

## Foreword

While *The College President Handbook* is intended for new college and university presidents, the range of topics thoughtfully compiled and spritely written by accomplished current and past presidents offers an opportunity for a broader audience of readers. The volume is unusual as it combines specific recommendations, observations, and takeaways filled with candor, humor, and uplifting stories for one of education's most challenging roles. Governing boards, search committees, and senior leadership would find this book of great interest and utility in their work. As a former college president for eighteen years, I wish I'd had this book when I started and could have benefited from the essays throughout my tenure.

Editors James Soto Antony, Ana Mari Cauce, Lynn M. Gangone, and Tara P. Nicola have successfully curated a wise and diverse group of presidents and chancellors who write of their professional and personal experiences across various sectors of higher education. From community colleges, small liberal arts colleges, and regional institutions to flagship state universities and medical centers, the authors detail their hard-earned experiences and share them with readers in generous and compelling ways. New presidents reading this book will be struck—and hopefully comforted—by the variety of professional experiences that prepared the authors for their presidencies. While many have risen in the academic ranks from professor to dean or provost, others enter the office as student affairs professionals bringing expertise in diversity and inclusion as well as budget and strategic planning. Others join the academy with impressive nontraditional backgrounds as a cabinet member, elected official, and successful lawyer. They write about the presidency from their experience of long service to one institution, service to two institutions, or interim status to those early in their current role. Their personal and professional backgrounds mark the diverse landscape of higher education and its rich tapestry; an inspiring collection of lives led in pursuit of the common good.

While their individual stories are diverse and compelling—immigrants, activists, graduates of their institution or those who “snuck” onto campus for a tour before an interview, board chairs, scholars, and administrators—a common thread comes out loud and clear in each of the twenty-four essays: student-focused leadership as the North Star.

## THE SCOPE OF THIS BOOK

Readers will have the opportunity to delve into key aspects of higher education administration with candid assessments supplemented by sourced information and research. They will have the full scope of this unique job described as “a calling” (McCartney, chapter 2); “a calling to serve” (Gunter-Smith, chapter 22); “the face of the university” (Cauce, chapter 1); “the ‘first fan’ of athletics” (Kustra, chapter 8); “the storyteller-in-chief” (Christ, chapter 4); “the listener-in-chief” (Crutcher, chapter 19); “a diplomat,” “salesperson,” and “actor” (McCartney, chapter 2); and “a manager of change” (Gunter-Smith, chapter 22).

### *Transition and the Early Years*

Various authors touch upon the importance of the transition to the presidency and the early years. David W. Oxtoby (chapter 3) writes about his monthly visits to his new institution between his appointment and move to campus, while intentionally avoiding big events, allowing his predecessor to conclude the year. Several authors reflect upon the imperative of active listening during the transition and early years while getting to know the senior team, faculty, students, alumni, and board of trustees. Kathleen McCartney (chapter 2) organizes worthy recommendations around two five-year terms and recalls the advice of a former colleague to “keep smiling” and set the tone for a presidency while managing time, building a team, and cultivating equanimity. Cynthia Teniente-Matson (chapter 11) urges taking the time to “reflect and write your narrative, and relate it to the institution you are leading.” These early signals of listening, staffing decisions, and opportunities for particular emphasis are all key ingredients for successful presidencies. Ross Gittell (chapter 13) argues for the importance of highlighting the need for financial sustainability early in a tenure to prepare and guide the community for uncertain economic futures.

### *Staffing*

Directly or indirectly, each president references the imperative of building a senior team and, with it, a campus culture that reflects the new president’s values and aspirations. It is clear in reading the collection of essays—about everything from

emergencies and strategic planning to day-to-day management—that presidents will not achieve their desired goals without an able team of colleagues working in common pursuit. Once again, early listening and assessment of senior staff are critical as new presidents are advised to “assume nothing” (Teniente-Matson, chapter 11). Some authors call out specific roles essential for supporting a president’s success: senior development officer (Mills, chapter 16); executive assistant and chief of staff (McCartney, chapter 2); and the athletic director who reports directly to the president (Kustra, chapter 8).

### *Finances and Fundraising*

The complex financing of higher education and its challenged business model is a deserved focus of several chapters. New presidents will receive real-world advice and recommended resources to understand financial statements and schedules and to “know questions to ask” the chief financial officer (Stuebner, chapter 12). Useful guidance is offered on strategic financial management (Gittell, chapter 13) and the opportunities that exist for engaged trustees to pair their expertise with staff (Stuebner, chapter 12), a necessary reality for smaller institutions especially.

