of efficiency from President Angelos' point of view.

He understood the importance of running the university in an efficient manner and he

knew the chief of staff role was integral to his success. Angelos also embodied an understanding of university chiefs of staff versus a White House chief of staff by noting that:

I really aspire for the organizational efficiency, keeping me on track, helping me do my job better and getting me where I had to go as opposed to that high-level, trench coat-wearing, you know, chief of staff, cloak and dagger world.

This also points to a difference with a university chief of staff to that of other organizations that utilize the chief of staff role. Angelos also indicated that chiefs of staff can be used to shield the president from difficult situations and acknowledged doing so but more importantly the role was used for organizational efficiency.

Angelos' thoughts on organization also echo those of other presidents when they talk about efficiency. The primary skill that President Angelos sought in his chiefs of staff, and others in his administration, was organization. He remarked of this need, "Top notch organizational skills. I mean, that's number one. You know everything from the Rolodex, the timeliness, the not forgetting, the respect that they show how to offer the people I was engaging with." Organization was important to Angelos because, "The university is one of the most ornate bureaucracies ever designed. ... to have a chief of staff that could make everything work better ... the chief of staff was value added." He even went as far as comparing university bureaucracies to that of the Vatican in terms of complexity and structure.

Given that efficiency was President Grey's most pressing need, he noted that a weakness was managing time stating:

I have a hard time saying no. ... One of the things the chief of staff could do would be to take some of those things off your plate so you could have more of that time. ... Take ideas like that and act on them immediately.

President Grey also noted that, “The ability to write, to take on a big task and get them done in a rapid and efficient and effective manner” was important to him. This again echoes that of other presidents who stated they had very little room for error with their schedules. President Grey also emphasized the importance of accomplishing tasks quickly often with little information thus pointing to ambiguity:

Almost every situation you come into in higher education in a president’s office or a senior vice president’s office is an ambiguous situation. You need to make a decision relatively fast. You need to make the right decision and you’re doing so with not enough information. And you’re doing so in a very fluid environment.

Grey also reflected on a new hire he made when he first started as president. He hired a “manager of special projects” from another university to essentially operate as a precursor to a chief of staff role. Grey recalled that the manager of special projects he hired was not a good fit because they were too power hungry and wanted power over others. Grey noted, “It was just the wrong fit because he wanted to have power over the vice presidents. And that’s the wrong idea. You could be strong and present ideas, but you’re not in charge of them.”

Like other presidents in this study, President Smith realized the importance of running the university in an efficient manner. He acknowledged that he and his executive vice president and cabinet often had little time to dwell on issues stating:

You don't always have time. ... If you had the luxury of time of course I'd have them think about it and read about it and come up with their recommendation but it's not having the luxury of time is what makes these decisions hard.

Smith also noted that:

You're always running into things that you're not sure what the answer is, but you've got to pull the trigger. It's you know you just have to make a decision. That's one of the key qualities of a great leader is they make a decision. And I would make that decision.

To this end, President Smith recognized the importance of his executive vice president thinking along the same lines as him as a means for success. Smith noted:

It's just having someone who knows how the president thinks and what his goals and aspirations are, what his timetable would be and operates accordingly. And that's what I had not only with Steve Kent but with several of our folks.

While President Smith did not employ a chief of staff and instead utilized an executive vice president as a close partner, the skills Smith desired in the executive vice president role were very similar to those desired by other presidents who used chiefs of staff as well as those who did not.

Like other presidents in this study, President Weir emphasized the need for an efficient operation in his office. He utilized his chief of staff, Kian, in a variety of ways while increasing the complexity and intensity of his assigned duties over time as he began to trust him more. Regarding efficiency, President Weir stated, "Kian would review my

calendar periodically to make sure I was using my time effectively.” This was essential for Weir because:

All of your time fills up very quickly and sometimes it isn’t necessarily the most effective use of your time. Kian took the lead on making sure that I wasn’t going off in the wrong direction in terms of use of my time and the appointments that were being made for me.

Interestingly, Weir admitted that he may not remember what was discussed during meetings particularly in terms of follow-up items because he knew his chief of staff, Kian, was in the room taking notes. Additionally, Weir noted of Kian’s ability to stay on track with his duties:

He was Mr. Follow-up. He made sure that stuff got done that was supposed to get done all around the university ... I often had him sit in meetings with me if I met with somebody because I would sometimes make promises in those meetings and if I made a promise, I need to make sure that somebody followed up to make sure whatever I promised got done.

Ultimately, President Weir recognized the importance of having a chief of staff because he knew his own strengths and weaknesses. He acknowledged that, “Given my own personality and my own strengths and weaknesses, I think I could not have been a particularly good president without a chief of staff. I needed somebody to make sure stuff got done.”

Trust

Trust was the most discussed and most desired factor that President Ale sought in his special assistant during his tenure. Ale indicated that he set clear expectations from the beginning as he recalled telling her that truth was the most important aspect of the role:

You don't want somebody in that role that's going to walk in and tell you what you think you want to hear. You need somebody who can be just absolutely brutally blunt when they need to be and without any fear of any retribution. ... We'll be in big trouble because I'll be much more disappointed in you if you didn't tell me I was going to step in it.

President Ale also stated that he would often have his special assistant handle matters that did not require his personal attention or that of the office of the president. He also noted that he did not even need to know the details stating, “I didn’t need to know every detail about accommodating a request to the office that she could manage.” Ale emphasized the importance of trusting his special assistant because it could make or break his presidency. Ale noted:

If you can’t trust your special assistant or your chief of staff, you’re in big trouble. ... If you can’t trust them, you better get another one. And if you can’t trust their judgment, then you made a mistake hiring them.

President Ale regarded trust as a personal matter close to his heart when he stated, “The reality is I trust her with my life. ... So, then that made for a really good relationship.” Ale admitted his special assistant was “the secret to my success from the

standpoint of how we got out of the gate and how we swung the tide about trust in the office.” President Ale encouraged his special assistant, Barbara, to tell him when he was wrong. Ale also encouraged Barbara to warn him if she felt he was about to head in the wrong direction with a decision as president.

Trust also helped President Ale address ambiguity in his role as president. He recognized the presence of ambiguity in his decision making processes and that of his special assistant as well. He noted the importance of focusing on what was best for the institution while navigating issues for which he may not have a clear answer. He stated, “There may not be a good answer, but we’ll try to figure out what is in the best interest of the institution. Don’t ever forget that.”

Trust also played a key role in President Ale’s ability to maintain a trusted confidant in his special assistant, Barbara. When asked if he shared new ideas or approaches to problems with her before those ideas left the confines of his office, he stated:

Oh, hell yes. Yeah. I mean, oftentimes my special assistant was the person who you bounce an approach off of with a problem and where you were going to go, and you needed feedback from somebody that you could count on and make sure it was totally confidential.

Like President Ale, trust was an important quality to President Anderson and his chiefs of staff. President Anderson recalled the interview process before he was hired as president of West University. When interviewing with the existing chief of staff, Carol, at

West University prior to taking the job as university president, Anderson noted of the discussion with her:

I said, what's the most important thing you can do for me that in order to help me be successful? And she said, 'be honest with you'. And I said, 'bingo'. That's probably the thing that I need is somebody who can be completely honest and straightforward.

President Anderson also indicated that the relationship with his chiefs of staff was “chemistry and trust.” Anderson stated that he even needed reminding of the trustworthy relationship he had with his chief of staff, Ginny, at East University when she told him, “Anderson, I got this. I got this. Go on and do what you need to do. I got this.”

Trust from the campus was also a key factor that President Anderson needed in his chief of staff. He noted of his chief of staff, Carol, from West University that, “Having somebody that the campus knows they can trust and knows they can talk to and knows they can be open” is a key for a successful chief of staff role.

President Grey discussed several internal administrative and outside sources that he used as trusted confidants. President Grey sometimes relied on the opinions of those people to discuss ideas before implementing them. Those confidants included other vice presidents within the university, a former journalist and legislative expert, his spouse, and a peer from an institution where President Grey previously worked.

President Weir not only expected trust from his chief of staff but acted as a trustworthy individual in return as well. President Weir protected his chief of staff from a system president who was angry about a decision made in President Weir’s office by his

chief of staff, Kian, despite Kian doing his job as he was instructed. By protecting Kian, President Weir showed that Kian could trust him.

Tying to this, Weir noted the importance of honesty and trust between himself and Kian. Weir expected Kian to work closely with him and tell him things even if he did not want to hear them – similar to President Ale. The ability to confide in one another was important to President Weir. Beyond that, however, President Weir relied on others inside and outside the university to serve as his trusted confidants. Those included an academic senate chair, an executive vice chancellor, his chief of staff, Kian, and his spouse who was also a faculty member at a sister institution within his university system.

Weir was the most direct among participants insisting that presidents should have a chief of staff because it was a necessity in modern universities. He attributed this necessity to the complexity of modern universities. He noted of the danger of leading a university without a chief of staff that:

So, in a sense, the proof is in the pudding. There may be people who are so good at getting things done, at being really well organized. There might be people who don't need it. It's quite possible. But I just think of today's modern university that's really dangerous.

Weir recognized the importance of having a chief of staff because he witnessed how other university presidents failed in part, and in his opinion, due to the fact that they did not have a chief of staff.

President Angelos framed trust as an important hiring factor for a chief of staff along with respect and joy. He noted, "That the relationship be one of you know: trust,

respect, and joy.” President Angelos maintained, however, that organizational skills were the most important factor in his consideration of chiefs of staff.

President Smith did not specifically mention the word *trust* in his interview but spoke of it in broader terms when talking about his executive vice president Steve Kent. He noted of Kent:

He was just so thorough and much more thorough than I and that was a real asset and relief for me. Because I’m kind of a slap it and go with it kind of guy and he just took care of everything.

Smith also recalled having Kent handle difficult situations because he was too involved in other duties as president. Smith spoke of this quality in terms of having good judgment and implied that trust was important to him when he stated, “It wasn’t that I was completely devoid of any involvement in these things, but it, I left that kind of thing to him and he did them masterfully.” Being able to delegate tasks to his executive vice president knowing that he would handle them “masterfully” is indicative of the amount of trust that Smith put in the role.

Like efficiency, trust was a key factor not only in the desired qualities of a chief of staff or other assistant that presidents may hire, but implicit throughout presidents’ discussion of their relationship with those assistants. Running a university requires heavy trust in others to exert their expertise and get their jobs done in the most desirable manner.

Relationships

Friendship, relationships, close bonds, and joy were all mentioned as desired qualities by multiple presidents in this study. The closeness with which presidents indicated that they worked with their chiefs of staff or other assistants was salient through their description of their friendships going beyond normal office relationships.

