

THE RESEARCH UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT'S SERVICE ON EXTERNAL
BOARDS

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education – Doctor of Philosophy

2016

ABSTRACT

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This dissertation explores and analyzes the nature of the service on external boards performed by presidents at twelve research universities. This qualitative study examines why presidents choose to serve on some boards and decline other opportunities to do so, provides insight as to the relationship between a president's role and objectives and external board service, and illustrates various components of such board service. The dissertation then uses two theoretical frameworks to investigate how such service is both managed and perceived by a president.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to first thank my Dissertation committee for their direction and wisdom during this project. Thanks to Karen Klomparens who has been a key part of my life as both a law student and doctoral student via our collaboration not only on the committee but in advocating for graduate and professional students at Michigan State University. Thanks to Brendan Cantwell for always being willing to ask tough, fair-minded questions and pushing me to go further with this project. And, thanks to Roger Baldwin for sharing his insight and experiences to try and hone the project for practical application and use by higher education decision-makers.

A special thank you must go to Marilyn Amey, the Chair of my Dissertation committee. Without her words of encouragement and guidance throughout my time as a doctoral student, much of this would not be possible and especially not in the timeline we both had in mind. My sincerest gratitude to you for being an excellent partner in this process.

Next, I owe a great debt of gratitude to those individuals who gave me such wonderful, practical learning experiences through my doctoral program. Ginny Haas, Dave Byelich, Vennie Gore, Vernon Miller, Denise Maybank, and Jim Pignataro: I have learned a lot about many different aspects of the higher education world thanks to you opening the door for me to get a mere taste of what it is like in your respective worlds. I hope I can continue to grow as a higher education professional and any success I am blessed enough to have later on will be in large part because of you.

Thanks to my cohort mates and those graduate and professional students I became good friends with across the institution during my service with the Council of Graduate Students (COGS). I learned something new nearly every day, and a special thank you to Mike Zeig and Rob Kniss for being my partners in crime throughout my time in the Higher, Adult, and Lifelong

Education program.

Last, thank you to my parents, Eddie and Rita. You both are role models and truly excellent parents and I am very lucky to have had your support all these years. This has been a long journey and thank you for being behind me every step along the way.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE DISSERTATION

Problem statement

Today's modern research university is complex and sizable in scope (Kerr, 1995). Concurrently, the demands, expectations, and opportunities placed on the desk of the research university president have also grown in proportion to the complexity of the institutions they manage (Kerr, 1995; Sambolin, 2010). Within this sphere, presidents have been asked, and have agreed in large numbers, to serve on a full spectrum of external boards. In 2005, 1/3 of college presidents surveyed stated they served on corporate boards (Fain, 2005). The nature of these appointments ranges from local non-profit groups to multi-national corporations.

Service on external boards has been viewed as having both positive and negative effects. As to the former, such service can be viewed as indirectly building relationships that could benefit the university, for example, in developing business partnerships between the university and major organizations, as well as through the increased prestige for a university by having its president be deemed to be respected enough to serve on a major entity's board of directors (Bowley, 2010). However, the true value of this type of service by university presidents has been questioned, primarily due to the amount of focus required on external board activity as opposed to more direct university business (Wilson, 2010).

There is also an overarching question of whether such service benefits the university or the president, and, when controversy arises as to such service, whether the university shoulders most of the downside (Lorin, 2010). Indeed, the downsides may differ based on how the president delegated responsibilities, what types of organizations they are involved with, and their own time allocation to those boards, details that Rick Legon, President of the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB), suggests should be worked out during

contract negotiations when a president is hired in order to set clear expectations and limits (Asquith, 2006).

Not much academic research has been conducted on the external board-related commitments a president maintains and the rationale behind such service. The question of such service on external boards has, however, come into sharp focus in both mainstream and higher education media repeatedly over the last few years (Bowley, 2010, Eisenberg, 2010). Media coverage has placed scrutiny on the significant compensation Presidents can earn from such service. For example, Shirley Jackson, President of the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, came under focus for serving on six major corporate boards simultaneously and topping the list of presidents earning a salary from such commitments, earning \$1.4 million from those companies in 2011-2012 (Waldman, 2012).

Rick Legon from AGB downplays the emphasis being placed on the financial aspect of such service, however (Asquith, 2006). Legon purports that the financial impact to presidents is not a motivating factor when compared with the idea incubation and network expansion from which presidents and their universities gain benefit (Asquith, 2006). This seeming distortion on the compensation issue is interesting to explore with presidents themselves in assessing how pertinent the compensation of some of these corporate opportunities is from their perspective.

Other stories have related to the alleged conflicts presidents can encounter when serving in a very visible capacity on major corporate boards (Eisenberg, 2010; Fain, 2008). Conflict categories include time or loyalty conflicts, where presidents are alleged to spend too much time on responsibilities internal stakeholders view as peripheral to their central duties of leading the university (Eisenberg, 2010). For example, Ruth Simmons, then President at Brown University, sat on the corporate boards of Goldman Sachs, Pfizer, and Texas Instruments, and admitted

having to step down from those commitments due to the amount of time involved (Eisenberg, 2010).

Purported conflicts of interest have been the other major story in the media. Presidents are discouraged by corporate governance experts from serving on the boards of companies where a university trustee has a direct interest (Stripling & Fuller, 2012). However, problems can still arise where presidents' serve on a company's board that has a direct relationship with their institution. Phyllis Wise, former President at the University of Washington, had to publicly defend her service on the board of Nike Corporation, with whom the university had athletics contracts (Bowley, 2010). Wise also reaffirmed that she would recuse herself from university decisions involving the company and had to argue vigorously against the notion that her presence with Nike might make internal stakeholders at the University of Washington more leery in criticizing Nike's labor policies in Asia (Bowley, 2010).

More broadly, this research speaks to wider issues in higher education such as the linkages between universities and external private entities in areas such as research or outside faculty employment (Boardman & Ponomariov, 2009; Caraprezza, 2014; Euben, 2004). The role of presidents serving as keys to some of these interactions is of note considering the wider public and academic interest in this area. Similarly, at a time when the reputation of higher education and universities is challenged on various fronts, the decision of a president to serve on an external board and how that service is overseen by a governing board may serve to increase or decrease that risk for their institution (Kurre, n.d.)

Given the media scrutiny on these matters and the seemingly high time commitment involved, do presidents value such service, and if so, how? Do university presidents manage their time and the potential for conflicts in a way that does not diminish their stature on-campus? How

such service intertwines with the president's other responsibilities, duties, and commitments are of central concern to this research project.

Research questions

The primary research question this project hoped to address was:

Given the numerous other expectations and responsibilities of modern-day university presidents, why do research-university presidents serve on external boards?

In order to explore this topic in-depth, several sub-questions were asked:

1. Is service on external boards something the presidents see as valuable to the campus?
2. If the presidents do see value in such service, what is the stated value?
3. What benefits and disadvantages presidents perceive of serving on external boards?
4. How do presidents balance their external board service with their other responsibilities?
5. How do presidents decide which boards they wish to serve and focus their time on?
6. How do presidents manage the potential for conflicts of interest?

The decision to conduct a qualitative study was made in order to gain a richer understanding of a topic area that has not been studied in tremendous detail and to look for some of the subtleties that might be missed if using more quantitative methods (Anderson, 2010). In the next section of the study, I explore some of the literature available on the general roles of the president and other works that examine the external board service of other leaders, both inside and outside of higher education.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for this study situates the external board service of a research university president within the broader frame of what the contemporary role of a president is in higher education. Additionally, comparable examples involving the external board service of other leaders in higher education and beyond are examined before then looking at how presidential board service has been portrayed.

Role of a President

The first section of the literature review examines the general roles a university President undertakes on a day-to-day basis, with special emphasis on how these roles might intersect with their work on outside boards.

A president's service on an external board can be analyzed adequately only when first juxtaposed with the panoply of other responsibilities associated with that position. Of primary consideration are areas where these other responsibilities intertwine or conflict with a president's service on an external board. Where a university leader, particularly a president, may have a duty to uphold and promote their institution's mission and values, there is the possibility of this responsibility clashing with their duty of loyalty to the company and its shareholders as a director (Husten, 2014). The president is ultimately accountable to the external and internal stakeholders that support or fulfil the mission of the university (Bowen & Shapiro, 1998).

In broad terms, a president is viewed as the chief executive of a higher education institution. The president fulfils comparable duties to a CEO, including assuming overall responsibility for leading an organization, managing conflicts, and allocating various resources to maximize the institution's progress (Mintzberg, 1980). The analogy to CEOs of companies is something that Kramer and Mendenhall (1982) discuss explicitly in terms of the relative

visibility of CEOs and university presidents. As an illustration, both positions had information dissemination roles that were important to internal and external stakeholders, with CEOs providing quarterly company updates and presidents testifying to federal and state governmental units, including the executive branch and the legislature (Kramer & Mendenhall, 1982). The analogy has also been favored due to the complexity of and money involved with modern day academic enterprises (Wiseman, 1991).

Presidents are in charge of vastly complex, large organizations with a broad spectrum of internal and external stakeholders (Bowen & Shapiro, 1998). At research universities within the American Association of Universities (AAU), the organization comprising 62 leading public and private research universities in the United States and Canada, presidents must execute a strategic vision that places a special emphasis on research, as well as teaching and service.

For public research university presidents, in a resource-dependent, accountability driven financial environment, executing this vision successfully and affordably becomes key.

Partnerships between industry and higher education, on matters such as technology transfer, are one way that institutions believe they can meld a vision that garners more public support and more resources from state governments (Tornatzky, Waugaman, P. & O'Gray, D., 2001).

Presidents are ambassadors of these partnerships and could conceivably be asked to serve on a corporate or industry board in order to better connect higher education with industry (Ohio Christian University, n.d.).

Indeed, at these prestigious institutions the role of a president as an innovator and a highly visible person on a national or international field could be of particular importance, especially for raising funds from donors (Cook, 1996). The reputation of such universities appears to align well with them desiring an individual who is considered a national thought

leader or, at the least, involved and influential in issues of interest, either inside or outside of higher education policy. A recent example can be seen in the wave of campus media communications emphasizing their particular university president's role in lobbying the various branches of the federal government related to the negative impacts of sequestration on higher education funding (Floyd, 2013; Susswein, 2013). Similarly, campuses are always keen to promote when a current or former leader is selected to lead national or international agencies or associations such as the National Science Foundation (NSF) or the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) as this can be seen to also reflect well on the overall reputation of the university. This practice can be viewed as part of the ever-growing 'academic prestige' competition occurring between major universities vying to get an advantage, through hiring superstar researchers or other means, that will get them into or maintain them in the top ten percent of institutions across the country (Frank, 2012).

Presidents also perform many symbolic functions at universities. The title of president, or at some institutions Chancellor, derives from the British influence on American higher education (Rile, 2001). For example, presiding over the commencement committee, chairing the faculty council meetings and "promoting the general interests of the university" were in the job description of Princeton's President in 1802 (Rile, 2001). In relation to religiously-affiliated institutions, community development was also a central component of the job (Thelin, 2011). This traditional role has been expanded. Now, the president has a much more external focus, an extension of the community engagement and promotional role presidents have traditionally been expected to play, as noted above (Weill, 2009).

Sawsan Awwad (2009) centers on the president as initiator and maintainer of community engagement, where the President cultivates relationships with external stakeholders through

speeches, attending various functions, meetings and leading fundraising efforts that tie in to the outreach function of the university (Olzacki, 2001). Awwad (2009) does not really mention the president's service on external boards as part of these responsibilities, even though the tie-ins are noteworthy given what such service can do with engaging various groups. Meanwhile, the provost is delineated as the internal leader of the university, expected to have a large amount of authority with respect to the administration of faculty and academic matters (Duderstadt, 1996). However, if one looks historically, the president possesses more overall authority as to the full scope of an institution's evolved activities than they originally possessed, while the faculty have arguably lost influence (Duderstadt, 1996; Thelin, 2011).

Symbolic roles also move beyond the ceremonial to the president's ability to drive change at universities. Dione Somerville (2006) suggests that symbolic interjections by a university president can help during large scale change processes, although there is a converse argument that presidents may not be on campus much due to external responsibilities, and their tenure in office is short compared with faculty, negatively affecting a president's ability to drive change. (Budros, 2002). Still, presidents are, generally, able to direct institutional resources and focus towards a particular set of objectives (McMurray, 2010). They become arbiters of what priorities are to be supported institutionally. To extrapolate this idea further, if any senior university administrator serves on external corporate boards, it may drive the way decisions are made, how changes are implemented, and what is prioritized on a campus. For instance, at the University of Minnesota a medical school dean served on the board of Pepsi-Cola Corporation, leading to concerns that the free range of academic research could be affected if such research were to depict Pepsi in a negative light (Gleason, 2011).

Another useful piece of literature to consider is the president's role as an extracurricular manager (Trachtenberg, 2009). Trachtenberg argues that business, government and the courts have become the main audiences for the president. Being involved with external boards could be conceptualized as one way of building relationships that help manage the expectations of such audiences and organize them in such an array to benefit the institution. For instance, William G. Bowen was president of Princeton University for 16 years and served on Merck's Board of Directors. Bowen claims that the experience aided him in developing Princeton's then-fledgling life sciences activities as he had knowledge of where their field was headed and where to look for talented researchers (Bowley, 2010). However, what Trachtenberg does not explore in any depth is how these external audiences might use various mechanisms (funding etc.) to manage the university president in question. If one refers back to the central issue of this study, the questions related to service on external boards could come down to how much the organizations behind those commitments influence the work of the president at their campus in both positive and negative ways.

The moral compass or ethical aspect of the presidency underpins the religious origins of the position. If one looks at the incidents at Penn State University involving the abuse of minors by a former Penn State Assistant football coach and the subsequent alleged cover-up by senior administrators, including then-President Graham Spanier, much criticism is present about the lack of moral leadership (Philadelphia Tribune, 2012; Baer, 2011). Presidents are expected to provide guidance on values issues that confront the university, from suicides to sexual abuse (Duderstadt, 1996). Elson Floyd (2000), the former President of Western Michigan University, stated the ethical responsibility of a university president well:

When hired to do this job, I was given a public trust and am held accountable -- not only to the Board of Trustees, but to the taxpayers, parents, students, alumni, and community

members who support this University. I am accountable for the expenditures, activities, actions, and direction this University takes. I am accountable for the character of this organization. And I strongly believe that accountability can be a great motivator.

Extrapolated, one could ask whether this expectation of moral leadership applies to one's service on external boards. If a major corporation is criticized for engaging in unethical practices, where does the loyalty of the president lie – to the company or to the university? A further quandary arises when university presidents are perceived to be absent from campus most of the time and the potential effect on their ability to preside over institutional issues of this nature (Kniffin, 1997; Zimmerman, 2013). If one looks at the notion of accountability proclaimed by Floyd (2000), there could also be a question of who holds the president to account as a university official for his or her actions on an external corporate or non-profit board.

The external foci of presidents has also led them into a position of becoming less intimately involved in the day-to-day running of campuses and, subsequently, placed more into the position of being a negotiator or mediator between divergent groups at the university (McPherson, 2002). This view may give full weight to the notion that the president is still the ultimate administrative authority and needs to account for the level of decision-making delegated to other administrators. Nevertheless, if one considers this a tenable point, if not a comprehensively valid, one can rightly ask whether the president can truly just be an umpire of sorts between various groups, or is locked into taking certain decisions by influences ascribed to their external activities, such as service on outside boards.

While discussion of the roles a university president plays is vital, so is the context in which such roles are formed. Two particularly pertinent examples derive from Mary Bucklin (2010) and Fujita (1990). Bucklin (2010) asked the question whether female university presidents have different expectations placed upon them. As an example, Bucklin (2010)

suggests that college athletics departments may treat a female president differently than a male one, assuming the latter to be more amenable to athletics department goals and being quicker to insert gender into the conversation when critical of a female president's purportedly adverse decision. The female presidents Bucklin (2010) studied adjusted their behavior to de-emphasize their gender and become more engaged in athletics activities, playing to more stereotypical male roles. If gender affects how a president may construct their behaviors in office, then it is feasible that it may affect how they conceptualize service on external boards. As a thought, might a President feel an incentive to participate in certain boards to break down gender barriers?

Meanwhile, Fujita (1990) looked at a variety of factors and constituents involved with assessing a president's performance and the direction they may take an institution. Fujita depicts how Board members, charged with ultimate stewardship of an institution, typically give greater support to a president than the faculty typically proffers. The question Fujita does not explore in detail is whether or not this greater support stems from a closer proximity by the president to the institution's governing board and whether that closer working relationship affects the meaningfulness of the evaluation conducted by the board as to a president's performance. A president may have, as part of their assessment, service on external boards and entities in an ambassadorial function on behalf of the university or, more controversially depending on their proximity to members of the institution's governing board, could serve on the boards of entities in which their trustees are involved (Stripling & Fuller, 2012).

