

# Women Attorneys in Higher Education Leadership



Association of American  
Law Schools

# Women Attorneys in Higher Education Leadership

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# Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all those involved with this project, beginning with Kellye Testy for her support of this research collaboration. Thanks also go to AALS staff members, including Zaena Ballon, Barbra Elenbaas, Isabella French, Marisa Guevara-Torres, Katherine London, Faith Nchang, and Elliott Ward. We also thank Jeff Allum for his input and feedback.

We extend our gratitude to the University of Tennessee Winston College of Law, the Institute for Professional Leadership, and Dean Lonnie T. Brown, Jr., for their support of this research. We are grateful as well to Winston College faculty and library staff who shared helpful feedback and research support, especially Brad Areheart, Wendy Bach, Teri Dobbins Baxter, Valarie Blake, Eliza Boles, Zack Buck, Sherley Cruz, Joan MacLeod Heminway, Paul McLaughlin, Briana Rosenbaum, Paula Schaefer, Danny Schaffzin, and Christopher Sundby. Thanks also go to Winston College students, Hardwick Fellow Sara Andersen and Stephen Mitchell, for their research assistance.

This project was inspired by the close and supportive network of women attorneys who served their law schools as dean when author Katharine Schaffzin led the University of Memphis Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law from 2018 to 2024. The experiences of these women inspired the author to pursue this current project to bring to light the challenges and sometimes shocking mistreatment faced by women attorneys even at the highest level, not to embrace a victimhood mindset, but instead to highlight their courage and strength, share their strategies for success, and encourage their supporters to rally as their allies and champions.

We are proud to build upon the existing body of research on women attorneys in leadership established by so many authors, including Deborah L. Rhode, Meera E. Deo, Nancy Levit, Roberta D. Liebenberg, Laura M. Padilla, Judith Resnik, Laura F. Rothstein, and Patricia E. Salkin. Additionally, we are grateful to those women attorneys leading in higher education who provided early insight into research topics and survey design, including retired Sixth Circuit Judge Bernice Donald, Darby Dickerson, Kendra Huard Fershee, Leah Chan Grinvald, Lolita Buckner Inniss, Emily M. Janoski-Haehlen, Janet K. Levit, Hari M. Osofsky, Rachel Rebouché, Patricia Roberts, Laura Ann Rosenbury, Sean M. Scott, Sudha Setty, and Karen J. Sneddon.

We greatly appreciate the participation of the 121 anonymous women attorneys in higher education leadership who responded to our survey despite their busy and demanding schedules. Special thanks go to the seven sitting law deans who participated in a focus group in July 2025 for sharing their experiences, priorities, and advice. The high rate of participation and enthusiasm from the survey pool affirmed the importance and timeliness of this research.

Finally, we must acknowledge all of the women attorneys who currently lead or have led colleges and universities as deans, provosts, and presidents. They bravely faced the same challenges expected of every leader, as well as those hidden or not-so-hidden obstacles placed before them by virtue of their gender. May this report serve to acknowledge that invisible burden and better prepare future leaders for success.

# Executive Summary

The Women Attorneys in Higher Education Leadership study was designed to understand the experiences, career pathways, challenges, and characteristics of women attorneys leading higher education institutions. Study findings can benefit women attorneys aspiring to leadership, institutional leaders who support them, and the organizations they may lead.

The study was based on a survey of 274 women attorneys who are currently or who formerly led higher education institutions – college or university presidents, provosts, and deans. The survey was fielded by the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) in June and July of 2025 and received 121 total responses for a 44.2 percent response rate. To complement the quantitative data from the survey, current women law school deans were invited to a focus group in July 2025; seven sitting law school deans participated.

## Introduction

- Both the legal profession and higher education leadership have made tremendous progress in the 21st century by growing the number of women in leadership roles. The number of lawyers leading higher education institutions has also grown.
- Amidst this growth in both the number of women and the number of lawyers leading higher education institutions, however, women attorneys are still underrepresented in higher education leadership.
- What are the circumstances and characteristics that make women lawyers successful in leading higher education institutions? What are the structural and cultural obstacles they face?

## Contours of the Study

### RESEARCH GOALS

**This study of *Women Attorneys in Higher Education Leadership* aimed to achieve the following research goals, employing a survey and a qualitative focus group:**

1. Benchmark the number of women attorneys in higher education leadership positions;
2. Identify characteristics and circumstances that make women lawyers successful in higher education leadership;
3. Identify structural and cultural obstacles to the advancement of women attorneys into higher education leadership; and
4. Provide insight into what universities, leaders, and women attorneys can do to promote and support women lawyers into higher education leadership.

### SURVEY RESPONDENT PROFILE

- Of the 121 survey respondents, a majority were current and former law school deans (33.1% and 35.5% respectively).
- Smaller percentages of our respondent pool were comprised of current college or university presidents (11.6%), former interim law school deans (13.2%), former college or university presidents or interim presidents (3.3%), and other current leaders (3.3%).
- By race and ethnicity, the composition of our respondent pool closely mirrors that of current law school deans. About 12 percent of current women law school deans are Black or African American leaders; a higher percentage (19.8%) of survey respondents were Black or African American. About two-thirds (63.6%) of survey respondents were White or Caucasian, compared with about 67 percent of law school deans overall. Smaller numbers of women leaders of other races and ethnicities responded to the survey.
- About one-fifth (19.8%) of survey respondents are first-generation college students whose parents did not earn a four-year bachelor's degree. A similar proportion (19%) have at least one parent who earned a bachelor's degree, and over one-half (55%) reported having at least one parent with a law degree or other advanced degree.

## Lawyers Make Good Leaders

- Lawyers are successful in higher education leadership, likely because the skills and characteristics of good lawyers mirror the hallmarks of good leaders.
- For women attorney leaders participating in this study, there was a strong consensus around leadership and motherhood as characteristics of identity. Over one-half (55.3%) of survey respondents identified themselves as a “leader” and a slightly smaller proportion (43.9%) identified themselves as a mother, mom, or parent.
- Good judgment (69.8%), integrity (61.2%), hard work (56.9%), and emotional intelligence (54.3%) were selected by a majority of respondents as the attributes most helpful to their success as a leader.
- The most well-traveled path to higher education leadership begins with a faculty appointment, and the findings of this study mirror that general trend. About half (50.9%) of survey respondents primarily served as faculty members at a law school prior to their current or most recent leadership role, and another one-quarter (25.9%) served primarily in an administrative role at a law school.
- Almost one-quarter (23.5%) of respondents (23 of 98; 23.5%) earned their JD from Harvard or Yale. About another tenth (9.2%) combined earned their JD from New York University, the University of California, San Francisco, and the University of Michigan. However, about two-thirds (67.4%) of our respondents earned their JD elsewhere, suggesting that women leaders may be more likely to have earned their JDs from a wider range of schools than law school deans overall.
- About one-half (52.6%) of respondents cited serving as an associate dean as helpful in preparing them for their current or most recent leadership role, and a similar proportion (49.1%) cited serving in a leadership role on a law school committee.

## Obstacles to Women Attorneys in Higher Education Leadership

- Nearly three-quarters (74.8%) of survey respondents agreed they had experienced gender bias in their current or most recent role.
- In addition to acknowledging gender bias, several survey respondents cited intersectional bias frequently in response to open-ended survey questions. They explained that the intersection of multiple identities – primarily racial, ethnic, and gender identities – were at the heart of their experiences of bias as attorneys in higher education leadership.
- Almost two-thirds (61.1%) of survey respondents who are current leaders reported earning more than their male predecessors; a much smaller proportion (13%) reported earning the same or less than their male predecessors, and a full quarter (25.9%) of current women leaders did not know how their salary compares to that of their male predecessors.



- Findings from the focus group, and open-ended responses from the survey, indicate that the large number of respondents reporting earning salaries higher than their predecessors could be the result of intense negotiation rather than a reflection of women leaders being offered a similar or higher salary than their male predecessors.
- Nearly two-thirds (61.5%) of respondents reported having received a performance or student evaluation that they believed was negatively influenced by their gender identity.
- A majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that people were or are surprised to see someone like them in a higher education leadership role (71.9%). A smaller, but not insignificant, proportion of respondents agreed they had been marginalized professionally because of their gender identity (57.0%).
- Although it was not the experience of a majority of respondents, about one-third (29.8%) agreed they had been made to feel unsafe (professionally, emotionally, physically, or in another way) because of their gender identity.
- A majority (85.1%) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed they had experienced gender-based microaggressions in their leadership positions.
- Over three-quarters (78.9%) of survey respondents agreed they pay more attention to their appearance than their male peers, and 73.7 percent agreed they pay more attention to their appearance now than earlier in their careers.

## Strategies to Promote & Support Women Leaders

- The literature on efforts to promote the advancement of women attorneys in practice often highlights mentoring and professional development as effective interventions. A large majority (76.7%) of respondents reported they have or had a mentor or champion.
- Women attorneys do not lead higher education institutions alone. Over three-quarters (77.4%) of survey respondents reported that at least one colleague or supervisor has helped them advance professionally by providing opportunities for them to take on greater responsibility, acting as a sounding board, or recommending them for specific jobs.
- Survey respondents most often listed the cabinet or leadership team and partner or spouse as people they rely on in fulfilling their leadership responsibilities; one-fifth (19.9%) of respondents reported trusting colleagues and peers in fulfilling their leadership responsibilities and about 15 percent trusting their partner or spouse in fulfilling their leadership responsibilities.

# Introduction

Higher education in 2025 is facing unprecedented challenges to enrollment, academic freedom, federal funding, immigration, regulatory compliance, shrinking budgets, political obstacles, and litigation. The skills required for the job include: “complex problem solving, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, cognitive flexibility, people management, and collaborating with others,” “financial acuity, cultural competency, technological deftness, crisis management, entrepreneurial mindset, political savviness, empathy and respect, multi-genre communication skills, high emotional intelligence, and agility.”<sup>2</sup>

It is not surprising that the number of lawyers serving as college presidents has grown in recent years, as the skillset of an attorney--which includes strategic planning, critical thinking, clear communication, and crisis management--is more useful than ever in this increasingly perilous landscape of higher education.<sup>3</sup> There is no doubt that women attorneys in higher education leadership positions not only possess but have honed the skills required to succeed in these roles.

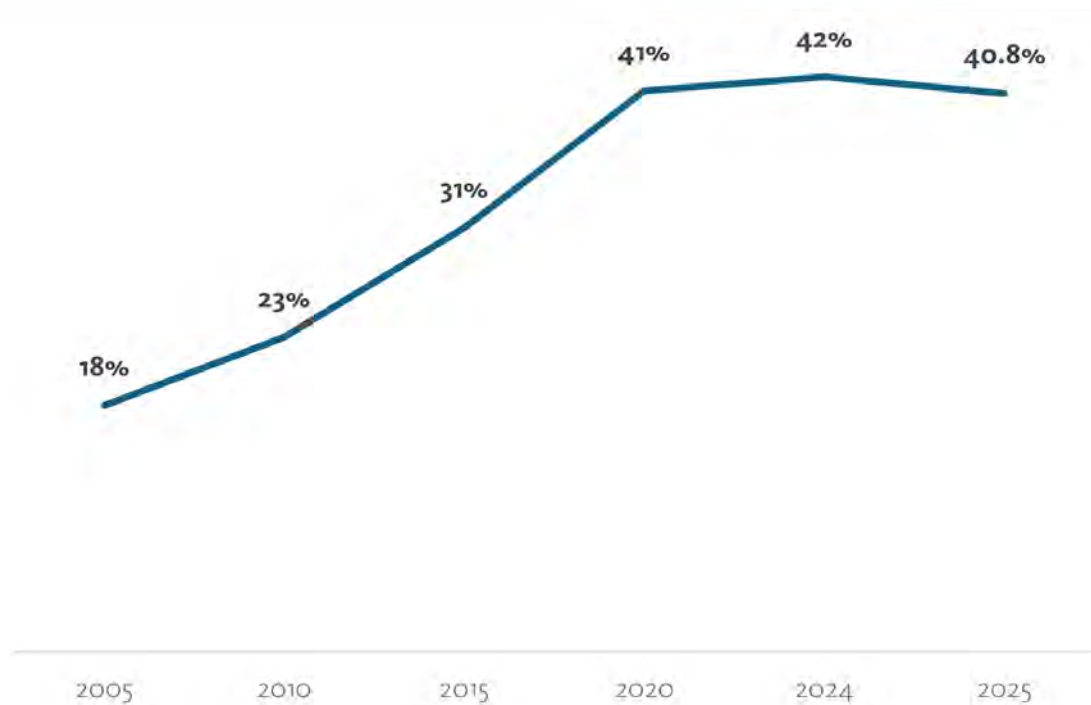
The legal profession has made tremendous progress in the 21st century by growing the number of women in their ranks.<sup>4</sup> Women have achieved representative parity among new lawyers.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, women attorneys remain underrepresented in higher education leadership positions.