Among key qualities desired in his special assistants including trust and relatability, President Ale indicated the importance of a close relationship with his special assistant. He openly acknowledged that his special assistant helped him be successful in the role of president noting she was a “key to my success” and someone he grew close with because of the role. Ale noted, “Trust is like, you can’t believe you love them like a daughter or a son. And you work hard and spend lots of time with them.” President Ale also noted about spending time with his assistant that “I spent so much more time with her... I was meeting with my special assistant every damn day except when I was gone on vacation.” Ale also indicated the close relationship helped with the loneliness of the job “at the top” being president.

Other presidents noted the importance of getting along well and trusting one another. President Smith noted of his executive vice president:

In 13 years and 3 months, we might have disagreed 4 or 5 times at most, certainly less than 10. And usually he ended up being right. And we never had a cross word. He was just a wonderful partner in our efforts.

While trust, efficiency, relatability, dealing with ambiguity, and friendship were all important qualities that President Ale desired in his special assistant, other presidents stated that they sought similar qualities in their chiefs of staff.

Friendship and joy were important factors for chiefs of staff during President Angelos' tenure. He needed his chief of staff to be trusted by campus and others in their orbit at the university. Beyond a need for efficiency using the chief of staff, Angelos indicated that a strong relationship with his chief of staff was important. He noted, "That the relationship be one of trust, respect, and joy, I would say joy. ... Telling jokes, humor, showing pictures of grandchildren or kids who hit a home run at the baseball game." Angelos indicated that friendship and joy were not required but helped. He noted that he did not share that level of connection with one of his chiefs of staff indicating a level of frustration with them noting, "I hated those meetings when they had to come into my office with their little pad and 44 things to cover. I did not enjoy that at all. I had to get out from under that." Additionally, Angelos reiterated the need for friendship and joy noting the one chief of staff who did not share those characteristics stating, "It was a miserable time having a chief of staff who I didn't really like being with." He added regarding hiring for the role that:

It's not a job that you hire that I think you would put an ad in the Chronicle and hire someone from around the country. ... but that would be about the worst hire ever made. If you hired someone who after a month you decided this person is really not that much fun. They may be good at something. That would be a disaster.

Angelos highlighted the importance of friendship with his chief of staff noting, “Friendship has to be there. You don’t have to be a friend to your general counsel or your VP of student affairs. Really don’t have to with your provost.” Angelos also indicated he is still friends with two of his former chiefs of staff but not other members of his former university leadership teams. He noted, “You’re seeing each other at your best and at your worst.” Reflecting on his perception of chief of staff utilization by other presidents as “bimodal”, Angelos recognized he did not think all presidents can be close with their chiefs of staff stating, “It’s not more important than their organizational skills, but it’s awfully important.”

Beyond friendship, relatability and courteousness were important factors for Presidents Ale and Angelos. President Ale also indicated his need to be able to relate to his special assistant and for her to be able to relate to others well. Given that both the president and special assistant interact with a variety of positions and personalities on a day-to-day basis, it requires a certain level of social skill to manage. President Ale stated the importance of, “Having really good people skills. Being able to deal with the various personalities of the people within the collective institution.”

Soft skills were important to President Angelos as well. He noted that he desired for his chiefs of staff to be courteous when interacting with others on his behalf or on behalf of the university. He relayed that his chiefs of staff, “... were, if I might use an old fashioned word, courteous, made people feel good to be with them ... fit into the culture of the university.” Not only did President Angelos desire a close relationship with his

chiefs of staff, but he also expected them to relate well to others in the university as a means of being effective in their jobs.

President Anderson relayed a story about a campus suicide that resulted in him driving from two hours away back to campus to help. He noted of his chief of staff during the time, “When you go through those types of things with someone, it builds a relationship that is actually quite strong.” Table A7 (see Appendix A) details the qualities desired in assistants by university presidents.

Myriad qualities are desired of assistants by university presidents. This section highlights those qualities and illustrates the diversity of needs which are all respective to the individual president’s job. Among those needs, a need for information is interwoven throughout. As chiefs of staff, executive vice presidents, and special assistants work in the highest level of the university structure, they wield informational power.

Informational Power

Informational power is used as the theoretical frame in this study. The term *informational power* is also known here as *informational influence*, which is defined by Raven (1965) as, “informational influence, arising from the content of a communication, becomes independent of the influencing agent, but depends on cognitive changes in the influence” (p. 381). The exchange of information from the influencing agent to the target is done so to implement change (Erchul & Raven, 1997).

The presidents in this study indicated they received information in a variety of ways including through their chiefs of staff or direct reports and through cabinet members. This came to the forefront during interviews for this study when participants

noted how information flowed through decision processes, communications, transitions, and consultation. Some presidents in this study indicated that their chiefs of staff “knew everything” and were recognized on campus for knowing as much. Other chiefs of staff and presidential assistants were used to handle communications or monitor the pulse of campus. Additionally, an important use of information was during their transition into the role of president, especially at campuses they did not know prior to arrival. Some presidents indicated they did share power with subordinates while others did not. Given the variety of ways information was used and received by presidents, it points to the necessity of the trustworthiness of their assistants and their assistants’ or others’ abilities to act as close confidants was necessary. This also points to the importance of informational power to the presidents’ offices and their assistants whether they are chiefs of staff, special assistants, or executive vice presidents.

“They knew everything”

President Angelos summed up his chiefs of staff by noting that, “They knew everything.” Regarding sharing power with his chief of staff, Angelos noted, “No, I didn’t [share power], except that where information is power. Or access to power.” He knew the necessity of keeping things moving and therefore, “nothing was kept secret from them.” This knowledge of his chiefs of staff extended beyond his office as well. He stated, “People including cabinet members knew that the chief of staff knew more about what was going on than they did and so that imbues a sense of power.” Angelos also noted that both his chief of staff and executive assistant, “had more access than anyone else in the university.”

President Anderson echoed this by stating, “She knew, there was little that she didn’t know about what was going on.” He also noted that his chief of staff was in close contact with his provost, especially when he was not on campus and attending to other presidential duties. His provost was the “number two” at his institution and kept clear lines of communication with his chief of staff and the provost “didn’t do much without talking to Ginny.” Anderson also indicated that his chiefs of staff did not act as a gatekeeper but “a full partner” and “somebody that has a pretty good sense of what’s going on.” This not only indicates the high value that President Anderson placed on his chiefs of staff but is indicative of the informational power that they wielded through their knowledge of what was happening on campus.

On a more personal level, President Smith acknowledged his executive vice president, “knew what I thought” and “we thought just alike.” President Weir continued this thought by noting, “I very much wanted both my chief of staff and my executive vice president to know everything I knew.” The flow of information with Weir, however, was not often two-way. He noted, “I generally wanted to know most of what they knew, but not necessarily everything. ... Although there are details of frankly, I was happy that they didn’t share with me.” President Ale echoed this thought stating, “I didn’t need to know every detail” about things his special assistant could manage on her own indicating he trusted her judgment.

Communications

Some presidents used their chiefs of staff and other assistants to draft communications on behalf of the president, from the president, or on their own. President

Angelos noted he was kept in the loop about communications when his chief of staff responded on his behalf. President Weir never checked his presidential email account because he did not have time, so his chief of staff monitored it. President Anderson indicated that their chiefs of staff were privy to information that would never reach the president. He referenced his time at two separate institutions where he employed two chiefs of staff. President Anderson said of both chiefs of staff that they would have conversations with people that “they would never have with me.” This indicates that people were comfortable telling the chiefs of staff one thing but telling the president “what I wanted to hear” according to Anderson. This helped his chiefs of staff understand situations better than he could and, as a result, he relied on them for this type of privileged information. Anderson continued this thought by noting, “I don’t need somebody that read to distill reports. I need to know somebody that has a sense for what’s going on.”

President Angelos noted that information came to him from a variety of sources. Typically, if it was a matter of great importance, he would find out from the respective party directly. Angelos used the hypothetical example of “\$10 million in rare books” being donated to the university library to illustrate his point. If it was a smaller matter, Angelos would find out through his chief of staff during their daily meeting.

Messenger of Doom

While President Weir corrected the use of the terminology “messenger of doom” later in his interview to say that his chief of staff, Kian, was sometimes used to deliver bad news, the essence of the role remains the same. Weir indicated he did use his chief of

staff as a “bad cop” to save face at times but would have done things differently after reflecting on his time as president especially regarding delivering bad news. He confessed, “I dumped a little bit more of that on him than perhaps I should have.” However, President Weir recognized the benefit of using his chief of staff in this way stating:

He was kind of the voice of me when I wanted, well, I wanted to, you know, to be made Mr. Nice Guy. ... I used Kian to be my messenger of doom. That overstates that. I’m joking, but to be the messenger of ‘you know you got to do something. This has got to get done.’

Additionally, President Angelos indicated he actively avoided using his chief of staff as a “bad cop” while recognizing his predecessors may have done so. President Smith alluded to this noting he liked to “pick people that do things well that I don’t like to do”. This, however, may not imply using his executive vice president as a “bad cop” or deliverer of bad news, but simply that he tasked subordinates with things they liked to do that he did not. As such, this should be considered a sub-theme for ways presidents used their chiefs of staff or other assistants.

Monitoring the campus pulse

Some presidents used their chiefs of staff and other assistants or direct reports to monitor the pulse of campus around certain issues or in general. President Weir indicated the usefulness of a chief of staff who had their finger on the pulse of campus noting it was one of the most important things they could do for him. He also indicated an appreciation for knowing when contentious issues might arise before they became

problematic through his chief of staff. In one instance, Weir described a dean “acting like a petty dictator” and treating staff poorly. He found this information out through his chief of staff, Kian. Similarly, President Ale received information from his special assistant about a well-known university employee who was going to abruptly resign. Ale also noted that his special assistant was “able to extract information from people that others have difficulty being able to do.”

President Weir indicated a need to constantly understand what was going on outside the confines of his office. He leveraged his chief of staff’s connections to campus as well as his chief of staff’s connections to other campuses in their university system. Weir acknowledged that, “One of the most important things would be someone who has their finger or their ears to the ground. To hear the rumblings of problems as they’re boiling up before they actually boil over.”

Other presidents relied on respective silos in their cabinet structure to receive information. President Smith relayed a story about a racially charged incident on campus that he found out about through his vice president of communications. He also relayed a story about a contractor not being paid that he received from an outside party instead of a cabinet member instead of his executive vice president. President Grey echoed the same noting he would receive information from the respective cabinet member responsible for the issue at hand. President Ale said he typically sought information from respective vice presidents and that he “can’t remember a time a major circumstance came up that it came through the special assistant ... rather than through the report.”