There has also been growth in the president's responsibilities for communicating with, managing and influencing their institution's governing board (Bahls, 2011; Derby, 2012). This can sometimes lead to negative consequences, especially when an experienced president is overly relied upon by the governing board for information about campus climate (Bahls, 2011;

Derby, 2012). One can imagine a scenario where a President is able to over or under state their time spent on external board activities, and the associated effects on the institution. However, governing boards are encouraged to allow presidents to engage in professional development activities, such as working with outside organizations (Doser, 1990).

As seen in the literature, much is expected of the leaders of higher education institutions. A more delineated focus on presidents' external commitments is highlighted in the following section.

Presidential external board commitments

The second part of the literature focuses on the commitments of university presidents when serving on the boards of organizations external to the institution. Literature on the work of university presidents has mostly been confined to a specific subset of the broader topic being considered as part of my research. In the majority of cases, the spotlight shines on university presidents who serve on corporate boards where either: a) something has gone wrong at the company, leading campus constituents to question the president's service on said company's board; or b) the President is embroiled in a campus controversy causing questions in the media and from shareholders about whether said President should remain on the company's board; or c) there is a real or perceived conflict of interest caused by the President's service on a particular board (Bowley 2010; Heyboer, 2013). This leaves a void when considering the broader rationale for such service and call for an in-depth look at why Presidents serve or do not serve on a corporate and volunteer boards.

The latter allegations of a conflict of interest can be seen in media reports related to the tenure of Dr. Mary Sue Coleman, then-president at the University of Michigan, on the board of directors for Johnson & Johnson (Bowley, 2010; Wilson, 2010). Some individuals accused

Coleman of supporting a campus smoking ban to indirectly promote Johnson & Johnson's nicotine products that students might use on-campus if they could not smoke on University of Michigan property (Soave, 2010). This might be a tenuous connection to draw as Coleman may simply have gained greater perspective on the issue of smoking prohibition from serving on the board or had pre-existing opinions on this matter.

However, the debate strikes at the heart of whether the *type* of organization a president serves on as a board member matters. In this instance, critics pointed to the specific problems that may be encountered when a university president serves on the board of a major biomedical company because of exposure to the university's research mission and medical schools (Lazar, 2010). This vulnerability was one University of Michigan acknowledged, in a slightly different context, when it became the first university in the nation to reject funding for continuing education courses for its medical school doctors from pharmaceutical companies and medical device makers (Singer & Wilson, 2010).

The scrutiny over Coleman's for-profit external board work may also have contributed to her successor, Mark Schlissel, having limitations imposed in his employment agreement with the University of Michigan (Woodhouse, 2014). Schlissel is limited to serving on one for-profit board and must get written approval from the Board of Regents to serve on those boards (Woodhouse, 2014). There is, however, no such restriction on the number of non-profit boards Schlissel is able to serve on (Woodhouse, 2014). This differentiation in the restrictions based on the type of board Schlissel may serve on is an indicator more of a worry over corporate board service than to non-profit work. However, both endeavors may consume a significant amount of time away from direct administration of the affairs of the institution. Coleman's critics also raised concerns related to the amount of time and focus the president spent on such external

matters, with some having described her as “moonlighting” (Wilson, 2010). This derives from a sentiment that being a university president is, in itself, a full-time responsibility and asks how anyone serving in such a position could find adequate time to serve on the board of directors of a company as sizeable as Johnson & Johnson (Lazar, 2010). This particular critique cuts at the system of corporate governance where directorships are only considered part-time responsibilities and the utility for companies of having individuals with other full-time responsibilities is being increasingly questioned.

A further example where the specter of conflicts of interest arose is related to the service on two corporate boards of Rutgers University President Robert Barchi (Zernike, 2013). Barchi served on the boards of VWR International and Covance, companies involved in laboratory supplies and development of pharmaceutical products respectively, even before he was appointed to be Rutgers’ president. Both companies had financial ties to Rutgers, with one of the companies receiving \$15 million from Rutgers over a five year period for providing various services to the university (Zernike, 2013). These relationships predate Barchi’s appointment as Rutgers President (The Record, 2013).

Meanwhile, Barchi earned a total of \$317,000 combined from both companies in 2009 for serving on their respective companies’ boards of directors (Zernike, 2013). New Jersey lawmakers urged Barchi to resign from both boards, citing substantial ethical concerns with such service (New Jersey Television, 2013). Many focused on the negative effect of even the appearance of a conflict of interest for a major research institution as Rutgers, citing Barchi’s chief responsibility to protect Rutgers’ reputation as rationale enough for why he should step down from both corporate boards (Heyboer, 2013). Indeed, the perceptions of conflict in this instance were added to questions over Barchi’s handling of very public problems in Rutgers

athletics program that were arguably quite costly to the university in terms of reputation and money (Times of Trenton, 2013).

Shortly before lawmakers and the media began to focus on his corporate board membership at Covance and VWR International, Barchi wrote a memo to other top university administrators instructing them to exclude him from any discussions involving the two companies and the university (Boburg, 2013). The university argued that this was simply a codification of a practice Barchi instituted since beginning his tenure as Rutgers President in 2012 (Boburg, 2013). This move was seen as a method to get ahead of what Barchi and others at Rutgers knew was going to be a topic of public discussion, especially due to the aforementioned financial arrangements between the university and the two companies in question.

The problems for Barchi and Rutgers also point to a key dilemma: when is a conflict of interest real versus perceived and does the possible differentiation between perception and reality matter when it comes to a president's chief duty to the university? Editorials on the matter outlined the issue, outlined the steps Barchi took, and still mostly fell on the side of suggesting Barchi resign his seats on the boards of Covance and VWR International (*The Record*, 2013; *Times of Trenton*, 2013).

Political criticism of Barchi's service may not have come entirely from the perspective of selfless, public accountability: At that time, New Jersey Democrats had several arguments with university officials on matters ranging from athletics to the composition of Rutgers' Board of Governors (Nurin, 2013). Disapproval of Barchi's board activities could have been opportunity for further political point scoring and leveraging. However, the whole affair leads to a reasonable line of inquiry: Under what conditions is a research university willing to open itself up to a perceived conflict of interest and how does it handle such complexities if it is willing to assume

the risk of a president serving on corporate boards where there is a prior business relationship between a company and the university.

The illustration of conflicts of time and of interest give pause for thought on what other individuals believe to be the benefit of these relationships. Evidently, there is a perceived benefit as the governing boards of Rutgers and Michigan both allowed their presidents to remain on such boards, defending the “value of such corporate affiliations” (Times of Trenton, 2013). However, if the president being on such boards might lead to donations for the university, is this less of a conflict of interest than if the university is paying money to these companies for services?

Most allegations regarding conflicts of interest relate to instances where presidents served on corporate boards, as opposed to their service on other types of boards, such as non-profits (Boburg & Alex, 2013; Eisenberg, 2010). This leads to an impression where conflicts of interest only occur due to service on corporate boards. The conflict of interest question has also been examined in instances where university presidents serve on the boards of companies headed by university trustees whom they serve at the pleasure of (Stripling & Fuller, 2012). This potential role-reversal, whereby a president becomes his or her boss’ supervisor in a different organization, will be further explored in my study.

Nevertheless, the ‘Academic-Industrial Complex’ as it has been referred to, is a reality (Bowley, 2010). In 2008, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Fain, 2008) found that:

19 of the presidents of the 40 research universities with the largest operating budgets sit on at least one corporate board. Leaders of private universities are the most likely to serve on boards. And while most of the presidents hold just one or two director slots, three sit on four boards each.

The amount of time spent on such lucrative endeavors does not consider service on volunteer boards, such as those found in government or organizations such as the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). While high compensation may not be an image issue that arises

for university presidents serving on volunteer boards, the possible quandaries of being able to meaningfully contribute to these organizations due to their primary responsibilities still exist (Garrett, 2010; Newman & Weiss, 1994). This again raises the question of the underlying reasons as to why presidents, other than personal financial gain, might serve on such boards given that they are arguably overwhelmed with other on-campus matters (Stancill, 2013).

In 2010, Brown University President Ruth Simmons did not stand for re-election as a director on the board of Goldman Sachs due to time demands, as well as criticism from campus constituents surrounding her service on such a company after the financial crisis (Lorin, 2010). Derek Bok (2014) frames the broader time commitment problem well when probing whether the current priorities of university presidents are correct. Bok (2014) used the findings from a 2010 survey on how president's spent their time to ask why community relations and fundraising, both rationales for why presidents may serve on an external board, rank far above handling academic matters. The time allocation of university presidents appeared, Bok suggested, to be misaligned with the core functions of the organizations they lead.

The justifications for university presidents serving on boards outside of their institution are diverse in nature (Ambrose 2013; Fain, 2008). For new presidents, such an opportunity allows one to gain more experience in the boardroom environment and decision-making process, a critical skill that the President may not otherwise have gained in their prior work (Garrett, 2010). It could be questioned how much this benefits the campus as opposed to benefitting the President's strategic guidance of the board, a question asked by many stakeholders including U.S. senators, or if the two results are mostly intertwined. Such service allows networking and resume enhancement for the President as well as boosting relationships with external individuals and entities (Fain, 2008; Reed, 2013).

Comparable Illustrations of External Board Service

This third section of the literature review highlights analogous situations to a President serving on an external governing board. When reviewing the literature regarding university presidents' service on external boards, there is a concentration on specific examples from media articles and quantitative data (Fain, 2008). To fill the gap, it is useful to look for appropriate analogous situations, be they inside or outside of the higher education sector, to provide some context as to the rationale and associated trends behind such service.

A first comparison can be drawn from within higher education and from individuals who, to varying degrees, have involvement with a President's own external service: university governing board members. University trustees are many times appointed, or occasionally elected, for their corporate prowess and, most notably at public universities, due to their political networks (Cooper, 2013). Governing board members occasionally leave their leadership roles on a board because of employment opportunities with major companies, such as in 2012 when Karen Peetz, then chairman of the University of Pennsylvania Trustees, decided not to run for re-election as chair due to her appointment as President of BNY Mellon (La Torre, 2012).

In 2011, an illuminating example involving Michigan State University Board of Trustees Chairman Joel Ferguson emerged (Melinn, 2011). Ferguson, a developer, was offered the opportunity to serve on the board of a Detroit casino. Ferguson wanted to serve on that board, as well as continue to serve on the MSU Board of Trustees (Balaskovitz, 2011; Melinn, 2011). He eventually decided to drop his bid to serve on the casino board in favor of remaining chairman of the MSU Board of Trustees after legal advice indicated that, in Michigan, state law prohibits any

elected official¹ from serving on a casino board (Melinn, 2011).

Reasons why Ferguson wished to serve on such a board may be complex but, given his prominence, also provide insight as to why a highly visible individual may push hard to be able to serve on an outside board such as that of a casino. Some possible rationales are similar to why Presidents may wish to serve on external corporate boards. For instance, Ferguson could have used his expertise to tackle a different type of challenge and would also have received substantial compensation for such knowledge, being eligible for up to \$210,000 in the first year of service on the Greektown casino board (Truscott Rossman, 2011). Ferguson's move could also be seen in the context of the general trend of increased linkages between private sector entities and higher education, with companies eager to access resources and information from universities (Pusser, Slaughter, & Thomas 2006). In their roles, trustees can almost play the role of liaison or ambassador to political or commercial interests and, thus, may be seen as advantageous to the institution (Pusser, Slaughter, & Thomas, 2006).

However, the inverse could also be true: Trustees may wish to bring knowledge from their external experiences, including service on boards of other organizations, to the university in the hope of more robustly playing their stewardship role. For instance, trustees at both public and private research universities have increased professorial salaries to try and prevent star talent being lured away to competitor-institutions or private industry (Colombo, 2014). This tactic has been taken from the world of for-profit companies' talent retention plans with the financial and labor consequences across the higher education sector (Rhoades, 1998).

Questions have been asked recently in relation to the integrity of trustees as their independent governance of higher education institutions faces major threats (Bastedo, 2009).

¹ In Michigan, governing board members at the University of Michigan, Michigan State University and Wayne State University are elected in party-based, statewide elections.

Bastedo (2009) pointed to conflicting financial and political loyalties trustees may face in their stewardship role as problematic for higher education. Universities can be seen as organizational tools to meet the needs of external interests, with those interests pressuring trustees to make decisions that violate a trustee's fiduciary duty to the university. Trustees are, in Bastedo's terms, components of a "moral seduction" (Bastedo, 2009, p. 354) where trustees, beholden to political parties and half of whom at research university's may serve on corporate boards, are part of a process of co-opting universities to meet external needs (Pusser, Slaughter, & Thomas, 2006).

University presidents have been described as the CEOs of their respective institution due to their complex set of responsibilities, the similarities of the modern academic enterprises presidents run to major businesses in terms of organizational capacities, and the overall scale of higher education as an industry, spending more than \$455 billion per year (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2012). Additionally, universities are seen as engines of business and economic development, with Presidents almost acting as captains of industry in certain communities (Curran, 1998; Lane & Johnstone, 2012). Accordingly, a second parallel may be drawn if one looks at literature on the service of chief executives of companies of exterior boards outside of their own. This is perhaps a more direct comparison from which to draw context, especially in some of the conversations regarding presidential compensation (Hamermesh, 2013; Lee & Severns, 2013).

The literature and coverage in the area of CEO service on outside boards is a little more developed than that for presidents. There has been a greater emphasis placed on examining the benefits and disadvantages of CEOs serving on such outside boards and long-term statistics in this area (Behan, 2009; Marcus, 2013; Rascoff, 2013). For instance, in a 2011 article published by the Stanford Graduate School of Business, it was stated that "active CEOs represented over

half (53 percent) of the pool of newly elected independent directors among S&P 500 companies in 2000. By 2010 that percentage fell to 26 percent” (Larcker & Tayan, 2011). The same article claimed that active CEOs only served on 0.6 outside boards in 2010, down from 1.6 at the beginning of the millennium (Larcker & Tayan, 2011).

The quandary of conflicts of commitment arise for CEOs as well as university presidents when it comes to serving on multiple other boards. Marc Hogan (2012) cites the increased demands on CEOs, as well as potential pressure from shareholders of their own company if the CEO is seen to be engaging in time consuming extra-curricular activities if the company is struggling. There may also be a downturn in companies asking CEOs of other companies to serve on their boards, fearing that those individuals suffer from lack of time to consider in-depth, strategic issues or work through crisis situations, such as the unexpected resignation of a CEO (Hogan, 2012). Other researchers have found little evidence that the appointment of an outside CEO contributes positively to the operating performance, decision making, or oversight capacity of a board (Fahlenbrach, Low, & Stulz, 2010). More broadly, the aforementioned reasons contribute to a purported decline in the interlocking nature of the upper echelons of the corporate sector as the overall number of individuals who seek multiple board placements has diminished (Chu & Davis, 2011). In spite of such issues, though, it is the CEO more often than not who declines such invitations to serve on other boards as a director (Hogan, 2012).

However, there is value, depicted in the literature, to CEOs serving on the boards of companies outside of their own. For instance, Bill Mitchell, a former CEO of Arrow Electronic, suggests that such work can help CEOs understand the “machinery of how a board really works...which most company executives...never get” (Behan, 2009, para. 3). In very real terms, such service allows the executive to sit in the shoes of a board member and garner a

“fundamental understanding of how your own board members are thinking about your company” and watch and learn from how chief executives of other organizations relate to their board members (Marcus, 2013). Last, if a CEO serves on the board of a company that compliments his or her own organization, it can build important networks and allows the CEO to learn more about another part of their commercial universe (Behan, 2009; Raskoff, 2013).

Chief executives, similar to university presidents, may suffer from an effect Lucy Marcus (2013) refers to as “director contagion.” Marcus postulates that when the very strengths or position that led a CEO to serve on the board of a company becomes a weakness (e.g. underperformance of the chief executives own company), this negativity could potentially spread to the company on whose board they serve. Marcus’ point is well taken, although one could question to what degree this negativity automatically attaches depends very much on the influence of shareholders over the direction of a particular company and the specific issue at hand. Andrew Sorkin (2012) highlighted an instance where institutional shareholders have voted against CEO-director appointments on boards because of the CEO’s track record and decision-making at other companies. However, in this case, James Johnston, the former chief executive of Fannie Mae, was still likely to be appointed to the Goldman Sachs board as shareholders typically follow management recommendations on such matters (Sorkin, 2012).

