

General Administration

BLACK WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION:
THE HOWARD UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE



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UNIVERSITY**

CENTER FOR

**WOMEN,
GENDER
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LEADERSHIP**



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The Center is an interdisciplinary program with a vision to be a Center of Excellence for Black women and Black feminist consciousness, activism, and global leadership. The Center aims to meet this vision through programming that promotes transformational leadership, global engagement, research, service learning, and building impactful partnerships. The mission of the Center is to promote global excellence for Black women and gender issues, feminist activism, and transformational leadership through global engagement, research, service learning, and impactful partnerships.

The GWGGL Working Paper Series examines issues related to women, gender, and sexuality with a particular focus on the Black experience. It provides a platform for scholars working on issues from all disciplines to share research on a broad range of topics such as science and technology, health, politics and public policy, law, social justice, business and entrepreneurship, medicine, environmental justice, and climate, diversity and inclusion, arts and the humanities.

Black Women in Higher Education: The Howard University Experience is a special edition of the Working Paper Series (WPS) of the Center for Women, Gender and Global Leadership. The reports in this series form part of the Women in Leadership: A Storytelling Project, which uses oral narratives to document the experiences and journeys of women leaders at Howard University. The storytelling project is available on the Center's YouTube page.



CENTER FOR
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Black Women in Higher Education: The Howard University Experience

A Special Edition of the Working Paper Series by the Center for Women, Gender and Global Leadership

The historic launch of the Howard University Center for Women, Gender and Global Leadership on October 4, 2020, was the culmination of many years of women and feminist organizing and activism at Howard University. The Center stands as an homage to the women and men who have advocated for, advanced, and established programs, initiatives, courses and other forms of activism for women and gender issues in the long history of Howard University.

Howard is known as a place of many firsts, yet the history of women remains largely in the archives. For example, women have established or led seven centers in areas ranging from the Center for Sickle Cell Disease to the Center for Women and Global Leadership. The contributors have also identified notable women faculty, students and staff from the Howard University archives that have not received much attention in existing literature on Howard's history.

Howard's administration has made recent strides in cultivating Black women leaders as deans and leaders in critical administrative positions. Still, there has been little analysis of how gender equity is practiced among faculty, the board of trustees, and executive leadership. The election of Kamala Harris, a Howard alumna, as the first woman vice president of the United States in 2020 reinvigorated Howard University's position as a leading Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in the United States and abroad. Howard University has produced several pioneer Black figures and leaders in the United States, including a Supreme Court judge, members of Congress, leaders of big companies and movie stars. Yet, we know little about the women and men faculty who teach, train and develop these leaders.

Black Women in Higher Education: The Howard University Experience is the culmination of a two-year research project designed by J. Jarpa Dawuni, Ph.D., and Anita Plummer, Ph.D., and carried out by graduate students and faculty that documents the past and present status of women faculty, students, and administrators at Howard University. Each working paper provides historical and contemporary data and case studies of women at the institution in areas ranging from their role in leadership positions, faculty rank, salary, retention, post-graduate work, exposure to violence and discrimination, and more. The data reveal a complex story of individuals and groups of women addressing gender inequity spanning the University's over 150-year history.

As a center focused on global leadership, this project draws on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (goal number five) which calls on nations and institutions to work towards achieving gender equality. Equally, goal number four (#4) calls for quality education. Recent efforts to promote diversity, equity, inclusion and access (DEIA) require data and informed research to provide a baseline for assessing where progress has been made and where more work needs to be done. This Working Paper Series (WPS) provides the needed baseline for further research on the topic of women's representation at institutions of higher education—specifically within HBCUs.