Navigating the transition

Five of the six participants noted that they needed a chief of staff or equivalent to help them navigate their transition into the presidential role as new employees at the university. Some presidents came from outside the university and were not familiar with the intricacies of their new employer while others had some experience yet did not know as much as they would have liked. Chiefs of staff and other assistants in the position of providing institutional knowledge wielded informational power over their presidents in these scenarios. President Anderson noted of his chiefs of staff:

Having a chief of staff that knew something about what was going on was hugely important in that transition because the place was a mess. And so, I inherited the chief of staff, which made that transition, because it was such a mess, made it much easier to understand.

Anderson continued by noting he took the job at one of the two institutions discussed in his interview because of the incumbent chief of staff's institutional knowledge. Anderson stated:

Then after I interviewed and I met the chief of staff that was there, I felt like she had a good sense of what was going on and had a pretty good feel for the things that you know might need to be done and how we might proceed with that. ... It was very helpful for me to come into an organization with somebody that knew and had a long history with the organization, who knew the players, who knew where the skeletons were buried.

President Anderson also noted of his time at both West University and East University that he relied on his chiefs of staff, Carol and Ginny, respectively, for institutional knowledge especially as he prepared to begin leading an institution that was new to him. Anderson appreciated the knowledge that Carol brought to the table since it helped him navigate crisis situations. He said of Carol, “Having somebody that you know has a good sense of how the organization works, how the campus works, what we need to do, you know, through a whole series of things.”

Similarly, President Smith, a former regent for the institution where he served as president noted:

When you become the actual president, and not just a regent, you find how little you do know about what's been going on. So, you just have to have an attitude of being a sponge and just soak up everything you can learn as quickly as you learn it.

He went on to note that he hired people who filled the gaps in his abilities. He also noted that his chiefs of staff's knowledge of their respective campuses helped him navigate crises on campus.

President Grey kept a provost from a previous administration on board so he could lean on her because she, “had tentacles out all over campus and had ways to find information and understood things.” He did not know the university having come from another university. He also noted that he leaned on the university general counsel for guidance.

President Weir was thrust into the role as president after his predecessor died suddenly. The predecessor's chief of staff had served for only two weeks under the previous president before joining Weir's administration in the same role. Weir kept him in place and eventually evolved the role into *Assistant Vice President and Chief of Staff* and later *Associate Vice President and Chief of Staff*. Weir also noted that he used his chief of staff to maintain connections with other chiefs of staff in their university system. He said this allowed him to monitor how other campuses may respond to policy decisions from system leadership or elsewhere. He said he found this information "exceptionally helpful" from his chief of staff.

President Ale noted that his special assistant had extensive knowledge of the university and had been employed there for many years prior to his arrival. He used her to better understand who to talk to about certain issues and how to get things done. He noted, "It's really important to have somebody who understands the culture of the institution." He also warned that bringing in an entirely new staff as a new president could be problematic because there would be no one with institutional knowledge to help him.

Advisory Roles

Advisory roles came in a variety of forms for each president in this study. Four of the six participants indicated that their chief of staff, special assistant, or executive vice president acted as an advisor in various ways. Presidents Ale, Anderson, Smith, and Weir all used their chiefs of staff, executive vice president, or special assistant as an advisor. President Angelos indicated that he would keep his chief of staff in the loop, but did not

ask them for their opinion on a decision he had to make. Grey did not have a chief of staff and instead leaned on several people including his general counsel, a friend of the university and former journalist, and other university leaders with whom he had a close relationship. Finally, each president involved in this study indicated they used their spouse as a confidant in various ways.

Spouse as Confidant

One of the more curious findings in this study was that all six participants said their spouse acted as a close confidant during their time as president. Initially, this was not a factor in the questioning process, but came to light through follow-up questions after one participant mentioned it and the researcher relayed the question regarding spouses as confidants to the other participants. Each participant noted varying degrees of information they would share as well as varying degrees of feedback they would allow and receive from their spouses.

President Ale stated that, “[My wife] was very supportive and she would listen. Rarely did she say, ‘You ought to do A, B, and C.’ She’d often say, ‘I don’t agree with it. You better think about it some more’.” Ale noted that he and his wife would often debrief over dinner as well.

President Anderson noted in an email correspondence for this study that:

My wife of 50+ years should certainly be included and probably listed among my most trusted advisors and confident [sic]! ... She listened, discussed and provided wise counsel for many of the issues I faced, particularly in my CEO roles!

President Angelos noted of his wife:

I would say a confidant. Mainly I say so because the situations were often more complex than would lend themselves to frank advice from an ‘outsider’ to the conversation. On the other hand, in situations where if I felt she could offer advice, I certainly asked her for it and received it willingly.

President Grey indicated of his wife:

I share everything I do at work with my wife. ... And what the decisions we make, sometimes she disagrees with them. ... She is the person that I listen to. I don’t agree with her all the time. I modify what she says. But yes, she is a key person that I communicated with on every major decision we made.

President Smith noted of his wife, who was very involved with campus during his time as president, that she was a confidant beyond areas of special interest to her which included campus beautification and health issues. He noted of her role as a confidant providing him insight into decision making that, “Absolutely! And, not just health and campus appearance.”

President Weir’s wife, a law professor at a sister institution to his, played a role as a sounding board noting that, “Without a doubt, my wife played a crucial role for me in the decision-making process. ... I discussed every major decision and initiative with her beforehand.” Table A8 (see Appendix A) details whether a president claimed their assistant or spouse acted as a confidant.

Acting as Stand-In

Beyond advisory roles, presidents indicated a variety of responses regarding whether their assistants acted as a stand-in for them during events or meetings. Four of

the six presidents in this study used their chief of staff or special assistant as a stand-in for meetings in various ways. Presidents Ale, Anderson, Angelos, and Weir all used their chiefs of staff or special assistants as stand-ins for meetings to varying degrees.

Presidents Grey and Smith did not indicate that they used their chiefs of staff as stand-ins.

President Ale indicated that his special assistant would go to meetings on his behalf, but only if he was unavailable due to an emergency or family issue. President Anderson's chief of staff would represent him in certain situations, but not all. Alumni events were acceptable, according to Anderson, as the alumni knew the chief of staff, but faculty meetings were off limits because the faculty would balk at having a staff member representing the president to them. President Angelos' chief of staff would sit in on meetings as a notetaker and reviewed with the president after to keep him on track. Additionally, Angelos indicated three levels of what the chief of staff did in meetings for him: note taker and follow-up person; attend meetings where president needed to hear something but was not the main person in the meeting; and act as the lead in the meeting when the president could not attend.

President Weir, as noted earlier, used his chief of staff to sometimes deliver bad news and help save face, although he later said he would have changed his approach now that he has reflected on his tenure as president. Conversely, President Ale noted that, "If you have a chief of staff because you are averse to managing conflict, and I'm talking about serious issues, big issues ... If you're not willing to manage it yourself, then you probably don't belong in the job." Ale's perspective affirms President Angelos' philosophy that chiefs of staff are used in myriad ways by different presidents. Presidents

Grey and Smith delegated duties to respective vice presidents as needed in lieu of an assistant attending the meeting on their behalf. Presidents' decisions to use their assistants to go to meetings on their behalf are detailed in Table A9 (see Appendix A).

Faculty Relationships

Participants mentioned a variety of ways they navigated relationships with faculty through their chiefs of staff or through their own personal efforts. Four of the six participants specifically mentioned being careful not to upset faculty by sending their chiefs of staff to meetings when the president should attend instead. Each of those four presidents came from academic backgrounds and knew what it was like to be a faculty member: Ale, Anderson, Angelos, and Weir. President Grey also hailed from faculty, but did not specifically mention sensitivity toward the group.

President Weir served as faculty senate chair for his university system and his local campus. He said, "I did understand faculty, and I did understand faculty perspective, and I think, particularly when Kian started, Kian did not." He went on to note his chief of staff, Kian, did not fully understand the difference between faculty and staff when he started the job. As such, he protected Kian from faculty by opting to deal with them directly when issues arose. It was not until later when Weir had confidence in Kian's knowledge of faculty that he allowed him to interface directly with them.

President Angelos recognized the sensitivity of going to faculty with a presidential staff member who never served as a faculty member. He noted, "Faculty would never be satisfied being shunted to the chief of staff, unless it was one time quickly and then they would want me."

President Anderson also acknowledged the sensitivity of sending his chiefs of staff to faculty stating that, “The alumni association knew her role, but the faculty, you know, the faculty would not appreciate having a staff person. That’s how they view anybody that doesn’t have [a terminal degree].” One of his chiefs of staff would later go on to earn an EdD in educational administration while serving in the role.

President Ale provided the perspective as a former faculty member who knew the challenges that faculty members can face. He stated, “At heart, I’m an academic. I know how they walk. I know how they talk. I was one of them. Understood pressures on them.” After referencing a contentious issue relating to faculty, he noted, “I went through all the ranks from an instructor to a full professor. ... It just gives you a perspective that’s different.” He warned that not coming from faculty can be challenging to presidents especially if they come from the business world. However, he also noted that presidents can still be successful without faculty experience but need a chief of staff that can fill in those gaps.

Reasons for not hiring a chief of staff

As noted, Presidents Ale, Grey, and Smith did not have a chief of staff. Ale indicated he used the title *special assistant to the president* instead. President Smith did not have a chief of staff and instead relied on an executive vice president as one of his close confidants and assistants. Smith utilized his provost, vice president of administration and affairs, and executive vice president, Steve Kent, as his core group of advisors. All functions of the university reported up through that core group according to him. President Grey did not have a chief of staff but acknowledged he should have hired

one because, upon reflection, he recognized he was stretched too thin as president with varied responsibilities and a busy schedule. Grey also admitted that he had, “a hard time saying no when somebody wants to see me or do something” further illustrating his packed schedule.

To Hire or Not to Hire

This study examines six recently retired university presidents from public R1 institutions in the United States. Three of those presidents were chosen because they hired and utilized a chief of staff during their tenure while the other three were chosen because they did not hire or utilize a chief of staff during their tenure. Interestingly, of the three who did not hire a chief of staff, two indicated they either should have hired one or had one albeit under a different title: *special assistant to the president*.

