Full Length Research Paper

Budgetary decision-making practices and styles of college presidents: the case of historically black Colleges and Universities

[1]Brandon K. Dumas, [2]Chanika Jones, [3]Victior Mbarika, [4]Geoffrey M. Kituyi

[1]Southern University, [2]Southern University, [3]Southern University, [4]Southern University

*Corresponding authors e-mail: kimayoka@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Historically Black Colleges and Universities are seeking to reposition themselves in the current environment of higher education. This requires the ability to select leaders who have a firm understanding of planning, budgeting and knowing how to manage and promote their institutions. However, little data exists on the role played by college presidents in budgetary process and how their decision-making and leadership styles influence budgeting. This paper presents initial insights into the role played by of college presidents in budgeting. Study participants consisted of sitting and former presidents of Historically Black Colleges and Universities from four-year public and private colleges and universities in the United States of America, who had at least two years of experience as president. A total of 17 presidents participated in the interviews. Data were analyzed and presented qualitatively. Findings reveal that the main role of college presidents was approval of final budgets. They did not directly participate in process of budgeting and were at large receivers of budgetary information rather than givers. Most of the budgetary work was done by individual departments, sections, directorates, schools and faculties who generated their own budgets and passed them to higher authorities for approval. The study posts that for effective budgeting, college presidents should play a bigger role in terms of indentifying strategic avenues of new revenues for their colleges and at the same time try to find new cost effective ways of doing business for example through adoption of technology.

Keywords: Budgetary Decision-Making, Decision-Making practices, Decision-Making styles, College Presidents, Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

INTRODUCTION

From a broad perspective, higher education has faced a multitude of challenges that include calls for greater accountability, greater access, more relevant research, enhanced global competitiveness, and responsiveness to pressing societal concerns (Penley, 2009). Penley further suggests that in some instances college and university educators and administrators have perceived these demands, as previously noted, to be threats and have reacted defensively to the notion of outside involvement

and supervision. Accordingly, several institutions have experienced decreases in enrollment while others have been forced to reconsider tenure and other forms of long-term faculty independence and job security (Appadurai, 2009). Consequently, for most college and university leaders the current economic crisis represents one of the most difficult times in higher education that many of them have ever experienced (Melville-Ross, 2010). Making matters worse, higher education has always been "short

of money" making declining resources one of the major areas where some of the greatest changes will occur in the future operations of these institutions (Cohen, 1998; Hirsch and Weber, 1999). In effect, it is becoming profoundly more evident that higher education will have to face many unprecedented demands from both the public and private sectors and will have to operate from decision-making paradigms that are decisively more effective.

Minor (2004) suggests that the mission of HBCUs places them in a distinctly different context that may potentially affect the decision-making practices among HBCU presidents, since the structural, cultural, or situational distinction of these institutions must be taken into account. Guy-Sheftall (2006) theorized that the "presidential-centric" and "hierarchical structures" at HBCUs may be due to the national climate that has often been hostile to the mission and values of HBCUs. Nevertheless, Nichols (2004) states that while HBCUs are unique in their educational mission they are subject to the same pressures facing all of higher education.

Current challenges facing higher education as a whole have simultaneously raised more operational concerns about the effectiveness of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) presidential leadership in responding to the many social, economic and political environments which may threaten the survival of these valued institutions. As HBCUs seek to reposition themselves in the current environment of higher education, the ability to select leaders who have a firm understanding of planning, budgeting and knowing how to manage and promote their institutions is critical to addressing challenges (Nichols, 2004). Moreover, institutions that can effectively make decisions in response to their environments stand a much better chance of surviving and thriving than those that do not face a threat of extinction (McCoy, 2007). Thus, the findings from this study attempt to add to the literature as it relates the budgetary decision-making practices and styles of HBCU presidents by investigating their leadership styles and decision-making practices in response to critical issues at their respective institutions. Results garnered from this study may also be used in future HBCU presidential selection processes to identify candidates possessing more effective leadership skills.

Minor (2008) has stated that within the higher education arena, the perception of HBCU leadership is often portrayed as cynical. This negative perception has been typically fueled by numerous articles that report violations of faculty rights, financial fragility, or contention between the faculty and the president. Minor (2004) proposes that researchers' lack of the contextual understanding of HBCUs will continually provide a view which suggests troubling and underperforming schools.

Therefore, the results of this study may provide a more explicit understanding of budget decision-making practices of HBCU presidents which will not only enable them to efficiently articulate the many challenges they face, but more importantly, devise more effective leadership responses both now and in the future.

Finally, these findings may also contribute to areas of study in postmodernism. Kezar, Carducci, and Contrera-McGavin (2006) explain that research has often focused on best practices and leaders' effectiveness. "We may learn more if we study the ambiguities and problems encountered in the leadership process, study failed attempts at change and examine why leadership does not emerge around various initiatives. Many untold stories on many different campuses might, with careful analysis, shed more light on leadership than continued studies of best practices," (p.171). Hence, this study will also provide comparisons and contrasts of leadership styles employed by HBCU presidents as they have responded to some of the most pressing challenges confronting the continued operation of their respective institutions.

