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UTAH WOMEN & LEADERSHIP Project

The Status of Women Leaders in Utah Higher Education: A 2026 Update

In 2014, the Utah Women & Leadership Project (UWLP) released a research and policy brief titled "The Status of Women Leaders in Utah Education,"[1] followed by an update in 2017.[2] These reports examined the status of women's leadership in both K–12 and postsecondary education across the state of Utah. In 2021, an update was published that focused only on the higher education portion of the previous briefs.[3] The purpose of the current brief is to update the 2021 publication and determine what, if any, progress has been made in women's leadership within Utah's higher education sector. As in the previous publication, this update includes the eight public degree-granting colleges and universities and the eight technical colleges within the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE), as well as the two largest private institutions. This brief also compares Utah data with national data, reviews the applicable literature, and examines changes in leadership over time.

Much of the national data used in this brief comes from the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR) and the American Council on Education (ACE). CUPA-HR monitors trends, explores emerging workforce issues, conducts research, and promotes strategic discussions among colleges and universities, while ACE mobilizes the higher education community to shape effective public policy. Both organizations contribute toward progress for women in higher education leadership across the nation and abroad. We obtained systemwide and institutional position-specific data for Utah by collecting information from institutional websites or contacting key individuals at each college or university.

Setting the Stage

For this report, we analyzed data from Utah colleges and universities. More specifically, the degree-granting public colleges and universities within the USHE were Salt Lake Community College (SLCC), Snow College (SC), Southern Utah University (SUU), University of Utah (U of U), Utah State University (USU), Utah Tech University (UTU), Utah Valley University (UVU), and Weber State University (WSU). The private higher education institutions analyzed were Brigham Young University (BYU) and Westminster University (WU). In Utah, research-focused institutions included BYU, the U of U, and USU. Regional institutions included SUU, UTU, UVU, WSU, and WU, while the two-year colleges were SLCC and SC. The eight Utah technical colleges analyzed included Bridgerland, Davis, Dixie, Mountainland, Ogden-Weber, Southwest, Tooele, and Uintah Basin. The data were double checked and confirmed in September 2026.

Nationally, the 2025–2026 CUPA-HR[4] report indicated that women held 55.3% of senior leadership positions across the United States, up from 52.0% in 2020. Although seemingly at parity, representation varied by position, institution type, and status (e.g., research-intensive institutions are considered high status). For example, ACE's 2023 Survey of American College Presidents found that women held 43.6% of associate-level community college presidencies, a substantial improvement from 2016 (35.8%).[5] In 2020, Inside Higher Ed[6] reported that although the number of women in administration was rising, they still faced significant seniority and pay disparities.

The 2023 ACE report also examined the pipeline for president and provost positions by gathering data on individuals' previous positions and place of employment prior to their current appointments. The report found that, in the pipeline to key leadership roles in higher education, 70.0% of presidents were hired from *outside* the institution, while only 30.0% of presidents were promoted *within* their institution.[7] This pattern may help explain why women still hold less than 40.0% of executive leadership roles, particularly given that women are often more geographically bound than men.[8] The rising trend in Utah to hire talent from outside the state may further negatively impact the pipeline to leadership for women in higher education who live in Utah.

This research and policy brief is organized by position: State Board of Higher Education, Presidents, Cabinet Members, Chief Academic Officers and Vice Presidents, and Academic Deans. These sections will be followed by implications and opportunities for the Utah higher education community.

State Board of Higher Education

State-level governance is typically composed of elected or appointed individuals; thus, these roles are not directly associated with the leadership pipeline for women in higher education. However, decisions made by these governing bodies affect the status of women's leadership across the state. Typically, each state has a governing body that oversees higher education; it is composed of regents, education board members, or chancellors (see Ohio and Delaware for exceptions).

National: Based on information collected from each state's governing board websites, national data show women comprise 40.1% of governing bodies—nearly the same as the percentage reported in 2020 (39.8%) and an increase from the percentages reported in both 2017 (33.5%) and 2014 (29.3%). States with high representation for women include Maryland (75.0%), Wisconsin (64.3%), Colorado (63.6%), Alaska (63.6%), and Vermont (61.5%). States with low representation

for women included Oklahoma (11.1%), North Dakota (12.5%), South Carolina (14.3%), Virginia (15.4%), and Alabama (16.7%).