President Grey did not hire a chief of staff, but indicated that, because his job was so time consuming and because he had a hard time saying no to commitments, he should have hired a chief of staff to help him navigate the complexities of the job. President Grey also cited the 2008 financial crisis and following recession as a reason for not hiring a chief of staff due to budget shortfalls. He noted, “Everybody wants more people. We just did not add people at the administrative level at the university”. President Grey recalled his relationship with the university’s chief legal counsel, Herbie Lachlan, and how he would have denied Lachlan the opportunity to become chief of staff had he asked for the role because he wanted to maintain him as his legal counsel instead. This points to an interesting dynamic Grey’s presidential office. Jacobs (2020) notes those aspiring to be a chief of staff may need experience in the university’s office of general counsel.

Grey, however, did not see that advantage in the same light and instead wanted Lachlan to remain in the general counsel position instead of possibly becoming his chief of staff.

President Ale, on the other hand, used a special assistant to the president but admitted that the person essentially served the same function as a chief of staff. While indicating an avoidance of the title “chief of staff” because of previous presidential administrations, Ale also indicated that the chief of staff role was misunderstood on campus – a communication issue.

That said, President Smith was the sole president interviewed for this study who did not express a desire to utilize a chief of staff and did not hire one. Of the six presidents interviewed for this study, President Smith was the only one whose prior background before becoming president was not in an academic position but rather in the banking and legal industries. Smith did serve as a board member for the institution where he served as president but was not faculty or staff prior to his presidency. This could indicate either a different perspective on managing and leading a university or a lack of knowledge of how those with academic backgrounds could possibly lead a university as president.

President Smith also noted that he did not see the need to have a chief of staff. He even insisted that the title *chief of staff* is a “misnomer” arguing that the chief of staff was typically a person in charge of office staff – literally the *chief* of the staff. Instead of utilizing a chief of staff, Smith relied on an executive vice president, Steve Kent, as part of his closest core advisors. Kent was the highest ranking official outside of the president

and helped run the university while Smith was focused on other duties, particularly development work. He noted of Steve's duties compared to his own:

I'd have people say, 'Well, you run the university.' I said, 'No no, I don't run the university.' It's not like I could when I was in the banking business. I could run that. But I can't run the – the faculty don't report to me. And it's just way too large and complex.

This perspective highlights Smith's need for others to help him run the university, but instead of a chief of staff, he relied on his executive vice president and others for operational success as president.

Five of the six presidents either utilized a chief of staff, or similar role like a special assistant or executive vice president or felt they should have hired a chief of staff when they did not. It is critical, however, to account for the circumstances under which both Presidents Ale and Grey did not hire a chief of staff during their tenure. That is, either a campus environment around the title *chief of staff* or fiscal implications for not hiring one. This also illustrates more reasons to not hire a chief of staff beyond simple personal preference and professional background, as it was with President Smith, and includes the fiscal environment and campus climate.

Presidents Anderson, Angelos, and Weir all hired chiefs of staff because they recognized the essential support function the role provided to their presidencies. President Ale did not hire a chief of staff because of personal choice and communication issues around the role in the past. President Grey did not hire a chief of staff because he preferred to keep a lean cabinet structure while the ongoing 2008 financial crisis and

resulting economic downturn created an environment where spending too much on administrative roles would not have been preferred. President Smith did not hire a chief of staff because he did not see the necessity coming from a background in business and law, but he did note qualities desired in his executive vice president and other presidential deputies that closely align with the other participants in this study. As a result of these findings, the emphasis and larger extrapolation of these findings will focus on those who did hire a chief of staff.

A misnomer

President Smith did not have a chief of staff during his tenure. He indicated that the chief of staff role sometimes was devalued to a mere schedule keeper and task master. Smith indicated that:

It's usually a misnomer. The chief of staff is really the right-hand person to the president and just takes care of whatever official and even unofficial duties are necessary. In truth, the chief of staff, the entire staff report to the chief of staff which, to my knowledge, doesn't happen in most places. It's the term that is used often and I wanted the person that I had asked to take this position to be a senior vice president and also, as a matter of fact, general counsel.

Smith also noted that a predecessor viewed his chief of staff as a "valet" that drove the president around and helped with his schedule. While he did not personally characterize the position as a valet, he did note that his executive vice president "wasn't interested in anything like that" but was a key to his success as president.

2008 financial crisis

Presidents Angelos and Grey indicated one reason they did not hire a chief of staff was because of the 2008 financial crisis and recession. Neither wanted the appearance of having too many people reporting to the president during a time of budgetary shortfall from the perspective of their board, faculty, and staff. Angelos did not initially hire a chief of staff during his tenure noting that:

I didn't because of, you know, I thought it would, in a time of financial exigency, the recession, when I first took over the ongoing budget, rising tuition, a general negative about too many reports to the president on part of the board. A general feeling on the part of faculty, maybe in the academic sector, that I would be wasting money. That's really why I didn't. I wouldn't say that I didn't need one.

Grey indicated about not hiring a chief of staff that:

I try to keep central administration as lean as possible and try to get more of the resources of the university out to faculty and staff and the colleges. ... In retrospect, I would have probably added a chief of staff, because I probably ran my office ... with too few people.

Grey added that he only added two development positions during his initial time as president and added no other positions in the university administration because he wanted to address a budget shortfall.

The 2008 financial crisis and recession clearly impacted the ability of some presidents to hire a chief of staff or other assistants within their presidential cabinet structure. For Grey, it was a double impact in that he inherently desired to run a lean

operation but was also forced to do so because of the 2008 financial crisis. Both Presidents Angelos and Grey indicated that they may have hired a chief of staff during that time had it not been for the negative financial implications of hiring a potentially expensive staff line to their budgets.

Media Analysis

An analysis of available media from local news outlets, respective universities, and other news sources was conducted regarding each chief of staff, special assistant, or executive vice president associated with this study. While accounts were scarce for some of the assistants, found media corroborated duties shared by the presidents in their interviews. President Grey is not included in this analysis since he did not have a chief of staff or similar assistant during his tenure. For the purposes of confidentiality, all names of media outlets or universities were deleted, and direct quotes were omitted to protect the confidentiality of the respondents. Those findings are discussed in this section.

President Ale

President Ale's special assistant, Barbara, came from an academic background. A news article noted Barbara's duties included working with other administrators in the university, acting as a stand-in for the president at events or other official duties, and working with the president's staff to coordinate their duties. Ale indicated that Barbara's experience with the university and focus on its strategic priorities were important to the hiring process in one article. Other documents and media relating to Barbara indicated a wide variety of duties within the President Ale's office including standing in for Ale during a ceremony. President Ale indicated his desire to select Barbara because of her

institutional knowledge, leadership skills, and relationships with others in the institution. Additionally, a news release from the university about Barbara summarized her role with a focus on operations of the office of the president while Barbara indicated her role was never the same day-to-day.

President Anderson

President Anderson discussed two chiefs of staff during his interview: Carol and Ginny. Carol served under Anderson at West University and was chief of staff under a previous administration prior to his arrival. Ginny served under Anderson at East University initially as an assistant and was later promoted to chief of staff. Information relating to Carol's tenure as chief of staff at West University was difficult to find, however, more information was available about Ginny's tenure as chief of staff.

Ginny's role focused on serving with specialized task forces relating to various student issues on campus which was confirmed by multiple university news releases. When discussing this effort, Ginny spoke on behalf of Anderson in a media release from the university. Additionally, Ginny spoke on behalf of Anderson in a news article relating to a scandal that consumed the office of the president during their time together. Other forms of service include Ginny being listed as main point of contact for a news release from the university regarding efforts in President Anderson's office. A news release from another university profiling Ginny confirmed that she served four years under Anderson as a special projects manager before being promoted to chief of staff. These examples affirm Anderson's assertion that his chiefs of staff acted or spoke on his behalf in certain circumstances.

President Angelos

Information relating to President Angelos' chiefs of staff was difficult to find. Only two mentions were made of one of his chiefs of staff in a book chapter he wrote about presidential duties. Angelos noted his chief of staff helped him stay informed of what was happening on campus and helped him prepare for meetings. Additionally, Angelos noted in the book chapter that he leveraged his chief of staff to help with the transition period to a new president when he was preparing to retire. This corroborates other mentions of chiefs of staff helping with presidential transition periods.

President Smith

President Smith utilized an executive vice president, Steve, as a close advisor during their time at Flatland State University. Like Smith, Steve was an attorney prior to joining Smith's administration and served the university in various capacities before becoming executive vice president under Smith. Steve is referenced in multiple news releases from the university. It was noted in one university news release that he served as the primary point of contact for campus incident response procedures. Additionally, Steve was characterized as working closer with President Smith than anyone else in a news release recapping Smith's time as president. Steve was also closely involved with raising money for a campus memorial in Smith's honor while he was still president. While the researcher was not able to find articles illustrating how Steve operated on Smith's behalf, it was clear from university news releases that they worked closely together during their time in office thus affirming Smith's account of the executive vice president role.

President Weir

President Weir indicated in his interview for this study that he would be surprised if it was possible to find articles about his chief of staff Kian. This proved not to be the case. Several university news releases and other media articles illustrated Kian's involvement on campus as chief of staff. Kian was listed as the main point of contact for two campus initiatives including the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) office as well as the head of the equal employment opportunity office on campus. President Weir noted that he often used Kian as a "bad cop" to deliver bad news, however, news releases indicated Kian was also the bearer of good news for campus initiatives including the implementation of the DEI office.

Kian was also listed as the primary point of contact for a campus survey in one news release and is shown signing an agreement with a partner university on Weir's behalf in another news release. Weir and Kian also traveled together to an overseas university to tour their scientific facilities. Weir and Kian were also seen as a working pair, albeit in a negative light, in a news article about a contentious campus event. Interestingly, Kian stayed on as administrative staff under the administration that followed President Weir after his retirement, however, Kian was given a new title of "special assistant" to the university president and stripped of his chief of staff title.