Financial stewardship is required of all presidents—those serving public or private institutions, large or small—and a key component is fundraising to advance the institution’s strategic goals. Fortunately, Barry Mills (chapter 16) lays out a positive philosophy for those who look to a presidency and fear the least desired aspect of the job. From building an advancement team and the prioritization required in a capital campaign, to the “silent phase” (a term I always found amusing since I never felt we were ever particularly silent on the import of securing more funds!) and “the ask”—Mills notes the importance for presidents to build confidence with donors as people generally “invest in your institution and you.” Patricia McGuire (chapter 17) reflects on her extraordinary thirty-year presidency noting that fundraising builds alumni engagement and loyalty; she wisely counsels “communication, testimonials, and success” in messaging.

### *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*

In the critical chapter on the role of the president in supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion, Sheila Edwards Lange (chapter 14) traces the history and “paradigm shift” in higher education from these issues as optional priorities of a president to a “necessary component” for institutional excellence and student success. Lange draws on her own experience and argues effectively to establish diversity as an institutional priority with attendant strategic communications to internal and external audiences with accountability and metrics for progress.

### *Communications*

A common thread throughout the essays is the vital importance of communications to every stakeholder of the institution. Presidents in this volume offer specific counsel: “do not engage in conflict unless absolutely necessary” (McGuire, chapter 17); communicate in controversial situations with bias response teams; and know that quick responses are important but so is centering the institution’s mission and values at the core of communication strategy (Crutcher, chapter 19). Communicating with clarity enables a president to lead by values (Drake, chapter 9), and social media platforms allow even a self-described introvert to be an accessible president to a larger campus population (Ono, chapter 18).

### *Shared Governance*

In one of the clearest and most helpful treatments of shared governance, Michael H. Schill (chapter 5) lays out its challenges and rebuts them with examples of effective outcomes. The COVID-19 pandemic is cited as an example of how higher education was able to mobilize quickly. While shared governance may “not always be pretty and it might not always be speedy,” Schill effectively makes the point of its significant contributions to the sector.

### *Planning*

Several authors attest to the responsibility of the president to oversee planning in key areas. President Michael Crow (chapter 21) argues that “to be a college president in the first decades of the twenty-first century is to be a manager of change.” How to oversee early transition planning (Oxtoby, chapter 3), federal and state legislative agendas (Napolitano, chapter 7), advancement and capital fundraising (Mills, chapter 16), and emergency management (Hutchinson, chapter 20) are all covered with personal experience and solid recommendations. Daniel R. Porterfield (chapter 23) offers a particularly thoughtful essay about being “contemplatives in action” while planning for life after the presidency.

### *Working with Boards of Trustees*

New presidents will especially value the sage advice of several authors on the topic of how to cultivate productive relationships with trustees. Eduardo J. Padrón (chapter 10) calls out the importance of trust with the board of trustees; David W. Oxtoby (chapter 3) writes of the candor required of board relationships; and Mary Sue Coleman (chapter 6) draws from her own experience on a university board and having successfully led two large state institutions to highlight the value of one-on-one communication and active listening. Similarly, Carol T. Christ (chapter 4), who led

a small liberal arts college and a large research university, notes the effectiveness of personal interaction with trustees.

## **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

While the individual chapters address the major elements of a president's portfolio, the collective impact of this book lies in the unmistakable spirit and dedication of the women and men who generously offer their advice. Despite the demands ("Enjoy working hard because the work is hard by any standard," writes Kathleen McCartney in chapter 2), presidents poignantly reflect on the privilege to hold these positions as they struggle with work-life balance (Gunter-Smith, chapter 22). Consider their descriptions of the presidency: "a true gift and blessing" (Cauce, chapter 1); "bringing dreams to life" (McCartney, chapter 2); "a life-changing job [. . .] some part of it becomes you. It takes root in your heart" (Christ, chapter 4); "the gift of problems" you can solve (Borrego, chapter 15).

For eighteen years, I was privileged to serve as president of Hobart and William Smith Colleges. Fortunately, I had a committed and dedicated team to work with our board of trustees, faculty, staff, students, and the local community to advance our priorities. While we had our share of challenges and crises, I share in the joyful and appreciative reflections of this role. For those embarking on this journey, I wish you the very best. You can make a real difference. Enjoy.

—MARK D. GEARAN

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