We also provide a comprehensive review of the literature related to leadership styles, decision-making practices of Historically Black Colleges and Universities' presidents. Further, we present the research methodology for this study, which include: the rationale for research design, site selection, participant selection and data analysis procedures. A summary of the rationale for utilizing a qualitative research approach, rationale for a phenomenological study, role of the research, selection of participants, rationale for interviews, data analysis, and trustworthiness. And finally, we present a summary of the analyses, discussions of the research questions, and recommendations for further research.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities

This area of the literature review focuses on HBCUs presidents and their decision-making practices. However, a thorough review of the literature indicated scholarship deficiencies in regards to HBCU presidents' leadership and decision-making practices. A majority of the information centers on general African-American leadership at HBCUs, the journey to becoming an HBCU president, and race issues for African-American presidents at Historically White Colleges and Universities. Much of the information available is dated, and may not be generalizable to today's HBCU leaders. An important point to note is that, despite their unique educational mission, HBCUs are subject to the same pressures facing all other higher education institutions and their

leaders will have to adjust their decision-making practices to reflect new political, social and economic environments while successfully tackling other mammoth challenges.

Institutional Growth and Development

Inadequate funding for HBCUs from both the public and private sectors has continued to be one of the more pervasive challenges. The literature reveals that during a period between 1957 and 1967, higher education received an unprecedented amount of state funding (Cohen, 1998). Since the late 1970s, however, allocation of state revenue to higher education has continued to plummet (Hirsch and Weber, 1999), and HBCUs have suffered disproportionately in the current financial crisis. As a result, some HBCU leaders have been forced to take drastic steps to keep their institutions vibrant or in some cases afloat (Gasman, 2010).

There are two main reasons why the current economic crisis has hit HBCUs so hard. First, these institutions serve a student population that is disproportionately low income. According to data from the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System reported that in the 2006-07 academic year 90 percent of HBCU students received financial aid. The second reason HBCUs have been hit substantially harder by the economic downturn is that they have historically had smaller endowments. Only three HBCUs – Howard University, Spelman College and Hampton University – have endowments in the top 300 of all U.S. institutions of higher education. In effect, smaller endowments mean fewer dollars available for operating costs and institutional financial aid (Gasman et al., 2010).

Due to the decline in state resources, all public higher education institutions are placing a stronger emphasis on fundraising. However, the recent economic hard times have made fundraising increasingly more difficult for presidents of black colleges. Moreover, asking for private funding is still relatively new for public black colleges and universities (Bowman, 2009).

Foundations, which are the backbone of support for private black colleges, have seen their endowments dwindle in the face of sharp stock market downturns. Therefore, many foundations have reduced or eliminated grants to black colleges altogether (JBHE Foundation, 2002-2003 Winter). As a result, over the past twenty (25) years, a dozen HBCUs have closed (June, 2003, p. 24). In other situations, financial restrictions have forced HBCUs to administer layoffs and cutbacks (Foreman, 2002; June, 2003). HBCU leaders will have to devise strategic, innovative and comprehensive fundraising plans to meet the survival needs of their institutions. It is additionally observed here that due to limited wealth held

by Black alumni and decreases in fundraising, with the exception of a few HBCUs, most are operating under intense financial stress which has created among other things, accreditation issues (Gasman et al., 2007).

Presidential Leadership in HBCUs

Diverse in tone and content, depictions of African American presidents have been crafted by a myriad of supporters and critics over the past 75 years (Gasman et al., 2010). From the beginning, HBCU campuses struggled with the dilemma of non-black leadership. The majority of the teachers were also not of African descent. African American groups were viewed as monolithic and outside the main political arena. Cheek (1991) also pointed out that in the years following World War I several black colleges witnessed uprisings of faculty, students, and alumni protesting their school's failure to promote African American leaders. Consequently, as leadership began to shift from white to African American. Gasman et al. noted that leaders in higher education adamantly voiced their belief that it was unwise to have African American presidents (2010).   According to Embree (1944), noticeable African-American leadership in America began to emerge in the ante-bellum period in 1890 and came to maturity in 1930. Embree concluded that three characteristics marked the African-American president: he did not derive his power from a democratic source; he was a self-styled exemplar; and his position was tenuous and vulnerable.

Gunnar Myrdal, a Swedish sociologist, further argued against black leadership and exclaimed that black college leaders have acquired a "dictatorial and paternalistic" demeanor towards blacks that imitated the leadership style of white southerners (Gasman et al., 2010). In addition, Harvard professors Christopher Jencks and David Riesman (1967) labeled HBCUs as academic disaster areas and depicted black presidents as overwhelmingly negative leaders who tyrannized the faculty (1967). However, to the dismay of some, African-American presidents continued to thrive, and today the majority of the presidents of HBCUs, as well as the faculty, staff, and students, are African American.

