

## Catholic College and University Presidents: Trends Since 2000

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While the proportion of male and female presidents of Catholic colleges and universities has held constant over the past 15 years, the increasing number of lay presidents and a higher rate of presidential transitions have significantly changed the complexion of Catholic higher education leadership.

### Consistent Female Leadership

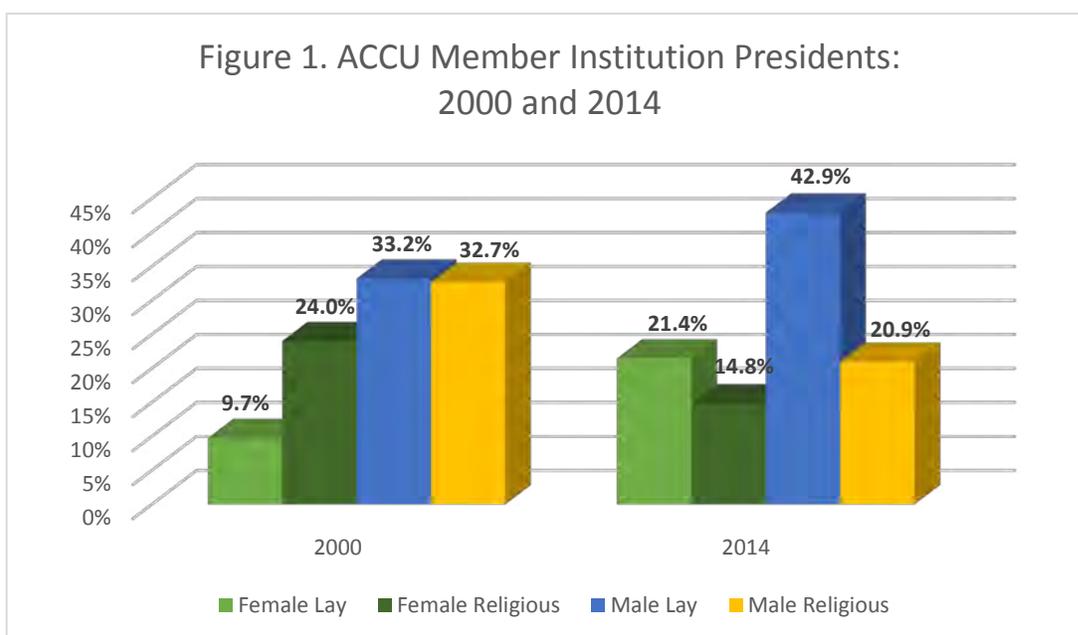
The percentage of female presidents at Catholic colleges and universities has remained consistently high. Over the past 15 years, male presidents have led about 65 percent of ACCU member institutions, while the percentage of female presidents has held at about 35 percent (see **Figure 1**). The presence of female leadership is notably higher than at other college and university sectors. ACCU previously analyzed [research conducted in 2012](#) by the American Council on Education (ACE), finding that more than 77 percent of presidents at non-Catholic four-year colleges and universities were male, with just under 23 percent being female. Compared with these figures, ACCU member institutions continue to set the standard for promoting female university leadership.

The percentage of female Catholic college presidents is also impressive when compared to their counterparts

working in government and business. For example, women make up only 20 percent of [representatives serving in the U.S. Congress](#). Even lower are the numbers of female chief executive officers of major corporations: 2015 data indicate that only 4.6 percent of CEOs at [S&P 500 companies](#) are female, and only 4.8 percent of CEOs at [Fortune 500 companies](#) are female.

Another useful point of comparison is female leadership in Catholic dioceses. Recent research reported by [Crux](#) found that, on average, one of the three most influential positions in every diocese (chancellor, chief financial officer, and schools superintendent) are filled by women. However, the study found that in 69 of the 197 dioceses, women did not fill any of these leadership positions. Among those dioceses with female leaders, the highest percentage of women serve as superintendents of schools—close to half of these positions are held by women. Education remains a sector which has traditionally encouraged—and continues to encourage—female leadership.

While the gender ratio has been consistent over the past 15 years, the number of lay presidents in Catholic higher education has increased. In 2000, there were 111 presidents who were religious sisters, priests, or brothers, and 84 lay presidents. The number of lay presidents increased to 126 in



## Tracking Trends in Presidential Transitions

2014, leaving 70 religious sisters, priests, or brothers serving as Catholic college presidents. Overall, the percentage of lay presidents increased by about half from 2000 to 2015.

The number of female religious presidents has decreased more dramatically than the number of male religious presidents—a 43 percent decline in religious sisters, compared to a 34 percent drop among priests and brothers. Conversely, the appointment of lay female presidents increased by the fastest rate, growing by more than 100 percent over the latest 15-year period.

### Presidential Transitions

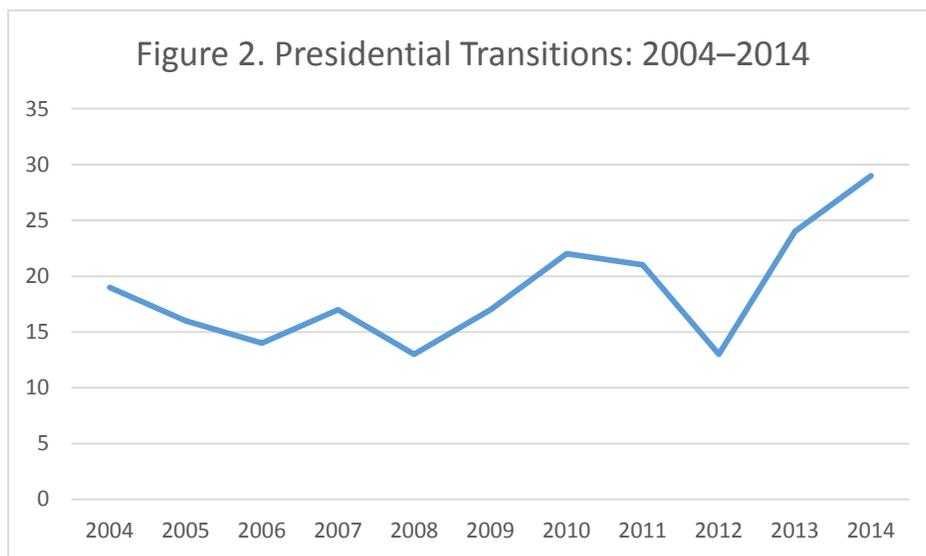
Figure 2 depicts the increasing number of presidential transitions from 2004 to 2014. Since 2004, an average of 18.6 presidential transitions occurred per year, with a high-water mark of 29 new presidents taking office in 2014. The number of presidential transitions is not expected to decline in the near future. In the 2012 ACE survey, just over 50 percent of the Catholic college presidents surveyed reported plans to step down from their current presidency within five years.

Interestingly, transition periods on many campuses have become longer as boards take more time to find

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suitable candidates. As a result, the sector has seen a growing use of interim appointments. In 2000, only two interim appointments occurred among 21 vacancies; in 2014, nine Catholic campuses had made interim appointments among 25 openings.

Overall, the gender demographics of the cohort of ACCU member presidents have remained consistent since 2000. However, significant differences have emerged related to the proportion of lay and religious presidents. Additionally, the number of presidential transitions has generally increased, and is expected to rise above the 15-year average over the next few years. What those changes will mean for the complexion of ACCU member institutions remains to be seen. ✧



*Mark your calendars for the next ACCU Catholic Mission Institute for New Presidents, January 28–30, 2016, in Washington, DC!*