Collectively, the working papers document critical areas of women's experiences in different academic departments, colleges, and schools. In 2022, women students comprised 74% of the student body at Howard. It is well documented that women today have more access to education than at any other point in history. (*Continued*)

PREFACE

Persistent gender inequality and inequity point to institutional failures at Howard and in higher education broadly. In 2019-2020, women comprised 55% of the faculty at Howard; however, when divided by rank, 66.81% of full professors and 53.27% of associate professors are men (College Factual, 2020). Lectureships, assistant professors, instructors, and adjuncts are predominantly held by women. Education is viewed as an equalizer, and this working paper series examines how women at the institution that graduates the highest number of Black professionals in medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, engineering, nursing, law, social work, and education fare in ensuring women are equally represented in those fields at Howard and beyond.

Representation in administrative leadership and faculty is essential in understanding the story of women's evolving roles at Howard University. Each paper focuses on three aspects of women's roles at the institution. It begins with a microhistory of each college or school, followed by an analysis of women's intellectual contributions in their disciplines over the institution's history. The second area focuses on contemporary data (up to the year 2020) on gender in administrative, faculty, and non-faculty teaching positions. The final part of each paper examines the societal and institutional practices and culture contributing to gender inequality and provides policy recommendations that may help address disparities in Black women's representation in higher education leadership.

Significance and Contribution

The role and experiences of Black women in higher education have been documented in the literature, especially in Predominately White Institutions (PWIs).

This WPS extends the literature by highlighting the following areas:

- The historical evolution of Black women faculty, administrators and students at Howard University.
- The formal institutional barriers Black women administrators and faculty encounter and the strategies used to address them.
- The informal cultural challenges faculty and administrators experience.
- Feminist theoretical perspectives that specifically focus on gender and race as critical dimensions to framing Black women in higher education.
- Highlights the broader implications of inequality and inequity on women in underrepresented sectors, especially in science and medicine.

This working paper series is the first project that shines a light on the role of women academics and administrators at Howard University. Each paper provides policy recommendations that can help Howard University and similar institutions advance gender equality and inclusion on campus. This project will contribute to existing scholarship on Black women in higher education by using Howard University as a case study.

J. Jarpa Dawuni, Ph.D. (Editor-in-Chief)

Founding Director, CWGGL

Associate Professor of Political Science

Anita Plummer, Ph.D. (Associate Editor)

Associate Director for Research & Faculty Engagement, CWGGL

Associate Professor of African Studies

Mouhamadou Moustapha Hoyeck (Managing Editor)

Outreach Coordinator, CWGGL

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Lifting As They Climb: Women Administrators at Howard University¹

Crystal Yuille
Howard University
Cryuille95@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Black women's positionality as both racialized and gendered minorities, as they seek leadership positions at Howard University and the changes in the gender composition of Howard University's leadership over time. The author employs theoretical approaches rooted in intersectional Black feminism and critical race theory to examine institutionalized patriarchy paired with other forms of oppression that have impacted Black women administrators at Howard. The author concludes that the institution's core values of excellence, leadership, service, and truth have fundamentally shaped the leadership of outstanding figures, and women leaders have been invaluable in the pursuit of cultivating the success of Howard students and, in some cases instrumental in the survival of the institution. Despite this, their efforts have gone largely overlooked.

The HBCU foundation of religious-based formal education and the popular argument that these institutions provide a constant social defense against racism have created a powerful torque of resistance to discussions focusing on the manner in which women have been treated and educated at HBCUs. (Bonner, 2001, pp. 180-181).

¹Florence Bonner, Former Senior Vice President of Research and Compliance, Howard University

INTRODUCTION

On the night of November 7, 2020, when newly elected United States Vice President Kamala Harris stood before an aching nation, she utilized her platform to highlight unsung heroes and urge the masses to consider the possibilities of what the United States could become. Her speech interweaved tributes to women who made powerful sacrifices in the name of equality and justice, including Black women whom she noted are "too often overlooked, but so often prove they are the backbone of our democracy" (Betancourt, 2020).

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As a woman of color with both African and South Asian ancestry and as a graduate of a premier Historically Black College and University (HBCU), Harris' ascension to the second-highest executive office in the nation signaled a crucial step for representation and political power – a point Harris referenced by stating “every little girl watching tonight sees that this is a country of possibilities,” (Betancourt, 2020). Her statement illuminated the importance of representation and inclusivity, especially within influential political and academic institutions.