Although small, the number of attorneys leading higher education institutions at the presidential level has grown in recent decades.<sup>6</sup> Of the 158 attorneys in these presidential leadership roles from 1970 to 2019, however, only 10.1 percent (16) have been women.<sup>7</sup> By 2017, 30 percent of college presidents were women,<sup>8</sup> but only 20 percent of college presidents with Juris Doctor (“JD”) degrees were women.<sup>9</sup> There has been little growth in the proportion of college and university presidents who are women; as of 2023, the figure still sat at just under one-third.<sup>10</sup>

The experiences and backgrounds of university provosts have not been studied as regularly as those of college presidents. As of 2014, 44 percent of college and university provosts were women,<sup>11</sup> up from 4 percent in 2007.<sup>12</sup> Very few provosts held JD degrees or cited Law as their primary field of study.<sup>13</sup>

In 2010, 18 percent of law school deans were women; this more than doubled by 2020, when 41 percent of law schools had women deans.<sup>14</sup> By fall 2024, 42 percent of law schools had a woman dean.<sup>15</sup> As of fall 2025, 41 percent of law deans are women.<sup>16</sup> This marks a departure from the steady upward trajectory in the proportion of law school deans who were women, which had commenced in the early 2000s.<sup>17</sup>

**Figure 1. The percent of law school deans who are women grew steadily until the early 2020s, then plateaued**



This report sets out to examine the experiences and circumstances of women attorneys in higher education leadership to benefit women attorneys aspiring to leadership, institutional leaders who support them, and the organizations they may lead. Women leaders often downplay their challenges to maintain a veil of strength;<sup>18</sup> this strategy may work for individual leaders but, unfortunately, hinders the ability of the collective to address inequities and offer support. A study whereby women attorneys in higher education leadership could safely share their experiences and strategies confidentially allows those leaders to use their experiences to lay the foundation for institutional improvement and to inspire those coming up behind them.

Part II of this report explains the contours of the study, including the methodology employed for two distinct streams of data collection. Results describing the characteristics of the women attorneys leading higher education institutions are also included in Part II. Part III describes the overlapping characteristics of lawyers and leaders and includes study results related to the leadership qualities of respondents. Higher education leaders' career pathways are also compared to those of respondents in Part III. Part IV examines the structural and cultural obstacles respondents face in higher education leadership. In Part V, the report describes potential interventions and solutions that may ameliorate some of the unique challenges that women attorneys experience when leading in higher education settings.

# Contours of the Study

## RESEARCH GOALS

This study of Women Attorneys in Higher Education Leadership was designed to:

- 1) benchmark the number of women attorneys in higher education leadership positions;
- 2) identify characteristics and circumstances that make women lawyers successful in higher education leadership;
- 3) identify structural and cultural obstacles to the advancement of women attorneys into higher education leadership; and
- 4) provide insight into what universities, leaders, and women attorneys can do to promote and support women lawyers into higher education leadership.

By benchmarking the number of women attorneys leading higher education institutions, we can establish a baseline from which to measure progress. By naming obstacles, institutions can study effective interventions to overcome them. By sharing strategies, women attorneys can empower and inspire others to success, as well as those who support them.

## SURVEY OVERVIEW AND STUDY METHODOLOGY

This study employed two streams of data collection, the cornerstone of which was a survey of women attorneys who are currently serving, or who formerly served, in higher education leadership roles. The survey instrument (see Appendix) covered experiences related to gender bias, career pathways, preparation for and experiences in higher education leadership, and demographic information. This sample was designed to reach as many women attorneys as possible who are currently serving,

or who formerly served, in higher education leadership roles. For the purpose of this study, higher education leadership roles included college or university president, provost, or dean. The sample included:

- All current women law school deans, including those serving as interim deans;
- All former women law school deans who held the position between 2010 and 2025; and
- Women attorneys who were identified as currently or formerly serving in higher education leadership roles based on publicly available information.<sup>19</sup>

The sample of women attorney leaders for whom email addresses could be found totaled 274. These survey invitees included 75 currently sitting law school deans, 100 former law school deans, and a variety of other leaders from a wide variety of law schools and higher education institutions throughout the country. The survey received 121 responses in total, which represents a 44.2 percent response rate. Though our respondents are small in number, a response rate of over 40 percent far exceeded our expectations for this survey.

All 274 invitees received a personalized introduction from the authors in May of 2025, prior to the survey launch. This message explained the project and research goals and invited recipients to participate in the survey when it arrived in their inboxes. The survey launched on June 3, 2025, and remained open through the end of July 2025. Survey recipients were contacted by email with survey reminders both through the Association of American Law Schools' (AALS) survey platform, as well as with personalized messages from the authors.

The research team at AALS conducted the survey, performed all data analysis, and anonymized respondent data. In the findings that follow, some very small groups of respondents have been combined to protect respondents' anonymity. Combinations of this nature will be noted throughout the report, as will omissions when cell sizes are too small to report without disclosure risk. To maximize usable responses for each question, incomplete survey responses were included in the analysis for any question to which the respondent provided an answer.

To complement the quantitative data collected through the survey, the authors invited women law school deans to participate in a voluntary focus group in July 2025. All current sitting women law school deans were invited, and seven current sitting deans participated in the focus group, a second stream of data collection, which centered on experiences of gender bias in their current and previous leadership roles. Throughout the report, findings will draw from both the quantitative survey results as well as the rich conversations shared during the focus group.

Women leaders who responded to the survey were asked to optionally provide name and contact information for their current or former supervisors. Very few respondents (fewer than 25) provided contact information for supervisors. The authors fielded a short survey to these supervisors containing questions about their experiences hiring, supervising, and working with women attorney leaders, but received only two responses. Therefore, data from the supervisor survey is not included in the findings reported here; experiences and strategies of those who supervise and hire women attorney leaders is a topic that warrants further dedicated research.

## **WHO ARE WOMEN ATTORNEYS IN HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERSHIP?**

As further explained below, lawyers generally have the knowledge, skill, and experience to succeed as leaders in higher education. Nonetheless, attorneys comprise only a small set of presidents, provosts, and college deans. Additionally, women are underrepresented as presidents, provosts, and law school deans. Thus, the authors hypothesized that women attorneys were also underrepresented in higher education leadership positions.<sup>20</sup>

An initial goal of this survey is to benchmark the number of women attorneys who have served or currently serve as university presidents, provosts, or deans. From this point, the legal profession and higher education can gauge both progress and regression in tracking the number of women attorneys serving in these leadership roles. If institutions determine that they are failing to maximize the

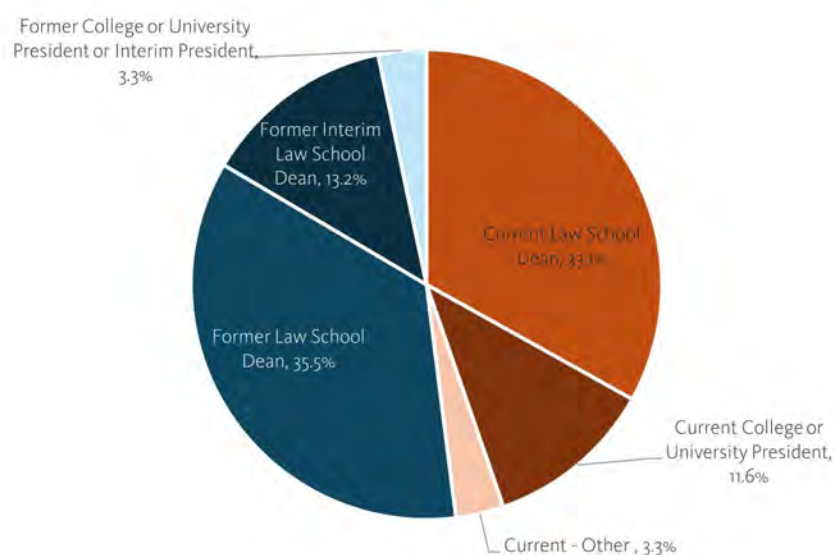
potential organizational benefits offered by women attorneys, they can strategically undertake efforts to improve. Without benchmarking, however, institutions cannot begin to identify shortcomings or measure the impact of interventions.

It was not possible to identify all living attorneys who have led American universities at the president, provost, and dean level; we were only able to identify the contact information for 274 women to have served in any of those roles. As the U.S. is home to nearly 4,000 colleges and universities and approximately 200 law schools, women attorneys have not represented any sizable proportion of higher education leaders, despite the skills and experience they could bring to these organizations. Given that many women attorneys are well-prepared to lead higher education institutions, it is useful to examine factors that contribute to their gross underrepresentation in these roles.

## SURVEY RESPONDENT PROFILE

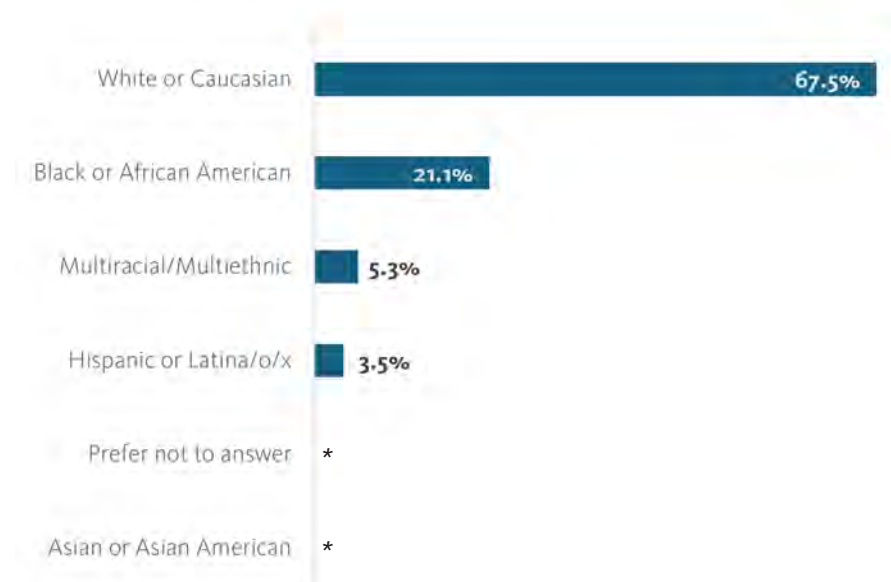
A majority of survey respondents were current and former law school deans (33.1% and 35.5% respectively).<sup>21</sup> Current law school deans made up 27 percent of all survey invitees and therefore were slightly overrepresented in the responses. The high response rate from this group likely reflects a strong interest in this topic by women lawyers who are currently serving in higher education leadership roles, the majority of whom are leading law schools. Smaller percentages of our respondent pool were comprised of current college or university presidents (11.6%), former interim law school deans (13.2%), former college or university presidents or interim presidents (3.3%), and other current leaders (3.3%). Former college or university presidents and interim presidents represented slightly less than 8 percent of all survey invitees and were therefore underrepresented in the responses.

**Figure 2. Survey respondents by position type**



By race and ethnicity, the composition of our respondent pool closely mirrors that of current law school deans. Today, about 12 percent of women law school deans are Black or African American leaders;<sup>22</sup> a higher percentage (19.8%) of our survey respondents were Black or African American women leaders. About two-thirds (63.6%) of respondents were White or Caucasian, compared with about 67 percent of law school deans overall.<sup>23</sup> Smaller numbers of women leaders of other races and ethnicities responded to our survey.

