2023-05-01

Rising Responsiveness: The Roles And Influence Of U.s-Mexico Borderland Public University Board Leaders On Student Diversity

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the most important beings in my life:

To God for giving me a life full of love, health, and the tenacity to pursue a lifelong dream of earning a doctoral degree.

To my parents, David and Irma: From day one, you encouraged my brothers and me to be the best version of ourselves, to be respectful and treat everyone as equals, to be ethical and hard-working citizens, and never to lose sight of what matters in life. As my father often says: *primero la familia, después la familia, y por último, la familia* (first the family, next the family, and finally, the family). I love you!

To my wife, Maria Esther: Through our thirty-four (and counting) years of a happy and blessed marriage, you have been my biggest supporter, especially throughout the many years it has taken me to get to this point in my life, both professionally and academically. I love you so much!

To my daughters, Alba and Daniela: You have been my everyday inspiration to be the best version of what a father should be. Watching you grow and develop into the beautiful and strong women you are, has been a joy and the greatest reward I could have ever imagined. I love you!

Finally, to the little angels that someday will hopefully call me *Abuelito*, I offer them the words from C.S. Lewis: "You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream."

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by

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A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at El Paso

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Educational Leadership and Foundations

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

May 2023

Acknowledgments

Throughout my life, I have been blessed by having come in contact with so many people who, with their small or large presence, deserve my gratitude and recognition for helping me get to this point. Starting with my parents and brothers, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, and the rest of my family; my classmates, teachers, and professors from elementary to graduate school; and the many colleagues at all organizational levels that I have had a chance to meet and work with throughout my thirty-seven plus years of professional work. I have learned something from each and every one of you, and I am grateful that God put you on my life's path.

To my dissertation Chair, Dr. Eduardo Arellano, who patiently listened to me and helped me organize my thoughts and make sense of my ideas for my doctoral dissertation. Without your guidance, it would have been tough for me to focus my efforts on the goal of exploring the topic of board governance. To my dissertation committee members, Dean Dr. Clifton Tanabe, Dr. Arturo Olivarez, and Dr. Jesus Cisneros: despite your heavy workloads and responsibilities, you did not hesitate to accept my invitation to be part of my committee. Throughout the process, you offered significant professional guidance, and equally as important, you showed that you genuinely cared and supported my project. To all of you, thank you very much for believing in me and treating me not just as a doctoral student but as a future colleague.

My gratitude also goes to the Department of Educational Leadership and Foundations faculty and staff, especially Dr. Rodolfo Rincones, Dr. Penelope Espinoza, and Dr. John Daresh. Special thanks to former faculty member Dr. Angus Mungal, who showed his unconditional willingness to help and support me and the rest of my cohort from the very first day of the doctoral program.

My overall experience as a doctoral student received an incredible boost from the support of the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) to become the first, and so far the only, student in the university's history to be appointed by the Texas Governor to serve as Student Regent in the Board of Regents of the University of Texas System. Getting appointed to the board as Student Regent would not have been possible without the full support of the late university President Dr. Diana Natalicio, a champion and prominent supporter of minority students like me. I often heard Dr. Natalicio say that she believed talent existed everywhere and all it needed was to be developed and supported. I can attest that she was true to her words!

My thanks also go to the University of Texas System Chancellor James B. Milliken, who supported and recommended my Student Regent candidacy to the office of Governor Jim Abbot, to whom I am also grateful for his appointment. My gratitude also goes to the University of Texas System Board of Regents and the Board Office, who made my service experience memorable and inspired me to learn more about how influential the governing board's decisions can be in students' lives, their families, and their communities. I am also grateful to the Regents and Boards that graciously agreed to participate in my study. Their invaluable insights, comments, and contributions undoubtedly enriched my research work.

Abstract

The study sought to learn how governing boards of public university systems located along the U.S.-Mexico border exercise their roles and influence over matters of student diversity. Traditionally, governing boards have been dominated by older white males and have concentrated their attention on high-level financial issues. In addition, the boards have enacted policies and rules directed to traditional student populations of young white males who earn their bachelor's degrees in four years. This notion is no longer valid and is being challenged by increasingly enrolling diverse communities. Student body composition on campuses nationwide have changed noticeably since the beginning of the 21st century. Women are now a majority on college campuses, and the overall white non-Hispanic population is decreasing as the Hispanic and Asian communities expand their presence on campus. Furthermore, society is seeing multiple manifestations of inconformity against discrimination of women, ethnic, racial, and gender identities. To deal with a diverse student composition and increasing social pressures, governing boards need to raise their awareness of issues affecting not only their campus communities but also their at-large communities. Boards need to expand their current financial fiduciary roles to include roles that show they care about other issues of importance to their communities, especially those that can make a difference in students' lives.

This qualitative study purposively selected experienced board leaders who know the board activities and asked them to share their valuable insight through an interview protocol. The study's findings showed that governing boards along the U.S.-Mexico borderland have a high level of awareness about their campus demographics, the needs of their students, and how they support activities that promote diverse enrollment and a welcoming campus atmosphere. Boards were also found to have an interest in engaging with their communities and having a larger

influence on student degree attainment, especially for those from traditionally underrepresented sectors of society. In sum, the study contributes to scholarly research by helping to fill the gaps in the study of boards of multi-university systems and presenting evidence that boards are embracing their fiduciary duty of care by acting in their campus communities' best interests.

Keywords: Board governance, public university system boards, student diversity, board roles, board history, board awareness.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Problem Statement

Governing boards oversee public and private higher education institutions' curricular, organizational, and financial aspects. The power and influence of governing boards of higher education institutions over the colleges and universities they direct have been well-researched and documented (Bassinger, 2016; Brown, 2004; Kezar, 2008; Morgan et al., 2021; Wilson, 2016). From the foundation of the first colleges in the former U.S. colonies to the second decade of the 21st century, boards have played a very influential role in the lives of their students and their families, faculty, campuses, and the communities where they are located (Geiger, 2016; Lucas, 2006). Through their policies and decision-making authority, boards also affect the lives of multiple external stakeholders. When deciding to build new classrooms, research buildings, and athletic venues, boards impact their surrounding communities by bringing considerable funding expensed locally, generating economic activity in and around their campus and facilities (Astin and Astin, 2015; Baringer & Riffe, 2018; Kezar, 2016; Kezar, 2019; Morgan et al., 2021). Increasingly, governing boards are also influencing the investing community at large. With their significant, endowed investment funds worth billions of dollars, their investing choices, and investment portfolio allocations, boards also influence private investors and other governing boards (Raikes, 2018; Rall, 2021; Weerts, 2016).

Governing boards are different from State Coordinating boards. The first ones, the subject of the study, are concerned with managing and overseeing a group of higher education institutions in a system or individual public or private institutions. State coordinating boards do not manage institutions, approve operating and investment budgets, or hire system and campus leaders. Instead, state boards coordinate all state-wide public post-secondary institutions, develop

state-wide strategic plans and policies, serve as liaisons between the institutions and the state legislatures, conduct research and provide data analysis and reports on higher education-related issues, approve new academic programs, and monitor institutions to ensure that they provide high-quality programs (Morgan et al., 2021; Pechota et al., 2019; Young et al., 2018). Another difference is that coordinating boards prioritize the state's interests while governing boards focus on their campuses or system (Hendrickson et al., 2013).

The field of board governance, both for private corporations and at the college and university levels, has attracted the attention of academic researchers from their early years of existence (Barringer & Riffe, 2018; Geiger, 2016; Lucas, 2006;). From the time that they were founded, private and public higher education institutions have in common that their education missions and everyday operating policies are guided by the actions, decisions, and support of a board of regents, also known as a board of trustees (Barringer & Riffe, 2018; Geiger, 2016; Lucas, 2006;). Academic research has focused on understanding various board roles and responsibilities, including hiring, evaluating, and dismissing system chancellors and campus presidents, the process followed to create policies and guidelines, and making critical decisions related to funding, operating budgets, and financial and capital investments. Other scholars have studied the composition of the board, the demographic characteristics of its members, the process of assigning regents to standing and special committees, and the process followed to discuss accepting or rejecting philanthropic gifts (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 2021; Geiger, 2016; Kezar, 2019; Rall et al., 2021). Studies have also focused on the relationships between the boards and the institutions' faculty, students, and alumni, as well as the communities they serve and their elected officials at the local, state, and national levels (Young et al., 2018; Woodward, 2009;). Additional studies have focused on the board's performance

and effectiveness, identifying differences between boards of private and public institutions, including the process of joining the board. In the case of public institutions boards, regents are usually appointed by the state's governor and confirmed by the legislature, while in private institutions, membership is achieved through personalized invitations to join the board (Brown, 2004; Kezar, 2006; Michael et al.2000; Rall, 2021).

Academic research shows that boards' effectiveness and influence over their campuses and communities are being measured in terms of financial performance, with little attention to other non-financial areas in which board decisions can have a significant impact. Regents are bound by fiduciary rules and duties of care, loyalty, and obedience to their institutions (Morgan et al., 2021; Nava, 2020; Rall, 2021). Board members are also expected to put the collective interests of their institutions over personal interests. By these standards, boards are meeting their fiduciary commitments (Morgan et al., 2021; Nava, 2020; Rall, 2021). However, by concentrating their attention on financial matters, boards may be neglecting other important issues that fall under the review of their fiduciary responsibilities and deserve their attention. Morgan et al. (2021) recent research posited that "boards have been understudied within higher education relative to their enormous potential to influence postsecondary institutions" (p.570). Kezar et al. (2021) found that the "few empirical studies of leadership for equity in higher education … were conducted over a decade ago, when "diversity agendas' were often focused on representational diversity and were less race-conscious" (p. 3). By expanding the scope of their fiduciary duties, boards can widen their influence over increasingly important matters that affect society in general and their campus communities in particular (Fulton, 2019; Muñoz et al., 2017; Rall et al., 2022; Reilly, 2009). Boards have the power to set the institutions' vision, enact rules and policies, hire campus leaders that will commit to following their mission, and align

stakeholders' interests to meet their intended outcomes (Astin & Astin, 2015; Fulton, 2019; Rall, 2021; Wilson, 2016).

A matter of specific concern to the study is system governing boards embracing the concept of diversity in higher education institutions for the benefit of students on their system campuses. Academic research has primarily focused on learning about the roles of boards of public and private individual institutions, but little is known about boards that govern public university systems. Rall et al.(2022) research concluded that "the scholarship that does center public institutions overwhelmingly concentrates on single institutions, limiting knowledge of boards that govern multicampus systems" (p.392). Starting in the decade of 2010, scholars have been focusing on understanding the phenomenon of how boards' traditional and fiduciary roles are evolving, influenced by changes in student demographics, social movements, and community expectations (Kezar, 2019; Morgan et al., 2021; Rall, 2021; Rall et al., 2022). Since the beginning of the 21st century, demographic trends show that campus communities are experiencing changes in their student population compositions. Existing administrative campus policies written in the late decades of the 20th century have long assumed that the campus population reflects the United States' population, where white males are the majority and where the average student is a traditional student that enrolls in college right after high school, and graduates with his cohort four years later (Barnett., 2020; Clausen & McKnight, 2018; Landrum et al., 2000). The most recent Census Bureau data shows these assumptions are outdated and no longer valid (U.S. Census, 2020). The 2020 Census and data from U.S.-Mexico borderland public four-year university systems tear down these assumptions (California State University System, 2022; University of Arizona System, 2022; University of California System, 2022; University of Texas System, 2022). Census statistics show that females, not males, are the

majority population in the United States. As large as it is, the white population is no longer a dominant majority. Since 2010, it has been ceding ground to a growing Hispanic community that will soon become a national majority, just like it already is in some U.S.-Mexico borderland states (Adams et al., 2014; AGB/Gallup, 2020; U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).

The new demographic realities of the student population demand that colleges and universities, under the leadership of their governing boards, change their approach to their educational mission to make it more welcoming and inclusive of the needs of a growing diverse student body. The boards' awareness of the demographic diversity in their campuses should translate into a thorough review of current but outdated practices and administrative procedures. These practices include admission standards that tend to discriminate against minorities through dated and complicated formulas that take into account standardized test scores and family legacy, policies that disqualify economically disadvantaged students from financial aid packages, and a review of faculty's pedagogy methods that need to be refocused to fit the student's academic needs (Clauson & McKnight, 2018; Krisberg, 2019; Morgan et al., 2021).

Embracing the concept of student diversity and promoting long-term policies and structural changes in their campuses to accommodate the growing diversity of gender identities, racial and ethnic population's different socioeconomic backgrounds, and various other essential characteristics is a current challenge to governing boards (Claeys-Kulik et al., 2019; Rall, 2021). The task becomes more daunting for the typical board with a homogenous composition dominated by financially solid, older white males, who are perceived as being distant and not representative of the communities they serve (Barnett, 2020; Bernstein et al., 2020; Kezar, 2016; McBain & Powell, 2021; Wilson, 2016). The contrast between the student and board demographics requires boards to recognize a new reality and consider how diverse student

groups are impacted by their actions. In their strategies and decision-making, board leaders need to consider the educational needs of a widely diverse student population that differ from those of traditional white male student populations. The study aims to understand and document how a homogenous board can enact diversity policies that benefit a diverse student population.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to describe how governing boards of four-year public university systems located along the U.S.-Mexico border exercise their roles and influence their system's campuses by enacting policies and initiatives that foster student diversity in campus communities, and how they support student diversity initiatives that society and their campuses are demanding. This is important because governing boards have decision-making powers that can influence students, their families, and their communities' decisions. A board's decision to modify or adapt current admission barriers faced by minority students or lower the cost of attending college may help students decide whether to enroll in an institution to pursue an academic degree. Among other duties, boards have the legal capacity to create and dictate influential policies, take decisive actions, issue pronouncements for or against specific events, endorse policies, and appoint and remove people in campus leadership positions. Boards also have the option to stand still, remain passive and take no actions, which is another form of showing their stance. Being idle could be a strategy used by governing boards to gain some time to understand better and process the information on current events instead of rushing into a decision that may seem reactionary and hollow, that may end up being more controversial, misinformed, or poorly implemented A reactionary, short-term superficial board decision may be costly and even generate unintended legal consequences (Bradenburg et al., 2021; Kincey et al., 2021; McBain & Powell, 2021).

University board roles have traditionally been concerned with their institutions' high-level financial matters, including approving operating budgets and plant investment projects and financing, securing government funding, creating policies to ensure legal compliance, hiring and firing university presidents, reviewing legal contracts with far-reaching implications to their institutions, and reviewing, accepting or rejecting conditions attached to large amount philanthropic gifts (Brandenburg et al., 2021; Nava, 2020; McBain & Powell, 2021). System boards' roles are clearly defined by their state's constitutions and reflected in their bylaws and policies, but not enough information exists on how these roles influence their communities. Rall et al. (2022) posit that "though bylaws delineate certain powers and responsibilities vested in the board, how these roles manifest in the governance of higher education is less clear" (p.394). Traditional board roles need to be updated to focus and expand the board's attention to matters of importance to society that have always existed but have recently taken shape and captured the public's interest. Since 2012, multiple social movements have occurred throughout the US to show their nonconformity and protest discrimination of women, ethnic, racial, and gender identity. Along with manifestations of income distribution and other economic disparities, public expressions of unconformity have penetrated all levels of society (Bassinger, 2016; Bernstein et al., 2020; Kezar, 2016; Pelletier, 2021; Rall, 2021; Wilson, 2016). Colleges and universities are not immune to the events. Their communities have already started applying pressure on campus leaders to act in ways that contribute to addressing the issues that directly affect campus stakeholders. (AGB, 2014; AGB/Gallup, 2020; Bowles, 2021; Fulton, 2019; Kezar et al., 2021; Rall, 2021).

For consistency throughout the study, public university governing board members will be referred to as regents, except for naming citations made by a court case or a state's statute.

Trustee is another term used in academic literature and by some states' constitutions to designate governing board members (California State University System, 2022). Essentially, both words have the same meaning (AGB, 2020; Barringer & Riffe, 2018; Hendrickson et al., 2014). Both terms, regent and trustee, refer to the appointed or elected residents who serve on governing boards and carry with them the fiduciary responsibility to manage the multiple resources that a state and the public have placed on a selected group of state residents who willingly commit to properly overseeing and managing those resources for a collective benefit (AGB, 2020; Barringer & Riffe, 2018; Hendrickson et al., 2014). The following section will introduce the study's research questions.

Research Questions

The general research questions of the study are: What roles do U.S.-Mexico borderland public university governing boards have on student diversity? And, what influence do U.S.-Mexico borderland public university governing boards have on student diversity?

The research questions in the study are grounded on an extensive review of available literature on boards of regents, the boards' demographic compositions, the legal mandate to act on behalf of the best interests of the system stakeholders, the roles they play in shaping higher education, and in the personal experiences of the researcher as a former student regent. The first three questions address the board roles, and the last one addresses board influence. The specific research questions (RQ) are:

RQ1: How do U.S.-Mexico public university governing boards adopt student diversity policies?

RQ2: How do U.S.-Mexico public university governing boards support implementation of student diversity?

RQ3: How do U.S.-Mexico public university governing boards evaluate student diversity initiatives?

RQ4: How do U.S.-Mexico public university governing boards exercise their influence on student diversity?

Study Parameters

The study is limited to four-year public university system governing boards located along the U.S.-Mexico border. In addition to their geographic location, the states of Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas share a common history, traditions, and cultural roots. In all states, the population is becoming increasingly ethnically diverse, with a highly growing presence of Hispanics and a decreasing non-Hispanic White population. The student population at most university campuses in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands is also becoming diverse. In 90% of them, women constitute the majority of the student body (Table 4 on page 166). As for racial and ethnic diversity, the significant presence of Hispanics and other growing minorities, mostly from Asian countries, has begun to mirror the state's overall demographics (Table 4, page 166). Understanding how governing boards support student diversity is a central focus of the research work. The study uses a qualitative research method to contribute to the research field on the system board's influence on campus life. The project focuses on collecting the perspectives of system board chairs or vice-chairs of governing boards of public higher education institutions located along the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. The study had to assume that the study's participants would offer honest responses.

Summary

The study aims to identify how governing boards of public higher education systems in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands use their legally granted powers to support and influence student

diversity. Governing boards are in a privileged governance position that allows them to directly influence the educational destinies of their systems' institutions. As the highest governing authority in their university systems, boards are vested with the authority to enact policies and rules that regulate conduct and behaviors on their campuses. Boards also have the authority to hire and supervise system chancellors and campus presidents that share and can implement the boards' vision. By placing campus leaders, adopting policies, and approving operating and investing budgets embedded with plans that treat student diversity as an integral part of their strategic vision, boards can elevate diversity issues to a level similar to financial matters and no longer treat it as a secondary activity or as one of many items to address in their meeting agendas. Board regents have fiduciary duties that compel them to serve the system with high competence, commitment, and honor. In this role, regents are expected to place personal interests aside and act in the best interests of students, faculty, staff, the university system, their campuses, and their extended communities. Society is putting pressure on boards to recognize its concerns about diversity issues on campus. Regents are being compelled to expand their roles and responsibilities to support student diversity in their institutions that take into account the student population's demographic changes.

Board membership consists primarily of older white males with a privileged economic position. On average, less than a third of board members are women or ethnic minorities (AGB, 2021). This homogenous board composition differs starkly from the demographic composition of the student population, the leading group of people they serve, and the one they are supposed to care for and interpret their needs. Shifts in population demographics since the beginning of the 21st century have elevated women to a majority status over the male population, and the traditional dominant white population is losing its majority status to a continuously growing

Hispanic population (Census 2020). Of interest to the study is to identify how boards address the challenge of the needs of diverse student groups for which regents may not have an established legitimate connection that allows them to represent minorities and be strong advocates for their well-being.

Available academic literature has studied mainly individual boards of public and private institutions, but limited knowledge exists on governing boards of multicampus systems (Rall et al., 2022). The prevailing literature evaluates board governance and performance from a financial perspective. Following these criteria, boards are generally considered effective and stewards of the public's interest. However, only recently and likely influenced by recent national social movements that protest discrimination against women, ethnic minorities, and gender-diverse communities, academic researchers are turning their attention to studying the great potential that boards have to enact and support initiatives that improve their institutions' campus climate from a diversity and inclusive perspective. In addition to the common geographical location, these boards have in common that their systems and campus student populations are no longer majority white and instead are increasingly diverse, reflecting the demographic changes in their state's population. Additionally, U.S.-Mexico borderland states share a common history, traditions, customs, and environmental conditions, supporting a credible connection between them.

The following chapter will elaborate on the history of the boards and the early conditions that influenced their governance structures and shaped the boards' composition, their current roles and responsibilities, how their decisions and policies impact their multiple stakeholders, and the potential outcomes of adopting diversity-friendly policies that can bring benefits to students and their communities.

Chapter 2. Literature review

Introduction

Public university systems are governed by boards of regents with the ultimate authority and responsibility to guide the educational destinies of the institutions that make up their systems. Boards exercise their power by enacting rules and policies, controlling financial resources for operating and investing activities, designating system chancellors, campus presidents, and other top-level leaders, overseeing institutions' performance, and ensuring that institutions follow the board's overarching mission and vision. The study focuses on researching the roles and influence boards of four-year public university systems along the U.S.-Mexico borderlands have over their institutions.

The following literature review commences with a historical examination of boards of regents and trustees dating back to the incorporation of the first college institutions in the 17th century, followed by a delimitation of the selected boards subject of the study based on their geographical locations, size, and classification as public university systems. The study continues by reviewing the contemporary legal context supporting the board's authority, composition, and membership characteristics. This section is followed by a discussion of diversity and what it means in the context of higher education. The following sections explore boards' influence on campus life, how this influence extends to their at-large communities, and how the board's decisive actions can directly impact students, their families, faculty, and staff.

Historical Context of Governing Boards of Higher Education

Governing boards of U.S. higher education institutions trace their historical roots to the 17th century when the first colleges were founded in the original colonies by congregational leaders who saw a need to provide guidance and purpose to the institution. The first colleges

founded had a preeminently religious orientation (Geiger, 2016; Lucas, 2006). The elderly members of the diverse religious congregations that had established residence in the colonies sought to develop and educate the future ministers and spiritual leaders who could teach their faith to the masses. With the freedom of religion that the new colonies offered, schools and learning institutions were founded by religious groups associated with the Church of England and the Roman Catholic church, as well as denominations of Reformists, Calvinists, Puritans, Presbyterians, Quakers, and Baptists, among other denominations (Geiger, 2016; Lucas, 2006; Kezar, 2016). The first institutions founded in the colonies, all of which exist today, are Harvard College in Massachusetts (1636), the College of William and Mary in Virginia (1693), and Yale College in Connecticut (1701). Not wanting to be left behind, other colonies' congregations founded their own schools, including Princeton University in New Jersey (1746), Columbia University in New York (1754), University of Pennsylvania (1755), Brown University in Rhode Island (1765), and Dartmouth College in New Hampshire (1769). Over time, some schools disappeared, others consolidated with other institutions, and others evolved, transformed, or rebranded. The early learning institutions set the foundations for many of today's colleges and universities, which grew and converted from private, religious-affiliated enterprises to robust, secular, and non-profit organizations (Geiger, 2016).

Common among these colleges is that they were initially created to serve the needs of the congregations to preserve their religious beliefs, in addition to tending to the needs of the wealthy white population who could afford the high cost of educating their male descendants. College's elitist policies excluded women, people of color, and even white students from lower socioeconomic classes (Geiger, 2016; Kesar, 2019; Lucas, 2006). After the American Revolutionary War, the colonies gained independence from England and became the United

States. Newly formed state governments acknowledged the benefits and value of expanding access to higher education to the masses and supported the creation of state-funded public universities. New public state colleges and universities were commissioned in Maryland (1782), Georgia (1785), South Carolina (1785), North Carolina (1789), and Vermont (1791) (Geiger, 2016).

The states' educational efforts received a significant boost from the enactment of Congressional acts, like the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 and the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 (Altbach et al., 2001; Black, 2021; Lucas, 2006; Kaplin et al., 2020). The Northwest Ordinance was guided by principles that encouraged education by requiring every town to reserve tracts of land to erect public schools (Black, 2021). By providing earmarked funding and vast tracts of federal land to each state and territory of the U.S., the Morrill Acts encouraged states and territories to create public state universities that would open access to larger sectors of their populations (Altbach et al., 2001; Lucas, 2006; Kaplin et al., 2020). The 1890 Act took an important step toward combating racial inequalities by promoting student diversity and increasing college enrollment among the Black population. The 1890 Act restricted federal funding and resources to racially segregated states that enrolled only white students in their universities. As a condition for accessing the funds, states were encouraged to establish similar universities for the Black population that had been denied access to existing white colleges and universities (Lucas, 2006). Upon meeting this condition, federal funding would be released and equitably distributed between the White and the Black land-grant recognized institutions. To speed up access to these funds, some states responded by quickly creating new Black institutions, while others responded by designating existing Black universities as the recipients of the land-grant funds (Lucas, 2006). The Morrill Acts gave birth to land-grant institutions, which became

pillars of education and engines of economic development and scientific research (Altbach et al., 2001; Lucas, 2006; Kaplin et al., 2020). Many of these institutions are easily recognized today because their official names include the letters A&M, which stand for Agriculture and Mechanical arts, honoring their historical origins to develop and promote practical knowledge that could contribute to the state's and the nation's economic development (Altbach et al., 2001; Lucas, 2006).

With the growth and expansion of colleges and universities came the issues of institutional governance. The first colleges were led by the congregation's elderly ministers, who, as overseers, made collective decisions for the institution in an early form of board governance. Their communal decisions included hiring and firing presidents, finding financial resources to operate their school, and dictating the content of curricula and classes, modeled after the liberal arts curricula popular in European countries like England, France, and Italy (Geiger, 2016; Lucas, 2006). Boards that were initially comprised exclusively of congregations' members eventually opened up to include lay colonies' government representatives and wealthy landowners who could be counted on as financial supporters. In addition to limited public funding support received from the colonies' administrators, which gave them some governing authority over the college, and the tuition collected from their students and their families, colleges became more and more reliant on the philanthropic gifts of wealthy patrons, who understood the benefits that an educated workforce could bring to their business interests (Geiger, 2016; Lucas, 2006). Through their generosity towards higher education institutions, wealthy benefactors and businesspeople realized that they too could have the power to influence the outcome of higher education. They decided that they wanted to have a say in how gift-receiving colleges were managed, who should be named president in charge of leading the

institution, the content of the curricula, the major fields of study, and the balance between religious and secular instruction (Geiger, 2016; Lucas, 2006). These and other goals and aspirations shaped the governing boards of colleges and universities, a multilayered form of governance that exists today (Geiger, 2006; Lucas, 2006).

These origins influenced the membership composition of governing boards. Some early requirements to become a board trustee were that aspiring members needed to have sizable wealth to meet expected financial contributions to the institutions, belong to the ruling higher socioeconomic classes, and have business and social connections. These requirements effectively erected barriers and imposed entrance restrictions that could only be met or surpassed by older White males, successful businesspeople, influential congregation ministers, high-ranking government officials, and members of the upper socioeconomic classes (Geiger, 2006). The legacy of these requirements can still be seen in today's university and corporate boards (Adserias et al., 2017; Barringer & Riffe, 2018; AGB, 2021; McBain & Powell, 2021; Wilson, 2016).

The various religious and lay members' personal interests generated conflicts inside the boards, which led to infighting and power struggles to control the institutions. Geiger (2016) documented early recurring conflicts at Harvard between "old-line Puritans and more liberal Congregationalists" (p.5), at Yale over the college's location, and at William and Mary's over faculty control (Geiger, 2016). Colleges desperately needed additional sources of funding to subsist. Gifts and student tuition were insufficient to cover their expenses, so they reached out to local governments to provide needed financial help. Public support came with the condition that government representatives joined the institution's board of trustees as voting members. Over time, the combination of the evolving needs of society in a new nation, and the difference of

opinion among the lay, religious, and government members of the board, led to internal conflict that threatened the mere existence of the institutions they were supposed to protect.