While Harris' vice presidency sparked national conversations about the role of women in leadership and the role of HBCUs in educating future leaders, a pointed conversation on the intersecting dynamics between the two remains absent from dominant discourses. At HBCUs across the nation, the women who serve as higher education administrators have shaped the success of their institutions and led to positive academic gains. Women have played prominent roles as presidents, provosts, vice presidents, and deans of outstanding HBCUs; however, their contributions have gone largely under-researched and under-appreciated (Gasman, 2007, p. 762). Furthermore, as Patricia Hill Collins contends, Black women's unique positionality as racialized and gendered “outsiders-within” (Collins, 1986) has contributed to both opportunities and obstacles in higher education administration.

At Vice President Harris' alma mater, Howard University, Black women administrators have historically maneuvered through precarious terrain in their efforts to support the institution and its students. Women like Lucy Diggs Slowe (1885 -1937) were integral to Howard's mission, and despite serving as Howard University's first Dean of Women and helping to establish Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, the first historically Black, Greek letter membership sorority (and the sorority of which Kamala Harris is a member), like many women, Slowe faced relentless opposition in her pursuit of student advancement (Bell-Scott, 1997).

Today, Black female faculty and administrators have grown, partially due to increasing trends in Black women's educational attainment (Jones et. al, p. 5). Still, while women have outnumbered men in HBCU enrollment and graduation rates since 1976 (“NCES”), women continue to be underrepresented in the highest rungs of higher education leadership. This has created a reality in which the academic resources and opportunities offered to a majority-female, historically Black student body are often decided upon by a majority-male university leadership. The past three presidencies at Howard University have produced remarkable changes in the gendered composition of Howard University's leadership. In fact, under the leadership of President Wayne A. I. Frederick, the percentage of women officers of the university increased significantly. Such changes are projected to continue with the establishment of Howard University's Center for Women, Gender, and Global Leadership, which aims to highlight the integral role of race and gender in our society and beyond.

This begs the question, in what ways have Black women's positionality as both racialized and gendered minorities provided opportunities and obstacles as they seek leadership positions at Howard University, and how has the gender composition of Howard University's leadership changed over time? Through this study, I aim to uncover answers to these

questions by focusing on women and gender composition of the top leadership positions or “officers of the university” at Howard over the presidencies of President H. Patrick Swygert (1995 - 2008), Sidney A. Ribeau (2008 - 2013), and Wayne A. I. Frederick (2013 - present). The administrative leadership positions to be observed include university officers as outlined in the Howard University commencement programs and annual reports.

METHODOLOGY

To collect and analyze information about the gender composition of Howard University’s administrative leadership positions and the experience of women executive leaders at Howard University, I employ a qualitative study. I relied heavily on primary and secondary resources such as Howard University commencement programs and annual reports to retrieve data about the university officers and used Howard University magazines, newspapers, yearbooks, and official press releases to supplement the information.

Theoretical Approaches and Positionality Statement

The study employs a theoretical approach rooted in intersectional Black feminism and critical race theory. Both theories are essential to understanding how dynamics of race and gender may impact Black women leaders' experiences, even at an HBCU like Howard University. Intersectional Black feminism is a theory and praxis that is derived from a rich legacy of recognizing Black women’s particular lived experiences as a valid, helpful epistemology. In 1977, the Combahee River Collective released what some consider to be one of the “most compelling documents produced by Black Feminists” (Diversity, 2020), in which they articulated their aim to challenge oppressive status quos, stating,

We are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based on the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking (Combahee River Collective, 1977).

Their statement brought attention to how various forms of oppression impact people who identify with multiple intersecting identities. In 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the term ‘intersectionality’ as a conceptual framework that demystifies how Black women’s overlapping identities, such as race, gender, and economic status, may yield interdependent and interlocking forms of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw is also credited as one of the foremost experts on critical race theory (CRT). CRT began as an offshoot of legal studies aimed at uncovering the inherent bias and racism in legal institutions, but it has emerged as a valuable interdisciplinary complement to theories in women’s studies, sociology, ethnic studies, and more.

