

WittKieffer



TALENT INSIGHTS:

The Path to the
College Presidency

February 2024

CURRENT TRENDS

GREATER DIVERSITY

- Presidents at leading universities continue to grow more diverse, with more than a quarter (26%) identifying as people of color.
- Nearly two-thirds (62%) of WittKieffer's presidential placements in higher education over the past five years are people of color and/or women.

SUCCESSION ON THE RISE

- The average retirement age among past presidents increased to 69.
- Currently, a significant proportion of presidents, specifically more than four in 10 (44%), are aged 65 or above. This demographic trend implies an impending wave of retirements.
- Strategic succession planning and nurturing internal talent will be vital for smoother leadership transitions.

PATH TO PRESIDENCY

- More than nine in 10 (92%) of current presidents rose through the ranks in education, taking an average of 24 years to attain the role of president.
- More than three in four (78%) current presidents were recruited externally rather than being appointed from within an institution for which they taught or served in administration. However, in the last two years internal appointments appear to be on the rise.
- Nearly one in five (17%) presidents have served as an interim, either now or in the past.

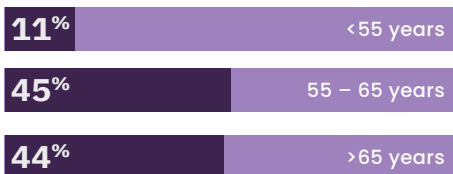
DIVERSITY LENS

- Presidents are growing more diverse, signaling a gradual movement towards a more inclusive and equitable presidency landscape.
- While gender diversity is seeing some improvement, women, on average, take three years longer to attain the position of president.
- More than four in 10 (44%) university presidents already exceed age 65, underscoring the need for effective succession planning.

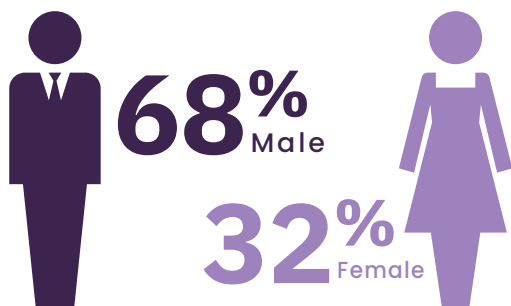
Demographic Profile

AGE
+/- **63**

Current age, on average



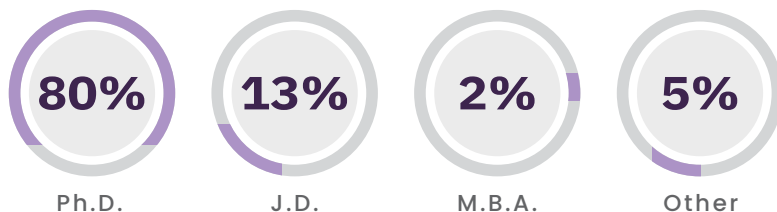
Gender Diversity



Compared to 30% female in 2016¹
Among WittKieffer Placements: 39%²



Academic Background



Ethnic Diversity



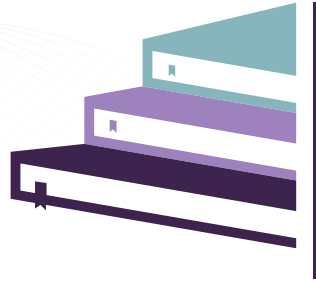
Compared to 17% POC in 2016¹
Among WittKieffer Placements: 32%²

¹ Benchmarking data from the previous publications of “The American College President.”

² WittKieffer’s placements over the last 60 months (Jan 1, 2019 to Dec 31, 2023). Source: WittKieffer proprietary research on the career paths of top 130 university presidents (105 national; 25 regional), as designated by *U.S. News and World Report*, December 2023.

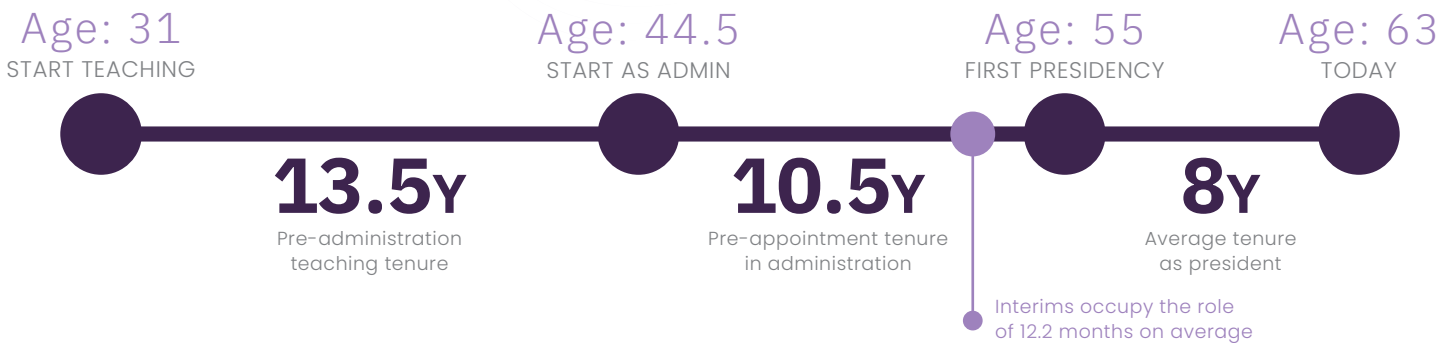
³ Black or African American 9%; Hispanic or Latino 5%; Asian 5%; North African or Middle Eastern 3%; Other 4%