Utah: Utah's State Board of Higher Education ranks 32nd among the 50 states in terms of the percentage of board members who are women. The board is composed of 30.0% women, which is below the national average (40.1%). Women's representation on the board is significantly lower than in 2021 (44.4%) and is slightly lower than in 2014 and 2017 (31.6% in both years).

Presidents

National: CUPA-HR found that women comprised 33.0% of college and university presidencies in 2020 and 32.7% in 2026.[9] The American College President report found that 28.7% of Carnegie Institutions offering doctoral degrees had women presidents (up from 21.8% in 2016).[10] Among institutions whose highest degree offering was a master's degree, 34.6% had women presidents (up from 29.0% in 2016). Similarly, 40.2% of institutions whose highest offering was a bachelor's degree had women presidents (up from 12.3% in 2016). Finally, the percentage of women leading associate-level institutions rose 7.8 percentage points to 43.6%.

Utah: Women make up 30.0% of current presidents of degree-granting colleges and universities. This is a significant decrease from 2021 (50.0%) but an increase from both 2017 (25.0%) and 2014 (12.5%). The number of women serving as presidents varies by institutional characteristics. Two of the eight public degree-granting colleges and universities have women presidents: a two-year college (SC) and a regional institution (SUU). One of the two private colleges and universities (WU) also has a woman as president. None of Utah's research institutions employs a woman president. Likewise, none of the eight technical colleges employs a woman as president, although one (Bridgerland) has a woman in this position in an interim capacity.

Boards of Trustees or Directors

National: Corporate data from a 2020 study by Kramer and Adams noted that boards composed of at least 30.0% women provide space for meaningful contributions from women; however, data from higher education boards show otherwise.[11] Women tend to be excluded from key decision-making opportunities and leadership positions on critical subcommittees (e.g., executive committees), even when those boards include more than 30.0% women. In the same study of 29 higher education institutions,[12] women accounted for an average membership of 28.0% of governing board membership—a decrease from the percentages we previously reported in 2014 (30.2%) and 2017 (28.4%). However, we expect that a broader national study would find at least a slight increase. No national data is available for technical college boards of trustees or directors.

Utah: The public and private degree-granting colleges and universities included in this report have boards comprised of 40.0% women, with USHE colleges and universities having more women on boards (43.8%) than the two private institutions (31.4%). Research-intensive institutions have a lower percentage of women serving as trustees (38.2% overall, with the U of U at 60.0%, USU at 41.7%, and BYU at 16.7%). Regional institutions have 42.2% of women serving as trustees: SUU (60.0%), WSU (50.0%), WU (39.1%), UVU (36.4%), and UTU (30.0%). Two-year colleges included fewer women on boards than research or regional institutions (35.3% overall, with SLCC at 42.9% and SC at 30.0%). Overall, the percentage of women serving on boards of trustees decreased slightly from 41.1% in 2021.

Utah technical colleges have the highest percentage of women trustees or directors (47.7%), with Bridgerland at 66.7%, Ogden-Weber at 54.5%, Mountainland at 50.0%, Southwest at 46.2%, Uintah Basin and Davis at 45.5%, Tooele at 40.0%, and Dixie at 22.2%. In 2021, we reported that women held 23.1% of governing board positions on technical campuses, so the current data show a significant increase in this area.

In key board leadership positions, women in Utah serve as chair of 44.4% of the boards (compared to 33.3% in 2021, 35.3% in 2017, and 29.8% in 2014) and as vice chair on 40.0% of boards, with variation by institutional characteristics. At the eight public degree-granting colleges and universities, women are less likely to be board chairs (37.5%) and more likely to be vice chairs (55.6%). Two research-intensive institutions had women as board chairs (USU and the U of U), and one of the three (USU) had a woman serving as vice chair. None of the regional institutions has a woman serving as chair, but all of them (SUU, UTU, UVU, WSU, and WU) have women serving as vice chairs. One two-year college (SLCC) has a woman chair, and neither has a woman vice chair. One of the two private institutions (WU) has a woman serving as vice chair, but neither (WU nor BYU) has a woman chair. At the eight technical colleges, five women serve as chair and two as vice chairs.