In their study of African-American college students’ experiences Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) noted CRT provided the necessary theoretical grounding to explore the experiences of African-American students due to its focus “on the racialized, gendered, and classed

experiences of communities of color” and its propensity to offer “a liberatory and transformative method for examining racial/ethnic, gender, and class discrimination.” Thus, CRT is useful for analyzing the obstacles and opportunities for Black women leaders in higher education administration.

As a young Black woman from the Mid-Atlantic who is both a graduate student and staff employee of Howard University, I embrace Black feminism’s affirmation that my lived experience is a helpful tool through which I interpret and observe the world around me. I am keenly aware of how my overlapping and intersecting identities have shaped my experience at Howard University. Such experiences, including informal discussions with women in top leadership positions at the university and the aforementioned theoretical approaches and methods, have yielded a practical conceptual framework that complements and aids the study.

HOWARD UNIVERSITY’S FOREMOTHERS: DEAN OF WOMEN, LUCY DIGGS SLOWE AND INTERIM PRESIDENT, JOYCE LADNER

Before exploring the contemporary changes in gender representation for university leadership, I will contextualize the university’s founding and dealings with gender by detailing the experiences of two outstanding leaders at Howard University – Dean of Women Lucy Diggs Slowe and Interim President Joyce Ladner. Slowe and Ladner’s experiences as Howard University foremothers reveals important details about Howard university’s engagement with issues of gender and leadership that have a bearing on the contemporary moment.

Howard University was founded in 1866 by Civil War General and Commissioner of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (the Freedmen's Bureau) Oliver Otis Howard. The following year, on March 2, 1867, the United States Congress chartered Howard University “for the education of youth in the liberal arts and sciences,” (Dyson, 1921). Howard University permitted the registration of students of all genders and races, and in fact, the first students to attend the university were four white daughters of members of Howard University’s Board of Trustees. In the Fall of 1867, most students enrolled at Howard University identified as “colored.” Since then, Howard University has embraced its dual mission to educate ‘youth and the Negro’ (Logan, 1969).

While Howard University has successfully educated droves of Howard women, patriarchal norms have affected how female students, faculty, and administrators experience the university. For example, records dictate that Howard University President Stephen M. Newman (1912 - 1918) was consistently hostile toward female leadership. He recommended to the Board that women faculty found to have married during their professorship should be assumed to have resigned, and he refused to consider the proposal of thirty-three female students for the establishment of a Dean of Women that would “direct them in all womanly activities and foster on their high levels of scholarship and refinement.” Newman stalled the process, not once, but twice, in 1915 and again in 1916 (Logan, 1969, p. 170).

It was not until 1922 that Howard University appointed Lucy Diggs Slowe (1885 - 1937) as the first official Dean of Women at Howard University, leading her to become the first Black woman to hold the position at a university in the United States (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2018). Recognized as a stalwart leader in higher education and foremost Dean of Women at an HBCU, her leadership facilitated the establishment of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., the National Council of Negro Women, and the National Association of College Women (Maryland Commission for Women, 2011). Slowe served as the first Black Member in the National Association of Deans and leveraged that experience to create the Association of Deans and Women Advisors to Girls in Negro Schools (Jones et al., 2012). At Howard University, Slowe was dutifully committed to her role as an academic leader, especially for her female students. Despite administrative challenges, she headed the creation of a “female campus” that encompassed three women’s dormitories at Howard University in 1931 (Perkins, 1996, p. 92) and transformed the position of Dean of Women from a primarily disciplinarian role to a role that specialized in supporting the intellectual development of the modern Howard woman (Herdlein et al., 2008, p. 295).