One of these conflicts developed in the early 1800s at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire. This institution got caught between the power and control ambitions of the board of trustees and public officials (Geiger, 2016; Kezar, 2016; Lucas, 2006). At the core of the issue was whether the state's legislators had the legal right to seize control of the institution, even though the school's charter specifically stated that it was the board of trustees' responsibility to oversee all matters related to the operation of the institution. The board fiercely defended their independent governance and, in 1816, filed a suit in state court against the state's legislators who wanted to gain control over Dartmouth College. The lawsuit claimed that its founding charter gave the college the character of a private entity, which made it immune to legislative acts that sought to interfere with its form of governance. A year later, the state court ruled against the board, denying its status as a private entity because it served a public purpose, and its trustees acted on behalf of the people, making them public officers subject to the legislator's authority (Kezar, 2016; Lucas, 2006). Unsatisfied with the resolution of the state court, the board decided to appeal to the United States Supreme Court, with the main arguments that the college was chartered as a private institution and that public institutions are subject to political interests that change with newly elected officials, and that constant changes posed a significant risk to the stability and educational objectives of the college. These and other supporting arguments were successfully presented, and in a seminal case judgment, *Trustees of Dartmouth College v. Woodward, 17 U.S. 518 (1819),* the Supreme Court ruled that the state's legislature had, in effect, violated the institution's founding charter by trying to impose their legislative will over a private corporation. The Supreme Court established the precedent that state control over an institution

applies only to those public entities funded by the state's treasury (Geiger, 2016; Kezar, 2016; Lucas, 2006; Kaplin et al., 2020). This historical decision recognized a private institution's right to an internal form of self-governance and acknowledged the board of trustees' authority over all matters concerning the institution. The historical relevance of the decision is that it sent a clear message to society that there is a distinction between private and public entities and that the law protects private entities from government intrusion. This powerful legal precedent remains valid today (Geiger, 2016; Lucas, 2006; Kaplin et al., 2020).

Contemporary governing boards trace their autonomy, decision-making, and power to act and direct their institutions' paths to these years-old traditions and legal precedents. For example, the State of Texas, which sponsors and funds the operations of seven of the twelve public university systems subject to the study, recognizes the history and importance of the traditional board governance structure. In the Texas Education Code (1971), the state explicitly addresses the roles and responsibilities of the system boards, including.

> (a) It is the policy of this state that the governing boards of institutions of higher education, being composed of lay members, shall exercise the traditional and time-honored role of such boards as their role has evolved in the United States and shall constitute the keystone of the governance structure. In this regard, each governing board: 1) Is expected to preserve institutional independence and to defend its right to manage its own affairs through its chosen administrators and employees …

The following section goes into more detail on what those roles are.

Roles of Governing Boards

Governing university boards share many traits, roles, and responsibilities. These include creating and overseeing the implementation of policies and directives related to academics and

admissions, determining each component institution's operating budgets, setting tuition and fees, and evaluating proposed increases to said tuition and fees. Boards also identify sources of funding and financing for campus planning and buildings, conduct searches to select and appoint system chancellors and institution presidents, set goals and objectives, determine their compensation packages, and evaluate their performance. Boards accept or reject philanthropic gifts, review and approve major legal contracts, and approve the issuance of public debt to finance major projects when state appropriations or other sources of funding are not sufficient to pay for approved capital investments (Bastedo, 2005; Barringer & Riffe, 2018; Garrity, 2015; Kezar, 2016; Nava, 2020; Woodward, 2009).

Regents and trustees appointed to serve on university system boards are not compensated in any way or form for their services. They can, however, apply for and receive reimbursement for reasonable expenses incurred while traveling, participating in board meetings, and attending official functions to represent the Board (Michael et al., 2000; Garrity, 2015). To perform their duties, regents invest considerable time away from personal, family, and business activities to attend scheduled and special meetings, participate in workshops and training sessions, read and learn about campuses' climates, and be briefed on current events happening at the local, state, national and international levels that could affect campus life (Bastedo, 2005; Manns, 2006). Despite time and effort demands, receiving a governor's appointment to serve on a university board is a highly coveted honor obtained by only a few state residents. Receiving an appointment to a university system board brings prestige and recognition to individuals, who see the appointments as public acknowledgment of their personal, academic, and business achievements, as well as an extension of their commitment to public service and society's well-being (Bastedo, 2005; Brandenburg et al., 2021; Woodward, 2009).

Appointed residents get the opportunity to be part of a select and exclusive group of people who can shape higher education and influence the direction higher education takes for current and future generations. The policies and decisions emanating from board meetings are powerful indicators of the path the university system wants its component institutions to follow. Approving budgets and plant investment projects, hiring or firing chancellors and presidents, or supporting campus policies on diversity and inclusion send strong messages to the entire community that the board is committed to improving their campuses' environments (Adseriaset al., 2017; AGB, 2021; McBain & Powell, 2021; Kezar, 2008; Kezar, 2016; Wilson, 2016). While performing their duties, regents benefit from gaining new contacts and developing networks with representatives from academia, legislatures, business leaders, and other fields (Claeys-Kulik et al., 2019; Kezar, 2016). Networking with key members of society's business and political circles is an essential role for board members. Their concurrence will be required to support the board's decisions in varied areas of interest associated with the university system they represent. Such influential decisions impact students, families, faculty, staff, communities, and society in general (Barringer & Riffe, 2018; Dika & Janosik, 2003; Michael et al., 2000).

U.S. – Mexico Borderland States System Governing Boards

States have a variety of public higher education institutions, including 4-year colleges and universities, 2-year junior and community colleges, and other institutions structured as technical, tribal, or vocational institutions. The study focuses only on public system governing boards of 4-year colleges and universities in the U.S.-Mexico borderland states of Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas. These publicly funded university systems share various characteristics that allow grouping and comparisons across state lines. These traits include having the largest institutions in the state measured by student enrollment and having programs

that lead to bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees that attract students from widely diverse geographical areas across the state, the United States, and internationally to their multiple campuses. The systems' institutions have a broader scope of influence in their communities, offer a wider variety of degrees in various disciplinary fields, conduct scientific research, manage considerable financial resources, and receive more public attention and recognition than two-year colleges. Junior and Community Colleges' student population tends to come from geographical proximities, have smaller enrollments, do not have stringent admission standards, and their curricula are designed to offer practical vocational training and associate's degrees to students that choose not to commit to a more extended time frame to earn their higher education degree (Nevarez & Wood, 2010).

Another common trait the selected systems share is their geographical location along the 2,000-mile-long border between the United States and Mexico. The population living along the U.S.-Mexico borderlands share multiple historical and cultural roots, dating back to before the 19th century when all these states were Mexican territories (Arias & Bellman, 1992). The U.S.-Mexico border states also share their economies, climate, natural resources, environmental issues, and lifestyles with each other and with their neighboring states across the international boundary line (Arias & Bellman, 1992). The influence of the historical heritage is reflected in the demographic composition of the states, which have seen some of the nation's highest rates of minority population growth since 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). In California, at 39.4%, and in New Mexico, at 47.7%, the Hispanic population is already more prominent than the former majority white population. The Hispanic population at 39.3% in Texas is projected to become the majority before the year 2030, surpassing the present white majority of 39.7% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). The African American community is a low percent minority in all four

states, ranging from a low 1.8% in New Mexico to an upper limit of 11.8% in Texas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).

A further common characteristic shared by university systems in the U.S.-Mexico border states is their campuses' diverse demographic composition dominated by Hispanic and white students. Table 1 on page 161 shows that of the eighty-four campuses grouped in the twelve university systems included in the study, sixty-one are classified by the U.S. Department of Education as Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). Of the total, sixty campuses across the U.S.-Mexico border are classified as Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), and only one campus located in Southeast Texas is classified as a Historical Black College and University (HBCU) (Excelencia in Education!, 2022; Hispanic Association of College and Universities, 2022). The U.S. Department of Education, acting under the authority of the Higher Education Act of 1965 as amended, Presidential Executive Orders, and other related legislation, classifies higher education institutions based on the percent of minority enrolled students they serve and who identify with a minority group. A designation and recognition as an MSI entitles eligible institutions to access additional federal grant funding to promote higher education success for students from diverse minority and underrepresented backgrounds (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). In addition to Hispanic Serving Institutions, other designations include Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), Native American-Serving non-Tribal Institutions (NASNTIs), and Asian American and Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AAPISIs) (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

Contemporary legal context of boards of public university systems

The legal structures and composition of each state's boards present similarities and variations that reflect each state's higher education policies. In all cases, boards receive their

governing authority from their respective state constitutions. Appointing regents and trustees to serve on a board is not a strict democratic exercise. State constitutions grant governors the sole discretion to select and appoint board members as vacancies occur (Bastedo, 2009; Kezar, 2008: McBain & Powell, 2021). The legal check on this process is that the state's Senate must confirm these appointments before the individuals can officially join the board (California State University System, 2022; McBain & Powell, 2021; New Mexico Higher Education Department, 2022; University of Arizona System, 2022; University of California System, 2022; University of Texas System, 2022).

To promote diversity and the continued refreshment of ideas, regents' terms are staggered so that every two or three years, new regents are appointed to serve on the board (McBain & Powel, 2021). As public entities that get their funding from state appropriations, members of boards, system offices, and universities have a fiduciary and moral responsibility to the public to serve their systems to the best of their capabilities; to act in the best of interests to their institutions; to act with total disregard to their personal interest, and to do it with dedication, honesty, and integrity (AGB-Gallup, 2020; Garrity, 2015; Kezar, 2016; McBain & Powel, 20021). To help them perform their responsibilities and preserve their independence when casting their votes for or against a proposal, board members receive a constitutional-backed appointment during their senate confirmation. This robust legal backing grants them the security that they will not be retaliated against in any way or form for expressing their points of view, even if these are controversial, go against the opinion of the governor, the board's chairperson, system chancellor, a university president, or any other person with a vested interest in the outcome of a vote. Getting appointed to serve on a board comes with legal and fiduciary responsibilities and personal commitments that have to be met. Failure to meet these

requirements could constitute grounds for dismissal from board service (Garrity, 2015). Grounds for removal include a lack of attendance at board meetings, unruly behavior or dishonorable conduct, and failure to follow board policies or disclose possible conflicts of interest. (Garrity, 2015; McBain & Powell, 2021). In some states, governors have the power to remove board members; in others, the board can start the removal process; in others, it would take a legislative act to remove the regent from the board (McBain & Powell, 2021). The state of Texas falls under this category, as it would take an act of the Senate to initiate an impeachment process to remove a regent from the board (Texas Education Code, 1971).

Board structure

Each state determines a board structure that reflects its educational policies, objectives, budget, legislative goals, and history. Some systems trace their history to the late 19th century, and others are of very recent creation, like the Texas Woman's University System, incorporated in 2021 (Texas Woman's University System, 2021). In addition to having fiduciary roles and responsibilities towards their fellow state residents, boards have common organizational structures. A chairperson leads the board with support from administrative offices and legal counsel. The work of the board is divided into standing regent-led committees that support the overall work of the board by studying and recommending specific actions related to such areas as academic and student affairs, audit and compliance, budgets, capital investments, governmental relations, and other specialized areas as mandated by state regulations (Astin & Astin, 2015; California State University System, 2022; New Mexico Higher Education Department, 2022; University of Arizona System, 2022; University of California System, 2022; University of Texas System, 2022). A typical board trait that follows a national trend is the absence of diverse members and demographic representation of the institutions in their system. Conventional boards

tend to be distinctively homogenous, with a majority representation of White males over 50 years old with professional backgrounds in business management and law practices (AGB, 2021; Kramer & Adams, 2020; Krisberg, 2019; Wilson, 2016).

Public university systems in Arizona, California, and Texas group several independent universities into university systems. Some systems, like the University of Arizona System, have as few as three universities across the state. Others, like the California State University System, have as many as twenty-three universities throughout the state. These university systems have a governance structure that includes a board of regents, an executive office that supports the board, and a system chancellor or president, supported by an administrative system office (California State University System, 2022; University of Arizona System, 2022; University of California System, 2022; University of Texas System, 2022). In contrast, the structure of higher education in New Mexico sees the convenience of maintaining the independence of each of its universities and requires each of them to be governed by a board of regents. According to the New Mexico Higher Education Department's website (2022), there are seven four-year public colleges and universities, seven two-year community colleges, four tribal colleges, and three special schools, each with its own board. For the study, only the two largest universities by enrollment size are considered systems: New Mexico State University, the state's land grant university, and the University of New Mexico, the state's flagship institution (New Mexico Higher Education Department, 2022). In addition to their main campuses, these two universities also have branch colleges that depend on them. These campuses, dispersed throughout the state, increase their area of influence, like university systems in the other borderland states. The U.S. – Mexico borderlands study on public university system boards will equate both New Mexico university systems to the other state's university systems because omitting them would exclude a large

borderland geographic area, a sizable and diverse demographic population, and present an incomplete picture of public higher education in the U.S-Mexico borderland states.

Boards are also distinctive in other ways. Variations include the number of regents serving on the board, ranging from five in the New Mexico State University System to twenty-six in the University of California System. The process to join the board differs, with most regents receiving governor appointments confirmed by the Senate. In some cases, like the California boards, some members join the board by earning nominations from important stakeholders, like faculty and alumni organizations. In contrast, some others are publicly elected officials who, by virtue of the office they hold, are extended *ex-officio* board members. Other differences include the regents' length of service terms, ranging from six to eight years in Arizona and New Mexico (Arizona Board of Regents, 2022; New Mexico State University Board of regents, 2022; The University of New Mexico Board of Regents, 2022). In the case of the University of California System, trustees receive appointments to serve for twelve years, while in the case of Texas, regents serve six-year terms with the possibility of extending service by getting reappointed by the governor for one more term (University of California System, 2022; University of Texas System, 2022).

In summary, U.S.-Mexico borderland public university system boards are composed as follows :

Arizona: Arizona has only one system comprising three institutions with a combined Fall 2021 enrollment of 212,714 students (Arizona Board of Regents, 2022). Of the twelve regents on the board, eight are appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Senate to serve eight-year terms, two are student regents appointed by the governor (but only one is a voting member) to

serve two-year terms, and two are publicly elected *ex-officio* members: the governor and the superintendent of public instruction. (Arizona Board of Regents, 2022).

California: The state of California has two public, four-year institution systems. The California State University system comprises twenty-three campuses, with a combined Fall 2021 enrollment of 477,466 students (The California State University System, 2022). The board has a total of twenty-five voting trustees, of which the governor appoints sixteen to serve eight-year terms; two are student trustees who are also appointed by the governor but serve only a two-year term; another governor appointee is a faculty trustee who, like students, serve for two years; the Alumni Council nominates one, and the other five are *ex-officio* elected officials. These members are the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Speaker of the Assembly, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the system Chancellor (The California State University System, 2022). The second California system is The University of California System, which consists of ten institutions that, in the Fall of 2021, collectively enrolled 294,662 students (The University of California System, 2022). The board is composed of twenty-six voting members. The governor appoints eighteen members to serve twelve-year terms. One is a student appointed by the Board to a one-year term, and the other seven are *ex-officio* elected officials. Similar to the California State System, this board's *ex-officio* members include the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Speaker of the Assembly, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the system chancellor, with the addition of two more voting members who represent the system institutions' alumni associations. In this system, the faculty is represented by two non-voting members (The University of California System, 2022).

New Mexico: The state of New Mexico has two large system institutions included in the study. The first one is the University of New Mexico System, which in Fall 2021 enrolled 21,638

students. This system board consists of seven voting members appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Senate for a six-year term, except for the student regent, who serves for only two years (The University of New Mexico Board of Regents, 2022). The second system is the New Mexico State University System. This university's system had a Fall 2021 enrollment of 21,694 students, and its board comprises five voting members. All are appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Senate for a six-year term, except the student regent, who serves a two-year term.

Texas: There are seven public, four-year university systems with multiple campuses in Texas. Their boards comprise nine voting regents plus one non-voting student regent. All regents are appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Senate, except for the student regent, who does not require Senate confirmation. Unlike the student regent, who serves only one year, regents serve six-year terms with the possibility of getting reappointed by the governor. (Texas Education Code, 1971). In Fall 2021, the University of Texas System had an enrollment of 243,714 students on fourteen campuses (University of Texas System, 2022); the Texas Tech University System had a Fall 2021 enrollment of 63,498 students on five campuses (Texas Tech University System, 2022); the Texas A&M University System had a Fall 2021 enrollment of 152,200 students in eleven campuses (Texas A&M University System, 2022); the University of Houston System had a Fall 2021 enrollment of 70,027 students in four campuses (University of Houston System); the University of North Texas System had a Fall 2021 enrollment of 49,060 in three campuses (University of North Texas System, 2022); the Texas State University System had a Fall 2021 enrollment of 37,864 students in seven campuses (Texas State University System, 2022), and the Texas Woman's University System had a Fall 2021 enrollment of 16,326 students in three campuses (Texas Woman's University System, 2022).

Board composition

A typical public university system board comprises an odd number of voting members (McBain & Powell, 2021). Texas' systems boards have nine voting members, Arizona's system board has eleven voting members, the University of New Mexico has seven voting members, New Mexico State University has five voting members, and the California State System board has twenty-five voting members. The only exception is the University of California System board, composed of twenty-six voting members. Having an even number of voting members makes a voting tie possible. In this situation, casting the deciding vote to break a tie is the responsibility of the board's chairperson (University of California Board of Regents, 2022).

According to the board's policies and bylaws, the chairperson of a public institution's board or regents is elected from within the board by its peers. However, in practice, board chairs are designated by the governor and are entrusted to carry the political vision in higher education set by the governor and other policy advisors (Kezar, 2008; Kezar, 2016; Lozano & Hughes, 2017; Wilson, 2016). In the case of the two California systems, the governor is the official president of the board, but in practice, the responsibility falls to the Chair of the board (University of California Board, 2022; California State Board, 2022). The Chair is responsible for conducting meetings in an orderly fashion and ensuring that state laws, internal policies, and regulations are adhered to. To aid the chairperson in advocating for a specific higher education agenda, the governor's office recruits residents that typically are alumni of one of the system's component institutions, show affinity to the governor's political philosophy, possess specific desired skills, have public service records, are successful practitioners in their respective fields, or are substantial donors to the governor's political party (Bastedo, 2009; Kezar, 2016; Kezar et al., 2021; Lederman, 2022). Using these and other characteristics as the selection criteria, the

political powers that have control over colleges and universities look to appoint individuals who, in a "mirror effect," will ensure the continuation and implementation of their agendas and the perpetuation of their common interests through their vote and established network connections (Bastedo, 2009; Barringer & Riffe, 2018; Kezar, 2008; Kezar, 2016; Wilson, 2016).

The mirror effect of appointing like-minded individuals who share business and social networks results in homogenous boards whose members have similar backgrounds, goals, political affiliations, and interests (Adams et al., 2004; Adserias et al., 2017; Bassinger, 2016; Krisberg, 2019). Boards' demographic composition is often dominated by older white males, who tend to be experienced business chief executive officers or successful law practitioners. Members are typically selected from the wealthy and elite classes to perpetuate their power, disregarding diversity and geographic representation considerations (Baird, 2018; Dika & Janosik, 2003; Krisberg, 2019; McBain & Powell, 2021; Michael et al., 2000; Woodward, 2009). Well-qualified and professionally successful women and minorities are mostly underrepresented or entirely absent from boards (AGB, 2020; Kramer & Adams, 2020; McBain & Powell, 2021; Wilson, 2016). Also missing from boards are experienced higher education professionals who have been part of and lived the higher education experience and therefore have a more education-focused approach. (Michael et al., 2000; Woodward, 2009). This is the case for system boards in Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, but not in California. This state's boards include two *ex-officio* education professionals: the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the system's Chancellor. The by-laws of the University of California System go a step further by including two non-voting faculty members on the board (The University of California System, 2022).

A homogenous board will most likely take the necessary actions to protect and preserve its unity and power (Baird, 2018; Dika & Janosik, 2003; Kezar, 2019; Michael et al., 2000; Woodward, 2009). Under these conditions, board members risk failing to meet their fiduciary responsibilities and losing their independence, autonomy, and accountability toward their campuses (Dika & Janosik, 2003; Kramer & Adams, 2020). More importantly, the decisions that board members make will not necessarily result in the best interests of the university and its stakeholders, especially students and their families, who do not see their interests being advocated, and who perceive voting board members as people completely disconnected from the students' financial reality (Baird, 2018; Dika & Janosik, 2003). Under these conditions, boards that are structured based on factors other than member's competency, educational backgrounds, track records, or genuine interest in higher education, and its institutions run the risk of becoming ineffective and simple extensions of the governor's political powers (Bastedo, 2005; Kezar, 2016; Michael et al., 2000). A politically restrained board will avoid arguing complex and controversial issues and engaging in challenging conversations and debates about the contemporary climates affecting campuses. By failing to exercise their constitutionally backed policy-making power, passive boards miss the opportunity to influence higher education through policies and regulations that can direct and even impose changes to an institution's organizational structures and facilitate the adoption of new strategies that could make the campuses more welcoming to an increasingly diverse student community and contribute to increasing faculty's diversity (Kramer & Adams, 2020; Lederman, 2022; Kezar, 2008). That is why the study analyzes how governing boards influence student diversity.

Campus and Student Diversity

Diversity is a term that is widely used in academic, political settings, and everyday conversations. In daily use, the term diversity is used to single out non-conforming characteristics of individuals and specific groups that do not comply or fit in within generally constructed society-accepted standards, beliefs, or lifestyles. Depending on the context, diversity can have different meanings to different people. When considering what diversity means to some people, a common initial association is with racial and ethnic backgrounds. Other people associate diversity with sex, gender, and sexual orientation, and some others with age or disability, to name a few (Adams et al., 2014; Brown, 2004; Claeys-Kulik et al., 2019; Kincey et al., 2021; Lederman, 2022). In their studies of definitions of diversity, researchers include common words like varied, different, range, state, quality, representation, and composition as characteristics of members in a group, suggesting that diversity describes a heterogenous and not a homogenous association concept. In addition, treatment, unbiased recognition, universal acceptance of those differences, and remediation of systemic discrimination and exclusion practices are goals pursued by diversity proponents (Adserias et al., 2017; Brown, 2004; Kincey et al., 2021; Krisberg, 2019; Lederman, 2022; Milem et al., 2005).

Diversity is a dynamic concept that is constantly evolving and adding attributes to its definition. A term that initially was used to refer to gender and racial/ethnic differences, diversity has grown to encompass traits like age, ancestry, skin color, disability, gender identity, genetic information, medical conditions, national origin, race, religion, sex, pregnancy, sexual orientation, socioeconomic conditions, spousal affiliation, and others (Bernstein et al., 2020; Clauson & McKnight, 2018; Claeys-Kulic et al., 2019; Hurtado et al., 1998; Kincey et al., 2021; Krisberg, 2019). In the context of higher education, diversity can also allude to variety in the

representation of women and minorities on boards, the student body, faculty and staff composition, student's immigration status, their field of study, or refer to first-generation students (Adams et al., 2014; Kincey et al., 2022; Kramer & Adams, 2020; Lederman, 2022; Milem et al., 2005). This list is by no means exhaustive.

Every individual and institution could potentially have their own working definition and concept of what diversity means and represents. This dynamic definition can change influenced by personal perspectives, perceptions, beliefs, or current social and political events and circumstances (Adams et al., 2014; Barnett, 2020; Clauson & McKnight, 2018; Kincey et al., 2022; Kramer & Adams, 2020; Lederman, 2022). Since the 2010's decade, significant social and political movements have surged from different societal groups that have shaped people's concept of diversity. These movements include protests and marches that seek to focus social and political attention on issues and events related to racial, gender, and identity discrimination. Social movements like Black Lives Matter (BLM), women's #MeToo, and LGBTQ+ rights have been central to people's social unrest. The list of social movements is extensive and in constant evolution, as society becomes more sensitive toward matters of diversity, equity, and inclusion (AGB, 2021; Bowles, 2021; Barnett, 2020; Kezar, 2019; Kezar et al., 2021; Kramer & Adams, 2020; Lederman, 2022; McBain & Powell, 2021; Wilson, 2016)

Researchers contribute with working definitions in their scholarly articles. Kincey et al. (2022) define diversity as the "fair and just treatment of different groups of people regardless of personal identification or association to create a sense of belonging" (p.95). Bernstein et al. (2020) define diversity as "the representation in one social system of people with distinctly different group affiliations of cultural significance (p.396)". Brown (2004) sees

> diversity not in terms of a separation or a demarcation of cultures, but as creating a culture of acceptance that fosters a sense of belonging among all persons by recognizing and respecting differences, and in so doing, promoting a sense of loyalty to an organization. The purpose of diversity is not to promote divisiveness but a sense of openness. It is a case of accepting difference and seeing it as an opportunity to extract and build on the advantages that are present in a diverse community (p.20).

Claeys-Kulik et al. (2019) posit that campus diversity reflects diversity in society, including differences such as gender, disability, ethnic background, religion or belief, age, sexual identity, socioeconomic background, and underrepresented communities (Claeys-Kulik et al., 2019). Clauson & McKnight (2018) observe that the definition of diversity keeps expanding to include new groups. In addition to gender and age, the definition of diversity now includes gender identity, nationality, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, and other identities now recognized by society (Clauson & McKnight, 2018). Kezar (2008) refers to diversity as a "loose term that includes race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, class, government-designated protected classes, and multiculturalism (p. 430)." Milem et al. (2005) define diversity "as an engagement across racial and ethnic lines comprised of a broad and varied set of activities and initiatives. This suggests that institutions must think beyond mission and value statements in developing and implementing a plan that will make an appreciable difference (p.4)". The above-cited authors' working definitions are worded differently but have some elements in common. They enumerate varied human characteristics that are represented in a group or community. In essence, these working definitions provide a list of what diversity encompasses and how heterogeneous an association can be. In the end, however, the term diversity does not seem to have a concise, unique definition that academics and researchers could universally use.

My working definition of campus diversity for the study is about recognizing without bias or reservations that campus communities, made up of students, faculty, administrators, and staff, possess individual identities and a wide range of collective human characteristics that make them unique in their own way, and that need to be dignified to enhance their higher education experience in a hospitable and nurturing campus climate. More specifically, the study recognizes the benefits accrued to diverse gender, ethnic and racial origin, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students attending a diversity-embracing and welcoming campus environment.

Higher education leadership's efforts to foster a diverse culture must be intentional and cannot be superficial. Campus diversity cannot be left to chance or fortuitous events and will not happen naturally or spontaneously. Student diversity must be actively pursued, constantly analyzed, encouraged, and supported during and after the implementation of initial efforts. Diversity is not a one-time event put in place and left to grow by itself unattended (Brown, 2004; Claeys-Kulik et al., 2019; Kezar, 2008; Kezar, 2019; Kincey et al., 2021). The process must be extensively and constantly communicated, nurtured, evaluated, questioned, and, if necessary, refocused toward achieving stated goals and expected outcomes. Campus stakeholders and community members need to get involved, embrace the efforts, and internalize the concept of diversity to allow it to become part of their selves, their organizational structure, everyday thoughts, routines, and actions (Brown, 2004; Claeys-Kulik et al., 2019; Kezar, 2019; Krisberg, 2019).

Once leadership decides to elevate student diversity to a priority, everyone must take ownership of its goals and objectives. By themselves, student diversity policies will accomplish nothing unless implemented (Kezar, 2008; Kezar et al., 2021; Kramer & Adams, 2020). Board members, their administrative support structures, system and chancellor's officers, campus

presidents and their cabinets, administrative staff, faculty, and students all play a role in implementing student diversity policies. In a higher education setting, especially at the campus levels, the president, student affairs administrators, and faculty's participation are essential, given the great diversity of the student body they interact with during their daily activities (Kezar, 2008; Kezar, 2019; Kezar et al., 2021). Faculty and student affairs administrators have a special responsibility because they are the main points of contact for future and currently enrolled students (Brown, 2004). Students will perceive how welcoming the campus environment is through faculty and administrators' interactions. For potential students not yet aware of any campus policies, meeting diverse advocates and school representatives could leave them with a strong positive first impression and feel welcomed and appreciated, reinforcing their intentions to apply for enrollment (Hurtado et al., 1998; Kezar, 2008; Kincey et al., 2014; Milem et al., 2005). The following section discusses how board decisions impact student lives.