Some commentators in business circles, recognizing the advantages and disadvantages of external board engagements for CEOs, call for limits to be put in place to ensure the CEO is not overextended (Hodgson, 2012). Some CEOs serve on the boards of as many as three or four other companies, a number that Spencer Raskoff, the CEO of Zillow, suggests is at the upper end of what should be allowed (Hodgson, 2012; Raskoff, 2013). Bill Mitchell, a former CEO of Arrow Electronic, suggests that the problem is overstated. Mitchell opined that “Boards only

meet six or eight times a year; three years [typical term of appointment to a board] is nothing in terms of "board time" (Behan, 2009, para. 6).

It is worth noting that individual abilities to manage such commitments differ and the literature does not really consider service on the boards of smaller for-profit, non-profit, or volunteer organizations. In this regard the service of university presidents may be broader in scope, although those presidents who serve on multiple corporate boards, in addition to other external commitments not as heavily highlighted, may suffer from the same type of 'overboarding' Marcus (2012) conceptualizes. Recently, presidential over commitment to these types of boards has become the concern of university trustees. More presidential contracts are including limitations on the number of corporate boards a president may serve on (Woodhouse, 2014).

The willingness to consider both sides of the argument, as well as gain some perspective from stakeholders of companies and CEOs themselves adds to the relative lack of breadth on the topic in higher education-specific literature. Useful parallels can be drawn, especially when one considers the accountability of the chief executive or President to their own stakeholders whilst engaging in external commitments.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this project is significant when analyzing the data collected from university presidents. In order to conduct a multi-faceted analysis of the data from two different perspectives, I decided to employ two different frameworks through which to look at the problems posited by this paper.

Boundary Spanning

The ability to span various organizational or geographic boundaries has been emphasized inside and outside of higher education circles (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010; Yip, Ernst, & Campbell, 2011). At its core, boundary spanning has been described as “bridge between an organization and its exchange partners” (Scott, 1998, p. 196). However, boundary spanning can be observed at both organizational and individual levels (Steadman, 1992; Friedman and Podolny, 1992).

At universities, some individuals move across boundaries in order to exchange information and represent the interests of the institution to outside partners and stakeholders, especially the communities where said institutions are located (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). These individual boundary spanners are engaged in two main activities: 1) the gathering and sorting of information, and 2) the representation of a particular unit and/or organization (Aldrich & Herker, 1977; Tushman, 1977). Weerts and Sandmann (2010) establish those at the presidential level as being “engagement champions” (p. 718). For instance, in this role, university presidents’ cross-boundaries to depict the importance of engagement to external stakeholders, be they legislators, donors, or alumni (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010).

In our area of focus, engagement can also be seen through certain behaviors that focus on the “power and balance between the organization and external agents to achieve mutual objectives, and they also [include] represent[ing] the perception, expectations, and ideas of each side to the other” (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010, p. 638). In theory, the role of a president in serving on external boards is one borne of such shared, if not mutual, purpose: A company may want a president on their board as they bring credibility, expertise and potential linkages to academic talent; research university presidents may want to serve on boards as it raises their own

profile and that of their institution and allows for conversations and network-building that can foster benign interplay.

There are different degrees and methods of boundary spanning (Lyonski, 1985). Internal boundary spanning might occur within an organization at the unit level, while external boundary spanning might be conducted by individuals, defined as boundary spanners, in a situation where they work with organizations/individuals outside of their own organization to build knowledge (Anacona & Caldwell, 1992; Chang, 1996). Formal boundary spanning is seen in terms of written communications and official meetings versus informal boundary spanning which is conducted through, for example, face-to-face casual conversations, phone calls, or correspondence (Ekkernik, 2008; Weedman, 1992). Work of presidents on external boards may involve elements of both formal and informal boundary spanning, and the more that is known about the precise nature of their boundary spanning, the more detail can be seen as to the precise level of involvement of presidents in such boards.

Presidential service on such boards could be seen as a form of external boundary spanning, one that has evolved from relations with the community to gaining knowledge and information from various other sectors (Skolaski, 2012). The formality of message, or lack thereof, may vary depending on the interactions the President has: Attending scheduled meetings of a corporate board versus the impromptu, informal interactions a university president may have with shareholders and other board members at social events, for example. Due to their prominent role in academia, many university presidents involved in external board service may be viewed as bringing credibility and trustworthiness to their roles as directors.

Boundary spanning has the potential to create advantages for a university in terms of showcasing it to broader audiences, creating information exchanges that lead to better

understandings with stakeholders and partners (Skolaski, 2012). However, boundary spanners can encounter challenges given the line that they straddle between inter-organizational systems. For instance, there can be pressure put on boundary spanners from both systems on particular issues. This can create a tension, even though the boundary spanner represents the institution, due to having at least a toe, if not a foot, on both sides of the boundary line (Spekman, 1979; Skolaski, 2012). While boundary spanners in other levels of the institution are encouraged to remain objective (Skolaski, 2012), a President with a duty of loyalty to both shareholders and university stakeholders may have more of a challenge unless clear rules regarding duty of loyalty and conflicts of interest are established.

Sensemaking

When crossing outside the academic sphere to serve on university boards, have presidents made sense of this experience and its associated ramifications, and if so how? This is a question that would be asked by Karl Weick (1995) and others interested in the leadership capacity of sensemaking. Sensemaking allows leaders to stimulate a deeper level of understanding about a particular issue. (Anacona, 2012). Sean Vereen (2005, p. 43) defines sensemaking as:

Sensemaking within organizations is the process in which cues in the administrative structure, social framework, events and interactions are interpreted and placed within a frame of understanding by an institutional actor. These frames are highly dependent on understanding past actions and events.

In its classic formulation, sensemaking has seven attributes, including identity construction at both individual and organizational levels, retrospection by the individual as to past experiences, creation of sensible environments that justify particular choices, a social underpinning attributing the relational nature of past experiences, ongoing processes that reflect the fluidity of events, extracted cues, and plausible explanation of past experiences (Smerek, 2013; Weick, 1995). In a larger frame, sensemaking through these attributes provides an

environment for a president to reflect on what his or her own role is, how each perceives external board service tying into his or her role, and to assess the realism with which each relates the two to stakeholders at both the university and the external entity. For instance, by attempting to illuminate, even partially, the rationale behind why presidents serve on corporate boards and how they handle potential issues that arise with such service, more discussion and debate on this important topic will occur (Weick, 1995). Sensemaking may also allow presidents to understand why such service can cause heated discussions on college campuses or in the media or allow them the opportunity to reflect on how they handle their board service in conjunction with the myriad other responsibilities they have on their plates.

Sensemaking can be broken down into three elements: exploration of the broader system, mapping the current situation, and acting to change the system by learning more about it (Anaconda, 2012). When initially exploring the system, a researcher should collect data from divergent sources to seek out patterns and be sure to strip out any pre-conceptions the researcher may have as to the matter at hand (Anaconda, 2012; Weick, 1995). Mapping the current situation, in this study, would be a metaphor for allowing the information obtained to speak for itself instead of being limited by a methodological approach that simply reinforces a particular construct related to external board service (Anaconda, 2012). Thus, open-ended questions will likely be of more use when discussing this issue with university presidents. Finally, one can envision changing the system to learn from it by seeking out lessons learned from the presidents in terms of their external board service. Would university presidents suggest that communication to stakeholders of how such service benefits the university be improved, for example? While sensemaking can be an effective capacity for leaders to build, there are barriers to building effective understanding that leaders, and those who work with them, must overcome or adapt to

(Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985; Staw, Sandelands, & Dutton, 1981). Individuals may want to protect a particular way of operating and not have the desirable level of openness for change in terms of how they handle particular situations (Anacona, 2012). Additionally, leaders may engage in erratic behavior if problems arise, making it difficult to engage in sensemaking, unless later removed from the situation (Anacona, 2012).

Sensemaking may not lead to a perfect impression of reality, but rather can be used by leaders to create the best impression of reality possible (Weick, 2001). Different perceptions can lead to varied impressions of reality, and these perceptions can create a set of actions that may alter reality (Anacona, 2012). Presidents should try and understand the impact that their experiences may have on the wider system through working to gain an appreciation of other possible perceptions (Anacona, 2012).

The literature review for this study provided a broad insight into some of the expectations placed on university presidents, observed situations where presidents serving on boards has drawn attention, and drawn comparison to the external board service of those in like situations. Last, the literature review described two lenses – sensemaking and boundary spanning - through which we can begin to look at the data collected to address the underlying questions central to this study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design of this exploratory study was qualitative in nature. A qualitative study, given the terms of the research problem, allowed for a deeper level of understanding of the motivations of university presidents when serving on external boards (SAGE, n.d.). Data were gathered through in-depth interviews. Twelve research university presidents were interviewed to understand their perspectives on external board service, the benefits and drawbacks to such service, and the rationale behind their choice of boards, if indeed it was their choice. The primary purpose of the interview was to listen to and understand the experiences of the presidents and how they made sense of their board service (Kvale, 1996). Detailed information was gathered from the interviews, one of the primary advantages to this methodology (McNamara, 1999).

The presidents were selected from within either the RU/VH (Research Universities that have very high research activity) or RU/H (Research Universities with a high research activity) Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching classifications. There are 207 universities in these categories. Given my focus on research university presidents as the subject of the study, these two classifications appeared appropriate and broad enough to get access to a good sample of interview subjects. In total I reached out to 65 university presidents to interview, with a mixture of public and private universities, institutions that are in each of the two Carnegie categories. Initially, I selected presidents to invite based on various factors that I took into account to allow for variation and comparison including demographic information pertaining to the president, length of tenure in his or her current role, and geographic location of the institution. The latter became a key consideration in selecting institutions after exhausting the initial 25 institutions I reached out to. Overall, the methodology allowed me to both get substantial information from which to look at the questions of central importance to this study

and also search for commonalities and differences across institutional type (Creswell, 2011).

Twelve presidents accepted the invitation to participate. Ten presidents were from public universities, while two were from private institutions. I contacted presidents directly via email and followed up after a period of 3-4 weeks if I did not receive a response. Typically those presidents who declined did so via an executive assistant, whereas presidents who accepted the invitation directly responded to me in one form or another. Most presidents, either directly or through their assistants, provided either a positive or negative response to the invitation as opposed to not providing a response. Before each interview, I conducted a document review on materials related to the interviewee. I attempted to gather information from online resources, including the particular university president's CV or bio. I also examined higher education and mainstream media sources to gain a basic understanding of the president's background and other information potentially useful in enhancing the semi-structured interviews I conducted.

My preference was to conduct in-person interviews with the university presidents, as telephone interviews cause there to be less rapport between interviewer and interviewee, including a reduction of social cues for the interviewer that can enrich the data (Oppendakker, 2006). However, face-to-face interviews were cost prohibitive, limiting access to great interview candidates purely based on geographical limitations and cost (Oppendakker, 2006). Thus, I conducted all interviews via a Skype-based telephone service. I thought about using video, but this would have been slightly more challenging for the presidents to setup, especially if they were traveling when being interviewed. I wanted to make the format of the interviews as easy for them as possible.

The interviews were semi-structured (see Appendix A) and in-depth, lasting approximately 30-40 minutes each. I selected questions for the interview based on themes that

emerged through the literature review and the research questions that this study was hoping to address. This allowed for questions to relate more naturally to the focus of the conversation whilst permitting interviewees to provide context rich, detailed information (Creswell, 2011). The method was salient in providing insight and information behind a scarcely-studied activity of a research university president. Semi-structured guides also allow for clarification of answers and probing of particular nuances that may arise through the course of individual interviews, as well as respecting the various backgrounds and interests of the presidents being interviewed (Barriball, 1994).

I audio recorded and additionally took notes for nine of the twelve interviews, adding to the trustworthiness of a qualitative study hopefully also helped alleviate potential concerns from a president about being accurately represented in the interview. Three presidents declined to be audio recorded for the interviews and, therefore, I used the notes from those interviews for the coding process. After all the interviews were conducted, I offered drafts of the transcripts or in the case of the three interviews not audio recorded my notes, to the research participants to ensure I represented their statements accurately (Creswell, 2011). Three presidents asked for transcripts of the interviews but did not request any alterations.

The analysis of qualitative data was a process that, for the purposes of this study, began during interviews with note-taking in addition to the audio recording that drew highlights or parallels to themes that emerged from other interviews (Stake 1995). Because this was a qualitative study, the research process was iterative, with new questions or themes emerging that caused other concepts to need investigation and the problem potentially needing refinement (Anderson, 2003). After the interviews were transcribed, I compared the contents of each interview and used a matrix to facilitate the coding and categorization process. The data were

organized according to the frequency of certain terms or themes in the data or other exceptional data points that were worth noting (Schutt, 2012).

When coding the data I initially reviewed the transcripts or notes from each interview, looking for responses the presidents provided that addressed one of the six sub-research questions. I then created a matrix that linked answers from each president either to an individual idea or, if a concept was common across presidents, a single phrase that encapsulated the core concept but showed how many presidents referred to this notion in the interviews. The matrix was further divided into responses to a research question that were more oriented to either of the boundary spanning or sensemaking conceptual frameworks.

While the conceptual frameworks were used inductively to guide the coding process, I did not limit myself to only exploring patterns that emerged within the frameworks. As this was an exploratory study, it was important to let the data determine findings versus drawing rigid boxes ahead of data collection that could have limited my analytical toolbox. Following an initial coding of the data, a separate matrix was developed that showed how themes might be interconnected (Schutt, 2012), especially with respect to the research questions being posited.

Interviewing multiple research university presidents helped to establish the trustworthiness of the study through triangulation. Presidents brought multiple perspectives to the issues raised in this study and depicting these perspectives accurately and supporting any findings with evidence from the interviews was extremely important (Creswell, 2011). I used a peer reviewer during the coding process to review the initial finding from the interviews as a form of triangulation to heighten confidence in the findings that emerged (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2002).

To further add credibility to the study, I clarify my biases in relation to the matter being studied. I have worked with several university presidents as a student governance leader throughout my undergraduate career and am considering becoming a university president as a long-term career objective. I have been involved, through my graduate assistantships, in projects that touched upon the external responsibilities of university presidents. However, in my conversations, a president's external board service had not come up in detail, certainly not enough to form substantial opinions on the research questions presented in this study. I addressed researcher biases by constantly being aware of my subjectivity and biases before and after my interviews and throughout my data analysis.

Furthermore, the findings were authenticated via looking at both the data and the conclusions drawn and ensuring that the data were appropriately referenced and categorized in the matrix depending on which question(s) the data helped address. The peer reviewer helped affirm or dismiss conclusions drawn in this last part of the analysis. It was also important to reflect upon the interactions with research participants and any problems I encountered in the interview process that would have an effect on the data collected (Schutt, 2012; Thorne, 1993). I have done this in the conclusion and implications section of this study.

Last, assurances of confidentiality were given due to the potentially sensitive nature of the topic being researched. I ensured confidentiality through assigning both the president and the institution they work at pseudonyms (e.g., President A) and only identifying boards served on in terms of the sector a given board was in (e.g., healthcare, finance, etc.)

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

After conducting twelve interviews with research university presidents, several interesting findings emerged relating to the primary areas of focus for this study. While there were definite commonalities in the presidents' responses to the questions posed to them, nuances emerged to show that the reasons why a president chooses to serve on a board, what the benefits and drawbacks are (and who these really relate to), and whether or not particular forms of service are truly conflicts do diverge. The reasons for the divergence are not so easily ascertained, with personal risk tolerance or other contextual factors unique to the president or the governance of the institution itself potentially playing a role. This section is structured to address the primary research questions of this study from the invitation and decision to serve on an external board through to the presidents' varied assessments of their external board service. For background on the types of institutions and boards the presidents serve, refer to Appendix B. A summary of the findings is presented at the end of this chapter.

Why presidents are asked to serve on external boards

The presidents interviewed centered on a core theme of why they were asked to serve on the external boards of various organizations or other entities and that theme was recognition. Presidents generally believed that they were being asked to serve as some form of recognition of either the institution and its importance or the president and his or her expertise and prior experiences. Indeed, some presidents may have been asked due to their good work on other boards. However, the benefit to the organization doing the asking and the potential pre-existing relationships to the president or the institution itself are also of note.

Recognition of a university's importance in the local community or state may come in different forms of asking, or maybe even expecting, a president to serve. For example, President

C stated that her presence on state commissions focusing on innovation and pipeline educational issues was “really a matter of the prominence of [the university] as a public institution.” Another variation of this stated by President C comes through her service on the board of a local museum. The founders’ of the museum wanted to have lasting representation from and connections to the university and so “whoever the president of the university...is, serves on that board.” More generally, President B believed he was asked, or even expected, to serve on outside boards due to an unwritten responsibility of presidents to make significant contributions to the “public will.”

