

UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS AND PERFORMANCE: TESTING THE THEORY OF  
PUBLICNESS FIT

by

Charles D. Thomas



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DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of  
The University of Texas at Dallas  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS

August 2019

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A sincere thank you goes to the Public Affairs faculty who provided consistent support and guidance to me and other graduate students in my cohort. The members of my committee, in particular, have broadened my professional and personal horizons in many ways. Much appreciation goes to Dr. Maxwell, whose level-headed direction, levity, and encouragement made the dissertation process manageable and enjoyable. Many thanks to Dr. Harrington, who provided valuable professional development advice and beneficial insights into research methods, data management, and analysis. The instruction I received from Drs. Goodman and Battaglio helped create a foundation for public administration research and a lifelong interest in public management. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to learn from and work with such dedicated and talented professionals.

May 2019

# UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS AND PERFORMANCE: TESTING THE THEORY OF PUBLICNESS FIT

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The University of Texas at Dallas, 2019

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For more than half a century, scholars have examined the qualities that distinguish public organizations from their private sector counterparts with the goal of understanding how and whether these distinctions influence organizational structure, personnel management, work-related attitudes, and goal setting. At the same time, the management literature has been dominated by studies about the importance of leadership on organizational performance. These deep streams of research converge in the theory of publicness fit, a succession effects model which posits that organizational performance is driven in part by the match of an executive's previous management experience and the publicness of the organization that he or she is hired to lead. An analysis of 114 four-year, high-level research universities and their presidents finds that institution-level performance improves in the years immediately following a change in leadership. Although presidents with private sector experience are found to secure more research and private funding, limited support is found for the theory of publicness fit as a predictor of student-centered outcomes, resource acquisition, or prestige. By contrast, significant relationships are observed between

university performance and several institutional characteristics, including sector, institution age, endowment, and student demographic makeup.

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Whether referred to as executive succession, CEO transition, or simply leadership change, the departure of an organizational leader and the appointment of a new one has long been the subject of intense scrutiny across academic fields. For nearly a century, management researchers have examined the impact of leadership turnover on profitability, strategic change, and organizational performance (Giambatista, Rowe, and Riaz 2005; Denis and Denis 1995; Kesner and Seboria 1994; Beatty and Zajac 1987; Dalton and Kesner 1985). Executive succession research has not been constrained to the private sector, however. Public administration scholars, too, have explored the effects of leadership change and managerial quality on public institutional performance, including local governments (Boyne et al. 2011; Boyne et al. 2010) and K-12 school districts (Juenke 2005; Hill 2005; Meier and O'Toole 2002). Higher education scholars, meanwhile, have eyed the connection between presidential change and university performance (Rutherford 2017; Birnbaum 1989; Birnbaum 1971).

Why is executive succession such a compelling area of study? The reasons are many. Most plainly, leadership turnover is inevitable. Regardless of their institutions' size, age, mission, or sector, top-tier leaders will come and go. The chief executive also plays the most important role in setting the strategic direction of an organization and, as the most highly visible figure in an institution, directly influences its external perception or prestige (Quigley and Hambrick 2014; Beatty and Zajac 1987). The ripples of chief executive decisions radiate outward to touch a broad collection of internal and external stakeholders, be they clients, employees, or the public (O'Toole

and Meier 1999; Kesner and Sebor 1994). An executive transition therefore portends potentially dramatic shifts in operations, public or investor perception, and performance.

While leadership change can mean an injection of fresh ideas into an organization, frequent turnover at the highest level generally has been associated with depressed organizational performance (Coughlan and Schmidt 1985; Allen, Panian, and Lotz 1979; Eitzen and Yentman 1972). Within the public higher education context, this concern is particularly salient because of the frequent turnover at the top. University presidents typically serve about 8.5 years (Bernasconi 2013), slightly longer tenures than those observed among S&P 500 CEOs, who average 7.2 years in their position (Harvard LSF 2018). The frequency of university presidential turnover has increased since 2008, however, likely as a result of growing complexity of the job and the mounting external pressures on presidents (Harris and Ellis 2018). This problem might be exacerbated among public university presidents, who are 50 percent more likely than their private university counterparts to leave their position within five years (Monks 2007). Because university presidents play an important role in resource acquisition, strategic planning, and the prestige of an institution, leadership shakeups can pose a legitimate threat to the financial wellbeing and overall direction of a university. By the same token, a succession event can mean the hiring of a transformative leader who increases private donations, smooths government relations, improves student outcomes, and raises an institution's national and global reputation.

This dissertation examines the impact of new university presidents on institutional performance, specifically studying the connection between presidents' managerial background in public or private organizations and the subsequent performance of the universities they are hired to lead. Guiding the dissertation is a central research question: How does a new president's

publicness fit influence university performance after a succession event? This introductory chapter reviews the executive succession literature and several recent theoretical frameworks and lines of study in management, public administration, and higher education. Chapter 2 outlines the theory of organizational publicness and the theory of publicness fit, the latter which guides this study. The dissertation's empirical analysis follows in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, which explore the relationship between presidents' publicness fit and university performance in three distinct areas: student-centered outcomes, resource acquisition, and institutional prestige. Lastly, the dissertation's concluding remarks and recommendations are provided in Chapter 6.

### **CEO Succession**

The study of executive succession in the last half-century has centered on a small number of core concepts, primarily focusing on the antecedents and consequences of leadership change (Schepker et al. 2017; Giambatista, Rowe, and Riaz 2005; Kesner and Sebor 1994). In short, succession scholarship has attempted to address two overriding questions: What prompts leadership change, and how does that change impact future performance? While the precursors of executive succession represent a minority of the literature, research on the antecedents of succession broadly indicates that leadership change is linked to poor organizational performance, whereas strong or even mediocre performance is associated with a lower rate of executive turnover (Boyne et al. 2010; Datta and Guthrie 1994; Friedman and Singh 1989; Frederickson, Hambrick, and Baumrin 1988; Salanick and Pfeffer 1980).

Antecedents research often has converged with the study of successor origin, a term that—in its most simplified form—denotes whether a new chief executive is promoted from within the organization or hired from without. As recently as the 1980s, the common belief among scholars

and practitioners was that organizations appoint a chief executive from outside the firm when they seek change (Berns and Klarner 2017), whereas the selection of an internal successor represents a “maintenance strategy” (Dalton and Kesner 1985, 750). Insider executives are believed to possess firm-specific knowledge and skills, while outsiders bring novel ideas and a drive for strategic innovation (Connelly et al. 2016; Zhang and Rajagopalan 2010; Karaevli 2007; Zhang and Rajagopalan 2004). These assumptions presume positive effects of both internal and external appointments, yet the beneficial and detrimental effects of insider or outsider succession appear heavily reliant on a variety of factors unrelated to the individual successor, including pre-succession organizational performance, board makeup, and market conditions (Schepker et al. 2017; Karaevli 2007; Davidson, Worrell, and Dutia 1993; Lubatkin et al. 1989; Chung et al. 1987).

What constitutes insiderness and outsiderhood has changed markedly since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Scholars and practitioners previously treated the insider denomination as synonymous with an internal promotion, while qualifying outsiders merely as a newly appointed leader who was not already employed with the firm. This interpretation led some critics to conclude that academic inquiries overlooked potentially influential factors at the individual and organizational level that better evidence the nature of insiderness and outsiderhood and their effects on performance (Petrovsky, James, and Boyne 2015; Karaevli 2007; Kesner and Sebor 1994). Instead of simply labeling insiderness as experience with a particular firm, some scholars developed more elegant definitions of insider and outsider, along with more refined frameworks by which they could assess the interplay of individual and organizational traits. In their proposal of the upper echelon theory, for example, Hambrick and Mason (1984) argue that an executive’s experience with similar companies and with the industry or sector defines their insider status and therefore should prove

beneficial in shaping the CEO's strategic outlook and innovation. Chatman's (1989) seminal model of person-organization fit, meanwhile, approaches the issue of insiderness through the lens of shared values and norms between people and organizations.

Contemporary scholars also have expanded the scope of succession effects by including more robust characterizations of successor origin while acknowledging the influence of pre-succession performance and environmental conditions on post-succession organizational performance (Georgakakis and Ruigrok 2017; Karaevli and Zajac 2013; Karaevli 2007). In her examination of leadership change over 30 years among publicly traded corporations in the U.S. airline and chemical industries, Karaevli (2007) finds that CEO outsiderhood along with pre-succession conditions—including organizational performance and the environmental capacity for growth—significantly impact future success. Specifically, new CEOs who possess experience from outside the firm and the industry were more likely to turn around poorly performing firms, particularly when constraints were low and environmental conditions were ripe for innovation (Karaevli 2007). Zhang and Rajagopalan (2010), in their examination of the moderating effects of successor origin on firm performance, narrowed in on firms' level of strategic change after a succession event. They find that a high level of strategic change—as exemplified by changes in research and development, inventory, and overhead, among other factors—correlates with improved performance among both inside and outside CEOs in the short term. Among outsider CEOs, however, as their tenure lengthened, performance faltered amid high levels of strategic change. Zhang and Rajagopalan (2010) conclude that adaptive and disruptive effects are at play, suggesting benefits to both insiderhood and outsiderhood in the short term but more lasting positive outcomes with insider CEOs.



More recently, Finkelstein, Hambrick, and Cannella (2009) and Chen and Hambrick (2012) propose theoretical frameworks around the concept of successor fit. According to the fit/refit model, executive succession provides “an opportunity to appoint a person whose qualifications and expertise *fit* the contingencies that are currently at hand” (Chen and Hambrick 2012, 227, emphasis in original). Post-succession organizational performance should improve if the new CEO is better suited—as defined by his or her qualifications and experience—to the specific conditions and needs of the organization immediately following the leadership change. Chen and Hambrick (2012) contend that performance improvement is much more likely when there is a misfit between the previous CEO and the organization’s contingencies, followed by a strong fit between the newly appointed CEO and these contingencies. Outsiders who might not possess extensive industry experience but who nevertheless match the social and resource constraints of the organization would be expected to make major strategic changes that yield such a performance improvement.

A similar sentiment regarding leadership fit has appeared in several recent succession- and leadership-oriented studies within the public administration context. These works have drilled further into sector-specific features that might help to predict turnover likelihood (Boyne et al. 2011), that predict management stability and tenure (Petrovsky et al. 2017; O’Toole and Meier 2003), and that explain the effects of managerial expertise and successor origin on performance (Rutherford 2017; Villadsen 2012; Hill 2005; Boyne and Dahya 2002). Similar to the fit/misfit model, more novel theories of public insiderness have posited a relationship between organizational performance and the chief executive’s motives and opportunities, as well as the external constraints and political influence on the organization (Petrovsky, James, and Boyne 2015; Boyne and Dahya 2002). Public administration researchers have found support for the notion

that managerial experience within public organizations or the specific institution an individual is hired to lead is of benefit to the organization. These benefits come in various forms, such as less frequent turnover and improved organizational performance. Civil service insiders, for example, have been found to stay in their positions longer than outsiders and are far less likely to leave for a private sector opportunity (Petrovsky et al. 2017). Internally promoted school superintendents are found to maintain district performance immediately following the succession event, whereas the appointment of a superintendent from outside the district is associated with a short-term shock to student scores on state-mandated tests (Hill 2005). At the same time, there is recent evidence that public institution outsiders are more likely to make operational modifications. Villadsen (2012) finds that new municipal directors hired from outside of the local government sector are significantly more likely to implement radical structural changes in Danish municipalities, as are executives hired away from other cities. Internal promotions, by contrast, are associated with more traditionally used city government models. Collectively, these findings suggest a complex, layered view of insider-outsider status in which executive background and organizational conditions work to shape leadership decisions and affect institutional outcomes.

### **The University President**

Higher education lends itself well to the study of successor background and its relationship to organizational performance. Leadership change is frequent in the higher education setting, universities are subject to unique norms and regulations, and higher education is an industry that is not sector specific. Publicly and privately owned colleges and universities conduct themselves similarly in many ways. Furthermore, university performance measures are unique and numerous,

and the revenues, outputs, and outcomes are specific to higher education. Incoming leaders must adjust to these myriad conditions and constraints to effect change.

Higher education also provides a special setting to observe various forms of insiderness. Higher education administration historically has been a field dominated by insiders of academe, a trend that largely holds firm in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Singell and Tang 2013). Nevertheless, the hiring of nontraditional college and university presidents has become more commonplace in the last two decades. Beardsley (2017) defines nontraditional presidents as individuals who did not rise through the ranks of tenure-track faculty and therefore did not enter the presidency through traditional university administration pathways, such as provostships, deanships, or vice presidencies. The percentage of institutions with nontraditional presidents grew to 23 percent by 2013, nearly double that of 2001 (Beardsley 2017). Academic outsiders, such as business and government leaders, are increasingly taking the helm of large four-year institutions, both public and private. Their experience in private firms and public agencies could uniquely shape strategic decisions and performance in a variety of ways. Higher education also experiences a unique cross-sector pollination in terms of leadership. Private university presidents might depart their institution to assume the executive spot at a large, public university. The reverse is possible, as well. Internal promotions to the presidency are infrequent in higher education, too (Blumenstyk 2005; Birnbaum 1971), meaning most incoming presidents possess a certain outsider status, even if they are traditional academics. Insider-outsider effects also play a unique role in higher education thanks to the presence of specialty institutions such as small liberal arts colleges and religiously affiliated institutions, which demand leaders “who are likely to ‘fit’ into the organization” because they “have been socialized in similar organizations” (Birnbaum 1971, 140).

## **Conclusion**

The identification of statistically significant links between specific presidential characteristics and organizational performance has scholarly and practical implications, thereby promising valuable contributions to the public administration and higher education literature. To explore these connections, this dissertation applies the theory of publicness fit as proposed by Petrovsky, James, and Boyne (2015). The theory, still untested in any known works, predicts that organizational performance is related to the match in publicness of a leader's previous organization and that of the organization he or she is hired to lead. Public organization insiders who are hired to lead more public institutions would demonstrate greater fit and should impact organizational performance accordingly. By contrast, private organization insiders who are called upon to lead more private institutions should expect to positively impact institutional performance as they bring strategic change and innovation drawn from their experience in managing organizations that are less public in nature, funding, and regulation.

This dissertation offers valuable insight to scholars in public administration and higher education, as well as professionals working in these fields. For practitioners, the findings could help shape future presidential hiring decisions, such that universities would be better equipped to seek candidates with the managerial experience suited to boost university performance. The dissertation also helps to fill the gap in the public administration and higher education literature relating to the ability of presidents to influence critical institution-level outcomes. Prior studies of higher education administration have relied on faculty or trustee perceptions of presidential performance (Michael, Schwartz, and Balraj 2001; Birnbaum 1989) or have focused on presidential decision making (Smerek 2013), but largely they have lacked objective, longitudinal

data that might demonstrate the president's ability to influence organizational performance (Harris and Ellis 2018). This paper, by contrast, relies on objective, longitudinal data from 114 four-year, high-level research doctoral universities, tracking numerous presidential succession events within public and private universities from 2006 to 2015. The three empirical analyses in this dissertation shed light on the influential role of presidents—as well as the impact of succession events—on university performance.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **PUBLIC/PRIVATE DISTINCTIONS, PUBLICNESS, AND THE THEORY OF PUBLICNESS FIT**

#### **Introduction**

For decades, scholars have ruminated on the qualities that distinguish public organizations from their private sector counterparts with the goal of understanding how and whether these distinctions influence organizational structure, personnel management, goal-setting, and work-related attitudes and values (Meier and O'Toole 2011; Rainey and Bozeman 2000; Perry and Rainey 1988; Rainey, Backoff, and Levine 1976). At the heart of the public/private dichotomy is the theory of publicness, which appeared in the public administration literature in the 1970s (Rainey, Backoff, and Levine 1976) and since has been evaluated as an organizational characteristic shaped by agency configuration, resources, management strategies, and performance measures, among other factors (Walker and Bozeman 2011; Pesch 2008; Pandey 2010; Haque 2001).

In their initial consideration of publicness, Rainey, Backoff, and Levine (1976, 234) contrast public and private organizations according to their ownership, suggesting that formal legal status serves as the “core” distinction that explains public versus private organizational designs and transactions. While this core approach is commonsense and tidy, Perry and Rainey (1988, 184) contend that the legal ownership paradigm fails to capture the “dimensionality” of the public/private distinction. External controls and funding, they argue, play more influential roles in shaping the goals and structures of organizations. In this assertion, Perry and Rainey (1988) express agreement with Bozeman’s (1987) landmark theory of dimensional publicness which

suggests that organizations may be more public, or more private, based on the extent to which they are beholden to political or economic authority. According to the dimensional model, organizations are more public if they are subject to greater political control, are responsible for outputs that are public in nature, and are more reliant on government-based resources (Bozeman and Bretschneider 1994; Coursey and Bozeman 1990; Bozeman 1987). As Bozeman (2013, 176) emphasizes, however, “public and private are dimensions, not dichotomies.” To that end, an organization’s publicness or privateness varies based on the extent to which it is subject to external influence, as captured by three distinct elements: ownership, funding, and control (Andrews, Boyne, and Walker 2011; Bozeman and Bretschneider 1994; Perry and Rainey 1988; Bozeman 1987).

Bozeman and Bretschneider (1994) broaden the scope of dimensional publicness, operationalizing it according to market authority, political authority, personnel, structure, and goal setting. They acknowledge that the political authority dimension in their study of research and development labs is based on weak empirical measures, such as organizational communication with government and managers’ perceived importance of government (Bozeman and Bretschneider 1994). Employing a more objective, quantifiable measure in their approach to the funding dimension, however, they specify resource publicness as the proportion of revenues or expenditures financed by the government (also referred to as “financial publicness,” see Chun and Rainey 2005, 2). Although few studies have incorporated empirical measures of political influence or authority, more extensive research in resource publicness has examined the funding dimension’s influence on organizational performance and outcomes across a variety of institutions including research and development labs (Crow and Bozeman 1987), federal agencies (Chun and Rainey

2005), universities (Lee 2017), hospitals (Goldstein and Naor 2005), and treatment facilities (Merritt, Cordell, and Farnworth 2018; Su 2016; Heinrich and Fournier 2004).

Publicness research in the last decade has evolved to incorporate various normative and environmental characteristics that might account for organizational outcomes and practices. Among cotemporary interpretations is the realized publicness framework (Moulton 2009), which suggests that organizational publicness could be measured by the extent to which objectives and outcomes achieve public values. The influence exerted on organizations by public value institutions—be they communities or regulative agencies—moderates public outcomes, according to the realized publicness framework (Feeney and Welch 2012; Moulton 2009). More recently, Bozeman and Moulton (2011) have called for an integrated model of publicness that blends normative and empirical dimensions to practical effect, ideally helping managers to position their organizations to respond to policy and institutional environments. Miller and Moulton (2013), meanwhile, measure collective organizational publicness as the proportion of nonprofit and government-owned and funded organizations within the policy environment.

While more recent classifications of publicness have extended beyond organizational measures of publicness to include multilevel and environmental conditions (Miller and Moulton 2013; Bozeman and Moulton 2011), the direct influence of political authority on organizations remains a central tenet of publicness research. In their analysis of more than 30 studies of publicness and organizational performance, Andrews, Boyne, and Walker (2011) find that researchers most often have relied merely on the ownership dimension as a simple dichotomous and underspecified measure while omitting other dimensions, most notably control. Few researchers, they conclude, have incorporated all three elements of dimensional publicness while



properly controlling for moderating variables, and rarely have any examined interactive effects of the three dimensions. Consequently, recommendations for future publicness research have called for longitudinal studies with large samples that utilize models incorporating multiple dimensions of publicness (Merritt, Cordell, and Farnworth 2017; Andrews, Boyne, and Walker 2011).

### **Publicness and Management**

Bozeman's (1987) contention that organizations can be more public or more private leads him to suggest that organizations operate along a publicness continuum. As their exposure to environmental conditions—such as regulations and revenue sources—changes, so too does their position along the publicness continuum (Nutt and Backoff 1993). It follows, then, that if organizations cannot be treated as purely public or purely private, neither may managers be treated as dichotomous figures who fall into neat classifications. Managers conform to sector constraints, adapt to organizational and sector norms, and employ strategies that comport with the unique motivations, responsibilities, laws, resources, and governance structures associated with their particular agency or firm.