While media accounts of assistants' roles in the form of university news releases, local media, and publicly disclosed private were scarce, those found did illustrate the closeness with which each president worked with their chiefs of staff, special assistants,

or executive vice presidents. These accounts also corroborated some of the duties assigned to their chiefs of staff that presidents noted in their interviews for this study.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the data and findings from seven interviews and email discussions with six recently retired public university presidents. Findings included presidents hiring chiefs of staff to address efficiency, ambiguity, and complexity. Other findings showed that presidents required trust and friendship from their chiefs of staff and assistants to be successful. One president effectively had a chief of staff but under a different name while another president who did not have a chief of staff admitted they should have hired one. Finally, all presidents indicated that, whether they used their chiefs of staff or other assistants as confidants or not, they used their spouses as confidants during their presidencies. Chapter 5 will provide discussion, implications, recommendations, and a conclusion to this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 5 provides discussion, implications, and recommendations for future study as well as a conclusion to this study. Discussion will include a summary of the findings in this multi-part six case study and a discussion of how the theoretical frame, *Informational Power*, connects with these findings. Limitations of the study are also discussed in this chapter.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations associated with this study: lack of gender diversity, lack of racial diversity, a limited set of participants, lack of perspective from chiefs of staff, and a lack of active presidents as participants. Attempts were made to foster gender balance between males and females in this study, however, it was difficult to find female participants who were willing to participate. This may be the result of fewer females occupying the role of the president. One female participant who was contacted declined to participate despite fitting the criteria and despite notifying them they did fit the criteria. As such, all participants in this study are white males. While this is unfortunate, it does fall within the constraints posed by Schneider, et al. (2019) when they noted that females only comprise 15.4% of top university leadership roles. By dividing this study's sample of six into even portions, they each represent 16.7% of the population. Had more participants been included in this study, they would have fit within the 15.4% posed by Schneider, et al. (2019).

Another demographic limitation is the lack of racial diversity. White males dominate the university presidential landscape in large public R1 institutions of higher education. All participants in this study were white males. While this was unintentional and diversity among university leadership is increasing (Lederman, 2022), it is the byproduct of a traditionally white university president population. A more racially diverse sample could lead to additional findings.

This study's methodology used case study design to analyze the hiring practices of university presidents regarding the chief of staff role. While this study was limited to six participants, a far greater number of participants may have yielded reasons why a university president may not hire a chief of staff. Additionally, while this study was qualitative in nature, a quantitative approach using a survey of all public university presidents questioning their hiring practices around the chief of staff role may have provided additional aggregate data not found in this study. A survey of current chiefs of staff may have yielded additional perspective on their role working for university presidents. Additionally, a nationwide survey of both active and retired presidents may yield different findings from those in this study.

Finally, and as indicated in the methodology section in Chapter 3 of this study, retired presidents were interviewed for their perspectives on why they did or did not hire a chief of staff. Active presidents would have been too difficult to engage which is why recently retired presidents were chosen instead. A study of active presidents may yield more current perspectives on hiring practices around the chief of staff role, but those participants may not be as forthcoming about their experiences and may lack the benefit

of reflection post-retirement. Additionally, the amount of time between when a retired president was hired, when they held the position, and the length of time between retirement and the interviews for this study may result in a decay of recollection by presidents and their time in office.

Discussion – Summary of Findings and Frame

The findings from this study indicate that university presidents require several key attributes and skills from their assistants: trust in the form of a close confidant, the ability to address ambiguity and complexity, the ability to improve efficiency, and the ability to provide crucial information to the president in varying forms. Additionally, presidents indicated various reasons to both hire and not hire a chief of staff. Reasons to hire included a need for information, a need for a confidant, and a need for efficiency. Reasons for not hiring included the 2008 financial crisis, a misunderstanding of what the role encompasses, and an avoidance of the “chief of staff” title due to the campus climate around the role. The next section dissects how both research questions were answered using this information.

RQ1: How do university presidents describe the necessity of hiring or not hiring a chief of staff?

The first research question in this study examined how presidents described the necessity of hiring a chief of staff. This question was answered in several ways by the presidents interviewed for this study including needs for trust, institutional knowledge, the ability to address ambiguity and complexity, efficiency, relationships, and information.

Trust and Relationships

Everage (2023) indicated building relationships and trust were foundational and important aspects of presidents' needs. Presidents are also in need of trusted confidants (Sanaghan & Lohndorf, 2018; Thacker & Freeman, 2021). Findings in this study agreed with Everage (2023), Sanaghan and Lohndorf (2018), and Thacker and Freeman (2021) around the importance of relationships and trust in the president's office. Presidents in this study discussed how trust was a top-tier quality desired in their chiefs of staff. While it is clear that trust is the foundation of any good relationship, in the high-stakes game of running a university, trust is paramount. While this study did not delve into the ways presidents trusted other cabinet members, clearly, care must be taken when hiring those who work closely to the president in terms of trust as there is little room for error if something goes wrong due to mistrust or a lie. Beyond that, hiring an untrustworthy assistant would be a mistake, according to one participant. Even those presidents interviewed in this study who did not hire a chief of staff required trust of those close to them. Trusted individuals are a requirement of the role of president and presidents must choose carefully from ones in their close orbit, whether a chief of staff, colleague, or friend outside the university. Even presidents who did not specifically mention trust as a top quality, it was heavily implied from the way they understood that duties would be completed effectively with little involvement on their part.

Jacobs (2025) noted the chief of staff helps presidents feel less lonely in their jobs indicating the importance of relationships in the presidents' orbits. Thacker and Freeman (2021) noted presidents need trusted confidants to effectively do their jobs. Sanaghan and Lohndorf (2018) stated the importance of confidants to "act as sanctuaries when the inevitable storms hit" (p. 26). Presidents in this study differed on who they said were close with them in terms of assistants and others in their orbits, but everyone commented that someone was close to them whether the chief of staff or not. This varied from the chief of staff to their spouses and others outside their cabinets. While Angelos indicated that presidents all deploy the chief of staff in different ways, presidents also find their trusted partners in different ways, too. Regardless, trusted partners are essential to combatting the loneliness of the job and essential to presidents' success.

Carver (2013) noted that presidents must be present or risk derailment whether that involves being physically present at meetings or ensuring that the presence of someone else in their stead does not send the wrong message. Each of these point to the need for a strong, trusted relationship between presidents and their assistants no matter if they are a chief of staff or not. Plus, this indicates a need for clear communication from presidents about the role of their chiefs of staff or other assistants, especially to their cabinets. Communication from presidents about what a chief of staff can or cannot do is crucial in most cases, however, this does not imply that all abilities or power be disclosed. Some presidents may prefer to keep the abilities of their chiefs of staff as a closely guarded secret as a strategic tool.

Liu et al. (2020) suggested that executive assistants are integral to presidents keeping objectives and duties on track. Presidents in this study all indicated that the job was not doable without someone to keep them in line. While this varied, it was clear that the job is not for one person alone and findings imply that anyone who does not put their trust in others to help them manage the university may fail. While the president is the top leader at the university, obviously they need support and cannot act alone.

Addressing Ambiguity and Complexity

Presidents face ambiguous decisions on a daily basis sometimes with little information and little time to resolve. The capacity to make decisions on such complex issues that presidents face is not tenable for one person and, thus, require help. Presidents need assistance especially as they continue to navigate increasingly complex issues as universities continue to evolve because, as they indicated, the job is harder than it used to be. Presidents may need someone to “captain the ship” while they are off campus dealing with other duties, such as development work. This confirms findings from Harris et al. (2022), Hemsall (2014), Hollander (2013), Kretovics (2019), and Martin (2021).

Whereas Nelson (2013) and Thomas (2015) argued that presidents are constantly and actively involved in the role and do not have time for much else, it is unclear from the presidents responding to this study whether that is a universal truth. President Ale indicated he would use his special assistant as a stand-in while he was on vacation which contradicts Nelson (2013) and Thomas (2015). However, at the same time, President Ale did not indicate whether he was monitoring email or checking in with his staff while on

vacation which would suggest confirmation of what Nelson (2013) and Thomas (2015) put forth about being constantly “on” as president.

Efficiency

Each president in this study emphasized a need for efficiency in their roles. Efficiency included keeping presidents on time for meetings and events, keeping presidents focused on the most important issues at hand, helping presidents make decisions quickly, acting as a follow-up person, or preventing them from wasting time on duties that others should be doing for them. Presidents’ needs for efficiency concurred with recent literature from Ciampa (2020), Everage (2023), Jacobs (2020, 2025), and Nelson (2013) that suggested efficiency is needed in the office of the president. Additionally, Trachtenberg (2009) noted that presidents are “completely unequipped to deal with all problems and all comers all the time” (p. viii, emphasis in original) which also corresponds with a need for efficiency in the office of the president.

Informational Power

Informational power was the theoretical framework used to guide this study (French & Raven, 1959; Raven, 1965). Presidents indicated they relied on information from their chiefs of staff and others to help them navigate their transition to the university as they began their tenure there, monitoring the campus pulse, providing institutional knowledge, being a “messenger of doom” and other general communications from the president’s office to others.

Regarding institutional knowledge, several presidents indicated they used their chiefs of staff or others to provide insight into the culture and history of their institutions

as they navigated their roles as new presidents. This comports with assertions from Harris et al. (2022), Jacobs (2025), and Taylor (2023) that presidents need shepherds to navigate their roles as new presidents. Given that universities are “idiosyncratic” (Harris et al., 2022, p. 80), there is no one single model for how they evolve or how they should be operated. This also echoes President Angelos’ assertion that chiefs of staff are used in a variety of ways by presidents. As new presidents arrive on the job, they must quickly figure out the history of their institution’s evolution and how the institution, like an organism, responds to stimuli in the form of their leadership decisions. Navigating both the evolution and stimuli response of universities requires the help and knowledge of assistants who know both. In this case, that is a chief of staff who has worked at the university long enough to know its idiosyncrasies. Given that presidents have little room for error in their jobs and little time to accomplish tasks, focusing on a single person who bears knowledge of the evolution of the university and successful stimuli instead of relying on a group of people is key. Additionally, President Angelos explicitly stated that he and his chief of staff shared informational power. Angelos further indicated that his chief of staff did not hide information from him during his time as president. While the perspective of Angelos’ chiefs of staff are not included here, this reinforces the need for trust and information in the president’s office.

Kessler (2010) spoke of presidents having access to “special sources of information” (p. 542). Here, this applies to the chief of staff role. Presidents in this study indicated that chiefs of staff “knew everything” and had their fingers on the pulse of the campus. Given the position of the chief of staff within the president’s office, it is clear

they have a view of campus that others do not share because of their close working and personal relationship with their presidents. They are privy to a plethora of information working in the president's office that few, if any, others may obtain. As such, chiefs of staff can act as a "special [source] of information" (Kessler, 2010, p. 542). President Ale, in particular, mentioned how his special assistant was adept at extracting information from other people. Clearly this benefitted Ale but is also an example of informational power at play.

