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## **Abstract**

This article focuses on the prioritization of and time spent by public comprehensive university presidents on their fundraising duties. This research is a component of a larger, more comprehensive study completed in 2012 entitled, *The American Public Comprehensive University: An Exploratory Study of The President's Role in Fundraising*.

This research is timely since public universities, which educate nearly 80% of all college students in America, are going through a period of great change. They are struggling to balance their budgets as states further reduce higher education appropriations. Specifically, state appropriations for public universities are at their lowest point in 30 years, having declined by about one-third since 1980; and there is no end in sight to this funding dilemma.

Although academic fundraising has occurred for centuries, this new decline in state support for public comprehensive universities has prompted presidents to turn to alumni, friends, corporations, and foundations for private funds with new and increased fundraising efforts to redress lost state appropriations. This alteration in the funding model during the past several years has changed the primary duties of university presidents.

## **Keywords**

fundraising, development, university president, public university, university finance

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## Abstract

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This research is timely since public universities, which educate nearly 80% of all college students in America, are going through a period of great change. They are struggling to balance their budgets as states further reduce higher education appropriations. Specifically, state appropriations for public universities are at their lowest point in 30 years, having declined by about one-third since 1980; and there is no end in sight to this funding dilemma.

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## Introduction

During the past 30 years, American public universities have suffered from many financial difficulties. Most recently, the latest recession – often dubbed the Great Recession – has caused state budgets to falter tremendously (Pattison & Eckl, 2010). During the economic decline that began in 2008, revenue collections have precipitously fallen in most states, and funding for most programs, including higher education, has been cut (Pattison & Eckl, 2010).

Schrecker (2011) argued in a recent *The Chronicle of Higher Education* editorial that, due to the current financial environment and the tremendous cutbacks that have occurred in appropriated funding, public colleges and universities are in “triage mode” (para. 1) and can no longer serve as a “safety net for the middle class and a source of economic mobility for society” (para. 1). These cutbacks in state appropriations have been the most significant driver of the change in the role of the university president, as cited by 71% of long-serving presidents (serving 10 years or more) in the American Council on Education (2007) study. Specifically, taxpayer support

for public higher education, as measured per student, has “plunged more precipitously since 2001, than any time in two decades” (Dillon, 2005, p. 1). Many university presidents consider this period the de facto privatization of public higher education (Dillon, 2005).

In the July 2011 *State Outlook Report* by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (2011) it was reported that “smaller regional state colleges [including comprehensive universities] face especially tough fiscal challenges” (p. 3) in the months and years ahead. As Cole (2009) noted, the financial crisis of 2008 and 2009 caused many states to cut state higher education budgets very deeply, and some of the best public universities are at great risk.

As a component of a larger study, this article examines the prioritization of and time spent on fundraising duties by presidents at public comprehensive universities. This study is very timely, since most public university presidents do not come from a fundraising background, and many have little to no training in this area, even with newly expanded responsibilities and expectations (Hartley & Godin, 2009; Nesbit, Rooney, Bouse, & Tempel, 2006).

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## The Purpose and Significance of the Study

This research examines the president's role in fundraising at America's 272 public comprehensive universities. The American Council on Education (2007) study, the sixth study during the past 25 years on the American college president, pointed out a number of issues in regard to the changing role of the university president in fundraising and the importance of these responsibilities. The American Council on Education study examined all university presidents from all types of institutions including public and private, as well as associate degree granting to doctoral level research universities, and reviewed responses from 2,148 participants. The American Council on Education study, although the most comprehensive of its type, demonstrated the need to differentiate the role and needs of university presidents at specific types of institutions, including public comprehensive universities.

There are 272 public comprehensive universities in the United States with a Carnegie Classification of Master's Level (small, medium, and large) as of July 1, 2011 (Carnegie Foundation, 2011). This generally includes institutions that award at least 50 master's degrees and fewer than 20 doctoral degrees (including none) in an academic year (Carnegie Foundation, 2011).

It is the intent of this study to provide a unique insight into the American public comprehensive university and the president's role in fundraising in order to identify distinctive activities and exclusive attributes among these institutions and to explore possible training and professional development programs to assist future and existing leaders of these institutions. This article specifically examines a few components of a broader study: the prioritization of and time spent on fundraising duties by public comprehensive university presidents.