Kerr and Gade (1986) found that when making decisions, African-American presidents of HBCUs have had to be much more concerned about issues of quality, academics, and fiscal respectability than presidents of predominately white institutions. It was also more difficult for HBCU presidents to penetrate certain power and social circles.   Furthermore, in addition to regular responsibilities, there were many outside activities that drew on their time simply because of race. Because there were so few African-American presidents during that time

it was incumbent upon them to disproportionately fill a number of local and national roles. Consequently, they had to maintain exceptional performance on all fronts because they were judged more harshly than other presidents.

In further exemplification, Tucker (1980) states that in leading their institutions, African American leaders have had to possess skills to cope with not only daily administrative responsibilities but also the special demands placed upon them by virtue of their blackness. Tucker elaborates that some of the turnover and failure to succeed in positions of leadership emanates from the fact that although these college presidents were placed in the position, they were denied the power to ensure effectiveness. In addition, many of these individuals lacked the prestige and image to be effective because, prior to assuming the role of presidency, they had been functioning as administrators of minority affairs. There are longstanding debates and confusion over the functions of African- American leaders, the goals of African American organizations, and the extent to which African-American people participate as followers. As a result, these leaders, followers, and organizations (while needed and supported by African-American populations) often tend to be viewed as unnecessary or subversive by white populations, and their leadership skills have been significantly overlooked (Kerner, 1968 and Theohavis, 1978).

Few studies have examined in detail the nature of the dynamic relationship between African American leaders and followers. Thompson (1973) explored the impact that personal charisma has in stimulating followership, but only limited work has been devoted to the identification of independent variables related to leaders and their relationships. College presidents come from very diverse backgrounds, and each has varying degrees of experience related to ethnicity. By their own admission, African American college presidents concurred that their upbringing had a significant impact on their leadership style. In comparison, African American women in college presidencies seem to place emphasis on having a heightened sense of the individual and stressing the importance of social justice for all (Williams, 1988).

Thompson's (1973) assessment of African-American leadership development further identified two major factors that stood out from previous scholarly works: the leader's recognition of unmet social needs and the persistence of inequity in the distribution of opportunities. Thompson additionally points out that there are several main factors influencing African American leaders which directly influence their ability to perform their jobs as others. These factors include the continued presence of political inequities, the absence of adequate economic opportunity, and the continued violence against African-

American people and a failure of society to respond to it (Kerner, 1968; Conyers, 1981).

The literature further reveals that McPhail (1989) discussed the results of his research on multiple roles of the contemporary African American college president in a paper presented at the National Conference of the American Association on Higher Education. He stated that, like their white counterparts, presidents of the nation's HBCUs have seen their roles evolve, as they have become promoters competing aggressively for students and philanthropic dollars for their colleges and universities. The literature review illustrates the type of scholarly void that HBCU presidents have had to operate in while simultaneously having the responsibility of finding new and better ways to articulate consistent, meaningful and relevant visions for their institutions in the midst of ever-changing social and political milieus.

METHODOLOGY

This section presents the research methods used.

Phenomenological study approach

Essentially, phenomenology can be understood as a research lens, which, when looked through, aids in understanding the meaning or essence of a person's experience: "It is snapping a picture that stops action in a particular time and context and presents a photograph in the form of a written text for the reader to glimpse the same experience" (Hug, 1998, p.207). However, it was noted that the text or photograph is not the actual experience itself, but simply provides evidence of the experience.

According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenology includes the interrelationship between the context (or environment) and the individual, which constitutes an experience. He further notes that "in accordance with phenomenological principles, scientific investigation is valid when the knowledge sought is arrived at through descriptions that make possible an understanding of the meanings and essences of experience" (p.84). The interrelationship generated by this study yielded certain perceptions or perspectives of the experience. The methodology requires the researcher to venture into the world of the participants and retrieve data through in-depth interviews, to analyze the data, and then to describe the phenomenon (Creswell, 2005).

Phenomenology is further viewed as "inquiry [which] asks the question, 'What is the structure and essence of the experience of this phenomenon for these people?" (Patton, 1990). The objectives of this research bode well with this definition in trying to understand the relative

context within which HBCU presidents made their decisions when confronted with major institutional challenges.

Selection of Participants

The participants in this research study consisted of sitting and former HBCU presidents from four-year public and private colleges and universities who had at least two years of experience as president. The goal was to obtain participants who could elucidate the process addressed by this investigation, namely how presidents make decisions about important issues at their institutions. Institutions in the researcher's own university system, very small institutions, and the HBCU where the researcher was enrolled were deliberately omitted. A phenomenological study intends to unearth meaningful data through exploration of relevant portions of participants' lives.   Therefore, it was expected that interviews with at least 12 presidents would allow the researcher to examine the actual experiences relative to the context in which HBCU presidents make their decisions when confronted with major challenges. The actual number of presidents interviewed for this study was 17.