Presidential Cabinets

National: CUPA-HR data provide approximate gender distributions of presidential cabinets, showing women in 46.0% of senior institutional posts.[13] Although these data do not describe precise cabinet compositions, they offer a reasonable estimate of women's representation in cabinet-level positions nationally.

Utah: Women comprise 42.4% of presidential cabinets (an increase from 37.1 as reported in 2021, 27.4% in 2017, and 23.0% in 2014) across Utah's degree-granting colleges and universities. WU tops the list with 66.7% of cabinet members being women, followed by UVU and WSU at 50.0%, SLCC and the U of U at 42.1%, BYU at 38.5%, and USU at 35.7%. SC, SUU, and UTU rank lowest, with 33.3% for both SC and SUU and 30.0% at UTU.

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Within Utah's technical colleges, women fill 47.7% of cabinet positions. Bridgerland leads, with women holding 83.3% of cabinet roles, followed by Uintah Basin (66.7%), Davis (50%), Ogden-Weber and Tooele (40.0%), and Dixie (33.3%). Mountainland and Southwest rank lowest, with only 25.0% of cabinet members being women.

Chief Academic Officers

National: The 2025 CUPA-HR report found that 51.6% of chief academic officer (CAO) positions at colleges and universities nationally are held by women, compared to 44.4% in 2021 and 42.0% in 2017.[14] An ACE 2018 report found that the CAO position is a key stepping stone for women advancing to the presidency. Nationally, women are strongly represented in assistant or associate CAO roles.[15]

Utah: In Utah, 44.4%, or four of nine, CAO positions are held by women, a significant increase from 20.0% in 2021 and 25.0% in both 2017 and 2014. This remains below the national level of 51.6%. All four of Utah's women CAOs work for public institutions: one at a research institution (the U of U) and three at regional universities (SUU, UTU, and WSU). One of Utah's regional institutions (WU) currently has an Interim CAO, but the role is held by a man. If we were to include the interim role in our analysis, the percentage of women serving as Chief Academic Officer in Utah's degree-granting institutions would drop from 44.4% to 40.0%. Five of eight technical colleges (Bridgerland, Davis, Dixie, Mountainland, and Uintah) have women serving as either CAOs or as vice presidents of instruction (62.5%).

In terms of assistant or associate CAO roles, women in Utah are significantly underrepresented. Overall, 27.0% of assistant or associate CAO positions at Utah's degree-granting institutions are held by women. Most institutions still fall below the national average (61.5%),[16] with only UVU (100%) and UTU (66.7%) exceeding it. Research-intensive, regional, and two-year institutions all show sizable gaps. Research institutions range from 20.0% women (BYU) to 12.5% (USU) and 11.1% (the U of U). Regional colleges and universities perform somewhat better overall, with 100% (UVU), 66.7% (UTU), 33.3% (SUU), and 0.0% (WSU) women assistant CAOs. Two-year institutions show a similar spread to the research institutions, with SLCC at 25.0% and SC employing no women in this role.

Vice Presidents

National: The 2025 CUPA-HR report found that 55.7% of vice president (VP) positions in postsecondary institutions are held by women, up from 40.0% in 2020.[17]

Utah: Utah is making progress in VP roles—women in Utah are represented at a higher rate than in previous years. However, they remain underrepresented compared to the nation. Women fill 44.1% of VP roles at Utah's degree-granting institutions, a significant increase from 33.3% in 2021, 18.4% in 2017, and 22.9% in 2014. At USHE institutions, 40.7% of VPs are women (up from 29.2% in 2021, 19.6% in 2017, and 23.3% in 2014), and representation has similarly increased at the two private institutions (from 44.0% in 2017 and 50% in 2021 to 57.1% in 2026). All of Utah's degree-granting public institutions have at least one woman serving in a VP role. The USHE institutions with the highest percentages include UVU (62.5%), SLCC, the U of U, and WSU (50.0%). These are followed by USU (30.0%), SC and SUU (25.0%), and UTU (16.7%). The two private institutions stand at 66.7% (WU) and 50.0% (BYU).

