



Women in the Leadership Pipeline in Higher Education Have Better Representation and Pay in Institutions With Female Presidents and Provosts

By Melissa Fuesting, Jacqueline Bichsel, and Anthony Schmidt
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Introduction

At most higher education institutions, the two most senior positions are the president and provost. Advancement to these roles most often follows a straightforward path. More than one-third (34%) of presidents were in a provost or vice provost role immediately prior to becoming president, and one-fourth (25%) were presidents at a different institution.¹ For provosts, the most common prior role is that of dean (45%), followed by vice provost (24%) and provost at another institution (14%).² Typically, deans are promoted to their positions from a senior faculty role. Therefore, a common path to the

¹ Pritchard, A., Nadel-Hawthorne, S., Schmidt, A., Fuesting, M., & Bichsel, J. (2020). [*Administrators in Higher Education Annual Report: Key Findings, Trends, and Comprehensive Tables for the 2019-20 Academic Year*](#) (Research Report). CUPA-HR.

² Ibid.

senior-most executive positions in higher ed is promotion through the faculty ranks to senior faculty level, securing a position as dean, and then obtaining a position as provost or president.

Prior research shows that women are both underrepresented and underpaid in most higher ed leadership positions.³ Previous research has also shown that having women in executive positions in the nonacademic, corporate workplace narrows the pay gap between female and male administrators.⁴

This report analyzes whether institutions with women presidents or provosts have higher representation and pay for women in administrative, dean, and faculty positions than institutions led by men.⁵

³ Ibid.

⁴ Flabbi, L., Macis, M., Moro, A., & Schivardi, F. (2019). [Do Female Executives Make a Difference? The Impact of Female Leadership on Gender Gaps and Firm Performance](#). *The Economic Journal*, 129(622), 2390-2423. doi: 10.3386/w22877

⁵ Analyses use data from the CUPA-HR 2020 *Administrators in Higher Education Survey* (N = 47,985 administrators) and the CUPA-HR 2020 *Faculty in Higher Education Survey* (N = 171,367 tenure-track faculty). Analyses on the impact of female presidents are based on 925 institutions that provided data on president gender and gender of other administrators. Analyses on the impact of female provosts on deans are based on 747 institutions that provided data on provost and dean gender. Analyses on the impact of provost gender on faculty are based on 476 institutions that provided information on provost gender and tenure-track faculty gender. Each institution was coded as having either a female or male president and either a female or male provost by using the demographic information that institutions reported on their president and provost in the CUPA-HR 2020 *Administrators in Higher Education Survey*. Most institutions have only one president and one provost; institutions that had multiple incumbents in one of these positions were coded as having a female president or female provost if one of the incumbents was female. Institutions that did not report gender on their president were omitted from analyses comparing institutions with a female president to institutions with a male president; similarly, institutions that did not report provost gender were omitted from analyses comparing institutions with a female provost to institutions with a male provost.

Representation and Pay of Female Administrators at Institutions With Female Presidents

Figure 1 shows the representation and pay equity of female presidents at colleges and universities. Only one-third (32%) of higher education presidents are women. Female presidents are paid \$0.91 for every \$1.00 paid to male presidents.