Governing boards' influence on campus life

Governing boards of public higher education systems have the power to influence campus life and its multiple stakeholders (AGB, 2014; Barnett, 2020; Brown, 2004; Kezar, 2016; Wilson, 2006). The board's power emanates from the state's constitution and is manifested by enacting rules and policies to regulate conduct, behaviors, expenditures, and activities throughout their affiliated institutions (Anderson, 2015; Fulton, 2019; California State University System, 2022; New Mexico Higher Education Department, 2022; University of Arizona System, 2022; University of California System, 2022; University of Texas System, 2022). By approving multimillion operating financial budgets, plant investment projects, academic programs, hiring, evaluating, and firing campus presidents and other top leadership positions, boards communicate to the campus community the direction they want.

Students and their families are directly affected by decisions made by governing boards. When boards set admission policies, accept or reject legacy as an admission criterion, promote affirmative action practices, eliminate standardized tests from the list of admission requirements, set tuition rates, and approve tuition increases, boards influence students' decisions (Adserias et al., 2017; Barnett 2020; Krisberg, 2019; Rall, 2021). Boards can erect or lower admission barriers with their policies. Rigorous and challenging admission standards may discourage students from applying for admission to a university, just like legacy admissions criteria exclude applicants with no previous family connections to the institutions, which excludes minorities and first-generation students (Kezar, 2016; Kezar, 2019; Morgan et al., 2021). At the same time, a high tuition and fee structure may prevent students whose families do not have the financial resources to pay for their education or lead them to incur high levels of student debt. When the cost of their education increases, some students may decide to change their enrollment status from full-time to part-time, resulting in a lower tuition bill but extending their time to graduation. Students may need to look for employment to generate additional income to pay for the extra cost of tuition or even decide to drop out of school (Fulton, 2019; Morgan et al., 2021; Smith, 2020). In any case, the boards' decisions end up influencing students' lifestyles and choices. Students affected by board decisions include young, traditional students transitioning directly from high school to college, as well as non-traditional students such as active armed forces personnel and veterans, students with family and full-time work responsibilities, single parents, especially women, and older students trying to earn additional academic credentials or explore new fields (Fulton, 2019; LePeau et al., 2019; Morgan et al., 2021; Smith, 2020).

When boards announce hiring a new university president, they send a clear message to the community about what kind of leader and leadership style they want to see on campus.

Before a board starts the process of searching and interviewing candidates for the president position, board members agree on the desired profile, personal values and characteristics, academic background, and high-level management experience that the ideal candidate should possess (Lederman, 2022; Fulton, 2019; Reilly, 2009). The board's selection will speak to the campus community and its external stakeholders. Boards are responsible for selecting a leader that fits well within the campus community. Ideally, the new president is one whose background, personal values and beliefs, and professional and academic interests are a good fit for the university, given its mission, vision, traditions, history, geographic location, enrollment demographics, cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity, status and prestige (Lederman, 2022; Fulton, 2019; Reilly, 2009). By appointing a woman, a person of color, or a candidate with characteristics across diverse, intersectional lines to lead the university, boards send a powerful diversity message to stakeholders about how they perceive the institution, what campus features they would like to eradicate, promote, change, maintain and grow, as well as what campus climate and outcomes they expect to see in the coming years (Lederman, 2022; Kramer & Adams, 2020; Muñoz et al., 2017; Stanley et al. 2019). According to a recent study on presidential searches and hirings, the number of minority-diverse university presidents, defined as women, Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians, appointed over the last five years has increased from 22.0% to 35.4% (Lederman, 2022). In his study, Lederman (2022) suggests that this significant increase in the hiring of minority presidents is partly in response to recent social movements denouncing institutional racism and social inequities and disrupting student protests and manifestations on campus. Other possible contributing factors include boards listening to more diverse opinions and responding to external pressures to diversify their pool of candidates; and boards being more open to considering highly qualified minority candidates that, even in the

middle of the past decade, would not have been regarded as capable of such undertakings (Lederman, 2022). The increase may also be attributed to changes in the search process by which viable candidates are identified, an expansion of the pipeline of minority candidates, and a shift in minority candidates' attitudes toward seeing themselves as legitimate university presidential candidates (Lederman, 2022).

Board decisions impact not only internal stakeholders but external stakeholders as well. When boards approve campuses' capital investment projects, they are also affecting the economies of their communities by committing millions of dollars to build new facilities, classroom buildings, athletic venues, or teaching hospitals (Brandenburg et al., 2021; Kezar, 2019; Rall, 2021; Weerts, 2016). These decisions have short, mid, and long-term implications for the community in the form of construction and supply contracts to build the facilities, implying the need to hire local labor and subcontractors, service providers, and source building materials. Afterward, these new or remodeled facilities continue bolstering business conditions and generating economic spillovers. Improved business activity favors entrepreneurial community residents who anticipate profit opportunities, open or expand their businesses, create jobs, contract with other companies and suppliers, and generate additional tax revenue for a city and state. To help finance high-value, long-term new projects, boards have the authority to tap public financial markets by issuing bonds and other debt instruments in the securities market. These bonds commit the universities' future state appropriations and tuition revenues to pay back debt with interest to bondholders when the instrument's maturity date becomes due (Brandenburg et al., 2021; NACUBO, 2022; Weerts, 2016). By responsibly and methodically participating in securities markets and offering high-grade debt instruments, public boards communicate to the investing community that they represent financially solid and well-managed reputable

institutions with a long-term vision. These are some institutional characteristics that society values in public entities. A positive public image may influence investors to consider adding university-backed debt securities as safe, high-grade investment options for their diversified portfolios (NACUBO, 2022; Nava, 2020; Peacock, 2021; Raikes, 2018).

When deciding how and where to invest endowed funds, the board assumes the ultimate responsibility for the portfolio allocation. Board members have fiduciary duties to oversee and manage the institutions' financial resources (Barringer & Riffe, 2018; Buse et al., 2016; Kezar, 2016; Milem et al., 2005; Morgan et al., 2021). Boards' investment decisions also send messages to their communities. Boards can decide to invest or disinvest in companies with a track record of supporting social, environmental, or other causes that may be important to the community. Activist stakeholders have been known to pressure boards to terminate their investments in companies that espouse values contrary to those of the university system and its institutions. Examples of activists' pressure can be found in the 1970s when many institutions divested in South African oil and mineral companies that supported apartheid (Phung, 2021). More recently, boards are being pressured to disinvest in companies that are not sustainable and environmentally conscious, like those in the fossil fuels industry, companies that have a track record of violating fundamental human and labor rights, especially those related to child labor, and companies associated with a political regime accused of violations of human rights and genocide (California State University System, 2022; Phung, 2021; Raikes, 2018).

The total market valuation of the institution's endowment funds, the investment returns the investments generate, and the investment portfolio allocations are indicative of the boards power and influence on external stakeholders. Successfully managed portfolios that constantly deliver high returns enhance the board's image as leaders in the investing community. Market

analysts observe their investment strategies' success and sometimes replicate them in their investment strategies (Peacock, 2021; Raikes, 2018). As of 2021, the top ten endowment funds held by private and public colleges and universities, measured by their market value, were led by Harvard University with $51.9 billion, the University of Texas System with $42.9 billion, Yale University with $42.2 billion, Stanford University with $37.8 billion, Princeton University with $37.7 billion, Massachusetts Institute of Technology with $27.5 billion, the University of Pennsylvania with $20.5 billion, the University of Notre Dame with $18.7 billion, Texas A&M University with $18.0 billion, and the University of Michigan, with $17.0 billion (NACUBO-TIIA, 2021).

Endowment accounts are financial gifts made to institutions in perpetuity. These intergenerational gifts cannot be spent, and only the returns generated by their strategic investment can be used to fulfill the educational objectives of the donors (NACUBO, 2021; Phung, 2021). Endowed gifts can be restricted if the donor provides specific instruction on how the returns should be expended or unrestricted if the donor does not specify how the returns should be spent, leaving this concern at the institution's discretion (NACUBO, 2021; Phung, 2021). With solid strategies and responsible fiscal management, investment returns generated by restricted endowments are distributed to honor donors' wishes. Boards serve as fiduciary custodians of restricted funds and have no say in spending the investment gains. Boards can only use investment returns generated by unrestricted endowments that have an unspecified purpose per a donor's wishes and of interests generated by restricted endowments where the board has specifically been named the beneficiary (McCreary, 2021; NACUBO, 2021; Whitford, 2022). These are the available investment returns that boards can discretionarily allocate to fund programs and activities that have the possibility of influencing students, faculty, and staff's

campus life. Funded programs may be directed to increase the amount of financial aid to students in need, promote specific projects for student success, fund programs and activities that promote diversity and inclusion among campus students, faculty, and staff, or distribute economic incentives for faculty and staff (McCreary, 2021; NACUBO, 2021; Whitford, 2022).

Another example of boards' power and influence on the public is their ability to scrutinize and decide whether to accept or reject a philanthropic gift to the institution (Bowles, 2021; Weerts, 2016). Boards want to preserve their institution's prestige, good name, and public image. They also want to avoid public scrutiny for being associated with a controversial figure, even if the origins of these associations date back to centuries ago, as is the case of some private colleges founded in the 16th to the early 20th centuries. Colleges and universities are just beginning to deal with the historical fact that early funding gifts were provided by generous donors who, under contemporary social criteria, are being judged for their obscure business dealings, discriminatory practices, and open stands that favored and justified human slavery (AGB, 2014; Powell, 2022; Universities Studying Slavery Consortium, 2022). To avoid public harm to the institution's image and prestige, before accepting a sizable gift, boards evaluate if the stipulated conditions of the gift are unfavorable to the institution, do not conform with the boards' values, or try to impose unilateral governing conditions that may challenge the board's control and authority over the institutions (Bowles, 2021; Universities Studying Slavery Consortium, 2022; Weerts, 2016).

Recent years of social disturbances and movements (AGB, 2021; Bowles, 2021; Barnett, 2020; Kezar, 2019; Kezar et al., 2021; Kramer & Adams, 2020; Lederman, 2022; McBain & Powell, 2021; Wilson, 2016) have influenced some boards' decisions to review their current holdings of legacy gifts (Universities Studying Slavery Consortium, 2022). Colleges and

universities, private and public, large and small, are trying to learn more about the donor's history, beliefs, and lifestyles, the origins of their wealth, the original purpose of their gifts, as well as the context of their times, while trying to decide whether the donor's original intentions are still in alignment with the institutions' contemporary values (Universities Studying Slavery Consortium, 2022). Some prominent private institutions, including Harvard, Georgetown, Columbia, and Emory universities, have recently unearthed historical evidence that enslaved people built their institutions, that slaves served students, faculty, and staff, and that founders and principal donors made their fortunes through highly questionable and sometimes illicit business practices, were slave traders and slave owners, and practiced racial and ethnic discriminating acts (Moody, 2022; Powell, 2022; Universities Studying Slavery Consortium, 2022; Walsh, 2022). Other institutions have discovered embedded discriminating practices in their early years in their founding charters, which specifically denied women and people of color admission to the institution (Powell, 2022; Texas A&M University System, 2022; Walsh, 2022).

Helping institutions learn more about their complex and obscure pasts has been the mission of a consortium of public and private institutions led by the University of Virginia. The Universities Studying Slavery (USS) consortium groups public and private institutions that have committed internal resources to research their history and to publicly acknowledge their institutions' ties to slavery and discriminatory practices (USS, 2022). As of early 2022, the USS consortium grouped more than 80 institutions, mainly from the United States, but with a growing international presence, as institutions from Canada, England, Ireland, Scotland, and Colombia have voluntarily committed to the consortium's mission (USS, 2022). Upon learning about the history and obscure past of their institutions, their donors, and early institutional practices through their own research or with the help of the Consortium, some boards have decided to act

and thoroughly review past, current, and future gifts to the institution that may generate unwanted negative public opinion and controversy that may affect the public image and prestige of the institution. To this effect, and under these new scrutiny conditions, some institutions have decided to reject new gift pledges, amend contracts, and return gifts to donors or their successors. When not possible to return these gifts because the funds have long been exhausted or used up to erect a building bearing the original donor's name, boards have decided to revise and cancel the agreement that granted the donor naming rights and rename the facility with the name of a less controversial individual (Bowles, 2021; University of Texas System Board of Regents, 2020). Other universities have taken down memorials and statues on campus that celebrated donors or other public figures associated with racially discriminatory pasts or committed a large amount of financial resources to try to redistribute to the Black communities for their past wrongdoings (Powell, 2022; University of Texas System Board of Regents, 2020; Walsh, 2022).

Governing Boards' Power to Change the System's Direction

Diverse society groups have shown their willingness to publicly display their unequivocal support for or against a controversial social or political issue (McBain & Powell, 2021; Wilson, 2016). An example of this was a recent event in 2020 when it took a single and tragic event of police brutality in May of 2020 against a member of the Minnesota minority Black community to generate public street demonstrations across the nation that, in little time, expanded to college and universities campuses across the country (Bowles, 2021; Kezar et al., 2021; Kramer & Adams, 2020; Lederman, 2022; McBain & Powell, 2021; Wilson, 2016). Campus unrest over discrimination issues against the black community grew and became disruptive to the campus environment. In the case of the University of Texas System and the University of Texas at Austin, its flagship institution, student unrest motivated the system's governing board and

campus university leadership to engage in tense, open dialogues with their Black student community led by their influential student-athletes. As a result of these meetings and negotiations, campus leadership agreed to enact quick and decisive actions that started a series of noticeable changes across the campus. Less than two months after the events in Minnesota, the Board of Regents of the University of Texas System "unanimously approved a series of actions that UT Austin will take to recruit, attract, retain, and support talented Black students from around the state and promote a better campus environment for students, faculty, staff, and visitors" (University of Texas System Board of Regents, 2020). The adopted actions include honoring the memory of the first Black student admitted to the university; renaming some campus buildings and the football stadium after notable Black alumni, and facilities that before honored controversial sponsors that openly supported discriminatory policies; implementing a new university-wide policy to recruit, develop and retain a more diverse world-class faculty; and refocus and improve the university's 2017 Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan (University of Texas System Board of Regents, 2020).

Since 2010, the general population has increased its consciousness and awareness about long-standing discrimination issues. The tense current social environment in city streets and campuses alike is evidenced by highly visible social movements happening across the United States. Communities are manifesting against discrimination towards women, gender, racial, and ethnic, as well as socioeconomic inequalities (Kezar et al., 2021; McBain & Powell, 2021; Wilson, 2016). Influenced by social media and technologies allowing live events to be broadcast in real-time and easily recorded, video images and information are quickly disseminated. Diverse population sectors across distant geographical regions can now instantly learn about events happening in other parts of the world. Without much effort, they can retransmit influencing

messages among their contact networks. Affordable and easy-to-use technologies have facilitated the viral dissemination of real-time images and events that have caused strong, widespread reactions and spontaneous manifestations (Kezar et al., 2021; McBain & Powell, 2021; Wilson, 2016). Society, in general, has become sensitive about economic and social discrimination issues and increasingly more open to voicing their dissatisfaction openly and vigorously, which has contributed to developing the public's highly polarized views (Kezar et al., 2021; McBain & Powell, 2021).

This is the new scenario in which governing boards are now operating. The university community has increased expectations about the governing board's roles and what actions they are taking to influence the campus climate (McBain & Powell, 2021; Barringer & Riffe, 2018; Bernstein et al., 2020; Buse et al., 2016; Kezar, 2016; Krisberg, 2019; Kramer & Adams, 2020; Morgan at al., 2021; Rall, 2021; Stanley at al., 2019)). Increased awareness of social unrest, addressing its consequences, and engaging in activities to combat the adverse effects on their campus' environment and populations should now be extended and recognized as a fiduciary duty (Barringer & Riffe, 2018; McBain & Powell, 2021; Morgan at al., 2021; Rall, 2021). Fiduciary duties require board members to always act in responsible, honest, and trustworthy ways and conduct themselves in unselfish ways by continuously putting the institution's and its stakeholders' best interests ahead of their own (Barringer & Riffe, 2018; McBain & Powell, 2021; Rall, 2021; Wilson, 2016). As part of their fiduciary duties, board leaders are expected to create educational value for the campus community as much as possible. Campus stakeholders are placing their expectations on higher education institutions to use their influence to align stakeholders' diversity interests in the same direction and elevate campus diversity issues to the same level of relevance that boards place on critical financial matters (Barringer & Riffe, 2018;

Bernstein et al., 2020; Buse et al., 2016; Kezar et al., 2021; Rall, 2021). By accepting that championing campus diversity is a fiduciary duty, governing boards can elevate student diversity to a priority level that requires them to view it on par with traditionally considered financial stewardship duties and frequently include it for discussion in their ordinary and special meeting agendas. Open discussions will lead board members to start the process of analyzing, if they have not done so already, their critical roles as influencers of campus life and campus climates (McBain & Powell, 2021; Nava, 2020, Rall, 2021; Wilson, 2016). Boards, which through their typical committees have traditionally focused on financial matters like budgets, physical plant building, investment, audit, and compliance, setting admission policies and tuition rates, are now being required by their stakeholders to take a more active role and enlarge their presence and influence around issues of campus diversity, equity, and inclusion. Pressures and demands to intervene and expand their reach on campus diversity issues come from internal stakeholders, like students and faculty, and external forces, like society in general and federal and state government policies (Astin & Astin, 2015; Kezar et al., 2021; Krisberg, 2019; Morgan et al., 2021; Raphael, 2021).

Governing boards have demonstrated their influence on students' lives in multiple ways. In February 2022, The University of Texas Board of Regents approved a new $300 million endowment fund to contribute to each of its component institutions' financial aid packages. Through the interest distributions of the endowment, the Promise Plus initiative will contribute to increasing the amount of financial aid available for students whose family's household income meets a certain threshold set by each institution, ranging from $60,000 up to $100,000. Combined with federal and state financial aid, the Promise Plus program is expected to significantly reduce and, in some cases, eliminate all tuition and fees assessed to students from

low-income families (University of Texas System, 2022). The two major California System governing boards recently made decisions that significantly impacted minorities' enrollment. In May 2020, the University of California Board of Regents voted to eliminate the use of standardized SAT and ACT scores from their campuses' admission formulas (Jaschik, 2022; University of California System, 2020). Two years later, the board of trustees of the California State University System adopted a similar resolution (California State University System, 2022). The practical effect of these decisions is that when evaluating a student's admission application to a university, admission counselors will ignore standardized test scores that have been found to systematically discriminate against minorities and give unfair advantages to students from privileged backgrounds. Admission counselors must then base their decisions on other formula factors, like the student's grade point average, courses taken, class ranks, and extracurricular activities (Jaschick, 2022; California State University System, 2022). Another example of board influence in campus life is found in the Texas A&M System. In April 2018, the Texas A&M University System Board of Regents created a grant program to supplement financial packages for at-risk students from low-income families who met eligibility criteria and were considered at risk of dropping out of school. In March 2022, the Texas A&M regents voted to extend the benefits of these grant programs to students from Ukraine who have been financially and emotionally affected by Russian forces' invasion of their nation. Expanding the benefits of these grants to Ukrainian students will provide them with sufficient financial aid support to cover the cost of their tuition and fees (Texas A&M University System, 2022).

In another case that shows how governing boards can influence external decision-makers and communities, the trustees of Stanford University voted in December 2018 to revise their $38 billion endowment's investment strategy to reflect and let it be guided by a more social,

environmental, and ethical framework (Raikes, 2018). To reach this decision, the board of trustees listened to the voices of multiple internal stakeholders, including students, faculty, staff, and alumni, conducted numerous focus groups, solicited advice from various social and financial experts, and considered input received from the external university community-at-large. With its endowments' massive size and diversity, Stanford's effective investment decisions are being analyzed, considered, and adopted by other university investing boards (Raikes, 2018). In line with their ethical and environmentally sustainable framework, in April 2021, the Stanford board approved the issuance of $375 million in bonds to finance a series of major projects in the university's capital plan. In addition to the significance of the large bond issuance, these influential bonds have the peculiarity that they have been independently certified as the first bond issued in the history of higher education that meets "rigorous environmental stewardship and social responsibility standards" (Peacock, 2021, p.1). External, independent credit rating agencies set the standards that certify a debt instrument's environmental, social, and governance investment category, in line with strict international standards, like the Paris Climate Accord (Peacock, 2021).

Governing boards who pledge to act on matters of student diversity need to be very deliberate and transparent in their intentions and commit to mid-and long-term goals that demonstrate that their interest is genuine and not superficial, and not a simple short-term reaction to an event that may not render any substantial effects on the community (Adserias et al., 2017; Clauson & McKnight, 2018; Kezar, 2016; Kincey et al., 2021; Rall, 2021). Boards need to be convinced of the importance of their actions and be ready to fully commit to this effort by including diversity discussions in their meeting agendas, identifying advocates inside their boards to lead and coordinate the board's actions, committing to providing the necessary long

term financial resources to fund their initiatives, and listen to the voices of their minority board members who contribute by enriching the dialogue with their diversified opinions and perspectives (Barringer & Riffe, 2018; Kezar 2016; Leon, 2014; Wilson, 2016). These conversations are necessary to get board members to align their words and intentions with actions and desired outcomes (Barringer and Riffe, 2018; Kezar, 2016; Leon, 2014; Wilson, 2016). Listening to diverse views may not be easy for the typical governing board with a primarily homogenous membership that is uncomfortable discussing controversial issues related to racial, ethnic, and gender identities.

The efforts to implement a diversity agenda must start at the board level. Often, this is where initiatives get stalled because of the lack of a genuine drive to implement a diversity agenda (Brown, 2004; Bowles, 2021; Fulton, 2019; McBain & Powell, 2021; Wilson, 2016). Multiple studies show that the average board's composition is highly homogenous. The typical board is constituted by a majority of white males with an average age of over 50 years, having professional profile backgrounds in business and law, and a solid socioeconomic position (Brown, 2004; Bowles, 2021; Fulton, 2019; McBain & Powell, 2021; Wilson, 2016). Governing boards made up of White male members are constantly criticized by campus diversity supporters because they do not appear to be genuinely representative of their diverse campuses' populations and seem disconnected from their everyday realities and challenges. The campus community sees a board with this configuration as uninformed and lacking the interest and political will to implement and oversee the execution of controversial campus diversity initiatives that will most likely face resistance from various fronts that could perceive the initiatives as a threat to their interests (Buse et al., 2016; McBain & Powell, 2021; Rall, 2021; Wilson, 2016). In contrast, boards that have promoted diversity in their membership by including women and ethnic

minorities have a better opportunity to listen and learn about campus challenges faced by women, students from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and non-traditional students (AGB/Gallup, 2020; Barnett, 2020; Clauson & McKnight, 2018, Wilson, 2016). Minority regents who share their views, testimonies, and life experiences with the rest of the board contribute to campus diversity efforts by helping raise their colleagues' awareness about various diversity-related issues that a homogeneous board may not hear about or may not consider relevant enough (AGB/Gallup, 2020; Barnett, 2020; Clauson & McKnight, 2018, Wilson, 2016). Their communities perceive diverse boards as closer and more relatable to their diverse campuses, which helps establish connections and open communication channels (AGB/Gallup, 2020; Barnett, 2020; Clauson & McKnight, 2018, Wilson, 2016).

Depending on their analysis and conclusions reached over campuses' needs, diversity-embracing governing boards have multiple strategic options available to them. These strategies can be deployed to improve diversity conditions on their campuses, influence the campus climate, and create the best educational conditions that could make campuses feel safer, more welcoming, and inclusive for all students, faculty, and staff, regardless of their cultural, ethnic, or racial background, gender identities, or any other characteristics with which they identify (Brandenburg et al., 2021; Barringer & Riffe, 2018; Brown, 2004; Kezar 2019; Kezar et al., 2021; Kramer & Adams, 2020; Morgan et al., 2021; Rall, 2021). It is imperative that governing boards develop standard yet flexible policies and initiatives that can be tailored to each campus's specific needs (Brandenburg et al., 2021; Barringer & Riffe, 2018; Brown, 2004; Kezar, 2019; Kezar et al., 2021; Kramer & Adams, 2020; Morgan et al., 2021; Rall, 2021). University systems group multiple institutions with a physical presence in broad geographical state areas. Each component institution has its own needs, culture, history, traditions, and diverse ethnic and racial

representation. Over two-thirds of the eighty-four campuses in the twelve systems in the U.S.-Mexico borderland states have the designation of Hispanic Serving institutions (HSIs) in common. HSI is a designation given by the U.S. Department of Education to eligible colleges and universities that reach and maintain full-time undergraduate enrollment of at least twenty-five percent of their student population who identifies as Hispanic (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Earning this designation entitles institutions to access additional federal grant funding to promote higher education success for students from diverse minority and underrepresented backgrounds (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2022).

However, being classified as an HSI does not mean all institutions are identical. The main reasons are that these campuses have a diverse student demographic composition mix with different concentrations of racial and ethnic groups, are in communities with diverse racial and ethnic populations, recruit students from different geographic areas, have different enrollment sizes, and other characteristics that make them unique in their own way (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2022). While the University of Texas at El Paso, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, and Texas A&M International University have a high percentage of Hispanic enrollment (over 80%), others, like the University of Texas at Austin, the University of Arizona, and the University of California – Irvine, barely meet the federal threshold of twenty-five percent required to qualify as an HSI (University of Texas System, 2022; U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Some universities have a history of being recognized as HSIs for over twenty years, while other institutions, like the Texas A&M University College Station campus, earned the federal HSI designation in March 2022 (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2022; Texas A&M University System, 2022).

An initial step in the process of addressing student diversity is for the board to conduct a self-assessment of its institutional and members' attitudes towards diversity policies, as well as the history and origins of their institutions. (Brandenburg et al., 2021; Bowles, 2021; Barnett, 2021; Claeys-Kulik et al., 2019; Kezar et al., 2021; Kramer & Adams, 2020; Rall, 2021). Through a self-assessment, the board should learn about its origins and history and be ready to confront the possibility that what they find could reveal shocking details of a dark past. In their self-assessments, some very well-known public and private universities like the University of Virginia, Harvard, Columbia, and Emory, to name a few, have been very surprised to find out that their institutions' foundations and origins, along with some well-known and highly respected founders and past board members, are tied to multiple significant events related to the slavery of African Americans, and discriminatory practices against women and minorities of color (Moody, 2022; Powell, 2022; Universities Studying Slavery Consortium, 2022; Walsh, 2022). The self-assessment is also an essential tool for board members to identify conscious and unconscious biases towards diversity and inclusiveness policies. The objective is to identify long-standing discriminatory embedded practices and beliefs that must be confronted head-on. By consciously and openly addressing these historical realities, the board begins the process of changing its own and its members' attitudes toward the need to embrace student diversity; they send a powerful message to the campus community about their intentions and start earning the moral authority it will need to stand firm when campus resistance starts to erupt (Kincey et al., 2021; Krisberg, 2019; Nava, 2020; Rall, 2021; Universities Studying Slavery Consortium, 2022).

Once a board is determined to exercise its authority to create policies that will promote long-range student diversity conditions, a follow-up step is to request a trustworthy assessment of their campuses' past and present policies and practices to find out where they are with their

previous diversity efforts and evaluate the current campus climate (Adserias et al., 2017; Bassinger, 2016; Claeys-Kulic et al., 2019; Kezar, 2019; Morgan et al., 2021). A rigorous assessment will identify whether the campus is in a beginner, an intermediate, or a mature advanced stage in its diversity implementation efforts. Knowing how advanced a campus is in its diversification efforts helps determine what strategies are needed, what human and financial resources should be made available, and what could be reasonable outcomes in the short, medium, and long terms (Adserias et al., 2017; Bassinger, 2016; Claeys-Kulic et al., 2019; Kezar, 2019; Morgan et al., 2021). An honest assessment that evaluates all aspects of the university is necessary to understand the effect of previous and current policies on the diversity front. An equity audit is an example of a comprehensive evaluation tool that helps administrators identify policies and practices that generate and drive inequality issues in the system. An equity study benchmarks and compares the institution's policies against other institutions' best practices (Olson, 2020). An evaluation can be done using internal resources or contracted out to independent consultants (Adserias et al., 2017; Astin & Astin, 2015; Bassinger, 2016; Krisberg, 2019). Either way, it is crucial that whoever conducts the assessment is a subject matter expert with experience and a solid professional background. An effective assessment will unearth hidden and long-standing systemic practices embedded in the university's admission, financial aid award criteria, hiring, promotion, and administrative procedures that have had the effect, intentional or not, of discriminating against minorities and people of color (Adserias et al., 2017; Astin & Astin, 2015; Bassinger, 2016; Krisberg, 2019). The evaluator's experience and unbiased professional independence are required to give the board an accurate depiction of the campus climate, not a lessened version of the findings (Adserias et al., 2017; Astin & Astin, 2015; Bassinger, 2016; Krisberg, 2019).

