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Crisis Leadership Practices of Women University Presidents: Trust, Communication & Care

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Crisis Leadership Practices of Women University Presidents:

Trust, Communication & Care

By

SHEILA E. ROCKER HEPPE

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

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in

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in the

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of the

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DAVIS

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Committee in Charge

2022

i

Abstract

During the first months of 2020 and throughout the following two years, the COVID-19 pandemic spurred changes in daily life for people worldwide and placed stress on the global economy. The crisis was one of the most impactful and unpredictable global events in recent history. The COVID-19 pandemic catapulted institutions of higher education across the United States into an unprecedented culture of change, creative innovation, and crisis management. Campus closures required rapid transition to new forms of instruction and student engagement. The health and safety of staff, faculty, and students became a primary focus for university presidents. Never before had college leaders been challenged by a crisis that affected all institutes of higher education across systems, states, and nations. The purpose of this study was to explore the crisis leadership practices employed by women executive leaders who served as university presidents in the California State University system during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings of this study center on the leadership experiences of five women presidents as they navigated the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on their campuses. The participants described their career pathways to their role as president and shared their observations of leadership in the context of their identity as a woman leader. Within a shared leadership framework, the participants identified the importance of their campus leadership team and building strong team dynamics during the crisis. Three foundational crisis leadership practices emerged from the research: trust, communication, and care. The participants reflected on what they had learned about themselves as leaders as they navigated the crisis. These observations about personal leadership practice were shared in the context of serving as a woman leader and in the context of serving within a state university system that employed a majority women presidents.

DEDICATION

To Christopher Mark Rocker Heppe – my life partner and my love.

You walk through your world inspiring *trust* and spreading joy.

To Katerina Elizabeth Rocker Mayer – most precious effervescent "go for it" daughter.

You embody *care* through your work, your heart, and your dedication to the well-being

of the people and animals of your world.

To Peter Hans Rocker Heppe – treasured son full of heart and soul.

Your gift to your world is your ability to *communicate* your insights, share your

expertise, and demonstrate your dedication to others.

This, and all that matters, is dedicated to the three of you.

For you, forever and for always.

You are my world.

mother-in-law, Myrna Heppe, who has held and continues to express the love and light left to us by my mother and her dear friend, Donna Rocker.

Crossing the finish line would have been impossible without the compassionate guidance and steadfast support of Dr. Patricia D. Quijada who served as my committee chair, thought partner, and genuine trusted friend. I am eternally grateful for Patricia and the many ways she shares her abundant knowledge, expresses beauty, and brings grace to the world around her. I also want to thank Dr. Cassandra Hart and Dr. Margarita Jimenez Silva for serving on my dissertation committee. I deeply appreciate the insight and encouragement they provided.

I am profoundly grateful and extremely humbled by the generosity and candidness of the university presidents who shared their time and expertise with me as I conducted this research. Each of these phenomenal women not only shared their time and thoughtfully responded to my interview questions, but they also graciously demonstrated their abilities to trust, communicate, and care through the content they shared and the manner in which they engaged with me. They are pure inspiration and role models for women leaders in higher education.

Many people provided support and kept me going on this journey. There are too many to name them all, however, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the following loved ones:

- Clint Rebik for sharing your life with me, traveling with me, laughing and learning with me, and dedicating your heart to forge our treasured friendship, which reaches beyond time and is infinitely precious.
- Dr. Shannon Morago for carving the path and supporting the journey,
- Jennifer Jones for "talking me in" during the last hour of many Sunday trips home,
- Dr. My Jenny Soojean Kwon for support beyond measure and a rock,

"When A Wise Woman Leads"

When a wise woman leads, she calls a circle together
and makes a place for stories to be shared, hopes to be uttered and revelation to unfold.

When a wise woman leads, she leads from stillness-
where she has gathered herself, mined her experience for its
insight, and turned her wisdom into story.

When a wise woman leads, she listens to the voice and hears the spirit.
she steps up and out, even when the path ahead is rugged or unclear.

When a wise woman leads, she dares to be vulnerable,
dares to be real, dares to speak from a place of unknowing.

When a wise woman leads, the experience of the journey
is as important as arriving.

When a wise woman leads, she thinks with her head,
ponders with her heart, decides with her soul.

When a wise woman leads, she knows when to leave,
when to let go, and when to push on.

When a wise woman leads, she speaks with the intensity of fire,
the freshness of air, the groundedness of earth, and the depth of the sea.

When a wise woman leads, she bears witness to our oneness,
and chooses what is best for the common good.

She is a tempest against injustice, a torrent of hopefulness,
a wellspring of wisdom.

She leads for the benefit of every sentient being,
that life will be sustained, that well-being will prevail,
that goodness will shine over all our days.

Jan Phillips
2012
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

During the first months of 2020 and throughout the next two years, the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic spurred changes in daily life for people worldwide and placed stress on the global economy. In his seminal text *On Leadership*, John Gardner (1993) defined leadership as "the process of persuasion or example by which an individual (or leadership team) induces a group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leader and his or her followers" (p. 1). The importance of leadership is heightened during a crisis when leaders must sometimes move forward without a full understanding of potential circumstances.

In 2020, as the COVID-19 infection rates rose worldwide, leaders within organizations and across governments often had little time to fully prepare or adequately assess all possible impacts or consequences before responding to or making policy changes. Clear objectives proved difficult to quickly discern and communicate. Due to high infection rates and rising death tolls, political leaders issued orders to shelter in place, schools and college campuses closed, and all non-essential businesses ceased functions. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic catapulted institutions of higher education across the United States into an unprecedented culture of change, creative innovation, and crisis management. Campus closures required rapid transition to new forms of instruction and student engagement. The health and safety of staff, faculty, and students became a primary focus for senior university administrators. Never before had college leaders been challenged by a crisis that affected all institutes of higher education across systems, states, and nations.

Fairhurst (2009) noted that "leadership is both new and old, a timeless concept that must simultaneously reflect the times yet stay ahead of them. To do so is no small feat, but it is most worthy of pursuit in contemporary organizational life" (p. 24). In order to reflect the times and

stay ahead of COVID-19, leaders across all sectors needed to think and communicate in new ways to move through the crisis. Often, the initial objective was to respond to the quickly expanding crisis without the luxury of anticipating next best steps (Cooper et al., 2020; Dumulescu & Muțiu, 2021; Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Holcombe et al., 2021; Salas-Vallina et al., 2022).

As with many other organizations, colleges and universities were not well prepared for a crisis the size and reach of the COVID-19 pandemic. Globally, institutions of higher education moved academic instruction to online formats within the first weeks of campus closures (Bradbury et al., 2020; Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Holcombe et al., 2021). Between March 6 and March 12, 2020, nearly two-thirds of all four-year institutions announced plans to transition online (Turk et al., 2020). The transition was rapid for the continuance of academic programs during the spring and summer 2020 terms (Cooper et al., 2020; Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Holcombe et al., 2021). Campus leaders struggled with the decision about how to best present the 2020 to 2021 academic year. During the summer of 2020, academic leaders at Davidson College launched the College Crisis Initiative (C2i) to serve as a research hub for institutions of higher education to "learn how colleges and universities innovate in a crisis mindset" (Turk et al., 2020). When the 2020 fall term began, 452 of the 1,442 four-year institutions in the United States reported that they were either fully or partially online (Turk et al., 2020). Three hundred twenty colleges offered a mix of online and face-to-face instruction, and 446 were fully or partially in-person (Turk et al., 2020). In the first week in September 2020, over 200 institutions had not yet stated an official plan for fall instruction (Turk et al., 2020). Campus communities looked to their presidents for direction and leadership during this time of rapid transition.

According to Rita Bornstein (2005), Americans have unrealistic expectations of college presidents. She contends that presidents are expected to be scholars as well as visionary leaders who demonstrate charisma and sustained high energy. As institutions of higher education were forced to readjust and change during the COVID-19 pandemic, students, parents, professors, and university staff looked to campus leaders for guidance. Perhaps, as Bornstein quipped, these leaders were expected to perform and lead beyond what would be anticipated from an ordinary mortal. In her article, "Presidents and the Big Picture," Bornstein (2003) called for campus leaders to serve as integral leaders by demonstrating and promoting leadership practices that are both collaborative and decisive. In order to maintain a focus on the vision for their campus, presidents should establish and retell the institutional story and embrace opportunities for collaboration, integration and interaction. She suggested campus presidents employ appropriate leadership practices to the circumstances presented. Ideally those practices would include decision making that was decisive and collaborative, analytical and relational, rational and intuitive (Bornstein, 2003). In 2017, the American Council on Education (ACE) American College President Study found that innovative leaders achieve their goals through the establishment of both internal and external networks.

At the time this manuscript was completed, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continued to challenge campuses and their communities. Current research indicated that employing a shared leadership framework is a best practice for navigating unpredictable challenges (Dumulescu & Muţiu, 2021; Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Holcombe et al., 2021; Salas-Vallina et al., 2022). According to Holcombe et al., (2021) shared leadership is contrasted to the hierarchical model of a leader at the top wielding power and influence. Instead, shared leadership offers a model of leadership that recognizes the contributions of multiple team members who

bring expertise and perspective to influence the group's direction. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) found that leaders who employ a shared leadership framework are able to navigate difficulties through innovative and relational leadership that is flexible and respectful of varied perspectives and priorities.

In research on women's leadership, women often describe power as something that increases as it is shared (Ely et al., 2011; Reis, 2015; Switzer, 2006). Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) found women leaders conceptualized power in a way that expressed the desire to expand everyone's power. They contend that women frame leadership as "not power over but, rather, power with" (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011, p.7). Shared leadership styles favored by women may offer advantages when leaders are faced with crises the magnitude of the COVID-19 pandemic where flexibility, innovation and attention to multiple perspectives are essential.

As women are reaching parity, or being employed in the same or similar numbers as men in the role of executive leaders in higher education (Amoruso, 2018), it is important to consider the specific influence and contribution of their leadership to the future of higher education. Women leaders are making an impact in higher education at an increasingly rapid rate. Women make up the majority of degree holders, and women faculty members have matched pace with their male counterparts in number and are nearly coming even in rank across institutions of higher education (Johnson, 2017). According to the American College President Study (Gagliardi et al., 2017), the percentage of women presidents in higher education increased from 26.4% in 2011 to 30.1% in 2016. If the same annual growth rate of 3.9% remains constant, gender parity in presidency position will be reached by 2030 (Howard & Gagliardi, 2018).

To better observe the leadership practices women rely upon, it is useful to look at women's leadership experiences in college systems where women are already prominently

represented in major roles. In 2018, the California State University (CSU) system became the largest four-year university system to have a majority women executive leadership as 12 of the 23 campus presidents were female (Amoruso, 2018), and since 2020, the majority of the CSU campuses have female Provosts and Vice Presidents of Academic Affairs (California State University, n.d.). Howard and Gagliardi (2018) reported changes in current leadership in higher education across the nation, which may influence a much higher rate of growth toward gender parity at the executive leadership level. Over 50% of university presidents intend to leave their current presidency between 2017 to 2022 (Howard & Gagliardi, 2018), which suggests executive leadership across the country will necessarily evolve. This turnover of university presidents will create hundreds of opportunities for campuses to embrace diverse choices. The survey of university presidents conducting by ACE (2016) found that more than 80% respondents indicated the importance of attracting a significant number of qualified women candidates to future presidential searches. Gender parity in the highest levels of leadership in higher education should be attainable with this commitment to increasing gender diversity from current presidents.

As momentum gathers toward gender parity at the highest level of leadership across all university settings, a deeper understanding of women's leadership practices as they execute their responsibilities during crisis will continue to inform this progress. The global COVID-19 pandemic brought new challenges to leaders in every sector. Understanding crisis leadership and the leadership practices women presidents employed when faced with unprecedented circumstances and unexpected events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, on their campuses could provide insight to inform leadership development and preparation for future campus crises. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the crisis leadership practices employed by

women executive leaders who serve in the position of university president in the CSU system during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Questions

To guide this study and better understand the experiences of women executive leaders who served in the position of president in the CSU system during the COVID-19 pandemic, the following research questions were employed:

1. What crisis leadership practices did women university presidents rely upon during the onset of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?

2. What have they learned about themselves as leaders as they navigated the challenges presented by the crisis?

The objective was to enable the presidents to share their experiences, motivations, and opinions using their own voice during qualitative interviews. The interview process encouraged self-reflection and allowed participants to share and identify the areas of influence and motivation toward their crisis leadership practices as they led their campuses through the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. By inquiring about their experiences of leading during this crisis, leadership practices were identified; leaders' responses can inform a deeper understanding of women's leadership in higher education that could be used to enhance leadership development and intentional preparation for future campus crises. The study was set in the largest four-year university system to have a majority of women presidents leading campuses (Amoruso, 2018). Therefore, this research advanced the understanding of crisis leadership experiences and leadership practices of women who have achieved the role of university president in higher education.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of the literature provides a brief examination of leadership in higher education, followed by the introduction of the theoretical framework of shared leadership in higher education, which serves as a foundation for reviewing the scholarship on crisis leadership. This section explores crisis leadership practices employed by leaders in higher education as well as specific responses by campus leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic. Literature on women's leadership is examined first from a historical perspective, followed by a focused interrogation of the development of women's leadership practices beginning with the conversation of women leaders' struggle with the glass ceiling to the acknowledgment of the labyrinth women leaders navigate on their way to top professional positions and the benefits of mentorship for women leaders.

Leadership in Higher Education

The primary mission of institutes of higher education in the United States is to provide education, experiences, and research opportunities to advance learning and intellectual inquiry (Birnbaum, 1992). People who hold leadership positions within colleges and universities must manage the complexities of multifaceted organizations as well assume responsibility for the educational programs, curriculum, and the culture of a school (Bensimon, 1989; Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001; Pounder, 2001). The complexity of the role has contributed to the difficulty in establishing one recognized definition for leadership in higher education (Bensimon, 1989; Birnbaum & Eckel, 2005; Pounder, 2001).

Fairhurst (2009) conceptualized leadership as an evolving concept that must meet the needs of the current circumstances while simultaneously anticipating future developments. Peter Northouse (2021), professor emeritus from Western Michigan University, conceptualized

leadership as a transactional process between leaders and followers. Northouse (2021) also emphasized the interactive nature of leadership. He asserted that there are three components that are paramount to understanding leadership: (1) leadership involves *influence,* (2) leadership occurs *in groups,* and (3) leadership includes attention to *common goals* (Northouse, 2021). His conclusions echo Gardner's (1993) observation that leadership is a transactional process in which the leader or leadership team persuades a group to pursue shared objectives. Leaders in higher education interact with a variety of stakeholders within and beyond their institutions. They must remain current in the transitioning landscape of higher education and employ a variety of skills, techniques and practices in order to successfully lead their campuses (Birnbaum & Eckel, 2005; Bornstein, 2004).

Three decades ago, Robert Birnbaum, (1992) offered insight into successful higher education leadership in *How Academic Leadership Works*. Birnbaum and his team conducted a five-year longitudinal study of presidents and other executive leaders on 35 college and university campuses. They found that two distinct levels of leadership are essential for a president or executive leader to successfully influence and persuade their followers: instrumental leadership and interpretive leadership (Birnbaum, 1992). When leaders demonstrate instrumental leadership they utilize technical leadership competence, experience, and judgment. Instrumental leadership skills include sound decision making, management of team members' activities, campus representation both internally and with external groups and the response to crises in various forms. Birnbaum found it is imperative for leaders at the executive level to demonstrate competency in instrumental leadership, which can also be exhibited by leaders across all levels of a college or university, particularly among those who manage staff, control resources, or represent the institution in the community. The second level, or interpretive leadership, requires

leaders to function beyond the technical daily activities. Interpretive leadership calls upon leaders to represent their campus through words or actions that communicate a vision or purpose for the intuition. Successful interpretive leadership requires support from followers achieved through successful "meaning making", collaboration and clear communication (Birnbaum, 1992). According to Gigliotti (2019), successful leaders in higher education are able to co-construct meaning and make sense of phenomena in collaboration with members of the campus community. When campus leaders exhibit authentic and effective communication, they can introduce new interpretations of existing campus values, inspiring new pride in and fresh vision for an institution (Bornstein, 2004).

Ruben and Gigliotti(2017) indicated that leaders in higher education must engage with both internal and external stakeholders. Leadership challenges can readily emerge as colleges and universities have "nonsingular, complex, and sometimes contradictory missions; and employ an academic workforce that enjoys a unique status in organizational governance and decision-making within a culture that situates individual autonomy and creativity near the top of its values system" (p. 4).

Theoretical Framework: Shared Leadership in Higher Education

Shared leadership describes the operations of leaders who demonstrate instrumental and interpretative leadership practices and who position themselves "within" instead of "on top" of the organization (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Helgesen, 1995; Hertneky, 2012; Holcombe et al., 2021; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Wheatley, 2006). Helgesen (1995) and Wheatley (2006) described relational leadership as leading from the center of a web. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) found that leaders are able to navigate difficulties through innovative and relational leadership that is flexible and respectful of varied perspectives and priorities. They define

relational leadership as focused on building relationships in a horizontal instead of a hierarchical structure. Kezar and Holcombe (2017) conceptualize the leadership style that emphasizes empowerment, relationship and collaboration as shared leadership. They identify other definitions of shared leadership in the literature such as relational leadership (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Wheatley, 2006), distributed leadership (Gronn, 2000; Spillane, 2006), collaborative leadership (Rosenthal, 1998), team leadership (Northouse, 2021), and connective leadership (Lipman-Blumen, 1992) as sharing the following five key elements that characterize shared leadership. First, more leadership roles are distributed across a group or organization than in traditional hierarchical structures. Second, the roles of leader and follower are interchangeable. Third, leadership is not based on position or authority, and fourth, innovation and problem-solving rely on the value of multiple perspectives. Finally, collaboration and interactions are encouraged when a shared leadership framework is employed.