While not all presidents detailed using their chiefs of staff or other assistants to deliver news on their behalf, whether good or bad, some did. President Weir used his chief of staff as a "messenger of doom" to deliver bad news and save face. While Weir later softened the use of "messenger of doom" to simply indicate delivery of bad news, it was clear from him and other presidents that their chiefs of staff and assistants acted as messengers on their behalf. Conversely, President Ale relayed a story about his special assistant delivering bad news to him in the form of a notice of resignation from a university employee. Weir also indicated he used the tactic of having his chief of staff deliver bad news to save face. Both examples comport with Jacobs' (2025) that chiefs of staff should be "skilled communicators" (p. 169) who can "deliver bad news" (p. 169) both to and from the president's office. This also comports with Martin's (2021) assertion that presidents have "excellent communication skills" (p. 104) to a variety of constituents.

Indirect Informational Power

Trusted relationships and confidants are also good examples of ways indirect informational power is at play within the president's office via their chiefs of staff as well. Those chiefs of staff are entrusted with information when they represent the president and when they feed the president information from outside parties. As Erchul and Raven (1997) noted indirect informational power typically comes from a subordinate indirectly telling their superior what to do. In this case, the chief of staff's trusted relationship and role as a confidant may indirectly influence the president through their informational power.

Some presidents indicated they do not look to their chiefs of staff for advice or guidance, implying they may not seek direct guidance, or direct informational power. This suggests the existence of indirect informational power at play though the president may not realize it. Conversely, other presidents indicated they wanted truth tellers and assistants who were candid in their responses to presidential decisions. This speaks to direct informational power. Presidents in this study did not give examples of ways their assistants used Socratic questioning, as Erchul and Raven (1997) wrote, as a form of indirect informational power.

Indirect informational power seems to lie beneath the surface of interactions and relationships between presidents and their chiefs of staff or other assistants. Close relationships and friendships may involve conversations and interactions that ultimately influence the president without giving them an explicit directive. Presidents may not know that they are being influenced by indirect informational power because of the

indirect nature and therefore would not express it in such terms when questioned about information exchange in this study. In this case, presidents are not aware of what they do not know. This begs for the added perspective of their chiefs of staff. This is further reinforced by the assertion that informational power does not require surveillance either on the part of the president or the chief of staff (Erchul & Raven, 1997; Raven, 1965).

RQ2: What factors influence the decision by presidents to hire or not to hire a chief of staff?

Several influences both for and against hiring a chief of staff were discussed by presidents in this study. Factors that influenced presidents' decision to hire a chief of staff were needs for information, lack of time, need for trusted confidants, and need for efficiency. Factors that influenced presidents' decision to not hire a chief of staff included the 2008 financial crisis, that the role was a misnomer, and that previous administrations used the role in an unfavorable way. Additionally, President Grey indicated he had trouble saying no to requests which could indicate a hesitance to ask for help. Sanaghan and Londorf (2018) noted this as a possible derailment factor for university presidents. While responses helped answer this research question, they raise further questions about whether presidents' leadership styles influence the decisions to hire a chief of staff or not. Whether the leadership style of a president impacts the decision to hire a chief of staff remains to be seen.

Presidents Anderson, Angelos, and Weir all hired chiefs of staff. Each saw the need for information, trusted confidants, and efficiency; however, those factors were also included in responses by presidents who did not hire chiefs of staff: Ale, Grey, and

Smith. What differentiates the groups who did hire a chief of staff and those who did not are a recognized need for help who work closely with the office of the president, specifically, in the form of a chief of staff. President Anderson indicated he did not know the campuses he was about to join as well as he should have and therefore needed someone to shepherd him through his new role. This applied to two different campuses and two different chiefs of staff who worked under Anderson. President Weir indicated a need to monitor other campuses in his university system and the way he achieved that was through his chief of staff because the chief of staff knew the other chiefs of staff on the sister campuses. Broadly, presidents indicated a need to know what was happening on their campuses and this came in the form of information from their chiefs of staff, special assistants, and executive vice presidents.

Every president in this study also indicated needs for trusted confidants, but those were not limited to chiefs of staff and included others outside the presidents' offices. Presidents also indicated a dire need for efficiency as they all had limited time to address myriad complex issues on a daily basis. Again, these findings are in alignment with Ciampa (2020), Everage (2023), Jacobs (2020, 2025), Nelson (2013), and Thacker and Freeman (2021).

The decisions to not hire a chief of staff revolved around the 2008 financial crisis, that the position was a "misnomer", and that previous administrations did not effectively communicate about the role. None of those reasons seem to align with the literature in Chapter 2 of this study regarding why presidents should or should not hire a chief of staff. Each reason for not hiring a chief of staff represents strategic decision making by

the respective president involved. However, clearly, the presidents who did not hire chiefs of staff indicated their inherent needs acting as president were the same as those who did have chiefs of staff, such as needs for information, trusted confidants, and efficiency. They simply structured their offices in different ways from those who did hire a chief of staff while still addressing their needs for information, trusted confidants, and efficiency. While this study began with the intent of examining both how presidents described the necessity of hiring a chief of staff and what influenced them to hire one or not, the underlying needs of their offices were the same.

President Smith initially indicated that the chief of staff title was a “misnomer” and someone who managed the office staff. While this may be true of some, it indicates Smith did not see the chief of staff role as a utility player. He instead utilized his executive vice president and others to handle the role of chief of staff in a more distributed way, depending on their areas of expertise. Presidents Smith, Grey, and Ale all indicated they relied on operational silos to address their needs, in lieu of having a chief of staff handle those issues. However, this did not exclude both Ale and Smith from relying on their special assistant and executive vice president, respectively, to also address issues that may fall within a certain operational silo. This is likely due to Smith’s background as a banker and lawyer prior to becoming president of his university. Smith left the duties of running the university to his executive vice president while he focused on other duties, especially development work.

The decision to not hire a chief of staff is not so much reflective of the needs of a president, or the lack thereof, to get the job done, but is more circumstantial and strategic

in nature based on presidential leadership needs and institutional history. Each president indicated efficiency, trust, and a need for information as paramount to their success. Circumstances applicable to a president's university guided the decision to not hire a chief of staff and included the 2008 financial crisis, historical use of the chief of staff title, and a lack of understanding of how the role is implemented by others on the part of the president. The latter, a lack of understanding of how the chief of staff role can be deployed, was informed by a president who came from a non-academic background where the chief of staff role, as it exists in the context of higher education, was not utilized in the same way.

Implications for Practitioners

Some of the themes from this study may already be well-known: presidents need people they can trust to run their organizations efficiently; presidents need people in whom they can confide and rely on for accurate information about how things are going and how they might play out. They also engage with all areas of the university in a variety of ways unlike other cabinet-level positions.

Presidents must choose chiefs of staff carefully as they not only need trust and efficiency, but a relational closeness that is not found in other cabinet-level positions. While that closeness may range from personal to professional, presidents must have someone at their right hand to act as a friend and lighthouse to help point the way. Whether that person ends up being a close friend after the fact, as some described, or whether a professional fondness is built between the chief of staff and president, some form of close trusting relationship is essential. I suggest the former is the best scenario –

presidents and chiefs of staff should be personally close. The reasoning is that presidents cannot embody everything that is required of the position without help and they need someone with whom they can express themselves emotionally as well. Presidents do not have time, and they do not have the mental capacity to do all things at once (Trachtenberg, 2009). While the chief of staff role may not act as a therapist or drinking buddy, presidents need both someone who can help them navigate the ambiguity of the role on a professional level and someone to help them manage the psychological load of the role. All presidents in this study confided in their spouses, but the chief of staff still provides the requisite professional help presidents need. It is clear that presidents find psychological help in various ways whether through a close relationship with their chief of staff or through confiding in their spouse about the job, however, they all indicated the operational necessity of assistants to help them run their universities.

The same needs apply to aspiring chiefs of staff. Those wishing to take on the role must consider their relatability to their boss president and expect to invest considerable time and effort in managing that relationship. The latter, investing time and effort, is assumed because trusted relationships are not instant and require time to build. Aspiring and current chiefs of staff must be prepared to help their presidents with the functional and psychological loads associated with the job. Furthermore, fostering a relationship that can weather small issues of mistrust or mistakes is important to the larger picture of chiefs of staff acting as a trusted confidant and partner to their president. That is, their relationship with the president should be strong enough that they can move on from speedbump mistakes. This study may also be useful to the National Association of

Presidential Assistants in Higher Education (NAPAHE) as the organization may see more chiefs of staff among its membership.

Presidents must also consider their weaknesses and choose chiefs of staff who complement them. If a president has difficulty saying “no” to requests for help, they need someone to keep them on track. If a president has difficulty managing their time effectively, they need someone to make space in their calendar to focus on the most important duties at hand. If the president does not know their institution, faculty, or campus culture very well, they need someone who can whisper in their ear the essential words that keep them in the best position to lead those areas. While most of the presidents in this study indicated that they may not have used their chiefs of staff for a “dummy check” (i.e. “Is this a bad idea?”) before deploying a certain tactic or exploring an avenue to solve a problem, it indicates a sense of pride on behalf of the president regarding their decision making. This should be further explored from the chief of staff point of view. That is, presidents were not keen to admit they checked with their chiefs of staff on ideas before they left the confines of their offices which may indicate prideful protection of their own perceived weaknesses or thought processes. Chiefs of staff should be aware of this and ready to guide their presidents where needed.

Presidents would also do well to clearly define what it is that their chiefs of staff do and their level of authority – or not. The reality is dependent on their needs, as indicated in this study where some former presidents asserted that chiefs of staff are used in different ways. Should a president decide to define a chief of staff’s role and power, they should consider how this may limit their operational effectiveness and impact the

perceptions and attitudes of others (e.g. cabinet members and faculty) toward the office of the president. Should a president decide to embrace an ambiguous definition of the chief of staff role, they would do well to carefully define when the chief of staff speaks on presidents' behalf and when they do not. Either way, communication regarding the chief of staff role and how it is deployed should be clear. Trust is paramount and can be the result of clear communication. No matter how chiefs of staff are deployed, they should be deployed in a way that fosters a trusting university community from the cabinet to the classroom.

University boards must also consider the vital importance of the chief of staff role to a president. Whether the role is named “chief of staff”, “special assistant to the president” or otherwise, boards should ensure that aspiring university presidents are aware of the need for the chief of staff role or other close assistant. Additionally, boards should carefully consider selecting a “shepherd” to guide new presidents in their onboarding and provide institutional knowledge to them as they begin their roles. Based on the responses from retired presidents in this study, the chief of staff is an ideal person to act as a presidential shepherd. Caution should be taken, however, in boards playing too large a role in selecting the shepherd as the chief of staff also needs to bond well with their president without the board getting in the way. Having someone with a wealth of institutional knowledge is one thing, but having someone with both institutional knowledge and the ability to bond well with their president is another and, in this case, may result in more success for presidents. As such, boards should also consider allocating proper resources to fund the chief of staff position if needed.