The importance of the university to the community may not be something that is highlighted by presidents for purely altruistic or practical reasons. A few presidents suggested that for some entities, especially private organizations, having the president of a major research institution on their board served to bolster that organization’s credibility and visibility. As President G alluded to with respect to service on the regional board of a bank, the company saw the benefit to the “community’s confidence in the bank to have the presence of [the]...university on their board.” President G further stated that the healthcare board he served on believed it was beneficial to have him serve in this role to demonstrate “that they have a strong community voice in their operations,” illustrating a perceived symbolic value to the external organization, a statement President A also subscribed to with respect to the healthcare board she was a part of. President L concurred with this belief, while also highlighting the challenges it can create for a president in determining which boards to serve on:

There are going to be no shortage of places that would like the president’s time and energy...candidly for what you will bring to their board or to their organization.

Aside from perhaps providing insight as to the potential volume of requests for service a president may receive, this statement represents another rationale for invitations to be on such boards: Developing future partnerships the external entity would like to have with the university.

Many presidents viewed partnerships with outside entities as “very important” [e.g., Presidents D & E], and serving on the board of those institutions allowed a president to have a very direct involvement in sustaining and building upon those partnerships. While describing the challenges of serving on other boards due to time commitment issues, President D paused to state that the hospital board he served on would leave due to the numerous, important “relationships between the university and the hospital.” Similarly, President G’ expressed the importance of the healthcare board he served on due to the “shared research activity” between his university and the entities governed by the healthcare board.

Outside of research, developing talent pipelines was another form of partnership highlighted. President C served on a board constituted of business leaders and CEOs, with employers wanting to work with “presidents from flagship universities... [and] universities that are trying to make a more systematic connection with employers.” For the organization it provided a talent pipeline; for the university such a connection “provided an opportunity to meet with firms who are interested in employing our students.”

While the role of the university was given prominence by the presidents as a reason they were asked to serve on external boards, another factor which emerged was that the invitation came as recognition of a president’s expertise, which can be defined in a few ways. The first would be the president’s field of study fit well with the board. For example, President E stated she was asked to serve on regional planning boards due to her academic and career experience in that area. Similarly, President A stated her reputation as a “national figure in healthcare circles” was a primary factor in getting invited to be on the boards of healthcare-affiliated entities.

The second form of expertise indicated by presidents was their administrative leadership. If the specific initiatives a president has undertaken or been interested in align with the focus of

an external entity, this alignment can support an invitation to serve on a pertinent external board. For instance, President L was asked to serve by a particular private board because “they like[d] my vision for delivering access to education in the 21st century.” President H recounted a similar experience, being asked to serve on a national higher education board because “of the kind of work that I have done in the past to promote undergraduate education.”

The last set of experiences that had some import was prior service experiences. President I suggested that other boards were likely to ask fellow board members about one’s contributions to adjudicate whether you would be effective on their own board. This notion was supported by President F, who put it succinctly:

[I]t’s just like you do one job well and somebody notices, you get asked to do another...If you do it right, then you get asked to do something else. That’s kind of your reward.

The other main topic of discussion that arose under this section of the study came from presidents talking about alumni/trustee requests to serve on a particular board. Illustrations include a donor or alumni asking for Presidents D and K to serve on an external board, or a university governing board member asking President C to serve on a board she was associated with because she “enjoyed” working with the president. In the latter example, President C saw potential benefits for the university in meeting potential employers for students.

The reverse can also be true. President F suggested that some of his counterparts who serve on for-profit boards may not simply be asked by the company in question but that the president sought out their trustees or donors to serve on such boards. The linkage between governing board members and encouraging external board opportunities was confirmed by President C who stated that “four or five of my board members have...said they would like me to serve on a corporate board.”

There were a few points that did not arise in any significant manner throughout the interviews but may be worthy of note nevertheless. The first of these was the reminder that presidents may have pre-existing connections to a board, even before assuming the presidency, and may be asked to join because they fill a particular gap in the board's makeup. President I recounted a story of serving on a local cultural board primarily due to a serendipitous circumstance when he was working at a law firm and he fit the demographics of what the board was looking for (aka a young partner at the firm).

While the overwhelming majority of the conversations centered on presidents sharing why they were *asked* to serve on a particular board or committee, there was not much focus on situations where a president was not asked to serve on a board. President F discussed a belief that his age worked against him serving on a corporate board, although the underlying reason for this belief was unclear. Relatedly, a president's performance, or lack thereof, on other boards or in their job may be a factor why someone is not invited to serve on a board, even if an invitation has typically gone to the individual holding the presidency. President L inferred that sometimes boards may have a probationary waiting period before inviting a president to serve to "make sure the new president isn't a chucklehead."

Presidents may be asked to serve on a board for a variety of reasons including the prominence of their institution, their own experiences, and the partnerships and connections the university may have historically had to a particular entity or that it hopes to have in the future. However, there were other, less prominent factors that played a role in the minds of some participants in the study, including situations where organizations do not ask for the service of presidents. The invitation to serve on a board does not necessarily always mean acceptance, as will be examined next.

Presidents and the decision to serve on external boards

After being asked to serve on an external board, the president must weigh whether such service is something they would like to provide. The interviews highlighted that three main considerations are undertaken by presidents in making this decision: 1) Is serving on the board something they are able to devote enough time to? 2) Would service on the board fit with either their personal interests or those of the institution? and, 3) is service on the board possible given reputational or governance constraints?

The consideration of time was the primary reason cited by presidents as to why they have either declined to serve or continue to serve on external boards. The presidents' stated their priority was running the institution and that other commitments needed to be evaluated in that light. President D discussed how the three Board of Trustees meetings at his institution often conflict with other meetings that occur, rendering him unable to serve effectively on external boards. President E emphasized time was also a factor in declining opportunities when she first arrived at the institution, while President I also mentioned declining external leadership roles, stating that "there was no way to get the job done."

Time was also spoken about in the context of other factors when deciding to serve on external boards. A president's interest or passion in serving on the board appeared to be a factor that could help overcome or at least ease concerns about the time commitment. President L indicated this with participation on local, non-profit community boards where such service was "a part of the position" as opposed to an additional allotment of time. President L further expounded upon this, stating:

[I]f you're not really passionate about something you'll wind up skipping it all the time and you'll be a bad board member and that doesn't do them any favors.

Separately, the fit with the president's own views on the importance of the external board's work also arose as a major factor. For President G, service on agricultural boards was important due to ties to the institution's history and the role of the industry in the state. "It is very important for me to be highly engaged in those agricultural-related boards and activities....Any slight to the industry would be a major political mistake." Some presidents were quick to emphasize involvement on national associations or federal boards for reasons of recognition and service. For instance, President L viewed serving on federal panels "when we're asked...it's our responsibility to participate" in order to "pay back" the investment made by the federal government in education. President F, also referring to federal boards, recognized the importance of such service but also expressed that "it helps to get national recognition for things too."

Conversely, it was the service on local economic development boards that President K viewed as important due to the contribution she felt was being made to the efforts of the local community in which the university is situated and the external board's fit with that perspective. This desire to be seen as making a contribution to the local community was one of the most noticeable factors presidents mentioned in deciding to serve on the board of an external entity. President A framed the sentiment well in describing her service on a two-county economic development board with other executive leaders in the region:

I'm very involved in our community because I believe that all boats rise if universities and communities work together....[I]f we don't work with economic development to improve the number of jobs, paid jobs and things like that, we won't have done as much as we could have for our community.

Another primary factor weighing on a president's decision to serve on an external board was dependent on whether they believed they could effectively contribute given their personal experiences. When describing whether to serve on a particular board or not, President J indicated it was his background and experience in that area which made him think he could effectively

contribute. Fit with respect to potential service on corporate boards in particular was described by President C at a more granular level who indicated that the type of responsibilities would have an impact on her decision to serve:

I'm not qualified as an accountant. I shouldn't be on an audit committee, for example. If they wanted me to be a public member, I think I can do that.

Outside of personal fit, presidents also framed their decision in terms of how service might benefit their institution, and how it was perceived as benefitting an institution took several forms. First, there was consideration as to whether service on a particular board might add to the “stature” (President A) of the university in the form of visibility for the institution or as described by President E in terms of aiding in her focus on creating “strategic partnerships.”

Another factor pointed out by President J was the ability for a president to learn information that would benefit the university. For example, the president noted that service on a board in the apparel industry allowed him to understand the industry more, including some of its business practices that affected his institution, specifically in relation to athletics. President G reinforces this concept well:

I'm able to influence the organizations that influence [the university] by being on that board....

Indeed the relationship between the university and the outside entity can precipitate service on an external board. President G elaborated on his statement above with respect to service on a healthcare board, noting that his institution was the “largest supplier of nurses, nurse practitioners, doctors” and by serving on the board he gained insight in terms of how quickly they wanted to expand and how he could help “produce the personnel to be able to supply their demand.” Similarly, President D discussed the decision to serve on a local art museum board as one derived from his belief that it would benefit the art and architecture programs back at the

university. This turned out to be the case as the university was able to loan certain historically significant artwork to the museum after demolishing its own exhibition space. Without the partnership with the local art museum, these works would likely have not been exhibited and been placed in storage. President D claimed that this outcome led to both he and the museum being “really happy about it [the arrangement].”

While many reasons were given for wanting to serve on external boards, there were a few reasons other than time and lack of interest why presidents declined or were apprehensive about the invitation to serve. For example, President C raised the hypothetical situation where a president is approached by a healthcare board for service. In her case the local hospital “directly competes with [the] university hospital so that wouldn’t be a good one for me to get involved in.”

Conflicts and the management thereof could also be viewed as a subset of one of the main thrusts of concern for presidents, which is the crossover reputational risk to their institution when deciding to serve on particular types of external board. President E discussed her negative perception about serving on a board for compensation “for [the] obvious controversy related to that.” President H stated he would not serve on any boards where there was a risk for “very significant labor issues” because of the potential for him to be perceived as pro or anti-labor as a university president. President H further explained his caution regarding served on boards in certain industries, giving the example of serving on a board membership in the carbon fuel industry where his institution had a strong commitment to sustainability.

When one considers the boards presidents decide to serve on, it is important to bear in mind that the president may not have the final say in whether or not they end up with a seat on a particular external board. Several presidents highlighted either formal or informal limitations on

such service as a result of how they related to their respective governing board. President A noted having to get the “green light” before serving on a board, discussing the time commitment and other potential issues in advance with her university’s board members. President H is obliged contractually to get approval from just the board chair, whereas Presidents C and J have an obligation to get approval from the board itself. Further, President C noted that some boards may be easier for board members to understand given their background versus others. For instance, a board linking business and higher education could be easier to “justify” to “business people” as service on as opposed to a higher education board that “they [had] no idea” about. It is salient that this limitation does not exist for all the presidents interviewed. Presidents D and F explained that such interaction with their governing boards was much more limited, with President D providing a list to the board as part of his annual evaluation and a report on an annual conflict of interest form if he were to earn a certain amount from participation on such boards.

The decision of university presidents to serve on an external board is one where time considerations intersect with personal and/or professional interests. Additionally, a university president may be restricted, either formally or informally, by constraints on their position. These restrictions may be imposed because of concerns about time, but also about where a board may perceive a president’s external time is best spent.

Board service and balancing responsibilities of the presidency

You just basically work as much as you need to work to get everything done.

The above statement from President I sums up how many participants suggested they balance their responsibilities as president with their service on external boards. However, the presidents provided more detail in terms of the primary commitments they faced as a board

member and how they managed such service. Another central focus of the conversation with participants was the differing time commitments of various types of boards.

Nearly all of the presidents suggested or agreed that a majority of their time spent on external boards was on scheduled meetings. President G offered that for some of the boards he serves on face-to-face meetings were required “because of the nature of the confidential information involved.” The time commitment is not just to the full board meetings, but also committee meetings the president may serve on. President A serves on the executive committee of a healthcare board, which means a more heightened level of involvement. Then for the regional economic development group President A serves on, there are education committee and health council meetings, which meet 7 times a year combined with four regular board meetings per year.

Not assuming extra responsibilities when serving on a particular board was a subject President L touched on when saying he “would be really hard pressed while serving as president to believe that I had time to serve as an officer.” President I reaffirmed that if one takes a leadership role on a board “the time commitments are different than if you are simply a board member.” However, the time involved may be as much when you are new to a board, as one tries to, as President L put it, “make an effort to demonstrate that [you] are going to be a good engaged board member” and impress other board members. The extra efforts to impress could be significant in terms of being recommended to serve on other boards later on, as stated by a few of the presidents interviewed.

Outside the meetings, one of the other big components of service noted by most of the presidents was the travel back and forth to meetings. The travel to them was instantly brought up by President E indicating her 1.5 hour travel time to in-state meetings was a substantial factor in

her thinking of the time commitment of board service. President F noted how the extra travel time can “tire the president out.” The travel time to meetings was seen as an opportunity to be productive, however, by a couple of the presidents. President A noted that in general she uses travel time on the plane to work, using the Wi-Fi to prepare for board meetings in advance; this time management was borne out of serving on the executive committee of a board where she received a 250-page board book that takes 4 hours per month to read. President I was also adamant about the opportunities that the travel for board service could bring:

[D]oesn't mean that you're not working on the...university while you are in the intercedes while you're traveling...so you do these board thing at the same time you're doing everything else.

Other factors beyond meetings that presidents raised as taking time were the preparation in advance of meetings and expectations of attending various social functions associated with board service. President H even suggested that most of his time serving on the national education boards was spent on pre-meeting preparation, “reading the materials, doing whatever it was.” On the social engagement side, President G suggested his geographical proximity left him having to “attend a lot more of the social celebratory events for [the organization]”. President L reinforced this, explaining that for the local food bank board he is a part of:

Once a month there's probably an evening function somewhere. Even if you just look at your calendar and go “Alright, I'm going to drop by this on my way to this dinner that I'm at tonight,” there's another...The drive time, the half hour that always turns into an hour as you walk around the room.

A majority of the presidents interviewed suggested balancing responsibilities was a very challenging, if not nearly insurmountable, task. “Essentially in these jobs [presidencies] you are just working, or you can be working, twenty-four seven,” suggested President D. President H framed it as almost a necessity to be working an “obscene” amount of hours and argued that the “presidents [who] don't work those hours, you know, are on the...on the typically on the slow

path to their demise.” President I delineated the overriding mentality well, outlining that, “If you’re going to be on a board, it is going to take time, but you’re just going to have to work harder to get everything else done...you can’t stop doing the work you need to be doing or want to be doing for the university.”

In among this relatively simple view of their schedule, presidents showcased either directly or through the conceptualization of their role some more pragmatic steps they take to balance their time. President B detailed an elaborate calendar system that he used to get a sense of time spent on internal and external commitments. President K conceptualized the idea of balance similarly, stating she prioritized her time off-campus in the following order: fundraising, university governance responsibilities, other professional meetings (such as national educational associations), and then other external boards. This thinking aided the president in trying to manage where she needed to spend her time most effectively.

A president’s schedule is not just formed by the president but also his or her executive assistant. Two presidents (L & F) praised their executive assistants, with President F stating that while trying to balance one’s time came down to “time management and discipline and fitting things in and prioritizing...you need a really good assistant....I mean you need to have somebody who puts stuff in front of your nose when you haven’t responded and things like that.” In addition to executive assistants, delegation of responsibilities to other university officers was also suggested by presidents as a method by which they could balance their different roles. President D viewed as his number two priority as president, “hiring great vice chancellors to help carry out [the] vision [of the president]. Priority three was also related, focusing in on the delegation of responsibilities and enabling his leadership team to perform their roles well.

President H also saw this as his number two role, wanting to “assemble a team of extraordinary leaders who can advance that mission without a doubt.” President I saw his role as setting the “roadmap” and then “surrounding [himself] with really first-rate lieutenants.” To reinforce the perspective, President B saw a primary responsibility as being to “hire and nurture very good people...and let them run this institution.”

The connection between deciding to serve or continue to serve on a board and balancing responsibilities, as explored in an earlier section, should also be restated. For President J, managing various commitments on his time comes from turning down “90%” of invitations to serve on boards, while President G stated that instead of stepping down from an external board, “[i]t’s probably choose not to [serve] from the start.” In agreeing to serve on a local arts board, President D stated he would only do so for one term as he “just didn’t have time.” These efforts to preemptively manage time or, in the case of President I and others step down from a board if necessary, can show the challenge for a president to predict how board service will fit in with their other priorities and loyalties to their institution.

The problems of projection facing a president are not helped when recognizing that a president’s board service could differ depending on the type of board. President L suggested that a president may serve on a federal panel about a particular topic and “work more intensively for a shorter period of time. [Whereas on] a local board, there are social functions and it goes out over several years, typically.” Intensity and length of commitment are two variables that illustrate the fluidity of board service.