Holcombe et al., (2021) emphasize "shared leadership involves multiple people influencing one another at varying levels and at varying times" rather than "one individual wielding power and influence over followers" (p.260). Like Helgesen's (1995) and Wheatley's (2006) definition of relational leadership with the leader positioned at the center of a web, Hertneky (2012) found the presidents "lead from within rather than having to be positioned out in front, without losing sight of their position of ultimate responsibility and decision making" (p.150) Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) found that leaders are able to navigate difficulties through innovative and relational leadership that is flexible and respectful of varied perspectives and priorities. They found that when women tend to conceptualize power in a way that is likely to seek to expand everyone's power and they describe accomplishing goals with others when they were interviewed about their leadership. Zheng et al., (2018) suggest successful women leaders

may develop a more resilient leadership style due to a "paradoxical mindset" that enables them to concurrently embrace their gender identity and the demands of their leadership role. They found that women tend to employ a more democratic and participative style of leadership.

The need for relational leaders who demonstrate solid instrumental and interpretive leadership practices, and who serve from a shared leadership framework, is paramount as higher education continues to evolve during the uncertainties and crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Crisis Leadership in Higher Education

In the literature, a crisis describes a variety of issues or events that cause harm or negatively impact an organization (Kovoor-Misra et al., 2000; Rosenthal et al., 2001; Yusko & Goldstein, 1997). In the context of this study and the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Ulmer et al.'s (2017) definition of an organizational crisis is employed: "a specific, *unexpected,* and *nonroutine* event or series of events that create high levels of *uncertainty* and simultaneously present an organization with both *opportunities* for and *threats* to its *high-priority goals*" (p. 8). The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic occurred across higher education campuses and presented a challenge for leaders at all levels. When a crisis occurs, leaders are expected to employ tactical responses to manage the situation (Al-Dabbagh, 2020; Boin et al., 2016). However, the mechanics of crisis management is distinct from crisis leadership, which requires a leader to account for the organization's unique history and placement in the community, while addressing the diverse needs of stakeholders and leading with integrity (Gigliotti, 2019).

Successful crisis management occurs when operations are not interrupted or are resumed promptly, when losses are minimized for all stakeholders, and when the situation is evaluated and utilized in future planning (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009). Based on this definition, it may

be argued that many campus responses during the COVID-19 pandemic were unsuccessfully managed. Campus classes and activities were interrupted across the nation and regular operations did not resume for over a year at most colleges (Bradbury et al., 2020; Cooper et al., 2020; Fernandez & Shaw, 2020).   However, the swift movement to online education and transition to virtual operations minimized losses for all stakeholders (Bradbury et al., 2020; Cooper et al., 2020). Although, the financial and educational losses are still being assessed, the lessons learned during the pandemic are being used for future planning (Blankenberger & Williams, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a paradigm shift in higher education instruction and operations. In April 2020, the American Council on Education (ACE) issued a survey to college and university presidents in the United States to assess the concerns and challenges faced during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Just a month after the global shift from in-person instruction to online education at all levels, the majority (85%) of college and university presidents in the United States reported that the transition to fully remote instruction and operations had gone "well" or "very well," and no presidents reported that the transition had gone "poorly" or "very poorly" (Turk et al., 2020). Eighty-six percent indicated their most pressing concerns were fall or summer enrollment numbers, 64% reported long-term concerns were financial viability, 45% reported it was sustaining an online learning environment, 44% reported the need to lay off faculty and/or staff, and 41% reported that their long-term concerns were the mental health of students (Turk et al., 2020).

The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic was unprecedented, and leaders in higher education had to make decisions about many situations that had not been anticipated and for which they were frequently unprepared (Cooper et al., 2020). Mitroff et al. (2006) reported on the findings from a survey on the preparedness of college and universities in the United States

for possible crises and whether they had designated crisis-management programs in place. In 2004, provosts from 350 institutions of higher education were surveyed, and 117 responded. Mitroff et al. (2006) found that colleges and universities were best prepared for crises they had already experienced, and most campuses were in very early development of crisis management program implementation. Provosts were asked to both rank their campus' level of preparedness and the number of crises experienced on their campus. Provosts reported their campuses as moderately prepared for a health outbreak (Mitroff et al., 2006). However, colleges and universities had not experienced an outbreak the size and scope of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic waned on, campus presidents were also confronted with the impacts of the pandemic on the future of their organizations. Leaders in higher education must consider the needs of a variety of stakeholders, including students, staff and faculty, parents, athletic teams, community partners, and governing bodies, when responding to a crisis on their campus. (Mitroff et al., 2006). People look to their leaders in times of crisis and expect them to respond in an effort to remedy the situation. A leaders' response can affect their professional careers and impact the future direction of the entire campus (Muffet-Willett & Kruse, 2009).

In March 2022, two years after the initial onset of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Lederman surveyed 375 college and university presidents. Seventy-one percent of the presidents reported that their institution must "fundamentally change its business model" in order to recover financially after the pandemic (Lederman, 2022). However, over three-quarters reported that over the next decade their college would be financially stable. Most presidents think their institution is stronger and performing better now than this time last year. A majority

believe their campuses will be better off a year from now than their current status (Lederman, 2022).

The professional consequences of leadership response are elevated in a time of crisis. The reputation and future of a campus can be affected by campus leaders' response during a crisis situation (Kelsay, 2007; Zdziarski et al., 2007). Strong evidence of campus leaders' commitment to the safety and security of their community can positively impact an institution's reputation and future success in recruiting students, staff, and faculty (Perrotti, 2007). During the COVID-19 pandemic, public perception of higher education was elevated when empathy, integrity, and accountability were demonstrated by campus leaders (Blankenberger & Williams, 2020; Van Bommel, 2021). These are qualities that tend to be emphasized in women's leadership patterns (Hertneky, 2012; Reis, 2015; Wolverton et al., 2009) which raises questions about whether women leaders' crisis leadership practices may be especially germane during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Post et al. (2019) conducted two related studies to determine if people trusted women leaders in times of crisis. They compared men and women leaders who adopted relational behaviors and interpersonal emotional management (IEM) during an organizational crisis. IEM "refers to threat-reducing behaviors that anticipate and manage the emotions of others" (Post et al., 2019, p. 43). In both studies, the participants recruited from the crowdsourcing marketplace Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) were asked to complete a survey based on vignettes describing organizations in crisis. In the first study, 476 participants were asked to assess the leader's response, and in the second survey, 400 participants were asked about the level of predictability or uncertainty in organizational crises. In the first study, participants ranged in age from 21 to 69, 48% identified as male, and 97% were native English speakers. The second study

had a similar gender balance of 47% men and 52% women participants who were employed

residents of the United States. The researchers found that women leaders were perceived as more

trustworthy in times of crisis when they incorporated high IEM into their leadership practices.

This outcome was most prevalent when the outcomes of the crisis were more predictable. Men

who use IEM in their leadership practices were found to have a trust advantage when the

outcomes of the crisis were less predictable. There was no difference in perceived trust between

men and women leaders who portrayed low IEM. Post et al. (2019) attributed their findings of a

trust advantage for women leaders who utilized IEM due to the view of IEM as more feminine

than masculine, and therefore, women were perceived as more trustworthy in crisis situations

when they exhibited these relational skills due to falling into gender stereotypes (Post et al.,

2019).

     Managing a crisis requires strong relational skills, and women tend to lead with a more

relational approach than men (Hertneky, 2012; Lambert & Gardner, 2009;). Garikipati and

Kambhampati (2021) conducted a study analyzing the number of total deaths and total cases of

COVID-19 up to May 2021 in 149 countries. Out of the 149 countries, 19 were led by women.

They also examined policy differences between men and women leaders and possible

explanations for varied leadership responses. The results from this study from the first year of the

crisis indicated that the national response and overall COVID outcomes measured by total deaths

and total cases in countries led by women were systematically better. Garikipati and

Kambhampati (2021) found women leaders were quick to respond and make decisions when the

consequences involved potential fatalities. In almost all cases, the countries lead by women

entered locked down status before countries with male leaders in similar circumstances. The 19

women leaders analyzed were found to be more willing to accept economic risks and more likely

to prioritize the preservation of life. Additionally, the women leaders were found to employ more decisive and clearer communication and relational behaviors or IEM. Garikipati and Kambhampati (2021) concluded, "even accounting for intuitional context and other controls, being female-led has provided countries with an advantage in the current crisis" (p. 417).

Women in Leadership

Sally Helgesen's (1990) seminal text *The Female Advantage: Women's Ways of Leadership* evaluates women in leadership through the lens of women's contribution to the workplace. Helgesen gathered information about the lived experiences of four highly successful women leaders and compared her findings to the conclusions drawn by Henry Mintzberg (1973). Through analysis of the women leaders' diaries, she found that they did not refer to their place in the organization as "at the top"; instead, they described themselves as leading from the center of their organizations. They were "not reaching down, but reaching out….Inseparable from their sense of themselves as being in the middle was the women's notion of being connected to those around them, bound as if by invisible strands or threads" (Helgesen, 1990, p.46). This finding was in contrast to the highly successful men Mintzberg (1973) studied who he described as leaders who controlled information and demonstrated authority and status as they represented their companies, allocated resources and made decisions from a place of power. Helgesen conceptualized that women leaders shared the following traits, or "the feminine principles":

1. Women worked at a steady pace with small breaks scheduled throughout the day.
2. Women did not view unscheduled tasks and encounters as interruptions.
3. Women made time for tasks not directly related to work.
4. Women preferred live action encounters, but scheduled time to attend to mail.
5. Women maintained a complex network of relationships outside their organizations.

6. Women focused on the ecology of leadership. They engaged in big-picture thinking.

7. Women saw their own identities as complex and multifaceted.

8. Women scheduled time for sharing information.

Similarly, Eagly and Johnson (1990) analyzed 162 studies on leadership styles and evaluated the presence and absence of differences between the male and female leadership styles. They did not find evidence to support the expectation that women led more interpersonally and male leaders were more task-focused. Instead, both men and women were found to utilize interpersonally oriented styles and task-oriented styles of leadership. However, they did find that women tended to lead more democratically and favor a more participatory style of leadership than men (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Eagly et al. (2007) compared the effectiveness of female and male leaders and concluded men and women were equally effective leaders, but gender differences were evidenced in that women were more effective in roles where communal interpersonal skills were highly valued. For example, women were more effective in leadership roles in education, government, and social service organizations but less effective in military positions where the leader role was perceived as masculine (Eagly et al., 2007).

When the majority of leaders across all sectors have been primarily men, academic examination of leadership practice tended to identify qualities, skills and styles attributed to men. This led to the proposal of a *great-men* theory (Curry, 2000). The key to becoming a good leader, according to this theory, is that "one must be male and born to greatness" at the right moment in history in order to be recognized and appreciated (Curry, 2000). The *great men* theory includes military and political leaders, and therefore, greatness has been assigned posthumously to leaders like George Washington. Curry (2000) pointed out the value of the *great men* theory is related to the social context of the early research on leadership, which did not include analysis of women

leaders or leaders of color. In the forward to Curry's *Pathways to Leadership in Education,* Maxine Greene wrote:

> Women struggling to construct themselves as leaders have to cope with popular images of vulnerability, self-mastery, and a distinctively male confidence….Not only do would-be leaders have to cope with the persistent images of male dominance, the only professional literature available to the women trying to master what is demanded of contemporary leadership consists largely of information gathered by male policy-makers presumed experts in theories of leadership, and male administrators. (p. ix)

During the past two decades, the social context has changed and research on the leadership styles of women leaders has begun to accumulate. Early research into gender and educational administration focused on comparing the number of women and men holding leadership positions in education (see Chliwniak, 1997; Dominici et al., 2009; Hurtado & DeAngelo, 2009; Kaplan & Tinsley, 1989). Those studies prompted research on the barriers that hindered women from becoming leaders and holding those positions in higher numbers (Antonaros, 2010; Easterly, 2008; Koenig et al., 2011). The common traits and characteristics perceived as ideal leadership qualities might have contributed to the challenges faced by women leaders. When cultural stereotypes favor masculine leadership traits it can appear women are not as well aligned for high-level leadership positions. This role incongruity between the perceived challenges of leadership and the stereotypical understanding of women as leaders is often the cause for bias (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Contributing to role incongruity is that predominantly communal qualities, like compassion and active listening, are perceived as feminine, while predominantly agentic or independent qualities, like competition and assertiveness, which are considered important to a successful leader, are perceived as masculine (Eagly et al., 2007).

According to Koenig et al., (2011) women are the targets of two forms of prejudice against them as leaders: a deficit in the ascription of leadership ability and a less favorable evaluation of agentic leadership behavior. In other words, descriptively, women seem unusual or unnatural in most leadership roles, and prescriptively, women often seem inappropriate or presumptuous when they display the agentic behavior often required by these roles.

Switzer (2006) compared perceptions of the leadership styles of men and women. Switzer described men's leadership style as "masculine stereotype" as "results oriented" versus women's "stereotypically feminine characteristics" which creates a "*double bind"* for women. When women behave in stereotypical relational or emotional ways, they can be perceived as weak leaders (Switzer, 2006). Alternatively, if women demonstrate leadership behaviors that are more stereotypically male, they may be perceived as pushy, aggressive, or rude (Switzer, 2006). Moreover, women tend to face more scrutiny than their male counterparts in an number of areas not necessarily related to their leadership practice, such as their wardrobe choices, overall physical appearance, and whether or not and the degree to which they smile (Acker, 1990; Biggs et al., 2018; Bornstein, 2014; Brower et al., 2019; Easterly & Ricard, 2011; Heilman, 2012; Ibarra et al., 2013; Robbins-McNeish, 2007; Vial et al., 2016).

Rita Bornstein is a retired university president who writes about leadership. She notes that achieving legitimacy, moderating the impulse to be completely authentic, and remaining emotionally controlled are challenging for all new university presidents, but gender-based expectations continue to create unique obstacles to the success of women in leadership (Bornstein, 2014). In a study by the non-profit organization, Catalyst (2007), three predictors of a double bind for women leaders were found: extreme perceptions, the high competence threshold, and competent but disliked. Women leaders can be caught in a double bind of extreme

perceptions when they are perceived as either too strong or the opposite, too weak to lead. The second predictor of a double bind is the high competence threshold in which women leaders find their leadership choices, and professional and academic experience held in higher scrutiny than those of their male counterparts. Additionally women leaders experience less monetary compensation and lower overall acknowledgement of their work than male leaders in the same or similar positions. Finally, the third predictor of a double blind for women leaders is competent but disliked or the perception that women are categorized as either a competent leader or a liked leader (Catalyst, 2007).

As more research on women's leadership style is conducted and gendered theories are developed, general perceptions of women leaders' potential are influenced. Leadership studies have moved beyond the "trait" and "situation" approaches to more integrated theories of leadership that include the contributions of relationships, context, and culture (Alvolio, 2007). Research focused on women's approaches to leadership has influenced a shift toward seeing the field of leadership from a female lens instead of comparing behaviors of men and women within a previously identified male paradigm.

From the Glass Ceiling to the Labyrinth

The metaphor of the glass ceiling, an invisible but impeding barrier to women's advancement to leadership positions, was first introduced by two *Wall Street Journal* reporters Hymowitz and Schellhardt in 1986. As more women moved into leadership roles at the turn of the century, the metaphor shifted from women's progress toward senior leadership positions being blocked by a glass ceiling to the description of a complicated labyrinth women must navigate to advance (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Eagly and Carli (2003) argued that the glass ceiling metaphor is outdated and does not take into account women's historically limited access to

positions within the professional pipeline toward leadership. Eagly and Carli (2003) proposed the image of a labyrinth is a more accurate descriptor of the varied and indirect paths women travel as they confront challenges on their way to leadership.

The Leadership Labyrinth can be described as three distinct but overlapping categories of challenges: human capital, prejudice, and gender differences (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Human capital includes access to education, work experience, and developmental opportunities that advance an individual toward leadership positions (Lepkowski, 2009; Searby et al., 2015; Thomas, 2014; Wilson, 2007). Another aspect of human capital is the difficult balance between work and home-life and the tendency for women to interrupt their career trajectory due to family responsibilities (Airini et al., 2010; Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Diehl, 2014; Eagly & Carli, 2003; Hannum et al., 2015; Hertneky, 2012; Madsen, 2012;). Prejudice refers to gender stereotypes, biased perception and evaluations, and vulnerability in the workplace (Brescoll, 2016; Eagly & Karau, 2002; D. M. Easterly & Ricard, 2011; Heilman, 2012; Koenig et al., 2011). Gender differences consist of stereotypes about style and effectiveness and commitment and motivation (Brower et al., 2019; Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Eddy et al., 2017; Heilman, 2012; Lepkowski, 2009). Additionally, women are less likely to self-promote or negotiate on their behalf (J. Acker, 1990; S. Acker, 2012; Antonaros, 2010; Babcock & Laschever, 2009; Madsen et al., 2012).

Issues of human capital, prejudice, and gender differences constitute many of the challenges experienced by women as they navigate the labyrinth toward executive leadership positions (Carli & Eagly, 2016; Kark & Eagly, 2010; McDonagh & Paris, 2012). Much can be learned from the experience of the women who adjust to these challenges and achieve leadership positions. Research has focused specifically on women leading in higher education settings.

Research has documented women leaders' experiences and informed the leadership development of women seeking executive positions at colleges and universities.

Women Leaders in Higher Education

Early research on women leaders in higher education documented the limited or slow progress of women to executive leadership roles (Airini et al., 2010; Curry, 200; Dominici et al., 2009; Eagly et al., 2007; Gangone, 2016; Hewlett, 2007; Howard & Gagliardi, 2018; Wilson, 2007). Belenky et al. (1997) found women leaders depict their intellectual and ethical development through the metaphor of *voice.* As more women rise to leadership positions in higher education, there are more stories to assist aspiring women leaders navigate the labyrinth toward the top (Baltodano et al., 2011; Kark & Eagly, 2010). It is important to understand who these women are and to hear about their experiences in their own voices in order to inform and inspire future women leaders (Searby et al., 2015).