Potential participants for this study were obtained from a listing of current HBCU presidents published by the United States Department of Education. Upon identification of the HBCU presidents, the researcher emailed each to explain the parameters of the intended study and to request participation. Presidents' availability and willingness to participate in this study were significant factor in their selection. The researcher then contacted the participants again via e-mail to schedule an appropriate time to conduct the telephone interview.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the degree to which the reader can depend on and trust the research findings. Trustworthiness has been further divided into credibility, dependability, transferability, and conformability, which is largely an issue of presentation (Lincoln et al., 2004). To ensure trustworthiness, credibility was maintained throughout this process by pursuing interpretations in different ways, in conjunction with a process of steady and provisional analysis. Dependability was fostered by employing the assistance of a research associate who made certain that the data collected, the analysis, and the interpretation were reflective of the participants' voices. Also, field notes were collected. These assisted in accurately portraying the mood, attitude, and tone of the participants.   To ensure transferability, descriptions of data in context were collected and reported with sufficient detail and precision to allow judgments about applicability to other setting. Finally, conformability was done by using the audit trails to detail each step in this study.

FINDINGS

The focal point of this study was to examine the decision-making practices, policies, and strategies used by HBCU presidents when they attempt to resolve some of the most perplexing and complex problems faced by their institutions in terms of budgets. In the process of this research, 17 individuals who have previously or are currently serving as president of one of the nation's 105 HBCUs were interviewed. Open-ended interview questions pertaining to the central research question were posed, and participants were given ample time to fully respond. Furthermore, the participants were encouraged to introduce new directions to the discussion as they deemed appropriate. In doing so, the researchers and participants were able to address the other research questions, as well as add new and unexpected insights to the body of data. The main research question was: How do HBCU presidents address budgetary issues that are deemed critical to the existence of their institutions?

The study sought to give voice to the perspectives of current and former HBCU presidents regarding their decision-making practices in regard to budgeting. Accordingly, this section provides a summary profile of participants and presents the findings that emerged during data analysis.

The Participants

The participant population was composed of individuals who were currently serving or had previously served as president of one, and in some cases more than one, of the nation's 105 HBCUs for at least two years. The following figure represents the number of years that the participants served as the leader of their respective institutions. Figure 1 shows the participants experience:

All were African Americans who possessed terminal degrees, although one held only an honorary doctorate granted by his current institution of employment. Four women and 13 men were interviewed. As shown below, their ages ranged from 44 to more than 70 years of age. Figure 2 shows age of respondents:

While all participants expressed the complexity of managing institutions with rapidly declining resources, collectively they possessed experience managing an array of institutional budgets ranging from less than $15 million to in excess of $126 million as shown in the chart below. Figure 3 shows budgets amanged:
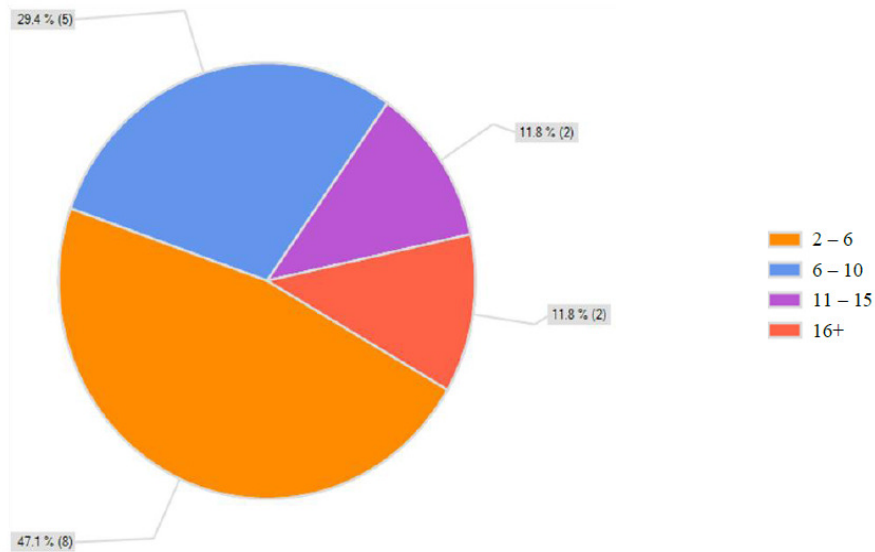
29.4 % (5)

11.8 % (2)

11.8 % (2)

47.1 % (8)

- ▬ 2 – 6
- ▬ 6 – 10
- ▬ 11 – 15
- ▬ 16+

Figure 1. Years of Presidential Experience

5.9 % (1)

58.8 % (10)

17.6 % (3)

11.8 % (2)

5.9 % (1)