**Figure 3. Survey respondents by race/ethnicity**



*\* Too small to report*

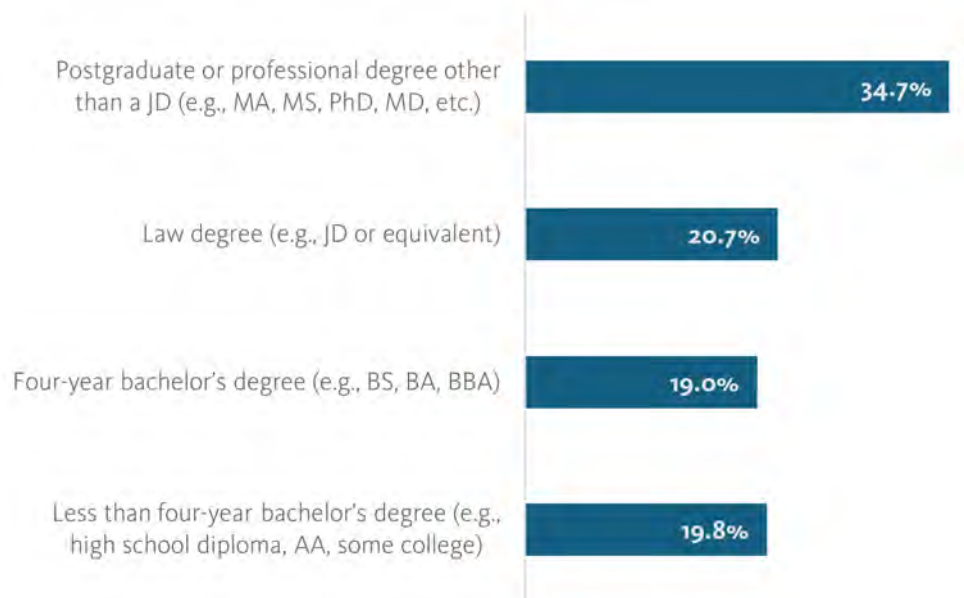
It is worth noting that there is a relationship between the composition of our respondents by race/ethnicity and the positions that qualified them to participate in the survey. It is well-documented that, as women began to take on the role of law dean in greater numbers in the 1980s and 1990s, a majority of these first women deans were White.<sup>24</sup> There has been an increase in the number of women of color serving as law deans, particularly since 2015.<sup>25</sup> This means that, in any study that includes perspectives from women law deans (who comprise most of our respondent pool), respondents who are currently serving in leadership roles will, by definition, be more diverse by race/ethnicity than respondents who formerly held these roles. More specifically, 58.3 percent of Black or African American survey respondents are currently serving in a higher education leadership role, compared with just 43 percent of White or Caucasian respondents. Findings in this report will include responses from former leaders who are more likely to be White or Caucasian and should be interpreted with this in mind.

In addition to considering the racial and ethnic backgrounds of women leaders, it is helpful to know when in the arc of their careers these women began taking on leadership roles. Over three quarters (81.2%) of survey respondents earned their JD between 1980 and 1999. Using this as a proxy for age means that most of our respondents are between roughly 50 and 70 years old. Given that most law school deans overall are under age 50, our respondent pool is slightly older.<sup>26</sup> This could be a result of

women attaining leadership roles later in their careers than men, and also a reflection of the fact that there are many former leaders in our population who are older than most current deans.

About one-fifth (19.8%) of survey respondents are first-generation college graduates whose parents did not earn a four-year bachelor's degree. A similar proportion (19%) have at least one parent who earned a bachelor's degree, and over one-half (55%) reported having at least one parent with a law degree or other advanced degree. These findings are consistent with those from previous research on law school deans' socioeconomic backgrounds, which also found that about 20 percent of law school deans overall are first-generation college students and about 55 percent have a parent with a law or other advanced degree.<sup>27</sup> Law school deans are more likely than the general population to come from families with higher education experience, and it follows that women attorneys in other higher education leadership roles are as well.

**Figure 4. Parental education levels of survey respondents**



## Lawyers Make Good Leaders

It should not be surprising that lawyers are successful in higher education leadership, because the skills and characteristics of good lawyers mirror the hallmarks of good leaders.<sup>28</sup> Women attorneys demonstrate many of these characteristics and even tend to prioritize some that are less frequently cited by male leaders as essential leadership skills.<sup>29</sup> All current and aspiring leaders in higher education may benefit from better understanding the unique skills practiced by effective women attorney leaders.

One of the primary goals of this *Women Attorneys in Higher Education Leadership* report was to examine the characteristics and circumstances, including the career pathways and preparation of successful women attorney leaders. In the sections that follow, insights from survey and focus group participants shed light on these questions.

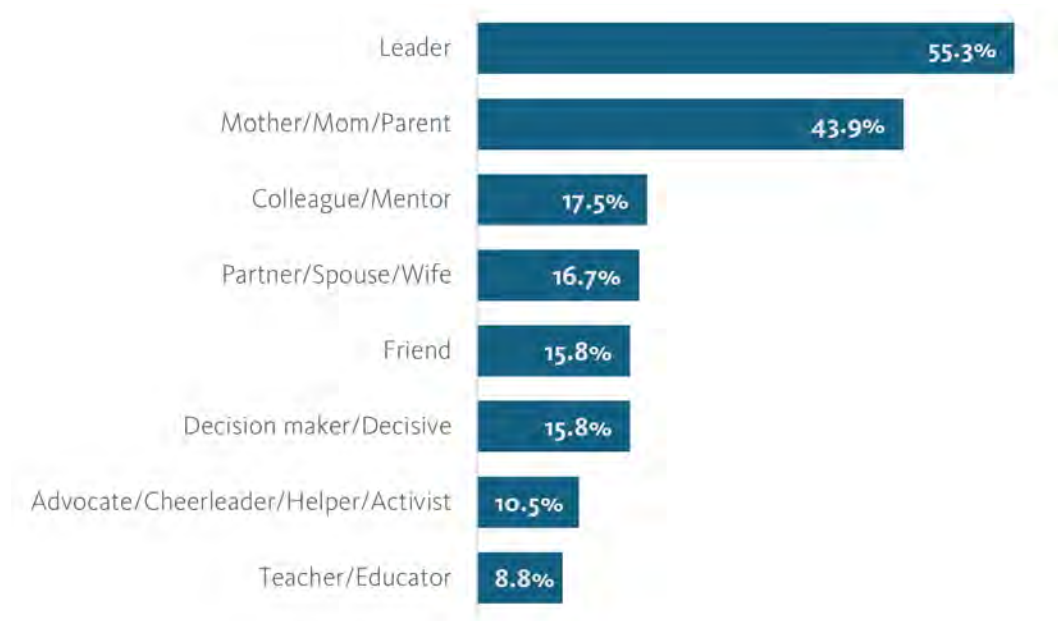


## OVERLAPPING CHARACTERISTICS & CIRCUMSTANCES

Lawyers tend to be skilled in problem-solving, crisis management, negotiation, critical thinking, and communication, preparing them well for the challenges of modern higher education leadership.<sup>30</sup> “Presidents with legal training can put the lawyer’s tool kit to good use making tough decisions, navigating legal complexities of compliance, and addressing issues arising from programmatic, human resources, and contractual obligations to help chart a sustainable course for the campus and the community it serves.”<sup>31</sup> Moreover, “as the higher education landscape continues to evolve – and in many instances becomes even more unstable – the calm, critical, and analytical approach that most lawyers tend to apply will be even more useful in the future.”<sup>32</sup>

Beyond the valuable skill set attorneys bring to these leadership roles, it is important to ask what characteristics specifically describe or define successful women attorney leaders.<sup>33</sup> Self-identity is a key reference point in terms of professional positioning, and for women attorney leaders participating in this study, there was a strong consensus around leadership and motherhood. Over one-half (55.3%) identified themselves as a “leader” and a slightly smaller proportion (43.9%) identified themselves as a mother, mom, or parent. Other common characteristics that respondents identified were colleague/mentor (17.5%), partner/spouse/wife (16.7%), decision maker (15.8%), and friend (15.8%).<sup>34</sup>

**Figure 5. Women attorney leaders commonly cited "leader" and mother, mom, or parent as characteristics of identity they use to define themselves**

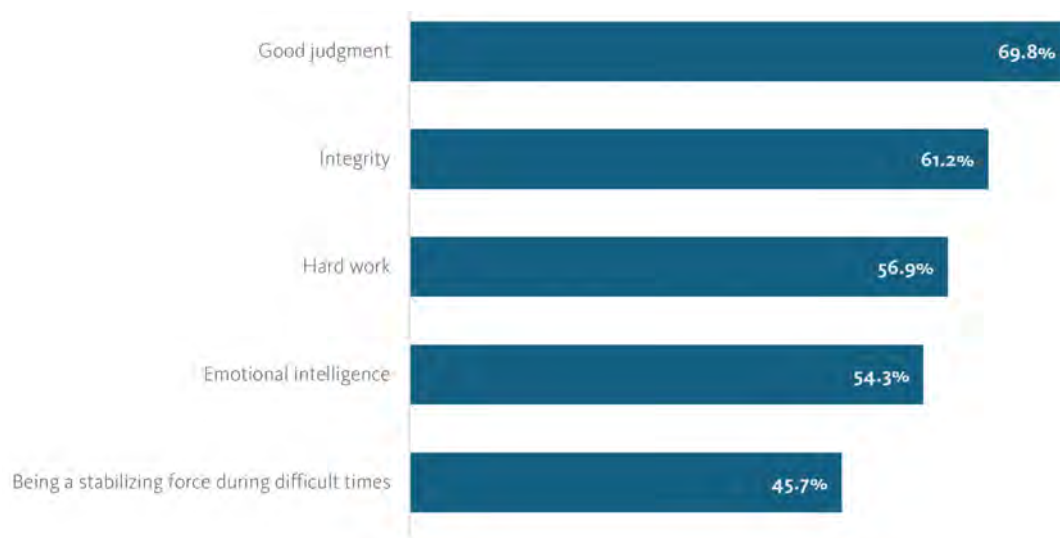


The mix of personal and professional identity characteristics among respondents is interesting because it suggests that successful women attorney leaders may bring interpersonal skills, such as emotional intelligence, resilience, empathy, and patience, to their leadership style. In this way, allowing space for personal identity alongside professional leadership may be a strategy for success for women. This may surprise some readers, who may be fully aware of the structural obstacles

women attorneys and women professors often face as maternal figures. The “motherhood penalty” describes the economic and employment disadvantages imposed on women by virtue of having children or even possessing the capacity to bear children. Within the legal profession, it “affects a mother’s hiring prospects, assignments, earnings, evaluations, and promotions.”<sup>35</sup> The “motherhood penalty” often drives women out of the work force before they advance to leadership positions.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to how women attorney leaders characterize themselves, understanding the attributes they believe have contributed to their success as leaders clarifies further what they bring to the table. Good judgment, integrity, hard work, and emotional intelligence were selected by a majority of respondents as the attributes most helpful to their success as a leader. These findings echo those from earlier research on law school deans, which showed that greater proportions of women deans than their male counterparts viewed emotional intelligence and integrity as important attributes in helping a dean succeed.<sup>37</sup> The ability to listen (39.7%), collaboration (29.3%), and the ability to convey the school’s mission and purpose (25.0%) were cited less frequently but still by at least one-quarter of respondents.<sup>38</sup>

**Figure 6. Good judgment was most commonly cited by women leaders as most helpful in their success as a leader**



While women attorneys, like all attorneys, are trained in the technical skills required to successfully lead in higher education – complex problem-solving, business organization, and crisis management – these are not necessarily the only things that come to mind when they think about themselves as leaders. Instead, the more intangible ideas of being a leader and a parent are top of mind when women attorney leaders think about how they characterize themselves. Moreover, judgment (56.9%), integrity (61.2%), hard work (56.9%), and emotional intelligence (54.3%) stood out to our respondents as keys to success, again demonstrating that these interpersonal skills and attributes can complement the technical skill sets needed to succeed in higher education leadership roles.

## **PATHWAYS TO AND PREPARATION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERSHIP**

Although alternatives exist, the path to most college presidencies typically begins with a faculty appointment, followed by an administrative leadership position, such as dean, and service as a university provost.<sup>39</sup> This study sought to identify similarities and differences experienced by women attorneys in reaching their higher education leadership posts.

### **TRADITIONAL PATHWAYS**

The most well-traveled path to higher education leadership begins with a faculty appointment. “Historically, the typical path to the college presidency began with a faculty member who served as a department chair or dean and then became a provost or held some other senior leadership post in the central administration.”<sup>40</sup> According to one 2022 study, over one-half of college and university presidents came from a faculty or academic background.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, previous research on law school deans has shown that the vast majority – over 80 percent – come from inside the legal academy.<sup>42</sup> This is not surprising given that the ABA requires that deans be tenured members of the faculty, except in “extraordinary circumstances.”<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, while the number of lawyer presidents has grown, the percentage of law professor presidents has actually fallen over time.<sup>44</sup>

The results of this study largely mirror these broad trends. About half (50.9%) of survey respondents primarily served as faculty members at a law school prior to their current or most recent leadership role, and another one-quarter (25.9%) served primarily in an administrative role at a law school.<sup>45</sup> Law professors have skills for higher education leadership because they understand substantive law, litigation, risk, alternative dispute resolution, persuasion, and communication.<sup>46</sup> Law school deans have even more applicable skills for presidential appointments, including fundraising, shared governance, budget oversight, and strategic direction.<sup>47</sup> While it is most common for law school deans to return to the faculty after their deanship concludes, a small percentage do move on to university or college president or provost positions.<sup>48</sup>

Although faculty appointments are the typical starting place for attorneys pursuing higher education leadership, there are only 197 ABA-accredited law schools approved to offer the JD degree<sup>49</sup> compared to the thousands of universities from which other disciplines may produce leaders.<sup>50</sup> While provost experience is a typical pathway to a presidency, lawyer presidents are unlikely to have this experience.<sup>51</sup> Lawyers are atypical provosts at the overwhelming majority of American universities, especially those without law schools.<sup>52</sup>

Not all attorneys serving as leaders in institutions of higher education followed a traditional path through the academy as professors in either law schools or other colleges. Alternative paths to leadership run through the office of general counsel, the board of trustees, or through government service.<sup>53</sup> Each path offers training in some of the skills necessary for successful leadership in higher education.