From interviews with eight female senior leaders, Barbara Curry (2000) developed the concept of the leader persona. By examining their challenges and successes, Curry found women leaders define their roles in their own terms. The layers of self-discovery and trial and error build an integrated identity, as the process of constructing a leader persona allows a woman to "come to know herself as a leader" (p. 52).

Belenky et al. (1997) observed that women employ listening and speaking to acquire knowledge. Many researchers of women's leadership interview leaders to gain insight into how women in the highest leadership roles achieved their positions and the lessons learned along their journey. (e.g., Cheung & Halpern 2010; Curry, 2000; Hannum et al., 2015; Hertneky 2012; Madsen 2008; Reis, 2015; Switzer 2006; Wolverton et al., 2009). Analysis of this work, and reflection on the stories and experiences of women leaders in higher education reveals rich

insight into the qualities and characteristics of women leaders in higher education and the leadership practices they have developed.

Susan Madsen (2008) performed comprehensive research on women university presidents, and her findings were published in *On Becoming a Woman Leader: Learning from the Experiences of University Presidents*. Madsen (2008) conducted exhaustive interviews with ten women university presidents or chancellors to explore their leadership experiences and developments ranging from participants' memories in childhood through their educational, career, mentee, and motivational experiences. She also obtained participants' advice and perspectives on leadership and what it takes to rise to the position of woman executive leader in higher education. Four themes emerged. Women reported that in order to successfully obtain and execute the role of university president they: 1) paid meticulous attention to the task of knowing and understanding self, 2) made an effort to be intentionally and thoroughly self-reflective, 3) were passionate about learning from their failures and mistakes, and 4) engendered a deep love of learning.

The women university presidents Madsen interviewed never stopped learning. They participated in a continuous process of self-reflection as they embraced new challenges and accepted responsibilities throughout their careers. Through their dedication to lifelong learning the participants were able to reflect and respond to the needs of their institutions (Madsen, 2008). Similarly, Switzer (2006) found women university presidents reported an ongoing interest in the bigger picture and a particular affinity for working on multidimensional assignments. When asked about their feelings around serving as president, women executive leaders reported appreciation for the opportunity to share the story of their institution and work with the campus community to build a common vision (Switzer, 2006).

Hertneky (2012) researched the formation of leadership self-identity by interviewing 12 women serving in their first college presidency. Five themes emerged from the interviews, which built from Madsen's (2008) work. The presidents identified (1) perceptions of themselves as leaders, (2) an ability to assess one's effectiveness, (3) the importance of presentation, (4) key relationships, and (5) the love of learning and passion for teaching as key to the development of their leadership self- identity (Hertneky, 2012, p. 147). The women in this study shared stories that reflected their experiences both as a president of a university and as a woman on the path toward that position. Hertneky (2012) characterized these stories in the categories of composing a career and composing a leadership self-identity.

In Hertneky's (2012) research, all but one of the presidents did not originally envision their careers culminating in a presidency. They advanced from one position to the next and received encouragement and mentorship to continue toward higher leadership roles. This seemingly accidental pursuit of the presidency, has been described by women leaders at both the community college (Eddy et al., 2017) and the state college levels (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Madsen, 2008). Perhaps because their leadership developed at the encouragement from others, the women in Hertneky's (2012) study defined leadership through the lens of relationships and connections with others. Hertneky (2012) concluded that although they did not begin with career plans toward the presidency, the women "did not get to where they are today by accident, and their working collaboratively is a function of their leadership, not an avoidance of it" (p. 149). Throughout their careers, and as a result of varied experiences of success and failure, these presidents composed leadership identities which reflect the diversity and complexity of skills including intellectual curiosity, cultural competence, the ability to interact with and listen to many different kinds of people and opinions, critical thinking, courage and expertise to manage

campus change efforts (Hertneky, 2012). Hertneky (2012) called for the recognition of leadership as complex, ambiguous, and personal. This warrant that authentic leadership is generated from within the leader mirrors Curry's (2000) advocacy for a philosophical shift from prescriptive leadership to a focus on continuous development and change, or adaptive leadership personas.

A study by Reis (2015) confirmed that women university presidents' leadership journeys more closely align to a labyrinth (Eagly et al., 2007) than traditional pathways to executive roles. According to Reis (2015), women university presidents employ leadership traits identified as essential for success by the Big 5 personality inventory: extroversion (connecting and working well with other people), openness (willingness to hear all voices), agreeableness, and conscientiousness. These three traits are linked to team building, creating a plan and managing change (Hertneky, 2012; Reis, 2015). The women participants in Reis' (2015) study described leading their campuses with a focus on supporting their team members and the continuance of leadership success well beyond the time they held the position of president. In their study, Wolverton et al. (2009) reported similar findings that women leaders demonstrated ambition and determination to reach leadership positions but their primary passions focused on the betterment of their campuses and the desire to contribute to the success of others.

Women in powerful positions may begin to identify essential aspect of women's leadership as they define success in new terms. Wolverton et al. (2009) published the significant stories of nine women presidents in *Women at the Top: What Women University and College Presidents Say about Effective Leadership.* All but one of women presidents interviewed served as the first women to lead her institution of higher education. Their stories provided insight and illuminated women's leadership experiences at the highest level. Wolverton et al. (2009) found

the presidents' leadership practices reflected their values of determination, personal honesty, integrity and respect for others through their leadership practices. The participants described reciprocal trust as the cornerstone of their presidencies. The foundation for this trust is built through the intertwining of integrity, commitment, credibility and competence (Hertneky, 2012; Reis, 2015; Wolverton et al., 2009).

Switzer (2006) interviewed 16 college presidents to understand their professional journeys and the adaptations they made in their roles and in their lives. In addition to serving as an executive leader at a university, they also carried significant family responsibilities. Only one of the women in Switzer's study reported having children living at home at the time of fulfilling the role of university president. A third of the subjects said they "could not imagine" combining the job of the presidency with at-home children. (Switzer, 2006).

Tunheim and Goldschmidt (2013) interviewed 15 women university presidents to assess whether women leaders claimed a calling to the role of the presidency. Employing a theoretical framework based on transformative learning theory, Tunheim and Goldschmidt focused on three components of a calling: mental construction, critical reflection, and development and action or pursuit. Eighty percent of the women university presidents felt they had been called to their professional positions (Tunheim & Goldschmidt, 2013). These women offered advice to aspiring leaders based upon reflection of how they each interpreted their call to leadership. They advocated for the assessment of potential opportunities from the perspective of both the impacts on personal life and finding a balance in the specific paring between the requirements for the job and the prospective leader's professional skills.

The importance of mentorship for women who achieve the position of president has been well-established in the research (Block & Tietjen-Smith, 2016; Brown, 2005; Hill & Wheat,

2017; Howard, 2004; Jefferson, 2017; Mullen, 2009; Novak, 2014; Searby et al., 2015).

Ballenger (2010) found women leaders in higher education made substantial advances in their careers when they had early mentoring relationships. When those mentors also champion or promote them, women leaders are able to attain higher positions in higher education (Thomas, 2014). Combining leadership development opportunities with ongoing mentorship by successful women leaders is an important component of attracting and keeping women executive leaders in campus positions (Hewlett, 2007; Hurtado & DeAngelo, 2009).

The results of Hannum et al.'s (2015) study of 35 women in senior leadership roles across the United States found women leaders reported more positive aspects of serving an executive leadership role in higher education than was reported in past research. The study was designed to better understand and identify new forms of leadership during a time of fundamental changes in higher education. They interviewed successful women senior leaders to gain understanding about the pathways to top level positions in higher education and identify ways to support women on that journey. Leaders were asked to report on both the positive and negative aspects of serving in a senior leadership role in higher education. The researchers asked women leaders to identify the barriers or sources of discouragement encountered on their path toward senior positions as well as the sources of encouragement and support. Women leaders reported a higher level of positive feelings and more descriptions of positive experiences as a leader than in prior literature. Hannum et al. (2015) concluded that advocates for women's advancement should prepare women for the difficulties they may encounter; however, discussions of women's leadership need to move beyond the challenges and highlight the rewards and benefits women experience in executing leadership roles (Hannum et al., 2015). In particular, women of color reported having a

role in shaping policy to be a powerful motivator toward serving in senior leadership positions (Hannum et al., 2015).

Stories from women in leadership positions better illustrates women's navigation of the labyrinth toward leadership positions and the "double bind" they may experience in this project. It is important to interrogate the research focused on women university presidents' leadership practices. As women lead they cultivate self-identity (Hertneky, 2012), voice (Belenky et al., 1997), and leadership persona (Curry, 2000). Women presidents' leadership practices are influenced by their perceptions of the role of family (Cheung & Halpern, 2010), the calling to the presidency (Tunheim & Goldschmidt, 2013) and the impact of mentoring on their leadership development (Ballenger, 2010). Reviewing this literature informed the examination of how women university presidents lead during times of crisis.

At the time this manuscript was completed, the impacts of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic continued to challenge campuses and their communities. Current research showed that the best practices for navigating unpredictable challenges include employing a shared leadership framework (Dumulescu & Muţiu, 2021; Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Holcombe et al., 2021; Salas-Vallina et al., 2022). Azorín et al. (2020) noted that shared leadership, which considers a diversity of perspectives, became the default leadership response during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders needed to connect, share, learn, and network in order to successfully navigate the issues presented by the crisis (Boin et al., 2016; Gigliotti, 2019). Shared leadership can facilitate communication, which may improve rapid decision-making, while increasing motivation and involvement of the team (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017). In this study, shared leadership was utilized as the framework to analyze the crisis leadership

practices of women presidents in the CSU system during the crisis caused by the COVID-19

pandemic.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the crisis leadership practices employed by women CSU presidents during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings of this study were based on interviews with five women who had experience as current higher education executive leaders and held the position of president at four-year universities. The California State University (CSU) system employed a higher number of women than men as campus presidents when this study was completed. The analysis in this study focused on the shared stories about experiences, decisions, and reflections about personal leadership responses to the crises on CSU campuses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Setting: California State University (CSU) System

Before the 2020 spring term ended, on May 12, 2020, CSU Chancellor Tim White announced that the 23 campuses would offer fall term classes primarily online (California State University, 2020). In order to slow the continued spread of COVID-19, CSU employees would continue to work remotely, and most campus buildings would be closed through the remainder of 2020 (California State University, 2020). The CSU was the first university system in the nation to announce a plan for fall 2020 instruction with the decision to prioritize the safety of the CSU campus populations (California State University, 2020) While a systemwide plan was in place, individual campus responses and teaching protocols were left for CSU campus presidents' and their leadership teams to determine. The campus presidents were the first leaders in higher education to know fall 2020 instruction would be primarily online. As each of the 23 CSU executive leadership teams considered the impacts for their campus community and student body, they also accounted for the health and safety of their students and employees as well as the

effects of their decisions would have on the communities and counties in which they were located.

The CSU system is the largest and most diverse state public university system in the United States, with over 56,000 employees, nearly 490,000 students and over four million alumni employed in every field and industry globally (California State University, n.d.). The 23 campuses of the CSU system are located throughout the state of California. The majority of the state's teachers and nearly 8 percent of the teachers in the nation are educated in the CSU. The system is the most affordable public university system in the United States and it produces more career- ready graduates than any other single source (California State University, n.d.).

Since 2018, the CSU system has employed the highest percentage of women university presidents; 12 of the 23 campuses are led by women (Amoruso, 2018). In 2022, the majority of the CSU campuses also had female provosts and vice presidents of academic affairs (CSU Chancellor's Office, 2022). Within the CSU system there is parity, or an equal number of women and men leaders, at the highest level of campus governance (Amoruso, 2018). This qualitative study focused on the leadership decisions, challenges, and reflections of women who served as president in the CSU system during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to identify and analyze the crisis leadership practices they employed.

Participants

The unit of analysis was a sample of five women executive leaders in higher education who served in the position of president and who navigated the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Purposeful and snowball sampling techniques were employed to identify participants able to provide authentic information and crisis leadership experiences. Merriam & Tisdell, (2015) defined purposeful sampling as "based on the assumption that the investigator wants to

discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 77). Using snowball sampling, the researcher utilized network connections to identify initial participants who provided introductions to additional women presidents who led CSU campuses during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data Collection

Invitations to participate in interviews were sent to all 12 women presidents in the CSU system (see Appendix A). Nine presidents responded to the invitation. Six provided the contact information for the best person in their office with whom the researcher could schedule an interview, and three sent personal emails declining the invitation. Three presidents did not respond. Presidents who agreed to participate were sent an informed consent and interview confirmation letter (see Appendices B and C). Interviews were conducted with five of the six presidents who provided contact information. Last minute scheduling changes caused by a new surge in campus COVID-19 infections prevented the final interview from occurring. Each of the five interviews was conducted via Zoom conferencing.

Letters of introduction were sent to women executive leaders who held the position of president within the CSU system. Participants were invited to participate in confidential, 50-minute interviews which were conducted via Zoom due to the continued health and safety precautions necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. All interviews were recorded in two formats; they were audiotaped as well as recorded using the virtual meeting platform Zoom.

Prior to each interview, the researcher collected basic demographic, professional, and educational information about each participant through three sources: the public platform LinkedIn, individual campus websites and the CSU system website. This information was shared with participants prior to the interview for accuracy.

The transcriptions of the recorded interviews were compared and reconciled with the audio recordings to ensure a precise written record. Interviews were semi-structured utilizing a protocol designed to guide the interview through the participants' experiences leading their campus during the crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic (see Appendix D). The semi-structured interview format allowed the researcher to respond to new information and adjust the questions to address issues and pursue ideas or thoughts presented in the interview. This structure also acknowledged the assumption that individual participants experience and define the world in unique ways (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Field Notes and Analytic Memos

Since interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom, the researcher utilized field notes to record the process of scheduling, conducting the interviews, and other details. During the interviews, the researcher kept field notes to record observations and track the path of the interview. Following each interview, the researcher reviewed the Zoom recording to produce detailed field notes to describe the interview fully. Field notes included details about both the participant's and the researcher's actions and reactions, descriptions of the setting, and other details. Analytic memos were created based upon the observations recorded in the field notes and the researcher's reflections after each interview.

Analytic memos were incorporated in this study to serve as the researcher's detailed record of thoughts and initial analysis of the data. Birks et al. (2008) observed that the purpose of analytic memos is to map research activities, extract meaning, support momentum, and provide communication. Analytic memos were coded and used as data in this qualitative study. Analytic memo writing provided a process through writing and reflecting about thoughts and observations

which helped the researcher transition from coding to the formal written presentation of the study results (Saldaña, 2016).

The study was approved by the UC, Davis Institutional Review Board. The privacy of all participants was ensured and the names of their campuses were not identified. Participants were given pseudonyms that were used in all aspects of the study except during the interviews. Efforts were made to remove both personal and campus identifying information from the data presented. All subsequent transcriptions, memos, notes, and the final written study relied on pseudonyms. All data, including written notes, transcriptions, audio and Zoom recordings, field notes and analytic memos, were securely collected and stored in password-protected files. All handwritten notes were digitized, and the original hard copies destroyed. All scanned documents were stored in secure password-protected files.

Data Analysis

The data gathered in this study were analyzed according to a grounded theory approach following coding cycles detailed by Saldaña (2016) and Corbin and Strauss (2015). As data were gathered through interviews and field notes, the researcher simultaneously produced analytic memos recording thoughts, observations, and questions that informed the direction of the study and were included as part of the final presentation of the results. Participants' recorded narratives were analyzed for significant statements, meanings of statements, themes or meanings, and descriptions of the crisis leadership practices employed during the COVID-19 pandemic (Creswell, 2018). Throughout the research process and during the coding cycles, data were constantly compared to assess for similarities and differences and to check that the researcher was able to question how meaning and concepts were identified. (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

The researcher first conducted open coding as the first coding cycle to begin to identify the units of data relevant to the study. Units of data were defined through two criteria: the unit should reveal data relevant to the study and inspire the reader to think beyond the singular bit of information and the unit should be the smallest piece of information about something that can be understood alone, interpretable in the absence of any additional information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In vivo coding was also employed during the first cycle of coding. The researcher identified codes from within the transcripts, field notes, and analytic memos by extracting words, terms and phrases used by participants in the study (Saldaña, 2016).

Following the initial open coding and in vivo coding cycle, the researcher conducted focused coding and axial coding before integrating all former coding and categories through theoretical coding. Focused coding was employed to identify the most significant or frequent codes in order to create categories that made the most analytic sense (Saldana, 2016 p. 240). Each category was developed in terms of its properties and dimensions. Through axial coding, the categories were compared to assess how they related to one another. A category's properties were defined as the characteristics or attributes of the category (Saldaña, 2016). Theoretical coding progressed the persistent analysis and continuous comparison of the categories toward core categories, which were identified as major themes of the study (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). When taken together, the core categories defined through the coding processes provided the structure for research results grounded in the views of participants in the study (Creswell, 2018).

Trustworthiness and Limitations

To confirm the findings in the study were congruent to the participants' experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), a respondent validation strategy, or member checks, was employed. Preliminary analysis was shared with some of the participants to check for credibility. Comments

from participants and the researcher's response or actions were documented and included with field notes and analytic memos to create a complete record of the data analysis process. Triangulating the data justified the validity of the themes that emerged from interviews. In qualitative research, validity can be assessed by "the researcher's ability to show convincingly how they got there, and how they built confidence that this was the best account possible" (Richards, 2020, p. 143). Corbin and Strauss (2015) preferred the term *credibility* instead of *validity* to describe findings that are believable and trustworthy when they reflect the participants', the researcher's and the readers' the experiences with the data.