- ▬ Less than 45
- ▬ 45 – 55
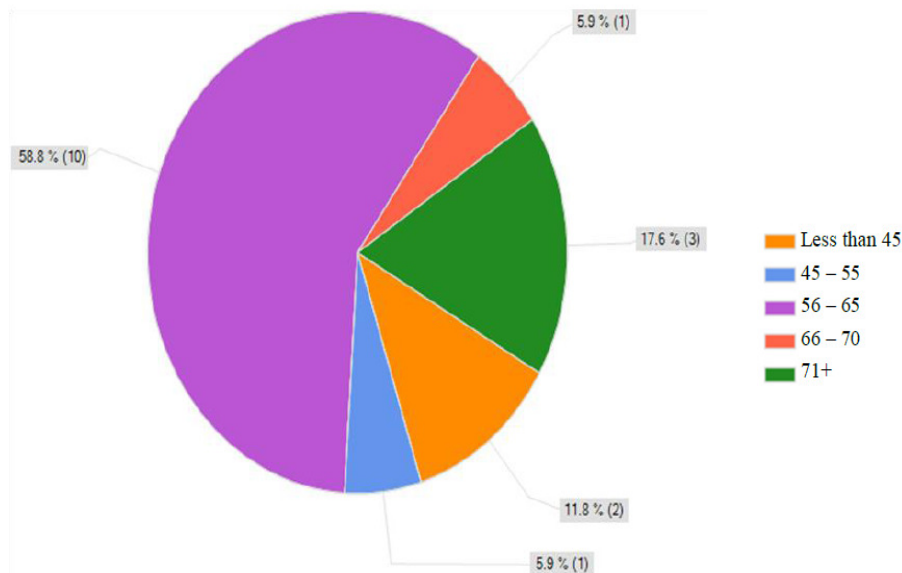- ▬ 56 – 65
- ▬ 66 – 70
- ▬ 71+

Figure 2. Ages of Participants

All of the interviews were scheduled at times and dates convenient for participants and were conducted via telephone. During the interviews, two presidents participated from their homes, two took place while the participants were driving to an engagement, and the other 13 participants were interviewed from their offices. Despite the potential for distraction posed by driving – or in the case of one interviewee, interruptions from persons and repairs taking place in his vicinity – the participants answered questions fully, and the researcher felt confident in the thoroughness and accuracy of the interview data.

Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants, and these are used throughout the remainder of this study. Due to the relatively large number of presidents included, however, each is referred to by a first-name pseudonym,
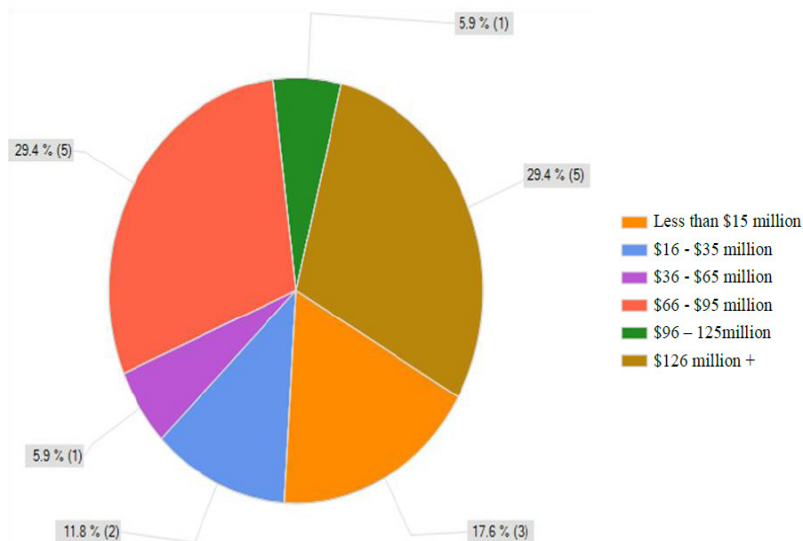
Figure 3. Amounts of Largest Budgets Managed

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Nicknames	Gender	Age	Status
Alicia	Female	56	Former
Blake	Male	60	Current
Charles	Male	74	Current
Ellen	Female	55+	Current
Francine	Female	58	Current
George	Male	61	Current
Harvey	Male	64	Former
Isaac	Male	44	Current
James	Male	60+	Current
Kenneth	Male	64	Current
Langston	Male	72	Current
Michael	Male	64	Current
Nelson	Male	44	Current
Olivia	Female	70	Current
Paul	Male	72	Current
Quentin	Male	66	Current
Richard	Male	61	Current

rather than by the honorific term "doctor." This was done to avoid unnecessary repetition and to simplify the reporting process. Each participant signed two consent forms: one to participate in the study, and the other to allow permission to record the interview. Table 1 shows nick names, gender, age and employment status:

The first participant in this study was assigned the pseudonym *Alicia.* A 56-year-old woman, Alicia, like many of her fellow participants, holds a doctorate in educational administration. Although she has now retired, she served 25 years of her professional career in higher education, plus four years in the secondary system. Her

most recent position was a six-year stint as president of a private, doctoral-granting university in a southern mid-sized city. Alicia answered the researcher's questions fully, setting a basis for comparison with other participants.

Blake, 60, presides over a state-operated comprehensive university that offers one doctoral program, although he stated that the Carnegie classification lists his institution as non-doctoral granting. Blake has a Ph.D. in psychology, a field he feels has helped him a great deal during his career in higher education. He exhibited involvement in the interview process by asking for clarification of questions when needed, and provided well-thought-out and in-depth answers.