Four of Utah's degree-granting institutions (WU, the U of U, USU, and WU) have one person serving as interim VP. One of these (WU) employs a woman interim VP, while the others (the U of U, USU, and WU) have men in this position. If interim VP positions are included in the total counts, the average percentage of women serving as VPs in degree-granting institutions would drop from 44.1% to 43.1%.

The share of women VPs in Utah's technical colleges is 50.0%, which is similar to the national average of 55.1%. Three-quarters of VPs at Bridgerland and Uintah Basin are women, followed by 66.7% at Ogden-Weber, and 50.0% at both Southwest and Tooele. Davis, Dixie, and Mountainland rank lowest, with 33.3%, 25.0%, and 0.0%, respectively, of VP roles filled by women.

Utah falls significantly below the national average, with women holding 44.7% of assistant or associate vice president (AVP) roles, compared with 52.6% nationally. Two of Utah's public degree-granting institutions currently have at least one person serving in an interim AVP capacity. One of these institutions (SLCC) employs a woman in this role, while the other (USU) employs one man and one woman. If these interim positions were included in the count, the overall percentage of women serving as AVPs in Utah's degree-granting institutions would increase from 44.1% to 45.6%.

Of Utah's public institutions, the U of U has the highest representation of women in AVP roles (75.0%), followed by SLCC, USU, UTU, and WSU (each at 50.0%). SUU and UVU rank lowest at 35.7% and 25.0%, respectively. The only private institution employing AVPs is BYU, where women make up 40.0% of AVPs. Half of Utah's technical colleges have assistant or associate vice president (AVP) roles. Women's representation is highest at Bridgerland and Davis (66.7% each). Uintah Basin has two AVP positions, one of which is held by a woman (50.0% representation), and Mountainland has eight AVP positions, with 37.5% held by women.

Academic Deans

National: Academic deans are among key leadership positions within higher education institutions. The 2025 CUPA-HR report indicates that the national percentage of women deans increased from about 33.0% in 2001 to 50.1% in 2025.[18] Nationally, women hold approximately 58.6% of assistant or associate academic dean roles.

Utah: Utah falls far below the national average, with women holding 37.0% of academic dean positions. Women's repre-

sentation in this role varies substantially across state institutions. Public degree-granting institutions have lower representation, at 35.2%—up from 22.9% in 2017 and 30.8% in 2014—while private institutions have significantly increased women's representation, now at 42.1% (up from 31.3% in 2021 and 31.6% in 2017). Specifically, WU has women in 40.0% of its academic dean positions, and BYU has 42.9%. Among Utah's public colleges and universities, regional institutions have slightly more women in dean roles (37.5% overall, with WSU at 50.0%, UTU at 40.0%, UVU at 33.3%, and SUU at 28.6%) than research-intensive institutions (35.0% overall, with the U of U at 46.7% and USU at 0%) or two-year institutions (30.0% overall, with SLCC at 40.0% and SC at 20.0%).

For assistant or associate academic dean roles, women hold 46.3% of positions in Utah, down from 51.5% in 2021. BYU is the only private institution with associate dean roles, and 36.0% of these positions are held by women. Public research-intensive institutions have 54.4% women in these roles, with the U of U at 55.0% and USU at 52.2%. Regional institutions have 44.4% women, with WSU at 75.0%, UVU at 47.6%, UTU at 33.3%, and SUU at 25.0%. Among the two-year institutions, only SLCC employs assistant or associate academic deans, with women holding 35.7% of these leadership positions.

Data Summary

Table 1 provides an overview of the top positions examined by gender nationally, across all Utah institutions of higher education (public/private degree-granting and technical colleges), and only degree-granting institutions within Utah (public and the two largest private). Overall, 390 women (43.0%) and 517 men (57.0%) serve in the most senior positions across Utah public and private higher education institutions. Within degree-granting institutions (public and the two largest private), 302 women (41.9%) and 418 men (58.1%) hold these positions. The numbers represent an increase from 2021 (36.0%) and 2017 (30.0%) in the percentage of women holding top postsecondary posts statewide.