## THE JOURNEY OF WOMEN ATTORNEYS

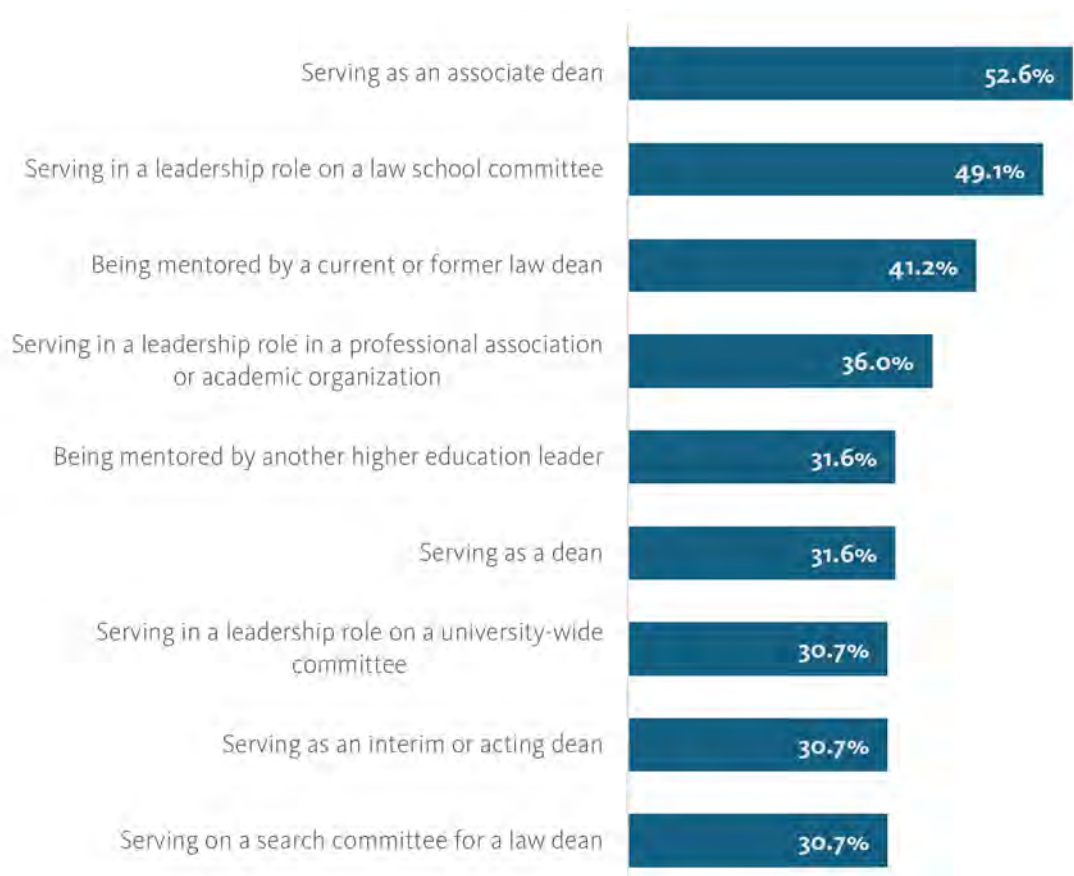
Given that women are underrepresented across higher education leadership, and women attorneys even more so, it is helpful to examine the ways in which successful women attorneys prepared for their careers in higher education leadership. As mentioned above, most of the survey respondents reported career pathways originating primarily as law school faculty members or administrators prior to their current or most recent leadership roles. The experiences these women had and the career pathways they pursued prior to their leadership roles can be informative for women aspiring to higher education leadership roles, and for those who support them.

As previously described, most respondents to the survey are between ages 50 and 70, using the year they earned their JD as a proxy, which likely reflects the high proportion of former deans in our population. When considering only current leaders, over one-half (54.2%) earned their JDs in the 1990s, meaning most current leaders are between 50 and 60 years old. Previous research on sitting deans found that the average age of a sitting law school dean in 2020 was 53.7 years old.<sup>54</sup> This aligns strongly with our findings on when in their career women are reaching leadership positions, suggesting that despite the cultural and structural obstacles women face throughout their careers, they are not necessarily attaining leadership positions much later than their male counterparts.

In addition to understanding how long women leaders work to prepare for their leadership roles, it is useful also to learn about their academic backgrounds. It is well-documented, especially in the legal academy which produces the vast majority of women attorney leaders in higher education, that “deans tend to . . . have mostly graduated from a small group of elite law schools.”<sup>55</sup> This holds true across institutions: deans who graduated from the top law schools are more likely to become deans across all law schools than deans who graduated from lower-ranked schools.<sup>56</sup> This study of women attorneys in higher education leadership reveals some concentration in terms of where leaders earned their degrees: almost one-quarter (23.5%) of respondents earned their JD from Harvard or Yale. About another tenth (9.2%) combined earned their JD from New York University, the University of California, San Francisco, and the University of Michigan. However, about two-thirds (67.4%) of respondents earned their JD elsewhere, suggesting that women leaders may be more likely to have earned their JD from a wider range of schools than law school deans overall.

Earning a law degree is one early step in women attorneys’ careers. What other experiences are helpful to them as they prepare for leadership roles later on in their career pathways? About one-half (52.6%) of survey respondents cited serving as an associate dean as helpful in preparing them for their current or most recent leadership role, and a similar proportion (49.1%) cited serving in a leadership role on a law school committee. Mentorship, serving on search committees for various positions, and other leadership roles were also seen as helpful preparation. These findings align with previous research on law school deans showing that they, too, found serving as an associate dean and in a leadership role on a law school committee to be the most helpful experiences in preparing for a law school deanship.<sup>57</sup> Survey respondents were more likely than law school deans overall to point to a leadership role in a professional association or academic organization as a helpful experience (36% of survey respondents vs. 25% of law school deans overall).<sup>58</sup>

**Figure 7. Serving as an associate dean was cited as a helpful experience in preparing for a leadership role by over one-half of women attorney leaders**



*\*Note: other experiences were listed by smaller proportions of respondents and therefore are not reported here.*

To summarize, women attorneys, like other higher education leaders, are likely to have come from an academic background, and in the survey population, mainly from a background in law teaching. Current women attorney leaders are most likely to be in their fifties, which aligns with other research on law school deans overall. While about one-third (32.7%) of respondents earned their JDs at a small number of higher-ranking law schools, there seems to be greater diversity among women leaders in terms of their academic backgrounds when compared to law school deans overall. Lastly, respondents identified serving as associate dean, leading a law school search committee, and mentorship as the most important experiences in terms of preparing for higher education leadership roles.

# Obstacles to Women Attorneys in Higher Education Leadership

Previous research has documented gender inequities in the legal profession<sup>59</sup> and in higher education.<sup>60</sup> Many of these circumstances have been attributed to myriad structural and cultural obstacles.<sup>61</sup> This study sought to assess whether women attorneys experienced similar challenges in their higher education leadership positions, to better prepare such women, the leaders who support them, and the institutions for which they work to develop strategies for overcoming them. Nearly three-quarters (74.8%) of survey respondents agreed they had experienced gender bias in their current or most recent role. An overwhelming majority of respondents also agreed or strongly agreed they had overcome obstacles to success because of their gender identity (71.9%). The challenges that survey respondents identified were, indeed, both structural and cultural.

**74.8%**  
of survey respondents  
agree they have  
experienced gender bias  
in their current or most  
recent role

## STRUCTURAL OBSTACLES

Recognizing that women attorneys have made up a disproportionately low number of leaders in higher education over time, this research seeks to identify structural or institutionalized obstacles to the advancement of women attorneys in this setting. Gender inequities in compensation in the legal profession and in higher education have been well-documented.<sup>62</sup> Scholars have previously identified gender bias in the annual evaluation and assessment processes employed by law firms and universities as an obstacle to the advancement of women in those fields.<sup>63</sup> This current research sought to consider whether women attorneys also experienced these or other structural barriers to advancement into higher education leadership.

In addition to acknowledging gender bias, several survey respondents cited intersectional bias frequently in response to open-ended survey questions. They explained that the intersection of multiple identities – primarily racial, ethnic, and gender identities – were at the heart of their experiences of bias as attorneys in higher education leadership. This survey was not designed to appropriately assess the impact of intersectionality, but responses were significant enough that they must be mentioned here in relation to structural obstacles that warrant dedicated study.

## COMPENSATION & STATUS

A wage gap exists in many industries, including the legal profession.<sup>64</sup> Women in higher education are not exempt and are compensated at 81.2 percent of the salaries of their male counterparts for the same work,<sup>65</sup> which adversely affects the pool of potential candidates remaining in the field to gain the experience necessary to become leaders in higher education. The authors hypothesized that women attorneys in higher education leadership would report similar inequities.

Earlier research on law school faculty found that “women are disproportionately represented among clinical or legal writing faculty positions.”<sup>66</sup> Further, women “constitute the majority of faculty in each position, except for tenured classroom faculty and dean positions.”<sup>67</sup> The same study found that less than one-half (44%) of law schools extend tenure eligibility to clinical faculty and even fewer (25%) to legal writing faculty, positions which women are more likely than men to hold. So, women law faculty, who are among the most likely women attorneys to become higher education leaders, tend to be concentrated in positions that are less likely to be eligible for tenure, which is a requirement to become a law school dean and almost certainly a prerequisite to advance beyond that. The combination of these factors necessarily limits the pathways for women to seek higher education leadership roles. In fact, several survey respondents commented that people were more surprised to see them succeeding in a leadership role because of their academic backgrounds in clinical legal education or legal writing, rather than as doctrinal faculty (as compared to being surprised to see them succeed in the role because of their gender).

As with women attorneys,<sup>68</sup> women faculty bear a disproportionate burden for performing service, which makes tenure more difficult, limiting the traditional pipeline to higher education leadership.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, traditional faculty voting structures concentrate voting power in full professors with tenure, a group historically dominated by White men.<sup>70</sup> Non-tenure-track faculty, a group populated mostly by women,<sup>71</sup> are the least enfranchised. By concentrating voting power in a group where women and people of color are least represented, higher education institutions ensure that women pursuing promotion and tenure on the pathway to leadership are more likely to face gendered obstacles.

Additionally, many women coming through the traditional academic pipeline to higher education leadership are filtered out by the “pink ghetto.” This phrase describes the inequities of compensation and power in fields dominated by women or other marginalized groups, such as teaching and nursing.<sup>72</sup> The first research to apply the phrase to higher education did so in the law school setting to describe such inequities in non-tenure-track appointments in the areas of clinical teaching, legal writing, academic success, bar preparation, and libraries.<sup>73</sup> Faculty in these positions dominated by women are compensated at considerably lower salaries than tenured and tenure-track faculty.<sup>74</sup>

While compensation may be a factor limiting the pool from which women attorneys in higher education develop into leaders, it may not be a significant factor to women once they reach leadership positions. Among women attorneys currently serving in higher education leadership roles responding to the survey, almost two-thirds (61.1%) reported earning more than their male predecessors; a much smaller proportion (13%) reported earning the same or less than their male predecessors. Interestingly, a full quarter (25.7%) of current women leaders did not know how their salary compares to that of their male predecessors.<sup>75</sup>

Findings from the July 2025 focus group, and open-ended responses from the survey, indicate that the large number of respondents reporting earning salaries higher than their predecessors could be the result of intense negotiation rather than a reflection of women leaders being offered a similar or higher salary than their male predecessors. One survey respondent reported: “After starting the job



as dean, I saw the detailed budget and realized that I was being paid \$20K a year less than the male dean who preceded me and by most metrics had an unsuccessful deanship.” Another reported being paid less than both her male predecessor and successor.

One focus group participant, in describing salary negotiations in her first deanship, remarked that the law school initially “offered her less than [her predecessor],” despite the fact that he was “not even a full professor.” She knew she needed to negotiate this, but sensitively, so as not to “blow everything up.” Another focus group participant was told, as explanation for why she was offered two-thirds of her male predecessor’s salary, that her male predecessor was “the breadwinner of his family.” Several other participants described having to do research on male predecessors’ salaries and having to push hard in negotiations to be offered a greater or equal salary than their predecessors. While being offered a lower salary from the start was a common experience, one survey respondent also pointed out that her male predecessors had higher salaries, but after many years of successful tenure, insinuating that she understood why her offer might have been lower in that specific context.