A number of the presidents interviewed suggested that for-profit boards required a greater time commitment than other types of external boards because of the compensation involved. President K referred to the decent expectation of time required by serving on for-profit boards,

with this potentially perceived as problematic by certain university stakeholders. President E declined service on such boards due to not believing she had sufficient time to devote when her main job was trying to run the institution. Meanwhile President F suggested that due to the compensation offered on corporate boards, “they expect work, so it diverts you from....Those corporate boards require more work than the nonprofit boards.” This perspective tied in to the potential for abuse serving on for-profit boards that President L expounded upon, stating that service on such boards can be overplayed because for-profit boards “don’t give you money for nothing, typically, unless you’re...President Clinton” and thus expect a much greater proportion of a president’s time. Time commitment pressures appeared to factor in to a president’s decision-making about what boards to serve on and whether they could continue to serve on a board. For example, President D depicted the need to “be selective” in terms of which boards he agreed to be on. President A also saw the need for putting the university first if the time commitment of outside board service became too great.

Presidents portrayed the extent of board commitments as involving much more than attending meetings. The total time spent may be understandable only to them and the staff who see the consequences of those commitments directly, such as the executive assistants who work with the presidents’ schedules. In general, the presidents did not appear to balance their responsibilities aside from simply working longer hours to get everything done.

However, indirectly through delegation or through prioritization, calendaring, or managing which boards they decide to join, one can see a few attempts made at balancing responsibilities. The commitments on these boards may differ depending on the role the president has and the type of board it is, especially if a president decides to serve on a for-profit board. Several participants declined to serve on such boards for fear of the time commitment

involved, a point illustrated by President F who saw more of a practical decision with board service due to the time involved:

[P]residents who serve on corporate boards typically do not serve on professional nonprofit boards.... You have to make that choice.

Conflict management

Conflicts are another theme that emerged from the data. The notion of conflicts related to corporate board service is one that is prominent in the higher education media (Schwartz, 2011; Wilson, 2010). Those presidents interviewed provided insight as to the steps they take, either voluntarily or by virtue of requirements incumbent upon them, to prevent or manage conflicts of interest, in particular. However, there were differences in risk tolerance among the presidents, especially with respect to service on for-profit-boards, as well as whether particular situations could be problematic in regard to potential conflicts of interest. How presidents divulged, directly or indirectly, what situations constituted a ‘conflict’ in their mind was also noteworthy.

Many presidents spoke of their duty of loyalty to their university. Presidents who were concerned about any crossover reputational risk of external board service also stated that they would not want to participate in activities “put the name of the university in jeopardy,” as President H phrased it. A similar perspective was offered by President L in suggesting he did not want his board service to become a “distracting factor” for the university. In terms of specific responsibilities, this duty of loyalty was best illustrated by President C who shared her challenges with boards who may ask her to fundraise on their behalf. She articulated that this could “pose a conflict of interest...since my principal fundraising duties [have] to be for the university.”

This duty of loyalty does not stop at areas where there might be interest-based conflicts, but also relates to time management concerns. President A summed up the consensus of many

when stating that, “if your time commitment is too great and it conflicts and it means that you couldn’t do your university job, do your president job first.” President K also noted the potential for presidents to be seen as spending an “inappropriate [amount of] time” on boards by stakeholders, a challenge exacerbated on for-profit boards that may have a greater expectation of time commitment, as inferred by several presidents. A few presidents acknowledged they ended up resigning from one of the boards they served on due to, in part, feeling as if they spent too much time on those responsibilities.

How presidents engaged in conflict management, including time commitment issues, varied. A primary method appeared to be in the choice of board they served on. President E stated she simply did not want to serve on private boards because of the time commitment and the controversies of receiving additional compensation. President K had a similar approach for similar reasons, noting she could not afford even the “perception of conflicts of commitment.” A company that directly supplies products or services to the university might also not be a preferable board for a president to serve on, suggested President C who served on non-profit boards exclusively due to the problems that the ‘additional compensation’ provided by for-profit boards, as well as the putatively heightened risks posed by serving on for-profit boards as opposed to non-profits:

[I]f that corporation gets into any kind of trouble with the FTC [Federal Trade Commission] or they have some kind of industrial accident...it’s hard to keep your role as a board member separate from the university’s interest. Whereas these non-profit boards I’m on, I think, [have] much less of a reputational risk for the university.

The reason why receiving additional compensation on these boards can create perception or more tangible issues was also well illuminated by President F:

You can augment your salary quite a bit actually....They want you to do something, so it can be abused because you’re taking time away from your day job....We’re all interested in making money....Presidents get paid a lot of money at universities like yours and mine.

President F's service on external boards was limited at that time to non-profit and federal boards. However, his thinking on corporate boards and, in his view, the problems of taking time away from the university and earning large sums for it, is instructive in displaying one aspect of why a president might avoid such boards to circumvent questions as to his or her loyalty. Interestingly, Presidents F and A raised the question as to whether the problems of serving on a corporate board could be mitigated through presidents donating a portion of the monies earned on external boards to their universities. President A suggested she would make such a donation if she was on a for-profit board as president as she "would want to stay clean" and because she was aware of the fact that universities need the money to operate.

Concerns about financial interactions between the university and an outside entity are why President A, in a prior role at another institution, declined to serve on the board of a construction company associated with one of her governing board members. While she foresaw challenges that made her decline service, the university contracted with the board member's company for campus construction. The building came in over-budget and there were subsequent legal issues "between the university and the board member." For President A, this moment appeared to reinforce the awkward consequence of the situation in that she would have nearly been suing herself.

Not all presidents saw an issue with participating with an external entity associated with a governing board member or other individuals highly connected to the university. President C was invited by a trustee to serve on a trade association of technology companies and declared some "good partnerships" with those companies resulted. However, President C recognized the challenge of a governing board member inviting her to serve on a trade association board, but after some consideration decided that there was value to the university and "we're not going to

tell her she couldn't have me on her board." A factor in the appears to be the organization being not-for-profit. President D reached a similar conclusion about serving on a non-profit board of a large donor to the university feeling as if he "needed to serve." This belief stemmed from the importance President D placed on donor relations and the donor was someone he respected and wanted to be as "accommodating" as he possibly could given his time commitments. Similarly, President J's service on an apparel board derived from the request of a graduate of the institution.

Presidents that did or wanted to serve on for-profit boards believed the potential for conflicts could be managed through normal processes involving mandatory disclosures. For example, President G served on a utility board and a regional bank board that are both for-profit entities. He has to report any external compensation he receives from service on such boards. President D, who does not serve on a for-profit board but would if given the "right opportunity", has a similar reporting requirement if earning above a certain threshold on an external board.

Many presidents also pointed to instances where they recused themselves from certain decisions on those external boards that affected or had the potential to affect their university. For instance, President I served on the board of a major national foundation. However, he did not get involved in any discussions between university staff or the foundation about potential funding and did not discuss or vote on those matters when they appeared before the external foundation board. President I showed the delicate juxtaposition here: He was aware of the potential for challenges that could arise and acknowledged that "in the real world, everybody knew at [the foundation] I was president..." Yet, the president also wanted to conduct "meaningful" service and strenuously avoid conflicts. President G recused himself when the healthcare board he was on voted on the dual appointment of a researcher between the external entity and the university. President L recused himself from votes related to the university with respect to a non-profit,

agriculturally related board he serves on, despite the external board having a longstanding seat for the president of a university. At a prior institution in a different role, President A also recused herself from discussions that had “negative or even positive impacts on our university. I thought I should not be present to have those discussions...so I’ve got out of the room.”

Yet, upon further examination, the constraints on conflicts of interest do not prevent certain information exchanges. While not voting on personnel matters etc. and recognizing that he could not ethically describe the inner workings of the healthcare organization’s needs in detail, President G felt at liberty to “judiciously” connect the rough parameters of the needs of the organization to the university’s dean of health professions in terms of increasing the graduation of nurses. Likewise, President L recuses himself from voting on university-related issues on the agriculture board, but acknowledges that he “couldn’t think of a president of [the university] that hasn’t been on...the board.” Further, President L was cognizant of external entities’ interest in wanting to “[a]cknowledge, honor, maintain their connection with the university.” This would be a slight tension that the president appears to be mindful of when serving, with organizations wanting that long-term connection but the president having to be mindful of what sorts of decisions on that board are appropriate for them to participate in and how information should be exchanged.

The type of push-and-pull a president may feel while serving on external boards may depend on the type of board on which they choose to serve and their own risk assessment. This will be interesting when later examining the president’s awareness of potential challenges associated with such service against the perceived advantages presidents’ outlined as to why external board service can be beneficial.

It is clear, though, that there is mindfulness about the possibility of conflicts, especially at institutions with the complexity or size suggested by President C, whereby “the larger your university is, the more likely it is there are some kind of conflict that could raise its head.” However, presidents appear to perceive for-profit boards as the primary area where traditional conflicts, such as time or interest, are more likely to emerge. Yet, there are varied opinions among the presidents about whether serving on for-profit boards or external boards where certain individuals connected to the university have invited them, constitutes an insurmountable problem.

Relatedly, there are seeming differences between what the president may view as a conflict versus what their board or other stakeholders may see as a quandary, if not quite a conflict. President F wanted to serve on the governing board of another university and thought this could be problematic given the type of duty of loyalty conflict in relation to fundraising President C raised earlier. In the end, his governing board gave him the go ahead because, in his opinion, “all they care about is if I do my job.” A different example came from President B who donated significant amounts of his salary back to his former institution and obtained approval from the chairperson of his board to do make the donation.

A governing board’s interest in a president's outside board service varied greatly among the research participants. Compared to some presidents who engaged the board about their board service, President K noted that her service was not of much interest to her governing board and President E agreed that her board members were far more “interested in what’s going on internally” as opposed to what the board may view as outside commitments.

Assessing service on external boards

The presidents interviewed were most effusive in relation to the benefits and drawbacks of external board service. The answers can be divided up into two approximate parts: 1) the effects of such service for the president and 2) the effects on the university. Some answers made the division indistinct, with presidents arguing that benefits for them individually could be extrapolated to their university. Presidents' provided a wide array of benefits related to external board service, while the drawbacks mentioned fell generally into a narrower set of responses related to reputational risk and time commitment pressures.

In looking at benefits to the institution, nearly all of those interviewed said such service has allowed them to build connections and gain information that was beneficial to the institution in terms of informing internal decision-making or resource enhancement. The benefit to the institution came in many forms. For President C, serving on a technology council with IT leaders provided an opportunity to survey them about what sorts of skills they were looking for in potential employees straight out of college. This was useful to the president in "thinking about curriculum" for a new data sciences program at her university and some members she met on the external board now serve in an advisory capacity for the program. Further, President C noted that her service on a local museum board opened the door for the special collections library at her university to collaborate with the museum board on particular matters of mutual interest. The president claimed that this enhanced collaboration and permitted the "shar[ing] of ideas," with the exchange turning into a "professional building experience" for staff at both the museum and the university's special collaboration library.

President H provided another example where the exchange of information drawn from board service was of benefit. He served on the board of a national higher education association

and “used what I was learning there to stimulate discussions here [on campus], no question about that.” Specifically, the national association’s work on accreditation was brought back to campus and used by the university to become “pioneers in new forms of accreditation,” according to President H.

Another benefit to service on outside boards is the opportunity for presidents to look outside of the higher education bubble and examine how the university can best make a meaningful impact upon the local community or other forums, as President K argued. Gaining a perspective on the “external landscape” (President E) permitted some presidents to re-align institutional decision-making in support of external partners’ objectives that may benefit the university. For example, President C’s work with different companies on a technology council means that when companies look to get a federal contract in the data sciences area, she tries to connect them to university faculty members “who could maybe help them” successfully gain the contract.

President D illustrated a similar example where understanding the external landscape was beneficial to the campus, this time in relation to decision-making in the healthcare arena. Serving on a local hospital board, President D saw that the hospital used data based decision-making and project groups to persistently try to solve a problem, in this case a higher number of infections in post-operative care in a particular type of surgery. He contrasted this with higher education where, in his view, perhaps not enough time was spent addressing problems and coming up with solutions. Here, the president identified problematic tendencies of university project management and problem-solving and looked for means to fix these deficiencies. Similarly, President G offered an enlightening perspective on *why* board service helps a university’s decision-making in seeing connections between the university and the external environment:

You...don't know what you don't know, and rather than being in a reactive mode as far as workforce development, scholarly productivity, funding opportunities, we're more often able to be structuring out activities...around insights to the future and that competitively positions us much better....

However, gathering information can also be viewed more as a benefit to the presidency or the individual holding that position. The opportunity to learn new information was in the comments of President B, one of the presidents who almost cast themselves in a student role in serving on these boards. President B described his service as “a great learning experience” and an opportunity to understand “a larger extent of activities...that you would never be exposed to.”

The learning aspect of external board service can more directly relate to the other functions, as well. President J's service on for-profit boards allowed him to gain a greater understanding of the contrast in decision-making cycles between universities and companies: A university has a much longer decision-making cycle looking at a variety of metrics based on prior programming versus that of a corporation which has a “90-day decision cycle.” Given that many university governing board members come from a private sector background, President J was able to understand their thinking on this a lot more.

For President A, the information gained in her service on healthcare boards that were associated with her field of study has future benefit. She has been able to see new research in her field and “how some of the things I've written about and been involved implementing...” have turned out. More significantly, President A noted her intent to return to the faculty in the next few years and the information she gained from boards will enable her to teach students “from a very practical perspective rather than from a scholarly one.” It could be argued that there is a benefit to the students and thus to the university, but the primary beneficiary under this thinking would be the president and his or her career development. President F reaffirmed this notion, suggesting that “you get to be more highly regarded nationally” if you serve on a prominent

external board. This situation is indicative of the ambiguity of whether the institution or the president is the primary beneficiary of board service.

Some presidents articulated a belief that even in situations where the board service primarily benefits them personally, the university also gains. When asked in the interview what the value of his external board service was to the university, President I noted among other factors that the president ought to be engaged in activities that are “meaningful for me personally and you want to have a president that’s happy,” drawing a connection between the president’s happiness and his or her ability to be effective. This notion of making a president “happy” was attached more to the president than the university in comments made by President F who suggested that board service is beneficial to the president because it provided “an outlet for the day-to-day things that can drive you crazy.” This evokes a similar theme to President I’s comments in terms of connecting a president’s frame of mind with the benefit that meaningful board service can provide.

Numerous presidents also mentioned the increased visibility to their universities that board service provides. For President A, enhancing the visibility for a smaller, private institution in a community with much larger universities was significant. According to the president, because of its size and scope, her institution did not necessarily have a plethora of “grateful undergraduates who have wonderful rah-rah experience[s] here,” so service on boards allowed her an ability to engage in “friendraising” on behalf of the institution with “very wealthy people” who previously did not know about her institution.

The opportunity for others outside the university to learn about the institution is not just about gaining new knowledge but also, in the words of President D, about disavowing stereotypes others may have. President D noted that external entities or individuals have

stereotypes about university leaders and being out in the community helps erase some of the negative connotations that exist. Breaking stereotypes can also be important in the opposite scenario, with the president able to communicate opportunities to internal stakeholders. President D noted the ability to nominate a university employee to serve on a local art museum board was a chance to build connections that the president “wouldn’t really have known about” without having been a member of the board.

President I offered a different perspective on where increased visibility is useful: that of the process of corporate cultivation. The president offered that external board service can build “contacts [that] can be valuable for the university... [the president] can often be valued among other members of a corporate board, and the corporation might be useful to the university.” This utility for the university can be couched in the notion of public-private partnerships that President E suggested her service brought about, leading specifically to “individuals who now support the university [through] events, sponsorships.....”

However, the audience a president may be trying to reach on behalf of an institution may be limited depending on the type of board he or she may serve on. President F implied that corporate boards “are not really publicly known” and thus do not offer the same sort of opportunities for the university visibility through president service that being part of a government board does. President F does not serve on corporate boards and has “mixed feelings” about them, but viewed visibility as a primary benefit of board service saying, “if it’s a high-level board, it brings visibility that you really can’t even buy for the university,” including through marketing campaigns.

The connection between increasing visibility among different groups for the university and fundraising cannot be understated given the answers provided by those presidents

interviewed. The ability to use such board service to grow partnerships and have companies “maybe become philanthropic partners” was put forward by President C and fully supported by President G when describing his views on the “indirect development” benefits of public service:

I need to have our state’s business leaders believing in, supportive, and understanding the economic and societal impacts of the...university....If I have major corporate interests talking about how important [the university] is, that’s better advertising than any ad I could take out....many of our major corporate interests in the state and region have the potential to be financially supportive of [the university].

