

## A Snapshot of Generational Change in Leadership of American Research-Intensive Universities

American research-intensive universities are among the most prestigious and influential in the world. Their presidents and provosts rightly cite the work of professors, researchers and students as the element that makes their universities what they are.

Still, it makes a difference who holds leadership roles in universities, so who they are and where they hail from and are educated can be matters of interest as well as bases for more informed speculation about whether or not to expect change in the profile of institutional leaders of these special organizations.

**Table 1**

### **American-Member Institutions of the Association of American Universities**

Boston University	Brandeis University
Brown University	California Institute of Technology
Carnegie Mellon University	Case Western Reserve University
Columbia University	Cornell University
Duke University	Emory University
Georgia Institute of Technology	Harvard University
Indiana University	Iowa State University
Johns Hopkins University	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Michigan State University	New York University
Northwestern University	Ohio State University
Pennsylvania State University	Princeton University
Purdue University	Rice University
Rutgers University	Stanford University
Stony Brook University	Texas A&M University
Tulane University	University of Arizona
University at Buffalo	University of California, Berkeley
University of California, Davis	University of California, Irvine
University of California, Santa Barbara	University of Chicago
University of Colorado, Boulder	University of Florida
University of Illinois	University of Iowa
University of Michigan	University of Minnesota
University of Missouri	University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
University of Oregon	University of Pennsylvania
University of Pittsburgh	University of Rochester
University of Southern California	University of Texas, Austin
University of Virginia	University of Washington
University of Wisconsin	Vanderbilt University
Washington University in Saint Louis	Yale University

Here, I examine the sixty (60) American institutional members of the Association of American Universities(AAU; [www.aau.edu](http://www.aau.edu), Table 1) across a small set of personal /demographic and professional characteristics of their presidents one generation apart, 1992 and 2017.

In addition, the same characteristics are considered for the current provosts of the universities. The inclusion of provosts was prompted by the extent to which the data indicate that that position has become the last stop in the professional advancement journey of nearly half of the current group of presidents (but not so in the 1992 cohort) and invites speculation as to the degree of change that may be expected in the near future.

Two notes pertaining to the universities used in this analysis are in order: First, some of the universities included here were not members of AAU in 1992. However, those not members in 1992 were well on their way to becoming research-intensive institutions.

A second note is one of caution related to the small numbers of American universities considered here. AAU membership criteria are quite stringent and omit many institutions in which research is a primary activity. But for the purpose of taking a “snapshot” of leadership in research-intensive universities, AAU membership provides perspective.

## The Data

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Presidents <u>1992</u></b>	<b>Presidents <u>2017</u></b>	<b>Provosts <u>2017</u></b>
<b>Gender</b>			
Female	5%(3)	20%(12)	37%(22)
LGBTQ	(0)	(0)	2%(1)
Male	95%(57)	80%(48)	61%(37)
<b>African-American</b>	<b>(0)</b>	<b>5%(3)</b>	<b>7%(4)</b>
<b>Foreign-born or <u>-educated</u></b>	<b>18%(11)</b>	<b>23%(14)</b>	<b>22%(13)</b>
Australia		2%(1)	
Canada	2%(1)	3%(2)	
China	2%(1)	3%(2)	
Cuba		2%(1)	
Cyprus		2%(1)	
Germany	5%(3)		
India		3%(2)	5%(3)
Iran	3%(2)	2%(1)	
Netherlands		2%(1)	
New Zealand			2%(1)
Norway	2%(1)		
South Africa			2%(1)
Sweden	2%(1)		

United Kingdom	3%(2)	3%(2) S	13%(8)
Venezuela		2%(1)	

Foreign-born is an unambiguous attribute. A similar straightforward approach is used with respect to foreign-educated, defined here as undergraduate or graduate enrollment in a country outside the United States and does not include post-doctoral studies abroad or subsequent involvement in international higher education or affairs. These universities are all actively engaged in a variety of programs and relationships with entities of numerous types located around the world.

Moreover, many of the 1992 cohort of presidents are described as children of immigrant parents and often were first-time college attendees in their families from homes in which mothers and fathers spoke in native tongues, not English.