Table 1. Percentage of Women in Top Higher Education Leadership Positions

Leadership Position	US[a]	All Utah (including Technical)	Degree-Granting Utah
Board of Higher Education	40.1%	33.3%	33.3%
President	33.0%	18.8%	30.0%
Trustee	—	43.3%	40.0%
President's Cabinet	46.0%	43.8%	42.4%
Chief Academic Officer/Provost	51.6%	52.9%	44.4%
Associate/Assistant CAO	61.5%	26.3%	27.0%
Vice President	55.7%	45.7%	44.1%
Associate/Assistant Vice President	52.6%	45.7%	44.7%
Academic Dean	50.7%	37.0%	37.0%
Associate/Assistant Academic Dean	52.6%	46.3%	46.3%
Total	**55.3%**	**43.0%**	**41.9%**

[a]*All US data come from the 2025 CUPA-HR data provided to UWLP, except State Boards of Education data, which were collected by UWLP researchers. Current national-level trustee data were not available.*

Figure 1 compares the Utah public and private degree-granting institution percentages over time from all three UWLP briefs. The figure does not include data for technical colleges because the 2014 and 2017 briefs did not.

Figure 1: Change Over Time, Women in Top Positions in USHE

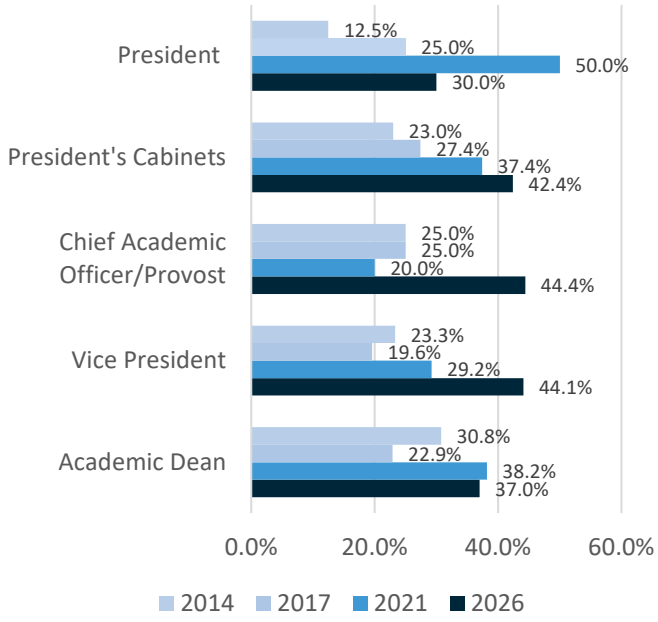
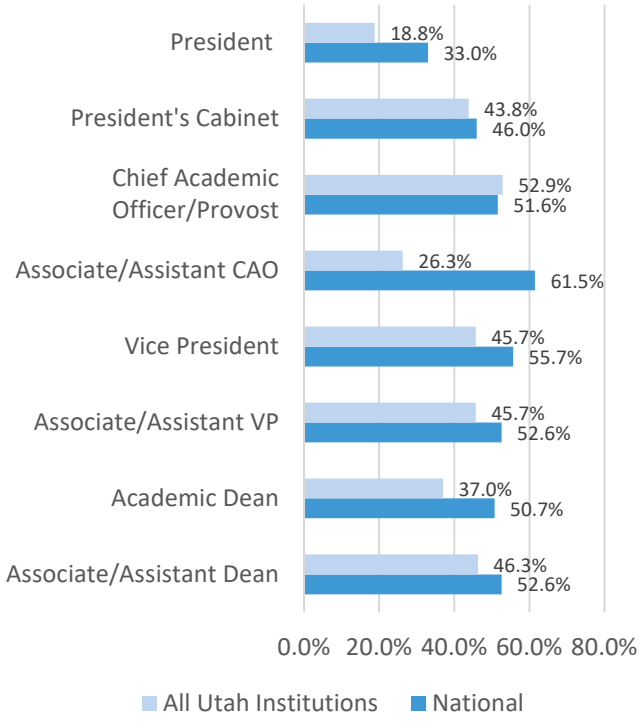


Figure 2, shown on the next page, provides a comparison of Utah and national percentages and illustrates the pipeline positions that feed into top-level leadership roles across both degree-granting and technical institutions.