Positionality

In an effort to provide transparency and recognize any potential researcher bias, I acknowledged my background prior to and reflected on it during the research process. I identify as a cis-gender white woman from a middle-class background. I hold bachelor's degrees in English and Psychology from the University of California, Davis and a master's degree in Counseling Psychology from the University of San Francisco. I was a credentialed teacher in California holding a multiple subject teaching credential, single subject teaching credentials in English and Psychology, and a pupil personnel services credential. I am a scholar practitioner; my education and experience in teaching and counseling inform both my work and my research. As a scholar, I am drawn to qualitative research that calls upon sophisticated communication and interviewing skills and the intuitive, analytical, and observation abilities requisite for successful professional practice for both teachers and counselors.

I have worked for the CSU system for 27 years and currently serve as an administrator at the director level. I approached this research as a scholar practitioner interested in women's

leadership in higher education during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. No leaders from the campus where I am employed participated in this study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Women who have the privilege and responsibility to serve in the role as university president have multiple experiences and have frequently held a variety of leadership roles in different areas across higher education (Gupton & Slick, 1996). The five presidents interviewed for this study had the unprecedented experience of leading their campuses during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Each of their professional responses was informed by past experiences, leadership style, interactions with their local communities, the camaraderie shared among executive leaders with the chancellor and other system presidents, the relationships with their own leadership teams, and interactions with faculty, staff, and students at their universities. The presidents interviewed for this study were assigned pseudonyms in order to preserve their confidentiality. Efforts were made to remove both personal and campus based identifying information from the data presented. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What crisis leadership practices did women senior leaders in higher education rely upon during the onset of the crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic?

2. What have they learned about themselves as leaders as they navigated the challenges presented by the crisis?

The five presidents interviewed each identified the importance of their campus leadership team and building strong team dynamics during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which coincided with the shared leadership framework. Three foundational crisis leadership practices emerged from the data analysis. The presidents identified trust, communication, and care as the three primary crisis leadership practices they most relied upon as women presidents within the state university system during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The first of three foundational crisis leadership practices that emerged from the data analysis was the role of building and demonstrating trust. All five presidents offered multiple examples of the importance of trust for their leadership during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The creation of trust to establish authenticity and demonstrated credibility was important in building relationships and creating meaningful collaboration with community partners during the crisis. Building and demonstrating trust was also identified as a critical component needed to move forward and lead their campuses through the changes introduced by the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The presidents identified communication as the second foundational leadership practice during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. By focusing on accessibility and establishing clear communication, the presidents made connections across their campuses and within the larger community. They described the importance of listening and giving voice to others as a key factor in fostering communication. These practices established before the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic enabled communication plans to be enacted more quickly on their campus during the crisis. Finally, presidents identified the importance of outreach and messaging as they led their campuses through the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Care was the third foundational leadership practice the presidents relied upon as they navigated the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Care for the students on their campuses was the presidents' primary concern. They created more opportunities for students to communicate with campus administration and access student services. The participants reported that leading through the crisis resulted in a clearer identity with their role as a mother. They identified motherhood as a strength they incorporated into their leadership of their campuses

during the pandemic. Finally, the presidents shared the importance of self-care and the role of family and work-life considerations for women leaders.

The presidents reflected on what they had learned about themselves as leaders as they navigated the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. These observations about personal leadership practice were shared in the context of serving as a female executive leader and in the context of serving as a president of a university within a state university system that employed a majority women presidents. All presidents interviewed attributed the intentionality of the CSU system for providing women executive leaders opportunity and access to the presidency. Each of the presidents identified the importance of their cabinet or team of vice presidents on their campus. The leadership insights shared by individual presidents and their experiences leading within the CSU system are presented to describe how they navigated the challenges on their campuses and within their communities during the pandemic.

Pathways to the Presidency

Each of the five presidents shared stories of early leadership experiences in a variety of settings, such as classrooms, family situations, sports teams, or church groups. In recounting their path to their current role as president, each woman recalled at least one individual mentor, professor or administrator who recognized their potential and promise as a leader in higher education early in their college education or within the first years of their career in a university setting. Two of the presidents were "First Gen" or the first members of their families to attend college and had a professor who encouraged them to pursue a terminal graduate degree and a career in higher education. Four presidents were once deans and three served in the role of provost and vice president of academic affairs before taking on the presidency. Three of the presidents had earned at least one degree from a university in the CSU system. Two women

40

counted an American Council on Education (ACE) fellowship as foundational to their leadership development experience and all five presidents had mentors, retired presidents, or leadership coaches they regularly consulted with while in their current position.

Each president identified a defining statement or question that influenced her pathway to the presidency. President Zephyr had a group of professionals she admired ask her, "What is your next step for your career?" President Ondine had heard, "You're in charge," since she was in grade school and throughout her career. The love of learning and the pursuit of what "her heart found interesting" guided President Atman. President Terra found success in her early leadership roles through the study and implementation of efficient meeting techniques and the positive modeling provided by a dean who "always saw the potential in every situation and person." President Agni learned the most about leadership from watching a poor leader and then being introduced to their replacement who asked the question, "What can I do to enable your success?" She noted she has adopted this question into her own leadership practice.

What Women Bring to the Presidency

The president of a university serves as the leader of their campus and represents the university in their community and at the system level. The presidents interviewed for this study shared experiences and perspectives from three roles: (1) a woman executive leader, (2) a member of the collective body of system presidents within the CSU system, and (3) as the campus leader of their individual team of vice-presidents and campus leaders. Each of the presidents identified mentors, leadership models, and intentional professional practice as important factors on the pathway to executive leadership. Specific observations of leadership practices commonly adopted by women presidents in this study trended toward collaboration and inclusivity. When she first arrived at her campus as president, President Agni described it as a

"culture of hierarchical leadership – a more masculine approach to things." It was her observation that women leaders tend to be more inclusive and less "bought in" to hierarchy as a trusted leadership practice. President Ondine shared similar insights regarding women's leadership practices.

> Speaking generally, about what I know about women leaders, we are much more collaborative and much more inclusive. Women tend to value meaning seeking, looking for common ground, and consensus building. I think I am not alone in that observation. You will probably find that as a common theme among all the women leaders you interview. It is that kind of feminist approach to leadership that I also subscribe to. I don't think it's unique to me as an individual. Although I think, each of us, all leaders and all women leaders have our unique characteristics and personalities. But I think placing particular value on collaboration, common ground and consensus building is important to us as leaders in part because we're women. For me it's because I'm a woman for sure.

President Zephyr extended this observation to include the specific practice of how a leader facilitates meetings and the work of people in groups.

> I think you can really observe the difference between more male or female leadership practices when you watch how the leader runs a meeting. When you have women leaders in the room, it can seem more apparent when the men tend to dominate the conversation and frankly, there's a lot of mansplaining that happens. And so it is up to the convener to make sure that this is controlled in some way. It can be very awkward but it is important if you want to hear all voices and encourage collaboration. You know, as a leader, I don't speak just to prove how smart I am or just to be the loudest voice. But I will speak when I have something directly substantive to the topic at hand. And meetings should be

conducted so everybody can have that approach and not have to endure a lot of

mansplaining.

When meetings are not managed in that way, you know women just tune out. I

have seen it so many times. The women they're just like – I'm not talking. It's just not

worth it. Let's just get this over with, you know. I think really looking at the

communication patterns of what tend to be more male communication patterns and what

tend to be more female – and of course, there are always exceptions, right? – is really

fundamental to making good decisions to make sure all voices are heard.

Women Presidents within the California State University System Leadership

The president of a university serves as the leader of their campus and also represents the

university in their community and at the system level. The women interviewed for this study

shared experiences and perspectives from their role as a president in the state university system

with a majority women executive leaders. President Ondine and President Agni identified the

student-centered mission of the CSU system as aligned with women's leadership tenants. For

instance, President Odine said,

> I think the mission of the CSU is very appealing to anyone who has social justice, equity
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> diversity and inclusion values and principles and so as a result, I think, then we've
>
> attracted a more diverse pool for leadership positions, if you will. I think the mission of
>
> the CSU attracts a bunch of really darn good women leaders and we all earned the
>
> opportunity to serve the students.
>
> Similarly, President Agni stated,

My passion is removing institutional obstacles to graduation. And that brought me to the

CSU. It is my evangelical zeal for student success that aligns well with the mission of the

CSU so that's how I ended up in this seat. I am here for the students.

A majority of the CSU campuses were led by women presidents throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Each of the presidents interviewed credited former chancellor Timothy White for his intentionality in finding and hiring women executive leaders to lead as campus presidents in the CSU system. President Atman shared the history of the shift toward providing opportunities for women presidents within the CSU system:

Oh, it's absolutely strategic and intentional. It absolutely is. I recall hearing from a senior

woman president years ago when there were numerous openings and not one woman got

the nod. She spoke out very strongly. Really? There are three presidencies open and not

one woman is qualified to be a candidate? I think that made Chancellor White pensive.

And so I think then he became very intentional. First behind the scenes by talking with

the search firms and then by being thoughtful about the configuration of the search

committees...It really makes a difference to have representatives on the committee who

understand that everybody comes to the presidency a different way. CSU search advisory

committees always include a system president. Leadership has been very intentional

about offering opportunities throughout the system.

President Ondine also recognized the intentional efforts within the CSU system and called for continued attention to offering opportunities to a wide pool of candidates for leadership positions. She said,

Tim got us started and we need to keep doing what we have been doing in the CSU,

which is be serious about bias training and diversify the hiring search committee or the

44

people who get to hire. For the position of the president, the trustees make the hire decision based on the recommendation of the committee and the chancellor. And then we need to continue to be bold and make the right decisions.

President Zephyr stated the importance of supporting new presidents after they are hired into the system:

They have to walk their talk. You know, really focusing on the search process intentionally and then supporting the women after they are hired in their jobs…. One cool thing we have in the CSU is there is always a president on the search advisory committee and then after they are hired, that president becomes the new president's 'buddy' in the system to show them around.

President Agni also expressed the value of having a mentor who is a retired woman president with whom she is able to consult. However, during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, President Agni's mentor told her, "Just ignore everything I told you before March 2020. This [crisis] is a whole different ballgame." Even though she had been coached to "stay out of the weeds" as a president, the pandemic required President Agni to pay attention to unprecedented details. President Agni credits the chancellor and the trustees for working together to first ensure their pools are diverse, to hire consciously, and then provide mentorship opportunities in order to

create a culture that makes it a great place for a woman to lead. At my first presidents' meeting, I was shocked at what a warm fuzzy group it was. I asked, has this always been true? And someone said no, this has changed. I think it was the chancellor's intentionality about adding different voices and even changing the culture within the president's group. And when over half of them are women, it changes the tone.

45

These women presidents served together in the state university system as members of the Chancellor's Senior Leadership Council (CSLC), which met bi-monthly to receive and discuss pending policies. However, during the onset of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the CSU Chancellor met with the system president's daily and then, as the crisis progressed, the CSLC met weekly. These frequent meetings provided a community for the presidents and a critical communication link within the CSU system. All of the women presidents interviewed reported on the benefits of the support provided during the crisis by their president colleagues and the leadership of the chancellor. Presidents who joined the system before Timothy White was named chancellor described the change from a culture of presidents' meetings feeling "just deadly" and "filled with helplessness'" spurred by poor relationships with unions and negative morale on campuses across the system to current meetings that included agreements about the culture of the CSLC. President Terra said, "We purposefully built a team. We have guidelines for communication and interaction. You wouldn't think you'd be doing that at the presidential level, but we went to the trouble of doing it." President Agni described the CSLC as "a really warm, supportive group. I know I have 22 people I can text, and they will drop everything to help me. That is a remarkable culture." The trust and camaraderie experienced at the system level was highlighted by each of the presidents. Furthermore, the formation and development of trust and shared leadership within the leadership teams on their individual campuses was paramount to the president's leadership response to the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Shared Leadership: The Importance of Team

Each of the presidents identified the importance of their cabinet or team of vice presidents on their campus during the pandemic. President Terra said, "The most rewarding aspect of leading my campus through the crisis has been seeing the high performance of my

various teams. Every vice-president and all the AVPs working with them have really stepped up." Building a successful team is an intentional practice. President Atman compared her cabinet to an ecosystem:

> I think presidents and systems should absolutely look for the best leaders, but remember as a system you're going to be working as a team. So when I think about my cabinet I realize I need a lot of diversity. So it's not just about women or other underrepresented leaders. I'll just be really clear, it's the gamut of diversity of thought, of perspective, of upbringing, of you know, how you identify. All of that diversity just brings more value and creates a better system. It is really just ecosystems, right? Really, if you want an ecosystem to thrive, it has to be diverse. If an ecosystem is homogenous, you're just making it fragile, and it's vulnerable and not likely to continue to exist if it stays that way. It is pretty easy to see that our future has to include diverse leaders.

President Ondine subscribed to a leadership style defined as connective leadership with a focus on building positive team dynamics:

> I subscribe to the leadership style called connective leadership, because it's very emergent and dynamic. It identifies traditional areas like relational and in some ways directive, social or collaborative, but it identifies leadership as being all connected. Any good leader is going to really understand the situational context and understand what needs to be utilized in that situational context in order to either engage in informed decision making, or really get the group working together even more effectively. Or improving processes and practices or policies. Connective leadership understands the interdependency of leadership styles itself and the interdependencies of the human systems in which we have to work.

Presidents Agni and Zephyr noted that they valued receiving feedback from their teams and constituencies before making their decisions. In their experience, the time spent gathering information and listening to differing perspectives and opinions provides the best foundation for moving decisions forward. Specifically, President Zephyr said,

> I like getting input from my team. I know at the end of the day, I have to stop that process when it seems to be complete and I'm hearing the same thing repeated. Then I need to make a decision. And it's not a democracy at that point, I realize it's on my shoulders to make a decision but I like having a clear process. I often have said, in higher education, you need to allow time for process and either you put in that time at the beginning of the decision prior to the decision or you're going to go through a process after the decision. And that process is often damage control. So I think it is best to have a process in our environment, but people are looking at you to make the final decision. It is my experience that people will feel comfortable, even if they don't agree with the decision, if they know the factors that went into it, the reasoning behind the decision. And if they feel heard then they can support the decision.

Similarly, President Agni noted:

> I am not hierarchical. I believe in getting people around a table. I regularly say, "She who makes a decision alone, will often make the wrong one." So I like to get as much feedback as I can. Get as many people around the table as I can. But having said that, I also believe you can talk things to death. Which is a handicap in higher education. So I will, at a certain point, say okay I'm going to make a decision. And I'm also very willing to rethink a decision. I don't let my ego get invested in what I've decided if someone presents new information. I'll lead in another direction…. I don't let the consultative

nature of what I do slow me down but I believe in surrounding myself with the smartest

possible people and encouraging free dialogue…. I like a discursive process so I want to

surround myself with people who are smart, fearless, and can tell me when I'm wrong.

Campus presidents are responsible for the direction of their university. All five presidents

expressed deep appreciation for the members of their cabinets and leadership teams. President

Atman identified the importance of intrinsic motivation and the power that derives from team

members wanting to work together. She said:

Especially during the pandemic, we are moving forward as a collective, as a team,

because the only way leadership matters is, if you have a team that works really, really

well together and is willing to get that really big work done. The work has to mean

something to them, and they have to lead with intrinsic motivation. It's not about the title,

or the money, any of that because at the end of the day none of that will motivate us to

keep going. Working as a team is about wanting to work together. All in agreement – in

unison.

President Zephyr credited her team with her campus' ability to respond to the crisis

caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, "It really helped that during that time we had a very tight

team already. My cabinet was on board with the mission and we could move very quickly and

agilely." President Terra described her development into a shared leadership perspective. As the

crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic consistently presented new challenges, she was able to

trust in the expertise and leadership skills of members of her cabinet. She stated,

You know, one thing I'm glad about is that I have learned to not feel that it is just me

having to come up with all the answers. I don't have to be the one who knows exactly

how to get our students to take vaccinations, or wear masks or any of the other variety of

49

issues which arise. I have learned that my Vice President for Student Affairs has a whole

team thinking of creative ways to do it. And you know around the whole table I have a

cabinet full of people with great teams working with them.

The presidents reported that their teams both at the system level and on their individual

campuses were crucial to their leadership during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

One president credited her vice president with coining the saying, "One Heart. One Heartbeat,"

as their campus motto throughout out the crisis. Data analysis revealed that the presidents' relied

upon three foundational leadership practices. More specifically, the presidents' leadership

practice during the crisis was demonstrated through trust, communication, and caring.

Foundational Crisis Leadership Practice: Trust

The first of three foundational crisis leadership practices that emerged from the data

analysis was the role of building and demonstrating trust. All five presidents offered multiple

examples of the importance of trust for and to their leadership practice during the crisis caused

by the COVID-19 pandemic. The creation of trust to establish authenticity and demonstrate

credibility was important in building relationships and creating meaningful collaboration with

community partners during the crisis. Building and demonstrating trust was also identified as a

critical component needed to move forward and lead their campuses through the changes

introduced by the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Building Trust through Authenticity and Credibility

The presidents identified building trust as an essential component to their leadership

practice. President Ondine and President Atman described trust as a personal and professional

value. President Ondine saw the building of trust as a product of leading by example and

personal values. She said,

Trust is paramount. I build trust by living by my values as a leader. I believe in integrity, honesty, truthfulness and fairness. I believe in transparency and accountability. I believe in working together and trusting one another. I believe that we're stronger together. Collaboration is key. So I take all of these lists of values, I live them. I lead by example. And I build trust. I have high expectations that as my team works together to form a community we also demonstrate these values and build trust with others around us.

Similarly, President Atman shared the importance of defining principles and values for a group in order to build trust. She specifically noted that

One of my most important lessons learned is before you start, it is important to identify what are the principles and values that are going to guide the group. Because we're going to have some tough decisions ahead of us. We have to trust each other. Have shared principles and values that we trust guide our work together.

