

RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION: A HISTORICAL RETROSPECTIVE OF NCURA DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION FOCUSED ON GENDER IN LEADERSHIP

Saiqa Anne Qureshi*	Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland, USA ORCID ID 0000-0003-1702-8934	Squire13@JHU.edu
Laneika K. Musalini	Columbus State University, Columbus, Georgia, USA	Musalini_Laneika@columbusstate.edu
Marianne Woods	Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland, USA	MWoods9@jhu.edu

*Corresponding author

ABSTRACT

What is new?	This study is a reflective comparison of the data of membership and leadership across industries, with a qualitative retrospective and a discussion of diversity, equity, and inclusion within NCURA, the National Council of University Research Administrators, as that organization had a far higher percentage of female leadership over time.
What was the approach?	The paper focuses on data comparing the NCURA organization with other organizations over time in terms of female leadership, and considers the causes of why that difference exists.
What is the academic impact?	The National Council of University Research Administrators (NCURA) has been at the forefront of female leadership, with both the number and percentage of elected female leaders far outpacing comparable measures in other professions, since the 1970's. What drove this consistent strength, what allowed female leaders to be elected, and what innovation in practice areas in research administration, drove improved diversity, equity, and inclusion inside the profession?
What is the wider impact?	In addition to female leadership within the organization, NCURA membership today is almost 81% female (as identified from NCURA membership profile data). Could this data point be the sole contributing factor for the massive increase in female leaders within NCURA? This study will consider female

leadership both in the organization and the elected officers, specifically the presidency.

Keywords

Research Administration, Women, Representation, Gender Representation, Research, Higher Education

NCURA AND LEADERSHIP

The National Council of University Research Administrators (NCURA), was founded in 1959, and is a non-profit professional society "...dedicated to advancing the profession of research administration through education and professional development programs, the sharing of knowledge and experiences, and the fostering of a diverse, collegial, and respected global community". It has individual members worldwide, primarily in the United States, representing colleges, universities, teaching hospitals, and research institutes (NCURA, 2023). The field of research administration, and specifically university research administration, provides financial and administrative management for academic research endeavors in colleges and universities (NCURA, 2023).

NCURA leadership, as defined by the elected (one-year) president position, featured a higher percentage of women than comparable other measures decade by decade. In the 1970's NCURA had 10% female leadership, rising 10 percentage points per decade in the 1980's and 1990's, to 50% in the 2000's, 60% in the 2010's and 20-teens, and 67% in the early 2020's. This upward trajectory is highly unusual when compared to other associations or organizations. This article considers the factors that made NCURA different from, and elements that were similar to, other organizations and institutions, to create a causal theory around the escalated percentage of female leadership.

The two comparable Pew Research (2018) studies examined upward mobility of women going back to the 1960's. However, it concentrated on women elected to the US House of Representatives and US Senate. The US House of Representatives rose to 10% only in 1992, and 20% by 2016. The US Senate was under 10% female in the 1980's and rose to 20% by the 2012 term. State Governors remain below 20% in 2021, and cabinet level appointments broke the 20% threshold in 1992 under the Clinton presidency, dropping under President George W. Bush, rising under both President Obama and President Biden, now approaching 50% in 2021.

In corporate America the numbers are more stark, female Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of Fortune 500 corporations remain under 10%. Women as board members of Fortune 500 corporations exceeded 20% only in 2015. Furthermore, in Universities across the US the position of University President in 2000 achieved 20% female leadership.

NCURA, by contrast, had a higher percentage of female elected leadership to the top position in each decade, something that particularly accelerated in the early 2000's. So, what was different? What did NCURA do to be at the forefront of diversity and inclusion regarding female leadership? What made NCURA different, even compared to university presidentship?

NCURA’s staff leadership is part of the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE), a membership organization of more than 48,000 association executives and industry partners representing 7,400 organizations. As of May 20, 2021, ASAE was at the 46% female and 36% male C-level/Vice President/Executive level, with 18% unknown, other, or missing data. At the CEO level specifically, the gender makeup is 46% female and 40% male, with 14% unknown, other or missing gender data. The employee leadership of NCURA is female led, and the leadership team approximately matches the percentage in the ASAE; however, the ASAE does not have retrospective data, so it is not known if the gender of employee leadership historically matches or tracks above the leadership in the industry.

As seen in Figure 1, the percentage of female leaders of NCURA increased decade by decade.