In part because of her fearless pursuit of gender activism, Slowe encountered problems with the Howard University administration. In the late 1920s, Slowe supported a group of young women who issued a sexual harassment complaint against their professor. Following the incident, Slowe detailed how her male colleagues including Howard University’s longest serving and first Black President Mordecai Wyatt Johnson (1926-1960) ostracized and castigated her. In a 1927 memorandum, Slowe shared that President Johnson raised the salaries of her colleagues by \$850 to \$1150 dollars, while only raising hers by \$200 (Bell-Scott, 1997, p. 74). Furthermore, he recused her from conferences with the Academic Deans, cut her departmental budget, and suggested she decrease the scope of her activities before suggesting she relinquish her position. Finally, in 1937, when Slowe faced a debilitating sickness that left her bedridden for weeks, President Johnson sent an employee to deliver what was called the “deathbed ultimatum.” He demanded that Slowe either return to Howard University within 24 hours or be replaced as dean. Slowe did not overcome her sickness, and she died about a month later, in October 1937 (Verongos, 2020).

Slowe staunchly opposed social conservatism’s failure to nurture the intellectual curiosities of female students (Perkins, 1996). Her critiques of sexist and racist social institutions have been echoed by other scholars, including some who argue, “When exploring early HBCU Black women deans’ experiences, it is apparent that Black women in HBCU leadership often navigated spaces rich with racial pride but riddled with gender discrimination,” (Commodore, 2019). Slowe’s experience demonstrates the difficult terrain for Black female administrators who must navigate institutionalized forms of racialized patriarchy at historically black institutions of higher learning.

The case of Howard University’s Interim President Joyce Ladner (1994 - 1995) further exemplified the tenuous reality for Black women in administrative roles at HBCUs. Born in Battles, Mississippi, in 1947, Joyce Ladner built a career as a consummate professor and scholar-activist. She first arrived at Howard University in the 1980s as a professor of

sociology before pivoting to an administrative role as Vice President of Academic Affairs (Provost) in 1990.

In the summer of 1994, after calls for the resignation of President Franklin Jenifer (1990 - 1994), Ladner was appointed by the Board of Trustees to the position of Interim President ("The Bison: 1995"). According to Ladner, upon taking the position, she was tasked with eliminating a projected 25 million-dollar deficit that her predecessors incurred (Strauss, 1995). She displayed exceptional leadership while moving the university out of crisis by implementing a restructuring plan, mentoring student leaders, and instituting registration crackdowns. While the Board of Trustees supported these measures, it was met with mixed responses from faculty and students, who expressed emotions ranging from anxiety and anger to support and empathy for the situation Ladner inherited ("The Hilltop 9-9-1994," 1994).

Despite the Board of Trustees' recognition that Ladner confronted "major challenges" and took "tough and definitive actions needed to bring the university back on course for the year" ("Howard University Names H. Patrick Swygert," 1995), the Board unanimously elected to appoint H. Patrick Swygert as the 15th president of Howard University in 1995 ("The Hilltop 5-13-1995", 1995). Following the news, student leaders awarded President Ladner with a plaque to thank her for being a "strong and persevering president" who always had the "university and student's best interests at heart," ("The Hilltop 9-9-1994", 1994). Twenty years later, during a plenary panel in 2015, Ladner briefly revealed her sentiments about the matter, stating:

