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Presidential transitions during capital campaigns: Perspectives of chief development officers



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Award Date

1-1-2007

Degree Type

Dissertation

Degree Name

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Department

Educational Leadership

First Committee Member

Bob Ackerman

Number of Pages

203

Abstract

In the past few decades, capital campaigns at institutions of higher education have increased in duration, while collegiate presidential tenures have been doing just the opposite. Turnover in the top post was frequent, even during major fundraising campaigns. Prior to this study, presidential transitions during campaigns had not been previously analyzed. Therefore, the objective of this exploratory study was to better understand presidential transitions during capital campaigns from the perspective of the chief development officer (CDO) who maintained continuity. Nine CDOs who experienced presidential transitions during campaigns were interviewed to better understand their experience. The institutions represented were Florida State University, Millikin University, Muhlenberg College, University of Indianapolis, University of North Florida, University of Redlands, University of Wisconsin - Whitewater, Villanova University, and Wake Forest University; Schlossberg's theory of transition served as the theoretical framework for the study and formed the four research questions which reflected Schlossberg's S's: situation, self, supports, and strategies. The situation was defined differently at each institution, although they did have some similarities, such as lengthy campaigns of seven years or more, successful goal completions, and transitions that occurred after the campaign went public. Most presidential transitions were negative and restricting to campaign work, even when the transitions went smoothly; The nine CDOs that participated in this study had an average of 24 years work in fundraising, and 15 years at their specific institution. The participants relied on the following traits to help them navigate the change in leadership: patience, perseverance, work drive, flexibility, teamwork, confidence, altruism, resiliency, and focus. Four groups or individuals were cited as most often providing support during the presidential transition: the Board of Trustees, the development staff, the incoming president, and senior staff colleagues. Lastly, the strategies for dealing with a presidential transition during a campaign included (a) providing input in the selection of the new president, (b) communication with constituency, (c) education of the incoming president, (d) involving the new president in the campaign right away, and (e) creating new funding priorities. Recommendations for a CDO dealing with a change in leadership during a campaign have been outlined in the final chapter.

Keywords

Campaigns; Capital; Capital Campaigns; Chief; Chief Development Officers; College Presidents; Development; Fundraising; Higher Education; Leadership; Officers; Perspective; Presidential; Presidential Transitions

Controlled Subject

Education, Higher; School management and organization

File Format

pdf

File Size

5447.68 KB

Degree Grantor

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Language

English

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Identifier

<https://doi.org/10.25669/1cpt-juqj>

Repository Citation

Nehls, Kimberly Kay, "Presidential transitions during capital campaigns: Perspectives of chief development officers" (2007). *UNLV Retrospective Theses & Dissertations 2773*.

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