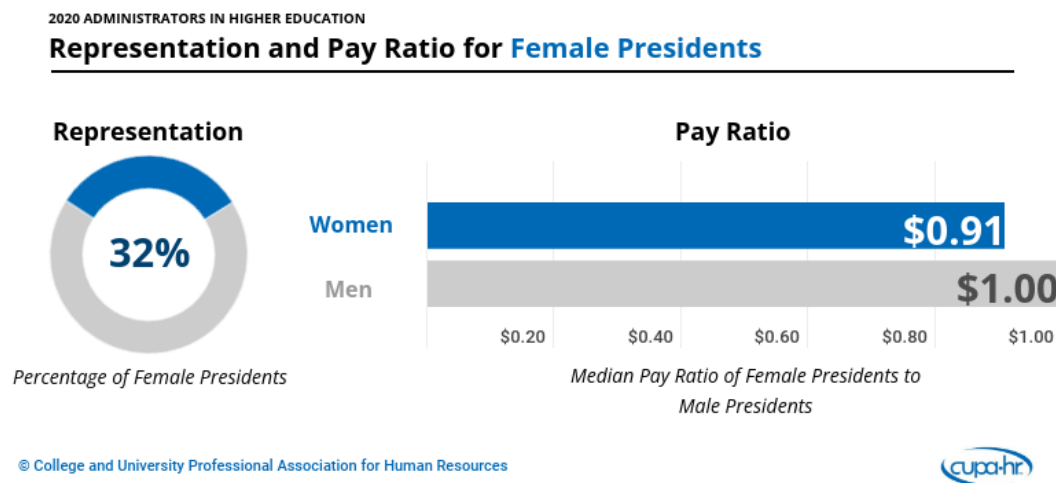


Figure 1. Representation and Pay Ratio for Female Presidents

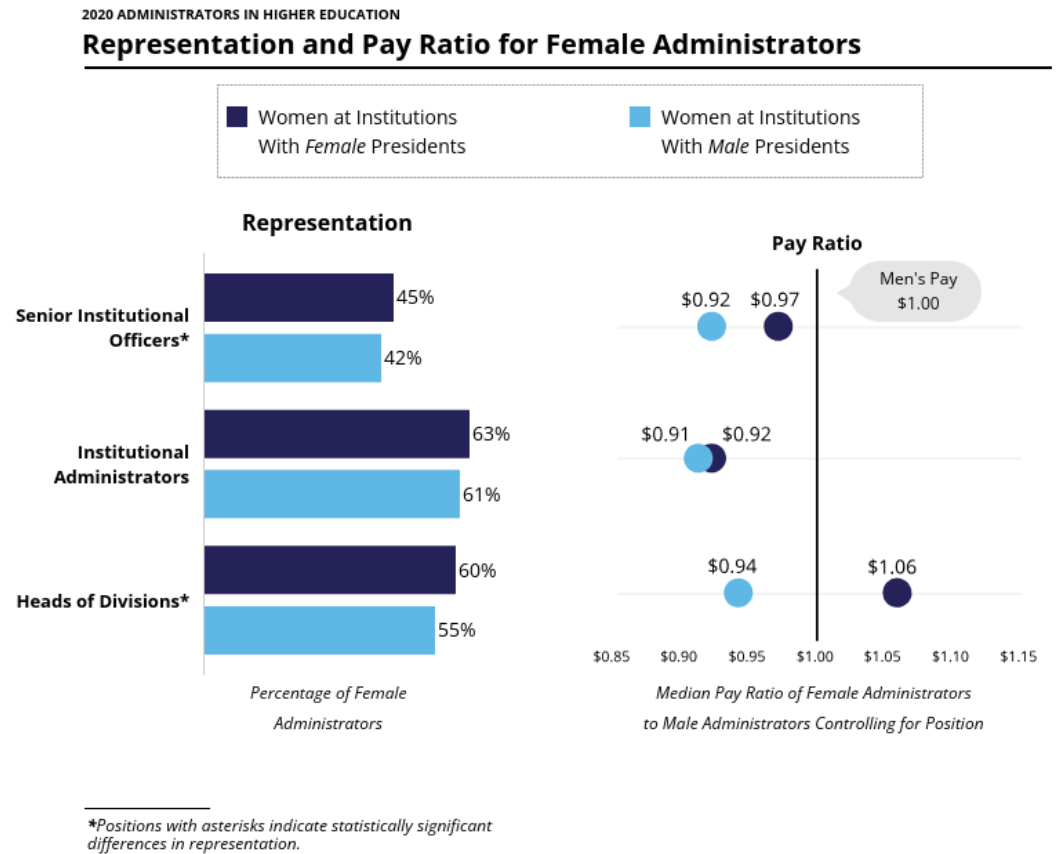
Figure 2 compares the representation and pay equity of female administrators at institutions with female and male presidents.⁶ Institutions with female presidents have a higher percentage of women in all administrative categories: senior institutional officers, institutional

⁶ Median pay ratio calculations control for position. First, median salaries by sex for each specific position were obtained; then the median of those medians was calculated for each position area. This controls for the fact that women are represented differently in specific positions that may pay higher or lower salaries, and it means that the wage gaps present are not explained by the fact that women have greater representation in lower- or higher-paying positions.