The intertwining of friendraising and fundraising as an expressed outcome of such board service was included in the insight offered by President I. The president believed that presidents who serve on corporate boards that have meetings not particularly close to their university might use the trips to “pursu[e] fat cats that live by and whose philanthropic instincts you wish to excite for the university,” showcasing a melding of board service into the core functions of the presidency.

Another example of integrating board service and the core roles of the presidency can be seen in hiring. President F showcased how this could be operationalized during board service through the “networking aspect” of external board service. In his view the national government boards of which he was a part had “helped with hiring at that level” because candidates or potential candidates knew about him, increasing the size and potential quality of the pool.

Only about a quarter of the presidents noted the altruistic benefits of board service, which included allowing an opportunity to improve the community they lived in and fulfilling their belief that service should be an important component of a president’s role. President D listed such service as the number one benefit to being on community boards, tying it into the history of the university and its purpose. He also hinted that such activity in the community was “critical for anybody that leads a campus” and was an “expectation” of the presidency. Meanwhile, President L saw the capability “to give back” by serving on a philanthropic or non-profit boards,

such as the food bank board he participated on, as a “personal benefit” and a way to repay the successes he enjoyed, while service on federal board was a “responsibility” and a means of “paying back [the] investment” made by the government. Further, President B viewed service on community/non-profit boards differently than his service on corporate boards due to a greater dealing with “human issues” and some entities that were “about doing good.”

Stature and reputation was another factor raised by a few presidents, though this matter is more of a double-sided coin than some others. President I suggested that serving on a high-profile, high reputation board can have a “reflective glory for [the university] in having a president who’s on very distinguished boards. President F raised the same point, asserting:

[A]lumni, because we put out magazines and so on, when they read that their president is doing things at the national and international levels, they gain a little more pride in the university.

However, this reflective glory may depend on the level of promotion done related to such service. While President F had his service highlighted in university-affiliated publications, President I conversely “did not make much of” his board service. Thus, the reflective glory aspect of board service was not as pronounced at the institution of President F due to the limited publication of such service.

Reputational benefit can also accrue to the organization the president is serving on. President G believed he was asked to be on a regional bank board as a sign to the community of “confidence” in the bank. Along this same line, President L saw the benefit to the food bank board he served on:

People who donate to the food bank, for example, to know that “the [university president] cares enough to be putting his time on that board I think probably helps the institution by virtue of reputation.

The tangible benefit of these assertions is hard to quantify, but illustrates the potentially reflexive nature of reputational benefits at least as stated by a subset of the participating presidents.

Nevertheless, the crossover reputational benefit could also turn into a reputational risk that transcends the division between the external entity and the university. President H stated he would not “participate [in external board service] in a way that would put the name of the university in jeopardy” as one of his primary roles as a university president was to guard its reputation. Several presidents, many of whom decided not to serve on corporate boards, suggested that this type of risk was exacerbated by serving on for-profit boards. President K equated the lack of substantial financial interactions between a non-profit and the university with a much lower chance of a conflict arising.

President G suggested that the external commitments a president may accept are restricted by the internal pull on presidents, especially at public universities. The “internal demand of involvement, engagement, and hands-on visibility of the president” is too strong, argued President G, for a president to focus too heavily on external affairs as opposed to private universities where the expectation of seeing the president might be comparatively lower. President G was also one of the presidents who most openly talked about the personal impact of overextending oneself. When asked how he balanced responsibilities as president with outside board service, President G recounted the challenges he saw of maintaining a “successful partnered life” due to the long hours and rigors of the position. Others hinted at the personal impact as well, including President I who said board service added to the “wear and tear” on the president and President L who saw board service as another responsibility that ended up “cheating” or “stealing” time away from the president’s personal family time.

Presidents described a plethora of interconnected benefits for their institutions resulting from external board service: better connections, better information, and potentially more money. The drawbacks were more narrowly construed as time commitments and conflicts. However,

there are some areas where the benefits to the institution and to the president of serving on external boards meld. For instance, meeting new people and making connections can be advantageous to the president's career and provide recognition for the president, as President F acknowledged, in addition to serving the university and the external organization of which they are a part. Additionally, different types of boards were associated by many of the presidents with varying levels of risk, visibility, and bringing stature back to the institution. The findings from the interviews will be discussed using the theoretical frameworks of sensemaking and boundary-spanning to try to look at the underpinning for the presidents' beliefs and experiences.

Summary of Findings

Why presidents are asked to serve on external boards

- Recognition of the university and its importance or role to a community and or region
- Recognition of the president and his or her role or expertise
- Pre-existing relationships with a particular external entity
- Recommendation due to good work on other external boards

Presidents and the decision to serve on an external board

- Time commitment concerns – can sometimes be overcome by interest in board or the perceived value that board service could bring.
- Presidents perceive a particular entity as a good fit for their or the institution's interests. Sometimes the two intertwine.
- Limitations and constraints may be placed on the president by governing boards, though the extent of this is mixed.

Board service and balancing responsibilities of the presidency

- Presidents mostly appeared to fold in external board service with other duties of presidency and saw it as an addition to their already busy workload. A few presidents discussed using a calendaring system that divided their various responsibilities or highlighted the importance of their executive assistants in keeping them organized
- Time commitments on boards mostly spent on meetings or preparation, but the significance of other, informal functions should not be understated.
- Different boards and different roles on boards may have varied time commitments associated with them.

Conflict management

- Varied methods of disclosing conflicts, mostly pertaining to finances.
- Presidents discussed their duty of loyalty comes to university first and then to the external entity
- Differences in risk tolerance about serving on for-profit boards
- Distinctions in what situations may be viewed as inappropriate, even if these situations may not represent conflicts in a legal sense.

Assessing service on external boards

- Benefits can accrue to the university and the president. Stated benefits include building connections and resources, gaining information and increased visibility or stature
- Benefits may differ depending on the objective of the president in serving on a particular board and the audience he or she is trying to reach.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The next section of this study looks at the information gathered from the interviews through the lens of the conceptual frameworks of sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Anacona, 2012) and boundary spanning (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010; Yip, Ernst, & Campbell, 2011). These frameworks help provide perspective on why the presidents may act, or in certain instances not act. Additionally, the frameworks provide an underpinning for how a president may think about their own service on these boards and how it intertwines with the role of the presidency. It is significant to the data analysis that the two conceptual frameworks may connect with one another. How a president has made sense of their service has a bearing on the emphasis or reasons they may engage in boundary spanning.

Sensemaking

How presidents viewed their external board service can be seen through their perceptions of why they decided to serve on boards, how they handled conflicts of interest, and what the benefits and drawbacks of such service are. Presidents viewed their role in a two main ways: 1) As an ambassador for the institution, raising its visibility and liaising with external stakeholders and 2) as a resource gatherer for the university in terms of funds, human capital, information etc. Interspersed in the discussion about these two roles is the question of whether the benefits of such service are linked more to the individual or to the president and whether the two can ever be separated.

Sensemaking can be useful when looking at areas where changes in the system might be beneficial, for instance in the way external board service is communicated to and overseen by governing boards (Anacona, 2012). Relatedly, presidents also made sense of potential conflicts of interest, and what constitutes a conflict, in sometimes divergent ways.

Presidential roles and the benefits of external board service.

Many presidents made sense of their role on external boards through the benefits such service brought back to the institution or to them personally. For example, the role of increasing the visibility and reputation of the institution was referenced by several presidents as a benefit of external board service. For instance, President L saw the role of the president as the “embodiment of the institution to the exterior world” and that “public service in various organizations...I think it’s a responsibility.” President L construed such service as an “ex officio role, by virtue of the position” and something he was “passionate about.” Broader thoughts about the presidency depict the motivation behind President L deciding to serve on a local food bank board, for example. President L is a good illustration of how a president thinks about whether to serve on a particular board. If he was not passionate about the board, or it was not otherwise required, he chose not to serve outside boards that did not “resonat[e] with [him] personally.”

President F’s experiences also support the idea that board service is a mechanism to accomplish the outreach and visibility function of the presidency. President F viewed his role as “head cheerleader” of the institution. He later opined that one of the most significant benefits of service on federal boards was the increased pride alumni felt when they read in alumni publications about the president’s prominent outside involvement and its widespread effects. One could challenge the president by arguing that it is difficult to tangibly assess the impact of the pride-raising benefit of external board service and how directly it relates to one of the other primary roles of the presidency, fundraising. Additionally, amongst raising pride for the institution, President F did make sense out of his experience from a more individualistic perspective, noting that there was an element of obtaining “national recognition” that was of personal benefit. In sum, a president can understand board service in multiple ways and, in some

sense, the views offered by President F show the fluid nature of board service. There are no distinct reasons, apportioned by percentage, as to why a president may serve on a board or what the benefits will be. More so, presidents seem to see numerous possible benefits to the university and themselves, which sometimes coincide, as a rationalization for agreeing to serve.

A good example of the ‘resource-gathering’ role that presidents generally referred to is President C who viewed her role as helping “secure resources for the institution, but also making...strategic partnerships.” This perspective aligns well with the president’s focus on thinking about internship and employment opportunities for students, or how a curriculum can be better aligned to meet employer needs. Information and opportunity can be considered resources for the university’s benefit and President C appears to take a deliberate approach to her service on some external boards, with those two potential assets in mind.

Whether serving in an ambassadorial or resource-gathering role, presidents have faced questions about if their service is of benefit to the university or to them as individuals. For example, situations have been reported in the higher education media where presidents have been criticized by internal stakeholders for “moonlighting,” due to a perception of spending too much time externally on boards (Wilson, 2010), although President F and many of those interviewed suggested they heard no such complaints. This, however, could also be due to a lack of knowledge by internal stakeholders of the activities of the president when they travel outside the university, a line of reasoning reinforced if such service is not discussed with faculty, staff, *etc.*

Presidents identified other individual benefits that could be derived through external board service. For example, President A spoke of maintaining current knowledge in the field through external board service, a personal benefit useful if the president intends to return to his or her academic area after finishing their tenure as president. Additionally, Presidents B and I

spoke of the personal enjoyment and fulfillment that serving on outside boards brought to them.

These perspectives show an awareness that the benefits of external board service flow to the individual as well as to the university and, some could argue, that the two are not always connected. The identity construction at both individual and organizational levels involved with sensemaking is evident when one looks at both the presidents' perceptions on both their roles and the benefits of external board service.

Factors affecting sensemaking related to external board service.

Moving beyond the connection between how presidents view their role and their decisions related to external boards, one sees differences in how presidents made sense of their specific experiences due to several factors, including the type of external board served on and the type of institution of which they were president. As to the latter, several public university presidents in this study expressed hesitancy about serving on external boards. For instance, President C was cautious due to the "additional compensation" such boards carried with them and President K noted a view, shared by a few of her other counterparts, that for-profit boards had a decent expectation of time commitment.

The way the type of institution influences how a president makes sense of their board service can be seen in how these perceptions are shaped by internal stakeholders and the environment. President G's assessment that there is a larger "international demand of involvement" from a public university president as compared to a private university president can be placed next to President F opining that there are a "lot of advantages being a president at a private....You don't deal with legislators." There is an inference here that public universities are more constrained because of having a different set of stakeholders and stakeholder expectations for the president, whereas a private university president is freer to engage with external boards,

especially for-profit boards. For instance, President G, the president of a public university, feels “compelled” to accept invitations to serve on boards affiliated with the state government, even though those take up more time than the other for-profit and non-profit boards he served on combined. However, these state government boards allow the president to work with others on issues that are tied to the historic mission of the institution, so there is a ‘fit’ between the board service and the university.

Another way presidents construed a resource gathering role while serving on external boards was via fundraising. For example, President D noted development as a key priority of a president and when asked to serve on a board by a large donor to the university, even if it wasn’t tightly connected to the mission of the institution, felt like he “needed to serve” on that board. This was in spite of time concerns that led President D to state up-front that he would only be able to serve one term on the board. An interesting query here would be to see if there was danger of the donor stopping or lessening contributions to the institution if the president had not served on this particular outside board. President D may have made sense of the situation in this due to the nature of past experiences with this particular donor or other donors at that level or out of his thoughts as to the presidency or his personal responsibility to others, the latter notion supported by comments he made about trying to accommodate the requests of individuals he respected, regardless of being a donor or not.

Another element of the resource gathering role of a president is hiring talented individuals. Several presidents suggested this was a primary part of the job, including President I who talked about the importance of “surrounding yourself with first-rate lieutenants.” This concept manifested in two ways with respect to outside board service: Some presidents, such as President F, discussed board service as beneficial to the hiring of talented new faculty or staff

members because service on external boards gained visibility for the institution. Others, such as President D, talked about the key staff they have hired almost as an enabling tool that allowed the president to try and balance his or her responsibilities, including outside board service. A particular manifestation of the latter came when two presidents discussed the time impact their service on outside boards had on their executive assistants. The fact that executive assistants holistically schedule these external commitments of the president shows the centrality outside board service can have to a presidency and the role of executive assistants in supporting the president in all aspects of the position. A divergent view here, questions the propriety of using the time in what arguably may not be a central function of the presidency. However, the integration of these outside board service opportunities into the expected or perceived roles of the presidency likely pre-empts this argument in most circumstances.

Another part of the resource-gathering role appeared to be the development of resources to implement the vision formed and shepherded by the president. President H listed “keeping the ship pointed in the right direction” and “keep[ing] the university focused on the long-term and having the vision to do that” as a major part of the presidency in his experience. The connection between this, the president’s field of study, and the types of national higher education boards he served on permitted the president to view such board service as part of his core work, “instigating” innovation for the institution on certain academic issues. It would also appear that the president’s academic background has a role to play in how they perceive what they should be engaging in and where it can benefit the institution. President J had a background in issues associated with a particular federal agency and that led to a belief that he could effectively contribute to an external board that worked on a smaller cross-section of issues related to that agency. For President J, and similarly President A with respect to her service on outside

healthcare boards, outside board membership is an extension of their academic persona and expertise. The beliefs of these presidents create a ‘sensible’ framework, at least to the presidents, to justify taking the action to serve on these types of external boards (Smerek, 2013, Weick, 1995).

Relatedly, many presidents perceived their role on external boards as that of a quasi-student who learns information and brings it back to the university, a component of resource-gathering intertwined heavily with boundary spanning as well as sensemaking. Many presidents thought of this as beneficial to the university due to the relationship between a particular board and some aspect of the institution, as for example with President J’s service on an apparel-related board and the assertion that information was useful to the university. Again, presidents interpreted this benefit as accruing to the university and some were very specific with examples of where information learned on an outside board affected institutional decision-making. For instance, President G discussed how being on a healthcare board had enabled him to “judiciously” share information with relevant academic programs to help meet the needs of the outside entity and provide a means by which his institution could help meet the state’s needs.

It would be imprudent to ignore that presidents may see these decisions as good for the university because they played a role in making them happen. Thus, board service is seen as a benefit to the university because it is beneficial to the president to construe it as such. In this way, some presidents are making a retrospective positive justification for taking a particular course of action, be it the time spent on working on these external boards or engaging in partnerships that the president may construe more positively than other stakeholders.

Oversight and Conflicts of Interest.

Presidents made sense of the oversight of their external board activities in very different ways. While many presidents, like President G, did not have many formal reporting requirements as to their board service, others, such as Presidents A and J, have to get approval to serve on governing boards. Thus, sensemaking can occur to justify the choice to serve on a particular board and can reflect the environment or constraints that the president faces.

Related to this is the idea that presidents may not be free to serve on boards they choose. Some boards are mandatory, either formally or by expectations of the position. President C, for example, noted that board service is not entirely a matter of “free choice” as she had to justify the time commitment and the benefits to the university, highlighting the different views of the accrued benefit to the university that her governing board might have. This reflection is an illustration where a president makes sense of their own identity and service through the effect on other stakeholders.

Contrast this to the presidents who had little formal interactions with their governing boards about such service. President F explained that his board was more “results oriented” than time oriented and did not mind him serving on the board of another higher education institution. This shows a completely different environment for a president to decide to serve on boards and might well affect how they think about which boards they might like to serve on.

One related area that presidents universally discussed was connected to conflicts of interest, real or perceived, and steps they took to mitigate those risks. Presidents explicitly discussed why they did this mostly in terms of the impact such conflicts could have on the institution. President C declined to serve on a hospital board because it competed with the university’s own hospital while President I said to avoid conflicts like the plague. Presidents did

not discuss in great detail, however, the potential damage that a problem with conflicts of interest could have on them personally. Nonetheless, the reputational problems that may be caused by a president's external board service could lead a governing board to increase their control in ensuring the welfare of the university as their organization is being directly threatened (Staw, Sandelands, & Dutton, 1981).