Finally, President Agni offered an example of how working together around shared principles enabled her campus leaders to work together, build trust, and achieve solidarity around a message supporting vaccinations on her campus:

In fact, on my campus, even before the unions had signed their memorandums of understanding, myself, the Chair of the Senate, the President of CFA and the President CSUEU, sent out a campus wide email jointly, from the four of us, signed, asking employees to go get vaccinated. We had to trust each other and work toward the same goal. That's kind of solidarity. In particular built a lot more trust with CSUEU because, to be fair, their folks were here through this whole darn thing, they were the ones who are on the front line.

Many of the presidents shared examples of groups from campus working together during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis extended well beyond campus boundaries. The communities in which the universities were located were impacted as well, and it was imperative that university presidents worked closely with community leaders during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This process also required building trust.

Building Trust with Community Partners

The presidents shared the opinion that trust must be earned and maintained over time and through shared experiences with community leaders and members of their local health care community. The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated university presidents work closely with community leaders. President Terra and President Atman both described the deep value of positive partnerships within the community. President Terra said,

> When it comes to working with the community the key is partnership. We've always had a very positive partnership with the city. You know, our mayor is a graduate and so he's a big cheerleader. But that relationship was really cemented during this time because, well for a number of reasons, but I think they really saw, especially the health department, saw that they could trust us. That we would tell them if we had a problem. And if they told us to do something, we did it right away. And I see that paying off. There have been important developments between us and the city. For example, we have five big departments now in the city that are taking our interns for paid internships and I think this kind of buildup of trust and communication has been really part of making those kinds of things possible.

While President Atman stated,

I always felt confident about my leadership capabilities, but I think I've learned a lot about my intuition in relationship building and not only with my campus community but, in particular with my community. In the county where I serve, it really matters. It just really matters that you have a heart for the people of this community. And that you engage. I have a very strong internal as well as external role, as the President. I'm pretty high energy, and that continued this throughout the pandemic because I felt that people needed us. I maybe even underestimated how much. So it seemed clear I had to be ever positive and ever present.

President Zephyr identified the importance of conversation and demonstrating the willingness to listen in order to build relationships. Like President Atman, she found value in taking action in order to build trust with community partners, noting

There was a lot of pent up demand for conversation and some really difficult conversations about everything from vaccinations to racial justice in the community and on our campus. You know, it involved a lot of listening and absorbing. During a crisis, and when people are really upset that can be hard to do – it is a lot to take. But it has been worth it. The community and other leaders in our area can see that I am a person of my word. I'm doing things.

In order to effectively lead their campuses through the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the presidents relied upon their leadership skills and the relationships built within the community prior to the crisis. When personal perspectives and experiences can be varied to the point of conflict, leaders must demonstrate the ability to listen to many voices in order to establish credibility. President Ondine set high expectations for communication and collaboration among leaders in her community even when opinions were diverse. She explained,

The community hospital leaders and campus leaders are also very involved in the community and serve as key members of some influential groups in town like Rotary, where all the movers and shakers are, and the chamber, city council, downtown business association and various important boards of directors. Our community has a wonderful mix of viewpoints, both conservative and more progressive. We have people who believe in the pandemic and those who don't believe. Our campus and the hospital had many leaders attending meetings and events and participating throughout the community. I think we were able to build relationships and establish credibility by working together and being united as campus and hospital as partners. We were able to convince a number of the most influential people in town to be supportive of COVID practices and that was incredibly helpful both externally and internally.

I just knew that if we set expectations high, and then we were able to enforce those expectations, that people would comply. And people in the community have complied. We have a very good vaccination rate.

County Health Departments were identified as primary partners during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. President Ondine established a clear partnership with the county and demonstrated trust in local decision making. As she said,

From the beginning, we started working very closely and collaboratively with the county health department. I think one of the things I had to do first and foremost, and with parents, alumni and with donors and philanthropic folk was to demonstrate partnership and communication with our local health department. One of the key things that was really important was that I had to educate both external people and the campus early on to let them know that, yes, CDC may say one thing, and yes, Governor Newsom may say

54

another. But where there are gray areas of interpretation that is interpreted by the county

health department and our campus is working with them, very closely to determine what

is best for our particular campus in our particular community. So what is happening in

other counties or on other campuses in the system may be different. We're making

decisions with a focus on the cases in our county so we are able to do what is best within

our community.

Each of the presidents trusted their personal leadership skills as they navigated the crisis

caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Trust in their campus teams and building on the trust

established with community partners was identified as a foundational leadership practice. They

relied upon the credibility they earned both before the start of the crisis caused by the COVID-19

pandemic and throughout their leadership during the crisis. They built trust through the focus on

relationships and dedication to authentic communication on their campuses and within their

communities.

Foundational Crisis Leadership Practice: Communication

The presidents identified communication as a foundational leadership practice during the

crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. By focusing on accessibility and establishing clear

communication, the presidents made connections across their campuses and within the

community at large. They described the importance of listening and giving voice to others as a

key factor in fostering communication. These practices established before the crisis caused by

the COVID-19 pandemic enabled communication plans to be enacted more quickly on their

campus during the crisis. Finally, presidents identified the importance of outreach and messaging

as they led their campuses during the crisis.

Accessibility and Connections

The president of a university must lead a complex organization with many areas of focus and a variety of priorities. One of the leadership tenants described by the women presidents in this study was their commitment to the students on their campuses and their dedication to being accessible to students, staff, and faculty. President Terra shared that accessibility is an area where some of the presidents within the state system have a difference of opinion. Some presidents "keep a distance from the majority of campus activities and the day to day conversations…. they see their role as leader from the top and will show up at main events." President Terra sought to create an environment that promoted success and where people knew she was available when needed:

> I really promote accessibility. As I mentioned, that's somewhat controversial among the presidents. But I have found that it really works well for me. People, you know, once they know they can contact you, that you are available when they need you, many don't bother. It's just when people think that they can't get to you, they can't contact the president, that it becomes an issue. So I spend a lot of time on email to follow up and be accessible to whomever reaches out.

President Zephyr observed that when people know "the president genuinely values hearing from multiple perspectives, that she is genuinely accessible to open conversations, then communication can flourish." President Atman and President Ondine promoted accessibility and open communication by holding regular meetings of all campus administrators or MPPs (the acronym for the classification for university administrators who are part of the management personnel plan) and department chairs. President Ondine noted:

I have always held regular major MPP meetings, including department chairs where

normally 80-90 people attend. This has served as my main communication to campus

leadership about how we're doing and what needs to happen in order to continue our

support for students, staff and faculty

President Atman extended accessibility by attending faculty senate and associated student union

meetings. She explained,

Another of my communication strategies is I show up. I go to every Academic Senate

meeting and I'm there for the full two hours. I go to every Associated Students meeting

every week, every Friday. I never miss because somebody might have a question for me

and I want to hear what the concerns are myself. And also, I want to hear all the

celebrations first hand. That is one of the best things about being president. I love hearing

about all of the great things people are doing on our campus.

In addition to formal meetings, one president had monthly "walk and talks." Students

were notified of the day and time they were able to join the president as she walked around the

campus. The president reported that it was

somewhat surprising to learn the students actually want[ed] to walk with the president. Of

course, they have things to say and important questions to ask. It was a bonus to learn

they wanted to stroll around with me and share those things. Of course it is the outcome I

hoped for.

Listening and Giving Voice

The presidents described being accessible and making connections as part of their

leadership style and a priority for their practice. President Zephyr pointed out that "while it is

important to show up, the president also needs to listen. Really listen to all the voices in the room." President Agni counted listening as the foundation of her leadership strengths:

My leadership strengths are relationship building, empowering people and maintaining a clear focus on the students on my campus. I do all of those things by being a good listener. I love stories. I think history is just the compilation of people's stories. And, if you're paying attention to history, you're listening to all the stories and looking for the people whose stories got drowned out. To be a good leader you need to listen to everyone, not just the dominant person. Nothing gives me greater pleasure than to be around a table with a group of people working on a project together and getting it done. We do that by giving voice to everyone at the table.

President Terra also relied upon her listening skills to create the best environment for her team to be most effective, saying,

Especially in a crisis situation, everyone needs to feel like they not only have a seat at the table, but their voices are valued and that they see the influence from what they do. You know I subscribe to the notion that at the 50,000-foot level my job is to create environments where people can be successful. I need to enable others because I can't do the whole job myself. I think my academic background… has helped me be a really good listener. I pay attention, I listen and I don't jump to conclusions. I tend not to take things too personally. I like to see our team have fun and work together. But really talk about everything, even the difficult things and be focused on problem solving and be transparent. I listen and I am careful not to micromanage. People need to know they are trusted, that their voice matters.

President Ondine also shared the importance of supporting people to work together. She identified her ability to bring people together so that they are able to learn to listen to one another as her most significant leadership strength:

My greatest strength as a leader in higher education is my ability to bring divergent points of view together to find common ground. My ability to instill or develop trust establishes an opportunity for teamwork. I really listen to what people are saying and I pay attention to what they are not saying too. It is a matter of bringing people together so we can all work toward shared goals and shared mission. I pay close attention to how I build community. I bring people together from divergent points of view and encourage them to share and, more importantly, teach them how to really listen when others share their side of the issue. I've always lived by this motto to find a way to harness people's strengths and then basically make sure they're in the right spot- where they can implement those strengths. Have their voices heard. Because we're so much stronger when we listen to each other. We are so much stronger as a collective.

When their campuses were impacted by the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the presidents were able to call upon their established practices in order to engage with their campus communities quickly. It became important to utilize their connections and adapt the manner in which they provided accessibility when the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic forced people to work and communicate from their homes. Listening to one another and ensuring all voices were being considered became paramount.

Outreach and Messaging

In March of 2020, California Governor Newsom issued a stay-at-home order that initiated the rapid closure of the university campuses within the CSU system as well as closure of

other schools and businesses. This practice was not isolated to the United States or California.

Worldwide, institutions of higher education were forced to adapt to unforeseen circumstances

with little notice. President Agni may have been the most prepared to respond to the pandemic as

she had served on a campus pandemic planning group in a former administrative role. As a

member of that committee, she had the opportunity to contemplate important issues like

communication with students, staff, and faculty; and messaging to the community; strategies to

best serve residential students; and the importance of working with county health officials.

However as she pointed out, "when the committee met we did talk regularly about these issues.

But of course, nowhere in the pandemic planning did we ever imagine or suggest it might be

more than like two or three weeks." As the magnitude of the crisis caused by the COVID-19

pandemic became apparent, the CSU system was the first in the United States to announce the

move to fully online instruction. The Chancellor convened the 23 presidents daily and then

weekly as the crisis progressed. President Atman and President Terra worked closely with their

campus teams to implement and adapt the plans generated by the Chancellor's office. President

Atman said,

> The chancellor says, I want all of you to go virtual in this many hours and report back.
> So, I immediately pulled my cabinet together. Started with here's what the North Star, the
> Chancellor, is talking about. The North Star has prioritized the health and safety of our
> campus and, of course, as president, that's always first on my mind – the health and safety
> of our people. The most important thing the Chancellor said was "I want this done in
> hours" and my provost said. "I can do it, but if you gave me days, it would be better." I
> really listen to my team. I have an amazing cabinet. And so, I had to have the courage to
> defy the "hours" and say we're going to do it in days. And that decision made a lot of

difference for our campus because it allowed us to breathe. That time allowed us to get it

right and it allowed people, I think, to have faith in us. People thought, "Okay, this is

going to be big and we can do it. We're good, we're going to try to find time to reflect on

it and process it." So, yes, on my campus, like all the others we had the shock of it all, but

I think people felt like we were doing it right.

President Terra also emphasized the importance of listening to and planning with her campus

team. She explained how she would approach the system wide meetings with the Chancellor and

other campus presidents,

And, of course we were meeting. All the Presidents of the CSU system were meeting. In

my memory, it felt as if we were meeting continually at first. And then we met

consistently on Friday afternoons. In some ways it got so I was dreading Friday afternoon

because there would be 23 different opinions about how everything should be handled.

My team at my campus has a tendency to say, "Okay we're going to do this." And then

quickly have a comprehensive plan in place. So I would be sitting in the presidents'

meetings just listening. It was interesting to hear what everybody else was doing. But

we'd already decided what was going to happen on my campus. I knew what we were

going to do. And, unless a really much better idea came up, my campus already had a

plan.

All CSU campuses had an Emergency Operations Center (EOC), which could be engaged

in an emergency. Through the EOC, university police, campus staff, and leaders from across the

organization train together to anticipate appropriate and swift response in the case of an

emergency on campus. When the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic affected their

campuses, each of the presidents activated the EOC at their institution. Within days, all of the

presidents either changed the membership of their EOC team or created a separate committee or team to work alongside of the EOC that focused solely on pandemic response. These enhanced response teams were designed to gather voices from across the entire campus. They included academic and administrative leaders, senate chairs and other faculty members, chief information officers (CIOs) and other members of technology teams, associated student union officers, facilities and maintenance leaders, marketing and communication staff, and other campus members who might have had a unique perspective or impact on the campus. President Agni described the process of creating the pandemic policy group on her campus:

> On my campus, we initiated the Emergency Operation Center. It was that group of people who train for campus emergencies and it was led by a police officer. And then we created a policy group which is led by me and included the president and vice-presidents. And so the EOC starts weighing these things and making recommendations to us and I realized we should move all classes to virtual instruction. This was the day or so before the system announcement. That was when I realized this EOC thing wasn't working. Things were changing too fast. The model didn't work. I told them we needed to collapse the groups. We're going to take the policy group and the EOC and we were going to meet all together so that we're all in the same space. By then, it was already on zoom. I got criticized. My EOC people were like "That is not the chain of command", and all this ridiculous EOC language, and I was like "I don't care. I want us all in the same room asking the same questions." Things were changing too fast. The EOC is designed for when we had a bomb threat or a flood, it was not designed for this. So I quickly created a completely different group and then started inviting other people in. To this day we meet. And there are probably now 25 of us. Academic technology, undergraduate studies, the

union's, yeah we brought in the unions, the senate chair and other faculty, students. I got

associated students sitting on it. So my initial response was to use the EOC, and realized

that didn't work. We needed a wider response and understanding.

The presidents articulated the value of expanding the membership of their teams to

ensure many perspecives were considered as they developed outreach strategies and community

messaging about the crisis. President Ondine had recently activated the EOC at her campus to

intiate a campus response to a community crisis so she felt her team was well practiced and

ready for the challenge when the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic arrived at her

campus. She said,

> I called the Emergency Operations Center together and we got to work. We started
>
> establising the team 24/7, really getting to the details, making lists of things we knew we
>
> had to accomplish. Communications, decisions around pivoting to online and all these
>
> things. We did not hesitate. We knew what to do. I did not hesitate, I was able to set the
>
> direction and see what we needed to achieve and we were able to get into action groups
>
> very quickly. We needed some new groups than we had used before. A pandemic was a
>
> new kind of crisis.

Campus Emergency Operations Centers and the subsequent new response committees

worked diligently to make plans and design campus responses at the onset of the crisis caused by

the COVID-19 pandemic. The speed at which campus teams were mobilized and ready to

address campus needs was key. President Agni shared that planning was both essential and at

times, frustrating but the outcome was satisfying as her campus worked together as a team. As

she explained:

I was often reminded of the saying, "Man plans, and God laughs." Initially we had these criteria. We set up scenarios- if we have two cases of covid, this is what we're going to do. And if we have this, then we will do that. You know, all the scenarios. Oh my God, I could have filled a dumpster with all our scenarios. Finally, I just realized we really needed to plan in real time and very quickly. So, that was the first important thing I learned. And the second important thing I learned is that, with the right motivation and the right goals, I saw this university do things this past summer in two weeks that I never thought that they could do in that amount of time. It is truly amazing that we moved everything virtual so quickly. As a leader you have to learn to process information pretty quickly. Because things just change so fast especially during a crisis. And then you have to be willing to make a decision and recognize it could be wrong and you'll be held accountable.

As decisions were made, it was important to communicate with the full campus community. The presidents held Zoom meetings and filmed messages designed to share information with students, staff, and faculty. President Terra made a video message for immediate release to her campus. President Zephyr asked faculty with expertise in subjects germane to the crisis to create short videos. Professors shared information about a variety of topics like talking with children about crisis, exercise, mental health, and even pet care. She said,

The videos gave people something positive to do to help as we managed the pandemic on campus. It also featured our faculty, our great faculty's work in a different way. It made them feel good and that was part of the effort. I think it helped to build trust across the board. Of course, the system was communicating about specific policies. I felt that my role was reminding people that, yes, this is serious but also I needed to figure out ways to

64

give people a feeling of hope. We can handle this. I paid a lot of attention to how our campus outreach made people feel.

Presidents Ondine, Terra, and Atman moved their existing meetings with MPPs, faculty groups, and students to Zoom and continued to demonstrate their commitment to accessibility. President Agni first relied upon email communications and Zoom meetings to share critical information. After a month, she began to create video messages for the campus because she learned that she "had to find other ways of holding hands and wrapping my arms around the community." She expanded on this point, saying:

> I learned quickly that there was nothing more important than communication. We could not communicate enough. No matter how much we communicated we could always do a better job. I was also pretty clear that the communication had to be from me. People were so scared, they needed to know that I was there. So I sent lots of emails. We put up a ridiculously detailed website that needed to be updated often. We tried to give everybody everything they asked for on the website. I personalized my emails according to the groups I was sending them to. I met with the associated students every week. Up until that time, I had not met with them personally but they just needed that connection. I mean, we got so close we could tell, on zoom, mind you, if one of us got a haircut. Really high touch. Then I finally got pushed in April to make a video. My audiovisual crew was my husband and my son. It was difficult and I worked really hard on it. I'm kinda a control freak, I wrote my own scripts. Then when I figured it out, boy, did I make videos. I made videos for lots of groups. Students, faculty, parents- everyone.