It is also crucial that the board's reports provide campus disaggregated data and not high-level summaries. Reaching conclusions with incomplete data can only lead to ineffective decisions and unsupported claims (Adams et al., 2014; Brandenburg et al., 2021; Barnett, 2020; Kezar, 2008; Hurtado et al.,1998; Smith, 2020). One effective tool to accomplish this objective of disaggregating data is using a diversity scorecard, an "initiative to call attention to disparities in aggregated data that tends to hide the reality of the state of equity in educational outcomes for underrepresented student minorities" (Bensimon, 2004, p.114). The diversity scorecard promotes awareness, interpretation, and action and uses visual prompts that give visibility to previously unnoticed or hidden data. Bensimon's (2004) study provides an example of the importance of disaggregated data. A gateway mathematics course had an overall average pass rate of 74.8%. Using the diversity scorecard, the researcher shows the pass rate disparities among the diverse ethnic groups at the institution. White students had a pass rate of 82.4%, but African American students only had a pass rate of 59.2%. At 87.3%, Asian students had a higher passing rate than White students and considerably higher than the 74.9% Hispanic student pass rate. The point of this example is to show that if decision-makers only view the aggregated average pass rate, underrepresented minorities' needs will go unmet because of their lack of visibility in their group's scores (Bensimon, 2004; Harris & Bensimon, 2007). Campuses have different population mixes and needs that cannot be identified in an aggregated system report. Comparatively, some campuses have a higher concentration of Hispanic students, while others have a higher concentration of white students (Table 4 page 166). Some campuses have enrollments below ten thousand students, while some institutions enroll as many as a hundred and nineteen thousand students (Table 4 page 166). Disaggregated data will provide a more accurate depiction of the campus population's needs, their demographic characteristics, and the

number of individuals in each category, information necessary for a suitably customized diversity plan (Adams et al., 2014; Milem et al., 2005; Stanley et al., 2019).

One common complaint about campus policies is that white and male campus administrators created these to regulate campus conduct and behaviors for the majority student population, also presumed to be white and male (Barnett, 2020). This assumption was probably valid twenty years ago but can no longer be sustained. Disaggregated data from the 2020 U.S. Population Census and the U.S.-Mexico borderland public university systems provide a different view. Females constitute the majority population in the nation and are also the majority population in each U.S.-Mexico borderland state. During the 2010-2020 decade, women surpassed the male population to become the majority group. System and campus statistics show the same trend. In all university systems reviewed, most enrolled students are women. From the campus perspective, women constitute the majority in seventy-eight of the eighty-four U.S.–Mexico borderland state institutions (Table 2 on page 164 and Table 4 on page 166; U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Analyzing students' racial and ethnic demographics and using the California State University System's demographic data, the system's Hispanic student population represents 44.7% of total enrollment. In contrast, the White, Black, and other communities represent 21.9%, 4.1%, and 29.3%, respectively. Clearly, Hispanics are the majority, so it would be expected that system and campus policies are mainly created to suit them. However, ten out of the twenty-three institutions in the California State system have a majority white student enrollment, so applying policies that are not targeted to their demographic characteristics may not be the best set of decisions. Unless the board and campus administrators are aware of these and other differences and tailor the policies to the campus-specific needs, the board's policies will most likely be ineffective, ignored, or have unintended and unwanted consequences for one or more of

the non-majority student groups (Adams et al., 2014; Barnett, 2020; Claeys-Kulik et al., 2019; Kezar, 2019; Hurtado et al., 1998; Nava, 2020; Stanley et al., 2019).

Adapting policies to campus needs without tampering with their core objectives ensures that the targeted populations receive the intended benefits. Boards need to recognize that today's students will be tomorrow's entrepreneurs, professionals, workers, and citizens who will continue their generation's work. Today's students need to graduate prepared to live in a seemingly borderless world and be ready to interact and compete against highly diversified peers (Adserias, 2017; AGB, 2014; Bernstein et al., 2020; Brown, 2004; Clauson & McKnight, 2018; Fulton, 2019; Kezar et al., 2021; Kramer & Adams, 2020; Morgan et al., 2021; Wilson, 2016). By fomenting diversity plans across campuses and incorporating diversity issues in their class curricula, students gain valuable experiences that will prepare them for when they need to interact and negotiate with people from different countries with different religions, languages, values, and traditions. Exposing students and encouraging them to interact with other students with diverse backgrounds supporting different ideas and perspectives also allows them to view and reconsider their views shaped by their culture and life experiences. A welcoming, diverse campus may also help develop students' social relationships across ethnic groups, which would probably not be possible in a campus dominated by a large majority group (Adserias, 2017; AGB, 2014; Bernstein et al., 2020; Brown, 2004; Clauson and McKnight, 2018; Fulton, 2019; Kezar et al., 2021; Kramer 7 Adams, 2020; Morgan et al., 2021; Wilson, 2016). A satisfied student that had a positive college experience is more likely to re-enroll in graduate school to pursue a master's or doctoral degree, will likely speak highly about the experiences lived in the institution, recommend attending it to friends and family, and potentially become a future donor

to the institution (Adserias, 2017; Brown, 2004; Bowles, 2021Clauson & McKnight, 2018; Fulton, 2019; Kramer & Adams, 2020; Morgan et al., 2021; Nava, 2020; Rall, 2021).

Board policies and directives must be clearly defined, strongly worded, relevant, and highly intentional to have a long-lasting transformational effect on campuses. Weak and superficial policies will be easily identified and ignored, leaving campus stakeholders with no benefits and feelings of frustration that nothing meaningful is being done to address their diverse needs (Adserias et al., 2017; Bowles, 2021; Barringer & Riffe, 2018; Bassinger, 2016; Kezar, 2008; Kezar, 2019; Kincey et al., 2021; Jaschick & Lederman, 2022; Lederman, 2022; Leon, 2014; Smith, 2020). A well-informed board should be aware of the diverse composition of its campuses' student bodies. The board should also understand past and present demographic trends that will change the campus composition in years to come (Murdock et al., 2014). A highly visible and attention-grabbing strategy that boards can implement is to openly announce their intention to elevate student diversity issues as a core board and system value on par with financial and compliance values. By regularly including the discussion of diversity-specific topics in their meeting agendas, regents strongly signal to the campus communities that this is a matter of concern to them. As such, it should be a matter of concern for them as well (Adserias et al., 2017; Bowles, 2021; Barringer & Riffe, 2018; Bassinger, 2016; Kezar, 2008; Kezar, 2019; Kincey et al., 2021; Jaschick & Lederman, 2022; Lederman, 2022; Leon, 2014; Smith, 2020). Ordinary board meetings are attended or viewed at a distance by internal stakeholders like campus presidents and their executive cabinets, students and alumni, and external community partners and members of the press. The impact of witnessing board members engaging in diversity conversations sends a powerful message to the audience that the board is highly

committed to a diversity agenda and will pressure them to start planning and acting accordingly in their sphere of influence.

In conjunction with the public display of their intentions, boards also need to incorporate their diversity agendas into campus operating budgets and strategic development plans. Providing the necessary financial resources to implement their strategies gives campus presidents access to additional tools essential for implementation. Along with resources, campus leaders also need to know that they have the full backing of the boards and can rely on their political influence to push through the initiatives (AGB, 2014; Brown, 2014; Kezar, 2019; Kincey et al., 2021; Jaschick & Lederman, 2022; Lederman, 2022; Rall, 2021; Smith, 2020). If campus presidents do not feel that they have the backing of the boards, their change-reluctant campus constituencies might perceive this as a sign of weakness or a lack of authority to implement the changes. Support is critical for minority presidents, as their efforts to carry the board's mandate could be misinterpreted as following an agenda motivated by personal or special interest groups (AGB, 2014; Brown, 2014; Kezar, 2019; Kincey et al., 2021; Jaschick & Lederman, 2022; Lederman, 2022; Rall, 2021; Smith, 2020). Campus presidents and their cabinets need to be made aware that resources and political support come with high expectations for successful implementation and that they will be held accountable to the board and their campus communities for the success of the programs. To verify that student diversity objectives and outcomes are being met, compliance should be monitored by designing and implementing a set of clear and meaningful diversity metrics that measure the achievement of milestones and performance over time. Multiple metrics will focus attention on a holistic set of variables and avoid concentrating efforts on meeting a pre-determined numerical quota or receiving federal recognition as an HSI. Reaching HSI designation is certainly an important milestone. However,

implementing a diversity plan to transform the campus climate, including organizational climate and culture, takes more than reaching a numeric goal. It requires a higher level of comprehensive campus commitment and work to change internal procedures, practices, and organizational structures (AGB, 2014; Brown, 2014; Kezar, 2019; Kincey et al., 2021; Jaschick & Lederman, 2022; Lederman, 2022; Rall, 2021; Smith, 2020). While implementing these initiatives, campus leaders will likely face multiple personal and professional challenges that will question their beliefs and commitment to the project, test their role as campus influencers, and expose them to dissenting stakeholders' criticism and pressures to abandon their efforts. This is where the board's support becomes more critical, which can be manifested through statements of support to the campus president, regents' visit to the campuses to meet with opposing groups, and, whenever possible, by including economic incentives in their compensation packages for achieving milestones (AGB, 2014; Brown, 2014; Kezar, 2019; Kincey et al., 2021; Jaschick & Lederman, 2022; Lederman, 2022; Rall, 2021; Smith, 2020).

On a board level, it is crucial that regents devise a contingency plan during their diversity discussions that clearly spells out the steps to follow in case of a significant incident happening inside their campuses. With the help of their support offices, legal teams, and external consultants that keep them informed and up to date, regents need to understand and be aware of potential risks associated with social and student unrest, as has been the case since the middle of the 2010 decade (Brandenburg et al., 2021; Buse et al., 2016; Kezar et al., 2021; Raphael, 2021; Rall, 2021; Wilson, 2016). By coming up with a detailed plan that anticipates disruptive events and situations, boards can design a contingency protocol that will identify what actions to follow depending on the gravity of the problem, the people authorized to issue verbal or written communications on behalf of the board, what kind of human and financial resources should be

immediately made available, and what other actions to take to bring a situation under control (Brandenburg et al., 2021; Buse et al., 2016; Kezar et al., 2021; Raphael, 2021; Rall, 2021; Wilson, 2016). Having a plan will prevent the board, or any of its members, from making compulsive and reactionary decisions that may increase the risks for the system and the institutions, result in costly financial losses, as well as the possible loss of confidence in public opinion, with negative consequences to the system's prestige and public image (Brandenburg et al., 2021; Kezar et al., 2021; Raphael, 2021; Rall, 2021; Wilson, 2016).

How Students Benefit from Attending a Diversity-Embracing Campus

Attending a college campus that embraces a diverse campus climate could bring multiple benefits to students and make their college-attending experience rich and memorable (Adserias et al., 2017; Astin & Astin, 2015; Brandenburg et al., 2021; Barnett, 2020; Clarks-Kulik et al., 2019; Clausen & McKnight, 2018; Kezar, 2008; Hurtado et al., 1995; Milem at al., 2005; Morgan et al., 2021; Nava, 2020; Weerts, 2016). When student enrollment drops and the value of a higher education degree is being questioned, it is essential to ensure that students learn to value the college life experience (Moody, 2022; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2022). High-education institutions' enrollment fell by 4.1% from Spring 2021 to Spring 2022 (Moody, 2022; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2022). For the U.S.-Mexico borderland states, enrollment rates primarily reflect the declining trends observed across the nation from Spring 2021 to Spring 2022. Of the four U.S.-Mexico borderland states, only Arizona had an increase in enrollment from year-to-year equivalent to 1.3%. The other three border states experienced declining enrollment from year to year. California's enrollment fell by 8.1%, New Mexico's enrollment fell by 3.6%, and Texas' enrollment decreased by 2.6% (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2022).

A welcoming campus creates perceptions of a safe environment where students feel that they can learn, develop, and grow into responsible and engaged young adults. When students feel that they fit within the campus culture, they will be more likely to concentrate on their studies without being overly concerned by issues such as discrimination, microaggressions, and systemic biases (Brown, 2004; Hurtado et al., 1998; Kezar, 2019; Milem et al., 2005; Nava, 2020). An engaged student is also more likely to participate in enriching extracurricular campus activities outside of the classroom. Attending campus social, cultural, and sports events strengthens the student bond with the institution and opens the door to better integration with the campus community (Brown, 2004; Hurtado et al., 1998; Kezar, 2019; Milem et al., 2005; Nava, 2020). An important component of the college experience is the opportunity to meet diverse people to exchange ideas and perspectives, especially with students with diverse backgrounds, cultures, and life experiences (Hurtado et al., 1998; Kezar, 2019; Milem et al., 2005). A diverse campus also helps prepare graduating students to enter a highly globalized and diversified economy. In the economy, they will compete with talented workers from diverse geographical regions in the United States and abroad with different backgrounds, beliefs, values, cultures, and religions. Exposure to diverse people may contribute to their professional development by giving them previous knowledge and insight into other people's perspectives (Hurtado et al., 1998; Kezar, 2019; Milem et al., 2005). Employers participating in global markets may favor recruiting graduates who have already been exposed to a diverse community, offer job opportunities to candidates they believe fit in with their organizations, and can interact with their multicultural business partners (Brown, 2004; Hurtado et al., 1998; Kezar, 2019; Milem et al., 2005; Nava, 2020).

A diverse campus will also offer members of diverse groups opportunities to interact with each other and debate issues that affect their communities. Listening to challenging perspectives and points of view that one had not thought of often leads individuals to question themselves about the foundation of their values and beliefs and may help increase their tolerance levels towards situations they may not understand or are out of their control (Bernstein et al., 2020; Brown, 2004; Hurtado et al., 1998; Kezar, 2019; Milem et al., 2005; Morgan et al., 2021; Muñoz et al., 2017; Nava, 2020). For students who grew up with limited or no exposure to people from diverse backgrounds, meeting diverse students may help them understand other cultures, lifestyles, and socioeconomic conditions that may be unknown or inconceivable to them (Bernstein et al., 2020; Brown, 2004; Hurtado et al., 1998; Kezar, 2019; Milem et al., 2005; Morgan et al., 2021; Muñoz et al., 2017; Nava, 2020). Students can meet and learn about ethnically diverse students' lifestyles, cultures, and traditions on a diverse campus. Getting to know people better helps tear down group isolation silos and dispel myths and preconceptions about other racial, ethnic, or social groups (Bernstein et al., 2020; Brown, 2004; Hurtado et al., 1998; Kezar, 2019; Milem et al., 2005; Morgan et al., 2021; Muñoz et al., 2017; Nava, 2020).

A diverse student population is more likely to question established campus policies embedded in routine administrative procedures put in place when traditional white male students dominated the typical college (AGB, 2014; Astin & Astin, 2015; Bassinger, 2016; Kezar, 2016; Kincey et al., 2021; Milem et al., 2005; Morgan et al., 2021; Rall, 2021; Smith, 2020). Traditional students are defined as those between eighteen and twenty-three years old who enroll in college immediately after high school and graduate with their cohorts in four years (Kincey et al., 2021). According to results from the 2020 population Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020) and university systems' enrollment data, the pre-conception that the campus population is made

up of traditional male and white students is no longer sustainable. Table 4 on page 166 summarizes gender and ethnicity composition for the United States, U.S-Mexico borderland states, university systems, and affiliated campuses. The latest Census data shows that women, and not males, form the majority of the population in the United States. Women are also the majority in each of the U.S.-Mexico border states, in all university systems, and on ninety percent of their campuses (Table 2 on page 164 and Table 4 on page 166).

The 2020 Census data, the source for Table 2 on page 166, shows the growing diversity in the ethnic composition of the population at the national, state, university system, and campus levels. On a national level, the white population is a decreasing majority, having experienced a 10% contraction since the 2010 Census. During the same time, Hispanics and other ethnic groups, such as Asian and Pacific Islanders, achieved considerable population growth rates. State-wise, only Arizona has a majority white population in the U.S-Mexico borderland states. Table 4 on page 166 shows the population's demographics from the university system perspective. At the Arizona University System, 49.1% of enrolled students are white, and only the Texas Tech University System has a clear white majority enrollment at 53.0%. The remaining university systems show a wider variety of diverse student enrollment. The white population dominates campus enrollment in Arizona, but Hispanic enrollment is growing. In California, Hispanics make up most of the campus's enrollment. Still, it is important to note that there is a growing trend in the registration of Asian and Pacific Islander students. Hispanics constitute a clear enrollment majority on New Mexico campuses, while there is a more balanced mix in enrollment between white and Hispanic students on Texas campuses. It is important to note that Texas campuses enroll the most significant percentages of African American students across the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, especially in campuses located in the central and

southeastern parts of the state. The only Historically Black College and University (HBCU) institution in all of the U.S.-Mexico borderland systems reviewed in the study is Prairie View A&M University, located about fifty-five miles northwest of the city of Houston in Southeast Texas (Texas A&M University System, 2022).

Disaggregated population data at the campus level provides a different perspective from the highly concentrated data boards review. The days when a general policy was sufficient and applicable to a primarily homogenous student population are over. Governing boards' awareness of the presence of multiple and diverse groups implies that regents must analyze their campuses from a more contemporary and inclusive perspective. Regents need to change their thought processes and decision-making and recognize that their roles and responsibilities need to evolve and expand if they want to abide by their fiduciary duties of administering for their diverse student communities' best interests (Barringer & Riffe, 2018; Buse et al., 2016; Kezar et al., 2021; Kramer 7 Adams, 2020; Rall, 2021; Stanley et al., 2019). Acknowledgment of a diverse population on campus also means that boards need to rethink their overarching strategies on what constitutes a fair admissions process, recruitment and retention of diverse students and faculty, increases in financial aid options, performance metrics relevant to the community, and how they can encourage a campus environment that could be most effective and suitable to students learning and development needs (Adams et al., 2014; Claeys-Kulik et al., 2019; Barringer & Riffe, 2018; Brandenburg et al., 2021; Buse et al., 2016; Kezar et al., 2021; Kramer & Adams, 2020; Milem et al., 2005; Nava, 2020; Rall, 2021; Smith, 2020; Stanley et al., 2019).

Minority students benefit from a nurturing learning environment. Women and people of color are attracted by an institution's recruitment and enrollment process that favors diversity and are more like to remain enrolled and graduate. Incoming students are usually ignorant of the

overall diversity efforts undertaken by a campus. That is an important reason why their first contact with recruitment and admissions officials must be a positive experience (Adserias et al., 2017; Bassinger, 2016; Brandenburg et al., 2020; Clauson & McKnight, 2018; Hurtado et al., 1995; Milem et al., 2005; Leon, 2014; Morgan et al., 2020; Reilly, 2009; Stanley et al., 2019; Weerts, 2016). The first impression that prospective students get when talking to a university representative may be all it takes for the student to decide whether to continue the enrollment process, ask for more information or decide against continuing the enrollment process (Hurtado et al., 1995; Milem et al., 2005; Stanley et al., 2019; Weerts, 2016).

Some of the main concerns for many minority students are the issue of financial aid, the cost of their education, and how safe and welcoming the campus is. Sometimes, these initial experiences are so damaging for students that some choose not to enroll in any higher education institution (Hurtado et al., 1995; Milem et al., 2005). A follow-up concern is about campus life. Students want to understand the campus climate, how diverse the campus is, how many students and faculty look like them, and their opportunities to fit in and have a successful higher education student experience. Perceptions of student diversity climate receive a boost with the presence of administrators that are empathetic to new students' questions, fears, and anxieties related to the admission process. A campus recruiter that takes the time to establish a bond with the student and explain the financial aid packages available, in-campus work, research, and cultural opportunities, existing women and religious centers, and extracurricular activities on campus can contribute to a student's decision to enroll in pursuit of a degree in that institution (Hurtado et al., 1995; Milem et al., 2005; Nava, 2020; Stanley et al., 2019). Learning about the existence of cultural and diversity centers is essential because they serve as social anchors for students, help develop their identities, and their members can be relied on for peer support when

students may feel vulnerable and be prone to drop out or fall victim to illegal substance abuse (Barnett, 2020; Hurtado et al., 1995; Kincey et al., 2021; Milem et al., 2005; Nava, 2020; Stanley et al., 2019). Even in their inexperience in higher education matters, prospective students and their families can perceive how welcoming a campus could be after initial meetings with college representatives (Barnett, 2020; Hurtado et al., 1995; Kincey et al., 2021; Milem et al., 2005; Nava, 2020; Stanley et al., 2019).

With welcoming diversity policies, colleges and universities see their overall enrollment, retention, and graduation rates improve in line with their intended outcomes (Adams et al., 2014; Adserias et al., 2017; Barnett, 2020; Bassinger, 2016; Clauson & McKnight, 2018; Hurtado et al., 1995; Kezar, 2008; Kezar, 2019; Krisberg, 2019; Leon, 2014; LePeau et al., 2019; Milem et al., 2005; Raphael, 2021; Smith, 2020; Stanley et al., 2019; Weerts, 2016). A positive, diverse campus climate also encourages students' participation and freedom to express their ideas and concerns without fears of retaliation, hostile responses, or targeting by members from dissenting groups (Adams et al., 2014; Adserias et al., 2017; Barnett, 2020; Bassinger, 2016; Clauson & McKnight, 2018; Hurtado et al., 1995; Kezar, 2008; Kezar, 2019; Krisberg, 2019; Leon, 2014; LePeau et al., 2019; Milem et al., 2005; Raphael, 2021; Smith, 2020; Stanley et al., 2019; Weerts, 2016). Knowing that campus administrators listen to their concerns and, more importantly, are willing to respond and act accordingly gives activist students the confidence that their efforts and personal exposure are not in vain and not being patronized (Adams et al., 2014; Adserias et al., 2017; Barnett, 2020; Bassinger, 2016; Clauson & McKnight, 2018; Hurtado et al., 1995; Kezar, 2008; Kezar, 2019; Krisberg, 2019; Leon, 2014; LePeau et al., 2019; Milem et al., 2005; Raphael, 2021; Smith, 2020; Stanley et al., 2019; Weerts, 2016). In such a welcoming campus climate environment, students are more likely to participate in different activities that

could build up their self-confidence and strengthen their social activism inside and outside the campus.

Engaging in campus activities could also give students a refreshed view of the democratic system, its significance, and civic duties as members of a democratic society. Voluntary participation in organized protests and rallies can also be a learning and self-liberating experience. When their voices are heard by campus leadership, movement leaders are often invited to dialogue with campus leadership. These meetings can also be learning experiences because they require both groups to exchange and listen to the other party's ideas, perspectives, and concerns, collaborate, compromise, and negotiate solutions (Adserias et al., 2020; Leon, 2014; Raphael, 2021; Smith, 2020). Today's students are the next generation's leaders responsible for all social, economic, and political matters. Having been exposed during their college lives to critical issues affecting their diverse communities may be a contributing element to shaping their values and philosophy of life (Adams et al., 2014; Adserias et al., 2017; Barnett, 2020; Bassinger, 2016; Clauson & McKnight, 2018; Hurtado et al., 1995; Kezar, 2008; Kezar, 2019; Krisberg, 2019; Leon, 2014; LePeau et al., 2019; Milem et al., 2005; Raphael, 2021; Smith, 2020; Stanley et al., 2019; Weerts, 2016).

In a study of Texas's demographic trends beginning with the 1990 National Census and through the 2010 Census, Murdock et al. (2014) project important changes to the state's demographic composition. Their study correctly projects that by 2030, the state's white population status as a majority will be surrendered to the growing Hispanic population, which will become a majority in an unreversible trend. In this same projection, the Black and Asian populations will also see an increase in their compositions, diminishing even further the White population's status as the state's majority population. Recent data from the 2020 Census in Table

2 on page 164 confirms the trend observed in Murdock et al.'s study. This last Census shows that the Texas population is 39.7% White, 39.3% Hispanic, 11.8% Black, and 9.2% Other, a group that mainly includes the Asian population. With these actual results, Murdock et al. (2014) projection that Hispanics will become the state's majority is almost assured. The relevance of Murdock et al.'s study to this study is that in their conclusions, they observe that Hispanic and Black minorities have the lowest level of education in the state, which they found to be correlated to their lower socioeconomic status. In a solid recommendation to the state's legislators and policy makers, they strongly point out that "…increased levels of education can play a larger role in improving the socioeconomic characteristics of minority as well as non-Hispanic white populations in Texas. The data shows that, although not the total answer, education plays a major role in increasing income for all racial/ethnic groups. Its data indicate that, no matter what one's occupation or race/ethnicity is, increased education leads to increased income"(Murdock et al., 2014, p.233). As previously discussed in this study, an aware board that understands its campus demographics has the power to change restrictive admission and educational policies that could facilitate minority's access to a quality higher education, which could lead to socioeconomic improvements for students, their families, and their communities.

Summary

The literature review in this chapter clearly illustrated how the roles that boards of regents of public university systems influence the life choices of students and their families. Throughout their history, these boards have made important decisions that have guided the destiny of higher education in the United States. Initially limited to their institutions and immediate communities, their influence has grown over the years to reach and touch the lives of not just their campus communities but of expanded geographical regions and even influence the

actions and decisions of other governing boards. The literature shows that when board members stick to their responsibilities and honor their fiduciary duties of care, loyalty, and obedience, they can make life-changing decisions for their student communities. When boards acknowledge the diversity of people on their campuses and treat diversity as a strategic priority on par with financial and legal priorities, they set the foundations for a nurturing and welcoming campus climate that opens the doors of higher education to large sectors of the population that traditionally have been marginalized. With strong policies geared towards creating a suitable environment for women, racial and ethnic minorities, students with diverse gender identities, the economically disadvantaged, and non-traditional students, regents improve the chances that students will enroll in one of their institutions, persevere in their educational objectives, and graduate. When boards decide to drop admission decisions based on legacy or standardized tests, and when they choose to ease financial aid requirements, they send a clear and powerful message to discriminated minorities that they are welcomed and valued by the institutions. In addition to benefits that accrue to students and their families, which have the potential of improving their socioeconomic status and their chances for social mobility, society in general also benefits from the spillovers of education because communities have a better-educated population that can be more participative and active in matters of economic, social, and political importance.

A board that recognizes that students' demographics reflect the ever-changing national demographic composition can better anticipate and prepare their institutions to accommodate the learning needs of the new generations of students who are replacing the white, male, and affluent students to who higher education institutions have traditionally catered. With the growing importance of the Hispanic population along the US-Mexico border, boards of regents of universities in this region have an excellent opportunity to make an impact and leave their mark

not just on Hispanic students but on entire communities across their state. An essential requirement to achieve this is for the typical homogenous board made up of a majority of economically advantaged white males to find within itself members that can empathetically connect and understand the many learning, economic, and cultural challenges that minority students face when deciding on whether to enroll or not in a higher education institution. When regents advocate and provide a voice to minorities, they become legitimate representatives of the interests of minorities and acquire the moral authority necessary to support policies that push their institutions to fulfill the board's vision of a safe, inclusive, and welcoming campus environment.

Supporting minorities' growth and development has become necessary in today's social climate. Social movements in favor of ending discrimination against women and minorities have had the effect of attracting different sectors of the population that in the past have not been socially active and that are now putting pressure and demanding that private and public institutions get more involved in finding solutions to society's discrimination problems. Public and private colleges and universities are not immune to these demands, and boards must be aware of this. Throughout higher education's history, university campuses have been fertile grounds for student protests and unrest. The boards and the campus leadership are responsible for understanding their campus's climate and being prepared with a contingency plan to act when student unrest happens on their campuses.

The literature review shows that higher education governing boards can make a difference in student diversity. Therefore, it is important to explore what roles and influence public university governing system boards of the U.S.-Mexico border states have on student diversity.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

As previously discussed, public university governing boards of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands make decisions and enact rules and policies that influence and shape the present and future of higher education in Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas. This study aims to identify how U.S.-Mexico borderland governing boards of four-year public higher education institutions exercise their influence on their system's campuses to promote policies and initiatives that foster student diversity in campus communities. In the study, I sought to collect and analyze the board's Chair perspectives on student diversity and how the board implements strategies that contribute to improving the college experience of an increasingly diverse student population.