These anecdotes add context to survey findings: women leaders may end up making more than their male predecessors but this increase is not necessarily based on the first offer. More likely, women leaders will need to research and go back and forth in negotiations to be paid equally. While the onus should be on institutions hiring leaders to offer equitable compensation from the outset, women who aspire to higher education leadership roles should be aware and prepared to negotiate in this way as they are accepting these jobs.

## ASSESSMENT

Women attorneys in higher education are not unusual in that they are subject to gender bias in performance evaluations by supervisors.<sup>76</sup> As with many women in higher education, women attorneys in higher education leadership face the additional obstacle of gender bias in evaluations not only from supervisors above, but also from students below.<sup>77</sup> Nearly two-thirds (61.5%) of respondents reported having received a performance or student evaluation that they believed was negatively influenced by their gender identity. One survey respondent commented: “I do think students are harsher in their reviews of female professors.”

This double team of gender bias in evaluations adversely affects the evaluations of women in higher education annually and is compounded each year. The degree to which women attorneys in higher education must overperform to remain in the pool of potential leaders in higher education grows each year they are subject to bias in evaluation.

# 61.5%

of survey respondents report having received a performance or student evaluation that they believe was negatively influenced by their gender identity



## CULTURAL OBSTACLES

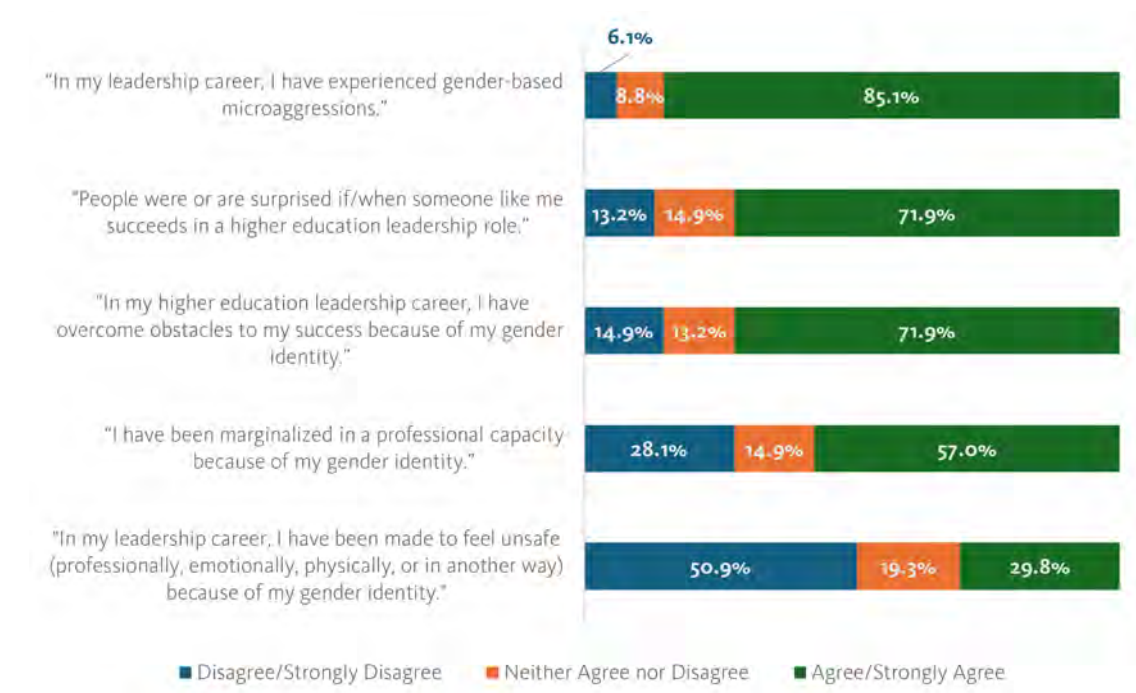
The number of cultural obstacles reported by women within the legal profession and those in higher education has been extensively documented.<sup>78</sup> The authors refer to cultural obstacles and cultural gender bias to describe the manifestation of gender stereotypes that have “become part of a society's shared knowledge.”<sup>79</sup> In an effort to design a manageable survey instrument that would be completed by busy university leaders, the authors necessarily limited their inquiry to the following topics raised by women attorneys leading in higher education in the very early development of this project: underestimation and marginalization, microaggressions, safety risks, and physical appearance.

Cultural gender bias is obviously and unfortunately a common experience for women leading higher education institutions. “Women still face a longstanding double standard and a double bind. They risk criticism for being too ‘soft’ or too ‘strident,’ too ‘aggressive’ or ‘not aggressive enough.’”<sup>80</sup> Moreover, “what appears assertive in a man often appears abrasive in a woman.”<sup>81</sup> One focus group participant described a situation in which she had been told by a female peer to be “nicer” and more “caring” to their male superior; that women leaders should be “tough but also be nice.” Another explained a feeling that some students, faculty, and others wanted her to “have a more mothering personality in this space.” These stories highlight the pressures women feel, even from female peers, to skillfully balance being a strong leader while staying within the bounds of what people expect from a woman leader.

## UNDERESTIMATION & MARGINALIZATION

As with women attorneys in practice,<sup>82</sup> underestimation and marginalization were common experiences of women attorneys in higher education leadership. A majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that people were or are surprised to see someone like them in a higher education leadership role (71.9%). A smaller but not insignificant proportion of respondents agreed they had been marginalized professionally because of their gender identity (57.0%).

**Figure 8. A majority of women attorneys report experiencing gender bias in various ways throughout their leadership careers**



Survey respondents offered examples of these experiences in response to the survey and in the focus group. One survey respondent lamented: "I don't know one woman who has not experienced some type of discrimination." Another was more specific, describing "being questioned about [her] competence by students" and "being told by the head of the law school that [she] was responsible for the incompetence of [her] supervisor".

There are, of course, variations in experiences of discrimination and, in turn, how these experiences impact women leaders personally and professionally. One survey respondent, for example, commented: "These questions are difficult to answer because none of my experiences are only because of my gender identity. They are because of my intersectional race and gender identity. My experiences as a Black woman leader are very distinct from those of my White female peers. I face and encounter an entirely different set of stereotypes, reactions, and challenges." This sentiment was echoed by several other survey respondents who mentioned that it is difficult or impossible to separate their experiences of gender bias from their racial and/or ethnic identities. Survey respondents shared other ways that intersectionality impacts their experiences of marginalization as well, such as in regard to sexual orientation, family backgrounds, and having a career pathway other than tenured classroom faculty prior to a leadership role. One respondent, for example, reported that "lack of an 'elite' education and coming from a non-traditional background – first-generation college, working-class family – were as much obstacles as [her] gender."

## SAFETY RISKS

There have been reports that some women attorneys in higher education leadership may have faced public pressure to resign or suffered threats in their professional positions.<sup>83</sup> Although it was not the experience of a majority of respondents, about one-third (29.8%) agreed they had been made to feel unsafe (professionally, emotionally, physically, or in another way) because of their gender identity.

Though about one-half (50.9%) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had been made to feel unsafe, there were some salient anecdotes in both the survey and during our focus group. One respondent was “subject to threats and egregious statements made online;” another reported always having “sexual harassment and borderline sexual harassment” on her mind while traveling to fundraise; and a third described gendered “bullying and retribution” from a supervisor. Focus group participants also shared several examples of feeling unsafe and pointed out that the kind of threatening behavior they experienced would likely not be experienced by their male counterparts. One participant remarked: “I’m pretty sure that male deans aren’t getting rape threats in the mail, I’m pretty sure they’re not getting the kind of language that was used . . . [and] I think that the way it’s intended and the way it lands is supposed to make women feel insecure in their position[.]” Another described dealing with “overt hostility” earlier in her career; for example, “being blocked in [her] office” while being “berated” and getting “body checked into a wall.”

Despite some alarming accounts of harassment from the survey and focus group, the responses reporting feeling unsafe were not uniform. Some respondents described mixed feelings about this, while others denied ever feeling this way or suggested that discrimination, as opposed to safety, is the real issue at hand. One survey respondent wrote about her own response in situations where she might have felt unsafe: “Regarding microaggressions and feelings of being unsafe, so much of this turns on my perceptions of others’ intentions. I have certainly encountered remarks that I thought would NEVER have been made to a man, but I try to remain a little agnostic about whether the intention behind those remarks is aggressive.” Several respondents also raised intersectionality here – again, specifically the intersections between racial and ethnic and gender identity that contributed to situations where they felt unsafe or discriminated against.

## MICROAGGRESSIONS

Microaggressions are a documented obstacle to women advancing in the legal profession.<sup>84</sup>

“Micromessages are small messages that reinforce implicit bias and group dynamics. Predominantly male paintings and photographs displayed throughout a law school are examples of nonverbal micromessages. Addressing a female faculty member by her first name, while male faculty members are referred to using titles like “professor,” is an example of a verbal micromessage. These messages are microaggressions that communicate microinequities which influence a woman’s interactions with colleagues, student engagement, professional credibility, and overall outcomes. Individual messages have a cumulative negative and positive effect on recipients and observers.”<sup>85</sup>

Examples of microaggressions in the context of women attorneys in higher education leadership might include mansplaining, addressing a leader informally without her title, or failing to hang her portrait among her male predecessors’.

An overwhelming majority (85.1%) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed they had experienced gender-based microaggressions in their leadership positions. Survey respondents offered several examples of these, “from being called ‘lady dean’ . . . to [a] university president expressing skepticism about women in leadership positions.” One survey respondent also reported this behavior coming from female in addition to male peers: “I had colleagues who were also women or women of color who undermined me in public and private as well as White male colleagues who did the same.” One focus group participant described an interaction with a donor in which the donor referred to her as a “little girl.” Another described how, in a recent meeting with a board chair, another dean, and a donor (all men), the “donor and the board chair did not talk to [her] . . . even though the donor was a law school grad and [she is] the law school dean.” Even after physically moving within the room, it was difficult to get the donor to make eye contact with her.

While it is clear that many women leaders are experiencing microaggressions in various forms on a regular basis, some survey respondents had different views. For example, one respondent reported experiencing “common forms of gender bias/micro-aggressions/ non-threatening advances . . . [that did] not translate into obstacles to [her] career advancement or interfere with [her] ability to succeed [in her] role.” Another respondent took issue with the term “microaggressions,” commenting that “they’re either aggressions or not worth caring about.” These perspectives illuminate the widely varied experiences women leaders have in terms of receiving and perceiving gender-based microaggressions throughout their careers.

**85.1%**  
of survey respondents  
agree or strongly agree  
they have experienced  
gender-based  
microaggressions in their  
leadership positions

The implementation of structural bias can also be a form of microaggression. For example, compensating a woman attorney at a salary lower than that of a male equal may be a structural obstacle, but offering to pay that woman less, which may occur more frequently than measured in this survey, sends the message that the woman is worth less than her male peers. This is not an uncommon experience, as evidenced by anecdotes from our focus group. For example, one participant asked her provost at the time, “What message do you want to send to all the women and people of color who are so excited about this appointment?” and stood firm in the face of a low salary offer, stating, “I cannot accept this because you would be sending a signal that I am worth less, and I don’t believe that I am.”

## KEEPING UP APPEARANCES

The arguably impossible double-standard governing expectations of the leadership styles of women attorneys in higher education leadership, not surprisingly, extends to the physical appearance of these same women. Women leaders are expected to meet minimum standards for appearance that require greater effort than that of their male peers. To prove themselves, women “have to look young, but also look experienced.”<sup>86</sup>

Over three-quarters (78.9%) of survey respondents agreed they pay more attention to their appearance than their male peers. Unfortunately, as these women have advanced into greater leadership roles, physical appearance has become more, rather than less, critical; 73.7 percent agreed they pay more attention to their appearance now than earlier in their career.

Physical appearance is not the only way in which women attorneys face social pressures in their higher education leadership roles. Additional aspects of balancing the social expectations of the job with other obligations and responsibilities came up during the study. One leader reported receiving advice that she should trade in her minivan for something “more professional” to be taken seriously.

Several focus group respondents raised the expectation or pressure for law school deans to host student dinners or other functions in their homes, naming the fact that male deans too often are able to rely upon their wives or female partners as “free labor” to assist with these types of events and other social expectations.