One of the most central debates in the study of the public/private divide is whether managerial qualifications, decision making, motivations, and influence on organizational performance differ between the two sectors (Meier and O'Toole 2011; Perry and Wise 1990; Perry and Rainey 1988; Rainey, Backoff, and Levine 1976; Murray 1975). In effect, does organizational publicness dictate managerial strategy and decisions? From the early years of public management research to as late as the 1970s, scholars and practitioners widely subscribed to what Murray (1975, 364) deemed the “generic model” of management, which held that managers' planning, assessment, motivation, and problem solving were fundamentally the same whether in private

firms or in public organizations. Murray (1975) rejects the notion of sectoral distinctiveness, arguing that objectives, responsiveness to external pressures, performance measurement, and personnel management are fundamentally similar across public and private organizations.

Since the late 1970s, public administration professionals and academics almost universally have rejected the generic model and instead subscribed to a philosophy of sectoral separateness, which research has borne out on a wide variety of fronts. At the heart of the sector divide are several fundamental assumptions about the unique pressures, goals, outcomes, and outputs of public and private organizations. Publicly owned organizations are viewed as maintaining an obligation and accountability to taxpayers, residents, or specific service recipients. As ownership becomes more ubiquitous, an organization is expected to be increasingly responsive to public need and to more actively promote fairness and equity (Merritt, Farnworth, and Kienapple 2018; Rainey 2014; Nutt and Backoff 1993; Rainey, Backoff, and Levin 1976). Unlike the products of private business that are designed for market exchange, the goods and services produced by public organizations are not approached from a perspective of profit-loss concern (Rainey 2014; Rainey, Backoff, and Levine 1976).

Managerial decisions are made in response to these sector considerations and restrictions. Publicness shapes managers' strategic decision making (Nutt 2005; Nutt and Backoff 1993), goal setting practices and goal ambiguity (Chun and Rainey 2005), and resource acquisition (Scott and Falcone 1998). Organizational publicness, sector orientation, and the nature of work also influence managers' commitment, motivation, and job satisfaction. Thanks to public organizations' emphasis on rules, red tape, and authority systems in lieu of financial rewards, public managers are afforded less authority to make personnel decisions, generally perceive their workplace

personnel policies and procedures to be less flexible, and are prone to experience feelings of alienation and disillusionment as a result of more rigid workplace strictures (Moynihan and Pandey 2007; DeHart-Davis and Pandey 2005; Coursey and Rainey 1990). At the same time, public managers cite unique attractions to public sector employment, including a desire to serve others and opportunities for career advancement (Lee and Wilkins 2011). Research in public service motivation (PSM) in particular has shed light on sector- and organization-specific socialization effects on management. Among public managers, professional organization membership and employment in an organization that engages in reform efforts are strongly associated with PSM, leading Moynihan and Pandey (2007) to contend that organizational norms and service-oriented operations may shape managers' motives and commitment. This speaks to organizations' broader socializing forces that instill agency values in public managers (Hamidallah, Riccucci, and Pandey 2015; Nalbandian and Edwards 1983). Others suggest there are likely organizational effects of PSM—such as workplace environment and incentive structures—that in turn yield positive effects on individual performance (Perry, Hondeghem, and Wise 2010). The service values of coworkers and supervisors also might influence individuals' PSM (Vandenabeele 2011), while increases in PSM scores yield larger improvements in work effort among public managers than among non-supervisory employees (Taylor and Taylor 2011). Individuals might be drawn to public management because of an organization's service orientation or social-justice-based mission and function, and individuals might view public management positions as opportunities to perform meaningful public service tasks (Clerkin and Cogburn 2012; Lee and Wilkins 2011; Christensen and Wright 2011). Public service motivation also appears to be better sustained over time among public employees compared with private-sector employees even when their work tasks are

identical, suggesting that sectoral and organizational conditions exert socializing influence, in turn shaping and reinforcing service attitudes (Kjeldsen and Jacobsen 2012).

Although public and private managers operate with differing incentives, organizational structures, and motivations, some commonly studied sectoral differences are those outlined in Bozeman's (1987) dimensional publicness theory—specifically funding and control. Public organizations rely on tax revenues and other forms of public funding, while private organizations generate revenues from sales and fees (Nutt 2005; Bozeman 1987). Whereas private firms may be beholden to shareholders, trustees, or boards of directors, public organizations operate often under several layers of oversight. Day-to-day decisions can be questioned or overruled by political appointees or elected officials (Nutt 2005). Financial decisions, too, are subject to government oversight. Allocations of public funds generally require the approval of a legislature, council, mayor, or governor, while budgetary decisions, purchases, staffing, and contracts are subject to public comment, open records requests, and media scrutiny (Nutt 2005; Coursey and Bozeman 1990). These fundamental distinctions between public and private organizations serve as the foundation of the theory that guides the research in this dissertation.

### **Theory of Publicness Fit**

The core approach and dimensional model of publicness, taken together, buttress the theory of publicness fit put forth by Petrovsky, James, and Boyne (2015), which treats publicness as a multidimensional concept comprising ownership, funding, and regulation—the latter a substitute in name only for Bozeman's (1987) original control dimension. The publicness fit theory, a framework for testing succession effects on performance, holds that a leader's ability to affect organizational performance is contingent upon a unique form of insiderness: the match between

his or her management experience and the publicness of the organization that he or she is hired to administer. The more closely a leader's previous organization matches the public characteristics of his or her current organization, the greater the publicness fit. An individual, for example, who previously managed an organization largely funded by government endowments and heavily regulated by state or federal agencies would demonstrate high fit when entering a managerial role at an organization with similar funding and regulatory characteristics as the prior organization.

The theory of publicness fit builds upon recent theoretical frameworks and streams of study in both public and private management. Public administration researchers have long explored the role of professional and cultural socialization, suggesting that public managers embrace—or at least adhere to—the mission, structure, and norms of the organizations they lead (Merritt and Farnworth 2018; Hamidallah, Riccucci, and Pandey 2015; Wright 2007; Nalbandian and Edwards 1983). Organizational publicness and managerial experience also may play important roles in this process (Merritt and Farnworth 2018; Juenke 2005). As such, individuals who are steeped in public organizations should be better suited to improve public organization performance when they assume a top leadership position at a new organization. The theory of publicness fit also draws upon the contingency theory of organizations, perhaps best summarized by Donaldson (2001). The latter theory posits that organizational effectiveness is related to the match between an organization's characteristics and various contingencies, such as environment, size, and strategy. When the match is high, performance is high. In detailing one of the fundamental elements of contingency theory, Donaldson (2001) writes, “there is a fit of some level of the organizational structure variable to each level of the contingency, which leads to higher performance, whereas misfit leads to lower performance. This fit-performance relationship is the heart of the contingency

theory paradigm” (21-22). To that end, a large organization, regardless of sector, might shift toward a more bureaucratic, decentralized structure to improve efficiency and decision making, thereby causing a better fit and improving performance.

In their publicness fit theory, Petrovsky, James, and Boyne (2015) adapt the contingency theory to evaluate the impact of individual executives on organizational performance, using publicness as a core contingency. Further, they break slightly from the contingency theory’s proposition of a linear fit-performance relationship, granting that while a leader’s experience with public funding and political oversight are considered advantageous to organizational effectiveness in public settings, perfect publicness fit is not always predicted to yield an improvement in institutional performance. To the contrary, Petrovsky, James, and Boyne (2015) argue that succession effects are a product of the new leader’s publicness fit as well as the organization’s prior performance. The authors use this distinction in prior performance to put forth two main propositions. First, they argue that high-performing organizations have comparably less room for improvement than poorly functioning organizations and therefore should experience negative performance consequences as a result of any succession event. Nevertheless, the hiring of an individual with high publicness fit is expected to dampen these negative effects, as he or she provides adaptive benefits to the organization, be they in the form of institutional knowledge, familiarity with political control, or experience working in publicly funded agencies. Second, Petrovsky, James, and Boyne (2015) predict that low-performing organizations will benefit from a succession event thanks to the injection of new leadership that shakes the organization from its stagnancy. New leaders with low publicness fit might implement novel strategic changes, resulting in positive effects on performance. As publicness fit falls, however, the leader’s inexperience with

public organization characteristics is expected to overtake the beneficial disruptive effects, eventually yielding negative disruptive effects on the organization.

### **The Higher Education Context**

Higher education lends itself well to an examination of the influence of publicness and managerial fit on organizational performance. Public and private universities are distinguished to some extent by their external control and funding, but because of their collective focus on education and research, institutions of both legal ownership distinctions provide for public outcomes and participate in revenue-generating activities (Marginson 2018; Anderson and Whitford 2016; Crow and Shangraw 2016; Marginson 2007). Public organizations are typically prevented from competing for customers (Nutt 2005), a characteristic that does not hold true for public universities that compete with private institutions for high-performing students (Grewal, Dearden, and Lilien 2008). Large research universities almost always are classified as not-for-profit entities regardless of their legal ownership status, even though all are dependent on nongovernment monies in the form of tuition, fees, and donations. Most publicly owned institutions, meanwhile, are dependent on state allocations for a substantial portion of their total receipts (Ehrenberg 2006). Private universities are not entirely unattached to public funds, however, as they take advantage of federal research grants and, in some cases, receive modest state and local allocations. Thanks to these numerous idiosyncrasies of higher education that blur public/private boundaries, Lee (2017, 186) notes, “particularly in higher education, the public and private distinction based on ownership status has become even less meaningful.”

In several high-profile ways, public universities have shown lesser resource publicness and greater administrative publicness in recent decades. These institutions as recently as 2005 relied

on state allocations for almost half of their annual revenues (McPherson and Schapiro 2006). By 2018, state support represented just 25.4 percent of their total receipts.<sup>1</sup> Federal funding for all universities has declined as a percentage of total revenues since the 1960s (Lyall and Nell 2006; McPherson and Schapiro 2006), yet some of the largest and most prestigious private institutions today receive a larger proportion of government funding than do large public research institutions thanks to their ability to secure lucrative research grants and contracts (Anderson and Whitford 2016). As public institutions become less reliant on government funding, whether by choice or by force, they may become less responsive to public interests and instead become more oriented toward client demands—and those of alumni, corporate donors, and big-dollar benefactors. Such a shift would represent an adoption of a more historically private model of transactional publicness (Nutt and Backoff 1993). While resource publicness in higher education has evolved rapidly since the early 1990s, state governments at the same time have implemented a variety of measures that constrain public universities' use of funds and limit their leaders' ability to make decisions (Alexander 2000). State governments have installed consolidated governing boards with direct line-item discretion authority (McLendon, Deaton, and Hearn 2007), as well as performance funding or budget systems that tie state allocations to university outcomes—most typically measures of student retention, graduation, and degree production (Conner and Rabovsky 2011; Bogue and Johnson 2010; McLendon, Hearn, and Deaton 2006). Nutt and Backoff (1993) suggest that such constantly shifting expectations as a result of political or electoral changes are indicative of greater organizational publicness.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the percentage of state allocations to total revenues for four-year doctoral universities in fiscal year 2018, as indicated in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, or IPEDS.



Thanks to these changing dynamics, any probe of the higher education public/private puzzle requires a multidimensional approach that moves beyond categorization based solely on legal ownership status. The theory of publicness fit accommodates a more nuanced approach. As detailed by Petrovsky, James, and Boyne (2015), publicness fit comprises three dimensions—funding, ownership, and regulation—each of which ranges from 0 to 100 percent. Because publicness fit is a composite of these three elements, an executive’s level of fit on one dimension may offset the level in another. As prior resource publicness studies have done (Heinrich and Fournier 2004; Crow and Bozeman 1987), the publicness fit model treats the funding dimension simply as the percentage of the organization’s budget that is composed of government appropriations. The ownership dimension, meanwhile, refers to an organization’s legal status as a public or private entity. Finally, the regulation dimension constitutes the extent to which an organization is politically directed by elected officials. The values for each dimension may vary or tend toward 0 or 100, depending upon whether continuous, interval, or dichotomous variables are used for each dimension. Figure 2.1 shows the equation that is employed to capture the publicness fit of the presidents in the following three chapters:

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$$\begin{aligned} \text{Publicness fit} = & 1/ \left[ a^* (\% \text{ public funding of new university} - \% \text{ public funding in} \right. \\ & \left. \text{president's previous organization})^2 \right. \\ & + b^* (\text{public ownership} - \text{prior managerial experience under public} \\ & \left. \text{ownership})^2 \right. \\ & \left. + c^* (\text{extent new university is publicly regulated} - \text{extent president's} \right. \\ & \left. \text{previous organization was publicly regulated})^2 \right]^{(1/2)} \end{aligned}$$

Figure 2.1: Publicness Fit Model

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Presidents whose universities' publicness mirrors that of the organizations at which they previously served are deemed to have high publicness fit. As noted previously, Petrovsky, James, and Boyne (2015) stop short of suggesting that perfect publicness fit will yield an improvement in institutional performance. They argue instead that the new leader's publicness fit and the organization's prior performance together shape post-succession performance. High-performing organizations should experience negative performance consequences as a result of any succession event, regardless of the incoming leader's publicness fit. However, an individual of high publicness fit is expected to minimize these negative effects, thanks to his or her experience in organizations of similar publicness. Conversely, a low-performing organization should witness a performance boost from any succession event, although Petrovsky, James, and Boyne (2015) anticipate that performance will decline over time for organizations that hire individuals with poor fit. Leaders with strong fit (and therefore a higher publicness fit value) are expected to improve organizational performance more consistently over time when hired at low-performing organizations.

## **Conclusion**

How might presidents affect performance as a result of their publicness fit? Several possibilities are worth suggestion. Leaders steeped in the ways of legislative gamesmanship seemingly should be able to position their organizations to adeptly respond to changing political winds, in part by relying on the negotiating and bargaining abilities that are demanded of public managers (Nutt 2005). University presidents who have long served at public institutions might have adopted unique value systems that correspond to public demand for access and equity in higher education (Anderson and Whitford 2016), as is observed of leaders in other public

organizations (Hamidallah, Riccucci, and Pandey 2015; Meier and Nigro 1976). These value systems could mean they prioritize access for low-income and underrepresented students (Crow and Shangraw 2016), which could impact various performance outcomes for those institutions. Lastly, leaders with high publicness fit could draw upon their unique sector-specific experience to make strategic changes in response to shifting environmental, economic, and political pressures. The studies in the following three chapters test the theory of publicness fit to determine whether presidents' publicness fit affects university performance across three sets of performance measures: student-centered outcomes, resource acquisition, and institutional prestige.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THE IMPACT OF UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS ON STUDENT-CENTERED OUTCOMES**

#### **Introduction**

The college degree has long been synonymous with improved economic opportunity, enhanced workforce productivity, and civic engagement (Stange 2014; Dee 2004). Recognizing these inherent benefits, the federal government, states, and many higher education institutions in recent decades have pushed to expand college access to individuals who previously were unable to pursue a degree (Scott, Bailey, and Kienzl 2006). Whether because of financial or academic difficulties, a large portion of these enrolled students has struggled to stay in school. By 2002, only one in three college students was able to earn a degree within four years, and slightly more than half of students could finish within six years (Astin and Oseguera 2002). In fear of the United States losing a global competitive edge, the Obama administration in 2011 established a “Race to the Top” grant program aimed at improving college graduation rates (Lewin 2011). It later announced a multibillion dollar program incentivizing students to take larger course loads per semester in an effort to speed up the time to completion (Kamenetz 2016).

At the same time, the growing use of federal and state financial aid programs, coupled with a loss of public faith in higher education, led lawmakers to more closely scrutinize colleges and universities. Government demand for greater efficiency, productivity, and accountability has prompted university administrators to keep close tabs on student persistence and graduation numbers (Alexander 2000). Most notably, state legislatures since the 1990s have prioritized degree production, retention rates, and graduation rates, increasingly putting pressure on public

institutions through the implementation of performance budgeting or funding systems that tie government dollars to public university outcomes (Conner and Rabovsky 2011).

Keeping students on track, therefore, remains of utmost importance to higher education administrators, requiring keen interest in retaining the students they admit and then graduating them in a timely fashion. Higher education professionals have developed myriad programs to improve the proportion of students who re-enroll for their second year, utilizing first-year seminars, orientations, mentoring programs, and learning communities to foster feelings of academic and personal investment in the campus (Kuh 2009; Tinto 1998). Institutions that avoid losing students to dropout or transfer thus should expect to graduate them—and do so within a reasonable period of time.

Because retention and graduation rates are widely viewed as measures of university equity, efficiency, productivity, and quality (Heck et al. 2014; Zhang 2009; Ryan 2004), their salience to university administrators cannot be understated. The question remains, however: Do university presidents affect these student-centered outcomes? This chapter examines the impact of university presidents' publicness fit on institutional performance, operationalized as the first-to-second-year retention rate, the six-year graduation rate, and the number of degrees conferred per full-time enrolled student (commonly known as degree production). The literature pertaining to these three performance measures is reviewed and is followed by sections detailing the data and results, then closing with discussion and recommendations for further study.

### **Impacts on Retention and Graduation**

From a policymaking and consumer standpoint, the student retention rate often has been treated as an indicator of university quality. As Astin (1997, 648) notes with skepticism,

“institutions with high retention rates are presumably doing a ‘better’ job retaining their students than are institutions with lower rates.” While that might indeed be the case, higher education scholars have spent the past four decades examining whether institutional conditions or student characteristics—or some combination of the two—better predict academic performance, retention, and degree completion.

University conditions such as institution size, residential status, and academic rigor have emerged as important predictors of retention (Astin 1997; Astin 1993b). Universities that enroll large numbers of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (also known as STEM) majors are expected to see lower retention and time-to-completion rates than universities with larger proportions of liberal arts and social sciences majors (Astin 1993b). Thanks in large part to Tinto’s seminal model of college dropout (1975) and Astin’s landmark theory of involvement (1984), researchers in recent decades have paid close attention to academic and extracurricular participation as influences on educational outcomes, including retention. More contemporary studies have yielded strong support for the beneficial impact of campus engagement on persistence in the forms of participation in academic support programs (Grillo and Leist 2013) and educationally purposeful activities (Kuh et al. 2008). Colleges and universities thus have pushed for more freshman involvement in so-called value adding engagement initiatives such as orientations and first-year experience programs that induce higher student satisfaction and learning—factors that are positively correlated with persistence and graduation (Anstine 2013; Kuh 2009; Tinto 1998).

At the student level, meanwhile, high school grade point average, admissions test scores (SAT/ACT), socioeconomic status, and race all have proven reliable predictors of retention (Titus

2006; Tross et al. 2000; Peltier, Laden, and Matranga 1999; Astin 1993a). White and Asian students are more likely to persist, whereas students from other racial groups show a lesser likelihood of retention and degree completion (Reason 2003; Titus 2006). Kuh and colleagues (2008) note, however, that individual pre-college characteristics such as standardized test scores yield less predictive value on retention once experiential conditions are taken into account, including living and working on or off campus.

As they are with retention, student academic and demographic characteristics are strongly associated with the six-year graduation rate. In perhaps the most expansive study of graduation and retention rates, Astin and Oseguera (2002) report that both measures are affected by race, GPA, SAT scores, and gender. Others have supported these findings, including Astin (2005) and Titus (2006) who find that the academic credentials of the entering freshman class—specifically the composite SAT score and high school grade point average—are significantly associated with degree completion. Among private universities, Scott, Bailey, and Kienzl (2006) find that an increase of 100 points in the top quartile of SAT scores translates to a 7 percent improvement in the graduation rate.

A variety of institutional factors, including personnel and resources, have been associated with the graduation rate as well. Anstine (2013) finds that faculty-to-student ratios, faculty salaries, and the percentage of full-time faculty are positively associated with graduation rates. Other researchers have uncovered modest links between student outcomes and university expenditures and resources, both in terms of their origin, amount, and proportion of total revenues. Ryan (2004), for example, notes a significant and positive correlation between graduation rates and spending on instructional and academic support programs at baccalaureate colleges. Similarly, Scott, Bailey,

and Kienzl (2006) observe a 0.44 percent increase in the graduation rate per \$1,000 in instructional expenditures per student at private universities. Titus (2006), meanwhile, uncovers a significant correlation between degree completion and a university's percentage of revenue from tuition, which is typically higher at private institutions. Among public universities, by contrast, Zhang (2009) finds that a 10 percent increase in state appropriations is associated with a slight increase in the graduation rate.