Charles, who is in his mid-70s, has for 20 years been president of a university previously headed by his father. Located in a southern community with a population of about 63,000, Charles took time to explain the university's history in the context of its community and state. He exhibited a relaxed conversational tone, inquired in a friendly manner about the researcher's associates, and commented on his own family and professional network. Charles' doctorate is in engineering mechanics, which he explained as a merger of engineering and mathematics. He has spent his career in higher education; first as a lecturer, then as a professor, a department chair, and was Dean of Math and Physics for 15 years before assuming his present position. He stated that his university was recently approved to grant the doctoral degree in aquaculture.

As president of a rural university near the heartland of America, *Ellen* presides over an institution with a student enrollment of fewer than 3,000. Although the Carnegie designation lists the university as granting master's degrees, she stated that the doctoral degree now is offered in physical therapy. Ellen, who declined to reveal her age, but described herself as a "senior citizen," holds a doctorate in educational leadership; her professional career has been largely in higher education, although she first spent five years in K-12 public education. At the beginning of the conversation, Ellen stated that her time was limited due to a pending off-campus speaking engagement, but that she would be willing to continue the interview on another occasion, if necessary. However, the time allotted proved adequate for responses that included unsolicited input about strategic planning initiatives, and there was no need to schedule another appointment.

Francine is president of a small, public non-doctoral granting university in the rural Northeast. In her late 50s, she has been in her current position for four years and manages a budget of about $30 million. The student aid rate of 97 % was among the three highest reported in this study. Her extensive professional background in higher education where she was responsible for budgets up to $100 million has served her well, she said, in meeting the financial challenges she inherited from her predecessor. Francine provided insights into the interrelated processes used to ameliorate these challenges.

At 61 years of age, *George* has been in his current position as president of a public, doctoral granting, southern university since 2003. He exhibited a wry sense of humor in first declining the term "state supported" in favor of agreeing that it was at least minimally state supported. During his career as a professor and president, he has developed insights into the impact of sound financial management, and shared ideas not provided by other participants.

As former president of the university with the highest reported student enrollment in this study, *Harvey* attributed his strengths as an effective leader to his academic work in business administration and his 20 years in higher education; his 22-year military career also was an important factor, he said. Located in a mid-sized southern city, his former university has the Carnegie doctoral/research designation. Now 64, Harvey, has a doctorate in business administration, and had about six years collective experience as president. His answers to questions provided in the interview guide included unique stories about the awarding of honorary doctorates to Freedom Riders from the Civil Rights Era who decades earlier had been expelled for their activities from the university where he last served as president.

Isaac was among the youngest of study participants. At 44, he provided insights into the problems faced by his small, religious-affiliated college, but stressed that similar challenges are faced by other small institutions, whether or not they are HBCUs. Isaac's interview data are especially rich in content and detail. With six and a half years of collective experience as president, his decisions are informed by his prior experience in student affairs. At 1:16, the faculty-to-student ratio at his college was among the most favorable found among this study's participants.

The second smallest in terms of student enrollment, this Southern church-affiliated private college had *James* as its president. The college grants only the baccalaureate degree. With a Ph.D. in art and a marketing background, James had been in higher education for 14 years. In his early 60s, James was the only participant who disagreed with the areas of challenge for HBCUs listed by the researcher, and provided sound reasons for doing so. He stated that he had not seen the research himself, and that he felt such a categorization "suggests a kind of broad-based generality

that I would need to examine."

Kenneth was president of a public comprehensive, doctoral-granting University located near the Atlantic coast in the Southeast. He provided a detailed discussion on ethics, and the role it plays in the university's overall credibility. He asked, however, that the examples he gave of ethical lapses not be cited in this study, since they have been reported in the media and would serve to identify his institution. He also was one of several presidents who discussed strategic planning. In his mid-60s, Kenneth has been in higher education for his entire career, and at the time of the interview had 15 years experience as president.

One of the most informative interviews was with *Langston*, president of a public doctoral granting institution located in a small Southern town with a resident population not much higher than the university's student enrollment. The community is located near a much larger metropolis, however. Langston previously served at universities where the budget ranged from $65 million to $180 million, although he now manages approximately $86 million. One of the key points he stressed in this interview was the vital role of stakeholders in moving the institution forward. When interviewed, Kenneth was 72 years old and had been in higher education for 47 years. He reported that his undergraduate, master's and doctorate all were in the field of sociology. From his comments, the researcher deduced Langston's passion not only for his present position, but a sincere fondness for the community in which it is situated.

In his mid-60s, *Michael* presides over the northeastern-most institution included in this study. The public, doctoral-granting university has a student enrollment of about 6,400 and is located in a city with a population of 194,000. Michael possesses a Ph.D. in political science and public administration, and brings four years of experience at his current level to his position. His interview was enhanced by a precise description of the radical steps he has taken to ensure the continuing viability of the university. He characterized his current budget of $150 million as "miniscule compared to what I did before." As chief financial officer of a major northern university, he was responsible for a budget of approximately $2 billion.