# 73.7%

of survey respondents agree they pay more attention to their appearance now than earlier in their career



You know another thing that gets overlooked is the social aspect. What do I mean by that? The previous model was that a male dean comes in, and the wife is free labor. By that I mean . . . there’s a reception; . . . she’s putting out canapes. . . . [He] look[s] starched every day because somebody runs to the cleaners, somebody takes care of the car.



One participant even remarked: “I have never once heard a female dean . . . [say] ‘we host them at the thing, my wife, or my husband, or my partner, does this.’”

Women attorneys face many similar structural and cultural obstacles in higher education leadership as they do in professional practice and academic settings. Inequitable compensation and assessment affect the pipeline to leadership. Cultural gender bias may hinder the opportunities and the interest of women attorneys seeking out and succeeding in these roles.

## Strategies to Promote & Support Women Leaders

Existing literature offers many interventions that may help women attorneys overcome obstacles to advancement in practice; proposed solutions may be similarly applicable to women attorneys in higher education leadership. Additionally, much can be learned from the advice of women attorneys leading higher education institutions. They have learned a great deal about success through their experiences and from the good counsel of others. Their advice to women attorneys aspiring to higher education leadership and to those who would support them is invaluable.

### **BENCHMARKS & ACCOUNTABILITY**

One goal of this current research, and an urgent need in the higher education leadership space, is to benchmark the number of women attorneys who have served or currently serve as university or college leaders. By benchmarking a starting point, higher education collectively or institutions individually can then collect data against which they can mark progress over time. In this way, they can hold themselves accountable.

To achieve accountability, institutions must ask difficult questions and reflect on the responses. Exit interviews are an effective tool to identify how institutions may improve by reflecting on where they may have failed.<sup>87</sup> It is all too convenient to the narrative to assume women attorneys are leaving because caretaking is incompatible with legal work.<sup>88</sup> That narrative suggests that law firms can do nothing to improve the situation and absolves the firms of their role in promoting such a culture, if it does in fact exist, and of their responsibility to consider additional factors contributing to the dissatisfaction of women attorneys.<sup>89</sup> Cultural climate surveys are another way organizations can identify areas for improvement before losing their best human assets. These interventions involve little financial investment and offer large rewards to those universities that are willing to look in the mirror to address their shortcomings and improve.

## MENTORING & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Perhaps because “46% of women of color and 60% of White women reported that they were denied informal or formal networking opportunities because of gender,”<sup>90</sup> the literature on efforts to promote the advancement of women attorneys in practice often highlights mentoring and professional development as effective interventions.<sup>91</sup> That advice was echoed by respondents to this survey. A large majority (76.7%) of respondents reported they have or had a mentor or champion. Asked how their mentor or champion helped them advance professionally, survey respondents most commonly noted receiving a recommendation or nomination for a specific position or positions; extending general advice; giving or supporting opportunities for leadership; and listening to challenges.

Though it is clear that mentorship provides a major support to women in leadership, finding a mentor can seem like a daunting task for early-career women aspiring to leadership roles. Survey respondents who said they did have a mentor or champion were asked how they identified their mentor. Many respondents mentioned that their mentor reached out to or identified them. Others wrote about organic relationship-building, reaching out to someone they admired, or meeting mentors in their workplace or in other professional settings.

Focus group participants echoed the importance of mentors, as well, and had some perspective on how to develop mentor/mentee relationships. One participant recommended asking: “Can we go to coffee? Can I pick your brain about my career path?;” asking for “informational interviews;” and “staying in touch” over time. “Mentors don’t drop from the sky,” she remarked, and relationship-building is key. Another offered: “My advice is to use the resources, the people resources, that you have cultivated[.] You didn’t get to be a leader by yourself, you’ve met people, you’ve been in different roles, and to use that can be very empowering.”

**76.7%**  
report they have or had a  
mentor or champion

## ALLIES & CHAMPIONS

Women attorneys do not lead higher education institutions alone. They receive help from within and without the walls of their universities, from both professional and personal support systems. Over three-quarters (77.4%) of survey respondents reported that at least one colleague or supervisor has helped them advance professionally. Survey respondents were asked to provide examples of how their colleague or supervisor helped them advance professionally. Many respondents mentioned that their colleague or supervisor provided opportunities for them to take on greater responsibility. For example, one survey respondent described how her supervisor gave her “extremely challenging tasks, [held her] accountable to complete them, and when [her] performance was good, he publicly praised [her] by name in visible ways.” Other examples included colleagues or supervisors acting as sounding boards, providing good general advice, recommending leaders for specific roles or jobs, and providing encouragement.

**77.4%**  
report that at least one  
colleague or supervisor  
has helped them advance  
professionally

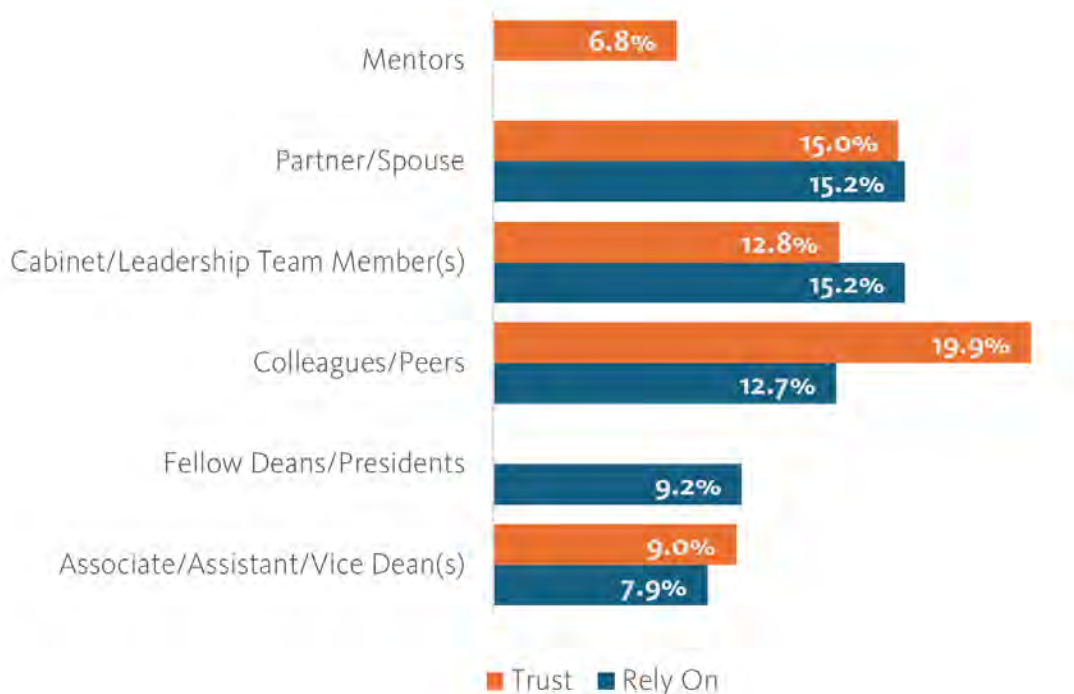


In addition to more formal mentorships and relationships with colleagues and supervisors, this study sought to investigate the close networks of reliable and trustworthy contacts that women leaders build. The survey asked respondents to list three people on whom they rely in fulfilling their leadership responsibilities in their current or most recent role. Survey respondents submitted a wide variety of answers here. The top two most common responses were the cabinet or leadership team and partner or spouse, with 15.2 percent of respondents listing both. Colleagues and peers, as well as fellow deans and presidents were also commonly cited. It is notable that there was a mix of professional and personal contacts in the responses to this question, and it is clear from the range of responses that women leaders have large networks and rely on many people in different facets of their lives to get their jobs done.

Survey respondents were also asked who they trust in fulfilling their leadership responsibilities. Here, there was slightly more consensus, with one-fifth (19.9%) of respondents reporting trusting colleagues and peers and about 15 percent trusting their partner or spouse. Here again, there was a wide range of responses, including cabinet or leadership team, mentors, board members, and personal friends.

There is significant overlap in terms of who women leaders most commonly report that they rely on and trust: colleagues/peers, cabinet/leadership team members, and partners/spouses were cited most often in both categories. While there was a very long, diverse list of responses, it is interesting to note that while women leaders did report relying on fellow deans or presidents, that group did not make the top five in terms of who women leaders trust.

**Figure 9. Women attorney leaders rely on and trust colleagues/peers, their cabinets or leadership teams, and their partners/spouses**





Some survey respondents also reported relying on or trusting an executive or leadership coach in fulfilling their leadership responsibilities. Although the majority of respondents did not have professional or executive coaches, just under one-third (27.2%) of respondents reported having an executive or professional coach in their current or most recent role. Of these, a one-quarter (25.8%) reported paying for the coach themselves and just over one-half (58.1%) reported that their school paid for these services. Some focus group participants mentioned executive or leadership coaching as something that women leaders should know to ask for during contract negotiations. One focus group participant explained: “I have an excellent leadership coach who is a woman who used to be a president of a college” and that this is funded by her law school.

## TRANSPARENT COMPENSATION

Our focus group revealed significant disappointment with the process of negotiating their salaries. Further, a substantial number of survey respondents reported that they are paid less than their predecessors and, even among the majority of respondents who reported being compensated at the same or at a higher salary than their predecessors, negative feelings related to low initial offers and the negotiation process persist. In the focus group for example, some participants expressed their frustration with institutions that publicly championed their progressive decision to elevate women into executive positions, while privately suggesting that these women were literally less valuable than their male peers. Transparent compensation negotiations for all women attorneys in higher education leadership, and indeed for all higher education leaders, would address this structural obstacle for women attorneys succeeding in these roles and attract even more qualified candidates to apply for these positions.

Salary information at most public universities is publicly available, which made lowball offers even more galling because those offering the lower salaries were aware that these women attorneys could uncover this information through their own due diligence.

At private universities, the salary situation is much more fraught because salary data are not publicly available. Negotiating in a vacuum requires these women to rely on information available through their networks, which may be more limited than those available to men.

Respondents also bemoaned limitations on their ability to research benefits negotiated by predecessors. Funding for executive coaching, personal assistants, and other less obvious benefits may be available, but many women attorneys were not aware enough of their existence to seek them in negotiations. Fair and transparent compensation discussions would go a long way toward supporting women attorneys in higher education leadership.

## Conclusion

To the authors, one of the most striking features of this study is the paucity of women attorneys who have served as president, provost, or dean. In a field of more than 4,000 American colleges and universities, the authors were able to identify contact information for only 274 women attorneys leading them in recent history. In light of the vast substantive knowledge and sharp skillset women attorneys offer to advance these institutions in today's highly charged environment, the small number suggests that higher education may be missing out on the contributions of potentially transformational leaders.

With a rise in the number of higher education institutions turning towards attorneys for leadership in a challenging time, women should be supported to pursue such positions equally as men. This study sought to identify those women attorneys who have served or currently do serve as leaders in higher education to benchmark their numbers, document their challenges, and learn from their experiences. This report reveals that, while women attorneys share many of the same characteristics as men who hold these positions, they also bring unique perspectives above and beyond those prerequisites to benefit their institutions.

While there may be many potential solutions to address these biases, some may be more effective than others.

First, institutions that benchmark their record in supporting women attorneys in leadership, investigate issues revealed through climate surveys and exit interviews, and hold themselves accountable will advantage themselves in efforts to attract and retain women attorney leaders. Second, leaders and organizations that support the mentoring and professional development of women attorneys should experience similar positive results. Third, institutions should implement transparent compensation practices, which benefit all employees and alleviate dissatisfaction among underrepresented groups. Those who appreciate women attorneys and the skills they offer also have a role to play by serving as allies and champions.