Communication with multiple constituencies in a variety of forms proved necessary and effective for the presidents. They needed to engage their teams, reach out to faculty and staff,

and maintain connections with their students all the while fostering continued engagement with the community surrounding their campuses. As President Terra noted,

> It seemed COVID was on our minds, all the time and I wanted to respond and keep communications flowing about that. But I had this sense that we had to keep talking about the more normal things that we'd have to do too. That we couldn't give people the impression that all we're doing at the university is disease control. You know we had to be moving ahead on our graduation initiative, and we had to be building buildings, and we had to continue to build partnerships. We had to be raising money. And I felt strongly that that would add to people's sense of normalcy, to let the students know that we are here and moving forward. And also give our whole community a sense of "don't worry they have capacity up there at the university".

Outreach and messaging were crucial as the presidents led their campuses through the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. They redesigned campus response structures, relied upon existing relationships and communication pathways, and took the time to listen throughout the crisis. These efforts and the presidents' steadfast dedication to communication were indications of their high level of care, which was demonstrated through their leadership.

Foundational Crisis Leadership Practice: Care

Care was the third foundational leadership practice that the participants relied upon as they navigated the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Their primary concern was care for the students on their campuses. They created more opportunities for students to communicate with campus administration and access student services. The presidents interviewed for this study reported that leading through the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a clearer identity with their role as a mother. They identified motherhood as a strength they

incorporated into their leadership of their campuses. Finally, the presidents shared the importance of self-care and the role of family and work-life considerations for women leaders.

University presidents are responsible for the leadership of their campus on many levels. They must be responsive at the system level, oversee the operations of each of the campus divisions lead by their vice presidents, serve alumni and court donors, and be involved in the communities surrounding their institution. However, students are at the heart of a university campus. All five of the presidents placed students at the center of their leadership practice. During the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the students were the primary consideration for all participants. President Agni said,

> I always keep my North Star in mind and that is students come first. The students come first. It doesn't make me always popular with some faculty. There are opinions that I should center faculty more, or other things. But I asked myself with everything I do, "If I do this, am I helping students?" And that is my focus, always, despite whatever pushback comes my way.

The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated campuses be closed to students, but the presidents were still responsible to move their campuses forward to create the best learning environments and prepare for the students' return. President Terra led significant campus improvements and building projects to expand classroom and lab facilities for students. All five presidents described successful fundraising campaigns to benefit the students on their campuses. When President Terra's team understood that the first round of federal funds for students would not benefit undocumented or international students, her development team "got busy and raised almost $300,000 so [they] could give that private money to students at the same time the federal money was being dispersed." President Atman's campus leaders completed their

strategic plan during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and followed through with plans to present a festive anniversary celebration, even though it required events be held virtually.

President Ondine had led her campus through crises before the COVID-19 pandemic, but this situation brought new challenges. She kept a steadfast focus on the student experience because she believed "even during the most difficult times, my job is to help students reach their potential." President Atman and President Agni saw students on their campuses demonstrate leadership as they welcomed students back to campus. President Agni said,

> On my campus we branded our comeback. We gave everyone this little kit that has a face mask and hand sanitizer. Well, the student government actually took the same brand and they did all their own preparedness stuff. It was amazing. Great, it was really great. For a campus that hasn't traditionally worked well together, it has been remarkable to see.

While President Atman recognized the importance of student leadership in demonstrating care on campus,

> I was particularly proud of my student body leaders taking a huge role in the vaccination policy. Their efforts went all the way from their own stories and getting on social media. They focused on why they were doing it. There was a campaign. Things like, I'm getting my vaccine for… and they would have little cards: my grandmother, my child, my community. I was really inspired by their efforts and dedication to the health and safety on our campus. They were able to accomplish so much even though they weren't able to meet together.

President Agni expressed frustration with the physical separation caused by the pandemic and the inability to interact with others in person:

People just need to know you care. Especially students. I've never had a period in my leadership, where people needed more TLC and patience in a forum that doesn't enable you to give them TLC. I think that 'virtual communication' has been bizarre and it continues to be bizarre.

President Atman concurred with the importance to extend care to students during this time of crisis, stating,

I found it is important to let them know that students can ask any question – anything. Sometimes there may be tears. And they need for me, the president, to be there for them. I trust my intuition to always be aware of what the students need. Sometimes, even though we are talking virtually, it feels like the students need a hug. The president and other leaders need to provide some kind of a compassionate space for them to let them know we care about them. I think that as a woman my intuition is to just be there and serve through caring.

Motherhood as Strength

The woman presidents interviewed for this study all identified as mothers. They referenced the experience of being a mother as an essential component that contributed to their ability to lead their campus successfully through the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. President Zephyr found a connection between the centering of the students on her campus and her role as a mother, explaining:

I think being student oriented and putting students at the heart is central to my leadership as a woman. I'm always asking myself and my team, "How are the students doing?" and making sure that we're taking care of them. I stay in close contact with our student affairs people. I think all of that has a kind of maternal tone to it. I do, I worry about the

students. I want to make sure they're okay. In this type of leadership focus, I'm not only

reflecting my identity as a woman, but I also happened to be a mother. I do think there's a

connection there.

President Atman offered a very direct connection between her leadership practice and her

identity as a mother:

Most people will be coached not to say this, but as a woman leader my greatest strength

is my role as a mother. I come to this this work by serving students and actually serving a

community, which identifies as a family. Not every campus identifies that way, but this

one does. So, for me that's my greatest strength. I love being a mother. I have grown

children, and I bring that to my leadership every minute, every single day, and

particularly during a crisis.

Presidents Terra and Agni found their experiences as a mother assisted with

communicating and setting a calming tone for their campuses during the crisis caused by the

COVID-19 pandemic. President Terra said,

It is important to provide direction and guidance. I think my professional and academic

background contribute to my demeanor. I'm a mother and learned to juggle in that. So

when things seemed chaotic that calm was necessary, because the panic was just

everywhere. Maybe people felt like well okay, the president seems calm, so I guess we're

okay.

Similarly, President Agni explained,

The other thing I have found with being a woman is that I can use my "mom voice" to

deliver harder news or more negative news and its perceived better. An example would

be sharing hard news with the campus about reductions in budget or staffing. The way you deliver the message communicates how much you care. Moms know this.

The presidents called upon skills learned during motherhood to navigate the challenges leading their campus through the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. They expressed genuine care for their students, and they were intentional about how that care was communicated to their campuses. President Atman was direct in stating her conviction of the importance of motherhood to her leadership. In her words,

The role that best prepared me to lead in a crisis, the role that I lean on is being a mother. I learned the most important aspects by being a mother: be kind, be gentle, be compassionate and listen. Really listen. And most of all care and love. You know, I'm not afraid of using the love words – ever.

Self-Care, Health, and Balance

Self-care and the support of family members were identified as essential to effective leadership practice. The presidents shared the importance of caring for personal health and striving to attain balance; although, none of the five participants claimed to have found the secret to achieving work-life balance as an executive leader in higher education. President Ondine explained that seeking balance is critical:

If you don't have your health, you have nothing. If you're going to maintain life in the balance, you really have to prioritize your health first. You have to be really centered which usually entails how you define your family or close ones. Your support systems, if you will. Then as a leader, you need to be very passionate about your work and give it all you got. You have to work really hard to maintain a balance there. Balance is a concept. Let's be honest, it is unachievable. But I always say you have to strive for a balance.

When things start to feel a little out of whack, you can dial up or down and make

adjustments to feel more level. It is up to each individual to define your own sense of life

balance, but if you don't stop and assess, you will never realize your ideal.

The presidents relied upon the support of partners or family members as they pursued

advanced degrees and new roles when they ascended in their careers to achieve the position of

university president. In the interviews for this study, the presidents reflected on the benefit of

that support during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Four presidents' partners were

also academics employed by a university. These individuals possessed an understanding of the

higher education landscape and provided full support for the presidents' advancements and

relocations to new campuses. During the pandemic, the presidents' partners and family members

were involved in actual services, like providing video production assistance, driving to

appointments and vaccination clinics, and reminding them not to stand up during meetings to

reveal they were wearing shorts and slippers. However, their partners' and family members'

abilities to offer emotional support was identified as most beneficial toward the goal of achieving

balance during crisis. President Terra described her partner as "always 100% into the enterprise,"

and President Zephyr appreciated having family, children, and grandchildren in her "bubble."

Thoughtful attention to caring for their own health and well-being allowed the presidents

to be at their best to lead their campuses through the unprecedented experience of the crisis

caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. President Agni stated that she now aspires to provide an

example to other leaders on her campus:

> When you show you care for them and for yourself too it creates a warmer climate. You
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> know if it's a dog eat dog world and there's a lot of gotcha management, I'm
>
> overgeneralizing here but, often women and people of color will thrive less in those kinds

of environments. You know both women and people of color tend to suffer from imposter

syndrome at greater rates and so, if they're in a threatening environment, they may come

to question their own competency. You know some women just go gangbusters and burn

themselves out – which is detrimental too. So creating an inclusive, non-threatening,

supportive work culture, I think, will go a long way to helping create a place where you

can begin to talk about balance. Honestly, it's hard and maybe impossible to achieve

work/life balance at the vice-president and presidential level, even the dean and director

level, really. But flexibility, time and attention to culture can help. Maybe just keep the

conversation going. If I'm focused on my balance, I can encourage others as well.

Leadership Lessons Learned through Crisis

This study of women presidents in the California State University system was guided by

two research questions: (1) What crisis leadership practices did women senior leaders in higher

education rely upon during the onset of the crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic? And (2)

What did they learn about themselves as leaders as they navigated the challenges presented by

the crisis? As detailed in previous sections of this chapter, the presidents identified trust,

communication, and care as the foundational leadership practices they relied upon as they led

their campuses through the crisis. During the interviews, the presidents were asked directly,

"What have you learned about yourself as a leader during the past year as you have navigated the

challenges presented by the crisis created by the COVID-10 pandemic?" The presidents'

responses reflected the crisis leadership practices of trust, communication, and care they

identified as foundational to their success leading their campuses.

President Agni was most proud of her pivot to relationship-building online. The students

were her priority, and she strived to demonstrate her level of caring and concern for them. She

found virtual communication to be challenging, but she has learned successful techniques to continue connection. She said,

> My style is relationship-building that it is much harder to in a virtual environment. Zoom is not the same as having a cup of coffee and conversation with someone. I use my home and time spent with folks to build relationships and then I use those relationships to get things done – then all of a sudden – this. At my core, I am most focused on the students, and I am most proud of the relationships I have built with our students during the pandemic.

Supporting others to embrace leadership and establishing the environment to encourage her team to work in unison inspired President Atman. She valued teamwork and was dedicated to building relationships by serving as an affirming and involved leader. In her own words,

> It is important for me, as president, to be ever present and ever positive. When I do that, I am able to encourage leadership in others. There are great leaders everywhere at every level on my campus and it is up to me to inspire that to shine. As a leader who is very public, I am confident in my leadership abilities and proud of how I build relationships. What matters most to me is that we are working together and moving forward through this crisis.

President Ondine felt energized by the challenges presented in leading during a crisis. She trusted in her ability to lead her campus and provide support and guidance to her students, staff and faculty. She explained that she

> thrive[s] under extreme stress and pressure. I love problem solving, solution building and the intensity. I am competitive by nature so the intensity of trying to lead within a community and deliver everyone safely is an exciting challenge.

President Terra valued communication and indicated that listening is a central leadership practice. She credited her tendency to remain calm and the ability to seek and hear multiple perspectives as crucial components to her leadership success, explaining

I have a tendency to remain calm and stay pretty even. I've been told that people on my team, across campus, and in the community noticed this quality in me. As people reacted to the situation and the crisis rolled out, it reinforced to me the importance of carefully listening and seeking more advice and the vital importance of really hearing the other person's perspective.

President Zephyr leaned into the leadership skills she amassed and perfected during her career to navigate the challenges presented by the crisis successfully. She was reflective about her practice and observations of leadership skills in others. President Zephyr explained the need to build trust through authenticity and accessibility:

I lead with the qualities I respect in a leader: being authentic, having humility, being data driven, being accessible, communicating – skills I have incorporated into my leadership throughout my career are ever more important right now during this crisis and I am leaning into those things.

At the conclusion of her interview, President Terra offered this final inspirational and forward-facing reflection on the experience of leading her campus through the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic:

Despite the difficulty, I have a feeling now, at least, of what a privilege is has been to be a leader at this historic moment. You know, there are many historic moments, but this one outranks all others during my lifetime. To have the opportunity to meet the challenges of the pandemic and the needs of the community and our society. I thought,

well, not everybody can say that they were president of a university during this time. So I don't think that gives me extra credit or anything but it does give me a certain sense of, well, "If I was able to do this, I can do the next thing."

Summary of the Findings

The findings of this study centered around the leadership experiences of five women presidents as they navigated the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on their campuses. The presidents described their career pathways to their role as president and shared their observations of leadership in the context their identity as a woman leader. Within a shared leadership framework, the five presidents explained the importance of their campus leadership team and building strong team dynamics during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Three foundational crisis leadership practices emerged during data analysis: trust, communication, and care. The presidents also reflected on what they had learned about themselves as leaders as they navigated the crisis. These observations about personal leadership practice were shared in the context of serving as a women executive leader and in the context of serving as a president of a university within the CSU, which had reached gender parity at the time this research was conducted.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the leadership practices employed by women executive leaders during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic**.** During the first months of 2020 and throughout the next two years, the COVID-19 pandemic spurred changes in daily life for people worldwide and placed stress on the global economy (Boin et al., 2021; Garikipati & Kambhampati, 2021). The crisis was one of the most impactful and unpredictable human events in recent history. The impacts the COVID-19 pandemic catapulted institutions of higher education across the United States into an unprecedented culture change, creative innovation, and crisis management (Al-Dabbagh, 2020; Blankenberger & Williams, 2020; Cooper et al., 2020; Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). Campus closures required rapid transition to new forms of instruction and student engagement (Bradbury et al., 2020; Dumulescu & Muţiu, 2021; Harris & Jones, 2020). The health and safety of staff, faculty, and students became a primary focus for university presidents.

Within three months of the onset of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in North America, on May 12, 2020, the chancellor of the CSU system announced that the 23 campuses would primarily offer fall term classes online to their nearly 490,000 students. The system's 56,000 employees would continue to work remotely. This decision to remain online prioritized the safety of the CSU faculty, staff, and students. As each of the 23 CSU executive leadership teams considered the impacts for their campus communities and student body, they needed to account for the health and safety of their students and employees while they also considering the effects of their decisions on the communities and counties in which they were located.

Since 2018, the CSU system has employed the highest percentage of women presidents in the nation with 12 of the 23 campuses being led by women (Amoruso, 2018). In 2022, the majority of the CSU campuses had female provosts and vice presidents of academic affairs. Research has documented the disparity between the ratio of women to men in executive leadership roles in higher education (Gangone, 2016; Holloway, 2015; Howard & Gagliardi, 2018; Wenniger & Conroy, 2002). Within the CSU system, however, there is parity, or an equal number of women and men leaders, at the highest level of campus governance. Five of the women presidents who led their campuses through the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic were interviewed in this study.

This qualitative study focused on the leadership decisions, challenges, and reflections of women who served as president in the nation's largest public university system in order to identify and analyze the crisis leadership practices employed during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter is presented in five sections: summary of the study, discussion of the findings, limitations, implications for policy and practice, and suggestions for future research.

Summary of the Study

The findings from this study are based on the analysis of five semi-structured interviews conducted with women presidents who navigated the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Twelve women presidents in the CSU system were invited to participate in this study. Nine presidents responded to the invitation. Six agreed to participate, and three declined the invitation. Three presidents did not respond. Interviews were conducted and recorded utilizing the Zoom platform due to the continued health and safety precautions necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Interview transcripts, field notes and analytical memos were coded according to a grounded theory methodology. Interview transcripts were analyzed for data, including significant

statements, meanings of statements, themes or meanings, and descriptions of the crisis leadership

practices employed during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 (Creswell, 2018). The following

research questions guided this study:

1. What crisis leadership practices did women senior leaders in higher education rely
   upon during the onset of the crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic?

2. What did they learn about themselves as leaders as they navigated the challenges
   presented by the crisis?

Discussion of the Findings

The findings of this study centered around the leadership experiences of five women

presidents as they navigated the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on their campuses.

The presidents described their career pathways and shared their observations of leadership in the

context their identity as a woman leader. Within a shared leadership framework (Holcombe et

al., 2021), the five presidents identified the importance of their campus leadership teams and

building strong team dynamics during the crisis. Three foundational crisis leadership practices

emerged during data analysis, specifically trust, communication, and care. The participants

identified these three crisis leadership practices as the ones they most relied upon during the

crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. During the semi-structured interviews, the presidents

reflected on what they had learned about themselves as leaders as they navigated the crisis.

These observations about personal leadership practice were shared in the context of serving as a

women leader and in the context of serving as a president of a university within a state university

system that employed a majority women presidents.

Pathways to the Presidency

Early leadership experiences and the mentorship of an influential leader formed the pathway to the presidency for the women interviewed for this study. Each of the five presidents shared stories of early leadership experiences in a variety of settings, such as classrooms, family situations, sports teams, or church groups, where someone recognized their potential as a leader. In recounting their path to their current role as president, each woman recalled at least one individual mentor, professor, or administrator who recognized their potential and promise as a leader in higher education early in their college education or within the first years of their career in a university setting. Two of the presidents were the first members of their families to attend college. They each had been encouraged by a professor to consider a career in academia and offered mentorship to pursue the path toward a terminal graduate degree.

According to the literature, women identified for their leadership promise and supported in seeking development of these traits during their undergraduate careers showed higher rates of leadership aspirations (Boatwright et al., 2003). Women leaders in higher education were shown to make substantial advances in their careers when they have early mentoring relationships (Ballenger, 2010; Bonebright et al., 2012). When those mentors also champion or promote them, women leaders are able to attain higher positions in higher education (Thomas, 2014).