This was interesting as when there are issues with external board service in the media it is almost always the individual president who also suffers reputational damage, not just the institution over which they preside. Take for example the scrutiny being placed by faculty members on the new president of the University of North Carolina System Margaret Spellings regarding her service on the board of the Apollo Group, an entity associated with for-profit education (Stancill, 2015). The role of the president to "protect the reputation of the university," as President H stated, can encompass protecting the role of the presidency as well. Additionally, the board of the organization on which the president serves can cause reputational damage if there are problems, whether related to the board service or unrelated issues occurring at the university, as noted by President L. The latter perspective shows a president making sense of the broader potential ramifications of such service. The absence of reflection on the impact on the presidency may be indicative of presidents taking for granted that an impact on the institution would have a negative impact on them, as well as a realization that while serving on those boards as the chief ambassador for the university, they embody their university and problems are never just limited to the particular president.

When discussing how they avoid conflicts, prevention measures were the means by which presidents appeared to manage conflicts. Several presidents noted submitting conflict of interest disclosure forms when they received compensation or had to obtain prior approval from

the university's governing board before serving on the board of an outside entity. The public university presidents, in particular, seem to link corporate boards to a heightened risk of conflict due to the compensation offered or the amount of time that those types of boards requested of their members.

Certain presidents overcame this risk because of the perceived benefit of serving on for-profit boards, be it creating partnerships or increasing visibility to the institution. They either believed in the existing processes to manage risk or did not see any greater risk than serving on other types of boards. Thus, presidents' sensemaking as to these types of boards seems to fluctuate depending on a risk-benefit analysis.

The assessment of what the underlying risk *is* may be different though. Presidents C and D had situations where they were asked to serve on an outside board by either a university governing board member or an alumnus and accepted. However, President A noted her reticence about serving on the construction company board of one of her governing board members at a former institution. Thus defining the nature of what situations may be conflicts of interest or may lead to conflicts could be substantially different from president to president. Different decisions may have been made in these instances because of the types of boards involved. For instance, the entity President C was invited to serve on was a non-profit organization and as long as she stayed clear of the political work of that organization, the president appears comfortable with the arrangement.

Conflicts of interest are not the only area where the sensemaking of presidents differed with respect to corporate boards. A few presidents noted that serving on for-profit boards could help raise the visibility of the university in certain circles. However, President F questioned this, suggesting that more visibility could be gained by serving on a federal board. This distinction

may be borne out of the objectives of the president and how they perceive to whom they want to be visible. President F may seek to be visible to the academic community that is of significance to the institution for the purposes of hiring new faculty and raising the university's stature in that community. President L would differ with President F as he viewed service on federal boards as something not necessarily done for visibility as the presidents were among their peers in one way or another. Meanwhile, President G, serving on a couple of for-profit boards, may want those with influence in the state and businesses to support the university. The pressures on sensemaking here, such as institutional context or risk tolerance of the president (and the governing board if they have to approve such service) are key.

Presidents' views of board service are, at least partially, shaped by the views on their own position, their prior experiences, and their institutional context. One wonders if they also have seen examples of where external board service has focused on in the higher education or mainstream media and justified the choices they made based on perceptions of conflicts they wanted to avoid. Of course, there are individual institutional contexts that make a difference too, a point President J emphasized when discussing the comparability of higher education benchmarking in general. Nonetheless, the common perspectives offered on for-profit board service among the public university presidents depict the heightened caution they feel about serving on that type of board.

Before leaving this discussion of sensemaking, it is important to note the importance presidents appear to attach to board service. As shown by President K, it is something that is among the priorities of a president, but may not be at the very top when compared with other duties, especially in relation to managing the governing board or fundraising. However, external board service was thought of by some to be a more central element in achieving their goals as

president and the linkage between how they thought of their role and external board service was more evident. For example, President E noted that she served on boards with people who are now supportive of the university in various ways and President D's service on an opera board affiliated with a donor could be seen as a kind of fundraising maintenance. It appears that there is some purposeful use of external board service in fulfilling the objectives of presidents for their respective roles.

Boundary Spanning

Presidential service on outside boards is the very embodiment of boundary spanning as classically proposed (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010; Yip, Ernst, and Campbell, 2011). Presidents gave multiple reasons for serving on external boards, and the perceived advantages related to such service mirrored much of the higher education literature, although the balance of boundary spanning between the university and the external entity is more uneven than the literature may suggest (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010). Meanwhile, the exact form of boundary spanning undertaken is split between formal and informal instances. In addition, the challenges presidents face serving on outside boards align closely with the problems encountered by boundary spanners in general, especially related to conflicts of interest (Spekman, 1979; Skolaski, 2012).

One of the primary reasons presidents gave for serving on external boards was the ability to be a "bridge between the organization and its exchange partners," a characteristic of boundary spanning (Scott, 1998, p. 196). This is very true when the university has or needs a connection with the outside entity and the president serves as that link. Several presidents noted that they represent the university on an outside board to perform this very function. Presidents D and G serve on healthcare-related boards because of the relationships those entities have with their respective universities. Specifically, President G raised an example of using general information

he learned about the upcoming demand for healthcare professionals in the area to inform programmatic decisions at the university to meet those anticipated needs.

There were several variations of relationships and exchanges between the universities and the outside entity. Some presidents described longstanding relationships where the president had a designated seat on the board; others, such as those described above, have shared interests and other agreements with the university where the president's service is important. Still others are more general, with the president believing the university had some sort of commitment to the local community in which it is based, such as President K and her service on an economic development board. As noted, many presidents also wanted to gain information for their institution's benefit. President C asked technology leaders on one board she serves on about what skills they looked for in graduates, using that information as input into curricular updates in particular programs.

A peer-to-peer exchange can also occur where the president serves as the ambassador for the university to the institution's peers. For example, President E serves on a multi-university board in her state that fosters information sharing and a degree of coordination between those institutions. President H has worked with a couple of national higher education associations, and exchange of information led to President H's university becoming a "pioneer" in a particular area of academic administration.

There was also evidence of boundary spanning by presidents where the connection back to their university work was more indirect. President B, for instance, shared one of his primary motivations for joining some of the boards he served on were that he found the work they did "interesting" and enjoyed meeting new people and learning things he may have never been exposed to. For President A, continued service on healthcare boards was beneficial, at least

partially, due to its relationship to her academic field. The information learned on those boards was beneficial as she considers her future pathway back into being a faculty member.

Not mentioned as much by the presidents were the specific benefits to the outside organization. President C was the most specific, offering faculty expertise to assist a local company looking to obtain a federal contract. Outside of this, there were more general exchange benefits noted by the presidents. For example, President G discussed how service on a bank board was beneficial in raising the community's confidence by seeing the president of the university on the board and President L saw a similar, visibility benefit of serving on local community boards. Again, however, the majority of the exchange of information, where applicable, seemed to benefit the university more than the outside organization.

Another benefit to the outside board, depending on why the president was asked, was the academic knowledge or expertise the president brings with him or herself. The service of President F on federal boards is an example of this, providing expertise to benefit, arguably, a national interest. Another example would be President J using his background and prior service with a federal agency to later work with a board that continued using that particular experience in a more specific manner.

The representational element of boundary spanning, done to raise engagement with external stakeholders, was also present in nearly all of the presidents' interviews (Scott, 1998). However, there was differentiation in which stakeholders they were trying reach through such service. President I pointed out even travel to boards could allow for engagement with alumni and donors, directly or indirectly. The dangers of not engaging with particular boards was also alluded to by President G, who stated that his service on agricultural boards was almost mandatory because not doing so could be perceived as a major *faux pas* by the agricultural

industry, a huge influence-maker in his state. Similarly, there was other evidence of presidents almost being expected to lead engagement with particular entities with which the university had long-been affiliated. For instance, a few presidents mentioned that a seat is reserved, either formally or informally, for them on the board of particular organizations.

Another perspective to consider is if a president is mandated to serve on particular boards is that their boundary spanning activities are not completely within their own power to set. President C noted that her board had to approve her service on external boards and that governing board members may not necessarily understand particular types of boards; this meant the president, debatably, has to cross a higher threshold of justification for certain types of boards as opposed to others. The president may therefore end up as an “engagement champion” with an entity or group they do not believe is worth that particular level of engagement because of feeling like they had to serve on a specific board because of the position or pressure from other stakeholders.

Time spent by presidents on outside boards can be viewed as external boundary spanning, as they work with organizations to create awareness and knowledge of their universities locally and more broadly (Skolaski, 2012). President A wanted to build awareness of her institution in the local community in a city with many other higher education institutions. Conversely, President E served on regional and national boards that created “visibility” at that level among peer institutions rather than non-higher education audiences.

Boundary spanning comes in many different forms aside from external boundary spanning between the president of a university and an external board. There is a certain amount of internal boundary spanning that has to occur as well related to a president’s external board service. Presidents’ conversations with their governing boards to gain approval for external work

or internal conversations about how to best approach external opportunities are examples of the ramifications of external boundary spanning. However, the amount of resultant internal boundary spanning can depend on things like the interest of the board in the president's outside activities; this was an inconsistent variable in the interviews for this study. Conversations with other internal stakeholders such as administrative or faculty leadership seem to center around sharing information about specific initiatives or opportunities that might benefit the university instead of more strategic conversations about how to leverage such board service.

Both formal and informal boundary spanning is also present in presidents' stated board activities (Weedman, 1992; Ekkernik, 2008). Many presidents noted the predominance of formal boundary spanning activities, such as external board meetings that take up the majority of most presidents' time on these boards. The associated preparation for these formal activities was also a heavily featured element of the presidents' work. Meetings take up an even more significant period of time for those who serve on executive committees of boards or in other leadership roles. Some presidents suggested they would not consider leadership roles on certain boards because it may become too burdensome of a time commitment.

However, it was the more informal boundary spanning elements of external board service that elicited the most interesting information. For example, attending social events associated with the purpose of the external board came up as a good illustration with President L inferring that this additional element could become a notable burden if a president did not decline at least some of these invitations. The importance of these sorts of casual events in meeting the president's objectives of serving on outside boards was not weighed against the value of formal meetings explicitly. However, there is an inference that at least some of the presidents interviewed saw these sorts of informal opportunities to network and meet new people as

significant factors in accomplishing their aims. This aspect was hinted at by President I in stating that it was “fun” to “press the flesh on [a] board [with] really engaging, committed, smart people.”

While there were definite advantages to the boundary spanning activities performed by presidents, and a degree of individual enjoyment and fulfilment, boundary spanning can have its challenges too, especially considering the dual-roles presidents have with the university and the outside entity (Spekman, 1979; Skolaski, 2012). This can be particularly problematic if there is an intersection of interest or a conflict of some sort. Some presidents explicitly stated that their ultimate loyalty was to the university and that duty precluded or gave pause to service on certain outside boards. As noted, President A did not serve on an outside board associated with one of her governing board members because of the problems she foresaw with such service.

However, boundary spanning is not necessarily precluded in all similar circumstances, seemingly due to different cost-benefit calculations made by the president. President C did serve on an outside board in which a governing board member was involved. This difference in perspective may have been borne out of a calculation of whether the work of the organization would lead to a substantive conflict of interest. In the case of President A, the outside entity was a construction company with a likely interest in the work of the university while in President C’s example, the outside group was more of a trade association. Thus, one could surmise that a president’s capacity to engage in boundary spanning can be constrained by risk aversion, not least due to the type of board or industry inviting them to serve. This idea is affirmed when looking at the caution many presidents had with regard to serving on for-profit boards, although it should be noted that many of them had not served on such boards but were providing their perspective and, in some case, the reason why they opted not to engage with such boards. For

instance, President E declined service on for-profit because of the time and a sense of wanting to stay away from controversy.

Nevertheless, there were presidents who were comfortable or willing to serve on for-profit boards due to the value of external engagement and if it is the “right fit,” according to President D. This cost-benefit analysis could be influenced by the type of institution the president is at. President F’s comments about private university presidents not having to engage with legislators and engaging with a board that is tied more closely to the institution gave implies that public university presidents may feel greater scrutiny about serving on for-profit boards.

Certainly, where presidential service on external boards is centered upon by the media, the stories on many occasions relate to public university presidents and alleged conflicts of interest. Different standards for what is acceptable may exist for public and private university presidents, a line of reasoning supported by President G’s comments about the heightened internal engagement (read: boundary spanning) expectations of faculty, staff etc., at public universities as opposed to private universities where there was a greater expectation that the president would be fundraising and off-campus anyway. Where the latter is more of an expectation, prominent external board service may be seen internally as a point of pride and an expectation as opposed to public universities where it may be seen internally as a secondary responsibility that can have positive effects but also major drawbacks. In all, there very well could be perceptual limitations on boundary spanning, not just real conflict of interest limitations that preclude service.

The above situations involve decisions of whether to serve or not serve on a particular board. In instances where a president has decided that the boundary spanning experience is worthwhile, challenges can still occur. Presidents L and I both offered instances where they

recused themselves on external boards from voting on matters that directly affect the university, typically related to funding of some sort. This is an example where there is a more formal restriction on the president's ability to exchange information and fully engage in crossing boundaries between organizations and that an ethically responsible stance is being taken to prevent the direct conflict of interest.

Nonetheless, it is right to question whether some conflict management tools are overly-limited in scope. While the presidents disclose conflicts of interest as defined by their institutions or state law, the ability to engage in mutually beneficial partnerships as boundary spanning can include, does not seem hindered as long as the president stays at arms-length from the underlying transaction itself. A few presidents noted situations where other university officials handled negotiations with the board and the president recused themselves from the discussions and subsequent voting. Also, non-financial initiatives or partnerships between the university and the external entity might be assessed differently for potential risk.

Overall, boundary spanning (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010; Yip, Ernst, & Campbell, 2011) is useful in looking at the work of presidents on external boards and allows a practical observation of many of the opportunities and drawbacks a president may encounter while performing such work. Nevertheless, the limitations on boundary spanning itself and the level of benefit from the different forms of boundary spanning would all be ideas worthy of further exploration, as detailed in the research recommendations section of this study. It is also worth reinforcing that how a president makes sense of his or her experience on such boards, while maybe different from how other stakeholders view the service, can be important in whether a president agrees to or continues to serve on an external board. The relationship between how a

president perceives his or her role and their actions related to external boards was certainly a factor among a contingent of the presidents interviewed.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The final chapter connects the understanding gained from conducting this study with the primary research questions posited in the beginning. Additionally, future research considerations are outlined, as well as limitations associated with this particular study. Last, the policy implications arising from this study are discussed.

Conclusion

To derive an adequate conclusion to this study, I return to the primary questions I hoped to address when proposing to undertake this research. The focus of this study centered on the following main research question and six sub-questions:

Given the numerous other expectations and responsibilities of modern-day university presidents, why do research-university presidents serve on external boards?

1. Is service on external boards something the presidents see as valuable to the campus?
2. If the presidents do see value in such service, what is the stated value?
3. What benefits and disadvantages presidents perceive of serving on external boards?
4. How do presidents balance their external board service with their other responsibilities?
5. How do presidents decide which boards they wish to serve and focus their time on?
6. How do presidents manage the potential for conflicts of interest?

Presidents serve on external boards for a variety of reasons. An underlying theme emerging from this study is that such service is expected of presidents at research universities, whether formally through a designated seat on the board of a particular entity, or an unwritten expectation where the president is compelled to serve because of a belief that such work would augment their efficacy as an ambassador for the institution.

The value or benefit to the campus was articulated in many ways. Presidents discussed learning about the external environment and finding ways the university could proactively engage with changes in it, for instance through enrollment growth in a particular field. Those interviewed also stated the value to the campus in terms of new partnerships and connections that could benefit the university financially through gifts or the support of specific initiatives or programs.

Another benefit or ‘value-added’ to the campus of the president serving on outside boards was the visibility it brought to the institution. Several presidents argued that being on a community board, for example, made them, and thus their universities, more visible to local decision-makers and community members. In turn, these individuals could see the importance of the work of the outside entity as well as the contribution the university was making on issues such as educational innovation and food needs.

Visibility can take many forms, however, and presidential service on high-profile national boards gains the institution a different type of prominence, whether it is among peers on the board of a higher education association or on a federal board that has a widespread impact. There is also a degree to which presidents saw personal advantages of serving on particular types of boards, whether it is because it raised their own stature or kept them involved in their own academic field of study. Which types of boards fulfilled these goals differed depending on the objectives of the president.

The benefit to the president cannot always be disassociated from the benefit of the institution. One president in particular articulated that the institution benefits from a president that is personally fulfilled and contented. Indeed, the benefit to many presidents of serving on external boards was the ability to learn or to meet new people, ironically two basic elements of

the higher education experience whether you are a president or a first-year undergraduate.