Implications for the Literature

The case studies presented here will provide opportunities for presidents and governing boards to compare hiring decisions and the importance of the chief of staff role in higher education. University presidents may glean better understanding of hiring presidential assistants using the results of this study. While this research is, by no means, an exhaustive look at general hiring practices of presidents in higher education, this study will contribute to the corpus of higher education literature through the examination of lessons learned by university presidents and their hiring decisions, especially surrounding the chief of staff role. The majority of studies focused on university presidents or chiefs of staff and their respective university presidents were qualitative in nature. This study contributes to the growing body of qualitative studies focused on the office of the president in a university setting. Additionally, this study will contribute to the literature on French and Raven's (1959) and Raven's (1965) bases of social power framework, especially regarding informational power.

Presidents who rose from academia comprised five of the six participants in this study. They all either said they had a chief of staff, had one by a different title, or should have hired one upon reflection. Implications for the literature are that the chief of staff role in higher education needs to be continually researched as it is still evolving and used in many ways by university presidents. Literature was also limited to a growing group of a few journal articles and dissertations on the topic while this study contributes a small part to that growing group. As the chief of staff role grows in popularity among university presidents, it may follow that the chief of staff role also grows in popularity

among deans, vice presidents, and other administrative positions in the university. The position will be seen in more places as it continues to grow in popularity thus requiring more research on the role.

Another question that arose from this study was how presidents perceive the use of a trusted confidant either in office or outside their offices (e.g. spouses, friends, former colleagues). While trust is important for any president's office, who they trust the most is another matter. Knowing what type of leader utilizes which type of trusted confidant may elucidate the type of leader behind the utilization. As an example query, does a more entrepreneurial president with no academic background find their trusted confidant differently from a president hailing from an academic background? What differences can be gleaned from these types of leaders? Additionally, is there a difference between a system president versus a campus president?

Chiefs of staff as they exist in university presidents' offices have been examined in several dissertations to this point - including this one. Whether a tipping point exists for research in "grey literature" shifting into peer reviewed literature on the subject of chiefs of staff in university presidents' offices remains to be seen. That is, there are a handful of dissertations and peer reviewed articles specifically dedicated to this type of study, but more peer reviewed articles may appear and are necessary. Given limited research on the subject, this study also broadens the research on the chief of staff role under university presidents in higher education. The study adds another facet to the growing body of research by highlighting the decision making processes of university presidents especially near the beginning of their tenures.

This study also expands the literature on the chief of staff role in higher education through the addition of the theoretical framework of informational power, the use of spouses as confidants, and the needs of new university presidents especially around institutional knowledge. It should be noted, however, that the qualitative nature of this study, and the case study design herein, provide insightful and detailed personal accounts of why presidents thought they should or should not hire a chief of staff.

Recommendations for Future Studies

While this study was limited to cases of six recently retired presidents at large public R1 universities in the United States, it could be expanded to include many more presidents in future iterations. Additionally, the study could be expanded to include institutions of different sizes, institutions at different Carnegie-classified levels, and private institutions. Each of these would help shed light on why university presidents from those respective institutions would hire a chief of staff and the additional contributing factors of size, budget, and transparency associated with institutions of different sizes and statuses. The majority of studies included in this work that focus on the office of the president or the chief of staff and their respective presidents at universities are qualitative in nature. Some quantitative studies addressed university presidents in myriad ways, but those were few. Further quantitative and mixed methods studies should be conducted given the abundance of qualitative studies. Given that qualitative studies about the office of the president, like this one, focus on detailed and personal stories from university presidents providing greater insight into the motivations

and needs of a very small sample, other quantitative or mixed methods studies may provide insight into the needs of a large sample of participants.

Data was not collected directly from chiefs of staff for this study while only presidents were interviewed, and relevant media sources were collected for triangulation purposes where available. Chiefs of staff should be interviewed to gain their perspective for why they think they were hired or needed by their presidents. These perspectives could corroborate presidents' decisions or shed new light on other factors not mentioned by presidents. Additionally, chiefs of staff seem to wield tremendous informational power which should be researched further and investigated from their point of view. Chiefs of staff can also elucidate why they think they were hired and whether it was necessary to help their president succeed as university executive.

Five of the six presidents interviewed for this study either had a chief of staff or similar or noted that they should have hired one. While this study was planned around three presidents who did have a chief of staff and three who did not, ultimately, two of the latter three noted they should have had one or used one under a different title. More perspectives for why a president did not hire a chief of staff are needed in future studies. Additionally, the five who did or should have hired a chief of staff rose from academia while the sixth participant who did not have a chief of staff and did not desire one came from the business world. While this was a small sample size, further study should be conducted to determine if there are any differences between the hiring practices for the chief of staff role by presidents with academic and non-academic backgrounds. Additionally, future studies should examine whether presidents from non-academic

backgrounds such as business, law, or finance have unique perspectives on their hiring decisions regarding the chief of staff role as compared to presidents with academic backgrounds.

Informational power was a key component to this study. Further studies should be conducted to examine the benefits of informational power as it is wielded by those in the office of the president. While this study begins that exploration, it is vital to better understand the informational needs of presidents and how those reporting to them can meet those needs.

Further study into the hiring practices of university presidents around the chief of staff role should also include inquiry into ways presidents' spouses were used as confidants or advisors. This was an unexpected factor that was revealed through the interview process with each president and warrants further exploration. It is also important to note that all participants were white males married to women. What factors traditional heterosexual marriages contribute to the needs of presidents remains to be seen. Additionally, while examining the "trusted confidant" aspect of the chief of staff role and other assistants, plus the factor of spouses being trusted confidants, it would be beneficial to examine trusted confidants of presidents in general. Whether only chiefs of staff and spouses are the main confidants used by all presidents remains to be seen.

Race and gender were also limitations of this study that require further inquiry given that all participants were white males. Studies focusing on more female presidents and non-white presidents of both sexes should be conducted in the future. Schneider, et al., (2019) found that females at universities in the United States comprised 15.4% of top

leadership roles. While this study examined six university presidents, the findings of Schneider, et al., (2019) comport with the lack of females examined here given that 16.67% represents one in six. Both racial and gender diversity may elucidate why a university president may or may not hire a chief of staff.

Additionally, direct and indirect informational power should be further studied in the context of university presidents and their chiefs of staff. While presidents in this study indicated they preferred truth tellers and assistants who told them things they may not want to hear, implying direct informational power, it was not clear what other circumstances may give way to the use of indirect informational power by their chiefs of staff.

It is unclear if leadership styles associated with each president impact how they allow chiefs of staff to embrace informational power and whether or not they, as presidents, should decide to hire a chief of staff. An examination of leadership styles as they align with common personality tests (e.g. Clifton Strengths or Myers-Briggs) may illustrate which types of leaders hire chiefs of staff and which do not. Furthermore, the psychological needs of presidents including the need for psychological safety should be explored further in future studies. While no president in this study explicitly indicated they used their chiefs of staff as a pseudo therapist, it was clear that presidents needed outlets for their thinking and burdens associated with the role. Examples of this exist through presidents' discussion of their chiefs of staff or special assistants becoming close friends as well as their utilization of their spouses as confidants to offload their thinking at the end of the day. Implications are that presidents used their chiefs of staff, special

assistants, spouses, colleagues, and other trusted confidants because of their psychological needs.

Conclusion

The job of a public R1 large university president is difficult, complicated, and filled with ambiguity. As a result, presidents have a primary requirement to run their universities efficiently as they have little time to dwell on decisions. They also have a great need to shield themselves from trifling matters to better focus on the most pressing needs of the office. Addressing the issues of time and focus are completed by hiring the right people in the president's office, especially some form of "right hand" like the chief of staff, special assistant, or executive vice president roles. As such, a right hand can act as a utility player that can play all positions but may not be the sole expert in one. These assistants must be trusted confidants and operate with a relational intimacy and closeness not seen in other relationships in the president's orbit. Often, a greater benefit is gleaned through the president's relationship with assistants if they possess a wealth of institutional knowledge into which the president can tap when needed to navigate their complex university environments. Institutional information is a byproduct of dedication to working at the institution; however, assistants must be wellsprings of information about the inner workings of the university on all fronts pertinent to their president's decision making. Presidents must rely on assistants who know the pulse of the university. Findings from this study align with current literature on the chief of staff role in higher education, too, however, more research is needed to evaluate the importance of the role and why all university presidents should consider hiring a chief of staff or similar.

Some presidents may choose to organize their executive-level structures with operational silos and engage directly with their respective cabinet members and lean less on a go-to person like a chief of staff. However, it is essential, especially for university presidents, that they have a chief of staff, or otherwise named position, to act as a trusted confidant, wellspring of information about the university, and efficient and organized operator of both short- and long-term duties that cross the president's plate. To successfully navigate the complex university environment, presidents must hire trusted assistants with authority, power, and the ability to become a close and trusted confidant. Chiefs of staff may not be utility players in the sense that they are able to play all the roles on the team (e.g. serve as vice president of finance with no expertise in that field); however, they are utility players for presidents in the sense that they can be deployed in numerous ways to fit the needs of their president. This study showed that, while not all presidents hire a chief of staff, their needs are the same in that they require copious amounts of information, trusted confidants, someone to help them run the university efficiently, and someone to help them effectively manage their limited time. Regardless of whether presidents use the title chief of staff, they need a utility player to support their complex and unending needs.

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20percent%20were%20white](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2022/02/14/colleges-have-hired-more-minority-presidents-amid-racial-reckoning#:~:text=Breaking%20the%20data%20down%20further,and%2056.3%20percent%20were%20white)

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APPENDIX

Appendix A

Study Details

Table A1

Chief of staff duties as denoted by recent job descriptions

Category	Duties include
Strategic planning	Development and oversight of policy, institutional goals, initiatives, special projects, and administrative programs
Management of presidential office	Management of staff and student workers as well as day-to-day operations
Information flow to and from president	Maintenance of the flow of information to and from the president as well as serving as initial point of contact for meetings, requests, and issues.
Presidential communication	Writing speeches for president, internal and external communications to and from president, presidential website management, and report generation.
Represents president	Speaking and acting on behalf of president when they cannot
Community & government relations and engagement	Maintenance of community relations and engagement with government officials on behalf of the president
Board liaison and cabinet member	Coordinates and runs all board activities including communication to and from president and acts as presidential cabinet member.

Senior advisor and direct report	Direct report and senior advisor to president.
Other duties as assigned	Facilities and fiscal affairs responsibilities, institutional research and effectiveness, accreditation, honorary degree nominations, presidential travel coordination, and event development and execution.