While the age of presidents and provosts was not examined in the analysis, three cases raise the interesting possibility of “senior” persons serving in these roles well beyond what has usually been seen as retirement in the mid- to late-60s. Henry Yang, Chancellor of the University of California, Santa Barbara, is age 77. His fellow chancellor at Berkeley, Carol Christ, accepted appointment at age 73 after serving as the University’s interim provost. Wallace Loh, President of the University of Maryland, is, by comparison, a mere stripling at age 71.

### Analysis

Even with the limitations of a small number of universities, generational change is apparent in the increase of women serving as presidents between 1992 and 2017 and a small increase in African-American presidents. The seven countries from which presidents in 1992 hailed from and/or were educated in were European or Canadian and increased to ten from a more diverse group of countries (although the actual numbers of presidents born or educated abroad remained similar).

To the extent that the position of Provost is the major source of presidents (a point addressed below), the change observed between generations of presidents remains roughly the same in the case of foreign-birth and foreign-educated provosts (albeit, from a smaller number of countries), with a small increase in the number of African-American provosts. But women constitute more than one-third of current provosts and it seems reasonable to expect there will be more women presidents of these particular group of universities.

In contrast, it is difficult to project an increase in African-American presidents of these universities comparable to that of women unless, of course, some of the women provosts of 2017 are African American.

Elsewhere (Skinner, 2017), I have sought to make the case that governing boards apparently see the increased value of the experience of being a foreign-born and/or -educated president, at least among universities ranked highly internationally. Data for the 50 highest-ranked institutions in the Times Higher Education World Rankings of Universities for 2017 (which include 25 of the American AAU members analyzed here) offer support for that view. The number of foreign-born and second-generation deans (the position from which nearly half of all provosts move) who come from Asia and most prominently India augur for increased numbers of provosts and then presidents/chancellors.

Between the cohort of presidents in 1992 and those who now hold those posts (Table 3) the path of professional advancement in American AAU institutions changed significantly. First, service as a provost became the jumping off point for most presidents in 2017. Whereas 38 percent of presidents in 1992 came into the presidency directly from service as a provost, 53 percent of presidents in 2017 took that route.

A change of comparable size took place over a quarter century as 25% of presidents in 2017 had been chancellor, president or acting/interim president, 39% in 1992 arrived in the presidency from having served as a president or in an acting capacity.

While the numbers are small, it is of note that among presidents in 1992, only one came from outside academia; four presidents (three of whom had served in government) were “outsiders” in 2017. No current provosts assumed office in 2017 from service outside academia, but the path to becoming a provost is quite diverse *within* universities, although service as a dean remains the more frequent route.

**Table 3**  
**Professional Advancement of Presidents and Provosts**

<u>Immediately Prior Post</u>	<u>Presidents</u> <u>1992</u>	<u>Presidents</u> <u>2017</u>	<u>Provosts</u> <u>2017</u>
Chancellor/President	34%(21)	22%(13)	3%(2)
Acting/Interim Chancellor/President	5%(3)	3%(2)	5%(3)
Provost	31%(19)	46%(28)	3%(2)
Acting/Interim Provost		2%(1)	8%(5)
Associate Vice Chancellor/Provost	2%(1)		6%(4)
Vice Chancellor/Provost	5%(3)	5%(3)	15%(9)
Dean	16%(10)	15%(9)	43%(26)
Acting/Interim Dean			2%(1)
Deputy/Vice Dean			3%(2)
Department Chair			2%(1)
Director	2%(1)		2%(1)
Professor	2%(1)		5%(3)
CEO (non-academic)	2%(1)		2%(1)
Governor (government)		2%(1)	
Deputy Secretary (government)		3%(2)	
Executive Vice President (foundation)	2%(1)		
Managing Principal (private firm)		2%(1)	

The story to be told when it comes to which fields and disciplines presidents of research-intensive universities emerge from should offer comfort to those who relish tradition (Table 4). The traditional “professions” – by which are meant architecture, clergy, engineering, law and medicine – maintain something of a hold on university presidencies of the types of institutions considered here. The relative importance of any one varies vis-a-vis the others, but they persist as preparation for leadership.