The results of this study are clear: women attorneys in higher education do experience structural and cultural bias based on gender and intersectionality in various ways and to varying degrees. Through these interventions, however, America's 4,000 colleges and universities can benefit from attracting and retaining the skills and talents of amazing women attorneys.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Patrica E. Salkin, *May It Please the Campus: Lawyers Leading Higher Education*, (Touro Law Center Press, 2022), 154 (quoting Paul Hsun-Ling Chou, "The Dark Spots on the Ivory Tower: Leaders in Higher Education Are Facing More Scrutiny, Higher Stress and Lower Job Security," Korn Ferry); American Council on Education, *The American College President: 2023 Edition* (American Council on Education, 2023), 17.
- <sup>2</sup> Salkin, *May It Please the Campus*, 26 (citing Ginny Schaefer Horvath and Maya Ranchod, "Sharpening the Lens for Hiring Leaders," 2020 Academic Vision Search).
- <sup>3</sup> Salkin, *May It Please the Campus*, 7, 16; Lyle Moran, "Lawyers Find Their Skill Sets Make Them Ideal Candidates for College Presidencies," *ABA Journal*, (April/May 2021): 61.
- <sup>4</sup> Sheryl L. Axelrod, "The Underrepresentation of Women at the Highest Levels of the Legal Profession," *Law Practice Today*, October 5, 2022, <https://www.lawpracticetoday.org/article/despite-all-the-profession-has-to-gain-from-our-greater-inclusion-the-under-representation-of-women-at-the-highest-levels-of-the-legal-profession/>; Debra Cassens Weiss, "For the First Time, Women Make Up Majority of Law Firm Associates, New NALP Report Says," *American Bar Association Journal*, January 5, 2024, <https://www.americanbar.org/groups/journal/articles/2024/for-the-first-time-women-make-up-a-majority-of-law-firm-associates-nalp-report-says/>
- <sup>5</sup> National Association for Law Placement, 2024 *Report on Diversity in U.S. Law Firms*, January 2025, 1-2, [https://www.nalp.org/uploads/Research/2024-25\\_NALPReportonDiversity.pdf](https://www.nalp.org/uploads/Research/2024-25_NALPReportonDiversity.pdf).
- <sup>6</sup> Salkin, *May It Please the Campus*, 167.
- <sup>7</sup> Salkin, *May It Please the Campus*, 167.
- <sup>8</sup> Salkin, *May It Please the Campus* 154; American Council on Education, *The American College President: 2023 Edition* (Washington, DC: American Council on Education, 2023) 17.
- <sup>9</sup> Salkin, *May It Please the Campus*, 154.
- <sup>10</sup> American Council on Education, *The American College President*, 17.
- <sup>11</sup> American Council on Education, *Chief Academic Office Survey: CAO Background* (American Council on Education 2019), <https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Chief-Academic-Officer-Survey-CAO-Background.pdf>.
- <sup>12</sup> Peter D. Eckel, Bryan J. Cook, and Jacqueline E. King, *The CAO Census: A National Profile of Chief Academic Officers* (American Council on Education, 2009), 2.
- <sup>13</sup> Eckel, Cook, and King, *The CAO Census*, 3; Harold V. Hartley III and Eric E. Godin, *A Study of Chief Academic Officers of Independent Colleges and Universities* (The Council of Independent Colleges 2010), 12-13, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED510962.pdf>.
- <sup>14</sup> Jeff Allum, Judith Areen, and Katie Kempner, *American Law School Dean Study* (Association of American Law Schools, 2022), 22.

<sup>15</sup> American Bar Association, *Profile of the Legal Profession 2024: Women in the Legal Profession* (2024), <https://www.americanbar.org/news/profile-legal-profession/women/#:~:text=As%20for%20law%20school%20leadership,t%20changed%20much%20since%202020>.

<sup>16</sup> AALS Rosenblatt's Deans Database, accessed October 23, 2025, <https://www.lawdeans.com/results.php?s=13>.

<sup>17</sup> Laura M. Padilla, "A Gendered Update on Women Law Deans: Who, Where, Why, and Why Not?," *American University Journal of Gender, Social Policy & Law* 15 (2007): 443, 464; Allum, Areen, and Kempner, *American Law School Dean Study*, 22; American Bar Association, *Profile of the Legal Profession 2024: Women in the Legal Profession* (2024), <https://www.americanbar.org/news/profile-legal-profession/women/#:~:text=As%20for%20law%20school%20leadership,t%20changed%20much%20since%202020>.

<sup>18</sup> Almost half (47.9%) of respondents reported self-censoring or refraining from speaking out about instances of gender-based bias directed at them personally for fear that doing so gives credence to gender-based tropes of weakness, vulnerability, or another negative characteristic.

<sup>19</sup> Research included reviews of LinkedIn biographies, college and university websites, and other literature. Many women leaders we included in our sample were identified by Patricia Salkin in her 2022 book *May It Please the Campus: Lawyers Leading Higher Education*. Salkin, Patricia. *May it Please the Campus: Lawyers Leading Higher Education*. Touro University Press, 2022.

<sup>20</sup> This guess was supported by extensive research by the ABA Commission on Women in the Legal Profession documenting a law faculty pipeline. The Commission documented an environment where women faculty were underrepresented among their peers and demeaned by students in the classroom. American Bar Association, *Unfinished Business: Overcoming the Sisyphus Factor*, (1995), 7.

<sup>21</sup> A very small number of respondents reported their gender as something other than a woman.

<sup>22</sup> AALS Rosenblatt's Deans Database, as of September 23, 2025, <https://lawdeans.com/results.php?s=15>.

<sup>23</sup> Nikki Brahm, "Resource Offers Data on Law School Deans," *Insight into Academia*, July 2, 2024, <https://insightintoacademia.com/resource-offers-data-on-law-school-deans/>.

<sup>24</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *The Unfinished Agenda: Women and the Legal Profession*, (Chicago: ABA Commission on Women in the Profession, 2001), 27; Laura M. Padilla, "Women Law Deans, Gender Sidelineing, and Presumptions of Incompetence," *Berkeley Journal of Gender, Law & Justice* 35 (2020): 4-9.

<sup>25</sup> Allum, Areen, and Kempner, *American Law School Dean Study*, 25.

<sup>26</sup> Allum, Areen, and Kempner, *American Law School Dean Study*, 27.

<sup>27</sup> Allum, Areen, and Kempner, *American Law School Dean Study*, 25.

<sup>28</sup> Salkin, *May It Please the Campus*, 16.

<sup>29</sup> Gindi Eckel Vincent and Mary B. Cranston, *Learning to Lead: What Really Works for Women in Law* (American Bar Association, 2013), 10-1; see also Alice H. Eagley and Linda L. Carli, *Through the Labyrinth: The Truth About How Women Become Leaders* (Harvard Business School Press, 2007), 133-135.

<sup>30</sup> Salkin, *May It Please the Campus*, 16.

<sup>31</sup> Salkin, *May It Please the Campus*, 7.

<sup>32</sup> Moran, “Lawyers Find Their Skill Sets Make Them Ideal Candidates for College Presidencies,” 61.

<sup>33</sup> The survey was intentionally designed to pose this question as open-ended; the authors did not want to suggest that respondents should or should not focus their responses here on professional or personal characteristics of identity.

<sup>34</sup> Other responses that were listed less often included collaborator, listener/confidant, servant leader, intermediary/mediator, and visionary/innovator.

<sup>35</sup> Stephanie A. Scharf, Roberta D. Liebenberg, and Paulette Brown, *Legal Careers of Parents & Child Caregivers* (American Bar Association, Commission on Women in the Profession, 2023), 3.

<sup>36</sup> Joyce Sterling and Linda Chanow, *In their Own Words: Experienced Women Lawyers Explain Why They Are Leaving Their Law Firms and the Profession* (American Bar Association, 2021), 21.

<sup>37</sup> Allum, Areen, and Kempner, *American Law School Dean Study* 74.

<sup>38</sup> Survey respondents were asked to select from a list of attributes, which, in addition to the ones reported here included: academic/intellectual leadership, business/finance abilities, humility, flexibility, building consensus, and marketing and promotion. Smaller proportions of respondents (under 25%) selected these. Respondents could also write in their own response; write-in responses were varied and came from less than 15% of respondents.

<sup>39</sup> Salkin, *May It Please the Campus*, 98.

<sup>40</sup> Salkin, *May It Please the Campus*, 45.

<sup>41</sup> American Council on Education, *The American College President*, 9.

<sup>42</sup> Allum, Areen, and Kempner, *American Law School Dean Study*, 36.

<sup>43</sup> American Bar Association, *Standards and Rules of Procedure for Approval of Law Schools; 2025-2026* (American Bar Association, 2025) Standard 203(b).

<sup>44</sup> Salkin, *May It Please the Campus*, 47. In the 1980s, 44 percent of lawyer college presidents had experience as law professors. That dropped to 30 percent in the 1990s and 2000s. In 2010s, less than 25 percent of lawyer presidents had experience as law professors. While there may be myriad explanations for this drop, it is worth noting that law professors are among the highest paid faculty on the 200 universities that employ them. Brielle Johnson and Melissa Fuesting, *Two Decades of Change: Faculty Discipline Trends in Higher Education* (College & University Professional Association for Human Resources, May 13, 2025), <https://www.cupahr.org/resource/two-decades-of-change-faculty-discipline-trends-in-higher-ed-may-2025/>. Qualified senior law faculty may decide not to pursue administrative leadership because any salary increase may be modest by comparison.

<sup>45</sup> The high percentage of respondents who reported leadership or administrative careers at law schools prior to their current or most recent leadership role is reflective of the high proportion of current and former law deans who responded to our survey; that in itself is reflective of the fact that most women attorneys in higher education leadership are serving at law schools.

<sup>46</sup> Salkin, *May It Please the Campus*, 46.

<sup>47</sup> Salkin, *May It Please the Campus*, 55-6.

<sup>48</sup> Allum, Areen, and Kempner, *American Law School Dean Study*, 38.

<sup>49</sup> "Council-Approved Law Schools," Section on Legal Education & Admissions to the Bar, American Bar Association, effective October 22, 2025, [https://www.americanbar.org/groups/legal\\_education/accreditation/approved-law-schools/?login](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/legal_education/accreditation/approved-law-schools/?login).

<sup>50</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, "The Total Number of Higher Education Institutions Decreases by 2 Percent" Aug. 21, 2024, [https://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/press\\_releases/8\\_21\\_2024.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/press_releases/8_21_2024.asp).

<sup>51</sup> Salkin, *May It Please the Campus*, 110.

<sup>52</sup> Eckel, Cook, King, *The CAO Census, A National Profile of Chief Academic Officers*, 3; Hartley and Godin, *A Study of Chief Academic Officers*, 12. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED510962.pdf>.

<sup>53</sup> Salkin, *May It Please the Campus*, 116-150.

<sup>54</sup> Allum, Areen, and Kempner, *American Law School Dean Study*, 26.

<sup>55</sup> Allum, Areen, and Kempner, *American Law School Dean Study*, 28.

<sup>56</sup> Allum, Areen, and Kempner, *American Law School Dean Study*, 29.

<sup>57</sup> Allum, Areen, and Kempner, *American Law School Dean Study*, 71.

<sup>58</sup> Allum, Areen, and Kempner, *American Law School Dean Study*, 71.

<sup>59</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Women & Leadership* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 76-94; Roberta D. Liebenberg and Stephanie A. Scharf, *Walking Out the Door: The Facts, Figures, and Future of Experienced Women Lawyers in Private Practice* (American Bar Association, 2019), 1; American Bar Association, *Profile of the Legal Profession 2023: Women in the Legal Profession* (2023), <https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/news/2023/potlp-2023.pdf>; Sterling and Chanow, *In Their Own Words*, 2-3.

<sup>60</sup> Rhode, *Women & Leadership*, 95-110; Glenn Colby and Ziyang Bai, *A Path Toward Equity For Women Faculty in Higher Education* (TIAA Institute, March 2023), 1, <https://www.tiaa.org/content/dam/tiaa/institute/pdf/insights-report/2023-03/tiaa-institute-a-path-toward-equity-for-women-faculty-wvoee-colby-bai-march-2023.pdf>; Anais Llorens et al., "Gender Bias In Academia: A Lifetime Problem That Needs Solutions," *Neuron* 109, no. 13 (2021): 2047-74, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0896627321004177?via%3Dihub>.



<sup>61</sup> Elizabeth D. Katz, Kyle Rozema, and Sarath Sanga, “Women in U.S. Law Schools, 1948–2021,” *Journal of Legal Analysis* 15, no. 1 (August 21, 2023): 51, <https://academic.oup.com/jla/article/15/1/48/7246687>; Llorens et al., “Gender Bias In Academia,” 2047–74.

<sup>62</sup> Rhode, *Women & Leadership*, 76–110; Liebenberg and Scharf, *Walking Out the Door*, 1; American Bar Association, *Profile of the Legal Profession* 2023; Sterling and Chanow, *In Their Own Words*, 4; Glenn Colby and Bai, *A Path Toward Equity For Women Faculty in Higher Education*, 1.

<sup>63</sup> Colleen Flaherty, “Ratings and Gender Bias Over Time,” *Inside Higher Education*, October 30, 2022, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2022/10/31/ratings-and-bias-against-women-over-time>.

<sup>64</sup> Rhode, *Women & Leadership*, 83; Axelrod, “The Underrepresentation of Women at the Highest Levels of the Legal Profession.”

<sup>65</sup> Glenn Colby and Chelsea Fowler, *Data Snapshot: IPEDS Data on Full-Time Women Faculty and Faculty of Color* (American Association of University Professors, (2020), 2, [https://www.aaup.org/sites/default/files/Dec-2020\\_Data\\_Snapshot\\_Women\\_and\\_Faculty\\_of\\_Color.pdf#:~:text=Representation%20of%20Women%20by%20Rank.%20Further%20disparities,even%20lower%20for%20full%20professors%20\(32.5%20percent\)](https://www.aaup.org/sites/default/files/Dec-2020_Data_Snapshot_Women_and_Faculty_of_Color.pdf#:~:text=Representation%20of%20Women%20by%20Rank.%20Further%20disparities,even%20lower%20for%20full%20professors%20(32.5%20percent).)).