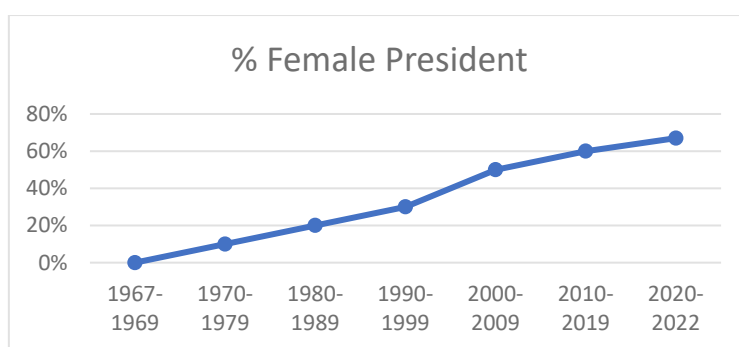


Figure 1: Percentage of Female Presidents of NCURA per Decade

As seen in Table 1, the percentage rate of female presidents in NCURA has steadily increased ten percentage points per year from 1970 to the current.

Table 1: Percentage of Female Presidents of NCURA per Decade

By Decade	% Female President
1967- 1969	0%
1970- 1979	10%
1980- 1989	20%
1990- 1999	30%
2000- 2009	50%
2010- 2019	60%
2020- 2022	67%

Figure 2 shows that the percentage of female leadership in the president role within NCURA far exceeded other key indicators, as defined by Pew. These include elected officials such as US Senators, Governors and House Representatives, and University Presidents—the most closely aligned industry comparison. They both far outstrip

Fortune 500 company CEOs and board members, though the latter has improved due to policy intervention ensuring that at least one board member in many cases, is female, increasing the percentage being represented. In recent years there has also been a rise of females in university presidencies, as reflected in Figure 2.

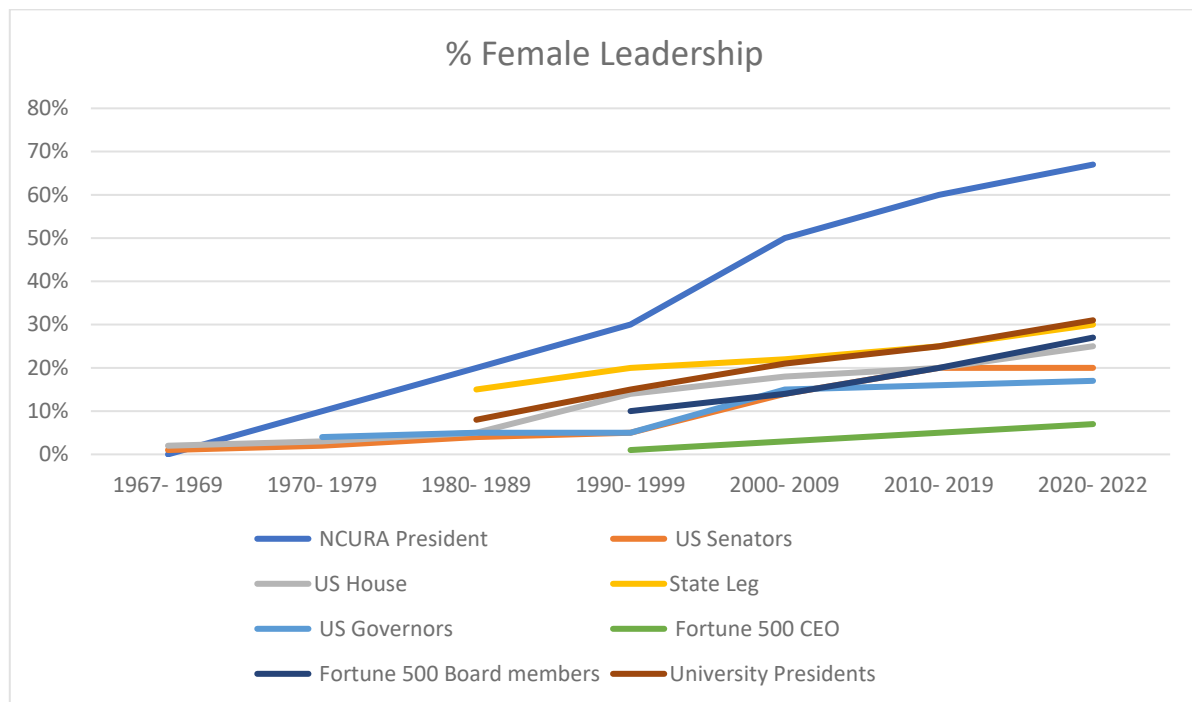


Figure 2: Percentage of Female Leaders in Key Indices 1967-2022 (president-elect)

LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

When comparing NCURA leadership and this early and high percentage of female leadership, it is important to consider where this phenomenon may have also occurred, and, additionally, what others think may have driven it. However, before this, it is important to consider why female leadership is important and what is its impact. There are many benefits to having more women in positions of leadership, including more diverse perspectives that lead to better decision making, improved organizational performance and higher job satisfaction overall, a greater impact of business on social issues, better representation of customers and stakeholders, increased innovation and creativity, and increased profitability and performance (LearNow, 2023).

Work by Dreher (2003) indicates that a combination of a social contact theory with strategic human resource management changes helps to explain the incidents of glass-ceiling breaking. Dreher's work revealed that the percentage of lower-level managerial positions held by women in the 1980s and early 1990s was positively associated with the number of work-life human resource practices provided in 1994 and with the percentage of senior management positions held by women in 1999. Additionally, the number of work-life human resource practices provided in 1994 was positively associated with the percentage of senior management positions held by women in 1999 and partially mediated the effect of lower-level female representation on senior level female representation (Dreher, 2003).

Furthermore, Schoen and Rost (2020), in a more recent publication, concur and show that the more diverse management and family-friendly practices that are implemented, the higher the proportion of women in management positions. However, the results do not show any effect for diversity training or that immigrants benefit from diversity practices.

This matches the steep incline in the percentage of female presidents of NCURA and posits the question, did these early NCURA female presidents and the female leadership in other roles on the board shape policies and norms that supported further female leadership in the organization? Did they intentionally, or inadvertently create policies and norms that supported work-life balance, or were they reflective of an industry, higher education, that had strong policies, and NCURA had the indirect benefit from those policies in the form of female leadership?

Could it be that as the industry of research administration shifted, that more females made it a career, which opened the door for more females to be nominated for and/or elected to office and leadership positions within NCURA? With an upsurge in female students, teachers, and administrative and managerial staff, women's participation has increased in relevant positions, as there is a correlation between the higher educational level achieved and the involvement in tasks of greater scope and responsibility in the academic world—a phenomenon called “the female advantage” (Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006). The female advantage generally begins with higher education attainment for females but assumes that this advantage goes beyond college impacting other factors in the life of a female.

Beyond female leadership, we look to consider the further diversification of leadership and suggested next steps. Pande and Ford (2011), in work for the World Bank, considered the impact of gender quotas in politics and corporate boards. They considered India and Norway and found that quotas increased female leadership and influenced policy outcomes; and, furthermore, rather than creating a backlash against women, quotas reduced gender discrimination in the long-term. Pande and Ford (2011) also found diverse evidence that political and corporate entities often acted to circumvent quotas and suggest that the design of the quota and selection systems matter for increasing female leadership.

IMPACT OF FEMALE LEADERSHIP

Reshi and Sudha (2022) posits women's empowerment refers to the process of providing women with the necessary resources and opportunities to exercise their rights, participate in decision-making processes, and have control over their lives. Exactly what difference does female leadership make? Female leadership leads to positive impact at the top of the wage distribution for women. The argument is that the female leader is better able to see and reward those closest to her and leads to better corporate performance if accompanied with a higher percentage of other female leaders (Flabbi et al., 2019). Additionally, female leadership is accompanied by a further increase in the number of female top and middle managers in the public sector (Arvate

et al., 2018), but with much less impact if this was a requirement of a quota (Maida & Weber, 2020). A further interesting finding is that “small and less productive establishments that invest less, pay their employees lower wages, but are more female-friendlier and more likely to be led by women” (Gagliarducci & Passerman, 2015).

NCURA’s presidential leadership was not the result of a quota that required any percentage of the board or elected officials to be female. It was directed by the membership, and the early female elected leaders, at an earlier point than other comparable indices and at a higher percentage, seemed to have foreshadowed or led to higher percentages of female leadership in later decades.

NCURA membership is a choice, and not a requirement to work in research administration, but a requirement for membership in NCURA is working in research administration in higher education, academic medical centers, universities or colleges, or other industries. The question to pursue is if higher education, as an industry, complies with the definition described by Gagliarducci and Passerman in their 2015 work, and as such all potential candidates came from an industry that is less productive, invests less, and pays lower wages with female friendly policies.