Overall, since 2020, the number of women serving on the Utah Board of Higher Education and as college and university presidents has decreased, while the number in provost positions has increased. Women's representation has increased on boards of trustees, as board chairs, and in presidential cabinets, and overall percentages of women vice presidents and academic deans in public degree-granting colleges and universities around the state have also increased.

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Figure 2: Women in Higher Education by Position (All Utah vs. Nation)

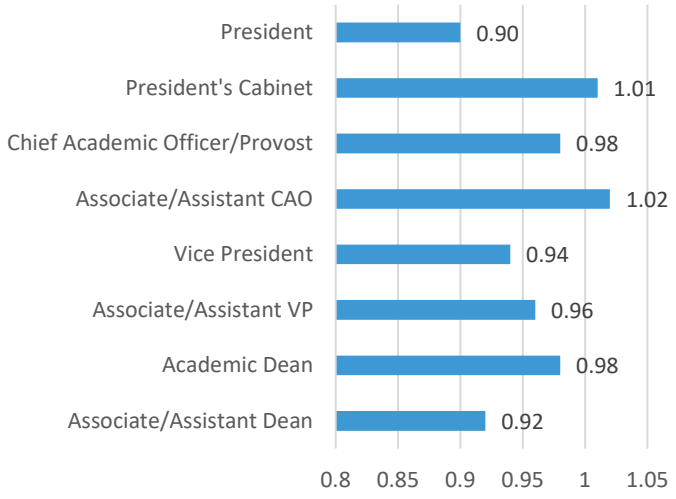


Salaries

The 2017 ACE Pipeline Report[19] found that the pipeline for higher education leadership is preparing women at a greater rate than men. *What does this mean?* As women earn more than half of doctorate degrees across the US, they are more prepared than ever to lead. However, this report also found that at every rank and in every institution type, except two-year private institutions, men are paid more than women by $13,874 at public institutions and $18,201 at private institutions. This is consistent with the 2025 CUPA-HR report, which found that women leaders are generally paid less than men.[20] Women presidents earn 90.0% of what their male counterparts earn, and women leaders overall earn 94.0% of what men in higher education leadership earn.[21] More importantly, women in the leadership pipeline at institutions with women presidents earn more and are more represented in leadership positions than those at institutions with presidents who are men.[22]

Across USHE's eight degree-granting institutions, the average base salaries of presidents who are men are $265,061 higher than the base salaries of women presidents. In other words, women presidents earn only 59.7% of men. However, the size of this gap is largely driven by a single outlier, the U of U, whose president's salary is nearly double that of the next highest-paid president (USU). When his salary is excluded, women presidents earn slightly more than men, at a ratio of 1.11 ($39,973). Salary information for Utah's private institutions was not available. Figure 3 shows the national ratio between women's and men's median salaries, with 1.00 representing men's salaries.

Figure 3: National Ratio of Women's Median Salary to Men's Median Salary



Conclusion

Research continues to show that many people underestimate the value of having women in key leadership positions within higher education; yet the evidence is clear that it matters on multiple fronts. Diverse and inclusive leadership teams consistently produce more creative, innovative, productive, and effective results, making gender inclusivity in postsecondary settings both critical and timely. As institutions across the nation work to strengthen organizational performance, gender diversity remains a central component. Women's leadership styles—often characterized by collaboration, inclusiveness, and shared decision-making—continue to contribute meaningfully to improved outcomes for students, faculty, staff, and communities.[23]

Utah's higher education system has made progress in several areas since 2021, including increases in women serving as vice presidents, academic deans, trustees, and cabinet members. Yet women remain underrepresented in many of the most influential roles, particularly presidencies, chief academic officer positions, and several key pipeline roles that lead to senior leadership. These gaps matter. As Utah navigates demographic shifts, workforce needs, and changes in the higher education landscape, the state must ensure that leadership teams reflect the full range of talent and perspectives within its communities. Doing so will strengthen institutions, bolster Utah's economy, and expand opportunities for students across the state.

Higher education institutions in Utah and across the United States will continue to face complex challenges, and strong leaders with outstanding capabilities are needed to meet them. To secure Utah's future, the state must prepare, support, and retain more women in educational leadership positions. Normalizing women's leadership provides diverse role models for faculty, staff, and students, and Utah leaders and residents must encourage and equip all talented individuals to serve in leadership roles within the state's educational system.

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