## Methodology

This study uses both descriptive and exploratory methodologies in its design. Descriptive research is used to provide specific details of the research topic, including statistical data gathered through various survey methods in order to study the population (Knupfer & McLellan, 1996; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Shields & Tajalli, 2006). Exploratory research allows for a further examination of the topic and uses qualitative as well as other methods, including interviews and previous studies, to complement the

research in order to develop hypotheses for further research (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Shields & Tajalli, 2006).

This exploratory study utilizes survey results from a total population of 272 public comprehensive university presidents, face-to-face or phone interviews with five public comprehensive university presidents, a review of available literature, and an analysis of secondary sources of data from previous research studies.

## Survey Results

This exploratory study utilizes survey results from 142 respondents (52.21% response rate) from a total population of 272 public comprehensive university presidents. A confidential survey entitled, *Public Comprehensive University Presidents and Fundraising*, was designed and mailed to 272 public comprehensive university presidents in 2011. The mailed survey instrument included 38 open-ended and standardized questions in the following six survey categories: (a) profile, background, and experience; (b) responsibilities and duties in fundraising; (c) capital and comprehensive campaign information; (d) governing board; (e) training and professional development; and (f) final comments.

This article focuses solely on secondary research questions number 1 and 2 of the broader study, which examined the time spent on fundraising duties by the public comprehensive university president. This article reviews responses to questions numbered 13, 14, 15, 16, and 19 from the survey instrument, which examined this research question in detail. In addition, this author interviewed five public comprehensive university presidents on various topics related to the overall study, including time spent conducting fundraising duties.

*How Much Time Does the President Devote to Fundraising?*

Survey questions 14, 15, 16, and 19 explored how much time in a typical month the public comprehensive university president devoted to his or her fundraising duties and responsibilities.

*Survey Question 14: In a typical month, how many days do you spend with your fundraising responsibilities and duties?* In response to survey question 14, during a typical month the respondents stated they spend an average of 6.70 days with fundraising duties and responsibilities, with a median response of 5 days (Table 1). Additionally, the range of this response was 1 to 21 days per month (Table 1).

**Survey Question 15: About how many days are spent away from campus each month in traveling and conducting fundraising duties?** The mean number of days was 3.85, and the median was 3 days (Table 1). The range of this response was 1 to 20 days per month (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Days Fundraising, Days Away from Campus, and Days Hosting Major Donors

Variable	Label	Minimum	Maximum	N	Mean	Median
Q14	Days fundraising?	1.00	21.00	121.00	6.70	5.00
Q15	Days away from campus?	1.00	20.00	117.00	3.85	3.00
Q19	Days spent each month?	1.00	20.00	113.00	5.27	4.00

**Survey Question 16: How often do you meet or talk with your chief development officer?** Over 19.69% of respondents stated that they met or talked with their chief development officer on a daily basis (Table 2). An additional 56.69% said they met or talked with their chief development officer 2-3 times per week, 14.96% met or talked on a weekly basis, and 8.66% met or talked 2-3 times per month or occasionally as needed (Table 2). Thus, 91.34% talked to their chief development officer once a week or more (Table 2).

**Table 2.** How Often Do You Meet/Talk with Your Chief Development Officer?

Q16	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
Daily	25	19.69	25	19.69
2-3 per week	72	56.69	97	76.38
Once per week	19	14.96	116	91.34
2-3 per month	7	5.51	123	96.85
Occasionally as needed	4	3.15	127	100

**Survey Question 19: How many days each month do you spend hosting major donors and prospects at university events such as dinners, ballgames, concerts, receptions, and other social and special events?** The mean for this response was 5.27 days with a median of 4 days (Table 1). However, the range of days spent

performing these duties and responsibilities was a minimum of 1 to a maximum of 20 days (Table 1).

### Prioritization of Fundraising Duties and Responsibilities

**Survey Question 13: In regard to all of the president's duties and responsibilities, is fundraising one of the top duties?** Survey question 13 requested that the respondent rank the importance of fundraising duties and responsibilities among all job related duties and responsibilities.