In the U.S.-Mexico borderland region, there are twelve four-year public university systems: One in Arizona, two in California, two in New Mexico, and seven in Texas. Each university system consists of multiple institutions in various geographic locations across the state. Each component institution has a unique history, culture, traditions, and demographic composition. In addition to their geographical location along the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, these university systems have in common the significant presence of minorities enrolled on their campuses, including a prominent and growing Hispanic student population.

A qualitative research methodology is the best channel to collect the necessary data for this study from each of the twelve university board leaders in the U.S.-Mexico borderland region (Lichtman, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The following sections describe the scholarly ideas that frame the work under which the research questions were generated, the research methods design, the approach to the sample selection, data collection, and analysis procedures, as well as

a description of the interview protocol and data limitations, validity, trustworthiness, credibility, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

The study's proposal was submitted for review and approval by the University of Texas at El Paso's Institutional Review Board (IRB). I began collecting data through surveys and interviews only after securing the IRB's approval for the study. My research project was assigned control number 1976124-1 and approved on October 19, 2022.

The data collected during the research was analyzed following the qualitative methodology described in the IRB submission. In a qualitative research study, the researcher focuses on understanding the meaning of events related to the phenomenon being studied that make them unique experiences. In contrast, quantitative studies seek to test a hypothesis with randomly selected samples analyzed through statistical methods that generalize results to a larger population (Lichtman, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The use of qualitative methods allows for the focus to be on individuals with specific characteristics and attributes. For this study, the uniqueness of board chairs refers to being distinguished with a governor's appointment to serve on a public university system board of regents and elected or designated to chair that board. Among other responsibilities granted by their state's constitutions, chairs, and vice-chairs when chairs are absent, have the authority to set the board's meeting agendas, assign members to serve on standing and special committees, cast deciding votes, and, very importantly, speak on behalf of the board. As I found out during my research, chairs also have the authority to delegate some of their mandates to other board members, including the authority to represent and speak on behalf of the board (California State University System, 2022; New Mexico State University, 2022; North Texas University System, 2022; Texas A&M University System, 2022; Texas State

University System, 2022; Texas Tech University System, 2022; Texas Woman's University System, 2022; University of Arizona System, 2022; University of California System, 2022; University of Houston System, 2022; University of New Mexico, 2022; University of Texas System, 2022).

Research Questions

The general research questions of the study are: What roles do U.S.-Mexico borderland public university governing boards have on student diversity? And, what influence do U.S.-Mexico borderland public university governing boards have on student diversity?

The research questions in the study are grounded on an extensive review of available literature on boards of regents, the boards' demographic compositions, the legal mandate to act on behalf of the best interests of the system stakeholders, the roles they play in shaping higher education, and in my personal experience as a former student regent. The first three questions address the board's roles, and the last one addresses board influence. The specific research questions (RQ) are:

RQ1: How do U.S.-Mexico public university governing boards adopt student diversity policies?

RQ2: How do U.S.-Mexico public university governing boards support the implementation of student diversity?

RQ3: How do U.S.-Mexico public university governing boards evaluate student diversity initiatives?

RQ4: How do U.S.-Mexico public university governing boards exercise their influence on student diversity?

Population

The population of interest in this study consisted of the chairs of the twelve four-year public university systems located along the U.S.-Mexico borderland states. Regents' Rules, Bylaws, and Policies at each board vest Chairs with authority to lead and implement the board's mission and vision. Chairs also have the authority to speak on their boards' behalf, making them the ideal source of information. In case the Chair is absent or is unable to perform his or her duties, each system's board policies and bylaws contemplate the figure of a Vice-Chair, who takes over the Chair's responsibilities and acts accordingly in the exercise of the duties and responsibilities given to the Chair (California State University System, 2022; New Mexico State University, 2022; North Texas University System, 2022; Texas A&M University System, 2022; Texas State University System, 2022; Texas Tech University System, 2022; Texas Woman's University System, 2022; University of Arizona System, 2022; University of California System, 2022; University of Houston System, 2022; University of New Mexico, 2022; University of Texas System, 2022). As I learned during this study, chairs also have the authority to delegate some of their responsibilities to other board regents. Having an experienced alternate member with authority to speak on behalf of the board expanded the population of interest. It improved the prospect that every system in the region would be represented. As will be discussed below, this consideration was vital in the recruitment of a couple of participants. The study assumes that consenting participants will offer informed, honest, and trustworthy answers in their responses.

Sample Selection

The study focuses on chairs of public university governing boards located in the U.S.-Mexico borderland region. Therefore, the universe of participants was limited to a maximum of twelve participants, one representative for each system board. Participants were selected by the

purposive sampling method. This technique allows picking candidates with a unique and privileged position of knowledge and representation that can make their insight invaluable to the study (Cox, 2009; Lichtman, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the case of this study, the purposive sampling method is applicable because chairs are part of a particular and limited group of people appointed by a governor to serve on the system board. Out of that exclusive membership, one is designated as Chair of the board, the specifically targeted individuals in this study.

Using publicly available information on their board's websites, I used the purposive sampling method to identify and recruit the key participants who could provide the best in-depth knowledge and information for this study. This method allowed me to identify the chairs of the twelve public university governing boards in the U.S.-Mexico borderland region: one in Arizona, two in California, two in New Mexico, and seven in Texas. System boards' websites have in common that they publish each of the regents' name and picture, a brief biographic description providing information on their academic, professional, and business backgrounds, their years of service, the length of their appointment, their role in the board, the committees they serve on, and their present or past affiliation to other public and private institution boards. System boards also have in common a dedicated office supporting the board's work with legal and business counsel and general administration assistance.

Based on personal experience and observations, I anticipated that gaining access to chairs would be challenging, considering their responsibilities and time commitments as board leaders and their personal and professional activities outside the board. Even though the regents' identities are publicly known, none of the websites list any personal physical, email addresses, or telephone numbers where they can be reached directly. Instead, all the websites ask any

interested party in contacting a board member on matters pertaining to the board's business to contact the Office of the Board of Regents directly. These restrictions apply to requests made by any member of the system community, the general public, and members of the press. The board office reviews, filters, and only forwards the request to the appropriate board member if deemed fitting. Each system website lists the physical address of the Office of the Board, a contact name, a telephone number, and an email address where any correspondence and requests can be submitted. (California State University System, 2022; New Mexico State University, 2022; North Texas University System, 2022; Texas A&M University System, 2022; Texas State University System, 2022; Texas Tech University System, 2022; Texas Woman's University System, 2022; University of Arizona System, 2022; University of California System, 2022; University of Houston System, 2022; University of New Mexico, 2022; University of Texas System, 2022).

To recruit the persons of interest to the study, I contacted the board's office via email, explaining who I am and the reason for my request. I believe it was essential to identify myself as a former student regent in one of the systems and to mention how my experience serving on the board sparked my academic interest in exploring and learning more about the roles and influence that board decisions can have on matters of student diversity. It took several communication efforts to be able to gain access to participants. These efforts included sending an initial e-mail invitation and a personalized letter to the board's chair, followed by a telephone call to the board office a couple of days later to confirm receipt of the invitation. When the recipients appeared to ignore the invitation, I followed up with two additional emails. (Appendixes D, E, and F). In some cases, the board's telephone system routed me to an automated voicemail system, prompting me to leave a voice message. Persistence yielded results,

and communication channels were established with some board office administrators, resulting in additional telephone calls and e-mail exchanges. Establishing these communication channels resulted in further conversations that led to the successful recruit of the study's participants. Board regents are volunteers who dedicate limited personal time to attend board-related businesses during the month. As a condition for participation, board offices requested that the interview protocol and the demographic questionnaire be provided up front so that legal counsel could review the questions and the office of the board could brief the participant regent on the study and questions. Understanding that the core topic on which this study is centered, which is student diversity, can be a legally and politically sensible issue, and that legal counsel may object to the regent's participation if I did not comply with the request, I agreed to provide up front the interview protocol and the demographic questionnaire.

Of the twelve invitations sent to potential participants in this study, eight boards responded, and four completely ignored the email invitations, telephone calls, and voice messages. I interpreted these four boards' lack of response and interest as a rejection to participate in my study. Of the eight boards that responded, four politely declined to participate. They replied via email, thanking me for the invitation and wishing me success in my study. The remaining four showed interest in my study and requested up front the interview protocol and demographic questionnaire, which I provided. After a few days, I heard back from them with the names of the regents who had agreed to do the interview. The board office provided the participant's email addresses so I could coordinate the interview's date and time directly with them. It is important to mention that in all of the positive responses, consent to participate in the study was granted by the board's chair and legal counsel. Upon learning the identity of the participants, I did another search on the board's website to start getting familiar with these

individuals. In their short biographies, I carefully read about their personal and professional trajectory, their involvement in board activities and committees, the length of their service as board chairs, and other general information, taking meticulous notes that could help me prepare for the time that we met.

The first board that agreed to participate made the current chair available. We decided on a date and time and did the interview via a recorded Microsoft TEAMS meeting. The selection process slightly diverged from my original plan for the second and third participants. In the previous section, I mentioned that I learned that chairs also have the authority to delegate some of their responsibilities to other regents. In my initial research design, I expected to interview the board's chair or the vice-chair in the absence of the chair. Both of these regents are expressly authorized by their by-laws to speak on behalf of the board. What I did not know was that this responsibility could be delegated to another board member with the chair's and legal counsel's express consent. This was the alternative that the second and third boards offered me, showing their willingness to participate in my study. These two board offices' informed me that neither the chair nor the vice-chair was available for my study. Instead, they proposed making a former chair available to help with my study. Before responding to the board offices, I decided to review the objectives of my research to make sure that in case I accepted their generous offer, I was not in default of my study's essential premise. I intended to interview current chairs or vice-chairs because, in addition to having the authority to represent the board, they also have leadership experience that gives them a unique insight into the board's inner workings. These board leaders have access to public and privileged private information and could provide a first-hand account of decisions, conversations, and events on the board. With this consideration in mind, I decided to accept the participation of former chairs who would legitimately contribute to my research

objective of collecting data and perceptions from experienced and knowledgeable board leaders. The second board that agreed to participate made available its immediate past chair, a regent that first served a two-year term as chair-elect, followed by a two-year term as board chair. Once we settled on a convenient date and time, this interview occurred through a recorded Microsoft TEAMS meeting. The third board that agreed to the interview also made available a former chair. In this case, this regent had chaired the board on two different occasions, each time for a one-year term. This meeting occurred in person at a campus office at the participant's request. The interview was recorded using Microsoft TEAMS. The fourth and final board chair had initially agreed to participate and do the interview. As we exchanged emails to settle on a convenient meeting time, I received an email from the board's legal counsel informing me that upon receipt and analysis of the interview protocol and the demographic questionnaire, they had decided against permitting any board member to participate in this study. The email ended with legal counsel's offer to assist me in accessing any public records and other publicly available information I could need and wishing me success with my research study.

In summary, of the twelve invitations sent, I received eight responses, and four were ignored. Five of the eight boards politely responded, rejecting the invitation. The final three agreed to make an experienced and well-versed board representative available for my study. It is important to note that all three consenting boards mentioned that they decided to meet with me in consideration of my previous role as a board Student Regent in one of the university systems subject to this study. They stated that in their decision, they considered my previous board service experience, my familiarity with general board's policies and procedures, both written and unwritten, and the training I must have received. They seemed to imply that my awareness of how governing boards worked on the inside would have made me sensitive to the political, legal,

and fiduciary responsibilities associated with a regent's duties, something they saw reflected in my approach to the study, how I addressed the board and the interview questions that I wanted to ask.

Data Collection Procedures

A purposive sampling method allows qualitative researchers the latitude to gather information from key population members with a unique and privileged position of knowledge and representation that makes their insight invaluable to a study (Kezar, 2016; Lichtman, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used the purposive sampling method to identify the key participants that could provide the best in-depth knowledge and information for this study. Once the connection was established with the three consenting individuals, I contacted them via e-mail and telephone to thank them for agreeing to participate and give them additional background on the study's objectives. Participants were provided with a letter of informed consent that advised them of the study's goals, the role they would play in the study, along with their rights, any benefits, compensation, risks, or any costs that may accrue to them. Participants were told in advance of the steps that I would follow to collect the data. These steps included obtaining their signed consent to participate in the study, filling out a short demographic sheet, a fifty to sixty minutes telephone, video, or in-person interview meeting, and if needed, requesting their availability at a later time for follow-up questions and clarification via a telephone call or an e-mail. Participants were also provided with information on their right to stop and withdraw from the study at any time and for whatever reason without consequences, who they could contact in case of questions about the study, how their personal information would be kept confidential, and how their responses will be safeguarded. Participants were given sufficient time to review the information. I finally asked them if they had any questions regarding the process and if they

understood what was being requested from them. They all responded affirmatively and proceeded to sign the consent letter.

Study participants reside in different geographical areas scattered throughout the U.S-Mexico borderland. For the participants' convenience and in consideration of any health recommendations and policies adopted by the board related to the recent COVID-19 pandemic, and in an effort to increase participation, recruits were offered the option to conduct the approximately one-hour interviews in one of three possible ways: a video call interview, a telephone call interview, or an in-person interview. In the invitation, recruits were advised that the interview would be centered around their perceptions on matters of student diversity. For the next step to collect the data, I spent a few minutes getting acquainted with the participants, trying to establish a rapport conducive to an effective interview.

Two instruments were designed to collect data from consenting participants. The first was a demographic survey created in an application called QuestionPro. This software provides advanced research tools to collect, analyze, and provide insight into large amounts of collected data (QuestionPro, Inc., 2022). The survey's questions were designed to learn about personal traits such as gender, age, ethnicity, outside occupation, years of board service on this or any other board, and educational attainment. Once the regents confirmed their participation in my study, I sent them an e-mail with a link to the survey. The completion rate was 100%. This tool had thirteen questions, and according to internal software measurement on response time, it took participants less than four minutes to answer the questions in Appendix B. The second instrument designed to collect information from the participants was an interview protocol consisting of eleven targeted questions and one final open question (Appendix C). The protocol's structure was such that it allowed participants some flexibility to freely respond to the questions

and elaborate on their thoughts while at the same time allowing me to make deeper inquiries on issues discussed that I believed added relevance to the study or brought forward issues that I had not previously identified. The study benefited from this semi-structured format because, in addition to responding to the protocol's questions, participants had the opportunity to expand at their leisure on their responses, provide statistical data, and voluntarily offer additional relevant information that enriched the purpose of this study. Initially, I estimated that these interviews would take around sixty minutes to complete. According to the time stamps on the transcribed interviews, the actual interview time averaged fifty minutes.

After the interview, participants were asked if they had any questions or additional comments before the meeting ended. In all cases, I offered participants to send them a file with their interview transcription, and all of them opted to receive it. I also offered to share a digital copy of the dissertation results upon completion of the study, and they all expressed their interest in receiving it. Participants were not compensated in any way or form for their contribution to my research. I did, however, thank them profusely for their generous time and help with my study.

Data Analysis

Collected data through the demographic survey and interviews were analyzed using an inductive approach. In this approach, the researcher examines the entire set of collected data ("the whole") and identifies emerging, frequent, and dominating themes through analysis. The inductive approach allows the researcher to investigate ideas, comments, and even intuitions, without the limitations imposed by a more rigidly structured methodology (Lichtman, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, "the whole" refers to all the data collected with the help of the consenting participants. Sharing their knowledge of board decisions, policies, and

intentions, as well as their unique perspectives on student diversity, resulted in a wealth of information transcribed and codified for analysis to identify key themes, patterns, words, and common or unique concepts. Based on an extensive literature review on the topic and my personal experience as a former student regent in one of the U.S.-Mexico borderland systems, I expected four common themes to be thoroughly addressed by the participants. The four themes were: Roles of the governing boards, boards exercising their influence, boards supporting campus activities, and boards evaluating results. For studies like this one, Saldaña (2013) recommends that qualitative researchers pay close attention to every word spoken by the participants to identify new concepts and themes that often emerge. Keeping this guidance in mind, the analysis of the collected data resulted in two additional themes that I had not anticipated (Saldaña, 2013): Boards' awareness of student diversity on campuses and boards' engagement with their communities.

Transcribed data were examined with the help of a qualitative analysis software package called NVivo. This software has tools that facilitate the identification and coding of voluminous data (QSR International, 2022). This application provided additional tools that contributed to classifying and sorting information and gave me further insights and perspectives I had not previously contemplated. As a result of the intense data analysis (Saldaña, 2013), multiple codes were identified and codified that helped to develop a complete image of how boards of regents in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands address student diversity on their system campuses. Some of these codes were expected, and others emerged from the analysis. Some codes were discussed with high frequency, some had a special significance because of the emphasis placed by the respondent, and some others were not frequently discussed but became relevant because a participant used a word or expression in different instances of the interview that made it an

essential contribution to the goals and objectives of the study (Lichtman, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

By transcribing the data myself, I had the opportunity to listen often and go back to the interviewee's responses, identifying additional verbal and non-verbal elements, topics, and themes that were initially not recognized. Analyzing interview transcriptions also helped identify notable quotes relevant to the study (Saldaña, 2013). Such quotes are incorporated into the study findings to support the conclusions reached (Lichtman, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Saldaña, 2013).

Based on the questionnaire results and the personal information on their board's websites, participants have established that they are well-qualified participants with the grounded insight to share their credible perceptions for the study. They have solid experience serving on boards, are experienced board leaders, are knowledgeable about board affairs, issues, and business, have access to high-quality public and private information, have diverse academic and professional backgrounds, and represent diverse sectors of society regarding gender, ethnic background, and occupations. Additionally, participants represented university system boards located in three of the four states that make up the U.S. - Mexico border.

Interview and Data Limitations

In addition to an extensive literature review on boards of regents' roles as fiduciary guides of their higher education institutions, I also reviewed board's websites, meeting minutes, adopted policies, and generated the data tables in Appendix A. A key tool to collect new data for the study is to interview consenting chairs or their designees from the twelve boards of regents of university systems located along the U.S.-Mexico borderland. As anticipated, securing access to regents to participate in interviews presents a set of challenges that impose some limitations on

the study. The main challenge was getting direct access to the participants. Even though their identity is publicly known, their personal contact information is not. Any efforts to reach out to a board member had to be initiated through the board's support office, which in tandem with legal counsel, reviews and filters all requests before passing them along to the intended board member. Because of the restricted access, only three boards allowed one of their current or past leaders to participate in my study, setting a limit to the data I could collect and the conclusions I could reach. This communication filtering prevented me from meeting the goal of interviewing all twelve board chairs. An anticipated challenge that did not materialize was related to the conditions and physical environment where the interviews occurred. In all cases, the interview sites were conducted comfortably and free of noise and other distractions, which made participants appear relaxed during the interview. A third challenge that did not seem to pose a problem was the meaning participants could have given to the terms diversity and student diversity. As discussed in the literature review, different scholars define diversity differently. It was possible that participants may also have their definition of diversity and how it relates to and applies to their boards. Another challenge is related to an inherent objective of this study when collecting valuable insight and perspectives from participants. This objective requires asking questions that some participants could have found inappropriate or intrusive and could have chosen not to respond to. None of the participants objected to any interview questions, which I believe were drafted following rigorous ethical standards described in the section on ethical considerations.

Other limitations may be directly associated with the insights revealed by the participants. Regents' responses were based on their perceptions, interpretation, biases, access, and recollection of facts and data. All of the comments made by the participants could be

challenged on the basis that they are personal assessments. The validity of their contribution to this study is based on the fact that given their experience and years of board service participation, theirs are considered expert opinions. Nevertheless, there is an inherent limitation to the study, as, in the end, these end up being well-informed personal judgments . Another limitation could be that participants' stances may have been influenced by their personal experiences serving on and off the board. One of the participants reported having worked before as a top campus administrator. This fact could probably have introduced some perspective bias to work done on the board. Another possible bias could be participants' tendency to emphasize only certain board projects that have special significance to them and probably avoid discussing other important events or board initiatives with which they may disagree or did not fully support. One more limitation could be related to the regents' legal responsibility and potential personal liability. Fiduciary duties prevent board members from disclosing information that is not public or has only been discussed during private executive sessions.

Related to awareness about legal restrictions, some boards that declined the invitation to participate in the study might have chosen to do it to avoid discussing the politically-sensitive topic of diversity or the closely related legal issue of Affirmative Action. There is a possibility that one or more of the participants chose to hold back on their comments in a conscious effort to stay in compliance with this legal requirement A limitation of the study's findings could be that the targeted boards are all located in states along the U.S.-Mexico border. This is a geographic area that, since the beginning of the 21st century, has seen a considerable decrease in its white non-Hispanic majority and an accelerated growth of its Hispanic and Asian populations (Table 2 on page 164). Most likely related to this population change are the changes in student demographics, resulting in 71% of all campuses under the twelve university systems earning the

Department of Education's distinguished classification of Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI). Serving on a board with a significantly sizeable Hispanic student population could be a weighted factor influencing the board's views on diversity. This contrasts with governing boards that may not feel any additional pressure because enrollment of minorities in their systems is not as significant as those on the U.S.-Mexico border states.

Ethical Considerations

I secured formal approval from the university's Institutional Review Board before collecting data. This approval assures compliance with all regulations and policies applicable to the study, which involved the volunteer participation of human subjects. All the recruited participants were adults over 18 years in full use of their mental and physical faculties. In all cases, participation in the study was strictly voluntary. Consenting participants were informed that they would not be personally identified anywhere in the study in any way or form, nor by the university system board they serve. The study respects their confidentiality, and their anonymity was protected when quoting one of their many relevant comments.

The study's collected data is strictly confidential, and every effort has been made to keep it as such. The responses are safeguarded and used exclusively for research purposes. Electronic data has been encrypted and stored on a password-protected laptop computer. Recorded interviews were transcribed and labeled in a way that preserves their confidentiality. Printed data has been kept secured in a locked file cabinet, to which only I have access. All data collected and generated during the research study will be deleted or destroyed in no more than three years after it has served its purpose.

There were no identified or unknown existing risks for participants. The demographic sheet and the interview did not require participants to make any particular physical effort and

were free from any pressures that could have generated a stressful situation. Participants had the option to stop at any time and for whatever reason without any consequences, and responses were limited to only the information that participants were willing to share. The anticipated risk of any breach of confidentiality is also minimal. Other than my sincere gratitude for their kind gesture, participants were not offered payment or incentives of any type.

Validity, Credibility, and Trustworthiness

The validity of qualitative research has been questioned mainly because its methodologies allow researchers freedoms that traditional quantitative methods do not (Lichtman, 2013; Maxwell, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Quantitative research methods benefit from a rigid structure that describes the sequential, step-by-step process the researcher will follow during the study, the development of a hypothesis that will be supported or rejected, the method to select representative random samples from a usually large population, and sophisticated mathematical and statistical tools to tests variables and how they interact with each other. A well-designed and executed quantitative research should be easy to replicate and validate if the described methodology is followed (Maxwell, 2009; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009). In contrast, a qualitative study is designed with a subjective perspective and smaller populations and samples, relying on participants' willingness to share their viewpoints, perceptions, and feelings to provide insight into the studied phenomena. Personal values and morals can influence this dynamic process and change from time to time, influenced by life's events. Interview locations and environments can be replicated and controlled by trying to recreate the research conditions, but this cannot be said or done for the individual participants whose unique perspectives, feelings, and perceptions cannot be duplicated (Lichtman, 2013; Maxwell, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Nonetheless, some steps can be taken to ensure that the conclusions reached by a qualitative researcher are valid, credible, and trustworthy. Maxwell, 2009, enumerates various steps that can be applied depending on the specific study circumstances. Different action steps can be used independently or in combination to increase the validity, credibility, and trustworthiness of the results obtained through the chosen qualitative methodology. One element that supports the reliability of the results is based on selecting participants with experience serving as chairs of a governing board. In the case of the study's participants, one was a current board chair, one was the board's immediate past chair, and another was a two-time past board chair. A review of their board's websites confirmed their identities, length of service years on the board, and their status as current or former board chairs. A second step that provides validity to a qualitative study is to devote time and attention to the studied phenomena. The longer the researcher is involved in studying the phenomena and the associated participants, the better. In the case of this study, the topic of board governance has been at the center of my academic interests for more than four years. It began in 2018 when board governance was discussed in one of my classes. I became fascinated by their roles and responsibilities and the power and influence the board of regents has over their system institutions. Later that year, I responded to my university's Student Government Association's invitation to apply for the student regent position at the university system's board of regents. My interest peaked a year later when I received the Texas Governor's appointment to serve as student regent on the system's board of regents, a position I held for one year. This position gave me a unique insider's perspective, which very likely contributed to generating the necessary connections with the study's participants, who saw in me someone they could trust and relate to their board experience on a personal basis.

A third step refers to the sampling and collection methods, the richness of the raw data, the thoroughness of the analysis, and the complementary descriptive notes and observations made by the researcher when interpreting the data. In this step, the researchers' goals are to collect high-quality data from board leaders, thoroughly analyze the data, and reach conclusions that contribute to advancing academic knowledge on governing system boards. A way to encourage participants to contribute their quality insights is by developing a relationship with them and generating a welcoming atmosphere suitable for the interviews. In my study, all participants appeared relaxed during the interview, contributing to their active participation and volunteering information that was not anticipated. Another contributing element to the trustworthiness of the study is the diverse backgrounds of the participants. The demographic survey data shows gender and ethnic diversity among the participants. Moreover, three southern border states are represented, providing different perspectives shaped by specific state conditions like geography, governance laws, state politics, and demographic composition. Having different geographical areas represented contributes by presenting distinct perspectives on common problems. A fifth step involves validating the data from the sources themselves. Respondent validation is a technique used to interact with the interviewees to confirm understanding of their responses or request a restatement of comments to avoid misinterpretations and misunderstandings. The semi-structured interview protocol allowed me to focus on respondents' answers while simultaneously allowing participants to expand on their responses (Lichtman, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The final question in the interview was an open question that invited participants to share any other thoughts related to student diversity that may not have been addressed previously.

A sixth step involved searching for inconsistencies in the collected data and the participants' narratives, arguments, or recollections of events that could invalidate the rest of the data. This step was accomplished during my thorough analysis of the raw data. Another step in Maxwell's 2009 sequence involves triangulating data using multiple alternative methods and sources to compare against collected data and develop a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena. This step was not considered in this study. An eighth step refers to using descriptive statistics to summarize numerical data in tables, graphs, or other concise views, like frequency distributions that present aggregated data in ways that are easier to understand and relate to. Appendix A contains four summarized tables (pages 161 through 168) on state and campus population and demographics, as well as on board and institutions composition and characteristics. The final step compares the researcher's conclusions and inferences to the findings in other relevant studies identified during the literature review stage (Maxwell, 2009). This last step will be accomplished by comparing the study's results with the findings of the authors' research work included in the study's literature review.

Another helpful tool that contributes to the validity and credibility of the study's methodology and conclusions is to disclose any conscious or unconscious biases that the researchers may have, which could have some effect on the study. One way for the researcher to reveal undue influences while developing a research strategy is to disclose them through a researcher identity memo. The purpose of a researcher identity memo is to "help you (the researcher) identify the goals, experiences, assumptions, feelings, and values that are most relevant to your planned research and to reflect on how these could inform and influence your research" (Maxwell, 2009, p.35). In qualitative research methodology literature, the researcher

identity memos are also known as “researcher self-disclosure” (Lichtman, 2013), and as “researcher’s position or reflexivity” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Following the researcher identity memo disclosure objectives, I believe it is appropriate to disclose a few situations that inspire and motivate me and that stand behind my decision to conduct a research study on boards of regents of higher education systems. The first and most important one refers to a personal experience serving a one-year term as the student regent in the board of regents of the largest university system in Texas. Receiving a governor’s appointment has been the highlight of my career as a student. During my year of service, I had the opportunity to experience from an insider’s point of view the board’s dynamics, how the board discusses sensitive legal, financial, and administrative issues, and how it makes important decisions that affect the system’s stakeholders, their campuses, and the communities where the institutions are located. I also had the opportunity to work directly with the system office that provides legal counsel and administrative support, the system’s Chancellor and his cabinet, campus presidents and their staff, and most importantly, I got to interact with diverse groups of students across the system who discussed their issues and ideas to improve their campus’ climate. Notwithstanding some legal constraints that restricted my participation in the meetings, the role of student regent gave me the opportunity of having a first-hand view of what a board of regents does, what it can do, how it exercises its influence over the system’s institutions, and also experienced the high regard and esteem in which many system and community stakeholders hold the members of the board. On the topic of promoting student diversity, my interest stems partly from being a member of the Hispanic community and partly from being an immigrant to the United States. As a member of a growing minority that is on pace to become a majority in Texas by the year 2030, I want to contribute through my identity perspective and research to the growing academic field

that has set a goal to have a better understanding of how system governing boards function, the power they wield, and the incredible potential they have to impact the lives of the diverse student communities that seek a higher education degree in one of their system's institutions.