administrators, and heads of divisions.⁷ Female administrators are generally paid less than male administrators in the same positions regardless of the sex of the president. However, female senior institutional officers, institutional administrators, and heads of divisions are paid more equitably

⁷ Chi-square analyses found significant differences in gender distribution at institutions with female versus male presidents for senior institutional officers, $\chi^2(1) = 5.27, p = .02$, and heads of divisions, $\chi^2(1) = 28.79, p < .0001$. Although the representation of women among institutional administrators is higher when there is a female president, this difference is not significant, $\chi^2(1) = 2.86, p = .09$.

at institutions with a female president than at institutions with a male president.⁸



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Figure 2. Representation and Pay Ratio for Female Administrators

⁸ See the [Administrators Survey Participation and Information Template](#) for specific positions surveyed in each of these categories.

Representation and Pay of Female Deans and Faculty at Institutions With Female Provosts

Figure 3 shows the representation and pay equity of female provosts at colleges and universities. Women make up less than half (44%) of all provosts. Female provosts are paid \$0.96 for every \$1.00 paid to male provosts.

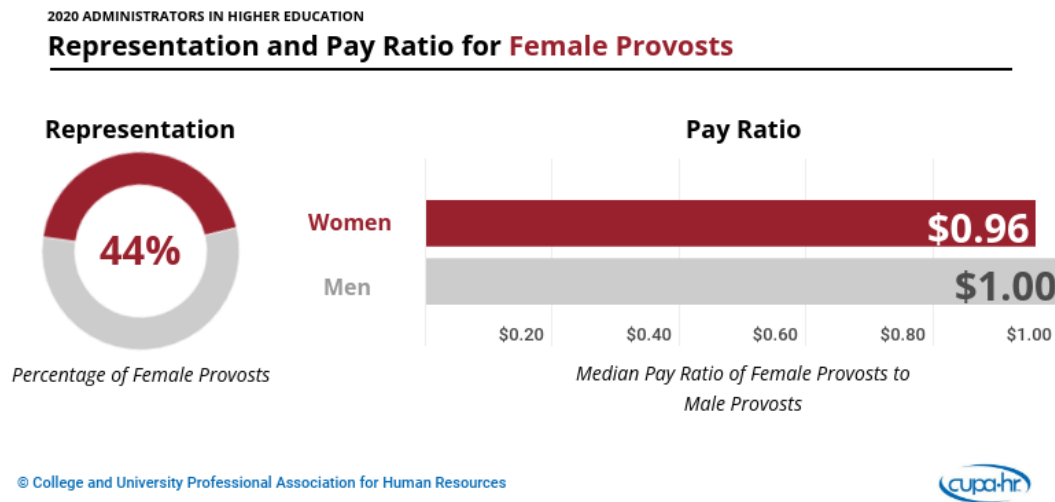


Figure 3. Representation and Pay Ratio for Female Provosts

Figure 4 displays the representation and pay equity of female deans and tenure-track faculty at institutions with a female provost compared to institutions with a male provost.⁹ Institutions with female provosts have a

⁹ Median pay ratio calculations control for position. For deans, median salaries by sex for each specific dean position were obtained; then the median of those medians was calculated. For faculty, median salaries by discipline, rank, and sex were obtained; then the median of those medians was calculated by rank. This controls for the fact that women are represented differently in specific positions or disciplines that may pay higher or lower salaries, and it means that the wage gaps present are not explained by the fact that women have greater representation in lower- or higher-paying positions.

significantly higher representation of women in dean positions and in all faculty ranks.^{10, 11}

Although female deans and faculty are paid less than male deans and faculty, provost sex does not have a strong or consistent impact on pay equity for deans and faculty. However, it is worth noting that better representation at higher faculty ranks and in dean positions has an impact on pay. Note that the representation of women drops with successive faculty ranks (from assistant to associate to full professor). These promotions represent the few times in a faculty member's career when appreciable salary increases are granted. If women are not being promoted, they are not receiving these pay raises. In addition, those in dean positions are generally promoted from senior faculty ranks. Therefore, if women are not adequately represented in senior faculty, they will not have the same likelihood as men of being considered for a higher-paying dean position.

¹⁰ Chi-square analyses found significant differences in gender distribution at institutions with female versus male provosts for deans, $\chi^2(1) = 19.25, p < .0001$, full professors, $\chi^2(1) = 38.48, p < .0001$, associate professors, $\chi^2(1) = 16.82, p < .0001$, and assistant professors, $\chi^2(1) = 24.32, p < .0001$.