Nelson was another of the younger participants in this study. At the age of 44, he already has had five years experience in his present position at a private non-doctoral granting college. His background included an array of disciplines including legal, political, corporate and athletic. Nelson demonstrated his involvement in the interview process by adding an area to the list of HBCU challenges presented by the researcher, and based the body of his interview on this theme. By placing emphasis

on the ability to attract talent, he effectively altered the course of the discussion and added an important element by which to analyze the data. Nelson's college was located in the second largest city covered in this study, yet had the smallest enrollment of any participating institution.

Olivia was another participant who added an area of concern to the discussion: the role of the university's culture in helping or hindering survival. Located in a community with a population of about 21,000, her institution had an enrollment of about 4,500 students, and was part of a large university system with 50,000 students. With a doctorate in languages, Olivia, 70, was the only interviewee born outside the United States. Although her plans called for retirement at the end of this current academic year, she described her future status as "retired, but not tired." This lively sense of humor was evident throughout the interview, which took place while she was driving. Despite her plans to start her vacation the following day, she devoted adequate time and attention to the process, and even asked the interviewer to grant her addition time for discussion. Her data were among the most interesting and contributed a new dimension of insight to the study.

Paul was the only participant who had not obtained an earned terminal degree, although his private college – which grants only the baccalaureate degree – had awarded him an honorary doctorate. Located in a midsized Southern city, his church-affiliated private college has a favorable faculty/student ratio of 1:17, fostered and maintained through extensive marketing efforts initiated during Paul's administration. At 72, he was one of the older participants, and was able to contribute information on what he described as one of his favorite topics – leadership – based on his years of experience. He described the creative plan he constructed to revitalize an HBCU that was in danger of closure. In addition to his financial advice, he provided data related to ethics that informed the conversation on that topic.

As president of a public doctoral-granting university situated in a large Midwestern city with a population of more than 2.8 million, *Quentin* holds a doctorate in educational administration. Now 66, Quentin worked in the airline industry prior to moving into the field of higher education, and has more than 20 years experience as a university president. He was the only participant who noted an additional challenge facing HBCUs relative to race: "Society does not value black universities providing education to black people." He described himself as a risk taker, but added that he finds adequate patience a personal challenge when dealing with stakeholders in the decision-making process. Quentin, who had been in his current position for less than two years, was managing a
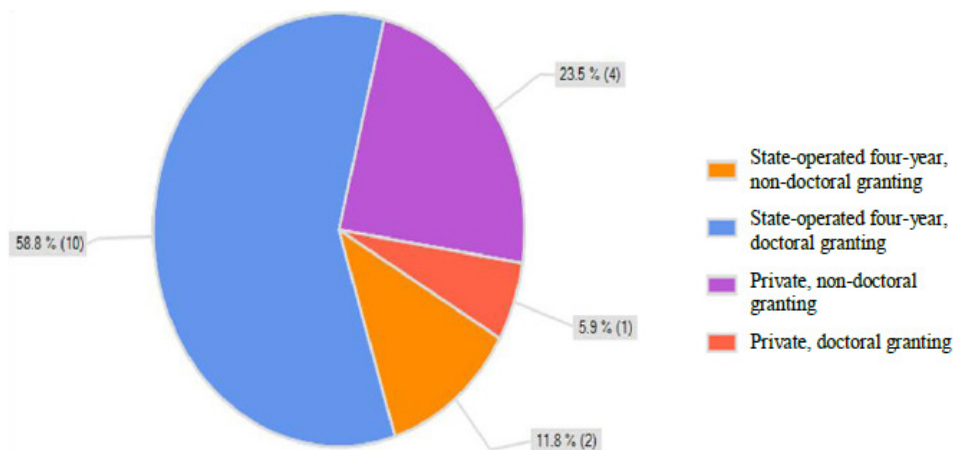
58.8 % (10)

23.5 % (4)

5.9 % (1)

11.8 % (2)

State-operated four-year, non-doctoral granting

State-operated four-year, doctoral granting

Private, non-doctoral granting

Private, doctoral granting

Figure 4. Carnegie Classifications of Institutions

budget of $140 million, and at a previous post was responsible for $500 million.

Richard also heads an institution located in a large metropolitan area that has a population of 1.2 million. With more than 11 years experience in an executive position at well-known predominantly white universities, he was in his eighth year as president of a public university that had an enrollment of approximately 9,000. He also taught history at different universities from 1980 to 1993. Richard was one of the participants who added a unique element to the equation: at the university level, he places a strong emphasis on reading, and publishes a recommended reading list. Like many other participants, he exuded confidence in his abilities and strategies for meeting the 21st century challenges faced as president of an HBCU.

Description of Sites

Although the researchers desired to visit each institution and to conduct interviews in person, the cost and other logistics associated with travel and lodging precluded such a possibility. The sites are described in general terms since permission to identify specific institutions was not obtained, and to protect the anonymity of participants. Due to the large number of colleges and universities included in this study, and the fact that the researcher was unable to visit these in person, site description will take the form of an overview; noteworthy details, however, will be included as deemed appropriate for adequate understanding of the settings.