PATH TO PRESIDENCY



24y

Average tenure in academia before first presidential appointment



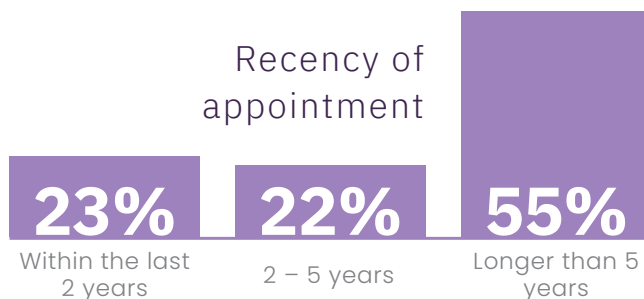
- Our analysis of previous presidents at leading universities showed an average retirement age of 69 (based on the analysis of nearly 40 former presidents).
- Interim leadership continues to grow, with nearly 1 in 5 (17%) leading presidents serving as interims now or in the past. More than a third (41%) of the 22 presidents who previously served as interims were appointed to the permanent position, and most were internally selected.
- One quarter of current university presidents at leading institutions previously held the role elsewhere. Reasons for accepting new appointments include:
 - Serving at an alma mater;
 - Joining a more prestigious institution;
 - Living closer to family;
 - Transitioning to a better work environment.

PATH TO PRESIDENCY

Current Presidency Role

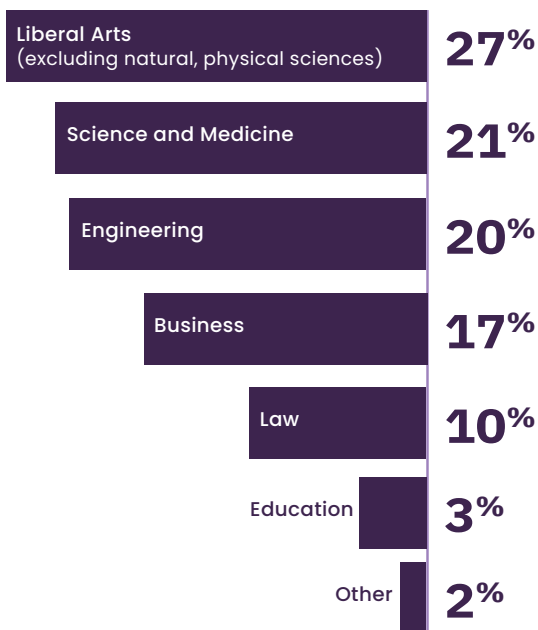


Historically, external recruitment for presidents was much more common, but internal appointments are now increasing. In just the last two years, 38% of presidents were internally appointed, much higher than the 22% average across all presidents studied. Average tenure for these leaders exceeds six years.



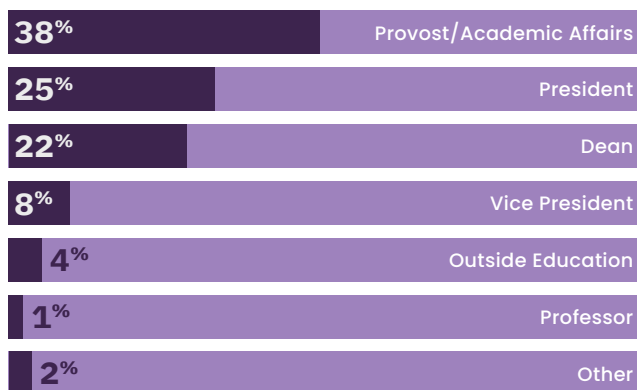
Common Academic Areas

Presidents specialize in a wide variety of academic areas.



Immediate Position Before Presidency

While the traditional provost path to the presidency remains prevalent, a substantial portion of presidents previously served as deans or in other administrative roles immediately prior to their presidential appointment. A quarter of current presidents came directly from the same role at another institution.





METHODOLOGY

WittKieffer proprietary research on the career paths of 130 current presidents at leading national and regional universities, as designated by *U.S. News and World Report*, December 2023.

The research was conducted using publicly available information from December 2023, such as institution websites, BoardEx, and LinkedIn.

ABOUT WITTKIEFFER

WittKieffer is the premier executive search and leadership advisory firm developing impactful leadership teams for organizations that improve quality of life. We work exclusively with organizations in healthcare, science and education – the Quality of Life Ecosystem – and provide the essential knowledge, analysis, and perspective that produce effective leaders and inclusive cultures. Through our executive search, interim leadership, and leadership advisory solutions, we strengthen organizations that make the world better. WittKieffer is proud to be 100 percent employee-owned.

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