Table A2
Campus profiles

Campus	Student Enrollment	Campus Size	Carnegie Classification	Flagship or Satellite	Chief of Staff?
Coastal University	20,000	Large	R1	Satellite	Yes
East University	48,000	Large	R1	Flagship	Yes
Aqua University	36,000	Large	R1	Flagship	No
North State University	-	System	-	System	No
Southeast State University	37,000	Large	R1	Flagship	Yes
Flatland State University	29,000	Large	R1	Flagship	No
West University	41,000	Large	R1	Flagship	Yes

Table A3*Study participants' profiles*

Participant	University	Sex	Race	Role at University
Robert Anderson	University of the East	M	W	President
Robert Anderson	University of the West	M	W	Chancellor
John Weir	Coastal University	M	W	Chancellor
Ronny Grey	Aqua University	M	W	Chancellor
Arthur Ale	North State University	M	W	Chancellor
Gregory Smith	Flatland State University	M	W	President
George Angelos	Southeast State University	M	W	President

Note. Sex: M=Male, F=Female; W= White, B= Black or African American, H= Hispanic or Latin American ethnicity

Table A4*Interview questions based on literature themes*

Grouped Themes	Count	Question
Complex Issues, Ambiguity, Utility Player	8	Why did you need someone like a chief of staff to help you address complex issues, ambiguity, or act as a sort of utility player (to use a baseball term) to fill gaps where needed?
Need Help, Staffing, Stand-In	8	What ways did you need help in the role particularly around ambiguous issues? Where did you turn and how did you address ambiguity?
Information Flow	5	How did information flow through your office? What sort of staffing did you have in place to control information flow? Did the chief of staff help you distill that information?
Confidant	4	Were you ever in need of a close confidant like a chief of staff or someone to share ideas before they left the office? Why?
Power	3	How did you share power with a chief of staff to help get things done if you had one? How did you share power if you did not?

Table A5*Research questions and data sources*

Research Questions	Data Sources		
	Interview	Documents	Media
1. How do university presidents describe the necessity of hiring or not hiring a chief of staff?	Retired Presidents	University websites, news releases	Local television and newspaper websites and recordings
2. What factors influence the decision by presidents to hire or not to hire a chief of staff?	Retired Presidents	University websites, news releases, crisis plans	Local television and newspaper websites and recordings

Table A6*President background*

President	Background	Did they have a chief of staff?	Assistant Name	Assistant Gender
Ale	Academic	No – Special Assistant to the President	Barbara	Female
Anderson	Academic	Yes	Ginny; Carol	Females
Angelos	Academic	Yes	Amanda; Bella	Females
Grey	Academic	No, but would have	N/A	N/A
Smith	Law, Banking	No – Executive Vice President	Steve	Male
Weir	Academic	Yes	Kian	Male

Table A7
Skills presidents require of assistants

President	Assistant title	Skills or traits needed
Ale	Special	Academic experience, constant reliability, sense of humor, thick
	Assistant to the President	skinned, resilient, efficient, reliable, people skills, ability to navigate ambiguity, trust, honesty, friendship, confidant, ability to work well with others, institutional knowledge
Anderson	Chief of Staff	Efficiency, reliability, trust, time saver, honesty, institutional knowledge, friendship, family, full partner – not gatekeeper, help president pivot to new tasks
Angelos	Chief of Staff	Organization, friendship, closeness, timeliness, respect, courteousness, efficiency, effectiveness, keep president on track, shield president from difficult situations, ability to represent president and university, speaking skills, affability, cultural fit
Grey	Multiple people	Efficiency, time management, confidant, no ego, servant mentality, servant leader, not power hungry, writing skills, effectiveness, focus on doing the right thing, institutional knowledge
Smith	Executive Vice President	Efficiency, knowledge of presidential thinking and his goals, smarts, good judgment, deal with and motivate people, set broad strategies, quality character
Weir	Chief of Staff	Ears to the ground, organization, efficiency, ability to redirect president, trust, honesty, confidant, bad cop / face saver, Mr. Follow-

up, ability to work closely with president, comfort giving and
receiving feedback, comfortable sharing information

Table A8*Did assistant act as an advisor to president?*

President	Assistant Title	Advisory role?	Spouse as Advisor?
Ale	Special Assistant to the President	Yes	Yes
Anderson	Chief of Staff	Yes	Yes
Angelos	Chief of Staff	No	Yes
Grey	Multiple people	N/A	Yes
Smith	Executive Vice President	Yes	Yes
Weir	Chief of Staff	Yes	Yes

Table A9*Did presidential assistant go to meetings on president's behalf?*

President	Assistant Title	Did assistant go to meetings on their behalf?
Ale	Special Assistant to the President	Yes, but rarely
Anderson	Chief of Staff	Yes, but only in certain situations
Angelos	Chief of Staff	Yes, but only as a notetaker for follow-up later
Grey	Multiple people	N/A
Smith	Executive Vice President	N/A
Weir	Chief of Staff	Yes, and spoke on president's behalf

Appendix B

Consent Form

Consent for Research Participation

Research Study Title: The Utility Players: University Presidents' Decisions in Hiring Chiefs of Staff

Researcher(s): Adam Brimer, University of Tennessee, Knoxville (Co-PI)
Dr. Pamela Angelle, University of Tennessee, Knoxville (PI, faculty advisor)

We are asking you to be in this research study because you are a retired university president from a public R1 university in the United States. You must be age 18 or older to participate in the study. The information in this consent form is to help you decide if you want to be in this research study. Please take your time reading this form and contact the researcher(s) to ask questions if there is anything you do not understand.

Why is the research being done?

The purpose of the research study is to understand the hiring decisions of university presidents around the chief of staff role whether they hired one or not.

What will I do in this study?

If you agree to be in the study, you will be interviewed via Zoom.

- Interviews will take place over Zoom for 90 minutes with cameras off (audio only) and be recorded. Follow up interviews will take place as necessary up to 30 minutes in length.
- You will be asked to review the transcript from the interview for accuracy prior to data analysis. Transcripts are generated by Zoom and checked for accuracy by the Co-PI.

You can skip any questions that you do not want to answer.

How long will I be in the research study?

The total time of participation in the study includes a 90-minute Zoom interview (audio only). If any follow-up questions are necessary, I will conduct an additional 30-minute Zoom interview (audio only) with you. Transcripts from the interviews will be shared with you to review for accuracy prior to data analysis.

If you agree to be in the study, your participation will last up to 3 hours over the course of 3 months involving up to 2 interviews (90 minutes and 30 minutes, respectively) and allotting for 1 hour of transcript review time on your part.

Can I say "No"?

Being in this study is up to you. You can say no now or leave the study later.

Either way, your decision won't affect your relationship with the researchers or the University of Tennessee.

What happens if I say "Yes" but change my mind later?

Even if you decide to be in the study now, you can change your mind and stop at any time.

IRB NUMBER: UTK IRB-24-08231-XM
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 07/09/2024

If you decide to stop before the study is completed, please contact the Co-PI (Adam Brimer) at abrimer@utk.edu indicating that you have withdrawn from the study. Information collected from you will be destroyed and backup copies will be destroyed. Any code keys connecting you to raw research will be destroyed as well.

Are there any risks to me?

It is possible that someone could find out you were in this study or see your study information, but we believe this risk is small because of the procedures we use to protect your information. These procedures are described later in this form.

Possible risks include discomfort discussing sensitive decisions made during your time as president and the possible identification of you through the study. Risks will be minimized through the anonymization of transcripts and related documents collected in the course of the study.

Are there any benefits to me?

We do not expect you to benefit from being in this study. Your participation may help us to learn more about hiring decisions around the chief of staff role and why some presidents choose to hire one or not. We hope the knowledge gained from this study will benefit others in the future.

What will happen with the information collected for this study?

The Co-PI will protect the confidentiality of your information by using pseudonyms for your name, the names of anyone mentioned by you, and the name of your institution. The Co-PI will keep a personal codebook linking the real names and pseudonyms together. This information will not be published or shared. Data will be stored in a secure cloud storage solution provided by the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and protected by two-factor authentication.

If information from this study is published or presented at scientific meetings, your name and other personal information will not be used.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information or what information came from you. Although it is unlikely, there are times when others may need to see the information we collect about you. These include:

- People at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville who oversee research to make sure it is conducted properly
- Government agencies (such as the Office for Human Research Protections in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), and others responsible for watching over the safety, effectiveness, and conduct of the research
- If a law or court requires us to share the information, we would have to follow that law or final court ruling

What will happen to my information after this study is over?

We will keep your information to use for future research. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be kept secure and stored separately from your research data collected as part of the study.

We will not share your research data with other researchers.

Will I be paid for being in this research study?

You will not be paid for being in this study.

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What else do I need to know?

Up to eight people will take part in this study. Given the multi-site case study design of this study, focusing on presidents who hired a chief of staff and presidents who did not is crucial to understanding their decision-making process around the chief of staff role. Because of the small number of participants in this study, it is possible that someone could identify you based on the information we collect from you. Again, this is a minimal risk.

We may need to stop your participation in the study without your consent if you no longer respond to communication or if the study is stopped for any reason.

If we learn about any new information that may change your mind about being in the study, we will tell you. If that happens, you may be asked to sign a new consent form.

Your research data may be used to create products or to deliver services, including some that may be sold or make money for others. If this happens, there are no plans to provide financial payment to you or your family.

Who can answer my questions about this research study?

If you have questions or concerns about this study, or have experienced a research related problem or injury, contact the researchers:

Adam Brimer – Co-PI (student researcher)

abrimer@utk.edu

1-865-974-8146

OR

Dr. Pamela Angelle – PI (faculty advisor)

pangelle@utk.edu

1-865-974-4139

For questions or concerns about your rights or to speak with someone other than the research team about the study, please contact:

Institutional Review Board
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Phone: 865-974-7697
Email: utkirb@utk.edu

Statement of Consent

I have read this form, been given the chance to ask questions and have my questions answered. If I have more questions, I have been told who to contact. I understand that I am agreeing to be in this study. I can keep a copy of this consent information for future reference. If I do not want to be in this study, I do not need to do anything else.



I agree to participate in the research study.



I do not agree to participate in the research study.

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VITA

Adam T. Brimer was born in Knoxville, Tennessee and grew up in nearby Morristown before returning to Knoxville to begin his academic pursuits at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville where he now has over a decade of experience working in higher education. He earned a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in 2007, a Master of Arts in Strategic Communication from the University of Tennessee at Martin in 2017, and a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in 2025.