¹¹ Chi-square analyses also found that women are significantly better represented at institutions with female versus male presidents for deans, $\chi^2(1) = 19.25, p < .0001$, full professors, $\chi^2(1) = 145.50, p < .0001$, associate professors, $\chi^2(1) = 25.30, p < .0001$, and assistant professors, $\chi^2(1) = 16.14, p < .0001$. These differences are not displayed in this report.

Representation and Pay Ratio for Female Deans and Tenure-Track Faculty

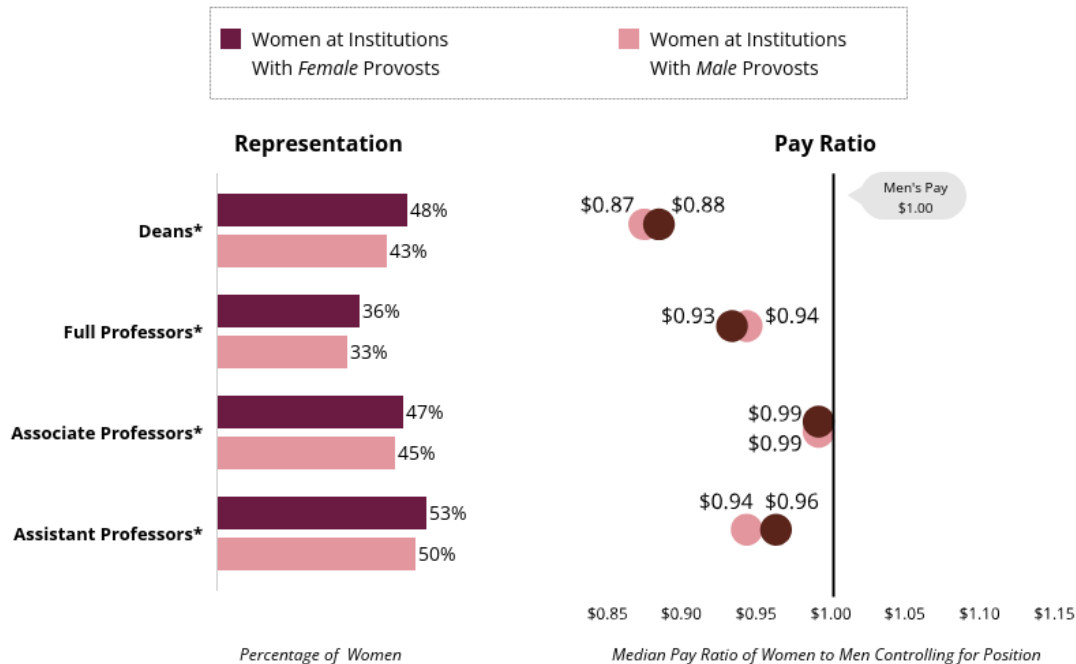


Figure 4. Representation and Pay Ratio for Female Deans and Tenure-Track Faculty

Conclusions

Past research in the private sector has demonstrated that corporations with female executives pay their female administrators more equitably.¹² This report presents evidence that similar patterns occur in higher education. Institutions with female presidents have a higher representation of women in

¹² Flabbi et al.

administrator positions and pay women in administrator positions more equitably. In addition, institutions with female provosts have a higher representation of women among deans and tenure-track faculty. In sum, higher ed institutions with female executives have better representation of women throughout their institutions in positions that: a) are paid higher salaries and b) serve as key points in the executive leadership pipeline.

Research also shows that adding women to the C-suite in the corporate world makes organizations more open to change and less open to risk.¹³ In an era where institutions are adapting to shifting workforce expectations, adjusting to continuous decreases in budgets, contemplating changes in enrollment, addressing challenges of recruitment and retention, and rethinking their mission, more openness to change and less tolerance of risk may be just what is needed to navigate this new landscape. Providing more (and more equitable) opportunities for women to advance within higher education seems an obvious path forward in this navigation.

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¹³ Post, C., Lokshin, B., & Boone, C. (2021, April). [Adding Women to the C-Suite Changes How Companies Think](#). *Harvard Business Review*.