Previous institutional performance also appears to matter when evaluating retention and graduation rates. Webber and Ehrenberg (2010) report a significant relationship between student service expenditures and graduation and persistence rates—an effect more pronounced among the lowest-performing universities. Specifically, Webber and Ehrenberg (2010) find that an increase of \$100 in service expenditures translates to a 0.6 percent increase in the graduation rate and a 0.5 percent increase in the retention rate at institutions with the lowest persistence figures. Crisp, Doran, and Reyes (2018) observe a positive correlation between enrollment, religious affiliation, and the graduation rate at broad access institutions, which are some of the least selective four-year institutions in the country, admitting at least 80 percent of applicants.

Recent research has indicated that political and operational settings also influence performance. Rutherford and Rabovsky (2018) examined institutions that adopted responsibility-centered management (RCM), a structure in which some university units are responsible for generating their own revenue to support operations. They find that the use of RCM is significantly and positively associated with overall graduation rates and graduation rates for white students, but not for black or Hispanic students. Meanwhile, Heck et al. (2014) model political culture and find



that graduation rates were estimated to be 0.9 to 1.2 percent higher in states that prioritize state-level initiatives than in states with more limited or traditional government cultures.

Although studies using degree production are more limited, researchers have established connections between degrees awarded and various institutional and fiscal factors. Titus (2009), in examining public and private universities, reveals a significant correlation between degree production and state appropriations. He reports a similar connection between degrees and state-based merit aid. Likewise, Zhang (2011) concludes that the merit-based aid program in Florida increased the number of total degrees by 11.8 percent, with slightly more modest improvements to the number of STEM degrees conferred. More recently, Stange (2015) notes a negative impact of differential pricing—a practice of charging higher tuition for high-cost degree programs—on the percentage of degrees awarded in engineering and business. He explains that these impacts are not offset by grant assistance, suggesting that differential pricing is one moderating factor in the connection between aid and degree production. And despite their near ubiquity of state-imposed performance funding systems, little evidence has emerged to suggest they have improved retention or completion rates. These non-findings apply in studies of performance budgeting or funding in multiple states (Tandberg and Hillman 2014; Shin 2010), single states (Hillman, Tandberg, and Cross 2014; Sandford and Hunter 2011), and among community colleges (Hillman, Tandberg, and Fryar 2015).

While researchers have linked retention and graduation rates with pre-college factors (GPA and SAT scores) and institutional conditions (residential status, enrollment, and support programs), almost no attention has been paid to the influence of university presidents on student-centered outcomes. The theory of publicness fit (Petrovsky, James, and Boyne 2015) posits that a

leader's previous managerial experience and familiarity with public ownership, funding, and regulation will shape his or her ability to affect the performance of the new organization. The theory holds that institutional performance will improve or decline following a succession event based on the organization's pre-succession performance. As such, the following hypotheses are suggested:

H<sub>1</sub>: Universities performing at a high level prior to the succession event will experience a decline in performance following the succession event.

H<sub>1-A</sub>: For universities performing at a high level prior to the succession event, the performance drop following the succession will decrease with the successor's publicness fit.

H<sub>2</sub>: Universities performing at a low level prior to the succession event will experience an increase in performance following the succession event.

H<sub>2-A</sub>: For universities performing at a low level prior to the succession event, the performance increase with the successor's publicness fit.

## **Data**

The unit of analysis in this study is the four-year public university. The study examines performance and leadership across a 10-year span, from 2006 to 2015, within the 114 institutions in the Carnegie R1 classification of doctoral high-research universities.<sup>2</sup> These represent some of the largest, most complex, and highly competitive higher education institutions in the United States. Institutional data comes from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, while individual-level data of university presidents was culled from university websites, press releases, and presidents' curricula vitae. This portion of the study employs three dependent variables, each of which represents a unique measure of university performance: the six-year graduation rate, the

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<sup>2</sup> City University of New York Graduate Center was excluded because of extensive missing data in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, or IPEDS.

first- to second-year student retention rate, and the combined number of undergraduate and graduate degrees conferred each year (otherwise known as degree production) per full-time enrolled student. While these performance measures capture outcomes that are core to universities' charge, they also are measures that state governments commonly utilize when setting performance standards and when allocating funds to public universities (Layzell 1999; McLendon, Hearn, and Deaton 2006; Bogue and Johnson 2010; Rabovsky 2012; Dougherty et al. 2014). Their connection to resource acquisition thus likely increases their salience to university administrators, particularly those at public institutions.

The public funding dimension in the present study incorporates state appropriations and government grants and contracts as a combined percentage of a university's total annual revenues. The ownership dimension reflects the legal ownership status of universities in the sample, 80 of which are classified as public and 34 of which are private. Ownership status of the president's previous organization varies through the presence of private universities, government agencies, and privately owned businesses and law firms. Lastly, the public regulation dimension captures the state-level governance structure that provides oversight or guidance to universities. Governance structure is a common measure of regulatory influence that has been studied in connection with universities' pricing and spending practices (Lowry 2001), their performance (Knott and Payne 2004; Volkwein and Tandberg 2008), their use of performance management data (Rabovsky 2014), and the frequency of university presidential turnover (Rutherford and Lozano 2018). Higher education governance structures assume a variety of forms, including boards and commissions at the institution, system, and state level that maintain varying degrees of centralization (McGuinness 2003). McLendon, Deaton, and Hearn (2007) note that higher education

coordinating boards act as “intermediary bodies” (647) between state governments and higher education institutions, assisting largely with statewide planning efforts but disarmed to the point of lacking direct authority over individual campuses. Coordinating boards stand in contrast to more centralized governing boards, which maintain line authority over routine decision making at individual institutions (Knott and Payne 2004; McLendon, Deaton, and Hearn 2007). As such, coordinating boards reflect low regulation in the present study, whereas consolidated governing boards or direct legislative or gubernatorial oversight reflect a high degree of regulation. Information on state higher education boards and commissions comes from the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (2018) and individual websites of current and former state higher education boards and commissions. Ownership and regulation are coded as dichotomous variables, while public funding is a continuous variable of up to 100 percent. An overriding criticism of early succession studies was the omission of organizational size, resources, and age data (Kesner and Sebor 1994). The present study therefore controls for university age and endowment per full-time student. Rabovsky (2012) and Zhang (2009) note significant effects of race on several measures of performance, including student retention and graduation rates. This study thus controls for the percentage of black and Hispanic students. Other controls include the state unemployment rate, full-time enrollment, and membership in a Power 5 football conference.

## **Results and Discussion**

How performance influences a presidential change and how a new president influences performance are of primary concern in this dissertation. The results provide several key takeaways on both fronts. In the three years preceding a succession event, performance remained virtually flat for universities that experienced a leadership change at some point during the 10-year

observation period (referred to henceforth as “transition universities”). Notably, however, among transition universities, the mean retention and graduation rates in the three years prior to the succession event were markedly lower than the sample means (Table 3.1). Whereas the mean retention rate was 89.3 across the sample, it remained almost 2 points lower among transition universities in the three years leading up to and including the transition year. A similar trend was observed with the six-year graduation rate. The mean graduation rate in the sample was 74.08 but was substantially lower among transition universities in the three years leading up to and including the year of the presidential succession—a mean graduation rate of 69.92.

An important question is whether bringing in a new president, regardless of his or her prior experience, effected desired change in the form of improved performance. When evaluating student-centered measures, there is some support for the notion that a leadership change yields performance benefits—and that prior performance makes a difference. Performance improved for transition universities as a whole in the three years following a succession event across all three student-centered measures. As shown in Table 3.2, the mean retention rate among transition universities in the three years leading up to and including the transition years improved by .75 percent in the three years after the leadership change. More noticeably, the mean graduation rate increased by 1.57 percent from the three years before to the three years after the succession event. Degrees per FTE, meanwhile, increased by 1.04 percent from before to after the succession event over the same span.

To determine high- and low-performing universities as specified in the publicness fit theory, institutions were divided into quartiles based on their annual totals in each of the three performance variables in the study: retention rate, six-year graduation rate, and degrees awarded

per full-time enrolled student. Separating out the top and bottom quartile performers among transition universities, a clearer picture of succession impact emerges. Table 3.2 shows that the post-succession improvement was minimal within high-performing transition universities and not consistent across all three post-succession years. Countering Hypothesis 1, however, performance did not decline for high-performing universities following a succession event. Retention rates, for one, improved slightly in the two years following a succession event at high-performing universities. During the transition year, the mean retention rate among high performers was 96.82. It rose to 96.95 in the first year after the transition and rose again in the second year to 97.19 before slipping back to 96.53 in the third year after the succession event. Graduation rates among high-performing transition universities remained almost flat in the three years following the succession event aside from a near-1.5 percent decline in the third year following the presidential change. Among the high-performing universities that experienced a succession event, degrees per FTE remained virtually unchanged in the following three years.

By contrast, performance improved markedly and consistently within the low-performing transition universities after the succession event, providing support for Hypothesis 2. For low-performing transition universities, the mean retention rate was 79.57, nearly 10 points below the sample mean (Table 3.3). In the year immediately following the succession event, mean retention rates improved to 80.45, and then to 81.15 two years after the succession event. The mean retention rate for these universities dipped slightly in the third year after the succession to 81.05. Similarly, graduation rate improvements were observed among low-performing transition universities in each of the three years following the leadership change, resulting in an overall graduation rate increase of almost 3 percent. The mean degrees per FTE among the lowest performing institutions remained

unchanged from the succession year to the following year before increasing in the second and third years after the succession event.

One interpretation of the large differences in means between the overall sample and the transition universities is that instability stymies performance. Graduation rates, for example, were a full 4 percentage points lower among transition universities compared with all universities in the sample. A more likely alternative is that leadership changes are much more common among public universities, which generally perform at a lower level than private institutions. As shown in Table 3.4, private universities vastly outperformed public universities in all three student-centered measures. At the same time, a presidential change occurred at public universities in 13.88 percent of observed years but in only 6.47 percent of observed years at private universities.

The presence of a transition year was not a significant predictor of performance across any of the three measures, whereas public ownership was significantly and negatively associated with all three performance measures. Linear regression models estimate public ownership translates to a 7.7 percent lower retention rate (Table 3.5), a 19.2 percent lower graduation rate (Table 3.6), and a .03 percent lower rate in degrees per FTE (Table 3.7), all significant at the .001 level. Leadership changes also were more common among low performing universities, which overwhelmingly were public. There were 49 cases in which universities in the bottom quartile of retention rates experienced a presidential transition, compared with only 23 cases among universities in the top quartile. All 49 cases in the bottom quartile took place at public universities, while eight of the 23 leadership changes in the top quartile occurred at public institutions.

Because leadership changes were much rarer among high-performing universities, Hypothesis 1-A could not be tested relying only on top-quartile institutions alone. Universities

within the top quartiles of the three performance measures in the study experienced so few presidential changes (just 23 transition years out of 293 observed years for top quartile institutions) that there were insufficient observations to yield results within acceptable limits of reliability. This alone points to three interpretations about high-performing universities, which are not mutually exclusive: 1) Presidents at high-performing universities opt to remain in their positions longer than at low-performing universities, resulting in fewer leadership changes; 2) University performance is related to presidential stability, such that performance increases as presidential tenures lengthen; and 3) Presidential tenures are longer and university performance is higher among private universities, which constituted the overwhelming majority of top quartile institutions. Future studies can explore these possibilities in greater depth. As a result of the limited presidential changes within the top quartile, transition universities were divided into top and bottom halves according to the three performance measures to increase the number of succession observations (Table 3.8). Neither linear nor random effects regression models revealed a significant correlation between any of the three performance measures and publicness fit, whether during the year of the succession event or any of the three following years for either top or bottom half institutions. No support was found for Hypothesis 1-A or 2-A when universities were divided into high and low performance groups.

Because succession events were more common among the lowest performing universities, regression analysis was possible for universities in the bottom quartile of the three performance measures. Partial support was found for Hypothesis 2-A when institutions were further delineated, as publicness fit was positively and significantly related to degrees per FTE among bottom quartile universities, but only during the year of the presidential change (Table 3.9). Conversely, publicness



fit was negatively and significantly associated with retention rates but only in the third year following the succession event (Table 3.10). This suggests that publicness fit might be an influential characteristic only among the lowest performing universities, where presidential decision making could be more consequential to student-centered outcomes. Because of the small number of observations, however, these results should be viewed with caution.

Publicness fit in the present study was calculated such that it varied year by year, president by president, according to changes in universities' public regulation and, more commonly, percentage of public funding. For example, Arizona State University President Michael Crow's publicness fit fluctuated yearly as Arizona State's public funding declined incrementally from 56 percent in 2006 to 37 percent in 2015. Crow served previously at a private institution, Columbia University, which relies on a smaller proportion of government funding in the form of grants and contracts. Calculating the difference in public funding between Arizona State in any observable year and Columbia during Crow's final year there (2002), publicness fit becomes a fluid figure based on annual fluctuations in government funding and, more rarely, regulation. When publicness fit was treated as such a variable applicable at all points during a president's tenure—not just during the transition year—it was generally not significantly related to the three student-based performance measures, save for graduation rate in which a significant and negative correlation is observed in a fixed effects model incorporating all 114 universities in the sample (Table 3.11).

While this result suggests that new presidents might make strategic changes that help to boost graduation rates, it is a counterintuitive conclusion to draw. A university's graduation rate would seem to take time to address, considering it is a measure across a span of six years, and therefore making strategic changes to improve graduation rates should take more than one year to

produce an observable effect. One could anticipate retention rates to change more quickly as a result of presidential direction if only because they are a measure of change from one year to the next. No such relationship was observed for retention, however, nor was a correlation found in regard to degrees per full-time enrolled student, whether across the sample or specifically within the first three years after a succession event for transition universities. In sum, a president's publicness fit does not appear to influence student-based outcomes, broadly speaking. The best predictors across all three measures were public ownership, university age, and student racial makeup. Age effects were most pronounced within the graduation rate: With every additional year, a .12 percent increase in graduation rate is estimated (Table 3.12). An increase of 1 percent in Hispanic students, meanwhile, was associated with a .6 percent increase in the graduation rate (Table 3.12) and a .23 percent increase in the retention rate (Table 3.13). Conversely, a 1 percent increase in black students is related to a .84 percent decrease in the graduation rate (Table 3.12) and a .35 percent decrease in the retention rate (Table 3.13).

Why is publicness fit not strongly and broadly related to performance across universities? One explanation is that the formula is not amenable to the regulation and ownership values employed in this study. Although publicness fit may range from 0 to 100, the mean publicness fit value of university presidents was 18.7 with a high of 100 and a low of .34. Publicness fit values also varied greatly despite minor changes in the dimensional values, which is attributable to the use of dichotomous variables to capture the ownership and regulation dimensions. Likely had a continuous measure been employed for one or both dimensions, as was the case with public funding, more subtle variations in the publicness fit value would have emerged.

Disaggregating the publicness fit variable allows for an examination of the individual impact of public ownership, public funding, and public regulation on performance. If one were to remove the regulation and ownership dimensions, for example, publicness fit would in effect become a measure of resource publicness. When accounting for the difference in public funding percentages between previous and current organization alone, fixed effects regressions revealed no significant correlations between public funding differences and performance on any of the three measures, whether across the entire sample or for any of the transition universities either in the transition year or in any of the three post-succession years. This indicates that presidents' resource publicness fit alone is a poor predictor of institutional performance.

Notably, significant effects emerged when examining the differences in ownership and regulation. A change in ownership—evidenced by a president's transition from a private to a public organization, or vice versa—is associated with a .55 percent decrease in the retention rate (Table 3.14) and a .71 percent decrease in the graduation rate (Table 3.15). The negative coefficients suggest that presidents who transition from a privately owned organization to a public one, or public to private, struggle navigating the new administrative and political conditions that they encounter. By contrast, presidents who transition from an organization regulated by a higher education coordinating board to one that is not, or vice versa, are associated with a .36 percent increase in the retention rate (Table 3.16) and a .82 percent increase in the graduation rate (Table 3.17). If nothing else, these positive effects indicate that coordinating boards exert little to no negative influence on universities. As for degree production, transitioning from an organization regulated by a higher education coordinating board to one that is not, or vice versa, did not show

a significant effect. A change in public ownership showed a positive effect on degree production approaching significance in the fixed effects model but did not clear the .05 threshold.

Several limitations must be acknowledged. Because high school GPA and SAT scores are highly correlated with student persistence and graduation likelihood, some researchers have acknowledged that the most selective institutions are predisposed to higher retention and graduation rates (Webber and Ehrenberg 2010; Astin 2005). Private universities by and large are more selective and charge substantially higher tuition, which allows them to provide more instructional and support services, only further improving the likelihood of better performance in these student-based outcomes. To accommodate this reality, some studies have controlled for selectivity. Astin and Oseguera (2002), for example, adjust for race, gender, religious affiliation, and pre-college performance, finding that controlling for these characteristics reduced the 31 percent gap between public and private universities' graduation rates to just 7 percent. The current study did not control for the percentage of commuter students or for mean student age, which some have argued must be considered because of their unique influence on institutional attachment and therefore retention and graduation rates (Scott, Bailey, and Kienzl 2006; Johnson 1997; Bean and Metzger 1985). The study also would have benefited from a common measure of institutional selectivity, such as SAT scores. Because of extensive missing data in the IPEDS data for SAT scores in the 25<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> percentiles from 2006 to 2015, particularly in the SAT verbal score, this variable was omitted.

## **Conclusion**

The public/private distinction remains an important area of study, and higher education provides a useful backdrop to observe sector-specific influences on management and

organizational performance. The results of this study indicate that executive changes at large research universities are not crippling events. Among high- and low-performing institutions alike, graduation rates, retention rates, and degrees awarded increased following the appointment of a new president. The findings, however, provided little support for the previously untested publicness fit theory. Publicness fit was positively related to two of three performance measures—degrees per FTE and the six-year graduation rate—but only during the transition year for the former, and only during the year immediately following a presidential succession event for the latter.

The absence of an across-the-board relationship between performance and publicness fit raises several distinct possibilities. First, the use of dichotomous variables to capture the public regulation and ownership variables reduced the amount of variation that could be observed in presidents' publicness fit values. These values tended toward 0 as a result and in some cases fluctuated substantially as a result of the most minor possible variations in the percentage of public funding. Second, publicness fit simply might not be a significant predictor of a president's ability to influence institution-wide student outcomes of any kind. Because student and campus characteristics are such strong predictors of retention and graduation (such as GPA, test scores, enrollment, and residential status), it is perhaps not surprising that a president's publicness fit is not consistently correlated with these measures of institutional performance. While presidents might set strategic initiatives aimed at improving retention and degree completions, they alone have limited ability to dramatically alter the quality of enrolled students or to remake an institution into a residential campus featuring abundant academic and extracurricular engagement opportunities. Despite important funding and regulatory differences between public and private

universities, the ability of presidents from either sector to shape student-centered outcomes might not be contingent upon their management experience at a previous public or private organization. Other presidential characteristics, such as education, years of experience, academic research, or area of expertise might better indicate a president's ability to shape university performance. Third, university presidents might not have as much influence over student-centered outcomes as they do on others. Student-centered measures could be swayed more by chief academic officers and deans, more so than by the president. Stemming from that likelihood, a fourth possibility is that publicness fit is strongly associated with other presidential (and thus university) performance measures that were not included here, such as acquiring resources or increasing institutional clout in the form of improved standing on league tables. This dissertation will explore the latter possibility in subsequent chapters.