<sup>66</sup> Association of American Law Schools, *American Law School Faculty Study*, (Association of American Law Schools, 2022), 33.

<sup>67</sup> Association of American Law Schools, *American Law School Faculty Study*, 33.

<sup>68</sup> Axelrod, “The Underrepresentation of Women at the Highest Levels of the Legal Profession.”

<sup>69</sup> Joy Misra, et al., “The Ivory Ceiling of Service Work,” *Academe* 97, no. 1 (January/ February 2011), <https://www.aaup.org/article/ivory-ceiling-service-work#.ZAJGduzMLX1>.

<sup>70</sup> Colby and Fowler, *Data Snapshot*, 2.

<sup>71</sup> Colby and Fowler, *Data Snapshot*, 2.

<sup>72</sup> Renee Nicole Allen, et. al., “The ‘Pink Ghetto’ Pipeline: Challenges and Opportunities for Women in Legal Education,” *University of Detroit Mercy Law Review* 96 (2019): 525, 527, 535.

<sup>73</sup> Allen, et. al., “The ‘Pink Ghetto’ Pipeline,” 525, 527, 535.

<sup>74</sup> Allen, et. al., “The ‘Pink Ghetto’ Pipeline,” 525, 527, 535.

<sup>75</sup> Many public universities publish the salaries of their employees, while very few private universities do. Thus, many respondents may have had access to limited information on the salaries of their predecessors.

<sup>76</sup> Shelley J. Correll, et al., “Inside the Black Box of Organizational Life: The Gendered Language of Performance Assessment,” *American Sociological Review* 85, no. 6 (2020): 1022–50, 1022; Monica Biernat, M. J. Tocci, and Joan C. Williams, “The Language of Performance Evaluations: Gender-Based Shifts in Content and Consistency of Judgment,” *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 3, no. 2 (2012): 186–192, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1948550611415693>.

<sup>77</sup> Rebecca J. Kreitzer and Jennie Sweet-Cushman, “Evaluating Student Evaluations of Teaching: A Review of Measurement and Equity Bias in SETs and Recommendations for Ethical Reform,” *Journal of Academic Ethics* 20 (2022): 73-84, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10805-021-09400-w>.

<sup>78</sup> Rhode, *Women & Leadership*, 76-110; Colby and Bai, *A Path Toward Equity*, 1; Katz, Rozema, and Sanga, “Women in U.S. Law Schools,” 51; Sterling and Chanow, *In Their Own Words*, 21.

<sup>79</sup> Eagley and Carli, *Through the Labyrinth*, 84.

<sup>80</sup> Rhode, *The Unfinished Agenda*, 6.

<sup>81</sup> Rhode, *The Unfinished Agenda*, 6.

<sup>82</sup> Rhode, *The Unfinished Agenda*, 6.

<sup>83</sup> Eric Kelderman, “A Year Ago, Women Were the Majority Among Ivy League Presidents. Now Most of Them Have Quit,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 15, 2024, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/a-year-ago-women-were-the-majority-among-ivy-league-presidents-now-most-of-them-have-quit?sra=true>.

<sup>84</sup> Allen et al., “The ‘Pink Ghetto’ Pipeline,” 530-31.

<sup>85</sup> Allen et al., “The ‘Pink Ghetto’ Pipeline,” 530-31.

<sup>86</sup> Sterling and Chanow, *In Their Own Words*, 20.

<sup>87</sup> See e.g., Liebenberg and Scharf, *Walking Out the Door*, 1; Sterling and Chanow, *In Their Own Words*, 21.

<sup>88</sup> Paula Schaefer, “The Motherhood Myth, Traditional Firms, and the Underrepresentation of Women,” *FIU Law Review* 20 (Fall 2025): 287-88.

<sup>89</sup> Schaefer, 287-88.

<sup>90</sup> Janet E. Gans Epner, *Visible Invisibility: Women of Color in Law Firms* (American Bar Association, 2006), 9.

<sup>91</sup> Gans Epner, *Visible Invisibility*, 9; Rhode, *The Unfinished Agenda*, 33-34.



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# Appendix: Survey Questionnaire

## INTRODUCTION

You have been identified as a woman attorney who serves or has served in a leadership position in higher education and we invite you to participate in this important survey to gather information about your experiences. Data collected will be held confidentially by the Association of American Law Schools, a private, nonprofit institution committed to advancing excellence in legal education.

The results of this survey will be analyzed as part of research conducted by the authors and AALS to:

- 1) benchmark the number of women attorneys in higher education leadership positions;
- 2) identify characteristics and circumstances that make women lawyers successful in higher education leadership;
- 3) identify structural and cultural obstacles to the advancement of women attorneys into higher education leadership; and
- 4) provide insight into what universities, leaders, and women attorneys can do to promote and support women lawyers into higher education leadership.

As a woman attorney in a leadership position, your unique perspective is essential in achieving these goals. We are extremely grateful for your time and attention.

## YOUR CURRENT OR MOST RECENT ROLE

**1. In your current or most recent leadership role, who do you rely on in fulfilling your leadership responsibilities? This could include professional or personal contacts; please list descriptive title, e.g. “my mentor”, “my supervisor”, “my spouse”.**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

**2. In your current role, who do you trust in fulfilling your leadership responsibilities? This could include professional or personal contacts; please list descriptive title, e.g. “my mentor”, “my supervisor”, “my spouse”.**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

## **WOMEN ATTORNEYS IN HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERSHIP**

**3. In your current role, do you earn more than, less than, or the same as predecessors who identify as male?**

- ☐ More than male predecessor(s)
- ☐ Less than male predecessor(s)
- ☐ The same as male predecessor(s)
- ☐ I'm not sure

## **WOMEN ATTORNEYS IN HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERSHIP**

**4. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “I have experienced gender bias in my current or most recent leadership role.”**

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

## **PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL CHARACTERISTICS**

**5. Please list the three most essential characteristics of identity that you use to categorize or define yourself. These may include personal characteristics or attributes such as “daughter”, “sister”, “friend”, and/or professional characteristics such as “leader”, “boss”, “decisionmaker”.**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

**\* 6. What attributes do you think have been most helpful to your success as a leader? Select up to five (5).**

- ☐ Hard work
- ☐ Flexibility
- ☐ Ability to convey the school's mission and purpose
- ☐ Academic/intellectual leadership
- ☐ Emotional intelligence
- ☐ Being a stabilizing force during difficult times
- ☐ Building consensus
- ☐ Collaboration
- ☐ Business/finance abilities
- ☐ Marketing and promotion
- ☐ Ability to listen
- ☐ Good judgment
- ☐ Humility
- ☐ Integrity
- ☐ Other (please specify)
- ☐ Women Attorneys in Higher Education Leadership
- ☐ Your Career Path

**\* 7. Choose the career path that most closely describes your career progression prior to your current/most recent leadership role:**

- ☐ Primarily in a faculty role at a law school
- ☐ Primarily in a faculty role at a four-year college or university
- ☐ Primarily in an administrative role at a law school
- ☐ Primarily in an administrative role at a four-year college or university
- ☐ Primarily in private practice
- ☐ Primarily in public service
- ☐ Other (please specify)

**8. Do you have/have you had a mentor or champion?**

- ☐ Yes [à Q9]
- ☐ No [à Skip to Q12]

**9. How did you identify your mentor or champion?** \_\_\_\_\_

**10. How has your mentor or champion helped you advance professionally?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**11. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “In my current or most recent leadership role, at least one colleague or supervisor has helped me advance professionally”.**

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

**How did your colleague or supervisor help you advance professionally?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**12. Which of the following experiences were helpful in preparing you for your current or most recent leadership role? Please select all that apply.**

- ☐ Serving on a search committee for a law dean
- ☐ Serving on a search committee for a college or university president
- ☐ Serving on a search committee for another senior higher education leadership position
- ☐ Serving as a vice president or in another senior leadership position at a four-year college or university
- ☐ Serving as a dean
- ☐ Serving as a deputy or vice dean
- ☐ Serving as an interim or acting dean
- ☐ Serving as an associate dean
- ☐ Serving in a leadership role at an academic center or legal clinic at a law school
- ☐ Serving in another senior higher education leadership position
- ☐ Serving in a leadership role on a law school committee
- ☐ Serving in a leadership role on a university-wide committee
- ☐ Serving in a leadership role at a law firm or other legal organization
- ☐ Serving in a leadership role in a professional association or academic organization
- ☐ Being mentored by a current or former law dean
- ☐ Being mentored by another higher education leader
- ☐ Completing a professional development program for aspiring law deans
- ☐ Completing a professional development program for higher education leaders
- ☐ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**13. Have you engaged the services of an executive coach or professional offering similar services while serving in your current or most recent leadership role?**

- ☐ Yes [à Q14]
- ☐ No [à Skip to Q15]

**14. Who funds/funded these services during your current/most recent role?**

- ☐ My school
- ☐ Me
- ☐ Someone else (please specify)

**15. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Women Attorneys in Higher Education Leadership**

|                                                                                                                                                        | Strongly Disagree     | Disagree              | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree                 | Strongly Agree        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| "In my higher education leadership career, I have overcome obstacles to my success because of my gender identity."                                     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| "People were or are surprised if/when someone like me succeeds in a higher education leadership role."                                                 | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| "I have been marginalized in a professional capacity because of my gender identity."                                                                   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| "In my leadership career, I have experienced gender-based microaggressions."                                                                           | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| "In my leadership career, I have been made to feel unsafe (professionally, emotionally, physically, or in another way) because of my gender identity." | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

If you would like to explain any of these circumstances, please do so here: \_\_\_\_\_



## WELLBEING IN LEADERSHIP

16. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

|                                                                                                                                  | Strongly Disagree     | Disagree              | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree                 | Strongly Agree        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| As a woman in a leadership position, I pay greater attention to my appearance than I did in my earlier professional experiences. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| As a woman in a leadership position, I pay greater attention to my appearance than my male peers.                                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

## GENDER BIAS THROUGHOUT YOUR CAREER

17. Have you ever experienced any of the following during your leadership career/current position/ leadership positions? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ Been boxed out of a leadership opportunity by someone who identifies as male because of your gender identity
- ☐ Been boxed out of a leadership opportunity by someone who identifies as female because of your gender identity
- ☐ Received a performance or student evaluation that you believe was negatively influenced, at least implicitly, by your gender identity
- ☐ Been the subject of a professional complaint that you believe was motivated, at least implicitly, by your gender identity
- ☐ Been the subject of negative press, social media, or letter-writing campaigns that you believe was motivated, at least implicitly, by your gender identity
- ☐ Self-censored or refrained from speaking out about instances of gender-based bias directed at you personally for fear that doing so gives credence to gender-based tropes of weakness, vulnerability, or other negative characteristic
- ☐ If you would like to explain any of these circumstances, please do so here: \_\_\_\_\_

## OPTIONAL DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

**18. Which of the following would you describe yourself as?**

- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Man
- ☐ Transgender
- ☐ Gender non-conforming, non-binary, or gender queer
- ☐ Prefer not to answer
- ☐ I prefer to self-identify:

**19. What is your race/ethnicity? Select all that apply.**

- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian or Asian American
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Hispanic or Latina/o/x
- ☐ Middle Eastern or Northern African
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ☐ White or Caucasian
- ☐ Multiracial
- ☐ Prefer not to answer
- ☐ I prefer to self-identify:

**20. What is the highest education level at least one of your parents or legal guardians completed?**

- ☐ Less than four-year bachelor's degree (e.g., high school diploma, AA, some college)
- ☐ Four-year bachelor's degree (e.g., BS, BA, BBA)
- ☐ Law degree (e.g., JD or equivalent)
- ☐ Postgraduate or professional degree other than a JD (e.g., MA, MS, PhD, MD, etc.)
- ☐ I'm not sure

**21. Where did you earn your JD? \_\_\_\_\_**

**22. What year did you earn your JD? \_\_\_\_\_**

## YOUR SUPERVISOR

As part of our research on women attorneys in higher education leadership, we have developed a brief survey with similar topics that we hope to field to supervisors of women leaders. If you are willing to provide your supervisor's name and contact information so that we may send them the supervisor survey, please do so below.

23. Your Supervisor's Name \_\_\_\_\_

24. Your Supervisor's Title \_\_\_\_\_

25. Your Supervisor's Email Address \_\_\_\_\_