Arguably, this was the single most important question asked on the survey instrument, since it required the president to rank his or her top job priorities, including fundraising duties and responsibilities among all others. The mean response to this question was 3.09, the median was 3, and the mode was 3 (Table 3). The responses ranged from 1 to 10 (Table 3). There were 74.58% of

**Table 3.** Ranking of Fundraising Duties

Minimum	Maximum	N	Mean	Median	Mode
1.00	10.00	118.00	3.09	3.00	3.00

all respondents who ranked their fundraising duties and responsibilities among their top three as a president of a public comprehensive university.

Additionally, 37.29% of respondents stated that fundraising responsibilities ranked either number one or two among all of their job duties. Additionally, 10.17% of the respondents ranked their fundraising duties and responsibilities at a level of five or higher.

In regard to secondary research question 2, 74.58% of all respondents stated their fundraising duties and responsibilities were among their top three. In addition, 37.29% said fundraising duties were their number one or two responsibility. The response to survey question 13 ranked fundraising duties and responsibilities with a mean of 3.09 and a median of 3.

### Interviews and Results

The selected interviews of five public comprehensive university presidents provided complementary and supporting data for this study and assisted in providing a more in-depth response to certain questions and a unique richness to this research. The five public comprehensive university presidents interviewed for this study were

coded as Presidents A, B, C, D, and E and were selected through a convenience sample in order to provide a geographic balance. Those chosen to be interviewed represented public comprehensive universities in five states located in five different regions of the country. The five presidents were all male, had a mean age of 61.4 years, and had been in their positions from 1 year to almost 14 years, with an average tenure of 6.60 years. In addition, the interviews were conducted on a confidential basis.

#### *Time Spent with Fundraising Duties and Responsibilities*

The five interviewed presidents spend a great deal of time with their fundraising duties, and the range of time varied greatly. One president stated that his fundraising duties consumed 25% of his time, another spent two days a week, and another stated he was gone 200 nights per year. The face-to-face and phone interviews provided information that was inconsistent with the mean and median provided by the data acquired from the survey instrument. However, the face-to-face and phone interview data corresponded with the minimum and maximum response ranges from the same survey.

#### *Ranking of Fundraising Duties and Responsibilities*

The five interviewed presidents were asked to rank their fundraising duties and responsibilities as they related to all of their presidential duties and responsibilities. All of the interviewed presidents are successful leaders and fully understood the role of fundraising at their respective institutions. All five public comprehensive university presidents ranked their fundraising duties and responsibilities as one of their top and most important duties. Three presidents ranked their fundraising duties and responsibilities either number one or two among all that they are faced with in their role. In addition, one president succinctly stated that fundraising is at the top of his list; another simply stated that it was a top five responsibility. The data obtained from the face-to-face and phone interviews was consistent with all data acquired from the survey information.

## **Conclusion**

This article reviewed specific components of a larger study regarding the prioritization of and the amount of time spent on fundraising duties and responsibilities by public comprehensive university presidents. This article and the related research are based on an exploratory

study that examined the president's role in fundraising at America's 272 public comprehensive universities.

Fundraising is one of the most demanding and visible roles of a university president, and he or she should expect to spend an inordinate amount of time raising private funds (Kaufman, 2004; Nelson, 2009). These fundraising duties and responsibilities faced by public comprehensive university presidents are due in large part to the decline in state appropriations supporting higher education (Cheslock & Gianneschi, 2008; Ehrenberg, 2006).

The funding model for public comprehensive universities has been altered immensely during the past 30 years by a precipitous decline in state appropriations that has caused the president's role in fundraising to change in order to fill these funding gaps (Ehrenberg, 2006; Kaufman, 2004; Pattison & Eckl, 2010). Latta (2010) described the current funding environment as a "perfect storm," as the need for an educated workforce is increasing in order to be competitive in the new global marketplace, the cost of attending a university is growing, and state funding declines are expected to continue. Hence, the role of the president at public universities is quickly shifting to more external responsibilities as the search for private funds continues to grow to fill this deepening gap caused by appropriation losses (Ehrenberg, 2006; Kaufman, 2004; Nelson, 2009).

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