Table 3.1: Student-centered Performance in Pre-Transition and Transition Years

	Sample Mean	Pre-Transition Year 3	Pre-Transition Year 2	Pre-Transition Year 1	Transition Year
Retention Rate	89.30	87.71	87.29	87.32	87.67
Graduation Rate	74.08	70.10	69.05	69.80	70.72
Degrees per FTE	0.2611	0.2499	0.2494	0.2517	0.2528

Table 3.2: Student-centered Performance in Post-Transition Years

	Post-Trans Year 1	Post-Trans Year 2	Post-Trans Year 3	Pre-Trans/ Trans Avg.	Post-Trans Avg.	% Change
Retention Rate	88.06	88.27	88.16	87.50	88.16	0.75
Graduation Rate	71.06	70.96	71.03	69.92	71.02	1.57
Degrees per FTE	0.2532	0.2538	0.2537	0.2510	0.2536	1.04

Table 3.3: Performance of Transition Universities (Top and Bottom Quartiles)

	Transition Year	Post-Trans Year 1	Post-Trans Year 2	Post-Trans Year 3
Top Quartile - Retention	96.83	96.95	97.19	96.53
Bottom Quartile - Retention	79.57	80.46	81.15	81.05
Top Quartile - Graduation Rate	92.36	92.23	92.48	90.88
Bottom Quartile - Graduation Rate	52.34	53.16	53.80	55.30
Top Quartile - Degrees/FTE	0.3045	0.3052	0.3074	0.3014
Bottom Quartile - Degrees/FTE	0.2186	0.2186	0.2218	0.2259

Table 3.4: Public vs. Private Universities – Mean Summary Statistics

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	Public	Private
Retention Rate	86.64	95.6
Graduation Rate	67.56	89.47
Degrees per FTE	0.2497	0.2881
University Age	133.83	170.41
Endowment per FTE	\$27,023.32	\$415,473.60
% Black Students	6.77	5.47
% Hispanic Students	8.47	3.36



Table 3.5: Public Ownership Status on Retention Rate (Linear Regression)

VARIABLES	Retention Rate
Public Status	-7.674*** (1.096)
Publicness Fit	-0.318 (0.200)
Endowment/FTE	-0.000108 (0.000856)
University Age	0.0504*** (0.00747)
Power 5 Football	1.616*** (0.402)
% Black Students	-0.345*** (0.0471)
% Hispanic Students	0.228*** (0.0247)
Unemployment Rate	0.106*** (0.0234)
Constant	86.37*** (1.515)
Observations	1,085
Number of universities	114

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Table 3.6: Public Ownership Status on Graduation Rate (Linear Regression)

VARIABLES	Graduation Rate
Public Status	-19.24*** (2.079)
Publicness Fit	-0.865** (0.350)
Endowment/FTE	-0.00173 (0.00153)
University Age	0.124*** (0.0139)
Power 5 Football	3.336*** (0.712)
% Black Students	-0.843*** (0.0838)
% Hispanic Students	0.600*** (0.0441)
Unemployment Rate	0.0919** (0.0409)
Constant	68.54*** (2.839)
Observations	1,084
Number of universities	114

Standard errors in parentheses  
 \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Table 3.7: Public Ownership Status on Degrees/FTE (Linear Regression)

VARIABLES	Degrees/FTE
Public Status	-0.0350*** (0.00719)
Publicness Fit	-0.00265 (0.00219)
Endowment/FTE	2.47e-06 (7.75e-06)
University Age	0.000152*** (5.22e-05)
Power 5 Football	-0.000364 (0.00384)
% Black Students	-0.00179*** (0.000435)
% Hispanic Students	0.00235*** (0.000231)
Unemployment Rate	-0.000530** (0.000254)
Constant	0.261*** (0.0106)
Observations	1,085
Number of universities	114

Standard errors in parentheses  
 \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Table 3.8: Performance of Transition Universities (Top and Bottom Halves)

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	Transition Year	Post-Trans. Year 1	Post-Trans. Year 2	Post-Trans. Year 3
Top Half - Retention	94.32	94.46	94.88	94.53
Bottom Half - Retention	82.36	82.93	83.51	83.92
Top Half - Grad Rate	85.61	85.98	86.57	86.05
Bottom Half Grad Rate	58.85	59.46	60.47	61.82
Top Half - Degrees/FTE	0.2837	0.284	0.2854	0.284
Bottom Half - Degrees/FTE	0.2297	0.2299	0.2326	0.2359

Table 3.9: Degrees/FTE on Publicness Fit (Fixed Effects)

VARIABLES	(Transition Year) Degrees/FTE
Publicness Fit	0.0267** (0.0104)
Endowment/FTE	3.10e-05 (2.82e-05)
University Age	-5.69e-06 (6.98e-05)
Power 5 Football	0.00411 (0.00384)
% Black Students	-5.61e-05 (0.000437)
% Hispanic Students	0.000116 (0.000288)
Unemployment Rate	0.000258 (0.000965)
Constant	0.209*** (0.0118)
Observations	43
R-squared	0.249

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Table 3.10: Retention Rate on Publicness Fit (Fixed Effects)

VARIABLES	(Post-Transition Year3) Retention Rate
Publicness Fit	-13.36*** (4.509)
Endowment/FTE	0.0501 (0.06.41)
University Age	0.00439 (0.0260)
Power 5 Football	0.247 (1.428)
% Black Students	-0.0721 (0.105)
% Hispanic Students	-0.0262 (0.0613)
Unemployment Rate	1.553*** (0.532)
Constant	70.37*** (7.162)
Observations	35
R-squared	0.309

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p&lt;0.01, \*\* p&lt;0.05, \* p&lt;0.1

Table 3.11: Graduation Rate on Publicness Fit (Fixed Effects)

VARIABLES	Graduation Rate
Publicness fit	-0.821*** (0.318)
Endowment/FTE	-0.00607*** (0.00156)
University age	0.600*** (0.0410)
Power 5 football	0.203 (0.749)
% Black students	-0.417*** (0.0895)
% Hispanic students	0.0870 (0.0665)
Unemployment rate	-0.0290 (0.0386)
Constant	-9.438* (5.569)
Observations	1,072
Number of universities	114
R-squared	0.448

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Table 3.12: Graduation Rate on Public Ownership (Fixed Effects)

VARIABLES	Graduation Rate
Public Ownership	-19.24*** (2.079)
Publicness Fit	-0.865** (0.350)
Endowment/FTE	-0.00173 (0.00153)
University Age	0.124*** (0.0139)
Power 5 Football	3.336*** (0.712)
% Black Students	-0.843*** (0.0838)
% Hispanic Students	0.600*** (0.0441)
Unemployment Rate	0.0919** (0.0409)
Constant	68.54*** (2.839)
Observations	1,084
Number of universities	114

Standard errors in parentheses  
\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1



Table 3.13: Retention Rate on Public Ownership (Fixed Effects)

VARIABLES	Retention Rate
Public Ownership	-7.674*** (1.096)
Publicness Fit	-0.318 (0.200)
Endowment/FTE	-0.000108 (0.000856)
University Age	0.0504*** (0.00747)
Power 5 Football	1.616*** (0.402)
% Black Students	-0.345*** (0.0471)
% Hispanic Students	0.228*** (0.0247)
Unemployment Rate	0.106*** (0.0234)
Constant	86.37*** (1.515)
Observations	1,085
Number of universities	114

Standard errors in parentheses  
 \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Table 3.14: Impact of Ownership Difference on Retention Rate (Fixed Effects)

VARIABLES	Retention Rate
Ownership Difference	-0.554** (0.220)
Full-time Enrollment	4.97e-05* (2.86e-05)
Endowment/FTE	-0.00190** (0.000930)
University Age	0.173*** (0.0257)
Power 5 Football	0.472 (0.439)
% Black Students	-0.348*** (0.0537)
% Hispanic Students	0.0794** (0.0402)
Unemployment Rate	0.0591** (0.0231)
Constant	64.37*** (3.347)
Observations	1,127
Number of universities	114
R-squared	0.270

Standard errors in parentheses  
\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Table 3.15: Impact of Ownership Difference on Graduation Rate (Fixed Effects)

VARIABLES	Graduation Rate
Ownership Difference	-0.714** (0.360)
Full-time Enrollment	2.34e-05 (4.67e-05)
Endowment/FTE	-0.00662*** (0.00152)
University Age	0.598*** (0.0420)
Power 5 Football	0.0156 (0.718)
% Black Students	-0.508*** (0.0877)
% Hispanic Students	0.0811 (0.0658)
Unemployment Rate	-0.0388 (0.0378)
Constant	-9.136* (5.471)
Observations	1,126
Number of universities	114
R-squared	0.453

Standard errors in parentheses  
 \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Table 3.16: Impact of Regulation Difference on Retention Rate (Fixed Effects)

VARIABLES	Retention Rate
Regulation Difference	0.364** (0.153)
Full-time Enrollment	4.16e-05 (2.86e-05)
Endowment/FTE	-0.00201** (0.000931)
University Age	0.171*** (0.0257)
Power 5 Football	0.528 (0.438)
% Black Students	-0.342*** (0.0535)
% Hispanic Students	0.0850** (0.0403)
Unemployment Rate	0.0568** (0.0232)
Constant	64.76*** (3.345)
Observations	1,127
Number of universities	114
R-squared	0.269

Standard errors in parentheses  
\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Table 3.17: Impact of Regulation Difference on Graduation Rate (Fixed Effects)

VARIABLES	Graduation Rate
Regulation Difference	0.817*** (0.250)
Full-time Enrollment	8.49e-06 (4.66e-05)
Endowment/FTE	-0.00685*** (0.00152)
University Age	0.596*** (0.0418)
Power 5 Football	0.0596 (0.714)
% Black Students	-0.506*** (0.0872)
% Hispanic Students	0.0916 (0.0656)
Unemployment Rate	-0.0452 (0.0378)
Constant	-8.632 (5.447)
Observations	1,126
Number of universities	114
R-squared	0.456

Standard errors in parentheses  
 \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **THE IMPACT OF UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS ON INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES**

#### **Introduction**

Financial support for higher education since the 1980s has undergone a monumental transformation. Federal funding for colleges and universities steadily declined beginning in the Vietnam War era, dropping from 30 percent of institutions' total revenues in 1965 to just 17 percent in 1995 (McPherson and Schapiro 2006). At the same time, state governments since the early 1990s have greatly reduced the share of their budgets dedicated to public colleges and universities (Ehrenberg 2006). To wit, in 1980, universities received as much as 45 percent of their revenues from state governments; within a span of 15 years, that figure had slipped to 33 percent (Lyall and Sell 2006; McPherson and Schapiro 2006). Some scholars argue that today's higher education financial climate can be traced to the 1990-1994 recession that triggered the first year-over-year cut in real dollars to higher education since the late 1950s (Weerts and Ronca 2006). During that same span, higher education represented the only major category of state spending to experience a decline (Breneman 1995). Since the early 1990s, state support has remained tenuous. Although a surging economy approaching the turn of the century helped to boost state funding per student to pre-recession amounts, the first recession of the 2000s yet again triggered cutbacks. As Zusman (2005) notes, per-student support from state governments in 2004 was 12 percent lower than in 1989. State and federal funding have yet to return to pre-1990s levels, and state budget allocations for higher education have experienced only modest annual growth since the Great Recession that began in 2008 (AASCU 2018). The financial climate in recent years has fomented what former Missouri Southern State University president Bruce Speck (2010) calls "a new

paradigm for higher education...that will include a renewed focus on increased private funding” (8).

Persistent cuts in state support portend several stark scenarios, particularly for public institutions that rely on government funds for nearly half of their operating budgets. With lesser state funding, the cost to the consumer is likely to rise, potentially resulting in limited access to education for underrepresented populations (Zusman 2005). Hiring and retaining high-quality faculty also could become much more challenging (Gallup and Svare 2016). Additionally, universities could be forced to rely more on market-driven academic programs such as business, engineering, and health care that can generate enough revenue in tuition or research grants to be self-sufficient (Rutherford and Rabovsky 2018; Gallup and Svare 2016).

In the face of such stymied government backing, university administrators have been forced to offset state revenues with other funding sources. For many colleges and universities, that has meant raising tuition and fee pricing in order to pay for capital projects and other non-academic services (SHEEO 2017). Tuition increases represent only a stopgap measure, however, as university leaders acknowledge there are limits to what students, as consumers, and lawmakers will tolerate (Szpaller 2019; Chang 2016). Consequently, administrators have prioritized other nongovernmental monies, including private donations, corporate sponsorships, and specialty grants. While colleges and universities of all stripes have established development offices tasked with forging business ties and generating alumni donations, the university president represents the face of the institution and is increasingly viewed as its chief fundraising officer (Tandberg 2010b). Some higher education researchers have suggested that the contemporary president’s primary task in fact is securing resources. As Hodson (2010) notes, “No other institutional officer can create

the vision, establish university-wide priorities, or make the case for support as effectively as the president. All are important elements of successful fundraising” (40). Raising revenues as university president means routine contacts with benefactors and frequent appearances at events to secure private donations. It also translates to consistent lobbying of state legislators and, in some cases, university system officials to push for allocations (Nicholson 2007). Arguably the most compelling evidence of the president’s fundraising role comes from the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU 2016) and its 2016 survey of state college and university presidents. Of the 17 most common job tasks that respondents said drew on their presidential competencies, five of the top six pertain to resource acquisition, including development, fundraising, lobbying, or meeting with elected officials to secure funding.

If a university president is familiar with the constraints of public funding, he or she presumably should be better able to secure state support, all factors equal. Likewise, an individual steeped in the private setting could be expected to navigate nongovernmental fundraising with some command. A guiding research question for this chapter therefore follows: Does a president’s publicness fit determine university revenues? Despite abundant research on the determinants of state support for higher education—and private support, to a lesser extent—the influence of the university president on resource acquisition has remained overlooked. This chapter thus explores the impact of university presidents’ publicness fit on institutional performance according to three distinct funding sources: state appropriations, research grants and contracts, and private gifts. The literature pertaining to these three performance measures is reviewed, followed by sections detailing the data and results. The chapter closes with a discussion of the results and recommendations for further study.



## State Support

State and local dollars accounted for nearly half of total operating funds at public research universities as recently as 2005 (McPherson and Schapiro 2006). Although it has experienced a steady downward trend in the last decade, state support still accounts for 25.4 percent of these institutions' total revenues.<sup>3</sup> Securing state dollars therefore remains of critical importance to university presidents, who must jockey for position amid other highly valued recurring expenditures. Colleges and universities face competition for state funding from K-12 education, corrections, and health care programs, particularly Medicaid, which accounts for as much as one-fifth of state budgets (Ness and Tandberg 2013; Weerts and Ronca 2012; Delaney and Doyle 2011; McLendon, Hearn, and Mokher 2009; Zusman 2005; Kane et al. 2005). Several studies have confirmed that as spending increases for Medicaid, the share of state funds to higher education declines (Tandberg 2010a; Okunade 2004). Higher education also is one of the major state spending areas most likely to experience cuts during economic downturns (Delaney and Doyle 2007; Humphreys 2000), which reflects its secondary status to primary education and entitlement programs.

Determinants of state support for higher education are numerous, although several factors have consistently emerged. Among institutional conditions, state support is positively correlated with university enrollments, statewide private higher education resources, and private gifts (Delaney and Doyle 2011; Weerts and Ronca 2006; Kane et al. 2005). As Tandberg and Ness (2011) contend, the positive association between state funding and private gifts to some extent

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<sup>3</sup> Based on the percentage of state allocations to total revenues for four-year doctoral universities in fiscal year 2018, as indicated in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, or IPEDS.

could reflect the growing use of matching funds. The Texas Research Incentive Program, for example, entitles public institutions to receive between 50 and 100 percent of a private research donation in matching state funds, with larger gifts receiving 1-to-1 funding (UT System 2015). Scholars also have identified several correlative demographic factors with state financial support, including the state unemployment rate and population (McLendon, Deaton, and Mokher 2009; Kane et al. 2005; Okunade 2004). Specifically, Weerts and Ronca (2012) report a 7 percent decrease in state appropriations for higher education for every 1 percent increase in the state unemployment rate. Other researchers have uncovered connections between state funding and higher education governance structures (Ness and Tandberg 2013; Tandberg and Ness 2011; McLendon, Deaton, and Mokher 2009), suggesting that more centralized systems of governance—such as consolidated governing boards—reduce state contributions. Conversely, the degree of legislative professionalism—as expressed by the number of, and spending on, legislative support staff—is associated with greater investment in higher education (Ness and Tandberg 2013; Tandberg and Ness 2011; Tandberg 2010a; Tandberg 2010b; McLendon, Deaton, and Mokher 2009).

Political influence, however, remains the most intensely scrutinized and most widely substantiated factor associated with state support for higher education. Party control of state houses and governors' seats is a consistent refrain. Archibald and Feldman (2006) note that state funding for higher education is positively impacted by Democratic control of the governorship and of the lower house in the state legislature. In related findings, Rizzo (2004) reports a decrease in the proportion of state funds for higher education when the governor's office is in Republican hands, while Weerts and Ronca (2006) reveal a reduction in state support when the state legislature's

upper house is majority Republican. McLendon, Deaton, and Mokher (2009) find a negative impact of Republican legislatures on higher education funding, but they observe a much more pronounced effect with a Republican governor. Beyond party affiliation, gubernatorial control has emerged elsewhere as an important factor. Tandberg et al. (2017) report lower spending on higher education in states in which the governor has the authority to fire the state's chief higher education officer. Similarly, Ness and Tandberg (2013) find that in states that empower governors with greater budgetary control, general funds to higher education are positively impacted while capital spending for higher education sees a negative effect. Worth noting of legislative influence, single-party control of legislatures has been associated with decreased state support, which could reflect competing party interests in state spending (Tandberg 2010a; Tandberg 2010b; Rizzo 2004). Lastly, interest groups appear to play an important political role in state allocations. When higher education interest groups are more numerous within a state compared with all other interest groups, the percentage of state funding to higher education increases (Tandberg 2010a; Tandberg 2006). Germane to the present study, none of the research cited here accounted for presidential characteristics or influence on state appropriations to higher education.

### **Nongovernmental Support**

To offset reduced state and federal funding, university leaders have looked to nongovernmental revenue sources including private donations in the form of major gifts, corporate support, and alumni contributions (Liu 2006). Tuition also has replaced government support at public and private institutions alike, accounting for approximately one-quarter of public university revenues—nearly twice its share in 1955 (McPherson and Schapiro 2006). What was once observed only among private institutions, some of the largest public research universities now rely

more on tuition than they do on state investments (Lyall and Sell 2006). This shift away from government support has given rise to terms such as the privatization or marketization of higher education (Fowles 2014; Lyall and Sell 2006; Ehrenberg 2006; Zusman 2005). Gifts and endowment revenues account for about 25 percent of private university income, while one in every three dollars comes in the form of research grants and contracts (McPherson and Schapiro 2006). At public institutions, meanwhile, endowment earnings and gifts provide about 11 percent of total revenues (McPherson and Schapiro 2006).

While one study uncovered a relationship between charismatic leadership and private donations and applications to religious colleges (Bastedo, Samuels, and Kleinman 2014), empirical studies of presidential influence on private philanthropy are essentially nonexistent. This speaks to a broader trend. As Liu (2006) acknowledges, “Scholarly research on private giving to higher education is very limited and has had a very short history as a serious subject of study” (125). Although the research is not voluminous, the existing literature of donative revenues points to a common theme: Donors want to be associated with the elites of higher education. In one of the only in-depth studies of private giving to higher education, Leslie and Ramey (1988) conclude that donors are attracted to large institutions that are regular recipients of private gifts. Similarly, Gianneschi (2004) finds that corporate and individual donors are more likely to give to public colleges and universities that already receive substantial support from the state. Some of the few determinants of philanthropic activity include universities’ enrollments, endowments, and quality (Gianneschi 2004; Smith and Ehrenberg 2003; Leslie and Ramey 1988). Substantiating earlier findings, Liu (2006) reveals a positive correlation between endowment growth and the proportion of total private giving to total revenue. Conversely, Liu (2006) determines that state appropriations

per FTE are negatively associated with alumni giving such that a 1 percent increase in state support translates to a .19 percent reduction in alumni contributions. More recently, Cheslock and Gianneschi (2008) report a significant effect of institutional type on private giving. They note that highly ranked institutions in the *U.S. News & World Report* take in nearly 3.5 times as much gift revenue as the least selective institutions in the rankings. The authors conclude that for every \$1,000 less in state revenue an institution receives, it sees a decline of \$45 in private gifts. Taken all together, these findings suggest a system in which the wealthiest, most selective institutions retain a systematic funding advantage over less selective, lesser funded universities.