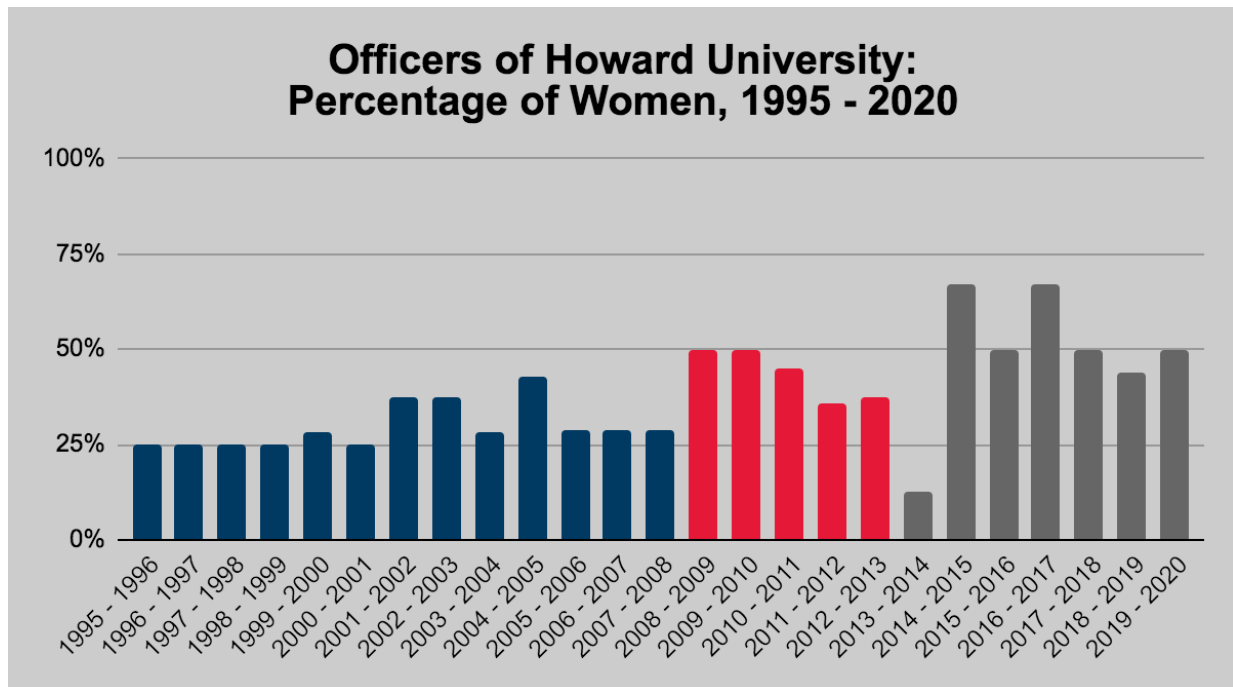
I served time as a provost at Howard and even one year as interim president before I was summarily moved on, and a man got the job. We won't talk about that because it had nothing to do with my qualifications, but we women in the academy have great difficulty ascending to those high levels ("Plenary Panel," 2015).

Her anecdote substantiates prevailing literature that details the experiences of many Black women in higher education (Tevis et al., 2020). Together, both Slowe and Ladner made a fundamental impact on the leadership, academics, and environment of Howard University, but not without obstacles. Their experiences as foremothers of university administration demonstrate the critical role of often overlooked women in university administration.

FINDINGS: GENDER AND LEADERSHIP

From the exit of Interim President Joyce Ladner in 1994 to the presidency of Dr. Wayne A. I. Frederick, the administrative makeup and the gendered composition of Howard University have changed dramatically.

Table A. Officers of Howard University: Percentage of Women, 1995-2020



**Blue indicates Swygert's presidency; *Red indicates Ribeau's presidency; *Grey indicates Frederick's presidency*

***Source: Howard University commencement programs and annual reports*

1995 - 2008: The Swygert Presidency

During the thirteen years of H. Patrick Swygert's presidency, Swygert directed officers of the university comprised of the following:

- Vice President for Academic Affairs/Provost & Chief Academic Officer
- Vice President for Health Affairs (also combined with the Dean of the College of Medicine)
- Vice President for University Advancement/Administration
- Senior Vice President (or Executive Vice President) and Chief Financial Officer
- Vice President for Government Affairs
- General Counsel
- Senior Vice President and Secretary (previously titled the Vice President for Human Resources and Secretary of the University and Board of Trustees)
- Vice President for Student Affairs
- Vice President for Research and Compliance
 - Four women served as officers of the university during the Swygert presidency:
- Norma B. Leftwich (1995 - 2012)
- Dr. A. Toy Caldwell-Colbert (2001 - 2003)
- Artis Hampshire-Cowan, Esq. (2001 - 2017)
- Ms. Sheila Roberts (2004 - 2005)

2008 - 2013: The Ribeau Presidency

Under the Ribeau Presidency, the officers of the university were comprised of the following:

