

TITLE: Professional Roles and Functions of Presidential Assistants in Contemporary Higher Education

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OBJECTIVE: To identify the primary roles, duties and functions, and leadership practices of presidential assistants in higher education.

METHODOLOGY: The sample consisted of 37 presidential assistants in New England on the official mailing list of the Steering Committee for Presidential Assistants in Higher Education, American Council on Education (N=71). Each respondent completed the LPI-Self, the Assistant to the President and/or Chancellor survey (Quatroche, 1988), and provided demographic data. Interviews were conducted with 10 respondents.

Typical respondents were between the ages of 40 and 49 (35%), white (100%), almost evenly divided between males (46%) and females (54%), with over 16 years in higher education (38%), and between 2-to-5 years in their present position (35%). Most (95%) work full-time, reporting to the president or chancellor (92%), and meeting with their supervisor on a daily basis (57%).

KEY FINDINGS: No significant differences were found in the mean scores between presidential assistants in New England and the Kouzes Posner normative sample. However, the rank order varied. Enabling was ranked most and Inspiring ranked least frequently by both groups. Presidential assistants ranked Encouraging second (versus third for the normative sample), modeling third (versus fourth), and Challenging fourth (versus second).

"Presidential assistants practice the behaviors measured by the LPI" (p.94).
"Assistants practice the leadership behaviors which assist the president in motivating people to move ahead to the envisioned future. Their behavior focuses more on successfully communicating throughout the organization (enabling others to act), persuading and enlisting support of essential persons (encouraging the heart), establishing an atmosphere of autonomy (both enabling and encouraging), and implementing the strategies and policies which enable the college to become what the vision portends (challenging the process and modeling the way)" (pp. 96-97).