According to the theory of publicness fit (Petrovsky, James, and Boyne 2015), a leader's previous managerial experience and familiarity with public ownership, funding, and regulation determines his or her ability to shape the performance of the new organization. The theory holds that institutional performance will improve or decline following a succession event based on the organization's pre-succession performance. Poorly performing organizations are expected to see an improvement while high-performing organizations should anticipate a performance decline. In the higher education context, university presidents who held prior managerial positions at public institutions presumably should be better equipped to secure resources from the state than presidents without experience at publicly owned colleges or universities. Likewise, individuals who previously held leadership positions at private institutions should be more adept at securing funds as presidents at private universities. Because of the demonstrated correlation between higher education governance and state appropriations, in particular, presidential experience with public regulation of higher education would seem highly valuable if not influential in the resource acquisition process. The following hypotheses therefore are presented:

H<sub>1</sub>: Universities performing at a high level prior to the succession event will experience a decline in performance following the succession event.

H<sub>1-A</sub>: For universities performing at a high level prior to the succession event, the performance drop following the succession will decrease with the successor's publicness fit.

H<sub>2</sub>: Universities performing at a low level prior to the succession event will experience an increase in performance following the succession event.

H<sub>2-A</sub>: For universities performing at a low level prior to the succession event, the performance improvement following the succession event will increase with the successor's publicness fit.

## **Data**

The unit of analysis in this chapter is the four-year university. The study examines performance across a 10-year span, from 2006 to 2015, within the 114 institutions in the Carnegie R1 classification of doctoral high-research universities.<sup>4</sup> As noted previously, these represent some of the largest, most complex, and highly competitive higher education institutions in the United States. Institutional data comes from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, while individual-level data of university presidents was collected from university websites, press releases, and presidents' curricula vitae. This chapter employs three distinct measures of university financial performance: state appropriations, research grants and contracts, and private gifts. Each of the three funding variables is divided by full-time enrollment to adjust for institutional size. While some private institutions receive nominal funding from state and local governments, IPEDS listed no state appropriations data for almost all private institutions in the sample during the

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<sup>4</sup> City University of New York Graduate Center was excluded because of extensive missing data in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, or IPEDS.

observation period. As a result, state appropriations are not considered for private institutions in this study.

The main independent variable of interest is the university president's publicness fit, which Petrovsky, James, and Boyne (2015) specify is a function of the difference in the public funding, regulation, and ownership between a leader's previous and current organization. In the current study, the public funding dimension merges state appropriations and government grants and contracts as a combined percentage of a university's total annual revenues. The ownership dimension reflects the legal ownership status of universities in the sample, 80 of which are classified as public and 34 of which are private. Public institutions are coded as 1, and private universities are coded as 0. Finally, the public regulation dimension represents the state-level governance structure that provides oversight or guidance to universities. Higher education coordinating boards reflect low regulation in the present study, whereas consolidated governing boards or direct legislative or gubernatorial oversight reflect a high degree of public regulation. Information on state higher education boards and commissions comes from the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (2018) and individual websites of current and former state higher education boards and commissions. Public regulation is treated as a dichotomous variable. Controls in the study include university age, endowment per full-time student, the percentage of black and Hispanic students, full-time enrollment, the state unemployment rate, and membership in a Power 5 football conference.

## **Results and Discussion**

The driving question for this chapter is whether presidents affect the amount of state, research, and private dollars coming to their universities. More specifically, when a new president

assumes leadership at an institution, are revenues notably altered based on his or her publicness fit? The results of this study suggest that incoming presidents have a limited effect on state appropriations. Of note, however, they appear to exert significant influence on research grants and private gifts. Each of the three performance variables is addressed here.

### *State Appropriations*

An important caveat to note is the Great Recession. While the recession's onset is often dated to 2008, its effects were not observed in this study until later years. State appropriations per full-time enrolled student peaked in 2008 at \$10,188. State support steadily declined across the following five years, reaching its lowest point at \$7,710 in 2013. Because recession effects were not uniformly felt across all states, a fixed-effects model allowed for a better observation of institution-level changes. Nevertheless, presidential succession events that occurred immediately after the onset of the recession might distort some of the findings reported here. As noted in the prior section, private universities were dropped from the analysis of this performance variable. Although some private institutions receive a small amount of funding from state and local governments, the IPEDS did not list state funding for the overwhelming majority of private universities in the sample.

Among the 80 public institutions in the study, annual state appropriations averaged \$8,777 per FTE. Turning to the pre- and post-succession figures, state appropriations declined slightly for universities that experienced a presidential change during the 10-year observation period (henceforth referred to as "transition universities"). In the three pre-succession years and including the year of the presidential change, transition universities averaged \$8,988 per FTE. Averaged



across the three immediate post-succession years, annual state appropriations per FTE for transition universities declined to \$8,860—a change of -1.42 percent (Table 4.1).

An initial fixed-effects regression of state appropriations on presidents' publicness fit showed no significant relationship when including all public institutions in the sample. As shown in Table 4.2, state funding per FTE was negatively correlated with university age ( $p < .001$ ) and positively correlated with membership in a Power 5 football conference ( $p < .05$ ). For every additional year in university age, public institutions can anticipate \$227 less in state appropriations per full-time student. While lump sums might be substantially larger for older state institutions, this finding indicates that younger universities receive more funding per student and therefore are likely more reliant on the state than are well-established universities that are able to draw more heavily from alternative sources of revenue. Concerning football, 47 of the 80 public institutions in the sample participated in a Power 5 conference for at least a portion of the observation period, many of them large flagship institutions. Membership in a Power 5 football conference translates to \$1,400 more in state appropriations per full-time student (Table 4.2). Because the analysis controlled for enrollment size and institution age, this finding provides some support for the notion that athletics is a driver of state support. Although many athletic programs rely on alumni donations and other licensing revenues, state lawmakers might be more likely to support institutions to which they have a personal interest, perhaps because of alumni affiliation.

Publicness fit was not a significant predictor of state appropriations across the sample, but disaggregation of the publicness fit variable allowed for examination of the difference between presidents' former and current organizations and the impact of those differences on state funding. Two of the publicness fit subcomponents—regulatory and ownership differences—had no impact

on state appropriations. Of note, the public ownership of the president's previous organization was not associated with state support for his or her current university. Put differently, prior work at a public institution had no discernable effect on state funding at the president's new university. Also worth noting, the presence of a higher education coordinating board played no significant role in state appropriations. Resource publicness, however, showed a modest but significant effect. Resource publicness here is described as the difference in the percentage of public revenues between a president's current organization and his or her previous organization. Interestingly, the percentage of public funding at a president's previous organization was not significantly associated with state appropriations at the current university. However, the *difference* in public funding between the two organizations was significantly associated with the current university's state appropriations per FTE (Table 4.3). With every 1 percent increase in the difference in public funding, state appropriations per FTE increased by \$8.43 at the president's current university. This finding is counterintuitive and indicates that presidents who transition from organizations that are less reliant on public funding to universities that are more reliant on public funding can anticipate a slight increase in state support.

To test the hypotheses set forth in this chapter, universities were separated into high- and low-performing groups. To begin, public universities were divided into quartiles based on the amount of state appropriations per FTE they receive. Hypothesis 1 predicted a decline in performance for high-performing universities following the succession event. This was partially supported. Among the highest-performing transition universities according to state funding, state appropriations per FTE dipped slightly in the first year after the presidential change, before increasing in the second and third years. State appropriations for these institutions increased 3.6

percent from the transition year to the third post-succession year. Hypothesis 2 posited a performance increase for low-performing universities following the succession event, and summary statistics supported this hypothesis. Among the transition universities in the lowest quartile, state appropriations per FTE increased consistently in each of the three post-succession years. Compared with the year of the presidential change, state appropriations per FTE improved by more than 5 percent by the third year following the succession event.

Because of the limited number of transition universities in the top and bottom quartiles, Hypotheses 1-A and 2-A could not be properly tested, requiring a modification to the performance groupings. Public universities were instead divided into halves to allow for regression analysis. Summary statistics show that state appropriations per FTE increased for the top half of transition universities, moving from an average of \$11,701 during the year of the presidential change to \$12,310 by the third post-succession year—an increase of 5.2 percent (Table 4.4).

By contrast, state appropriations per student fell among the bottom half of transition universities. During the year of the presidential change, these lower-performing institutions averaged \$5,701 per FTE. Three years after the succession, they were averaging \$5,502—a decrease of 3.42 percent. Among the transition universities, the president’s publicness fit was significantly and negatively associated with state appropriations among the top half of transition universities only during the first year after the presidential change (Table 4.4). This partly supports Hypothesis 1-A. Otherwise, publicness fit was not a significant predictor of state appropriations among the bottom half of transition universities for any pre- or post-succession years, or during the transition year itself. Hypothesis 2-A was not supported.

#### *Research Grants and Contracts*

While public institutions rely on state appropriations for up to half of their revenues, private institutions utilize research grants and contracts for a more substantial portion of their total receipts. The data in this study further evidenced this reality. Private universities in this study reported annual grant and contract revenues of \$28,283 per full-time student, compared with \$10,300 for public institutions (Table 4.5). Because public universities vastly outnumbered privates in the sample, the overall mean for grants and contracts was \$15,663 per FTE. Unlike state appropriations, grants and contracts did not demonstrate an emphatic, sustained shock from the Great Recession. Grant revenues across the sample averaged \$14,962 in 2006 and increased year over year until 2011, peaking at \$16,737. Grant funding per FTE declined, however, in the final three years of the observation period, concluding in 2015 at \$14,969.

Among transition universities, grant funding remained almost flat from before to after the presidential change. In the three years preceding the succession event and the transition year itself, institutions averaged \$14,631 in grant revenues. In the three post-succession years, they averaged \$14,749—an increase of 0.81 percent. Hypothesis 1 was partly supported, as top-quartile transition institutions experienced modest gains in grant funding in the first two post-succession years before seeing a 0.82 percent decline in the third post-succession year as compared with transition year revenues (Table 4.6). Hypothesis 2, meanwhile, was supported, as the bottom-quartile of transition universities witnessed year-over-year gains in grant revenues, including a 3.27 percent increase in the third post-succession year compared with transition year revenues. When dividing transition universities into top and bottom performers, results were mixed. Grant revenues increased for both groups following the succession event, countering Hypothesis 1 while supporting Hypothesis 2.

When incorporating all 114 institutions in the sample, fixed-effects regression revealed no significant correlation between presidents' publicness fit and the amount of grants and contracts revenue per FTE. As shown in Table 4.7, grant revenues were better predicted by two financial measures: university endowment ( $p < .001$ ) and the state unemployment rate ( $p < .001$ ). Because private university endowments are substantially larger than public institutions', and because private universities typically rely on grant revenues as a larger proportion of their total revenues than do public universities, this correlation is unsurprising. The state unemployment rate, meanwhile, can be viewed as a proxy for a state's economic health. With lower unemployment, states can expect to take in more tax revenues, which could explain increased grant and contract monies for large research universities.

Disaggregating the publicness fit variable, one subcomponent emerged as a significant predictor of grant funding: the difference in public ownership. University legal ownership in this study was treated as a dichotomous variable, with public institutions coded as 1. The *difference* in public ownership can be valued at 1 only when a president transitions from a private institution to a public institution. This finding therefore is logically sound, suggesting that presidents who served at private organizations before transitioning to a public university are better able to increase grant funding than presidents who transitioned from public to public or private to private. Private-to-public presidents are associated with a \$1,000 increase in per-student grant funding (Table 4.8). In this regression model, endowment and unemployment again were significant correlates of grant funding. However, the percentage of Hispanic students showed a positive association, while university age was negatively related.

Among the high- and low-performing groups—which were divided into halves because of the limited number of transition universities in the top and bottom quartiles—publicness fit was not associated with grant funding in the year of the presidential transition or any of the subsequent three years. Hypotheses 1-A and 2-A therefore were not supported. None of the three subcomponents of the publicness fit variable was consistently associated with grant funding in either the high- or low-performing group during the transition year or the following three years.

#### *Private Gifts*

Similar to grants and contracts, private gifts are concentrated within private universities. While the mean annual gifts per FTE was \$8,305 across the sample, private institutions averaged \$21,033 in gifts per year compared with just \$2,895 at publics (Table 4.5). Gift revenues also showed no sensitivity to recession effects. Save for one downturn in 2009, gifts per FTE increased year over year in each year of the study, increasing from \$7,000 per FTE in 2006 to \$11,104 in 2015. This could reflect a response to declining state support and drawdowns in grant funding in later years of the study, particularly 2012-2015, which might have prompted university leaders to prioritize private funding in an effort to offset losses elsewhere.

Gift revenues increased substantially following presidential changes. In the three years preceding the succession event and the transition year itself, transition institutions averaged \$5,880 in private donations. In the three post-succession years, they averaged \$6,715—an increase of 14.2 percent (Table 4.1). Support was found for both Hypothesis 1 and 2. Among the top quartile of universities in private gifts, donation revenues fell at transition universities following the presidential succession event. During the transition year, these institutions averaged \$27,412 in private gifts per FTE. During the three post-succession years, they averaged \$26,958—a 1.66

percent drop. Conversely, the lowest performing institutions in private gifts experienced notable gains. During the transition year, low-performing universities averaged \$711 in gifts per FTE. Across the following three years, they averaged \$749 per FTE—a 5.34 percent increase (Table 4.6). These effects were more pronounced when institutions were divided into top and bottom halves. Among the higher performing group, private gifts at transition universities fell by 3.35 percent in the three post-succession years as compared with transition-year receipts (Table 4.4). Among the lower performing group, transition university gift revenues per FTE increased by 18.14 percent in post-succession years.

Presidents' publicness fit was not significantly correlated with private gifts per FTE across the sample. Fixed effects regression revealed positive and significant relationships between gifts and two controls: endowment and university age (Table 4.9). For each additional year in university age, an institution can expect an additional \$403.40 in private gifts per FTE. These associations are commonsense, as private institutions are typically much older, tout much larger endowments, and receive substantially more revenue from gifts than do publics.

As was the case with grant funding, disaggregation of the publicness fit variable yielded a strong association between private gifts and the difference in public ownership. As noted earlier, the *difference* in public ownership can be valued at 1 only when a president transitions from a private institution to a public institution. This finding suggests that presidents who served at private organizations before transitioning to a public university are better able to increase private gift funding than presidents who transitioned from public to public or private to private. Private-to-public presidents are associated with a \$2,433 increase in per-student gift funding (Table 4.10).

This effect is more pronounced among high-performing universities, where private-to-public transition is associated with an increase in gifts per FTE of \$3,301.

Hypotheses 1-A and 2-A were only partly supported. Publicness fit was significantly and negatively correlated with gifts per FTE among low-performing transition universities in the year of the presidential change (Table 4.11). Conversely, publicness fit was significantly and positively correlated with gifts per FTE among high-performing transition universities in the first year following the presidential change (Table 4.12). These results are not entirely intuitive, and because they are not observed in other succession years, their association should be viewed with caution. This relationship is explored in greater depth in the concluding comments.

## **Conclusion**

The higher education financial landscape has markedly transformed in recent decades, and thanks to economic and political influences, governmental support for colleges and universities will remain a delicate subject. University presidents are adapting to these changes, seeking out revenues from diverse sources including tuition and fees, private gifts, and research grants and contracts. This study explored whether these institutional leaders wield influence over public and private revenues. Specifically, it examined the relationship between presidents' publicness fit and per-student revenues. Little support was found for publicness fit as a predictor of university funding. While a positive relationship between a president's publicness fit and state appropriations was observed in the first year following the presidential change among high-performing institutions, this appears to be an anomaly. Publicness fit was not associated with state funding when applied to the broader sample, nor was it a significant factor among low-performing transition universities in the years leading up to or following the presidential change. Similarly,



publicness fit was not significantly associated with grants and private gifts. Although correlations were found between publicness fit and these funding variables when looking specifically at high- or low-performing institutions, these connections were few, were wildly inconsistent, and were not predicted by theory or prior research. Any conclusions drawn from these connections should be made with caution.

Why is there no uniform link between publicness fit and university funding? Several possibilities exist. As acknowledged in Chapter 3, publicness fit in this study employs dichotomous coding for two of its three subcomponents: public ownership and public regulation. As such, publicness fit values exhibit little variation across presidents. The measure simply could be limiting by design. Another possibility is that presidents might not exert much influence over one or all of the financial measures employed here. State appropriations, in particular, have been consistently connected with demographic, economic, and political factors that could supersede presidential actions or background, potentially rendering their publicness fit moot. Although this possibility cannot be entirely ruled out, this explanation seems less likely once this chapter's findings are taken into account. While publicness fit as a composite variable did not demonstrate a consistent linkage to university funding, the disaggregated variable yielded an important finding: Research grants and private funds were both significantly and positively correlated with a change in public ownership. Put differently, when an individual departs a private institution to assume the presidency at a public institution, he or she can expect significant increases in per-student support from grants and gifts. Importantly, these increases are not trivial amounts—\$1,000 per FTE in additional grant money and \$2,433 per FTE more in private gifts. Considering the mean enrollment

of public institutions in the sample is slightly more than 29,000, this factor appears to translate to tens of millions of dollars in additional nongovernmental revenues.

This study also provided further evidence that presidential successions are not crippling events. Performance following leadership changes did not markedly decline. State appropriations dipped slightly for transition universities across the three years following the succession event, while grant funding slightly improved. In one of this study's key findings, private gifts per FTE improved by more than 14 percent in the three years following a presidential change. One explanation for this substantial improvement is prestige. As universities hire a new chief executive, they might embark on publicity campaigns to expose the president to alumni, corporate leaders, and wealthy donors. This enthusiasm could trigger increased donations among these groups. Alternatively, new presidents might prioritize fundraising as one of their first orders of business, leading to a surge in donative activity. Finally, new presidents could implement new development strategies that catalyze philanthropy. Future studies could build upon this finding by exploring the factors that stimulate private giving following presidential succession.

Several limitations must be acknowledged. Noting the repeatedly substantiated correlations between state appropriations and Medicare spending, gubernatorial party control, legislative party control, and legislative professionalism, the present study would have benefitted by controlling for these factors. Additional research could make this adjustment to better distinguish the influence of university presidents on levels of state support. The current study also did not account for program offerings that provide unique revenue-generating ability. Bioengineering, biotechnology, and other science and engineering programs conduct valuable research and development functions at many R1 institutions, bringing in large sums of federal grant money and industry support (Zusman 2005).

Future studies could accommodate for certain program offerings to better determine whether the presidential influence on fundraising is consistent once revenue-generating majors, laboratories, or innovation centers are taken into account.

This study also employed appropriations per FTE, which might not adequately reflect funding patterns and demographic conditions across states. While some states such as Arkansas, Oklahoma, Mississippi, and Alabama are home to only one R1 institution, some states such as California and Texas boast more than five. Wyoming, uniquely, has only one state-supported four-year university. Funding per full-time student could vary greatly between these states based not only on state economic trends but also on the number and classification of institutions. Although this study employed a fixed effects model that accommodated institutional conditions, later research could consider employing a modified dependent variable that better adapts to these state conditions. One could revise the measure used by McLendon, Deaton, and Mokher (2009) who utilized state appropriations per \$1,000 of personal income. Dividing that figure by full-time enrollment could produce a measure that concurrently accommodates state economic conditions and institutional enrollments.