As indicated in earlier, the presidents of four-year HBCUs outside the university system where the researcher is employed, and excluding the university where he is currently enrolled, were contacted. Of these presidents contacted, 17 were both willing to participate and able to schedule interviews within the time constraints imposed by the completion of this study. Participants' institutions comprised 13 public colleges and universities, three private colleges, and one private university; the four private institutions were church-affiliated entities.

Most of these HBCUs were located throughout the South and Southeast, although one was situated in the Midwest, and two in the Northeast. Host communities ranged from small, rural towns with populations of less than 2,000, to cities with nearly three million inhabitants. It is important to note, however, that several of the HBCUs situated in smaller communities had student populations comprising almost 50 % of the host community's total, and one actually had a student enrollment that exceeded the number of local residents by fifty percent; the reason for this seemingly skewed demographic was the sites' locations in proximity to much larger cities.

The majority of the participants' universities and colleges were founded in the mid- to late-1800s as agricultural, mechanical, or teacher training schools for African Americans and have seen their mission evolve to a focus on the arts, sciences, and technology. One included an emphasis on entrepreneurial development.

As indicated in Figure 4 above, the Carnegie classification for these institutions included six baccalaureate, ten master's, and one doctoral/research designations; however, interview data revealed that several institutions listed as non-doctoral actually grant the terminal degree in one or more fields.

The role of presidents in budgeting

Presidents were asked what role they played on budgeting. Most of them indicated that their main role came in at the approval of final budgets. This is the last phase in the budgeting process of a college or university. The following statement was extracted from one of the participants:

"My main role is to approve the final budget. I do not do much of the ground work at lower levels. That is work for technocrats"

Clearly, the above statement indicates that a college president's budgetary role is limited at strategic level. Therefore, he/she has no much influence in indentifying new revenue sources, finding more cost effective ways of spending and preventing unnecessary expenditures.

Further, most of the budgetary information in colleges had a bottom-up flow, whereby individual departments, sections, directorates, schools and faculties generated their own budget and passed them to higher authorities for approval as seen in this statement "budgetary information come from departments… ". In essence, the top-level leadership is the "recipient" of budgetary information and not the "source". Because of these, some strategic decisions may not be well covered by lower level officials who prepare budgets. The statement below was made by one of the serving presidents.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

All of the presidents who were interviewed exhibited a thoughtful, thorough approach to resolving the multiple issues that challenge the very existence of many HBCUs. And all of them recognized their place within this process from a vantage point grounded in humility. Kenneth summarized this philosophy when he stated that "Chancellors come and go, presidents come and go, but these institutions stay." With the dedication of experienced leaders and the energy brought in by newer members of the presidential community, it seems that HBCUs are in the process of reinventing themselves as relevant, financially sound institutions of higher learning capable of surviving and thriving in a global community that requires the contributions of all to prosper in the 21st century marketplace.

Budgeting was considered as a very important function by the largest number of participants. Several of the presidents stressed the interrelatedness of budgeting with other functions of the colleges and universities. These findings are in alignment with Kerr and Gade (1986) who noted that HBCU presidents must contend with issues of quality, academics and fiscal respectability. During the interview, one respondent noted that "…all

these things have to be in place and maintained to function well. If we let any one piece of the picture fall down, then everything else is damaged as well. You have to be mindful of a whole range of concerns in order to be an effective and decisive leader". Such comments are in agreement with Gasman (2010), Hirsch and Weber (1999), and Bowman (2009) who address the range of strategies needed to deal with the dire financial straits many HBCUs find themselves in. The impact of student demographics on the overall budget was a common topic among participants, as was anticipated in statistical reports published by the U.S. Department of Education (2002).

The budgetary challenges of HBCUs may be partly due to the budgetary approach and leadership styles of college presidents. This is because most of them did not play a big role in generating budgets. They are at the most part recipients of budgetary information and not the source as it should be. College residents need to steer organization growth through identify strategic ways of increasing revenue, ways of cutting costs through improve efficiency and use of technology among others. Unfortunately, this was left to technocrats at lower levels to decide.

Further, there is need for structural changes to allow top-down budgetary information flow so that strategic decisions are fed into various entities of colleges and universities during the budgeting process.

Limitations and delimitations

Limitations included the possible bias of both participants and the researchers. Biases of participants may have included opinions based on atypical experiences, preconceived beliefs about the interview process, or attitudes about the researcher. Those who agreed to participate may not reflect the views of the overall community of four-year HBCU presidents. It also is possible that the relatively small number of participants may have had views differing from those of the larger community.

Researchers' biases are grounded in the observations and opinions formed through work in several presidential administrations that have afforded access to the decision-making practices of HBCU presidents. To offset this possible bias, the researcher took careful field notes and recorded a variety of observations. These were carefully examined during the analysis process.

Factors used to delimit or narrow the scope of this study included focus on the central phenomenon of decision-making among a select number of four-year HBCU presidents, the disqualification of potential participants due to not meeting criteria such as institution

type or length of service, and the use of a limited number and type of interview questions. It is possible that the selection of other participants in different institutions would have altered the data, leading to different findings.

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