All of the presidents interviewed for this study served as either a dean or a provost and vice president of academic affairs before becoming a university president. The importance of mentorship for women who achieve the position of president has been well-established in the research (Block & Tietjen-Smith, 2016; Brown, 2005; Hill & Wheat, 2017; Howard, 2004; Jefferson, 2017; Mullen, 2009; Novak, 2014; Searby et al., 2015). Ballenger (2010) found women leaders in higher education made substantial advances in their careers when they had

early mentoring relationships. Combining leadership development opportunities with ongoing mentorship by successful women leaders are important components of attracting and keeping women executive leaders in campus positions (Baltodano et al., 2011; Ely et al., 2011; Hewlett, 2007; Hurtado & DeAngelo, 2009; Madsen et al., 2012). Two of the women presidents interviewed for this study participated in an ACE fellowship, which they identified as foundational to their leadership development experience. All five presidents had current mentors, retired presidents, or leadership coaches they regularly consulted with, which they found especially helpful during the COVID-19 pandemic.

What Women Bring to the Presidency

Beyond leading their campus, the president of a university represents their institution in the community and at the system level. The presidents interviewed for this study shared experiences and perspectives from three roles: (1) a woman executive leader, (2) a member of the collective body of system presidents within the CSU system, and (3) as the campus leader of their individual team of vice-presidents and campus leaders. Research on women's leadership practices note the tendency for women to adopt leadership practices that trend toward collaboration and inclusivity (Antonaros, 2010; Easterly, 2008; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Lambert & Gardner, 2009; Reis, 2015; Switzer, 2016). President Agni described her campus prior to her presidency as "hierarchical" and "more masculine." Her observation that women leaders tend to be more inclusive and less "bought in" to hierarchy as a trusted leadership practice is also supported in the literature (Acker, 1990; Brescoll, 2016; Hills, 2012; Koenig et al., 2011; Lyle & MacLeod, 2017; Post et al., 2019).

Thirty years prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Sally Helgesen (1990) analyzed women leaders' contribution to the workplace and introduced the concept of "the web

81

of inclusion" as a leadership practice that differed from successful practices identified by male leaders. The highly successful women leaders she studied did not refer to their place in the organization as "at the top"; instead they described themselves as leading from the center of their organizations. They were "not reaching down, but reaching out [...]. Inseparable from their sense of themselves as being in the middle was the women's notion of being connected to those around them, bound as if by invisible strands or threads" (Helgesen, 1990, p.46).

Shared Leadership and the Importance of Team

Women who have the privilege and responsibility to serve in the role as university president have had multiple experiences and have held a variety of leadership roles in different areas across higher education. The five women presidents interviewed for this study had the unprecedented experience of leading their campuses during the COVID-19 pandemic. The presidents emphasized the importance of involving their team and being connected to the people of their community and on their campus. The challenges presented by this complex crisis required presidents to practice intentional delegation of leadership that recognized the leadership potential of their teams. Each participant identified her team as the essential component to their campus response to the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Kezar and Holcombe (2017) conceptualized a leadership style that emphasizes empowerment, relationship, and collaboration as shared leadership. They found shared leadership to be characterized by the following five elements: (1) more leadership roles distributed across the group or organization than in traditional hierarchical structures; (2) interchangeable roles of leaders and followers; (3) leadership is not based on position or authority; (4) innovation and problem-solving relies on the value of multiple perspectives and finally; and (5) collaboration and interactions are encouraged. President Atman recognized that

there "are great leaders everywhere at every level on my campus and it is up to me to inspire that to shine," demonstrating how she encourages distributed leadership on her campus. President Terra found working with her cabinet and their teams to be the most rewarding aspect of leading through the crisis. She noted that "every vice president and all the AVPs working with them have really stepped up." This was a sentiment often repeated by the women presidents interviewed. They valued the leadership demonstrated by the members of their cabinets and from individuals across their campuses. Issues were considered and decisions were made based on the collaboration of their teams which represented a variety of perspective and areas of expertise.

President Agni said she sought ample feedback to inform her decision-making processes for, as she observed, "She who makes a decision alone, will often make the wrong one." Hertneky (2012) found women university presidents retain focus on their position of ultimate decision making while choosing to lead from within their organization instead of seeking to be positioned at the top. Presidents Agni and Zephyr shared their strategy to seek feedback from their teams and constituencies before making major decisions. In their experience, the time spent gathering information and listening to differing perspectives and opinions provided the best foundation for moving forward. President Zephyr shared that decision-making requires a process and a leader can choose to invest in the process before the decision or wait until after the decision when the process often becomes "damage control." She contends that when making a decision it is important for a leader to articulate the "factors that went into [the decision]…and if people feel heard then they can support the decision."

President Ondine championed connective leadership introduced by Lipman-Blumen (1992) as being "emergent and dynamic" in the way it identifies the connections between leadership styles that are relational, directive, social, or collective. She explained, "connective

leadership understands the interdependency of leadership style itself and the interdependencies of the human systems in which we work."

Shared leadership relies upon the interdependencies between leadership style and human systems President Ondine articulated. Helgesen's (1995) and Wheatley's (2006) definition of relational or shared leadership recognizes these interdependencies and positions the leader at the center of an intricate web. President Atman extended the concept of an interwoven and connected system when she compared her cabinet to an ecosystem that must be diverse in order to be strong:

> If you want an ecosystem to thrive, it has to be diverse. If an ecosystem is homogenous, you're just making it fragile, and it's vulnerable and not likely to continue to exist if it stays that way. It is pretty easy to see that our future has to include diverse leaders.

> Azorín et al. (2020) noted that shared leadership, which considers a diversity of perspectives, became the default leadership response during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders found they had to connect, share, learn, and network in order to successfully navigate the issues presented by the crisis (Azorín et al., 2020).

In their research of academic leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic, Harris and Jones (2020) noted that the pandemic caused an unprecedented speed of change. They concluded that crisis and change management skills are essential for leaders at all levels. In order to implement these skills on campuses, leaders require a high degree of trust, support and collaboration from their teams. Harris and Jones (2020) see trust as the "collective glue" needed to address the variety of unexpected issues that arise during crises.

Foundational Crisis Leadership Practice: Trust

The first of three foundational crisis leadership practices that emerged from the data analysis was the role of building and demonstrating trust. All five presidents offered multiple examples of the importance of trust for their leadership during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The creation of trust established authenticity and demonstrated credibility, which was important in building relationships and creating meaningful collaboration with community partners during the crisis. Building and demonstrating trust was also identified as a critical component needed to move forward and lead their campuses through the changes introduced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Without mutual trust, transformative change is not possible. When leaders demonstrate and inspire trust through empathy, they are perceived as trustworthy and better able to employ transformational leadership practices (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Tschannen-Moran, 2007; Van Bommel, 2021). Post et al. (2019) found that women leaders were perceived as more trustworthy in times of crisis when they employed IEM skills, including the demonstration of empathy, practicing active listening, and demonstrating emotional intelligence. Boin et al. (2016) recommended leaders show empathy and instill hope as they activate IEM skills during a crisis specifically to explain the circumstances of the crisis clearly, offer guidance, demonstrate competence, provide a plan to affirm leadership, and control the situation.

Each of the presidents trusted their personal leadership skills as they navigated the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Trust in their campus teams and building on the trust established with community partners was identified as a foundational leadership practice. Presidents Ondine and Atman described trust as a personal and professional value. President Ondine asserted that trust is a byproduct of leading by example and personal values. Tschannen-Moran (2007) found that trustworthy leaders "lift up the vision, model the behavior, provide the

coaching, manage the environment, and mediate the breakdowns of trust" (p. 52). The presidents

relied upon the credibility they earned both before the start of the crisis caused by the COVID-19

pandemic and throughout their leadership during the crisis. The relationships they fostered and

the trust they built with their faculty senates, staff unions, and associated student groups before

the pandemic, enabled the presidents to swiftly identify and gather with campus groups to

navigate the crisis together in established and trusted relationship. Academic leaders need to act

with intention and transparency so the campus community has a clear understanding and can

trust the direction the president is articulating (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020).

Gigliotti (2019) asserted that "[l]eadership involves the ability to situate and make sense

of phenomena in a way that is co-constructed with the individuals who are led" (p. 92). During

the interviews, the presidents shared examples of groups from campus working together during

the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. President Atman shared the importance of

defining principles and values for a group in order to build trust. President Agni offered an

example of how employing shared principles enabled her campus leaders to work together, build

trust, and achieve solidarity around a message supporting vaccinations on her campus.

The presidents shared the opinion that trust must be earned and maintained over time and

through shared experiences not only on their campuses but with community leaders and

members of their local health care communities since the crisis extended well beyond campus

boundaries. Walsh (2005) defined trustworthy leaders as being open to multiple perspectives and

diverse viewpoints. She contended that trustworthy leaders intentionally choose partners with a

variety of experiences and perspectives who are able to share core values. Common goals can

rapidly become clear during difficult events. The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic

necessitated university presidents work closely with community leaders. Presidents Terra and

Atman described the deep value of positive partnerships within the community. President Zephyr identified the importance of conversation and demonstrating a willingness to listen in order to build relationships. Like President Atman, she found value in taking action in order to build trust with community partners.

In order to effectively lead their campuses through the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the presidents relied upon their leadership skills and prior community relationships. When personal perspectives and experiences can be varied to the point of conflict, leaders must demonstrate the ability to listen to many voices in order to establish credibility and create reciprocal trust (Gigliotti, 2016; Sutherland, 2017). Wolverton et al. (2009) interviewed women university presidents who described reciprocal trust as the cornerstone of their presidencies. The foundation for this trust is built through the intertwining of integrity, commitment, credibility and competence (Hertneky, 2012; Reis, 2015; Wolverton et al., 2009). President Ondine indicated that she set high expectations for communication and collaboration among leaders in her community, even when opinions were diverse. President Zephyr acknowledged that the variety of opinions in the community and the level of fear and upset due to the crisis required she demonstrate trustworthiness so that "[t]he community and other leaders in [her] area can see that [she] is a person of [her] word. [She is] doing things". President Atman described building the foundation for trust on her leadership team through the establishment of shared principles and values "[b]ecause we're going to have some tough decisions ahead of us. We have to trust each other."

Sutherland's (2017) research of academic leadership response to campus crisis focused on trust and the dynamics of leadership. The findings centered on the influence of crisis leadership and the importance of trust in the context of leading within a community.

Communication and collaboration within community played a significant role in the campus

learning and growing after experiencing crisis (Sutherland, 2017). The presidents interviewed in

this study built trust through their focus on relationships and dedication to authentic

communication on their campuses and within their communities.

Foundational Crisis Leadership Practice: Communication

Communication was the second foundational leadership practice employed during the

crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants demonstrated a commitment to

communication as they led their campuses through the crisis, and their responses mirrored the

findings from Ruben and Gigliotti's (2016) research that "communication is considerably more

than a leadership tool or strategy. Rather, it is an orientation, a world view, a way of

understanding leadership that focuses more broadly on the process of social influence itself" (p.

1). The presidents made connections by focusing on accessibility and establishing clear

communication. They described the importance of listening and giving voice to others as a key

factor in fostering communication. These practices established before the crisis caused by the

COVID-19 pandemic enabled communication plans to be enacted more quickly on their

campuses during the crisis. Finally, presidents identified the importance of outreach and

messaging as they led their campuses through the crisis.

The president of a university must lead a complex organization with many areas of focus

and a variety of priorities (Bensimon, 1989; Birnbaum, 1992; Bornstein, 2003). One of the

leadership tenets described by the women presidents in this study was their commitment to being

accessible to students, staff, and faculty. During the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic,

academic leaders needed to communicate clearly and frequently utilizing a variety of methods in

order to be accessible to their campus community (Cooper et al., 2020; Dumulescu & Muţiu,

2021; Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). President Terra shared that accessibility was an area where some of the presidents within the state system differed in opinion. Some presidents kept "a distance from the majority of campus activities and the day-to-day conversations…. they see their role as leader from the top and will show up at main events." President Terra sought to create an environment that promoted success and where people knew she was available. President Atman and President Ondine promoted accessibility and open communication by holding regular meetings of all campus MPPs and department chairs. President Atman extended accessibility by attending faculty senate and associated student union meetings. President Zephyr observed when people know "the president genuinely values hearing from multiple perspectives, that she is genuinely accessible to open conversations, then communication can flourish."

The presidents described being accessible and making connections as part of their leadership style and a priority for their practice. Boin et al. (2021) found that leaders who practice clear crisis communications make an effort to be present, transparent, and demonstrate caring by listening. Lemoine et al. (2016) suggested women's communication skills are key to their rise to leadership roles, and Belenky et al. (1997) observed that women employ listening and speaking to acquire knowledge. President Zephyr pointed out that "while it is important to show up, the president also needs to listen. Really listen to all the voices in the room." President Agni counted listening as the foundation of her leadership strengths. President Terra also relied upon her listening skills to create the best environment for her team to be most effective. President Ondine shared the importance of supporting people to work together. She identified her ability to bring people together so that they are able to learn to listen to one another as her most significant leadership strength.

When their campuses were impacted by the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the presidents were able to call upon their established practices to engage with their campus communities quickly. It became important to utilize their connections and adapt the manner in which they provided accessibility when the crisis forced people to work and communicate from their homes. Listening to one another and ensuring all voices were being considered became paramount (Cooper et al., 2020; Dumulescu & Muţiu, 2021; Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). When campus leaders exhibit authentic and effective communication, they are able to introduce new interpretations of existing campus values, inspiring pride in and fresh vision for an institution (Benoit, 1997; Bornstein, 2004; Kelsay, 2007).

In March of 2020, the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic initiated the rapid closure of university campuses across the nation, including within the CSU system. Along with the rest of the world, institutions of higher education were forced to adapt to unforeseen circumstances with little notice. Mitroff et al. (2006) assessed whether higher education campuses in the United States were prepared for possible crises and if designated crisis-management programs were in place. Provosts reported their campuses were moderately prepared for an outbreak (Mitroff et al., 2006). However, colleges and universities had not experienced an outbreak the size and scope of the COVID-19 pandemic (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Holcombe et al., 2021). In this study, President Agni was the most prepared to respond to the pandemic as she had served on a campus pandemic planning group in a former administrative role. As a member of that committee, she had the opportunity to contemplate important issues, such as communication with students, staff, and faculty and messaging to the community as well as strategies to best serve residential students. As she pointed out, "when the committee met we

90

did talk regularly about these issues. But of course, nowhere in the pandemic planning did we ever imagine or suggest it might be more than like two or three weeks."

All CSU campuses had an EOC that could be engaged in an emergency. University police, campus staff, and leaders in the EOCs trained together to anticipate appropriate and swift responses in the case of an emergency on campus. When the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic affected their campuses, each of the presidents activated the EOC at their institution. Within days, all of the presidents either changed the membership of their EOC or created a separate committee or team to work alongside the EOC that focused solely on pandemic response. Leaders must be able to assess the multiple threats presented during a crisis and make appropriate adjustments and accommodations depending on the scope of the crisis (Al-Dabbagh, 2020; Gigliotti, 2019; Kovoor-Misra et al., 2000; Muffet-Willett & Kruse, 2009; Varma, 2011; Zdziarski et al., 2007). The presidents demonstrated crisis leadership acumen as they quickly assessed the limitations of the EOC structure and swiftly negotiated and implemented solutions in the form of new team configurations. These enhanced response teams were designed to gather voices from across the entire campus. They included academic and administrative leaders, senate chairs and other faculty, the CIOs and other members of the technology team, associated student union officers, facilities and maintenance leaders, marketing and communication staff, and other campus members who may have a unique perspective or impact for the campus. Campus EOCs and the subsequent new response committees worked diligently to make plans and design campus responses at the onset of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. President Agni shared that planning was both essential and at times, frustrating but positive outcomes were achieved at an astoundingly fast rate.

According to the literature, the speed at which campus teams are mobilized and ready to address campus needs is key (Coombs, 2014; Ulmer et al., 2017). As decisions are made, it is important to communicate with the full campus community (McNaughtan, 2019). Coyne et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of clear communication, guidance, and direction in a crisis. The presidents reported exercising these principles as they rapidly responded to the orders from the state and the CSU system to close their campuses. Communication and coordination during unpreceded times is paramount (Boin et al., 2021; Cooper et al., 2020; Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). The presidents created video messages for their campuses and transferred all meetings and instruction online. These practices demonstrated the presidents' commitment to accessibility while establishing communication during the crisis. President Agni first relied upon email communications and Zoom meetings to share critical information with her campus community. After a month, she began to create video messages for the campus because she learned that she "had to find other ways of holding hands and wrapping my arms around the community." President Zephyr asked faculty with expertise in subjects germane to the crisis to create short videos. Professors shared information about a variety of topics, such as talking with children about crisis, exercise, mental health, and even pet care. This strategy to include and involve faculty in the campus outreach coincided with advice from Koehn (2020) who encouraged leaders to emphasize experimentation and learning and provide specific roles or purposes for members of their teams.

Communication with multiple constituencies in a variety of forms proved necessary and effective for the presidents, which aligns with the current literature on crisis management (Bataille & Cordova, 2014; Coombs, 2014). They needed to engage their teams, reach out to faculty and staff, and maintain connections with their students all the while fostering continued

engagement with the community surrounding their campuses. Fernandez and Shaw (2020) contended that faculty, staff, and students are inspired during a crisis by academic leaders who are able to communicate a compelling and thoughtful shared vision for the institution that is realistic and attainable. In this study, the participants identified outreach and messaging as crucial to effective crisis leadership. They redesigned campus response structures, relied upon existing relationships and communication pathways, and took the time to listen throughout the crisis.

Foundational Crisis Leadership Practice: Care

Care for the students on their campuses was the presidents' primary concern during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. They created more opportunities for students to communicate with campus administration and access student services. The presidents interviewed for this study reported that leading through the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a clearer understanding of how their identity as a mother affected their leadership practices. They indicated motherhood was a strength they incorporated into their leadership of their campuses. Finally, the presidents shared the importance of self-care and the role of family and work-life considerations for women leaders.