There is some evidence to support this. The percentage of University presidents that are female, while far short of the NCURA percentages decade on decade, outpaced all other metrics including elected officials like state governors, US house and senate members, as well as state legislatures and far outpaced Fortune 500 companies—who had the lowest percentage as CEO. This would support an argument that the higher education industry may meet the criteria that Gagliarducci and Passerman describe (2015).

Additionally, McPherson and Schapiro (1993), in the introduction to their work about the value of higher education, outlines this well:

“Many of the complaints about higher education relate to wasteful spending and nebulous educational outcomes... The effort to identify cost-effective education methods and organization is laudable... they could very well be the difference between a thriving higher education industry in the 1990s and beyond and a declining industry, outmoded and noncompetitive” (McPherson & Schapiro, 1993, p. 3).

Consulting firm McKinsey & Co. (2010) argued that to educate the additional workers needed for the US economy, higher education needed to rapidly increase efficiency and cost effectiveness to produce an overall increase in productivity, graduating more students, at a higher graduation or completion rate for lower cost per head (Cota et al., 2011). Even earlier work by Skoro and Hryniak (1980), comparing 1967-1977 to 1929-1930, argues that there was already a decline in productivity due to “an inability to adjust rapidly to changes in demand... and a dramatic decline in external funding of research” (p. 147).

Further, Brewer and Tierney (2010) argued that innovation appears to be both too little and too slow, with little increase in the educational system's capacity to educate more students. They argue higher education has high barriers to entry with some state subsidy, so little impetus to innovate, and that the "labor intensive tutorial system" is not radically innovated by changes like first year seminars, team teaching and cross curriculum-based courses. Getz et al. (1997) found that higher education took three times as long to adopt an innovation than the for-profit industry.

Brewer and Tierney further argue that the investment, particularly investment in technology that in other fields makes up a large reason behind growth, was minimal and does not constitute process change. It is limited to peripheral and non-core services, and is, furthermore, hampered by investment into expansion of services or "scope creep", with the addition of diversified programs, not innovation and investment into modifying core delivery of services. They cite the addition of professional schools to liberal arts universities, secondary sites, academic medical centers, and doctoral programs, rather than investment in the process of core delivery of education.

Wildavsky et al. (2011) acknowledges that, "... why, in spite of a steady increase in the enrollment of nontraditional students, a steep decline in tenured faculty positions, and revolutionary development in technology that have touched nearly every other part of society, do most universities still operate much as they did fifty years ago?" (p. vii).

Paying lower wages is a more difficult criterion to assess. In an article for Higher Ed Dive of CIO's, Chief Information Officers, or those who work in the IT space, who chose higher education over industry begins with the preface that "...working in the private sector offers a much more financially lucrative career than a space like higher education..." (Riddell & Eide, 2016). Furthermore, analysis by the Congressional Budget Office in 2012, and the Columbian, found that federal employees who have less education are likely to earn more than their private industry counterparts, but for those with professional or doctoral degrees the opposite is true (Fisher, 2015). It appears to be a mixed result in terms of whether higher education pays more or less; however, the NCURA president role tends to elect a more seasoned and senior professional, and that tends to favor those with higher levels of education. In NCURA today, 7.2% of members hold a doctorate, far above the US working population of 4.5% (U.S. Census, 2019). We would argue that most presidents, and most NCURA members, are better educated so therefore earning less than they would in industry.

The fourth criterion set out is "female friendly policies." Anderson et al. (2002), find that when comparing gender and dependent care responsibilities those in higher education were in fact less satisfied on average than those in a control group of private industry. They describe universities as having a sketchy history when it comes to work-family policies. But also found that "leadership campuses" had, wholly, better policies than non-leadership campuses. In reviewing the data of where the female NCURA Presidents were employed in their year of leadership, we would argue that they were primarily at leadership campuses, especially in the first decades and that further expanded in the 2000s. In the 1970's that was the University of Iowa, in the 1980's that was the University

of Houston and University of Rochester, in the 1990's the University of Kansas, University of Nevada at Reno, and Johns Hopkins University, and in the 2000's Emory University, the Universities of Vermont, Houston, North Carolina at Wilmington, and the University of Maryland College Park. After 2010, it included the University of Montana, Oregon State, Harvard, Vanderbilt, East Carolina, Hawaii, New Mexico and Alaska, Fairbanks. The only universities that are not leadership here are both in North Carolina (Wilmington and East Carolina); however, North Carolina appears to be somewhat of an outlier and has state based innovative initiatives to keep specifically focused on being family-friendly, specifically the "Family Forward NC", program and the NC Child Program (Finaldi, 2020; NCIOM, 2020). We would therefore argue that while there is some data that higher education has less family-friendly policies than industry, the female presidents in NCURA came primarily from leadership institutions, that were the exception in terms of policy.