I believe that my professional and academic backgrounds, combined with my experience serving on the board and the contact network that I developed places me in an excellent position to contribute to my study to expand the academic knowledge about the roles and influence that boards of regents can have on student diversity and an improved campus learning environment.

Summary

This chapter provided a detailed description of the qualitative research methodology followed in this study. The methods design allowed for a rich interaction that allowed me to delve into participants' perceptions on matters of student diversity. The chapter includes descriptions of the research design, research questions, population, sample selection, data collection procedures, data analysis, interview and data limitations, ethical considerations, and a discussion regarding validity, credibility, and trustworthiness. Through the results of this study, my objective is to contribute to the field study of higher education system boards and how these can play a crucial role in supporting student diversity.

Chapter 4: Findings of the Study

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to describe how governing boards of four-year public university systems located along the U.S.-Mexico border, exercise their roles and influence on their system's campuses by enacting policies and initiatives that foster student diversity in campus communities, and how they support student diversity initiatives that society and their campuses are demanding. Governing boards have decision-making powers that can influence students, their families, and their communities' decisions. (Brandenburg et al., 2021; Kincey et al., 2021; McBain & Powell, 2021; Nava, 2020). Traditional board roles focus on high-level financial matters, but these roles need to be updated to focus and expand the board's attention to issues of importance to society, like gender, racial, and identity discrimination, that have always existed but have recently taken shape and captured the public's interest (Bernstein et al., 2020; Kezar, 2016; Pelletier, 2021; Rall, 2021; Wilson, 2016).

To accomplish this study's goals, I set up to collect perceptions and viewpoints from active governing board leaders that could provide an insightful, first-hand account of how boards of regents adopt new perspectives and work outside of their traditional financial overseeing duties to create favorable conditions and welcoming campus environments in support of their diverse student populations. This chapter will describe the participant's profiles and discuss the research findings. Based on the purpose of the study and the general and research questions, I expected participants to share their insight on the board's roles and how their policies and decisions influence their institutions' decisions about student diversity. In addition to these themes, other interrelated topics were discussed, including board support of diverse campus

activities, how the board evaluates results, the level of awareness about student diversity on its campuses, and how it engages with its communities.

Participant's Profiles

A total of twelve invitations to participate in my study were sent to governing board chairs, and I received eight responses. Five of these eight respondents politely declined the invitation, and three consented to allow an experienced and well-versed regent to participate. One of these participants is the current board chair, another is the immediate past chair, and the third one is a two-time former chair.

A demographic questionnaire was the instrument used to collect personal information and learn about participants' traits, such as gender, age, ethnicity, outside occupation, years of board service on this or any other board, and educational attainment. There are four U. S. states bordering Mexico, and three of those four states are represented in this study. One of the participant regents is a female, and the two other participants are males, and all of them indicated their age as being in the 65 to 74 years range. The participants have a diverse ethnic mix: one is a non-Hispanic white, another a Hispanic/Latinx, and the third identified as Other. Being a board regent is usually a part-time, non-compensated service activity. Regents only receive reimbursements for their travel expenses. Regents are assumed to have professional and business interests outside of the board. One participant reported being a media-related consultant, and another stated being a consultant and university Professor Emeritus. The third participant said that serving on the board was a full-time activity. This participant reportedly dedicates up to twenty-five days per month to work on board-related activities. In contrast, the other two participants reported dedicating five to seven days per month to board activities.

Participant regents were asked how long they have served on boards to understand how experienced the participants are on board-related matters. One regent said nineteen years; another said twenty years; the third regent has amassed over fifty years of board service. Questioned about their years of service on their current board, one participant said four years, another seven years, and the third twelve years. Of these service years, two regents reported serving as the board chair for four years, and the other reported serving three years as the board's chair. All three participants said they currently have no affiliation with any other board, public or private. Participants were also asked about their highest academic achievements. One reportedly earned a bachelor's degree at the system's flagship institution. The other two participants reported earning doctoral degrees, one at the system's flagship institution and the other at an unrelated university.

Based on the questionnaire results and the personal information available on their board's websites, participants have established solid experience serving on boards, are experienced board leaders, represent diverse demographic communities regarding gender and ethnic backgrounds, and have diverse academic and professional occupation backgrounds. By virtue of their roles and participation in public and private executive meetings, these regents have access to high-quality public and confidential information and are knowledgeable about the board's affairs, issues, and business. Additionally, participants represented university system boards located in three of the four states that make up the U.S. - Mexico borderland. All three regents are well-qualified participants with the grounded insight and judgment to share their credible perceptions for the study.

Findings

Based on the study's general and specific research questions, I expected the data collected in the interviews to support themes associated with the roles and influence governing boards have on student diversity, how boards adopt and support student diversity policies, how boards evaluate student diversity initiatives, and how boards exercise their influence on student diversity. Additionally, I expected participants to reference data in their boards' websites and system policies to support their answers, which they did on multiple occasions. Through their insightful responses, participants provided ample information that supported the anticipated themes. During the execution of the interview protocol, participants voluntarily offered additional comments and information that resulted in two other themes. This section will discuss findings related to the following themes: Roles of the governing boards, boards exercising their influence, boards supporting campus activities, boards evaluating results, boards' awareness of student diversity on campuses, and boards' engagement with their communities. These six interrelated themes represent an aspect or a facet of governing boards that the study's participants discussed during the interviews.

Roles of the governing boards

Boards' traditional roles include creating policies and guidelines, approving tuition and fees, hiring, evaluating, and dismissing campus leadership, making critical decisions related to funding, operating budgets, and financial and capital investments. In their responses, participants in the study referred to some of these roles and provided insight into the board's inner workings. Participants agreed that a critical role of the board is to focus on generating deep thinking and extensive philosophical work necessary to develop the systems' vision and long-term strategic plans. Boards work with the legislature to maximize funding for their systems and understand

and interpret the political atmosphere prevalent in the state's legislature, which ultimately appropriates their funding. Acting on the recommendation of the system chancellor and academic affairs committees, the board approves tuition and fees, student admission standards, and entrance requirements. Boards also approve majors and new degree programs that their communities demand.

The study's primary interest is understanding the roles of governing boards' leaders in student diversity. Their state constitutions and internal by-laws give governing boards authority and decision-making powers over the resources available to the system. A central question of the study is to learn how and if, by exercising their mandated roles, governing boards impact student diversity. When asked about how boards talk about issues of diversity during their meetings, participants coincided that diversity, as such, has not been included as a specific, singled-out item on any board's meeting agenda. However, consideration of diversity issues is embedded in their conversations and debates, even though the word diversity may not be explicitly used during the board's discussions. Their strategic plans have engrained issues like student diversity. It is woven into their policies, even though it may not be specifically spelled out. A participant mentioned how the discussion of student diversity issues often surfaces in various committee reports and special reports to the board of regents. A participant living in a predominantly white non-Hispanic state mentioned how discussing topics associated with diversity, equity, and inclusion has become a highly politicized and polarizing societal conversation. Governing boards are not immune to the effect, and the boards have inevitably experienced a political divide among their members. The participant went on to say, "This (political division) has not halted the board from continuing to focus on scholarships, continuing to focus on reviewing and monitoring the enrollment statistics of our students and the graduation

rates…. We have also endorsed the plans that each university has made for scholarships for low-income and targeted groups".

As a reflection of current society conversations influenced by social, racial, and economic protests and demonstrations, board leaders are receiving internal and external pressure from their constituents to hold discussions about diversity, equity and inclusion, student attainment initiatives, and college affordability, topics that were not even considered twenty years ago, when the focus was more on the institutions' financial performance. These and other controversial topics have made their way up to the boards from their institutions, which have been dealing with such issues for a longer term.

Board leaders lay out their vision for the system and institutions and develop long-term strategic plans to transform that vision into a reality. A participant from a state with a significant Hispanic student population mentioned that the board bases its strategy on four strategic goals: student success, boosting research, amplifying extension and outreach, and building a robust university system. The board is reviewing these goals and is seriously considering adding two more strategic goals, one of which would specifically be about diversity, equity, and inclusion. By "making it a strategic goal, it (becomes) front and center and becomes something that specifically gets funding allocated to it, just like our other goals have funding allocated to". Years ago, a different board implemented a plan focused on four strategic areas that impact student diversity: student access, student success, excellence, and college affordability. This board is also reviewing its strategic goals and will update them as necessary to ensure they meet present and future student needs.

Another board role is approving funding for the system and its component institutions. Boards approve the system's overall operating budget and their institutions' general operating

budgets. I asked participants about their board's intentionality in funding diversity-related programs and initiatives through one of the protocol's questions. All three participants coincided in that, currently, their board does not have a specific appropriation of funds to promote diversity on their campuses. They mentioned that in all cases, the decision to allocate funding for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) offices and programs corresponds to each institution's administrators. Board members maintain a healthy distance from campus leaders to avoid micromanaging them. Chancellors and Presidents are responsible for implementing and reporting results to the board. These campus leaders are expected to assign financial resources to the different colleges and departments following the system and university's mission, board policies, and direction, recognizing that each institution has particular needs related to unique features like campus size, student enrollment and demographics, geographical location, and community needs. A participant from a system that is experiencing significant enrollment growth of minorities in their campuses mentioned that the board has a system-wide strategic plan but places more focus on the universities' own strategic plans to evaluate what they are focusing on, how they are allocating their resources, and which groups are benefiting from these resources. Elaborating on this idea, the participant mentioned how the board leaves the execution of their policies to the system and campus administrators. In the participant's words, universities in this system "have shown substantial focus and interest on creating opportunities for traditionally marginalized groups, initiatives that the boards support."

Other relevant, although minor, categories identified during the interviews refer to participants mentioning how boards have gone through their own diversity-embracing transformation, as they now show a more significant presence of regents that are women and ethnic minorities who are bringing new perspectives to the board. This comment can be

supported by the demographic questionnaire results, in which participants self-identified with diverse backgrounds. Additionally, all three participants mentioned student regents' roles on their boards. Depending on the state they are located in, Student Regents receive appointments to serve one or two years on the governing board. Student regents serve as top-level liaisons between the board and campus student leadership. Student campus leaders share their constituents' needs and demands with student regents on important issues like the cost of their education, campus environment and diversity, safety, mental health issues, and other concerns. In turn, student regents present the issues directly to the board and advocate for such matters to be considered in the board's discussions and decisions.

Boards exercising their influence

Board leaders provide the vision of where they want to take their system and its institutions. With their authority, boards influence the system's actions, decisions, and performance. Board leaders have the power to influence outcomes when they provide direction to campus leadership, maintain the focus, and set expectations for student enrollment, retention, and graduation rates. Their influence is also felt when, following the board's recommendations, campus leaders allocate some of their operating budgets to fund spending and investment on projects that benefit diverse student communities involving traditional minorities, indigenous populations, and low-income students. In communicating their expectations to their campus leaders, a participant said, "... we expect all the universities to really achieve the same results. We've discussed that we focus on that, and the Presidents understand that that is their goal in terms of what we focus on retention and graduation rates". The board's strategic plans and continuous communication with campus presidents have established scholarship programs targeted at low-income and minority groups. One of the participants who lives in a state that has

a large Native American population was especially proud of mentioning how the coordinated efforts of the board and all of its universities' leaders had resulted in the creation of a significant scholarship program for members of Native American tribes, whose members now receive free tuition.

Another form of board influence on student diversity is the process of selecting their top executive leaders, that is, the system chancellor and university presidents. Boards determine the ideal profiles that potential candidates must meet, including the academic and administrative experience they should possess, special skills and research interests, and even their personal backgrounds. Lately, boards are actively looking for candidates with the sensitivity to work with their ever-increasing diverse student, faculty, and staff. When choosing these leaders, the board's focus on diversity begins in the search process's early stages. When initiating a search for a leader position, one of the boards establishes search committees made up of diverse representatives of various stakeholders responsible for designing the candidate's desired profile and characteristics. The participant from the enrollment-growing minority system described the process followed in a recent recruiting effort for a university president. The board's first step was to meet with the search consultants, looking for a firm with a solid background in placing diverse candidates. The next step for them was to create a diverse and genuinely representative search committee that included Hispanics and tribal representatives (in this state, native Americans have large communities). During the candidates' interview process, the search committee looked for multiple skills, dimensions, and experiences in their candidates. Regardless of their background, they chose the best candidate they believed was the best fit and could make the right difference for the institution. Another participant from a highly diversified system shared that the board will soon start a search for a top leadership position. Among the qualities they will consider from

their candidates is that they come from a minority background. As described by the participant, as part of their interview process, the search committee will include specific questions about the candidates' views on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

A similar approach is being implemented when interviewing potential faculty hires. To this effect, a participant from a system that enrolls a majority of diverse students raised the issue of not having sufficiently diverse faculty on campus to teach their expanding minority communities. This participant discussed coordinated board and campus plans to fill this void and said, "the (challenge) is encouraging because I always look at it as by educating our Hispanic students and minority students, we are growing our own teachers." The same participant emphasized that the board is highly aware of the diversity of students on their campuses and expects campus leaders to share the same level of awareness and make it one of their priorities. Another participant from a system that is as diversified as the previous one described that to get a good read on their candidates' opinions on campus diversity and to assess how they would respond to a situation grounded on it, they make it a point to include in their interviews a specific question (which was not revealed) related to diversity, expecting candidates to articulate their particular experiences in dealing with diversity, equity, and inclusion policies on campus. The participant said, "diversity is definitely something that we have to be very mindful of and do it with intentionality. We are focused on that, and it has its challenges. We have to be very focused on how we recruit".

The board influences student outcomes by enacting policies that are student-centered. Included here are policies promoting enrollment by lowering registration barriers, dropping unnecessary admission requirements, providing additional financial aid, and maintaining strict control over student tuition and fees. Upon the recommendation of its universities, boards have

the authority to approve new student fees that have a specific diversity purpose. If approved, it is then up to each institution to properly allocate these fees to maximize the benefits to as many students as possible. To encourage minorities' enrollment, one of the boards has made standardized placement scores like the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the American College testing (ACT) optional in the student's college application. College admission officers' selection criteria should include and give weight to other attributes in the student's application. This board leader believes that a more holistic approach would allow the recruiters to see the students' potential, despite a poor showing in a standard test that some students are uncomfortable taking or when they go through a nervous interview.

A participant from one of the largest overall student enrolling systems described the components of a recent board initiative being implemented. The first component refers to identifying and promoting the degrees that graduates must earn to better compete in the technologically driven digital economy. The initiative's second component focuses on ensuring that the state's labor force is aware and has access to the education opportunities available to earn those degrees. This initiative component recognizes the state's demographic trends that will result in current minorities becoming the state's majority soon and the need for these minorities to have financial scholarships and other resources like academic advising and psychological counseling available to them. Without the aid available to students, the board anticipates that the state may not be able to maintain and increase the level of economic prosperity currently enjoyed by the state's residents. The idea of full student attainment, primarily regarding socio-economically disadvantaged students, is a significant driving force that powers this initiative. To the participant who used the term attainment multiple times during the interview, attainment is

the expectation that students from "specifically lower-income and previously disadvantaged groups" will become highly skilled through higher education.

In their final remarks on how boards can positively influence diversity on campus, a participant who is the current chair of the board said, "I feel that it's really important that governing boards take an active role in that (referring to student diversity). That is something that they can set the tone at the top". Another participant's closing remarks were, "Boards have a soapbox that matters. They have an ability to both choose specific strategic initiatives like the attainment one I'm talking to you now about, and they have the ability to drive certain strategies into our universities and then to follow up with those metrics and measure whether indeed we're achieving what we intended". The third participant, a regent from a board that is aware of the changing state demographics, said: "I would hope that we reach a point when we don't have to discuss it (diversity). That it just happens naturally, organically. That our campuses and our campus life is what you would see outside the campus, that we reflect the community".

Boards supporting campus activities

The three participants agreed that their boards support and encourage various campus decisions and initiatives to benefit their diverse campus communities. These initiatives vary from system to system and include the funding of dedicated departments to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) on campus, creating programs that promote and celebrate diverse cultures, establishing scholarships and additional forms of financial aid, supporting early college programs, promoting student success and attainment, and recruitment of underrepresented students and faculty. Working with the system office and campus presidents, boards have identified some DEI opportunities and challenges that could benefit from additional resources and grant funding over the next several years. When it comes to allocating some of their budgets

to finance student diversity initiatives, none of the boards allocate specific funding for diversity-related activities. Each campus is responsible for funding the offices, departments, and programs they believe will positively impact their diverse student body, including women, Hispanics, Blacks, Native Americans, and LGBTQ+ communities. Board leaders also support campuses' decisions to invest resources to fund programs that provide critical student academic advising and psychological counseling, as well as assigning resources to identify the needs of students that do not have the background or support systems other students have.

Participants strongly believe diversity is built into their system's mission and woven into the board's discussions and decisions. Participants also believe that their boards are very intentional in their decision-making and that the notion of diversity is ever-present during their board discussions. In this sense, board diversity efforts are a work in progress. They try to promote it at any opportunity, considering that they only meet four or five times a year and that many other competing issues also deserve the board's attention. The boards support campus programs that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion development programs for students, faculty, and staff. Boards support diversity enhancement programs that encourage the active recruitment and retention of minority faculty. Boards support initiatives to increase postsecondary attainment for the state's students and increase degrees to historically underrepresented populations. Boards support and encourage campus initiatives to attract, recruit, retain, and support first-generation rural and indigenous students. Boards also support programs that provide academic advising and psychological counseling to children of migrant workers. Boards support dual enrollment in high schools and early colleges and intervene in favor of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) students (discussed below in the section about engaging with their communities). To alleviate the cost of higher education that

seems unattainable for disadvantaged students, boards have created “promise” scholarship programs that aim to make a college education affordable and, in some cases, even free. Boards support institutions' efforts to engage the various ethnic groups on their campuses through cultural events, seminars, fairs, and art exhibits from diverse artists. Boards support campus events like a Martin Luther King March, Black History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, or LGBTQ+ events. A participant from a system with a growing number of black and Hispanic students quoted the system’s chancellor: “Our member institutions are proud to provide a welcoming environment where first generation, low income, and underrepresented students feel at home and importantly succeed in ever-increasing numbers.” Boards support campus efforts to provide a quality and meaningful educational experience that prepares graduates to take and pass their major board certification in fields like education, health, law, and business.

Study participants were asked how their boards learn about diversity-related issues affecting or happening on their campuses. They coincided that as a common practice, boards invite feedback from multiple campus stakeholders, including student leadership and the faculty senate. One form of communication happens during public meetings when the chair opens the floor to public comments. Some communication between the board and the campuses occurs through the board’s website. A proactive form of learning about their campus activities is through their physical presence on their campuses. Whenever possible, board members attend campus events organized by student organizations and participate in town hall meetings where they get a chance to listen to their issues. However, some logistical challenges prevent board members from visiting all of their institutions. A participant mentioned that “the system has multiple campuses spread all over the state, and sometimes it is difficult to go to all of them, but the board tries hard to visit every campus as often as possible.” Another way boards receive

campus information is through student regents, another form of student representation with a direct presence on the governing board. Student regents meet with student government associations to discuss issues affecting their campus and then channel these concerns directly to the board, of which they are members.

One of the participants from a majority white non-Hispanic system acknowledged that the board still has a lot of work to do in the DEI area. That board needs to be more embracing of today's student's needs, which in many cases are different from those of college students in the early years of the twenty-first century. Recent societal events like protest marches against female violence, gender and racial discrimination, economic disparities, and globalization have permeated and spread to college campuses. This participant noted that "in general, society has different concerns and seems more politicized and opinionated." The use of new communication technologies, to which the current student body is very adept, contribute to the rapid and almost instantaneous spread of information through the student community. In this sense, boards see the need to try to keep pace with the times, stay alert, and become more sensitive and responsive to the evolving needs of today's students. Today's students have additional concerns that add stress to their lives, like figuring out how to pay for their high-cost higher education, the student debt they are accumulating, and the state of their mental health. In reference to how boards are becoming sensitive and supportive towards today's student needs, one of the participants, who in the demographic questionnaire disclosed falling in the 65 to 74 years old category, mentioned an example of one of those student stress-relieving strategies that seem to have become a common occurrence on campuses. Regarding using puppies as a form of relaxing therapy, the participant said, "when I was at school, and maybe when you were at school, who would have thought that we would be having pets on campus to assist the students through finals?".

Boards evaluating results

The three participants discussed several ways their boards evaluate campus leaders' performance. Based on their strategic goals, boards transform their vision into specific plans. Boards create the plans, but it is the campus administrator's duty to execute them. To determine whether their objectives are being met, boards establish specific metrics they want campus leaders to achieve in the short, mid, and long term. Boards evaluate trends and results and discuss their assessment with top administrators, expecting them to improve and correct those areas that are determined to be deficient. At least once a year, boards formally evaluate system chancellors in executive sessions to discuss their performance and that of the campus presidents. As part of chancellor and presidential annual reviews, key performance indicators are assessed, and a number are broken down to emphasize significant diverse populations. Between yearly evaluations, boards follow up on their metrics' results and hold conversations to discuss improvement and opportunities or the need to change course when a significant event alters their original plan. For these top administrators, achieving board-established goals and objectives is essential because their compensation and potential bonuses are tied to the successful execution of the predetermined goals. A participant from a system where minorities are now the overall campus majority shared that "the board of Regents, the chancellor, and campus presidents, look for results in data and set benchmarks with goals of making sure diversity groups succeed at the same or similar levels as overall student populations."

The study participants shared additional examples of how their boards evaluate relevant data on the system and its component institutions. Some of this data generates statistics that are relevant to student diversity, including minority enrollment, graduation, and retention rates. With the help of online tools that break down student enrollment and degrees and faculty data by

various categories, including race and ethnicity, the board, system office, and institutions regularly and aggressively evaluate campus data related to their diverse student and faculty populations. Key indicators tracked include minority student enrollment, minority student degrees and credentials awarded, number of minority faculty hired, and percentage of low-income students receiving financial aid and being awarded degrees. In addition to demographic data such as students' gender, age, ethnicity, and classification, reports also provide disaggregated data on majors and disciplines they are enrolled in. In evaluating disaggregated data, boards also ask questions about the efforts by the different schools and colleges to attract and retain their diverse students.

A participant from a state experiencing high growth rates in its young population mentioned how the board tracks statistical information related to future college students currently enrolled in K-12. This board is anticipating the arrival of the next generation of students to their campuses and wants to know who they are and their needs. As part of their analysis, this board also looks at the state's assessment of high schools to understand the quality of the student's education and consider it in their strategic plans. A participant made a connection between the board's objectives and those of the state's overall education plan. The participant mentioned that the board's evaluation includes information on how the university's graduate degrees and graduation rates contribute to the overall demand for specific majors according to the state's education plan. This comparison provides guidance to the board and system "that they must focus their recruiting efforts on a more diversified population sector to increase their output of qualified graduates in designated fields of knowledge." Boards are also concerned about students who drop out, those who graduate but are not well prepared to take on their new professional roles, and those graduates that pass their state certifications, a metric that reflects on the quality

of the education received. In addition to the information provided by their chancellor and presidents, internal reports, and online tools, boards also get information confirmed by their system's audit teams. Internal auditors examine financial and non-financial information, such as enrollment, retention, and graduation rates. This independent source of information provides an extra layer of trust and ensures that the board receives accurate information to support their decision-making and results evaluation.

In a closing remark, a participant from a relatively small university system mentioned that under extreme circumstances, and only after repeated attempts have been made to get administrators to improve their performance, the board would get more involved in the system's daily operations when it identifies crucial areas that they find are not going in a direction that supports its strategic policies. This is, however, a last resort action because before arriving at this point, the board would have evaluated multiple options, including replacing the leadership team. The participant concluded the remark by saying that although this is a hypothetical scenario, the board has discussed it and would be prepared to act should the need arise.

Boards' awareness of student diversity on campuses

Boards have varied ways to learn and become aware of concerns of importance to their stakeholders. Boards want to be well-informed to proactively identify trends before they become issues. Communication with multiple sources has made the board aware of issues affecting the student community, including the high cost of their education, high student debt after graduation, questioning the value of their college degree, and, more recently, issues related to mental illness.

According to the participants, the board's awareness comes from collecting and analyzing data, receiving updates from expert advisors, and constantly monitoring societal events affecting students and the community at large. To stay current, board members attend seminars and invite

external consultants and expert faculty speakers to talk to them about current issues in student diversity. All participants mentioned their boards holding special retreats to discuss current and emerging issues related to multiple subjects, including topics about diversity, student enrollment, and overall attainment. According to the participants' responses, for the last five to ten years, boards have been more apt to discuss topics outside of traditional financial issues, such as budgets, financial investments, real estate deals, and tuition settings that have habitually occupied the boards' attention. A participant who years ago was a top campus administrator compared his perceptions of the board back then with today's board. In the past, the participant observed that the board seemed to be "focused much of its time on either setting tuition and arguing over tuition or on real estate and financial issues, but very little (discussions) on academic affairs issues and student affairs issues. This board… has focused on overall attainment". The board's awareness has been elevated as a result of the involvement with its student leadership and understanding of their needs. An example given by one of the participants is how the board has extensively supported one of its institution's pilot program to confront mental health issues on campus. The system is looking into expanding this program to the other system campuses and working on identifying funding sources to launch the program system-wide.

All three participants discussed another essential source of information that increases board members' awareness about their constituents' needs. New board regents complete both a state-mandated and a system office onboarding process that includes topics on diversity and equity. This training helps them get the message about the issues the board considers strategic for the system and understand the system and the institution's mission and vision statements. During their onboarding process, newly appointed regents learn about diverse campus communities, the

needs and challenges of those student communities, and how these groups fit within the at-large community. Through this awareness, the board becomes sensitive towards community needs for new majors and programs that could help to solve shortages of a capable and well-educated labor force. Having this kind of awareness is essential because when the time comes to discuss and vote on a proposal, regents must consider how their decision could impact not only their system's diverse student population but also faculty, staff, and the community. Important decisions that could affect their communities for years to come include approving the expansion of current facilities, new real estate investments in some geographical regions, creating new colleges that are extensions of a main campus, or even creating stand-alone universities in remote areas located within their area of influence.

Boards have an understanding of the diverse nature of their communities and try to see them reflected in their campus's enrollment. All three participants mentioned their boards receiving statistical data on how their state's demographic composition is changing, the rates of growth for diverse ethnic communities, and their residents' socioeconomic status. These demographic studies show that a majority of future students will come from a minority or disadvantaged background. Boards strive to understand and anticipate the needs of traditionally marginalized groups like Hispanics, indigenous peoples, and African Americans that disproportionately fall into the low-income categories. Through their awareness of the ethnic and cultural diversity of students in their system, boards encourage campuses to design targeted programs and create scholarships that fit the needs of disadvantaged community members. Boards show their sensitivity by understanding that cultural and learning differences come with student diversity. Influenced by their culture and traditions, some students are more open and outspoken than others, some are more likely to question their professors, others hold strong

religious views, and others may have personal or learning challenges. Boards know the next generations of higher education students are currently enrolled in K-12 and are preparing programs that will cater to them. One of the boards in a state with a high growth rate of young residents has developed an extensive collaboration with the state's office that oversees K-12 education goals. This collaboration has resulted in a coordinated effort to facilitate students' transition to life in college.