**Table 4**  
**Doctoral Disciplines/Fields**

<b><u>Discipline</u></b>	<b>Presidents <u>1992</u></b>	<b>Presidents <u>2017</u></b>	<b>Provosts <u>2017</u></b>
Law	13%(8)	20%(12)	2%(1)
History	12%(7)	2%(1)	8%(5)
Medicine	8%(5)	10%(6)	3%(2)
Engineering	8%(5)	18%(11)	15%(9)
Political science	8%(5)	2%(1)	3%(2)
Psychology	7%(4)	5%(3)	5%(3)
Computer science		7%(4)	
Economics	5%(3)	5%(3)	10%(6)
Languages	5%(3)		
Physics	5%(3)	3%(2)	5%(3)
Philosophy	5%(3)		2%(1)
Biology	3%(2)	3%(2)	2%(1)
Geology	3%(2)		3%(2)
Mathematics	3%(2)	2%(1)	3%(2)
Theology	3%(2)		
Biochemistry	2%(1)		3%(2)
Classics	2%(1)		2%(1)
Industrial Relations	2%(1)		
Linguistics	2%(1)		
Journalism	2%(1)		
Literature	2%(1)	2%(1)	2%(1)
Business		3%(2)	3%(2)
Chemistry		3%(2)	3%(2)
Education		3%(2)	2%(1)
Physiology		3%(2)	3%(2)
Sociology		3%(2)	
Communications		2%(1)	2%(1)
Geography		2%(1)	2%(1)
Oceanography		2%(1)	
African-Am. Studies			3%(2)
Entomology			2%(1)
Geography			2%(1)
Library Science			2%(1)
Microbiology			2%(1)
Oncology			2%(1)
Org. Behavior			2%(1)
Toxicology			2%(1)

Architecture is the exception that proves the rule. Most close observers of higher education are hard-pressed to name an architect who is a university president, but they will readily attest to the joy university leaders have planning and opening new buildings and those may compensate for a lack of formal training in architecture.

Clergy are hard to come by, save for in religious-affiliated institutions which are not now AAU members. Still, in 1992, two presidents of the 60 institutions studied here held doctorates in theology. No such expertise is present among current presidents and provosts and therein, no doubt, lies a tale . . . untold here.

In 1992 presidents from law, medicine, engineering and theology made up nearly one-third of American AAU leaders. A generation later, presidents from the professions constituted almost half. Conspicuous is the growth in the number of engineers who preside over research-intensive universities today.

But signs that may well be omens suggest that the professions' hold on the academic presidency may not prevail in the next generation of presidents. Among current provosts of the 60 universities, the professions are represented by only 20 percent, as law and medicine decline and engineering slips slightly.

Three other observations: The more general one is the fragmentation of the traditional academic disciplines and their remixing into wholly-new fields. In any one of the 60 universities studied here it is common to have a professor whose appointments include neuroscience, linguistics, electrical engineering, philosophy, ethics. And if the professor is a medical doctor, the business card cannot hold all the characters that describe her/his appointment.

A second observation has to do with the near disappearance of historians from presidencies, at least over the generation covered here. Ironically and without design, 1992 was selected as the point in time to frame a generation as 25 years. That same year, the historian Francis Fukayama published his book, **THE END OF HISTORY AND THE LAST MAN**. As detailed in Table 4, between 1992 and 2017 presidents-as-historians dropped in number from seven to one.

Moreover, as noted earlier, one of the more striking results from this analysis is the growth in the number of women presidents in American AAU institutions from 3 to 12 between 1992 and 2017 and the 22 women who are now provosts of those institutions and likely to become presidents of their current universities or one of the other institutions. Fukayama's title may be more prescient than could ever be imagined, what with the absence of historians from academic presidencies and the continued growth in the number of women presidents.

Finally, the 60 universities examined here are not representative of the 5,000 or so colleges and universities in the United States, with the rich diversity of missions among them. But these 60 are the institutions to which the nation turns when it seeks to tackle problems and respond to opportunities. And while such universities are rich in tradition and complex in operation, their futures do depend on who leads them. Who leads them is changing.