CONCLUSION

NCURA was an early leader and remains so in terms of female presidential leadership. This was at least partially due to the nature of higher education as a field, that also supported a higher percentage of female university leadership, above other indices by decade. We argue that NCURA is reflective of higher education and that the industry matches the definition by Gagliarducci and Passerman in their 2015 work, as an industry that is less productive, invests less, and pays lower wages with female friendly policies, and these are the type of industries that featured higher percentages of female leadership.

In order for NCURA to continue to lead in the space of diversity in terms of leadership, they need to move beyond gender, to other forms of diversity. Chin et al. (2016) interviewed 15 leaders who were from diverse, non-dominant identity groups in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. They identified four competencies, with 16 dimensions, that are "likely to be crucial to leadership in the coming years as organizations become increasingly diverse: leveraging personal and social identities, utilizing a global and diverse mindset, leveraging community and organizational contexts, and promoting a diversity-supportive and inclusive climate" (p. 49). The focus areas identified are the future of diversity in leadership and challenge research administration and NCURA as an early leader and pioneer in female leadership to expand inclusivity.

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BIOGRAPHY


Saiqa Anne Qureshi, PhD MBA: Saiqa Anne Qureshi is an Adjunct Faculty at both Johns Hopkins University and at Saint Mary's College of California. Her academic background includes a PhD in Social Science from the American Institute at the University of Nottingham, UK, an MSc in Sociology, Oxford and BA, University of California, San Diego, US, in Sociology, Political Science and Near Eastern History, as well as an MBA from Imperial College London, UK. A mixed methods researcher, she writes, teaches


and speaks extensively about the intersection of sociological research and the experience of work and the workplace, specifically about optimizing work culture, including best hiring and management practices, the impact of discrimination, inclusion in the workplace and leadership. She is an expert in research administration, from development through application and management and trains nationally on a range of topics.


Laneika Musalini, EdD, MHRD: Highly accomplished professional with diverse experience in grant writing and administration, human resources/relations, equity & inclusion, leadership and financial management. She has a strong background in proposal development, budget development and management, strategic project development, program development, and policy development. Partnered with a comprehensive skill set including recruiting and training & development, as well as diversity, equity and inclusion. She works closely with president, vice presidents, deans, and faculty to execute grant proposals and research agreements as well as strategic planning for the grants/sponsored programs office. She holds both an Associate in Business, Bachelors of Human Services, Master's Degree in Human Resource Development, and a Doctor of Education, as well as certificates in both grant writing and diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace.

Marianne Woods, JD PhD: Marianne Rinaldo Woods, Ph.D., J.D. is the Retired Director of the Master of Science Program in Research Administration and a faculty member in the Department of Government, Krieger School of Arts and Sciences, Advanced Academic Programs at Johns Hopkins University. She is an international specialist on all issues pertaining to research administration and has consulted and lectured on research administration issues throughout the world. Prior to coming to Johns Hopkins University, Dr. Woods retired as Senior Associate Vice President for Research at The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), and prior to UTSA Dr. Woods was Associate Vice President for Research at the University of Alabama (UA) and also served for six years on the Council on Governmental Relations (COGR) Board of Directors and on the Contracts and Intellectual Property Committee. Dr. Woods also served two terms on the Board of Directors the University Industry Demonstration Partnership (UIDP) out of the National Academy of Science and was a member of the University Industry Research Roundtable. She has served as the University Administrative Representative to the Federal Demonstration Partnership and was Chair of the Export Controls Working Group.

CONTRIBUTION INFORMATION

Saiqa Anne Qureshi, PhD MBA,  Conceptualization, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project Administration, Validation, Visualization, Writing-Original Draft, Writing Review & Editing

Laneika Musalini, EdD, MHRD  Conceptualization, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project Administration, Validation, Visualization, Writing-Original Draft, Writing Review & Editing

Marianne Woods JD, PhD  Conceptualization, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project Administration, Validation, Visualization, Writing-Original Draft, Writing Review & Editing

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