Board leaders showed their awareness of the current diverse environment when a participant from a highly diverse system said, "...I think the emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion is very prevalent now in all institutions of higher education, secondary education, and corporations, you know, private and public corporations. So, this is the way of the future". In recognizing the board's awareness of demographic changes in their state and noting minorities' lower enrollment, retention, and graduation rates, another participant said, "...we've gone through a very non-representative… state back in 2002, from campuses (that have changed from) predominantly white, non-Hispanic to basically a university that now represents demographically the state ... Our challenge is now in (increasing) graduation rates and (ensuring all) system universities to really achieve the same result".

Board's engagement with their communities

Boards engage with their community stakeholders in different ways. Some boards do it by holding open forums and town halls, listening to community speakers at the beginning of each general or ordinary meeting, reaching out to community members, and through their long-term strategic plans that consider the needs of their communities. Other forms of engaging with their communities are participating and attending community and social events, supporting and standing up for some especially challenged student groups, and in the case of one of the boards,

by holding quarterly breakfast meetings with the student leadership. Boards also believe campus students should reflect their communities and the state's demographics. They support campus administrators' efforts to recruit students from their surrounding communities. These students will learn how their local institution can help them achieve their higher education goals. The board "hopes that once they graduate, they will choose to stay and grow in their communities."

Participants described how, when crafting their long-term visions and strategic plans, boards appropriate funding for long-term investments in new facilities or expanding existing campus facilities to create and house new programs and highly specialized majors in high demand by the state and their host communities. Currently, these new programs are concentrated in specialized areas of engineering, the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, and the health sciences. A participant from a system that oversees technical colleges gave the example of a community with special needs influenced by its economic activities, demanding graduates with technical and practical skills, such as health technicians and truck drivers. Boards seek to make investments in a higher education degree a meaningful and rewarding experience for the students, their families, and their communities. Boards are concerned not just with meeting a certain number of graduates. They want to ensure that their university graduates receive a quality education that will allow them to perform in the "real world," are ready to pass state certification tests if needed and become productive contributors to their communities.

Another example of how boards engage with their student communities is by understanding and acting on their needs. The regent from the state with high minority growth rates shared that the board has done extensive research on the favorable impact of dual enrollment on the student population. This board strongly supports efforts promoting high school

students' dual enrollment and advanced placement courses, especially for minorities, rural and disadvantaged students. The board's research shows how promoting the benefits of dual enrollment has positively increased college enrollment and people's attitudes toward higher education, especially in lower-income communities and neighborhoods where "opinions are not so positive." Concerning these communities, the participant who shared these comments referred to lower-income neighborhoods: "There's no one with a college degree. No one who's a professional. And so there really is no one you can turn to and talk about (college life). So dual enrollment acts as an intervention to convince students that they can succeed in college, and of course, it moves them ahead. Dual enrollment is associated with overall attainment, but attainment specifically for lower-income and previously disadvantaged groups of students".

The same participant offered another example of how the board is engaged with its community and supports the educational goals of a unique group of students. Specifically, this board recognizes the importance and contributions of past and current migrant communities. This example is about the work done by the board to provide financial and political support to Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) students. According to the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (2023), a DACA student is an eligible undocumented immigrant who came to the United States as a child and, because of their irregular migrant status, is not eligible to receive the same benefits as a U.S. citizen or a vetted legal immigrant. In this case, the board initially adopted a temporary policy allowing DACA students who graduated from a state high school to pay a discounted out-of-state tuition. Next, the board filed an *Amicus Brief* before the state's Supreme Court to support community colleges' efforts to provide in-state tuition for these students. In defining an *Amicus Brief*, Cornell Law School's Legal Information Institute (2023) says: "An *Amicus Curiae* literally translated from Latin is "friend of the court".

Generally, it is referencing a person or group who is not a party to an action but has a strong interest in the matter. This person or group will petition the court for permission to submit a brief in the action intending to influence the court's decision. Such briefs are called *amicus briefs*". After the State Supreme Court ruled against providing in-state tuition to non-citizens, the board discontinued its policy. Still, it then worked with state legislators to create a voter's initiative to permanently authorize state colleges and universities to charge in-state tuition to DACA students. This initiative was voted on and approved in the state's most recent election.

The participants in this study believe that the community needs to know and identify its board members. Board regents get multiple invitations to attend social, sporting, and fundraising events. Most of these events are organized by their component universities. These events are also attended by the universities' alums and local community members who look for the opportunity to meet the board members and share their perspectives on their communities. A well-known participant said about the board's engagement with the community: "This is a board that is more engaged and in tune with their constituents. Our system believes that our board needs to be visible when they are on campus, visible with the student body, visible with the faculty, with the staff, with business leaders out in the community, and of course, benefactors". Another form of engagement is directly reaching out to community partners who can become financial supporters of an institution. Most philanthropic gifts result from the engagement of the board and institution representatives, who develop relationships with alumni, community members, foundations, and corporations to create meaningful gifts to their campus communities aligned with the board's vision and interests. All boards have a common role in evaluating the terms and conditions of major gifts and donations to the system or one of their institutions. So before accepting a major gift, boards need to consider and understand the wishes and intentions of the donors and financial

supporters, who have expectations and want to know how their financial gifts are utilized. The well-known, community-involved participant described another way that some of the regents on that board engage with their communities. During the years that the regents get to serve on their board, they come in contact with and meet many students, especially the student regents and students that hold leadership positions on their campuses. Some board members help students understand their critical leadership roles by becoming their mentors. This mentorship relationship happens not only while the students are active in their roles but are intended to continue after they are discharged from their duties and graduate. The participant said, "regents can continue working with students after they graduate, we want to make sure that they continue their relationships with the university, with their education…the board wants to stay in touch (with students). They want to know that what they are doing has meaning to people and their lives".

In their concluding remarks about the board's engagement with their communities, the participant who currently holds the board's chair said that "it is up to the higher education institutions to educate our students in a way to make them citizens of this world, so that they can participate on this international, global economy." The community-minded participant said, "The federal government has its regulations. The state has its programs, and they want to make sure that we're doing it all…. We're kept on our toes by the community, by legislators, by the feds to make sure that we're doing what we're supposed to be doing".

Summary

This study aimed to explore how boards of regents of public university systems along the U.S.-Mexico border influence students' lives in their highly diversified campus communities. The first section of this chapter provided a profile of the study's participant characteristics.

Invitations were sent to twelve public higher education university systems located along the four states bordering the U.S.-Mexico border. Eight responded to the request, but only three accepted the invitation. The three participants represented boards situated in three of the four borderland states. One participant is the current board chair, another is the immediate past board chair, and the third has held the chair's position twice. All participants are experienced board members with many years of service on their boards, access to vital public and private system information, and valuable insight acquired through their current and past leadership positions.

The following section discussed the results of the applied questionnaire protocols and the data collected. Data analysis resulted in six distinctive but interrelated themes. The first of these themes is related to the roles of the governing boards on diversity. Participants agreed that the concept of diversity is embedded in their strategic goals. Boards do not allocate specific budgets to promote diversity on their campuses. Instead, they support each campus's decisions to fund activities that they believe will positively affect their particular campus communities. On the theme of board influence, participants agreed that boards provide the overall vision and direction that campus leaders must follow. Boards influence their system by selecting diversity-sensitive campus leaders and implementing student-centered policies that favor students from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds. On the theme of boards supporting campus activities, participants shared their insight into how their boards support their institutions' diversity initiatives that benefit their diverse student communities. The theme of boards evaluating results refers to the assessment boards make of their system and campus performance. These evaluations include reviewing data, metrics, and administrators' execution of board directives. All participants coincided on the importance of reviewing disaggregated data that allows comparison across different genders, ethnic, or economically disadvantaged groups for categories such as

enrollment, retention and graduation rates, and degrees awarded by group. The theme about the board's awareness of student diversity on campus provided an insight into how boards stay informed and alert about issues affecting the at-large community that may have spillover effects on their campuses. Participants discussed their board's concerns to ensure campus demographics reflect their state's demographic composition. The sixth and final theme found elements that supported the board's engagement with their communities. By actively listening to community needs, boards become more sensitive toward their demands and are more likely to build solutions to those needs into their strategic plans. Participants agreed that the board's interests go beyond meeting specific numbers. Boards also want to ensure that students' higher education experience is meaningful for them, their families, and their communities.

In the following chapter, I will discuss my conclusions on the study and make recommendations for U.S.-Mexico border university system leaders and future research.

Chapter 5: Summary of the Study, Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Summary of the Study

The purpose of the study was to describe how governing board leaders of four-year public university systems located along the U.S.-Mexico border perceive their roles and influence over their system's component institutions by enacting policies and initiatives that foster student diversity in campus communities, and how they support student diversity initiatives. Learning about their roles and influence is important because boards can influence students, their families, faculty, and communities' outcomes through their decisions (Brandenburg et al., 2021; Nava, 2020; McBain & Powell, 2021). Boards are responsible for developing their systems' long-term vision and strategic goals aligned with that vision. University board roles have traditionally been concerned with their institutions' high-level financial matters. However, these roles need to be reconsidered and updated to focus and expand the board's attention to other issues of importance to society that have existed and captured the public's interest. Issues like diversity, gender, and ethnic discrimination, unequal income distribution, and student debt are being debated and are having spillover effects on college campuses across the US. Various higher education stakeholders, including students, their families, faculty, and state and federal legislators, have started pressuring boards to consider these issues when they establish their strategic goals (Bassinger, 2016; Bernstein et al., 2020; Kezar, 2016; Pelletier, 2021; Rall, 2021; Wilson, 2016).

The findings of the study show that U.S.-Mexico borderland boards have a high level of awareness about the changing demographics in their home states and how the demographics are reflected in their growingly diverse campus communities. In all southern border states, the female population is a majority, while the white non-Hispanic population is decreasing to the

growing Hispanic and Asian communities. Boards were found to be more open to considering the needs of the increasing minority student population. They are open to supporting institutions' programs focused on promoting and elevating enrollment, retention, and graduation rates of minorities, which tend to be lower than those of the traditionally dominant student groups. The study also found that boards along the U.S-Mexico border tend to have a more diverse member composition than the national average, including more women and minorities. Their presence may contribute to the board's willingness to open and maintain multiple communication channels with their students and communities. A more visible and approachable board is more likely to be more engaged and interested in partnering with their numerous internal and external stakeholders to foster student diversity.

Study Conclusions

Governing boards of higher education institutions have been criticized because their traditions and practices fail to encourage the participation of diverse members, including women and minorities. The findings of the study present a different kind of board that is emerging along the U.S.-Mexico border. My study's findings discern from McBain & Powell's (2021) national report on policies, practices, and composition of college and university governing boards.

In my study, several of the twelve southern border boards show significant progress compared to the reported national averages. For example, the national report shows that as of 2020, the average public education governing board was chaired 77% of the time by a white non-Hispanic male. My study's results show that 59% of border chairs are white non-Hispanic males, meaning that women chair 41% of borderland boards, a stark comparison to the national average of 23%. Related to overall women's participation in public boards, very little has changed over the last decade. As recent as 2020, the national average gender board composition was dominated by

males at a 67% rate, while women comprised the remaining 37% of board membership. In 2010, female board membership was 28% and slightly increased in 2015 to 32%. On borderland boards, total female board membership ranges from a low of 10% to a high of 90%. Six of these boards have a higher female representation than the 2020 national average of 37%.

Ethnic board composition also shows differences between my study's results and the national report. In 2020, the average board composition was 65% white non-Hispanic, 20% Black, 4% Hispanic, and 11% Other. In half of the southern borderlands' boards, minority representation ranges from 40% to 100% (Table 3 on page 165). The age of board members is also a relevant topic of discussion, as 61% of these members fell in the age range of 50 to 69 years, and 15% fell in the 70 and over age category (McBain & Powell, 2021). My study's participants, a minor sample of all the board regents in the border area, show conformity with the national average, as all of them reported being 65 to 74 years old.

It is essential to contextualize the average national board representation with national and state population demographic and enrollment trends. Selected data from the 2020 U.S. Census Bureau report, summarized in Table 2 on page 164, show demographic trends relevant to the study. In 2010, the total male and female population split was practically the same. However, from 2010 to 2020, the male population decreased by 0.8%, giving women a 50.8% majority. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics IPEDS report (2020), summarized in Table 4 (page 166), shows that in 2020 total female enrollment nationwide mirrored the overall female population at 50.8%. For the U.S. states bordering Mexico, Fall 2020 higher education enrollment by gender shows that in Arizona, 45.1% of students were males and 54.9% were females; in California, 43.8% were males and 56.2% were females; in New Mexico, 42.5% were males and 57.5% were females, and in Texas 42.9% were males and 57.1% were females. An

analysis of the 2020 U.S. Census' ethnic composition in the same period shows that the white non-Hispanic and Black populations experienced a decrease of 9.3% and 0.8%, respectively, while the Hispanic population experienced an increase of 14.7%, and the category of "Other" ethnic groups saw a rise of 46% compared to 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Also, in 2020, an enrollment breakdown by ethnicity shows that for the entire US, white non-Hispanic students were still a majority at 57.8%, followed by Hispanics at 18.7%, African Americans at 12.1%, and "Other" groups at 11.4% (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics IPEDS report, 2020). For the U.S. states bordering Mexico, Fall 2020 higher education enrollment by ethnic groups shows that in Arizona, 49.1% of students were White, 25.8% were Hispanic, 3.8% were Black, and 21.2% identified as "Other". In California, 22.4% of students were White, 36.6% were Hispanic, 4.2% were Black, and 36.8% identified as "Other". In New Mexico, 30.1% of students were White, 51.3% were Hispanic, 2.5% were Black, and 16.02% identified as Other, and in Texas, 35.7% of students were White, 36.2% were Hispanic, 11.2% were Black, and 17.0% identified as "Other". The importance of knowing board composition is because it is more likely that diverse boards will listen to campus minorities' voices and pay attention to their issues in the presence of board members who identify with those issues and can amplify their voices and advocate their causes during board's discussions (Bair, 2018; Bastedo, 2005; Dika & Janosik, 2003; Kezar, 2016; Michael et al., 2000). The comparison of average national board composition related to gender and ethnicity against the general population and higher education enrollment shows that boards' criticism based on lack of diversity is valid. However, my study shows that boards along the U.S-Mexico border are trending toward a more representative board composition.

Governing boards have also been criticized on the basis that their homogenous composition does not represent the interests of their changing campus demographics. Boards seem to be working distantly from their diverse student communities. The distance from campus stakeholders does not allow them to understand and relate to students' personal and financial challenges (Bair, 2018; Bastedo, 2005; Dika & Janosik, 2003; Kezar, 2016; Michael et al., 2000). Literature on governing boards' roles and responsibilities suggests that boards' primary focus and concern is on high-level financial performance (Brandenburg et al., 2021; Nava, 2020; McBain & Powell, 2021). This includes approving multi-million operating budgets, managing mid-to long-term financial and real estate investments, and evaluating large philanthropic gifts. The findings of my study show that in addition to fulfilling their financial duties, participating boards have developed or are developing more humanistic roles and policies directed towards lessening some of their diverse student communities' pressing higher education needs. The insightful responses shared by the study participants suggest that Boards along the borderlands are embracing the concept of diversity and implementing it in their strategic plans. They are intentionally recruiting and hiring new leaders with the mentality and sensibility toward their diverse student and faculty communities. They are challenging current campus leaders to expand their ideas, thinking, and approach to diversity in students and faculty. This study's participant boards drive innovative policies that depart from conventional governing models that focus on and assume that the student body has not changed over the years. The outdated policies are failing students not because they are not well-written but because they are obsolete and no longer relevant to the current population mix on campus. Legacy board policies presume that students fit within traditional models tailored to homogenous characteristics like 18-24 years, white non-Hispanic males from middle or above socioeconomic classes, and graduate with their cohorts in

four years. New students and graduates need a different learning environment more suitable to changing times. The non-traditional student body is more diverse than before (Excelencia in Education!, 2022). Women are now the majority of students on campus nationwide (Table 4 on page 166). A continuously growing number of enrolled students come from underrepresented communities and have family financial hardships (Mangan, 2022). Students are proud of their ethnicities and backgrounds and proudly acknowledge their multiple, intersectional identities. Enrolled students' profiles show many of them have family responsibilities, are older, attend school part-time, and take more than four years to graduate (Fulton, 2019; LePeau et al., 2019; Morgan et al., 2021; Smith, 2020). State demographics are changing, and participants stated their boards are committed to seeing the new student population configuration reflected across campuses (Table 2 on page 164 and Table 4 on page 166).

During the course of the interviews, the study's participants provided a glimpse into what their boards are planning to do and already doing in support of student diversity. Their vast experienced-based insights were captured by the interview protocol, processed, categorized, and interpreted from individual and collective perspectives. Data analysis identified six distinctive but interrelated themes: Roles of the governing boards, boards exercising their influence, boards supporting campus activities, boards evaluating results, boards' awareness of student diversity on campus, and boards' engagement with their communities.

The first of these themes is related to evolving boards' governing roles. Traditional board roles include establishing policies, developing foresight and long-term strategic goals, and overseeing the system's performance and operations. Participants noted that board meetings are more inclusive of issues outside of financial and business affairs and are increasingly discussing academic and student affairs issues. By including other matters on their meeting agendas, boards

acknowledge the need to expand their fiduciary roles of care to accommodate matters outside of financial management. However, study participants agreed that student diversity is not currently a singled-out item discussed explicitly in their meetings. This finding suggests that as important as addressing issues of student and campus diversity might be, this issue must still compete for the board's attention with multiple other matters of financial, personnel, or investing nature. Nonetheless, participants coincided in that the notion of diversity is embedded in their discussions and is constantly brought up in committee reports. This is relevant because most of the hard work, analysis, and debate initiates in committees. Once consensus is reached, committees submit their recommendations to the plenum of the boards for final discussion and voting. Participants also agreed that discussing diversity, equity, and inclusion-related issues during board meetings leads to highly politicized and tense conversations between its members. This leads me to conclude that there is some inherent risk of political divisiveness along party lines that could disrupt the board's internal functions and slow down any efforts that favor student diversity. In the presence of this risk, one of the participants expressed that political divisiveness has not yet polarized or stopped the board from supporting campuses' diversity initiatives. Collectively, boards must be active but neutral political participants in state politics. As public state agencies, boards of university systems need to understand and interpret the state's political environment that will provide educational policy guidance and funding for their institutions. Participants also agreed that it is not the board's role to designate specific funds for diversity initiatives in their high-level system budgets. Boards may establish and fund "promise" scholarships that make higher education possible for financially disadvantaged students, but the burden of creating diversity-supporting initiatives falls on each institution. Following the board's strategic plans and general direction, campuses are encouraged to allocate some of their

operational budgets to fund targeted diversity programs that could have the highest positive impact on their student populations.

On the theme of board influence on diversity matters, the data shows that boards do have influence over campus decisions when they provide the overall vision and direction that campus leaders need to follow. Boards support and monitor the results of programs that promote minority students' enrollment, retention, and graduation rates at their campuses. The ability to influence the system's destinies through their vision leads me to conclude that boards can direct campus leadership to implement programs to improve minority and disadvantaged students' college experience. Diverse groups that stand to benefit from these programs include members of the Hispanic, Black, Native American, low-income, rural, migrant, and LGBTQ+ communities. These underrepresented groups also benefit when board policies encourage hiring faculty and staff from diverse backgrounds. Students benefit because they have more opportunities to establish connections with people they can identify with. Another indication of board influence is in the process of selecting system chancellors and campus presidents. During the search process, boards can be intentional about searching for campus leaders with the sensitivity to act appropriately on matters of student diversity. Boards can condition system and campus leaders' compensation and performance bonuses on the accomplishment of specific diversity goals and objectives, giving them another tool to exercise their influence on achieving envisioned diversity outcomes. The boards also exert influence by implementing student-centered policies that lower admission barriers, increasing scholarships and financial aid, and encouraging campuses' aggressive recruitment of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The analysis of the information provided by the participants allows me to reach one more conclusion on the boards' influential role beyond their campuses. Their influence shows when boards work with

community political and business leaders to solve common problems. These include approving new high-in-demand programs and majors that the regional economy demands, building new facilities, or coordinating long-term strategies that could contribute to the region's economic growth.

The third theme relates to how boards support on-campus activities. The study's findings support my conclusion that boards actively support their institutions' diversity-promoting initiatives in various direct and indirect ways. Directly, boards have created scholarships that benefit financially challenged students who disproportionately belong to minoritized communities. By attracting diverse students to their campuses, the board promotes an increased presence of students with different backgrounds that bring other points of view and cultural backgrounds. Regents periodically visit their system's campuses and hold town hall meetings and smaller meetings with students and faculty. In these meetings, regents get to listen to firsthand accounts of important issues in the community. Such events encourage regents to unite and build relationships with students from outside their communities. Indirectly, board initiatives include supporting institutions' decisions to fund departments that develop and implement diversity, equity, and inclusiveness. Boards also support campus programs that encourage historically underserved students to enroll in college by reaching out to them in their neighborhood's K-12 schools, opening up campus facilities to accommodate early college and dual enrollment programs, and making available an adequate number of academic advisors and financial aid counselors to help students devise a clear path towards graduation. These campus programs contribute to increasing enrollment, retention, and graduation rates that are lower for minority students when compared to the traditional student population (Excelencia in Education!, 2022). Boards also show their support for campus activities when they recognize how important

it is for their diverse student communities to celebrate their ethnic heritage and community affiliations through diverse artistic and cultural expressions and the participation of guest speakers.

The theme of evaluating results refers to the evaluation boards make of their system and campuses' performance against predetermined goals and objectives. These evaluations include establishing short-, mid-, and long-term metrics, reviewing campus data, and administrators' execution of board directives. The study participants coincided on how important it is for their boards to receive disaggregated data on enrollment, retention, graduation rates, and degrees awarded. Disaggregated data allows for comparisons across ethnicities, genders, or economically disadvantaged groups. The analysis of the disaggregated data gives the board the necessary insight to formulate its plans and issue the necessary directives that will redirect the campus' efforts. Results evaluation also refers to the periodic, usually yearly, performance evaluations of system chancellors and campus presidents. Campus leaders have an economic incentive to meet their established goals, as some of their compensation and bonuses are tied to the result of their evaluations. Various sources provide data to the board. These sources include the board of regents' support offices, internal websites summarizing large volumes of data, commissioned reports, and information provided by consultants and internal subject matter experts. Boards also receive information on current K-12 students that will be tomorrow's college students. Boards evaluate statistics to anticipate the future demand for enrollment in their institutions, their chosen field of study, the campus's need to hire additional faculty, the availability of educational space and infrastructure, and the demand for auxiliary services like meal plans and housing. Boards also evaluate reports produced by the state's office in charge of K-12 education to learn about the quality of the education that future college students are receiving, their level of college readiness,

and anticipate the demand for remedial courses for underprepared students. To assess their institution's education quality, boards review performance reports on how many of their system's graduates pass the state's professional certification exams in fields like education, health, law, and business. Having all these sources of information and multiple tools available to evaluate their system's performance led me to conclude that boards have adequate information to make sound and well-informed data-driven decisions. Careful analysis of the disaggregated data they receive can bring to their attention the need to redirect their efforts to those underperforming students who need additional help or are not receiving the benefits of the education the board is responsible for promoting.

The theme of the board's awareness of student diversity on campus was not a theme that I anticipated. The theme emerged from analyzing the additional information the study participants shared. The theme provided insight into how boards stay informed about issues affecting the at-large community that may have spillover effects on their campuses. The data collected during the interviews suggests that boards are now more adept at discussing emergent issues of diversity, along with their traditional finance-related conversations. Boards seek out information to proactively make decisions and take necessary actions instead of being reactive to events that they failed to anticipate. The recent concerns boards have discussed include racial and gender discrimination, student debt, and student mental health. Boards' awareness comes from data analysis and reports prepared by their support offices, the system offices, and their campuses. Boards also meet with internal and external consultants to help them understand the issues and how they can affect the institution's stability. Newly appointed regents undergo an onboarding process that, among other important issues, contributes to their awareness of campus diversity issues. This awareness prepares board members to empathize with current and new community

issues that the board needs to vote on. Participants also discussed their board's awareness of how their state's demographic composition is changing and the challenges that it brings to their educational systems. One of the challenges is ensuring that campus demographics reflect their state's growing diverse demographic composition. Changes to the state's demographic composition come with challenges, including disparities by ethnic groups in enrollment, retention, and graduation rates. Through their awareness of group statistics, I can conclude that boards are knowledgeable about their campuses' evolving demographics, their student needs and demands, and revisions that may be required to their strategic plans. Equipped with the information, boards can encourage campus leadership to implement programs that are likely to improve minorities' retention and graduation rates that contribute to closing the attainment gaps between the different ethnic groups.

The final theme, which also emerged from the information shared by participants, found elements that supported the board's engagement with their communities. Board members want to engage and be visible in educational, athletic, and social activities on campus and in the at-large community. They want to listen directly from students, faculty, and their respective leaders and develop strong relationships with community partners, including alumni, donors and benefactors, and civil and political leaders. Examples of how boards interact with their communities include opening communication channels by inviting community members to address the board during regularly scheduled meetings, formulating strategic plans that are inclusive of the community's needs, visiting campuses and meeting with students and faculty members, and engaging with outside stakeholders to encourage community partners to participate and get more involved in higher education matters. By actively listening to community needs, boards become more sensitive toward their demands and are more likely to consider allocating resources to invest in

new high-in-demand academic programs and building new high-impact facilities, like technologically equipped classroom buildings, hospitals, sports stadiums, and special events venues. Participants shared other examples of how their boards are involved with their communities. Regents supported campuses' efforts to recruit minoritized students in their schools and communities. Another clear example of a board engaging with its communities is the commitment and support one of the board leaders showed to Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) students who graduated from in-state high schools. Before the board's intervention, only legal state residents were eligible to pay in-state tuition. The board initially passed a resolution that allowed DACA students to pay reduced tuition. This initiative was legally challenged in state courts. When the court ruled this practice illegal, the board actively collaborated with legislators and registered voters to create and pass a new state law that made these students eligible to pay in-state tuition. Participants agreed that the board's interests go beyond meeting specific numerical goals. Based on the collected evidence, I can conclude that boards are vested in improving the relevancy of students' college learning experiences. They want to establish strong network connections with their campuses and external communities and ensure that the education students receive is of the highest quality, and is meaningful to them, their families, and their communities.

Study Implications

The results of the study strongly suggest that governing boards of higher education systems located along the U.S.-Mexico border cannot ignore student diversity issues happening on their campuses. Student diversification is taking place regardless of whether boards want to recognize it or not. A new kind of non-traditional student with a different gender and socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial background is replacing traditional students. The new group of

students comes with a new set of challenges that boards must understand and figure out if they want to keep fulfilling their system's educational mission.

The study participants discussed how the issue of student diversity is embedded, but not openly discussed, into the boards' policies, decisions, and strategic plans. The study revealed multiple board activities that benefit underrepresented gender, ethnic, and racial groups. However, evading an open discussion of diversity during board meetings results in diminished effectiveness of the board's actions. It raises the probability that some of the well-intentioned diversity plans will never materialize. Not having diversity as a stated board strategic goal means that diversity issues are at a disadvantage, with financial, investing, and personnel issues mentioned explicitly in their mission statements and included for discussion in meeting agendas. Avoiding discussions of diversity is most likely a result of the connotations that the terms diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have on a politically charged society. Additionally, the potential for political disruptions inside the board is increasing. State political actors seem to be intervening more on higher education issues and wanting to regulate the spending of state-appropriated funds, professors' tenure, and dictating the topics that can or cannot be taught in the classrooms (Colvin, 2023). States' attempts to dictate and control the boards' authority and decisions present a risk to the historic autonomy these boards have fought very hard for in the past.

The analysis of the collected data shows that participant boards have already taken important strides that are having a noticeable impact on their diverse student communities. Setting up scholarships, lowering admission barriers, advocating for DACA students, and hiring diversity-sensitive administrators are but a few examples. The success of these efforts implies the need to maintain and expand them to reach a more significant segment of the targeted student

population. To maintain a constant flow of underrepresented students to their campuses, boards must ensure that sufficient financial and human resources are made available to the institutions, that the board enacts diversity-welcoming policies, and that these are closely followed by campus administrators, who have the ultimate responsibility to implement them. The study's findings imply that participating boards are substantially aware of their students' needs and are laying down the foundations and setting up welcoming conditions that could appeal to their demands. Board actions suggest that they realize their decisions' impact on current and future students, their families, and their communities. This implies the need for board members to stay informed on events important to their communities, be intentional in their intentions to incorporate diversity into their current and future strategic plans and understand the responsibility that comes with their influence on society.