Table 4.1: Resource Acquisition in Pre- and Post-Succession Years among Transition Universities

	State Appropriations	Research Grants	Private Gifts
Sample Mean	\$8,777	\$15,663	\$8,305
Pre-Transition Year 3	\$9,079	\$15,283	\$5,594
Pre-Transition Year 2	\$8,982	\$14,603	\$5,551
Pre-Transition Year 1	\$8,944	\$14,064	\$5,700
Transition Year	\$8,945	\$14,574	\$6,673
Post-Transition Year 1	\$8,956	\$14,874	\$6,312
Post-Transition Year 2	\$8,960	\$14,891	\$7,287
Post-Transition Year 3	\$8,663	\$14,483	\$6,547
Pre-Transition/Trans. Avg.	\$8,988	\$14,631	\$5,880
Post-Transition Avg.	\$8,860	\$14,749	\$6,715
% Change	-1.42	0.81	14.20

Table 4.2: State Appropriations per FTE on Publicness Fit (Fixed Effects)

VARIABLES	State Appropriations
Publicness Fit	144.1 (215.7)
Full-time Enrollment	-0.00441 (0.0297)
Endowment/FTE	4.474 (3.361)
University Age	-227.2*** (31.55)
Power 5 Football	1,400*** (504.7)
% Black Students	36.87 (56.31)
% Hispanic Students	22.13 (43.10)
Unemployment Rate	-58.10** (26.16)
Constant	38,402*** (3,776)
Observations	751
Number of universities	80
R-squared	0.209

Standard errors in parentheses  
\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Table 4.3: State Appropriations per FTE on Publicness Fit among Top Half Transition Universities (Post-Succession Year 1)

VARIABLES	State Appropriations
Publicness Fit	-9,722*** (2,881)
Full-time Enrollment	1.931* (0.871)
Endowment/FTE	-103.6 (62.75)
University Age	-498.4 (308.7)
Power 5 Football	(Dropped – Collinearity)
% Black Students	-380.5 (545.5)
% Hispanic Students	-530.7 (424.9)
Unemployment Rate	-627.3 (397.9)
Constant	39,810 (43,765)
Observations	54
Number of universities	37
R-squared	0.604

Standard errors in parentheses  
 \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Table 4.4: Performance of Transition Universities (Top and Bottom Halves)

	Transition Year	Post-Transition Year 1	Post-Transition Year 2	Post-Transition Year 3
Top Half - State App.	\$11,701	\$12,106	\$12,058	\$12,310
Bottom Half - State App.	\$5,701	\$5,806	\$5,449	\$5,502
Top Half - Grants	\$23,060	\$23,769	\$23,959	\$23,556
Bottom Half - Grants	\$5,960	\$5,979	\$5,977	\$6,109
Top Half - Private Gifts	\$13,605	\$12,964	\$14,273	\$12,209
Bottom Half - Private Gifts	\$1,474	\$1,611	\$1,698	\$1,915

Table 4.5: Public vs. Private Universities - Summary Statistics

	Public	Private
State Appropriations per FTE	\$8,777	*
Grants per FTE	\$10,300	\$28,283
Private Gifts per FTE	\$2,895	\$21,033
University Age	133.83	170.41
Endowment per FTE	\$27,023.32	\$415,473.60
% Black Students	6.77	5.47
% Hispanic Students	8.47	3.36

Table 4.6: Performance of Transition Universities (Top and Bottom Quartiles; Totals per FTE)

	Transition Year	Post-Transition Year 1	Post-Transition Year 2	Post-Transition Year 3
Top Quartile - State App.	\$14,220	\$13,995	\$14,444	\$14,732
Bottom Quartile - State App.	\$4,160	\$4,482	\$4,385	\$4,371
Top Quartile - Grants	\$37,711	\$37,524	\$38,062	\$37,403
Bottom Quartile - Grants	\$4,649	\$4,659	\$4,778	\$4,801
Top Quartile - Gifts	\$27,412	\$26,419	\$29,059	\$25,396
Bottom Quartile - Gifts	\$711	\$779	\$664	\$804

Table 4.7: Grants per FTE on Publicness Fit (Complete Sample)

VARIABLES	Grants/FTE
Publicness Fit	489.8 (339.6)
Full-time Enrollment	-0.0814 (0.0504)
Endowment/FTE	5.764*** (1.666)
University Age	-77.08* (46.27)
Power 5 Football	239.6 (801.0)
% Black Students	80.48 (95.93)
% Hispanic Students	136.9* (71.81)
Unemployment Rate	378.7*** (41.39)
Constant	23,717*** (6,051)
Observations	1,073
Number of universities	114
R-squared	0.087

Standard errors in parentheses  
 \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1



Table 4.8: Grants per FTE on Ownership Difference (Fixed Effects)

VARIABLES	Grants/FTE
Ownership Difference	1,000*** (377.8)
Full-time Enrollment	-0.0941* (0.0490)
Endowment/FTE	6.141*** (1.595)
University Age	-88.64** (44.02)
Power 5 Football	349.2 (753.0)
% Black Students	101.9 (92.03)
% Hispanic Students	150.2** (69.01)
Unemployment Rate	383.6*** (39.67)
Constant	25,344*** (5,740)
Observations	1,127
Number of universities	114
R-squared	0.096

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Table 4.9: Gifts per FTE on Publicness Fit (Fixed Effects; Complete Sample)

VARIABLES	Gifts/FTE
Publicness Fit	-3.894 (648.5)
Full-time Enrollment	-0.143 (0.0963)
Endowment/FTE	26.48*** (3.182)
University Age	403.4*** (88.38)
Power 5 Football	-1,437 (1,530)
% Black Students	-91.49 (183.2)
% Hispanic Students	96.00 (137.2)
Unemployment Rate	-75.97 (79.06)
Constant	-49,189*** (11,558)
Observations	1,073
Number of universities	114
R-squared	0.163

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Table 4.10: Gifts per FTE on Ownership Difference (Fixed Effects; Complete Sample)

VARIABLES	Gifts/FTE
Ownership Difference	2,433*** (721.5)
Full-time Enrollment	-0.149 (0.0935)
Endowment/FTE	25.12*** (3.046)
University Age	382.4*** (84.07)
Power 5 Football	-892.2 (1,438)
% Black Students	-76.53 (175.8)
% Hispanic Students	98.14 (131.8)
Unemployment Rate	-75.68 (75.77)
Constant	-46,298*** (10,963)
Observations	1,127
Number of universities	114
R-squared	0.168

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Table 4.11: Gifts per FTE on Publicness Fit among Low-Performing Transition Universities in the Transition Year (Fixed Effects)

VARIABLES	Gifts/FTE
Publicness Fit	-1,417** (523.2)
Full-time Enrollment	-0.106 (0.0800)
Endowment/FTE	-50.49 (29.63)
University Age	246.5*** (55.55)
Power 5 Football	1,385** (616.3)
% Black Students	281.2** (117.5)
% Hispanic Students	-5.036 (58.17)
Unemployment Rate	103.7** (39.65)
Constant	-29,278*** (6,758)
Observations	70
Number of universities	50
R-squared	0.903

Standard errors in parentheses  
 \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Table 4.12: Gifts per FTE on Publicness Fit among High-Performing Transition Universities in Post-Succession Year 1 (Fixed Effects)

VARIABLES	Gifts/FTE
Publicness Fit	3,704** (1,356)
Full-time Enrollment	-0.711* (0.338)
Endowment/FTE	25.27** (7.248)
University Age	1,151*** (301.7)
Power 5 Football	(Dropped – Collinearity)
% Black Students	863.3 (494.4)
% Hispanic Students	-492.9 (715.5)
Unemployment Rate	-340.7 (323.7)
Constant	-163,368** (49,681)
Observations	50
Number of universities	37
R-squared	0.895

Standard errors in parentheses  
 \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

## CHAPTER 5

### THE IMPACT OF UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS ON RANKINGS

#### Introduction

Although their origin dates to the 1870s, the emergence of college rankings as a ubiquitous phenomenon in higher education can be traced to the early 1980s when *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *U.S. News and World Report* issued their first lists of the United States' top national universities (Meredith 2004; Monks and Ehrenberg 1999). In the subsequent decades, numerous publications, national governments, and prominent international universities have compiled catalogs of the leading national universities, liberal arts colleges, law and medical schools, and business programs (Meredith 2004). University rankings have been viewed as a tool for consumers, seemingly helping students and parents to assess colleges' quality and value for the dollar (Hazelkorn 2008; Clarke 2007; Monks and Ehrenberg 1999). Between 1995 and 2006, the proportion of students who said rankings were "very important" in choosing their college grew by more than 50 percent, from 10.5 percent to 16.4 percent of students (HERI 2007). At the same time, the proportion of students who said rankings were not important in their college choice declined by nearly 20 percent (HERI 2007). Rankings historically have mattered to select groups of students. In the late 1990s, for example, two-thirds of parents of high-achieving high school seniors deemed the *U.S. News* rankings "very helpful" in the college selection process (Machung 1998). McDonough et al. (1998) similarly reported that rankings were important in choosing a college among high achievers from high-income homes. Enrollment figures support these assertions, with as many as 55 percent of students attending the highest-ranked school to which they were admitted (Griffith and Rask 2007).

Acknowledging that rankings are of use to students—particularly the top achievers—in selecting their college, university administrators have acceded to the modern rankings reality. A 2001 survey of university presidents by the Association of Governing Boards revealed that more than three-quarters of presidents consider rankings somewhat or very important to their institution (Levin 2002). Because colleges and universities are driven by enrollment, rankings often are treated as a key recruitment tool (Weerts, Freed, and Morpew 2014). Not surprisingly, university administrators have frequently made strategic and personnel changes in an effort to influence rankings (Gnolek, Falciano, and Kuncel 2014). Specific university staff often are assigned to oversee the collection and reporting of institutional data to some of these rankings organizations, requiring the completion of extensive surveys and questionnaires, such as that of the *U.S. News* which contains about 600 questions (Griffith and Rask 2007). Ehrenberg (2002) recounts an incident at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in 2000 in which an administrator forgot to provide the most up-to-date institutional data to *U.S. News*. The publication defaulted to prior year figures as a result, which did not reflect many of the college's improvements. Consequently, when the 2001 rankings were published, Hobart and William Smith Colleges tumbled into the second tier of national liberal arts colleges. The administrator was fired as a result of the oversight, and the university's new president reportedly spent his first few months in office working to repair the reputational damage caused by the rankings debacle (Ehrenberg 2002). In more recent years, image management has moved beyond U.S. borders. In a survey of university leadership across 41 countries, Hazelkorn (2008) reports that 93 percent of university presidents and senior leaders want to improve their national rank, while 82 percent want to raise their international rank. Doing so, they say, will improve government funding of their institutions, improve their image among

benefactors, and help them to recruit star faculty (Hazelkorn 2008). These beliefs help explain why some institutions have spent hundreds of millions of dollars to move into the top tier of rankings (Farrell and Van Der Werf 2007), while other universities offer performance bonuses to presidents based on the university's position in the *U.S. News* rankings (Jaschik 2007).

Because they have become synonymous in many ways with institutional prestige and quality, and because of their salience to university leaders, rankings represent a unique measure of performance in higher education. This chapter examines the influence of university presidents on institutional position in national and international rankings, specifically targeting the relationship between ranking position and presidents' publicness fit. Rankings literature is first reviewed, followed by a description of the data and results. Concluding remarks, limitations, and recommendations for future study are included.

### **The Rankings Landscape**

The current rankings field is crowded with general and specialty lists covering a wide array of educational institutions, from national four-year universities, to private liberal arts schools, to graduate and vocational programs. Domestically, some of the more prominent rankings have included those published by the *Princeton Review*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Money*, *Businessweek*, and *Forbes* (Clarke 2007). Yet within the United States, the annual "Best Colleges" rankings published by *U.S. News and World Report* have achieved the greatest notoriety, leading some to refer to them as the "gold standard of the rankings business" (Ehrenberg 2002, 146) and the "swimsuit issue" of college rankings (Volkwein and Sweitzer 2006, 131). The *U.S. News* rankings emerged in 1983, initially ordering just the top 25 national universities according to their academic reputations among peer university presidents (Meredith 2004; Clarke 2002). It has since



expanded its list to 50 universities by 1998 and to 125 in 2006 while incorporating three nonnumeric “tiers” of institutions (Grewal, Dearden, and Lilien 2016). In addition to its print publication, the *U.S. News Best Colleges* report receives millions of views online each month (Marklein 2007).

In the mid-1990s to early 2000s, *U.S. News* relied on a rankings formula that blended institutional prestige, selectivity, and student performance. During this period, academic reputation received a weighting of 25 percent, the largest single factor in the formula (Ehrenberg 2002). Counter to its early years during which *U.S. News* asked only university presidents to rank their peers, the publication expanded the respondent pool in the 1990s to include provosts and deans (Ehrenberg 2002). By 2001, *U.S. News* had incorporated 16 unique measures (Clarke 2002) and assigned them the following weights: 25 percent to academic reputation; 20 percent to graduation and retention rates; 20 percent to faculty resources; 15 percent to student selectivity (as reflected by acceptance rates, SAT/ACT scores, and the percentage of students admitted from the top 25 and top 10 percent of their class); 10 percent to educational expenditures per student; and 5 percent each to alumni giving and graduation rate performance (Ehrenberg 2002). These weights underwent minor modification during the following decade. The most recent rankings, those of 2019, feature entirely new measures of quality, such as a social mobility measure that reflects an institution’s ability to retain and graduate low-income students (US News 2019). The publication has not abandoned peer assessment, however, although it has diminished the reputational weight by 5 percent in recent years such that it now accounts for one-fifth of a university’s rank score (US News 2019).

Spurred in part by the internationalization of education—and in part both by the popularity of *U.S. News* and the widespread criticisms of its ranking methodology—global college rankings sprang up in the early 2000s. Among them, the Academic Ranking of World Universities, or ARWU, produced by Shanghai’s Jiao Tong University, were first released in 2003 (Usher and Savino 2007). Unlike some of the other global university rankings, such as those by *Times Higher Education* or Hong Kong’s Education18, ARWU has eschewed subjective measures of prestige and instead put the overwhelming majority of its stock—as much as 90 percent—into institutional research performance (Marginson and van der Wende 2007; Usher and Savino 2007). Despite their novelty compared with more established national rankings, ARWU quickly came to be considered the “brand leader” in their category (Hazelkorn 2008, 194). Publication and citation numbers account for one-fifth of the ARWU score, while articles in arguably the most two prestigious research journals in the natural sciences—*Science* and *Nature*—account for another 20 percent. ARWU rankings also are based on institutional affiliation with Nobel laureates and Fields Medal recipients (Docampo and Cram 2014). Marginson and van der Wende (2007) acknowledge that the ARWU rankings by design favor institutions that are large, well funded, and oriented toward sciences and mathematics. Since its inception, the ARWU rankings have listed the top 100 world universities, in which U.S. research institutions are overwhelmingly represented.

### **Criticisms of Rankings**

University rankings have not been without their detractors. Scholars and university administrators have questioned their value, their measures, and what administrators deem detrimental effects of rankings on higher education admissions and performance management. Because of their traditional use of numeric ordering and at times less-than-transparent

methodologies, rankings publications have been accused of misleading consumers and creating false impressions of quality differences between comparable schools. As told by Clarke (2002), Stanford University president Gerhard Casper authored a letter to the editor of *U.S. News* in 1996, lamenting the publication's reliance on what he dubbed a "football-ranking mentality" by which *U.S. News* made numeric but statistically insignificant differentiations between universities (39). Sauder and Lancaster (2006) and Clarke (2002) substantiated this early criticism of the *U.S. News*' rankings, finding that changes in rank over time amongst the highest-ranked universities by and large are statistically insignificant.<sup>5</sup> Clarke (2002) specifically suggests that, when individually evaluating each of the rankings' 16 measures of undergraduate institutions, there is little difference between the No. 1 and No. 10 institutions, nor is there significant differentiation between the No. 15 and No. 50 universities. Clarke's (2002) conclusions suggest a sort of banding in which the most highly ranked institutions are virtually indistinguishable, followed by a larger second-tier band of universities that too are almost identical in terms of quality.

Others, meanwhile, have railed against *U.S. News*' reliance on institutional selectivity in the form of SAT scores and high school graduation rank of admitted students. The practice, some critics assert, overemphasizes the value of standardized testing while diminishing the importance of well-roundedness among admitted students (Meredith 2004). This selectivity bias also leads rankings publications to ignore the quality and impact of faculty, the accomplishments of individual researchers or units, and other indicators of teaching and learning (Porter and Toutkoushian 2006; Dill and Soo 2005).

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<sup>5</sup> Bowman and Bastedo (2009) report contradictory findings among top 25-ranked universities. However, changes to the *U.S. News* ranking methodology between 2001 and 2008 could explain these conflicting conclusions.

Rankings also might have catalyzed what Clarke (2007, 61) calls a “stratification” of the higher education system by which institutions progressively become divided along the lines of selectivity, with further polarization of the haves and have-nots in the race to recruit high-achieving students. In this paradigm, institutions treat students as statistical benefits or detriments to their position in national or global rankings. Because of their emphasis on standardized test scores and graduating class position, rankings incentivize universities to discount other student performance indicators, to draw down their admit rates, and to utilize early-decision systems that encourage students to accept entry to an institution rather than wait for admissions and financial aid offers to come in from other schools (Pusser and Marginson 2013; Clarke 2007). Institutions also have expanded their merit aid in an effort to attract top students and boost their position in rankings, in turn reducing need-based aid programs that often target underrepresented populations (Gnolek, Falciano, and Kuncel 2014; Pusser and Marginson 2013; Sauder and Espeland 2009; Dill and Soo 2005).

### **Playing the Rankings Game**

Research on the effects of university rankings helps to illustrate their significance to university administrators and high-achieving students. Collectively, the most prominent studies of rankings demonstrate how upward mobility in the rankings—or continued top-tier placement—benefits institutions in terms of selectivity, reputation, and revenue generation. Among the most elite private four-year institutions, Monks and Ehrenberg (1999) find that university selectivity increases as an institution moves higher up in the rankings. Specifically, with an upward shift of five places, a university’s admissions rate declines by 2 percentage points while the percentage of admitted students who enroll improves by 1 percent. The inverse holds true, as well, given that

institutional selectivity declines with poorer rankings and fewer admitted students go on to enroll. As a result, universities must admit a larger portion of total applicants, in turn loosening their selectivity constraints. SAT scores of incoming freshmen at lower-ranked institutions therefore decline. Monks and Ehrengberg (1999) also find that a fall of 10 places in the rankings translates to a 3 percent reduction in tuition revenues.

In a related study, Meredith (2004) notes that institutional movements in the *U.S. News* rankings produced significant changes in future selectivity. He finds that when a university moves from the second quartile to the first quartile in the numerical rankings, the percentage of students who graduated in the top 10 percent of their class increases by 1.5 percent. Additionally, such a shift results in a 4 percent reduction in the university's acceptance rate. Meredith (2004) reports similar but slightly smaller effects when universities move from the third quartile to the second quartile. However, institutions that move one place within the top 25 do not observe any changes in selectivity, suggesting that improvement in rankings matters much more for lower-ranked universities than it does for the most elite institutions. Falling into a lower quartile, meanwhile, results in a significant drop in average SAT scores, suggesting that as institutions' ranking declines, so too does its selectivity in subsequent years. Based on this finding, Meredith (2004) concludes that students with higher SAT scores apply in smaller numbers to the institutions that have experienced a drop in the rankings.

Replicating earlier work, Bowman and Bastedo (2009) examined the effects of rankings changes on national and liberal arts universities. They find that among national universities, an upward shift of one spot in the *U.S. News* rankings is responsible for a 1.2-point increase in the average SAT score of incoming students in the following year. While this finding supports earlier

research, the authors also note a significant increase in applications with a one-rank improvement. Perhaps most notably, Bowman and Bastedo (2009) uncover a unique and positive effect of appearing on the front page of the national university rankings—which historically has displayed the numerically ranked top 50, 100, or 125 institutions, depending on the publication year. Moving from the second page to the first page of the rankings layout translates to a 3.9 percent increase in the proportion of admitted students who graduated in the top 10 percent of their high school senior class. Among the top 25-ranked universities, Bowman and Bastedo (2009) find that a one-position improvement in the rankings resulted in small but significant improvements in the average SAT score and number of applications to the institution, as well as a small but significant reduction in the university’s acceptance rate.

Most recently, Gnolek, Falciano, and Kuncl (2014) echo the results of Meredith (2004) and Clarke (2002), finding that rankings movement among the top universities is uncommon and generally insignificant. Among the top 40 ranked universities in the *U.S. News*, the researchers determine that changes in rank upwards or downwards by two places is noise. They issue a similar conclusion when incorporating universities outside of the top 40 that experience a position change of plus or minus four places. Taken all together, these studies indicate that movement in the rankings is rare and difficult, albeit beneficial to the institutions that are able to do so. Likewise, this research suggests that the rankings game perpetuates an academic arms race for high-achieving students.