Students are at the heart of a university campus. The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated campuses be closed, but the presidents were still responsible to move their campuses forward to create the best learning environments and prepare for the students' return (Blankenberger & Williams, 2020). University presidents are responsible for the leadership of their campus on many levels. They must be responsive at the system level, oversee the operations of each of the campus divisions lead by their vice-presidents, serve alumni and court donors, and be involved in the communities surrounding their institution (Birnbaum, 1992;

Bornstein, 2004, 2013; Eckel & Kezar, 2011; Gavazzi, 2018). Despite these varied roles and responsibilities, all five of the presidents placed students at the center of their leadership practice during the pandemic. Walsh (2005) called upon academic leaders to extend care for students by creating campus communities that function as "sustaining circles of mutual support" (p. 9). Presidents Atman and Agni reported that the students on their campuses demonstrated leadership and provided structure and support for one another. During the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the students were the primary consideration for all of the presidents, which aligns with the current literature on campus leaders response to the crisis (Blankenberger & Williams, 2020; Cooper et al., 2020; Kelsay, 2007). President Ondine summarized the centering of the students' experience on her campus when she said, "even during the most difficult times, my job is to help students reach their potential."

Van Bommel (2021) found that empathy promotes innovation, engagement, and inclusion in times of crisis and Koehn (2020) called for leaders to demonstrate "tender loving care" (TLC) by acknowledging people's fears during a crisis. President Agni expressed frustration with the physical separation caused by the pandemic and the inability to interact with others in person. She said, "People just need to know you care. Especially students. I've never had a period in my leadership, where people needed more TLC and patience in a forum that doesn't enable you to give them TLC."

The woman presidents interviewed for this study referenced the experience of being a mother as an essential component contributing to their ability to successfully lead their campus through the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Cheung and Halpern (2010) indicated that success modeled by women at the top of their profession included successful integration of work and family life. They found that these women demonstrated a shift from the focus on only the

challenges faced in navigating the two domains separately to an integrated model of work and family interfaces (Cheung & Halpern, 2010). This finding that successful women leaders integrate work and family roles was mirrored in this study. However, beyond integration of disparate roles, this research found that the presidents credited their experience as mothers with providing valuable skills for leading during the crisis. For instance, President Zephyr found a connection between her centering of the students on her campus and her role as a mother. Presidents Terra and Agni each found their experiences as a mother assisted with communication and setting a calming tone for their campuses during the crisis. President Atman reported that women leaders are "coached not to say" that motherhood is an asset to executive leadership roles; however, she believes

> As a woman leader, my greatest strength is my role as a mother… I love being a mother.
> I have grown children, and I bring that to my leadership every minute, every single day,
> and particularly during a crisis.

Much research on women leaders in higher education has identified the challenges women face as they attempt to navigate family responsibilities with the pursuits of academic careers (Airini et al., 2010; Chesterman et al., 2005; Curry, 2000; Hannum et al., 2015; Jefferson, 2017; Lepkowski, 2009; Madsen, 2008; Perrakis & Martinez, 2012; Searby et al., 2015; Sullivan & Mainiero, 2007; Wolverton et al., 2009). Hannum et al. (2015) called for advocates of women's leadership to clearly articulate the benefits and rewards of serving in leadership positions in higher education. In contrast to the perception of motherhood as presenting professional challenges or barriers, the presidents interviewed for this study identified the skills learned by being a mother as beneficial as they navigated the challenges of leading their campus through the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This research would suggest the benefits

of motherhood be included when encouraging women to seek leadership roles in higher education.

Self-care and the support of family members were identified as essential to effective leadership practice. The presidents partners' and family members' ability to offer emotional support was identified as most beneficial toward the goal of achieving balance during crisis, which aligned with findings in the literature (Jefferson, 2017; Koehn, 2020; Perrakis & Martinez, 2012). The presidents shared the importance of caring for personal health and striving to attain balance. President Ondine perceived seeking balance as critical; "It is up to each individual to define your own sense of life balance, but if you don't stop and assess, you will never realize your ideal."

When leaders experience exhaustion and work overload they are less able to lead effectively and more prone to mistakes and miscommunications (Salas-Vallina et al., 2022). Thoughtful attention to caring for their own health and well-being allowed the presidents to lead their campuses successfully through the unprecedented experience of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which concurs with Koehn's (2020) assertion that leaders must prioritize their physical, emotional and spiritual health when navigating a crisis.

Leadership Lessons Learned through Crisis

As explored in previous sections of this chapter, the presidents identified trust, communication, and care as the foundational leadership practices they relied upon as they led their campuses through the crisis. During the interviews, the presidents were asked directly, "What have you learned about yourself as a leader during the past year as you have navigated the challenges presented by the crisis created by the COVID-10 pandemic?" The presidents' responses reflect the crisis leadership practices of trust, communication, and care.

The presidents each expressed deep self-trust. They have held multiple leadership roles and amassed experiences that inform the crisis leadership practices they employed during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Gupton & Slick, 1996). President Ondine feels confident in her ability to lead her campus during a crisis. She is energized by the challenges presented, in fact she "thrives under extreme stress and pressure". The presidents extend beyond self-trust as they impart trust to their teams and leaders across their campuses and within their communities.

The presidents all recognized the importance of their leadership team to the campus response to the challenges presented by the pandemic. Communication was identified as the most influential factor in team building during the crisis which comports with other literature on crisis leadership (Heide & Simonsson, 2020; McNaughtan, 2019; Varma, 2011). President Atman is dedicated to building relationships and serving as an affirming and involved leader. She seeks to establish an environment to encourage her team to work in unison. She prioritizes "working together and moving forward through this crisis." President Terra values communication and centers listening as a leadership practice. During the crisis, she remained calm and intentionally sought advice and heard from multiple perspectives. President Agni initially found virtual communication challenging. The students are her priority and she is most proud that during the crisis she was able to pivot and acquire successful techniques to continue connection and build relationships on line.

The ability to express support and care was paramount to the crisis leadership practices of all the presidents who participated in this study. President Agni seeks to maintain her level of support and caring of the students and President Atman strives to be "ever present and ever positive" to encourage and support the leadership potential in others. President Zephyr leans in to

the skills she has incorporated throughout her career as she supports her campus by "being authentic, having humility, being data driven, being accessible and communicating."

Limitations

All of the women presidents interviewed for this study led campuses within the same state university system. Since this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was not possible to meet with the presidents in-person or visit their campuses. Although many professional and personal communications moved to a virtual platform during the pandemic, it is assumed additional observational data would have been available in a face-to-face setting. All data were gathered from interviews of women leaders serving exclusively in the role of university president. Additional information and perspectives from women executive leaders on the same campuses may have offered different data regarding the individual campus responses and observations of crisis leadership practices.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Before 2020, colleges and universities had not encountered a collective crisis the scope and size of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It might have been impossible to imagine a crisis that would strike all colleges and universities in a nation simultaneously. The results of this study record and define practices for evaluation and future preparation for possible national and global crises that affect multiple campuses and communities. It is important to understand the effective actions of and decisions made by university presidents during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic to plan for crisis leadership response of universities in the future (Cooper et al., 2020; Dumulescu & Muţiu, 2021; Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). Since this study focused on the leadership practices of women leaders in executive roles in higher education, the results may inform leadership development opportunities for women and provide

scholarship toward further understanding of women's leadership practices, particularly during crises.

The swift institutional response to the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic at the universities led by the participants in this study was expedited by the intentional and authentic systems of shared leadership employed on their campuses and within their communities. Executive leadership development as well as crisis leadership development program curriculum could benefit from the incorporation of a shared leadership model, which include increased innovation, communication, and collaboration that foster trust across campus (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Holcombe et al., 2021; Salas-Vallina et al., 2022). Reflecting on these presidents' experiences and expertise could provide a deeper understanding of how women executives successfully lead, which can inform the creation of best methods to support, retain, and foster women leaders in higher education.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should be conducted on the multitude of impacts on higher education attributed to the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Research can focus on crisis-induced changes in higher education, such as the changes made to academic instruction, campus policies and procedures, student success initiatives, workforce considerations, fundraising priorities, leadership structures, and philosophies as campuses during and after the pandemic. Mitroff et al. (2006) assessed whether higher education campuses in the United States had prepared themselves for possible crises and if designated crisis-management programs were in place. It would be interesting to return to the data and further assess the current crisis responses of campuses that reported experience with an outbreak in the past.

Future research on the implications of leadership practices that responded to the magnitude and duration of the pandemic is necessary as higher education prepares for future disruptions. This study focused on women presidents' crisis leadership practices and lessons learned from leading during the pandemic. Each president identified trust, communication, and care as the three primary crisis leadership practices they most relied upon during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional research is needed to assess if there are long-term implications of these foundational crisis leadership practices and the prevalence and importance of these practices beyond crises. An analysis of the similarities and differences between crisis leadership practices of women and men presidents would add more depth and nuance to the literature on crisis leadership in higher education.

Finally, the women presidents in this study identified care as a foundational leadership practice and motherhood as a strength that guided their leadership during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. There is limited prior research to support this finding. Further study that assesses if women executive leaders identify motherhood as valuable to their leadership role would contribute to the understanding of the depth and complexities of women's leadership in higher education.

Conclusion

This study of women presidents in the California State University system was guided by two research questions: (1) What crisis leadership practices did women senior leaders in higher education rely upon during the onset of the crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic? And (2) What did they learn about themselves as leaders as they navigated the challenges presented by the crisis? The findings of this study centered around the leadership experiences of five women presidents as they navigated the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The presidents

acknowledged the importance of their campus leadership teams and recognized the leadership contributions of their campus colleagues. The three crisis leadership practices the presidents identified as essential to their navigation of the crisis were trust, communication, and care.

It is not possible to know with certainty when the next national or global crisis may descend upon campuses, but leaders in higher education can prepare for future disruptions by developing crisis leadership practices in advance. The woman presidents who successfully navigated the global crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and led their campuses with trust, communication and care exemplify shared leadership and serve as an example for leaders looking toward the future.

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Appendix A: Initial Email Inquiry to Presidents

Dear President XXXX,

I am writing to you today to request an hour of your time for an interview and conversation about women's leadership. I am a doctoral student at UC Davis and I serve as the Director of Extended Education at Humboldt State University. My study, *Crisis Leadership Practices of Women Executive Leaders in Higher Education,* explores the leadership practices employed during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic by women executive leaders who serve as university president in the California State University system.

This study is guided by the research questions: 1)What have women executive leaders in higher education learned about themselves as leaders as they navigated the challenges presented by the crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic? and 2)What crisis leadership practices did they rely upon during the onset of the crisis?

I would be honored to include your insights about your experience leading XXXX through the onset of the pandemic.

If you are interested in participating in my study, I have created **this form** to facilitate communication and designate the best contact with whom to schedule a meeting on your calendar. The form also provides access to the UC Davis Consent to Participate in Research. I appreciate your consideration and hope you are looking forward to a wonderful and restful Thanksgiving week.

All my best,

Sheila Rocker Heppe

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Pronouns: She, Her, Hers (Why include this? Click here to learn more.)
I acknowledge that I live and work on the ancestral lands of the Wiyot people who have been the caretakers of this land in the past, present and into the future.

Appendix B: Consent to Participate in Research and Contact Form

Crisis Leadership Practices of Women Executive Leaders in Higher Education

Hello and thank you for your interest in participating in this study. My name is Sheila Rocker Heppe. I am a doctoral student at UC Davis and the Director of Extended Education at Humboldt State University.

In the next section you will find the Consent to Participate in Research and a brief contact form. I will reach out to the person you designate and schedule a 50 minute interview at a time that fits best in your schedule.

Please do not hesitate to contact me directly at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or srh@humboldt.edu. Again, thank you and I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Title of study: Crisis Leadership Practices of Women Executive Leaders in Higher Education
Investigator: Sheila E. Rocker Heppe

Introduction and Purpose
You are being invited to join a research study. The purpose of this study is to explore the leadership practices employed during the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic by women executive leaders who serve in the position of president or provost & vice president of academic affairs in the California State University system.

If you agree to participate in this research, you will be asked to participate in an interview. You will be asked questions about your experiences leading your campus through the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. It will take about 50 minutes to complete the interview.

The interview will be conducted via Zoom. The interview will be audio/video recorded and transcribed, but your name will not be included on the transcription.

There is no direct benefit to you from taking part in this study. We hope that the research will contribute to the knowledge of women's crisis leadership practices in higher education.

The risks of this research are minimal. Some of the questions might make you feel uncomfortable. You do not have to answer any of the questions you do not want to answer.

Confidentiality
As with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality could be compromised; however, we are taking precautions to minimize this risk. Your responses to the interview questions may include information that identifies you. This identifiable information will be handled as confidentially as possible. However, individuals from UC Davis who oversee research may access your data during audits or other monitoring activities.

To minimize the risks of breach of confidentiality, participants will be given pseudonyms that will be used in all aspects of the study and the names of their campuses will not be identified. All transcriptions, memos, notes and final written study will incorporate pseudonyms. All data in the form of written notes, transcriptions, audio and Zoom recordings, field notes and analytic memos will be securely collected, encrypted, and stored in password protected files as these data are considered identifiable information All data collected by handwritten notes will be digitized and the original paper will be destroyed. All scanned documents will be stored in secure password protected files. After the project is completed, all data in electronic form (digital audio recordings, transcripts, databases) will be deleted from computers.

Compensation
You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

Rights
Participation in research is completely voluntary. You are free to decline to take part in the project. You can decline to answer any questions and you can stop taking part in the project at any time. Whether or not you choose to participate, or answer any question, or stop participating in the project, there will be no penalty to you or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Questions
If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact the investigator at ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇ or srh@humboldt.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact the University of California Davis, Institutional Review Board at 916 703 9158 or HS-IRBEducation@ucdavis.edu.

If you agree to take part in the research and allow the interview to be recorded, please give verbal consent at the beginning of the interview.

Your Name *

Your answer

Your Position *

○ Campus President

○ Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs

Best person to contact to schedule a 50 minute zoom meeting on your calendar *

Your answer

Best person to contact to schedule a 50 minute zoom meeting on your calendar *

Your answer

Contact email address(es) *

Your answer

Comments or Questions

Your answer

Back   Submit   Clear form

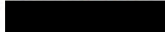Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

Crisis Leadership Practices of Women Executive Leaders in Higher Education

Thank you very much. I look forward to speaking with you soon.
Sincerely,
Sheila Rocker Heppe
████████ * srh@humboldt.edu

Edit your response

Submit another response

Appendix C: Interview Confirmation Letter

Dear President XXXX,

I am looking forward to our conversation on Friday, December 10th at 9:00am.

Thank you very much for sharing your time to participate in my research study focused on the experiences and practices of women leaders during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I have served in my role as the Director of Extended Education at Humboldt State for the past 11 years. Before moving to the self-support side of the campus, I taught in HSU's School of Education and coordinated student teacher placements in schools for 14 years. Learning as a scholar practitioner at UC Davis has been a pure joy for me and I am excited to be at this step in my doctoral journey. Thank you for your help conducting my research.

The interview will take about 50 minutes and, with your permission, I will record the zoom session and also collect a separate audio recording as back up to the zoom recording. All of your information will be kept confidential and the name of your campus will not be identified.

I have prepared questions in the following six areas:

1) Leadership Style
2) Initial leadership response to crisis
3) Communication during the campus crisis
4) Challenges presented by leading during crisis
5) Lessons gained through crisis
6) Reflections on leadership as woman in the CSU system

You will find the Consent to Participate in Research linked here. I will ask for your verbal consent to participate in the research and allow the interview to be recorded at the beginning of our conversation.

Again, I want to express my deep appreciation for your time and your willingness to share your insights and experiences.

All my best,

Sheila Rocker Heppe

srh@humboldt.edu

Appendix D: Interview Questions

1.   Share personal/professional information collected prior to interview to check for accuracy
        a.   Background (Gain information through prior research – Linked In, Campus and CSU websites)
                i. Institution
               ii. Current Position – years in that position
              iii. Education – Degrees and Institution

2.   Thank you for making the time to talk with me about your experience of leading your campus through the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. For this study I am interviewing women presidents who serve in the CSU system. I very much appreciate your time and willingness to talk with me about your experiences.

3.   How would you describe your leadership style?
        a.   What would you identify as your greatest strengths as a leader in higher education?
        b.   How are your personal values reflected in your leadership practice on your campus?
4.   Let's go back to March 2020. Will you describe how the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic first presented on your campus? What were your first actions as a leader?

5.   Tell me about your communication with the members of your team, the faculty, staff and students and the community at large. How did your communication strategies vary depending on the stakeholder group?

6.   If you had to choose a story or experience that best characterizes the challenges presented by the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, what would it be?
        a.   Can you tell me more about…..
        b.   Can you give me an example of….

7.   What has been the most rewarding aspects of leading your campus during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?
        a.   Can you tell me more about…..
        b.   Can you give me an example of….

8.   Looking back to this time last year (summer), what do you know now that you wish you had known then? Are there ways you would have lead differently or things you would have not done?

9.   As you reflect on the experience of leading your campus through the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which of the past professional positions or roles you have held best prepared you for the challenges that you and your campus faced?

10.   What have you learned about yourself as a leader during the past year as you have navigated the challenges presented by the crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic?

11.   Can you tell me about an event or experience during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic that was impacted or defined by your leadership as a woman?

12.   As a woman president in the California State University System, you are part of one of first higher education institutions in the United States to achieve parity between women and men campus leadership.
>   a.   In your opinion, how has the CSU been able to achieve the current level of parity between male and female leadership?
>   b.   What are the critical elements necessary to retain women executive leaders in the CSU?
>   c.   What advice would you give to leaders and trustees of other university systems to influence gender parity in campus leadership structures?