- Provost & Chief Academic Officer
- Senior Vice President for Strategic Planning, Operations, and External Affairs
- Vice President for Presidential Initiatives
- Senior Vice President and Chief Financial Officer/Treasurer
- Senior Vice President for Health Affairs & Executive Dean of Health Sciences
- General Counsel/Vice President & General Counsel
- Provost and Senior Vice President for Health Sciences
- Deputy Provost Health Sciences
- Vice President Development and Alumni Relations
- Senior Vice President and Secretary
- Senior Vice President Research and Compliance
- Vice President for Human Capital Management
- Executive Vice President & Chief Operating Officer
- Executive Vice President and Chief Talent Management Officer
- Vice President for Student Affairs
- Vice President for Human Resources
 - Seven women served as officers of the university under Ribeau:
- Artis Hampshire-Cowan, Esq. (2001 - 2017)
- Norma B. Leftwich (1995 - 2012)
- Dr. Florence Bonner (2008 - 2010)
- Elizabeth Stroud (2008 - 2009)
- Nesta Bernard (2008 - 2015)
- Dr. Eve Higginbotham (2009 - 2011)
- Dr. Barbara L. J. Griffin (2010 - 2012)

2013 - present: The Frederick Presidency

Under the Frederick Presidency, the officers of the university were comprised of the following:

- Chief Academic Officer and/or Provost
- Chief Financial Officer
- Vice President for Development and Alumni Affairs
- Vice President & Chief Communications Officer
- Vice President for Student Affairs
- Government Affairs/External Affairs
- Vice President for Human Resources
- Senior Vice President and Secretary
- General Counsel

- Vice President, Secretary, and General Counsel
- Executive Vice President & Chief Operating Officer
- Vice President of Corporate Relations
 - Eleven women served as officers of the university under Frederick until 2020:
- Artis Hampshire-Cowan, Esq. (2001 - 2017)
- Nesta Bernard (2008 - 2015)
- Dr. Barbara L. J. Griffin (2010 - 2013)
- Dr. Constance Ellison (2014 - 2015)
- Gracia Hillman (2014 - 2018)
- Florence Prioleau, J.D. (2014 - present)
- Carrolyn J. Bostick (2015 - 2017)
- Laura Jack (2015 - 2017)
- Crystal Brown (2017 - 2020)
- Dr. Tashni-Ann Dubroy (2017 - present)
- Debbi Jarvis (2018 - present)

DISCUSSION

The data shows an upward trend for Black women accessing positions of leadership at Howard University. President Swygert was appointed as president following the interim presidency of Joyce Ladner. During his tenure, women occupied four of the eight positions: Vice President for Academic Affairs/Provost & Chief Academic Officer, Senior Vice President and Chief Financial Officer, General Counsel, and Senior Vice President and Secretary, or as previously titled, the Vice President for Human Resources and Secretary of the University and Board of Trustees. Norma B. Leftwich and Artis Hampshire-Cowan remained in their respective roles during the entirety of Swygert's presidency. Dr. A. Toy Caldwell-Colbert and Sheila Roberts served for just one or two years. Of the twenty-three people who were officers of the university during Swygert's presidency, four were women. Thus, about 17% of the officers were women. Because female students outnumbered the male population, the women administrative leaders were significantly underrepresented.

Ribeau initiated significant shifts in the roles comprising the officers of the university and shifts in the gendered composition of the administration. Notably, Ribeau's presidency features at least 50% women officers – a first for the university (see Table D). Interestingly, while women covered an array of roles in executive leadership, they were not represented in academic affairs, strategic planning and operations, or finance. Seven women were represented of the twenty total officers, for a total of 35%, which signifies a 100% increase compared to the Swygert presidency but still a high level of underrepresentation for women leaders.