### *Academic Reputation*

“Rankings and selectivity are bound together, as are selectivity and institutional prestige.”  
— Pusser and Marginson (2013)

The largest subcomponent of the *U.S. News* ranking is academic reputation, which for many years has accounted for 25 percent of institutions' scores. Changing peer perceptions seemingly could vault an institution from rankings mediocrity to the upper echelon, or vice versa. The recent literature indicates that institutional prestige stems from student quality and institutional selectivity—which themselves are strong predictors of ranking position. That institutional reputation and ranking position are greatly intertwined is therefore unsurprising. Porter and Toutkoushian (2006) authored one of the first studies addressing the factors that affect academic reputation. Noting that the *U.S. News* rankings do not incorporate research measures, they nevertheless evaluate the reputational score against the number of academic publications by faculty at an institution. They report significant albeit modest gains in reputational score based on changes in research productivity. Specifically, the authors note mere 0.04-point increase in the 4-point reputation score when the average number of publications increases by 10 percent. By contrast, for every 100-point increase in the average SAT score, the reputation score improved by 0.4 points. Porter and Toutkoushian (2006) also report lower reputational scores associated with smaller faculty sizes and larger proportions of science degrees awarded. Research productivity also has been shown to influence peer assessment scores among some global rankings (Linton, Tierney, and Walsh 2011).

In a related study, Volkwein and Sweitzer (2006) report similar results, finding significant associations between academic reputation and three institutional characteristics: total enrollment, graduation rate, and average full professor salary. Faculty research productivity also emerged as a significant contributor to the reputational score in another of the researchers' models. Volkwein and Sweitzer (2006) conclude that larger, older, and wealthier universities are inclined to score

higher in the prestige measure thanks to the advantages they possess in recruiting quality students and faculty.

More recently, the findings of Bastedo and Bowman (2010) suggest that an institution's position in the *U.S. News* rankings shapes not just prospective students' perceptions of the university but also changes the minds of higher education leaders. The researchers find that as institutions in the top 25 moved upward in the rankings, their peer assessment scores in subsequent years improved irrespective of previous peer assessments. The same could be said of institutions that experience upward shifts between *U.S. News* tiers, which historically have grouped institutions into non-numerically ranked bands outside of the top 50, 100, or 125 numerically ranked universities. Bastedo and Bowman (2010) conclude that "higher education experts, who might normally be expected to have relatively stable assessment of reputation over time, are substantially influenced by rankings that many of them ostensibly disdain" (179). Moreover, these effects are not limited to national rankings of undergraduate institutions. Bowman and Bastedo (2011) reveal a similar trend within the *Times Higher Education* rankings of global universities, noting that rankings appeared to shape future peer assessments, whereas earlier peer assessments had no significant bearing on institutions' future rankings.

Changes in reputational assessment are typically small and differently affect high-ranking and low-ranking institutions. Grewal, Dearden, and Lilien (2016) find that changes in peer assessment scores generate greater movement in rankings for lower-ranked institutions, and that rankings competitions are waged essentially among similarly ranked institutions within narrow ranges. In their study of rankings movement, Gnolek, Falciano, and Kuncl (2014) make specific note of the relative stability of peer assessments among the highest ranked institutions, pointing



out that reputational scores did not change for four of the top 40 universities across the eight-year observation period in their study.

If an institution were committed to making a significant year-over-year improvement in ranking, specifically within the *U.S. News* list, its best opportunity to do so—statistically speaking—would be to improve its academic reputation. One of the few short-term acts that could produce such an effect would be the hiring of a well-known and respected president who could provide some of the needed reputational currency. As Harvard education professor Richard P. Chait commented to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, “The search for a president is a search for iconic prestige” (Blumenstyk 2005, A28). A new president also could make strategic changes in the first months or years of his or her presidency that could yield incremental improvements to objective measures in the rankings. The theory of publicness fit (Petrovsky, James, and Boyne 2015) suggests that these strategic changes are more likely and more productive when an incoming leader’s previous managerial experience mirrors the organization that he or she is hired to lead. In the higher education context, a new president steeped in public university management, for example, should be better able to navigate regulatory and governmental funding hurdles, perhaps taking advantage of state incentives for performance or research productivity (Conner and Rabovsky 2011; UT System 2015). According to the publicness fit theory, institutional performance will improve or decline following a succession event based on the organization’s pre-succession performance. Treating national and global rankings as a measure of performance, the following hypotheses are presented:

H<sub>1</sub>: Universities performing at a high level prior to the succession event will experience a decline in performance following the succession event.

H<sub>1-A</sub>: For universities performing at a high level prior to the succession event, the performance drop following the succession will decrease with the successor's publicness fit.

H<sub>2</sub>: Universities performing at a low level prior to the succession event will experience an increase in performance following the succession.

H<sub>2-A</sub>: For universities performing at a low level prior to the succession event, the performance increase with the successor's publicness fit.

## Data

The unit of analysis in this chapter is the four-year university. The study examines performance during a 10-year period, 2006 to 2015, within the 114 institutions in the Carnegie classification of doctoral high-research universities.<sup>6</sup> As noted previously, these represent some of the largest, most complex, and highly competitive higher education institutions in the United States. Institutional data comes from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, while individual-level data of university presidents was collected from university websites, press releases, and presidents' curricula vitae. This chapter utilizes two measures of university performance: positioning in the *U.S. News & World Report* Best Colleges rankings (*U.S. News*) and in the Academic Ranking of World Universities by Shanghai Jiao Tong University (ARWU).

The main independent variable of interest is the university president's publicness fit, which Petrovsky, James, and Boyne (2015) quantify as a function of the difference in the public funding, regulation, and ownership between a leader's previous and current organization. In the current study, the public funding dimension combines state appropriations and government grants and contracts as a percentage of a university's total annual revenues. The ownership dimension

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<sup>6</sup> City University of New York Graduate Center was excluded because of extensive missing data in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, or IPEDS.

captures the legal ownership status of universities in the sample, 80 of which are classified as public and 34 of which are private. Ownership is treated as a bivariate measure with public institutions coded as 1 and private universities coded as 0. Finally, the public regulation dimension reflects the state-level governance structure that provides oversight or guidance to universities. Higher education coordinating boards reflect low regulation in the current study, whereas consolidated governing boards or direct legislative or gubernatorial oversight indicate a high degree of public regulation. Information on state higher education boards and commissions comes from the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (2018) and individual websites of current and former state higher education boards and commissions. Public regulation is treated as a dichotomous variable. Controls in the study include university age, endowment per full-time student, the percentage of black and Hispanic students, full-time enrollment, the state unemployment rate, and membership in a Power 5 football conference.

As noted earlier, *U.S. News* historically has grouped universities into tiers, with only the first group receiving a numeric rank. In 2006 and 2007, for example, the numeric rankings extended from 1 to 125. Institutions that fell below No. 125 were grouped into unordered tiers, simply named “Tier 2,” “Tier 3,” or “Tier 4,” in which no institution was assigned a numeric rank. *U.S. News* expanded the top tier to include an ordered listing of the top 150 institutions in 2008 before moving to display the top 200 in 2011. In order to properly capture the direction and magnitude of the coefficients in the current study, the rankings were multiplied by -1 so that the top-ranked institution each year maintained the highest numeric value in the sample. Alternatively, the rankings could have been arranged in reverse numerical order. For example, had there been 150 institutions in the numeric rankings, the top-ranked university could be coded as No. 150. That

was ill advised in this case, however, because the number of numerically listed universities in the *U.S. News* rankings varied from year to year. Had the rankings been inversely ordered, the top-ranked university in could receive a value of 125 one year, 150 another year, or 200 another year. To avoid skewing the data, the values were converted to negatives.

Also as a result of the *U.S. News*' reliance on unordered tiers, the lowest-performing universities in terms of *U.S. News* rank could not be treated as a continuous variable, unlike the high-ranking universities that are numerically ordered in the top 125, 150, or 200, depending on the year of publication. Consequently, 165 observations in which universities were listed by *U.S. News* as Tier 2, 3, or 4 were excluded from the possible 1,140 total *U.S. News* observations. With these non-numeric rankings removed, the universities were regrouped into thirds based on their position in the numerically ordered rankings. Although the remaining 975 observations could have been evenly divided into perfect thirds of 325 observations per group, there were many occurrences in which universities tied in the *U.S. News* rankings. To avoid splitting tied universities across groups, observations were divided as closely as possible to even, resulting in a high group of 329 observations, a middle group of 321 observations, and a low group of 325 observations. Universities in the high group ranged in *U.S. News* rank from No. 1 to No. 35. Institutions in the middle group varied in rank from No. 36 to No. 77. Universities in the low group, meanwhile, were ranked from No. 78 to No. 190. It should be noted that, for two reasons, not every possible rank in these ranges is actually filled. First, when universities are tied, such as at No. 4, the rankings resume at No. 6. As such, no institution is ranked No. 5. This pattern is observed throughout the 10-year period in this study. Second, the *U.S. News* rankings include some institutions that were

not classified as Carnegie high research doctoral universities—and therefore were not part of this study’s sample.

ARWU rankings were not conducive to high- and low-performance distinctions. ARWU historically has ranked universities numerically only for the top 100, while pushing about 80 percent of remaining universities into unordered bands that vary in size. These typically include a group ranging from 101 to 150 and another from 151 to 200. Larger bands then round out the final 300 universities, ranging from 201 to 300, 301 to 400, and 401 to 500. As with the *U.S. News* “tiers,” institutions in these ARWU bands do not receive a specific numeric rank and instead are ordered alphabetically. Although ARWU expanded its rankings in 2017 to include 800 universities—and then broadened again in 2018 to list the top 1,000 institutions—ARWU included only the top 500 universities for the entire observation period in this study. As a result of the large banding practice by ARWU, it is conceivable that an institution at the lower end of the fifth band could have made vast improvement that, were individual rankings assigned, would have seen its position rise as much as 80 or 90 places but still not enough to move into the next highest grouping. Mere movements between these bands or tiers is insufficient as a measure of performance improvement because they discount both incremental and monumental changes in research productivity that take place within the larger bands of 100 institutions apiece. Because the ARWU rankings do not provided the needed specificity to observe ranking movements among lower-ranked universities, only the institutions in this study’s sample that appeared in the ARWU top 100 were evaluated. These institutions were treated as high-performing (as in, highly ranked) universities as specified in Hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 2 was applied only to *U.S. News* rankings and not to the ARWU classification.

## Results and Discussion

The summary statistics suggest a large downward trend in *U.S. News* ranking position among transition universities in the years following a presidential change (Table 5.1). Within the *U.S. News* rankings, the average rank among transition universities declined by about 10 percent (not to be mistaken for a 10-position change) across the three post-succession years compared with their average ranking in the three pre-succession and transition years. While this could signal a dampening effect of succession on rankings, this figure should be interpreted with some skepticism. As noted previously, the *U.S. News* rankings are not numerically listed for all universities, and the number of numerically displayed institutions is not uniform across the 10-year observation period in this study. The increasing average rank of transition universities in post-succession years could partly reflect the broadening of the *U.S. News* numeric listings in 2008 and 2011, which allowed universities that previously would have been labeled simply as Tier 3 or Tier 4 to later receive a large numeric rank, ranging from the 150s to 200. Because the sample period is 2006 to 2015, post-succession years by default are more numerous after the *U.S. News* expanded its numeric rankings list to at least 150.

Hypothesis 1 predicted a decline in rankings for high-performing universities—in this case, the already highly ranked institutions—following a presidential change. Within the *U.S. News* rankings, this was not supported. The average rank across the three post-succession years among high-performing transition institutions was 17.54—a miniscule 0.14-point downward departure from the 17.68 average rank during the year of the presidential change (Table 5.1). This effectively meant no rankings changes among the high-performing transition universities. This finding comports with recent research in rankings mobility, which has generally held that the highest-

ranking universities experience little to no movement from year to year (Grewal, Dearden, and Lilien 2016; Gnolek, Falciano, and Kuncel 2014). Within the ARWU rankings, Hypothesis 1 also was not supported. During the year of the presidential change, transition universities that ranked in the ARWU top 100 maintained an average rank of 43.71. Across the following three years, these institutions' average rank was 41.36—an upward shift of more than two positions on average (Table 5.1).

Hypothesis 2 predicted an upward shift in rankings for low-performing institutions—stated otherwise, a climb in position for the already lower-ranked universities. This hypothesis was not supported, and an opposite trend was observed. The average *U.S. News* rank among the lower third of transition universities was 117.95 during the year of the presidential change. The average rank consistently declined in each of the three post-succession years, ending at 123.58 in the third post-succession year while averaging 120.97 across the three-year post-succession period (Table 5.2). Hypothesis 2 could not be tested against the ARWU rankings as noted earlier, as a consequence of the rankings' lack of specificity within the lower tiers.

Turning to the independent variable of interest, presidents' publicness fit was not associated with universities' broader positioning in the ARWU rankings. That is to say, when universities were divided into three performance groups—high, middle, and low, as based on their general positioning across the 500 institutions in the overall rankings—their *group* association was unrelated to presidents' publicness fit. By contrast, publicness fit was significantly and positively correlated with institutions' performance group placement in the *U.S. News* rankings when universities were divided into thirds (Table 5.3). When delving beyond broad performance groups

and into the specific numeric rank in the ARWU and *U.S. News* rankings, ranking position was not significantly related to publicness fit in either rankings publication.

Within the *U.S. News* rankings, numeric ranking position was much more sensitive to student demographic and institutional characteristics. As shown in Table 5.4, a 1 percent increase in the percentage of black student enrollment yielded a 1.1-position decline in the *U.S. News* rankings. Similarly, for every additional 1 percent of Hispanic student enrollment, university ranking is expected to decline by 0.74 positions. Full-time enrollment also was significantly and negatively associated with ranking position. Conversely, university age was positively and significantly correlated with ranking position, such that an additional year in institutional age translates to a 0.28-position increase in ranking. Collectively, these findings show that older, smaller, and less diverse universities tend to place higher in the *U.S. News* rankings. Although a linear regression of ARWU rankings on publicness fit showed significant and positive effects of enrollment, endowment, and research grant funding per full-time student, two of the three factors dissipated once institutional effects were incorporated in the fixed effects model. This regression model revealed only endowment as a significant factor, although the coefficients were so small as to render it virtually inconsequential.

Among only transition universities, there were insufficient observations to utilize a fixed-effects model to regress numeric ranking on publicness fit. Alternatively, a linear regression model was used within the high- and low-performing universities in both sets of rankings. Neither the ARWU nor the *U.S. News* numeric ranking positions were associated with presidents' publicness fit among transition universities, in either high or low groups, whether during the year of the presidential change or during any of the three post-succession years. As



such, Hypotheses 1-A and 2-A were not supported. Position rank in either the ARWU or *U.S. News* rankings also was not associated with any of the publicness fit subcomponents—ownership difference, public funding difference, or regulatory difference.

## **Conclusion**

For more than 30 years, university rankings have been used by consumers to make their college choice. They have been particularly important to high-achieving students, who bring with them the highest SAT and ACT scores and highest graduating position in their senior classes. Thanks to the increasing popularity of rankings and the value assigned to them by high achieving high schoolers, university administrators have been forced to embrace the national and global rankings whether they want to or not. Because universities remain enrollment driven and are increasingly reliant on high-achieving students in order to be competitive in research and to attain performance goals that are positively correlated with selectivity—such as the retention rate and six-year graduation rate—rankings are likely to remain front of mind for university presidents for the foreseeable future.

The findings of this study indicate that presidents' publicness fit has no effect on rankings at their current institution. University characteristics, both demographic and resource-based, exert much more influence on this unique measure of performance. This study produced two important results. First, numeric position in the *U.S. News* rankings is influenced by institutional age, size, and demographic makeup. That smaller, older, and less diverse universities tend to place higher in the *U.S. News* rankings is not unusual. Rankings research overwhelmingly has concluded that institutional selectivity and resources translate to higher ranking position. The top 25 rankings year in and year out in *U.S. News* are dominated by the oldest and most selective universities in the

United States, most of which are private and have substantially larger resource pools from which to draw. Second, of the highest-level research universities in the Carnegie doctoral classification, positioning in the top 100 of the ARWU rankings is influenced by endowment. Private institutions—which boast endowments that on average are 16 times larger than those of public universities—dominate the top positions in the ARWU rankings each year. In the final year of this study, 2015, U.S. universities accounted for 17 of the top 20 universities in the ARWU rankings. Of those, 12 were private. Private U.S. universities also filled eight of the top 12 spots in the same year's rankings.

Several limitations and conditions should be noted. As was the case in Chapter 3, the study in this chapter would have benefited from a common measure of institutional selectivity, such as SAT scores. Because of extensive missing data in the IPEDS data for SAT scores in the 25<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> percentiles from 2006 to 2015, particularly in the SAT verbal score, this variable was omitted. It must be acknowledged, too, that *U.S. News* and ARWU adjust their rankings formulas periodically, weighting certain factors more intensely or less so in order to capture changes in higher education priorities and in response to feedback from institutions and higher education researchers (Clarke 2002). *U.S. News*, for example, has adjusted its rankings formula more than 20 times since its first year, 1983. These changes alone are responsible for institutional shifts in rankings. As Clarke (2002) notes, *U.S. News*' decision in 1997 to no longer round scores to the nearest whole number precipitated major shifts in institution's position, leading the University of Iowa to fall 12 places from 1998 to 1999. Some of the post-succession rankings declines observed among low-performing transition universities could be partly attributed to minor modifications in the rankings formulas. Because financial factors accounted for about 45 percent of the *U.S. News*

rank in a given year in this study, fluctuations in state support, research grants, tuition revenues, gifts, and alumni donations could impact institutions' positions on the list. Statewide cuts to higher education could mean minor but significant changes to one or more institutions' scores, causing them to fall in the rankings even if other universities make no improvements or advancements in their funding, selectivity, or student performance.

Perhaps it not surprising that presidents' publicness fit and its subcomponents showed no significant effect on university rankings. Rankings do not change easily and are "remarkably stable," especially among the most highly ranked institutions (Gnolek, Falciano, and Kuncel 2014, 762). This study's sample is populated almost entirely by universities that comprise a majority of the universities in each annual iteration of the *U.S. News* and ARWU rankings. It would logically follow that neither the high- nor low-performing transition universities experienced rankings gains in the years following a presidential change. Although lower-ranked universities have far greater room to improve than do highly ranked institutions, and the likelihood of longtime elite institutions suddenly losing ground is exceptionally low, movement throughout the rankings is slow and difficult. As Gnolek, Falciano, and Kuncel (2014) demonstrate, thanks to *U.S. News*' heavy weighting of graduation rate, some highly ranked institutions would have to increase their average graduation rate by just 2 percent to see a one-position rise in the rankings. This is no easy task, considering the highest-ranked institutions already boast graduation rates in the upper 80s to low 90s. Still, it represents a realistic opportunity for rankings improvement. By contrast, because *U.S. News* for years weighted the acceptance rate at 8 percent of its total score, these highly ranked institutions would have had to cut their admit rates by an unrealistic 30 percent to experience a similar one-position boost in the rankings.

It is worth noting that universities retain at least a modest amount of influence over many factors in the rankings formula, including admit rate, graduation rate, retention rate, fundraising, and faculty resources. Where they do not maintain any direct control, however, is the peer assessment score. Because reputation scores historically have constituted the largest proportion of an institution's rank, it can be concluded that ascending to the upper echelon of the rankings from outside the top 40 or 50 is almost impossible. Even were an institution to improve its empirical measures to match those of top 10 universities, there is such little variation between the top institutions' scores that the aspiring university could not crack the top 10 or possibly even the top 20 based on its objective improvements alone. It would require a concurrent reputational score boost. Because reputational scores have been found to be virtually static, however, it is unlikely that aspiring universities would experience the needed prestige gains. Moreover, it is unlikely that elite universities' peer assessments will suffer a precipitous decline thereby opening the door for middling universities to climb up. With that in mind, Gnolek, Falciano, and Kuncl (2014) estimate a .001 percent likelihood of these reputational gains needed for a university in the 30s to move into the 20s in the *U.S. News* rankings. Presidential prestige might make a difference among lower-ranked universities, where movement is less restricted, but presidents' publicness fit seems to have little effect on the rankings game.