The central drawbacks of serving on external boards alluded to by the presidents were reputational risk and time constraints. These were factors the presidents seemed to weigh before engaging in any sort of boundary spanning activity, although there were occasions discussed by the presidents where the source of the request to serve on the board may have outweighed other concerns the president had or, at the very least, made them more accommodating toward the request.

However, there appeared to be a great deal of concern related to the time that board service took, with a perception of many that service on for-profit boards or assuming of an officer position on any type of board involved a greater time commitment. The perceived time commitment was a contributing factor to why some presidents declined service on for-profit boards. The other major factor was the enhanced cross-over reputational risk that being on such boards could mean because of their profile and the potential for issues to become publicized. This affects the president in his or her role back at the university because there is, tangibly, little separation between a president serving as the institutional leader of a particular institution and a private citizen with expertise. The assumption made by the presidents in this study, and likely accurately so, is that any controversies that affect the outside board will come back to affect the institution merely by virtue of the president sitting on the board, regardless of his or her specific, individual beliefs or actions. Presidents shared concerns not only about the type of board itself, but also the industries with which the boards are affiliated, political activities related to the external organization, and, in one instance, whether their own high-profile issues at the university could negatively affect the external entity.

The controversies, namely related to conflicts of interest or time, are managed by

presidents to varying degrees of emphasis and, as to time management, success. The majority of presidents spoke of not actively balancing their responsibilities on external boards, with it simply becoming another responsibility on top of setting the strategy and vision for the university. One president mentioned a beneficial calendaring system and others discussed delegating responsibilities to key staff members or relying on their assistants to balance their time. However, the ability of the president to balance work with their personal life can be quite challenging, as evidenced by some presidents' discussion of how the lengthy hours take away from time at home.

As a way of addressing conflicts of interest, some presidents talked about recusing themselves from discussions and votes where funding was directly provided by the outside organization to their university. Additionally, presidents outlined that the negotiation of any such deals were handled by other university officials. However, there are other situations that may not rise to the financial level of conflict of interest which the presidents made sense of differently. Whether serving on an outside board associated with a university governing board member makes sense or if obtaining compensation from a board(s) is a great risk, presidents understood that these situations could be open to abuse and needed to be managed.

Overall, the decision to serve on an external board can come down to perceived benefit, external expectations of such service, and the fit with both the university's mission and the president's own interests. These factors are seemingly framed within a quasi-cost-benefit analysis conducted by the president, and in some cases reaffirmed by a governing board, after which a president accepts or declines an invitation to serve on an external board. Many presidents in this study serve on external boards in part because of the possibility of tying into the fundraising or external engagement aspects of their roles that have been written about in

some of the academic literature (Bok, 2014; Hodson, 2010; Jackson, 2013).

While carefully scrutinizing the requirements for serving on these boards, presidents participate on outside boards if it can help achieve the president's vision, or in certain cases the vision of other stakeholders, for the university. If a president sees his or her role as an ambassador for instance, external board service can be a means of fulfilling that ambition. If a president needs resources or wants to build partnerships, becoming a member of select outside boards can be a useful mechanism by which to achieve that objective.

Research Implications

This study focused on research university presidents and their service on boards external to the university. As an exploratory study, the research conducted can be built upon in numerous ways. Some methods, such as expanding the sampling pool, are dependent on overcoming some of the accessibility challenges incumbent when interviewing presidents. Nonetheless, there are means by which the implications contained in the findings of this study can be corroborated. Further, it is important to consider the policy implications for presidential external board service that arise out of this study. The implications not only affect how university governing board and presidents think about and are educated about such service, but also affect the external entities as well.

Limitations

Before moving to the research recommendations, it is important to first look at the limitations of the study. Primarily, as a qualitative study the results are not generalizable due to the small sample size and high-level of contextual detail provided (Savenye & Robinson, 2003). The high barriers to accessing presidents are also a limitation of this study, inherent in its focus. Presidents are difficult to schedule interviews with and the topic of conversation may dissuade

some from participating, even though the study took substantial efforts to protect the presidents' identities.

Having only two presidents participate from private universities is also a limitation of the data collected for this study. More analysis of potential differences between private and public university presidents could have been gained had more of the private research university leaders decided to participate. Further, the study does not include a counterfactual: presidents who do not serve on any external boards. There were two presidents who decided not to participate due to not participating in external board service. Had they been encouraged to do so, their perspective would have been interesting to compare and contrast to those presidents who decide to serve.

In terms of the interviews, in-person interviews would have been preferable due to the rapport that could have been gained and other social cues that would have provided additional context to the answers provided by the presidents (Oppendakker, 2006). However, budget constraints and convenience for the participants were factors in the interviews being conducted telephonically. A final limitation to note was that this study solely looks at the presidents' perspectives on their external board activities. Thus, the information provided on issues such as the benefits and disadvantages of external board service was from the standpoint of one type of university position and presidents in their sensemaking process may share information that is defensive of such service.

Future research recommendations.

The exploratory nature of the work done here interviewing presidents allows researchers who wish to follow-up on this study the freedom to do so in myriad ways (Savenye, Robinson, 2003). There were twelve presidents interviewed in this study out of the 200-plus research university presidents who fall within the Very High Research Activity or High Research Activity

Carnegie classifications. In total, 65 research university presidents were invited to participate in the study, with most presidents responding affirming their desire not to participate, after being reached out to on at least two occasions,

Researchers following up on this work could simply replicate the study and hope to get a larger sample size. This would allow for the findings here to be observed in light of having more research university presidents participate and to obtain more presidents who serve on the boards of for-profit entities, encouraging greater understanding of the differences that may exist when serving on for-profit, non-profit, and government-related boards. For example, this study's findings demonstrated a sense among many of those interviewed that serving on for-profit boards carries greater real or perceived risk for a president. This finding could be further examined with a higher number of study participants, especially among private university presidents at Very High Research Activity institutions to further develop the understandings gained here. However, trying to increase the number of presidents from the existing Carnegie classification tiers may prove challenging if a researcher simply replicates the methodology of this study. Constraints on the president's time and the nature of the topic may prove barriers to accessing a larger number of research participants.

A similar follow-up study could focus on even more specific questions such as whether board service is really used as a personal strategy for career advancement by presidents, whether or not presidents are able to separate in their mind the personal and institutional benefits and limitations of external board activities. More detail could also be gained to support or depart from claims by some presidents interviewed that service on for-profits boards was more time consuming. Does the additional compensation lead to increased engagement or is it merely an outcome of corporate board service? Likewise, a future study could examine whether different

understandings emerge about external board service based on demographic factors such as gender. Such a distinction did not emerge in this study.

One avenue I would explore is to get the perspective of other stakeholders about a president's outside board service, given the aforementioned limitations of the study. This could include governing board members, administrative colleagues in the president's cabinet, and faculty senate leaders, three groups of individuals mentioned by presidents as stakeholders they confer with to different degrees about the outcomes of their board service. It would be interesting to see, for example, a comparison of how much time these stakeholders perceive presidents spend on external board service versus the actual amount of time spent. Alternatively, if there are questions as to the value of such service or its true connection with the president's role, such research may encourage presidents to be more communicative about their work outside of the institution and its benefits.

Another potential avenue of exploration would be to ask the same series of questions to a broader range of presidents, moving outside of research universities and looking at comprehensive institutions. This would permit observation of whether the types of boards presidents serve on vary among institutional types and whether the perceived benefits of serving on such boards are the same as found in this study. Hypothetically, a president looking for his or her institution to move up to the two Carnegie classifications featured in this study might spend time trying to serve on boards that would help them gain community support to build a new hospital that can get federal funding from the National Institutes of Health.

The topic could also be approached from a quantitative instead of a qualitative perspective, with a survey or other instrument used to explore certain questions that were part of this research, but not necessarily at its core. For instance, distribution of a survey would allow

presidents more time to think about the total number of boards they are on, the amount of time spent on each board and the time dedicated to particular activities with the board such as formal meetings, social events, etc. Presidents may also be able to respond more easily to a survey than trying to block off a lengthy period of time for an interview, although an email survey could also become lost in the vortex of a president's email inbox in spite of any follow-up reminders that are sent. A better option may be to include more detailed questions in a pre-existing, established survey sent to presidents by a national association such as the American Council on Education that quizzes them more generally about their roles. This would provide potentially the best means to increase participation numbers.

Different frameworks may also help to understand and interpret presidential service on external boards. Based on the findings from this exploratory study, theories on individual decision-making and risk aversion could prove useful in further understanding why presidents choose to serve on particular boards and the factors that could affect whether or not they choose to accept an invitation to serve on a particular board, such as type of board or institution at which they are president. If research university presidents turn down most of the invitations they receive, understanding why certain opportunities are worth accepting, or if presidents at different types of institutions think similarly to research university presidents in terms of accepting or declining invitations to serve on external boards is beneficial to better comprehend presidential decision-making for this aspect of their role.

Policy Implications

There are several policy implications deriving from this study primarily affecting university presidents and their governing boards. Among the presidents there was a range of views as to the amount of time spent on external boards and whether their university governing

boards understood or were interested in learning about such service. This finding matches an earlier survey from the Association of Governing Boards on this issue which found that nearly one out of five presidents who responded did not receive *any* guidance from their institution related to corporate board service (Schwartz, 2011). There is a strong argument that governing board members should engage presidents about participating on outside boards and treating it as part of the president's core responsibilities.

To support this, one need only look at the instances of crossover risk and mutual benefit the presidents discussed in relation to their institutions and the external entity. While most suggested that risk was heightened in relation to for-profit boards, the potential for mutual benefit could be seen across various external board types. A president will likely be viewed in the role of president when serving on external boards, especially if they have been chosen by virtue of their position, and thus their work is viewed through their association with the university as opposed to them as an individual.

Governing board members should be aware of such service in case problems occur that affect the president's role the university. For instance, if a president is perceived as facing challenges in their role on a non-profit board, even with a local charity, the spotlight will likely shine back on the institution. Several presidents discussed this during the study and, in some instances, the possibility affected their choice to serve on a particular external board. Governing boards that are not aware of external board activities of their president, through an annual review or other means, might be in a position to be reactive as opposed to proactive if issues arise. If governing boards are to become more knowledgeable about such service, the most efficient means of communication might be to the board's executive leadership, who can disseminate information they deem relevant to the activities of the university. This method does not rely on

one person, for instance the Board chair, in determining relevance, and keeps the officers of the Board informed more fully about the activities of the president.

The frequency of these discussions may depend on whether or not a governing board is asked to approve the president serving on outside boards as is the case with President C, for example. This approach is the most risk-averse option for a governing board, but is one that could be seen as the type of micromanaging oft complained about by presidents (Kezar, 2006). A hybrid option governing boards could use is for the executive committee to approve service on boards where compensation is involved and to regularly engage with the president about service on other types of boards external to the university. This approach recognizes, as did the presidents interviewed for this study, that for-profit boards where compensation is offered carry a greater perceived risk for the president and, thus, the institution. This assessment is based on not only the perception of the presidents interviewed that there are a greater risk of challenges if outside money involved, but the belief that an external entity expects more if the entity is compensating the president as a board member.

This proposal also recognizes the importance of other types of board service the president may engage in. Regularly discussing these involvements, perhaps once a quarter, provides a forum for the type of boundary-spanning that can educate a board member about, for example, national conversations occurring about higher education that helps augment the governing board members' decision-making. For a president, this proposal provides a degree of flexibility in deciding which boards to serve on without having to justify all of their choices and offers a mechanism to converse with the executive committee about the full scope of their role.

One other policy consideration that emerged from discussions with the presidents and has emerged in the media is whether or not a university should cap the number of external boards its

president serves on (Woodhouse, 2014). If there are concerns about the time external boards take on a president's already demanding schedule, then a hard cap is a solution to this problem.

However, the time spent on such service, as seen through the perspectives shared in this study, is not equally spread out among the boards and may vary for several reasons, including whether the president has assumed a leadership role on an external board, how often the board meets *etc.*

Further, having a hard cap runs the risk of a situation occurring where the president is invited to serve on a board that benefits the university but is forced to decline service because of an arbitrary cap. Additionally, a president may have time to spend on external boards and see it as an important part of their role. If a governing board is going to establish an upper limit, it should do so with care and provide opportunity for discussion with the president in situations where exceeding the cap would directly benefit to the institution. This should be discussed with a president during the hiring process to establish clear parameters within which to operate. All of the above points get to an underlying question that may be subject to a separate, but related time-study: who decides where the president spends their time. Is it the president, the governing board, or is their schedule subject to the whims of other stakeholders, such as faculty governance, and emergencies that occur?

A final policy consideration in this study relates to the management of potential conflicts of interest. Some presidents who served on boards where they received compensation noted that they had to self-disclose in required conflict of interest forms. However, the disclosure of conflicts of interest that are financially related do not cover more complex situations, such as where a donor or governing board member might ask a president to serve on a particular board.

A blanket prohibition on accepting such opportunities again appears to be the most clear cut option, providing more certainty to not only the president but also the governing board

member(s) involved. There may be situations where the external board has no interface with the university and those instances might be an acceptable exception to the rule. Alternatively, there could be an opportunity for a presidential partnership working with others transparently on behalf of the university. In either illustration, a president should be vigilant whether such a partnership is more beneficial to the university or the external entity, and where stakeholder perceptions of presidential loyalty may accrue.

The conclusions drawn from this study provide a broader look at a research university president's service beyond the controversies that typically have appeared in the media (Wilson, 2010; Zernike, 2013). The findings of this study can be used to provide insight to board members as to how presidents make sense of opportunities to serve on external boards and, more generally, how such service connects with their view of the role of the president. Additionally, this study may prompt an earlier discussion between presidents and governing boards about expectations and limitations related to external board service, a practice recommended by the Association of Governing Boards with respect to corporate boards (Schwartz, 2011).

For research university presidents, this study offers perspective about these issues, the different benefits and drawbacks of engaging in the totality of duties related to external board service of all types, and how a president may decide to justify such service to a governing board or communicate with other internal and external stakeholders. For higher education researchers, this study offers a foundation to build upon. The focus on this aspect of research university presidencies is one that permits greater understanding of the total external engagement role of a president which, unlike fundraising, has not been studied in great, regular detail beyond more specific looks at corporate board service (Kaufman, 2004; Schwartz, 2011).

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Semi-structured interview questions

- A. What has been your pathway to become the president of your current institution?
- B. In a general sense, what do you view your role as a university president to be?
- C. How does the concept of 'service' connect with your role of being a university president, if at all?
- D. What boards do you currently serve on, external to the institution?
- E. Why do you believe you were asked to serve on each of these boards?
- F. What considerations made you choose which board(s) you would like to serve on?
- G. What factors, if any, have affected your decision to serve/not serve/not continue to serve on a particular board?
- H. How much time would you say you spend on external board responsibilities in a given week?
 - a. How is most of your time spent on these external boards? Formal, scheduled meetings, telephone calls, emails, etc.?
 - b. Does this differ among the boards that you serve on?
- I. How do you balance your time spent working on various boards with your other responsibilities as a university president?
- J. What level of information do you provide to university stakeholders about your work on external boards?
 - a. How do you communicate this information to stakeholders?
- K. What do you perceive are the advantages and disadvantages for you as a university president of serving on external boards?
- L. What do you perceive are the advantages and disadvantages to the institution of you serving on external boards?
 - a. What is the 'value-added' to the university by your service on such boards?
- M. Is there anything else that we haven't covered that might be important for this study to take into account?

Appendix B: Research Participant Matrix

Table 1: Research Participant Matrix

President	Institutional Control	Carnegie research classification	Approximate tenure in current role (years)	Examples of noted current or prior board service
President A	Private, not-for-profit	RU/H	5	Economic Development Healthcare
President B	Public	RU/H	1	National higher education association Entertainment/museum Retail National volunteer association Economic Development
President C	Public	RU/VH	5	Statewide educational coordination Economic Development National higher education associations Local museum Technology trade association
President D	Public	RU/VH	5	Agriculture Local art museum Local cultural facility National higher education association Charitable organization
President E	Public	RU/H	4	Economic Development Athletics National higher education association
President F	Private, not-for-profit	RU/H	14	Federal Agency Charitable organization Higher education Science and technology
President G	Public	RU/VH	5	Banking Utility Healthcare
President H	Public	RU/H	8	Statewide higher education board National higher education associations
President I	Public	RU/H	7	Private foundation Local historical and cultural Policy think-tank
President J	Public	RU/H	8	Apparel Federal Agency
President K	Public	RU/VH	6	Economic development Science & Technology education
President L	Public	RU/VH	7	Food bank Foundation Agriculture

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