In 2014, Frederick was appointed by the Board of Trustees as President of Howard University, and since then, he has transformed the university's officers and ushered in a new era for women's representation. Except for President Frederick's interim year as President (2013 - 2014), Frederick consistently appointed women to serve in at least 50% of officer

positions. Of the 12 positions, women served in 10 distinct roles and were only absent in the provost and chief financial officer positions. Of the 19 total university officers, 11 were women, which marked a level of nearly 58% representation of women. Thus, female representation increased by more than 50% from the Ribeau presidency and increased by more than 250% from the Swygert presidency.

Since 1994, when the Board of Trustees Interim passed over President Joyce Ladner for the permanent president position, the structure and gendered composition of the university's officers has changed dramatically. With every new presidency, the gendered composition of the university officers increased, though it never reached the gendered representation of the 71% female student body ("U.S. News and World Report"). Furthermore, during Howard University's 154 years in service, the Board of Trustees never elected a woman as permanent president. President Frederick argued that this could change in the next few years.

In a Fall 2016 edition of the Howard University Magazine, President Frederick supported Howard women in shattering 'glass ceilings', and expressed his desire for his successor to be the first female president. He wrote, "Whomever the 18th president of this storied institution will be, I hope that she is someone who is guided by the Howard Women before her who have paved a pathway to a place at the table for her" (*Frederick, 2016*). Again in 2020, while speaking to the Washington Business Journal, Frederick reflected on his experience as Howard University president. He expressed contempt at the fact that a woman can reach the highest office in the United States but has yet to be president of Howard University. When his contract ends in 2024, he stated his "next big goal is to transition the presidency of Howard in a normal way to our first female president" (Capriel, 2020). Such aspirations coming from the executive office of Howard University signal increased opportunities for women leaders at Howard University.

President Frederick also supported the forthcoming Center for Women, Gender, and Global Leadership. Headed by Dr. Josephine J. Dawuni, the center will produce research that raises the global visibility of issues related to Black women and other women of color. Moreover, the center's activities will serve as a valuable resource to Howard students as they journey through their academic careers. The establishment of the Center demonstrates that Black women have valuable epistemological contributions, and their experiences are worthy of study. Through the Center, there is increased potential for once-overlooked women to be highlighted in a new and significant way.

As more women are appointed as officers of the university at Howard University, time will tell what impact this will have on the university and its student body. Proponents of critical mass theory typically argue that it takes a "critical mass" of more than 30% of women in leadership to make substantive changes regarding gender issues. The theory is tied to the belief that less than 30% of women may be unable to garner the support necessary to pursue actions that do not align with the status quo. When a critical mass emerges, there is more opportunity to pursue gender issues (Donaldson & Emes, 2000).

Some scholars have contested critical mass theory, and in fact, history has shown that women have made significant changes regarding gender at universities despite the absence of a critical mass of women. Still, as Howard University leadership consistently meets or exceeds 50% of female representation, future studies analyzing the correlation between a critical mass of women higher education administrators and gender policies will inform our understanding of gender and leadership, especially at HBCUs.

CONCLUSION

Howard University is an outstanding institution of higher learning that aims to “produce leaders for America and the global community”. The institution’s core values of excellence, leadership, service, and truth have fundamentally shaped the leadership of outstanding figures. Women leaders have been invaluable in the pursuit of cultivating the success of Howard students and in some cases, instrumental in the survival of the institution. Still, their efforts have gone largely overlooked.

For Black women at HBCUs, institutionalized patriarchy paired with other forms of oppression has historically precluded them from ascending to the highest positions of power. Despite dealing with obstacles ranging from microaggressions to sexual harassment and budget cuts (Hernandez et al., 2020), Black women officers of the university have managed to lift while they climb. They have implemented policies, employed projects, and made tough, decisive choices with the best interests of the students and university in mind. The legacies of Howard University interim president Joyce Ladner and Dean of Women Lucy Diggs Slowe testify to that reality.

Howard University is making strides toward a more inclusive, representative university leadership. Time will tell the implications of this shift for the university and its student body. However, the increasing leadership roles of women may signal to its majority-female student body that, as Vice President Kamala Harris stated, “Howard teaches you can do anything and everything” (Harris, 2017).

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