Table 5.1: *U.S. News* and ARWU Rankings among Transition Universities

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	<i>US News</i> Rank (Numeric Only)	ARWU Rank (Top 100)
Sample Mean	64.15	41.87
Pre-Transition Year 3	62	41.47
Pre-Transition Year 2	66.03	41.36
Pre-Transition Year 1	70.89	43.38
Transition Year	70.38	43.71
Post-Transition Year 1	69.4	42.35
Post-Transition Year 2	72.81	39.19
Post-Transition Year 3	80.01	42.54
Pre-Trans./Trans. Avg.	67.33	42.48
Post-Transition Avg.	74.07	41.36
% Change	-10.01	2.64

Table 5.2: Average *U.S. News* Ranking among Top and Bottom Third Transition Universities

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	Transition Year	Post-Transition Year 1	Post-Transition Year 2	Post-Transition Year 3
Top Third	17.68	18.19	16.75	17.67
Bottom Third	117.95	118.38	120.95	123.58

Table 5.3: *U.S. News* Group on Publicness Fit (Fixed Effects)

VARIABLES	<i>U.S. News</i> Grouping
Publicness Fit	0.0485** (0.0236)
Full-time Enrollment	-6.87e-06* (3.65e-06)
Endowment/FTE	1.14e-05 (0.000102)
University Age	0.00576* (0.00308)
Power 5 Football	0.0326 (0.0533)
% Black Students	-0.0153 (0.00930)
% Hispanic Students	-0.0127** (0.00511)
Unemployment Rate	0.00532* (0.00289)
Grants/FTE	-9.43e-07 (2.02e-06)
Constant	-2.561*** (0.430)
Observations	919
Number of universities	108
R-squared	0.026

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Table 5.4: *U.S. News* Numeric Rank on Publicness Fit (Fixed Effects)

VARIABLES	<i>U.S. News</i> Rank
Publicness Fit	0.644 (0.846)
Full-time Enrollment	-0.000394*** (0.000131)
Endowment/FTE	-0.00294 (0.00367)
University Age	0.280** (0.110)
Power 5 Football	0.366 (1.915)
% Black Students	-1.101*** (0.334)
% Hispanic Students	-0.742*** (0.184)
Unemployment Rate	-0.0903 (0.104)
Grants/FTE	5.08e-05 (7.25e-05)
Constant	-85.19*** (15.43)
Observations	919
Number of universities	108
R-squared	0.054

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSION**

Leadership change is an inevitability for organizations of all stripes. Within the higher education setting, the frequency of executive turnover has increased in the last decade, exposing colleges and universities to greater instability and more routine strategic redirection. In turn, institutions regularly find themselves in search of presidents who fit the organization and will position it for success. The latest in a long line of theories of individual-organizational fit (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, and Johnson 2005; Donaldson 2001; Chatman 1989), the theory of publicness fit (Petrovsky, James, and Boyne 2015) posits that the match in publicness between an incoming leader's previous organization and the new organization will provide him or her with the contextual experience to either improve the institution's performance following the succession event, or to stabilize it in the long term. This dissertation represented the first known study to employ the publicness fit theory and formula, applying it to incoming presidents at four-year, high-research doctoral universities. The analyses produced little support for publicness fit as a predictor of university performance as measured by student-centered outcomes, resource acquisition, or institutional prestige. Nevertheless, the studies here provided several important takeaways. Perhaps most importantly, presidential succession was not a disruptive event that stymied university performance. Across student-centered measures (retention rate, graduation rate, and degree production), performance improved at universities that experienced a leadership change in each of the three years following the succession event. Although state appropriations to these transition universities dipped by about 1 percent after a presidential change, research grants remained virtually flat while private donations increased substantially. Lastly, high-ranking



institutions that changed presidents experienced little to no movement in college rankings after the succession, while low-ranking universities' minor downward shift in rankings after succession events is likely attributable to *U.S. News*' expanding numerical rankings over time rather than an objective change in performance in post-succession years.

That presidential transition did not stunt performance raises several possible conclusions. As noted in each of the empirical chapters, some traits and experiences of presidents, such as publicness fit, might wield little to no power on performance. This dissertation did not delve into other presidential characteristics and experiences that might affect performance, such as length of tenure, educational attainment, academic publishing, or field of expertise. This is worth noting, considering some support has been found for presidential length of service as an influence on graduation rates (Rutherford 2017). Leaders' tenure, race, and gender represent several variables of interest in contemporary study of institutional ability to achieve public outcomes (Merritt and Farnworth 2018; Juenke 2005). It is also possible that university presidents, either because of positional constraints or the complexity of their institutions, have limited ability to sway university performance for the better or worse. The assumption that presidents can directly affect institutional performance could reflect the tendency to romanticize leadership and credit executives for improvements and blame them for failures—even when the linkage between leadership and performance is indirect or unclear (Chen and Hambrick 2012; Meindl, Ehrlich, and Dukerich 1985). Four-year doctoral universities, as large bureaucratic organizations, might rely on a sort of performance inertia more so than presidential interventions. Alternatively, institutional performance might be subject to other, stronger influences such as student selectivity, institutional wealth, size, and age. The correlations shown in earlier chapters support this notion. University

age and private ownership were positively correlated with all three student-centered measures. Among resource measures, endowment and unemployment emerged as predictors of research grants, while private gifts were positively related to endowment and university age. Lastly, in terms of prestige measures, older, smaller, and less diverse universities were more likely to rank highly in the *U.S. News & World Report* Best Colleges rankings.

Presidents appear to exert influence over some performance measures, however, most notably the intake of private gifts and research grants. Public universities that hired their presidents away from private organizations can expect a \$1,000 increase in per-student grant funding and a \$2,433 increase in private gifts per full-time student. These findings suggest that presidents who rose up through private institutions are better acquainted with securing nonstate funding, whether in the form of philanthropic gifts or alumni donations. The coefficients are striking when taking total enrollments into account. At large public universities with tens of thousands of students, a \$1,000 increase in grant funding per student could translate to tens of millions of additional dollars. Future studies could expand the sample of universities to determine whether this relationship applies to all doctoral and master's granting universities, and whether previous positions, academic reputation, or targeted fundraising experience are some of the driving forces behind private-to-public presidents' ability to acquire research grants and gifts.

This dissertation uncovered an idiosyncrasy of the publicness fit formula that future studies might look to address. The publicness fit model suggests that the connection between individual leaders and organizational performance depends upon the *difference* in public ownership, funding, and control between the leader's previous and current organization. The fixation on the quantifiable difference in public funding, ownership, and control between organizations has the

effect of making publicness fit an interval variable, in effect disregarding the inherent publicness of each organization. To demonstrate, one can envision two scenarios in which two leaders' publicness fit values are similar if not identical despite significant differences in resource publicness of the organizations they once led and now lead.

Scenario 1:	President moves to University B (60% public funded) – from University A (50% public funded)
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10% difference

Scenario 2:	President moves to University D (20% public funded) – from University C (10% public funded)
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10% difference

In these scenarios, the difference in resource publicness for both presidents is 10 percent. Although Universities A and B are of similar resource publicness, as are Universities C and D, the president in Scenario 1 previously served and currently leads an organization that is much more dependent upon state and federal dollars. Presumably, he or she should be more comfortable working to secure public funding, having been employed in organizations that rely heavily on government allocations. By contrast, the president in Scenario 2 has been less reliant on public funds and therefore has likely been forced to seek out private gifts and grant funding to satisfy budget requirements. Even though the theory and model sync, considering the theory is concerned with the “fit” or match between the old and new organizations' publicness, it is impossible to determine whether *organizational* publicness has an impact on “outcome publicness” (Lee 2017, 187), such as state allocations or expenditures on public service initiatives. It is reasonable to

assume that presidents in Scenario 1 would be better suited to achieve outcomes that are more public in nature, but the publicness fit differential overlooks this possibility.

The publicness fit model also appears ill suited to higher education. Because universities by and large are becoming more tuition dependent and less reliant on government support, their ownership dimension is less relevant than it was even 20 years ago. If not for the increased regulation and oversight of public higher education, many of the differences between public and private universities would be purely semantic. Universities that receive less than the average percentage of public funds could be considered less public, meaning a president with only private university experience could show almost as good a “fit” as someone who previously served at a public institution that received limited government support. Does publicness fit matter more, then, at universities where public funding and oversight are much higher? The current model does lend itself easily to such a test.

The variable representing the public control dimension of the publicness fit formula emerged as one of several shortcomings and limitations of this dissertation. The presence of a higher education coordinating board is one of several governance layers that dictate policy to public universities, and some scholars might argue that boards of trustees or legislature party affiliation better reflect regulatory influence, as some studies have explored (McLendon, Deaton, and Hearn 2007; Knott and Payne 2004). Nevertheless, any measure of control that requires a binary variable will produce the same concerns of limited variance that were observed in this dissertation. To illustrate the limited nuance of the publicness fit formula when using dichotomous variables, take Colorado State University president Tony Frank, an internally hired candidate who previously served as the provost at Colorado State. The university’s ownership and regulation

values did not change from 2007 to 2008 when Frank was named president. However, the university's public funding percentage dipped slightly from 54 to 52 percent. The difference of a mere 2 percentage points in public funding was enough to set Frank's publicness fit value at 50 (Figure 6.1). Contrast that with the publicness fit of University of Chicago president Robert Zimmer, an external hire (Figure 6.1). Zimmer came from a private university—Brown University—to his current private institution, in effect zeroing out the ownership and regulation dimensions of the model. The difference in public funding between Brown University and the University of Chicago from 2013 to 2014 was only 1 percent, which—when added to zero values in the other two dimensions—resulted in Zimmer's 2014 publicness fit value of 100. Comparing these two cases, the difference of 1 percentage point in public funding led to a publicness fit value of 100 for one president (Zimmer) and value of 50 for another (Frank). Greater variation would occur with the use of continuous variables for ownership and control, or perhaps the formula could be revised to omit the ownership dimension. As noted previously, the public/private label in higher education increasingly has become more superficial than substantive. A potential ordinal measure of control could be the number of external regulatory bodies to which an institution is subject to oversight. Some institutions are beholden to trustees, boards of regents, state agencies, and legislatures, while others are exposed only to one or two layers of oversight. Researchers who employ the publicness fit model also might opt to exclude private institutions altogether, considering they are less likely to operate under similar controls—making their inclusion in a sample more likely to unrealistically bias the data.

Other variable limitations were present in this dissertation. The three empirical studies would have benefited from the inclusion of several control variables that were either omitted or

for which sufficient data could not be obtained. Chiefly, these would include a measure of institutional selectivity such as the incoming class’s high school GPA. Because selectivity correlates with several measures of performance in the studies, such as *U.S. News* ranking, retention rate, and graduation rate (Clarke 2002; Webber and Ehrenberg 2010; Astin 2005), controlling for student quality would have allowed for a more accurate interpretation of the relationship between university performance and critical presidential and institutional variables. The percentage of Pell Grant recipients also would have been insightful by indicating the extent to which universities admit low-income students who often bring lower academic bona fides. Because admitting lower-income individuals also could be interpreted as a measure of public service orientation, Pell Grants also could have been used as a measure of institutional publicness. Future studies of university publicness could incorporate such a measure.

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Publicness fit (Tony Frank) =	Publicness fit (Robert Zimmer) =
$\frac{1}{[a^* (54 - 52)^2 + b^* (1 - 1)^2 + c^* (1 - 1)^2]^{(1/2)}}$	$\frac{1}{[a^* (13 - 14)^2 + b^* (0 - 0)^2 + c^* (0 - 0)^2]^{(1/2)}}$
= .5	= 1

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Figure 6.1: Comparison of Publicness Fit Values

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Researchers who employ the publicness fit model in the future should consider increasing the number of organizations and studying the succession events that occurred only during one year, as opposed to all leadership changes across all years. Doing so should prevent a scenario in which too few succession observations are available to properly assess publicness fit among high- or low-

performing organizations. It also would standardize the process and eliminate conditions in which early- or late-period successions prohibited a more complete analysis. For example, if a succession event occurred in 2014 in this dissertation, 2015 would serve as the sole post-succession year to evaluate. Likewise, a 2007 succession event would leave 2006 as the lone pre-succession year to analyze. It would be more effective to review leadership changes that took place in just one year, such as 2010, and examine performance across all organizations in the three years before and after the succession year. This would also allow for the inclusion of a control group comprising all organizations that did not experience a leadership change at all during the observation period, such as 2007-2013. While multiple succession events could occur within a two- or three-year period, a large enough sample could allow researchers to include only those organizations that experienced a single succession event and only during a specified year. Regardless of research design, additional studies are needed to determine whether publicness fit is a valuable predictor of organizational performance, be it in higher education, public management, or elsewhere.

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## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Charles “Chad” Thomas has spent his professional career in education and journalism with a focus on public accountability and public service. He graduated from The University of Texas at Austin with a bachelor’s degree in psychology, where he worked as a writer and editor for *The Daily Texan* while freelancing for *The Dallas Morning News*. He later received his Master of Science degree in journalism from the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism at Ohio University and went on to report and edit for community and regional daily newspapers in Texas. Since 2010, he has served as director of student media at The University of Texas at Dallas, where he entered the Public Affairs doctoral program in 2014. His research interests include public higher education administration and policy, public administration ethics, and sustainability in public organizations.

# CHARLES “CHAD” THOMAS

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chadthomas@utdallas.edu

## EDUCATION

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- PhD    The University of Texas at Dallas  
         School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences  
         Public & Nonprofit Management (expected August 2019)
- MS     Ohio University  
         E.W. Scripps School of Journalism  
         Master of Science in Journalism
- BA     The University of Texas at Austin  
         College of Liberal Arts  
         Bachelor of Arts in Psychology

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

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The University of Texas at Dallas — Director of Student Media  
Richardson, Texas (November 2010 – present)

- Provide editorial, leadership, and career guidance to more than 180 student staff members within the department’s four nationally recognized media organizations.
- Drafted the department’s annual program assessment guidelines that employ an extensive content-analysis-based approach coupled with practicum-driven student learning outcomes.
- Developed and implemented the department’s first-ever yearly personnel performance appraisal systems for students and advisers.
- Led 2013 and 2017 internal and external reviews of the department using program standards issued by the Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher Education. Assessments included collaboration with students, faculty, and administrators to develop and implement a multi-stage action plan to address technology needs and human resources gaps in departmental policies and procedures.
- Proposed sweeping amendments to departmental bylaws in 2011 and 2017, ushering them through approval bodies including the Handbook of Operating Procedures Committee and the Student Media Operating Board.
- Supervise two professional full-time staff members and 30 stipend student workers.
- Maintain six cost centers totaling approximately \$600,000 and departmental equipment inventory of more than \$150,000.

- Establish publication dates, advertising rates, and ad deadlines. Oversee invoicing and collections of more than 60 on- and off-campus clients.
- Chair the Student Media Operating Board, a campus committee of faculty, staff, and students that provides editorial oversight and appoints student leadership.
- Facilitate orientation and training opportunities for students, securing guest speakers from professional media organizations including the *Dallas Morning News*, KERA, and NPR.

Previous:

*Tyler Morning Telegraph* – Business Editor (2010) – Tyler, Texas

*The Williamson County Sun* – City Reporter (2008 – 2009) – Georgetown, Texas

Round Rock ISD – Journalism Teacher (2004 – 2007) – Round Rock, Texas

*Round Rock Leader* – Sports Editor (2003 – 2004) – Round Rock, Texas

## **UNIVERSITY SERVICE & LEADERSHIP**

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UT Dallas SACSCOC Reaffirmation Committee (2016 – 2017)

- Chaired subcommittee on institutional environment and prepared reaffirmation reports on university health, safety, and security.

UT Dallas Safety and Security Council, Staff Chair (Fall 2014 – present)

- Review campus-wide safety concerns and make policy and procedural recommendations to key stakeholders including the university president, police department, and student support services.
- Co-chair meetings, prepare meeting minutes, and submit annual report to the Academic Senate.

UT Dallas Campus Bill Analyst, 85<sup>th</sup> and 86<sup>th</sup> Legislative Sessions (2016 – 2017; 2018 – 2019)

- Served as one of nine campus bill analysts assisting the Vice President for Public Affairs, focusing on draft legislation relating to Student Affairs' 25 reporting areas and other student services-based bills.
- Assessed the financial, staffing, and rule-making impacts of more than 80 bills focusing on a variety of higher education subjects including sexual assault reporting, housing operations, student health care, military veteran support, and student fee elections.
- Interviewed departmental directors and academic administrators to prepare written assessments for UT Dallas and UT System leadership with proposed bill amendments and policy recommendations.

UT Dallas Staff Council (2012 – 2018)

- Served as one of five members of the council's Executive Committee for five of six years on the council.
- Chaired the nine-member Benefits Committee for three years, advocating staff services and benefits.
- Chaired the Communications Committee for two consecutive years, overseeing the production of the quarterly newsletter sent to the university's 2,600 staff members.
- Gathered financial data and policy documentation from 10 peer institutions in preparing a written proposal to the UT Dallas president in 2017 to create the President's Outstanding Staff Award for exceptional employees and supervisors.
- Drafted a Staff Council proposal to the president in 2014 to implement a reduced tuition policy for staff dependents.
- Revised the Staff Council Scholarship application and rewarding criteria as secretary of the Benefits Committee in spring 2014 and chair in 2016.

Other:

UT Dallas Search Committee, Vice President for Communications (Spring 2017)

UT System Employee Advisory Council, alternate representative (September 2013 – present)

UT Dallas Student Affairs Professional Development Committee (2016 – 2018)

UT Dallas Weeks of Welcome Committee (2011 – present)

UT Dallas Homecoming Committee (2011 – 2016)

UT Dallas Athletic Hall of Honors Selection Committee (2014)

UT Dallas Athletics Guest Broadcast Commentator (2012 – 2013)

## **SELECT SERVICE & COMMITTEES**

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College Media Association (2013 – present)

- Chair the Digital and Multimedia Committee and serve as one of 11 members on the CMA advisory committee.
- Organized the conference schedule and workshop offerings as a member of the convention committee for the 2017 National College Media Convention.
- Directed the largest convention track (digital media) and secured 21 workshop sessions led by professionals from *The Dallas Morning News*, CNN, and KERA.
- Provide newspaper, magazine, and website critiques to visiting advisers and students at the annual National College Media Convention (2014 – present).

Texas Intercollegiate Press Association (March 2011 – present)

- Served on the Convention Committee for the 2015 convention in San Antonio.
- Judged on-site writing and design contests and Best of Show entries (2011-2015).
- Proctored on-site writing and design contests (2012-2015).
- Assisted in the coordination of speaker sessions for the 2014 convention.

- Provided newspaper, magazine, and website critiques to visiting advisers and students (2012-2015).

Other:

Oklahoma College Media Association, contest judge (2014 – present)

Illinois College Press Association, contest judge (2016 – present)

## RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

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- “University Presidents and Performance: Testing the Theory of Publicness Fit.” The University of Texas at Dallas, doctoral dissertation (Forthcoming 2019).
- “The Performance Problem: Predicting Presidential Turnover at Large Research Universities” (In Progress).
- “University Presidents and Performance: Testing the Theory of Publicness Fit.” Conference paper for the Southern Political Science Association, 2019.
- “Making Maniacs: How a Football and Basketball Promotion Campaign Fostered Fan Interest at Southern Methodist University from 1978 to 1981.” Ohio University, 2013.

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

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2011 – 2012    *Introduction to Media*  
                     School of Arts and Humanities  
                     The University of Texas at Dallas

2007 – 2008    *Introduction to News Writing & Reporting*  
                     E.W. Scripps School of Journalism  
                     Ohio University

## PRESENTATIONS

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- *University Presidents and Performance: Testing the Theory of Publicness Fit* — Southern Political Science Association Conference (January 2019, Austin, Texas).
- *Revival by Rebranding: Reinvigorating Publications and their Staffs* — Texas Intercollegiate Press Association Conference (April 2015, San Antonio, Texas).

## AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

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- Sandee Goertzen Award: UT Dallas Staff Council Member of the Year (2016)
- UT Dallas Staff Council Scholarship (Spring 2015, Fall 2015, Fall 2016)

- Texas Associated Press Managing Editors Awards (2011)
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> Place — Team news coverage
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> Place — Business writing
- Hopewell Middle School Teacher of the Year, Finalist (2006, 2007)