Boards along the U.S.-Mexico borderlands need to have a high level of awareness about their campus's diverse populations. Institutions are beginning to resemble their state's demographics, with a growing presence of women and Hispanics on campus. Seventy percent of all public universities in this region are cataloged as Hispanic Serving Institutions (Table 1 on page 161). The number of institutions will likely keep growing over the next few years (Mangan, 2022). This statistic raises the issue of how knowledgeable and prepared the boards, and their institutions are to enroll the newest cohorts of non-traditional students whose skill sets, learning, and financial needs differ from traditional students. Current boards are being challenged to reevaluate their ways of thinking about students and their needs. This implies that profound organizational cultural changes must follow meaningful shifts in board attitudes toward diversity. To the extent that boards accomplish this goal, institutions will follow their lead. Boards need to take a closer look at the new group of students enrolling in their universities, understand who

they are, their family and cultural backgrounds, and their challenges if they are to develop solutions to meet students' needs. Under these new conditions, boards would benefit significantly from internal membership diversification and a sense of community. It would be much easier for an actively involved and diversified board of regents that reflects their student population to empathize with their issues than for a distant and homogenous board that shows little or no understanding of minority student issues.

In practice, student population diversification implies the need to reexamine legacy board policies on admission, tuition setting, financial aid, enrollment, retention, and graduation. Legacy policies that no longer accomplish their purpose need to be revised to address the new challenges presented by today's and future generations of students. Failure to do so may result in decreased enrollments and increased risk of dropouts by students disenchanted with an unwelcoming campus environment, the lack of career advising and financial support to continue their education or the absence of support for mental health counseling.

Recommendations for Governing Board Leaders

The nation and state's demographic composition is changing, and the traditional dominant racial groups are slowly losing their majority status. Underrepresented communities have been gaining ground to the point that, according to the 2020 U.S. Census Bureau (2021), women are already the majority gender across the United States. The census also tells of the rapid growth rates of Hispanics and Asian communities in various states and the declining rates of the non-Hispanic white population, including those in the U.S.-Mexico borderland (Table 2 on page 164). Inspired by multiple well-publicized public events and manifestations of discontent since the beginning of the 21st century, today's students are unafraid to bring these issues to their campuses. Students are also more adept at manifesting their intersecting identities, adding

another complexity layer to student diversity (Fulton, 2019; LePeau et al., 2019; Morgan et al., 2021; Smith, 2020).

Boards have the responsibility and a historic opportunity to make a difference in the lives of their diverse student communities. The findings of the study suggest that board leaders along the U.S.-Mexico borderland are already aware of the demographic changes in their states' student population and have, or are in the process, of taking the necessary steps to embrace student diversity. Still, there are many disparities between the dominant and the underrepresented groups that need to be addressed. These disparities might continue without a clearly defined and communicated board diversity policy. The study participants shared that student diversity concerns are embedded in board decisions but are not explicitly discussed. To leave no doubt about the board's intentions, the concept of diversity must be openly discussed, included in meeting agendas, and elevated to the rank of a strategic goal. One of the participants confirmed that the board is already working on making diversity one of the systems' strategic pillars.

Boards need to continue to promote diversity initiatives and programs that bridge the gaps in enrollment, retention, and graduation rates, which are disproportionately lower for minoritized communities (Excelencia in Education!, 2022). Boards can support their institutions' diversity initiatives, evaluate their outcomes, and, if found to meet the board's goals, request that other system institutions replicate the program. Backed by their legal mandates and influence over their system's institutions, governing boards must be proactive and get more involved in developing diversity-friendly policies to improve the campus's diversity climate. Boards count on top-level campus administrators to follow and implement their strategic plans. One of the tools available to boards is the prospect of hiring system chancellors and campus presidents that are supportive and highly sensitive to matters of student diversity. With clear direction, goals and

objectives, and an adequate compensation, campus leaders are in a strong position to implement the board's diversity vision. To be effective and credible, boards' diversity directives must be intentional and transparent. Otherwise, students and faculty could perceive these initiatives as simple acts of showmanship or tokenism. Students can identify with a board that shows a genuine interest in their needs and decide that their efforts to improve their disadvantaged situation are not futile.

Boards must fight for their constitutional autonomy to decide how their system's institutions should be managed and present a united front to resist state political actors' attempts to dictate what boards can and cannot do. Open political interventions of state higher education practices are a developing issue in early 2023. Various state governors and legislatures across the US are proposing sweeping reforms that seek to limit the boards' and their institutions' traditional academic freedom and ban them from funding DEI programs. To pressure institutions into compliance with new requirements, newly proposed state legislation is threatening to reduce and even cut state funding allocations for institutions that fail to comply with the new requirement that would make it illegal to use public funds for DEI-related programs (Lu et al., 2023). Boards should employ every legal and negotiating tool available to them to make a clear stance about how much they value their autonomy and how important it is for higher education to have a lay, independent board advocating for its higher educational mission over and above any political interests. On an individual basis, regents need to stay away from divisive internal political stances. Every board member likely has a political affiliation, but these personal preferences must be set aside when conducting official board business at the risk of compromising the integrity of the higher educational mission trusted upon the board.

Boards can also play a role in diversifying their internal member composition. Board membership is mostly made up of white non-Hispanic males. Regents and trustees receive appointments from governors to serve on governing boards, so there are some direct legal limitations to what boards can do. But for boards that want to truly represent their states and student populations, it may be possible to urge the office of the governor to request considering the appointment of qualified candidates from non-traditional backgrounds. An increase in the board's diversity could open up the door to more internal diversity-sensitive debates and would probably contribute to some board members playing a more active role in advocating for diverse students' interests. There is a precedent at the youngest university system in Texas. At Texas Woman's University System (2022), whose mission is to "cultivate engaged leaders and global citizens by leveraging its historical strengths in health, liberal arts, and education and its standing as the nation's largest public university primarily for women." The Regent Bylaws explicitly state that at least four of the nine voting members must be women to fulfill its women-centered mission. For the rest of the boards, a diversity statement in their system's mission may be the key to ensuring diversity among their members.

The study found that boards want to have visibility on their campuses, and for that, they have devised different ways of communicating with their stakeholders. However, more work is needed to promote interactions between the board and students on campus. Board members are a small group, and it is understood that they cannot be physically present on all of their system's campuses. It is also clear that it is impossible to listen to the voices of all of their students on campus, which for some systems, is counted by the hundreds of thousands scattered all over the state. Nevertheless, boards have some tools available to them that can help them gain ground with their communities. Increasing their visits to campuses, committing to spending a few hours

talking to community leaders, holding video conferences with large audiences, or extending the length of their ordinary meetings to allow more stakeholders to address the full board in session, are ways that boards can increase their exposure to the community.

The study's findings also pointed to how important it is for boards to receive information and data on the system's campuses' performance in all operational-related categories. It also highlighted the importance of receiving disaggregated data by gender and ethnic groups. For boards to continue their efforts to promote more welcoming campuses, it is necessary to maintain the flow of disaggregated data and improve on it so that board analysts can drill down even further to identify even the most underserved of their populations and come up with the best possible data-driven intervention solutions that could make possible the attainment of their educational goals. Two of the study's participants disclosed that their boards also receive information about their future student populations, those currently enrolled in K-12. To proactively understand the needs of the new generation of students enrolling in their institutions and to make sure that their campuses are prepared with the necessary faculty, relevant study programs and majors, counseling and advising support, and building infrastructure, I consider it an absolute requirement for all boards to receive disaggregated state information on current and projected K-12 enrollment and reports on the quality of the education they are receiving. Awareness of the new student demands will help guide the board's strategic decision-making and ensure that their system's enrollment and graduation outcomes are aligned with the state's higher educational goals.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of the study and the literature review suggest emerging research areas deserving of researchers' attention, especially for those focused on board governance. One of

these research areas of interest is to gain more understanding of how governing board roles and priorities are evolving from their traditional fiduciary financial care focus to adopting new roles influenced by social movements, their state's changing demographics, and new community expectations, including addressing issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion (Kezar, 2019; Morgan et al., 2021; Rall, 2021; Rall et al., 2022). Another area that has been scarcely researched was suggested by Rall et al., 2022. In their work, these authors identified multiple studies on single private and public institutions but very limited academic knowledge about the roles of governing boards of multicampus systems, as the authors reviewed in the study (Rall et al., 2022). The findings of the study identified another area of future research related to changes in the demographic composition of governing boards, especially those located along the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Regents and trustees are becoming more diverse, and it would be interesting to find out how their diverse backgrounds and perspectives influence the board's future policies and decisions. Would these result in more favorable admission requirements, additional financial aid, or a more welcoming environment for students and faculty? Would a more diverse board be open to considering a more diverse pool of minority candidates for their executive administrator positions? Would representation of women and minorities on boards mirror their state's demographics? What kind of policies would emerge from such a diverse board?

This study discussed how board decisions influence students' educational plans. The study also examined how board decisions could impact the at-large communities. Boards are made up of groups of lay citizens appointed to serve for a number of years. To make a stronger case about regents and trustees making these influential decisions, I recommend expanding the participants to all board members, not just board leaders, as I did in my study. More extensive

participation could result in more significant amounts of data collected, likely to be richer and provide additional insight into the board's inner workings. Learning more details about these regents' backgrounds is another potential area of research. Other than their biographies posted by the board offices, little else is known about who they are, the merits or qualifications they possess that made them eligible candidates for the board, their experience in highly sensitive and politically charged environments, and specifically, what are their views on higher education-related issues. Learning about regents' backgrounds has proven difficult because accessing board members requires consent from the board's legal office. Even when granted, the regents are bound by legal and fiduciary duties that prevent them from openly disclosing board-related business.

Another area of developing interest and future research is how public university governing boards will react to the current trend of state governors and legislators infringing on their constitutional authority. Boards have long fought for their independence, which nowadays seems compromised by their state legislators' direct interventions. Legislators are trying to dictate what can and cannot be taught and what programs can and cannot be funded with state-appropriated funds. Concrete examples refer to issues of promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) on campus, funding programs and offices, and even class discussions about the consequences of slavery and discrimination (Kelderman, 2023; Lu, 2023; Moody, 2023). Governors appoint board members, and by doing so, they have the power to influence the board's ideology and composition. As recently as February 2023, Florida, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Texas legislators have introduced bills to prevent public colleges and universities from funding programs and departments that promote diversity, inclusion and equity on their campuses. If passed, this legislation will effectively ban the use of public funds to promote DEI,

an activity deemed to be an illegal exercise of taxpayers' money (Kelderman, 2023; Lu, 2023; Moody, 2023). Except for Texas, the other three states have already requested information from all of their public higher education institutions about any past expenditures they have incurred on DEI-related programs. Boards do not allocate specific budgets for DEI initiatives at their institutions. Still, based on their policies and directives to campus leaders, institutions allocate some of their budgets to fund offices and programs promoting DEI on their campuses. State requests for information have gone directly to public institutions, and as state agencies, they are obligated to respond. In early February 2023, Texas policymakers made their stance clear against any state agency's funding of DEI initiatives, which are now considered an illegal use of public funds. The governor's directive bans using state-appropriated and privately sponsored funds to pay for programs promoting diversity in student enrollment and hiring faculty and staff. A month later, all seven public university system boards in the state have issued public pronouncements stating their intentions to fully comply with the state directives (Colvin, 2023). The influential case judgment, *Trustees of Dartmouth College v. Woodward, 17 U.S. 518 (1819),* discussed in the study's literature review, does not apply to this case because these requests for information and defunding actions only apply to public institutions.

A final recommendation for further research relates to individual members of the board. Some higher education board regents have substantial experience serving on both corporate and higher education boards. It could be interesting to identify if there is any cross-interchange of ideas between higher education and corporate boards, especially on issues common to society. Regents and trustees who serve, or have served, on both education and corporate boards have likely gained awareness of current issues related to public manifestations against discriminatory practices and DEI. Just like higher education boards, corporate boards face pressure from their

stakeholders. In the case of corporate boards, pressure comes from federal and state regulations, investors, and their customer base, who seem to exert considerable pressure over the board decisions (Hardy-Fanta & Stewardson, 2007; Kramer & Adams, 2020). It could be interesting to find out if and how ideas and concerns about diversity are transferred from one board to another. More specifically, learning about how the adoption of diversity policies by corporate boards could have some spillover effects on governing boards of higher education institutions.

Summary

The literature review describes traditional governing boards and their members as distant from their institutions and primarily concerned about high-level financial matters. While multiple research-backed studies (Kezar, 2019; Morgan et al., 2021; Rall, 2021; Rall et al., 2022) support this perception, my research work revealed findings that suggest that boards have a higher level of awareness about changes in student demographics, social movements, and community expectations that they are being given credit for (Baird, 2018; Dika & Janosik, 2003). Participants in my study offered a glimpse into the inner-working of higher education governing boards located along the U.S.-Mexico border. Their valuable insight shines a light on activities and decisions, some small and quiet and others big and highly publicized, that boards are undertaking in favor of their system's diverse student communities. When viewed individually, such actions may not be recognized as being supportive enough to the diverse student community. But, when taken collectively and seeing how these actions positively impact students' lives, their families, and their communities, these programs and initiatives provide a different evaluation context.

The study differs from currently available scholarly research in two main ways. The first is by focusing on public multi-university systems that academic researchers of higher education

governance have largely overlooked (Rall et al., 2022). The second is by introducing a more humanistic and sympathetic image of governing boards toward the needs of the increasingly diverse student populations on their campuses. Through the study and its findings, I desire to contribute to a scholarly understanding of the growing field of board governance centered on public multi-university systems.

Supporting diversity on campus is a critical matter that should concern everyone, regardless of their background and identity. By supporting today's students' higher education dreams, governing boards are helping students become the best version of themselves, hoping they will continue the work done by many people before them to benefit future generations.

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Appendix A – Tables

Table 1

U.S.-Mexico Borderland Public 4-year University Systems, Component Institutions, and MSI classification

Number of Component Institutions	Number of MSI Institutions	Institution Name	MSI Classification
3	**3**	**Arizona University System**	
		Arizona State University	HSI
		Northern Arizona University	HSI
		University of Arizona	HSI
23	21	**California State University System**	
		California State - Bakersfield	HSI
		California State - Channel Islands	HSI
		California State - Chico	HSI
		California State - Dominguez Hills	HSI
		California State - East Bay	HSI
		California State - Fresno	HSI
		California State - Fullerton	HSI
		California State - Humboldt	HSI
		California State - Long Beach	HSI
		California State - Los Angeles	HSI
		California State - Maritime Academy	
		California State - Monterey Bay	HSI
		California State - Northridge	HSI
		California State - Pomona	HSI
		California State - Sacramento	HSI
		California State - San Bernardino	HSI
		California State - San Diego	HSI
		California State - San Francisco	HSI
		California State - San Jose	HSI
		California State - San Luis Obispo	
		California State - San Marcos	HSI
		California State - Sonoma	HSI
		California State - Stanislaus	HSI
10	5	**University of California System**	
		University of California - Berkeley	
		University of California - Davis	
		University of California - Irvine	HSI
		University of California - Los Angeles	
		University of California - Merced	HSI
		University of California - Riverside	HSI
		University of California - San Diego	
		University of California - San Francisco	
		University of California - Santa Barbara	HSI
		University of California - Santa Cruz	HSI
1	1	**New Mexico State University**	
		New Mexico State University	HSI
1	1	**University of New Mexico**	
		University of New Mexico	HSI
3	2	**North Texas University System**	
		University of North Texas	HSI
		University of North Texas at Dallas	HSI
		University of North Texas Health Science Center at Fort Worth	

Table 1. (cont.)

Number of Component Institutions	Number of MSI Institutions	Institution Name	MSI Classification
11	8	**Texas A&M University System.**	
		Prairie View A&M University	HBCU
		Tarleton State University	
		Texas A&M International University	HSI
		Texas A&M University	HSI
		Texas A&M University–Central Texas	HSI
		Texas A&M University–Commerce	
		Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi	HSI
		Texas A&M University–Kingsville	HSI
		Texas A&M University–San Antonio	HSI
		Texas A&M University–Texarkana	
		West Texas A&M University	HSI
7	4	**Texas State University System.**	
		Lamar University	
		Sam Houston State University	HSI
		Sul Ross State University	HSI
		Texas State University	HSI
		Lamar Institute of Technology (2-Year institute)	
		Lamar State College-Orange (2-Year institute)	
		Lamar State College-Port Arthur (2-Year institute)	HSI
5	3	**Texas Tech University System.**	
		Angelo State University	HSI
		Midwestern State University	
		Texas Tech University	HSI
		Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center	
		Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso	HSI
3	1	**Texas Woman's University System.**	
		Texas Woman's University	HSI
		TWU T. Boone Pickens Institute of Health Sciences - Dallas Center	
		TWU Institute of Health Sciences - Houston Center	
4	4	**University of Houston System**	
		University of Houston	HSI
		University of Houston–Clear Lake	HSI
		University of Houston–Downtown	HSI
		University of Houston–Victoria	HSI
13	7	**University of Texas System**	
		The University of Texas at Arlington	HSI
		The University of Texas at Austin	HSI
		The University of Texas at Dallas	
		The University of Texas at El Paso	HSI
		The University of Texas at San Antonio	HSI
		The University of Texas at Tyler	
		The University of Texas Permian Basin	HSI
		The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley	HSI
		The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center	
		The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston	
		The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston	
		The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio	HSI
		The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center	
84	60	**TOTAL U.S.-Mexico Borderland Public 4-year University Systems, Component Institutions, and MSI classification**	

Table 1. (cont.)

Sources:

¡Excelencia in Education! (2022)	https://www.edexcelencia.org/
Arizona University System (2022)	https://uoia.asu.edu/content/arizona-university-system
California State University System (2022)	https://www.calstate.edu/
Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (2022)	https://www.hacu.net/hacu/default.asp
New Mexico State University (2022)	https://nmsu.edu/
North Texas University System (2022)	https://www.untsystem.edu/
Texas A&M University System (2022)	https://www.tamus.edu/
Texas State University System (2022)	https://www.tsus.edu/
Texas Tech University System. (2022)	https://www.texastech.edu/
Texas Woman's University System (2022)	https://twu.edu/chancellor/communications/messages/messages-2021/we-are-the-texas-womans-university-system/
United States Department of Education (2022)	https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/edlite-minorityinst.html
University of California System (2022)	https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/
University of Houston System (2022)	https://www.uhsystem.edu/
University of New Mexico (2022)	http://www.unm.edu/
University of Texas System (2022)	https://www.utsystem.edu/

Notes:

MSI - Minority Serving Institutions

HSI: Hispanic Serving Institutions

HBCU: Historic Black Colleges and Universities

Table 2

National and State Demographic Characteristics

		State's Characteristics in 2020 Population Census															
State	State	Total Population	Numeric Change 2010 to 2020	% Change2010 ot 2020	Diversity Index %	Male %	% Change 2010 to 2020	Female %	% Change 2010 to 2020	African American %	% Change 2010 to 2020	Hispanic %	% Change 2010 to 2020	White %	% Change 2010 to 2020	Other Groups %	% Change 2010 to 2020
	TOTAL U.S.	**331,449,281**	**22,703,743**	**7.4%**	**61.1%**	**49.2%**	**-0.8%**	**50.8%**	**0.8%**	**12.1%**	**-0.8%**	**18.7%**	**14.7%**	**57.8%**	**-9.3%**	**11.4%**	**46.2%**
AZ	Arizona	7,151,502	759,485	11.9%	61.5%	49.7%	0.0%	50.3%	0.0%	4.4%	18.9%	30.7%	3.7%	53.4%	-7.6%	11.5%	29.2%
CA	California	39,538,223	2,284,267	6.1%	69.7%	49.7%	0.0%	50.3%	0.0%	5.4%	-6.9%	39.4%	4.8%	34.7%	-13.5%	20.5%	24.2%
NM	New Mexico	2,117,522	58,343	2.8%	63.0%	49.5%	0.2%	50.5%	-0.2%	1.8%	5.9%	47.7%	3.0%	36.5%	-9.9%	14.0%	21.7%
TX	Texas	29,145,505	3,999,944	15.9%	67.0%	49.7%	0.2%	50.3%	-0.2%	11.8%	2.6%	39.3%	4.5%	39.7%	-12.4%	9.2%	64.3%

Sources:

US Census Bureau 2020. State visualization of key demographic trends from the 2020 Census https://www.census.gov/library/stories/state-by-state.html

Notes:

* The U.S. Census Bureau defines the Diversity Index as "The probability that two people chosen at random will be from different racial and ethnic groups. The DI is bounded between 1 and 0. A value close to 1 indicates that almost everyone in the population has different racial and ethnic characteristics. A value of 0 indicates that everyone in the population has the same racial and ethnic characteristics"

* Other groups refers to: Native American, Asian, Pacific Islanders, Two or more, International , Unknown

* In these tables, gender was limited to the traditional binary definition of Male and Female. California Systems break data into additional categories: Non binary, Gender queer, Different identity, Trans Male / Trans Female

Table 3

Governing Boards: National and State Demographic and Characteristics

	GOVERNING BOARD CHARACTERISTICS																
System	Total Number of Members	Voting Members	Non-Voting Members	Board Chair Male or Female	Board Chair White or Minority	Number of Males	Male %	Number of Females	Female %	White	White %	Number of Minority	Minority %	Appointed	Ex-Officio	Other Appointed	Term Years
U.S. AVERAGE PUBLIC INSTITUTION GOVERNING BOARD	**12**	**12**	**0**	**M**	**W**	**8**	**62.9%**	**4**	**37.1%**	**8**	**64.7%**	**4**	**35.3%**	**9**	**2**	**1**	**6**
Arizona University System	12	11	1	F	W	7	58.3%	5	41.7%	8	66.7%	4	33.3%	10	2	0	8
California State University System	25	25	0	F	W	12	48.0%	13	52.0%	11	44.0%	14	56.0%	19	5	1	8
University of California System	28	26	2	M	W	17	60.7%	11	39.3%	14	50.0%	14	50.0%	18	7	3	12
New Mexico State University	5	5	0	F	M	3	60.0%	2	40.0%	0	0.0%	5	100.0%	5	0	0	6
University of New Mexico	7	7	0	M	W	5	71.4%	2	28.6%	4	57.1%	3	42.9%	7	0	0	6
North Texas University System	10	9	1	F	W	6	60.0%	4	40.0%	6	60.0%	4	40.0%	10	0	0	6
Texas A&M University System.	10	9	1	M	W	8	80.0%	2	20.0%	7	70.0%	3	30.0%	10	0	0	6
Texas State University System.	10	9	1	M	W	7	70.0%	3	30.0%	9	90.0%	1	10.0%	10	0	0	6
Texas Tech University System.	10	9	1	M	W	7	70.0%	3	30.0%	8	80.0%	2	20.0%	10	0	0	6
Texas Woman's University System.	10	9	1	F	M	1	10.0%	9	90.0%	7	70.0%	3	30.0%	10	0	0	6
University of Houston System	10	9	1	M	W	9	90.0%	1	10.0%	6	60.0%	4	40.0%	10	0	0	6
University of Texas System	10	9	1	M	W	7	70.0%	3	30.0%	6	60.0%	4	40.0%	10	0	0	6
TOTAL U.S.	**12**	**12**	**0**	**M**	**W**	**8**	**62.9%**	**4**	**37.1%**	**8**	**64.7%**	**4**	**35.3%**	**9**	**2**	**1**	**6**

Sources:

Arizona University System (2022) https://uoia.asu.edu/content/arizona-university-system

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New Mexico State University (2022) https://nmsu.edu/

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Texas Tech University System. (2022) https://www.texastech.edu/

Texas Woman's University System (2022) https://twu.edu/chancellor/communications/messages/messages-2021/we-are-the-texas-womans-university-system/

University of California System (2022) https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/

University of Houston System (2022) https://www.uhsystem.edu/

University of New Mexico (2022) http://www.unm.edu/

University of Texas System (2022) https://www.utsystem.edu/

Table 4

National, State and Campus Demographics

	Campus Enrollment Demographic Characteristics, Fall' 2020						
University System / Institution Name	Enrollment	Male %	Female %	African American %	Hispanic %	White %	Other Groups %
TOTAL U.S.	**19,355,811**	**49.2%**	**50.8%**	**12.1%**	**18.7%**	**57.8%**	**11.4%**
ARIZONA	**195,672**	**45.1%**	**54.9%**	**3.8%**	**25.8%**	**49.1%**	**21.2%**
Arizona University System	**195,672**	**45.1%**	**54.9%**	**3.8%**	**25.8%**	**49.1%**	**21.2%**
Arizona State University	119,951	46.4%	53.6%	4.0%	26.0%	48.0%	22.0%
Northern Arizona University	30,733	37.5%	62.5%	3.0%	25.0%	55.0%	17.0%
University of Arizona	44,988	46.7%	53.3%	4.0%	26.0%	48.0%	22.0%
CALIFORNIA	**771,412**	**43.8%**	**56.2%**	**4.2%**	**36.6%**	**22.4%**	**36.8%**
California State University System	**485,550**	**42.5%**	**57.5%**	**4.1%**	**44.7%**	**21.9%**	**29.3%**
California State - Bakersfield	11,397	34.0%	66.0%	4.0%	62.0%	15.0%	19.0%
California State - Channel Islands	6,943	35.0%	65.0%	2.0%	56.0%	25.0%	17.0%
California State - Chico	16,630	45.0%	55.0%	3.0%	35.0%	44.0%	18.0%
California State - Dominguez Hills	17,763	35.0%	65.0%	11.0%	65.0%	6.0%	18.0%
California State - East Bay	14,641	39.0%	61.0%	9.0%	35.0%	16.0%	40.0%
California State - Fresno	25,341	40.0%	60.0%	3.0%	55.0%	18.0%	24.0%
California State - Fullerton	41,408	41.0%	59.0%	2.0%	46.0%	19.0%	33.0%
California State - Humboldt	6,431	41.0%	59.0%	3.0%	33.0%	45.0%	19.0%
California State - Long Beach	39,359	42.0%	58.0%	4.0%	45.0%	17.0%	34.0%
California State - Los Angeles	26,342	40.0%	60.0%	4.0%	69.0%	5.0%	22.0%
California State - Maritime Academy	907	81.0%	19.0%	2.0%	23.0%	46.0%	29.0%
California State - Monterey Bay	6,871	36.0%	64.0%	3.0%	51.0%	25.0%	21.0%
California State - Northridge	38,815	44.0%	56.0%	5.0%	51.0%	22.0%	22.0%
California State - Pomona	29,704	53.0%	47.0%	3.0%	49.0%	15.0%	33.0%
California State - Sacramento	31,451	43.0%	57.0%	6.0%	35.0%	26.0%	33.0%
California State - San Bernardino	19,404	37.0%	63.0%	5.0%	66.0%	12.0%	17.0%
California State - San Diego	35,578	43.0%	57.0%	4.0%	33.0%	34.0%	29.0%
California State - San Francisco	27,075	43.0%	57.0%	6.0%	34.0%	17.0%	43.0%
California State - San Jose	34,012	49.0%	51.0%	3.0%	28.0%	15.0%	54.0%
California State - San Luis Obispo	22,287	51.0%	49.0%	1.0%	18.0%	54.0%	27.0%
California State - San Marcos	14,643	39.0%	61.0%	3.0%	49.0%	27.0%	21.0%
California State - Sonoma	7,807	36.0%	64.0%	2.0%	35.0%	43.0%	20.0%
California State - Stanislaus	10,741	33.0%	67.0%	2.0%	57.0%	20.0%	21.0%
University of California System	**285,862**	**46.1%**	**53.9%**	**4.3%**	**23.0%**	**23.1%**	**49.5%**
University of California - Berkeley	42,327	47.6%	52.4%	4.0%	15.5%	25.2%	55.3%
University of California - Davis	39,074	39.6%	60.4%	3.8%	20.8%	24.7%	50.7%
University of California - Irvine	36,303	47.4%	52.6%	3.5%	25.7%	15.8%	55.0%
University of California - Los Angeles	44,589	43.8%	56.2%	5.7%	18.2%	27.8%	48.3%
University of California - Merced	9,018	47.4%	52.6%	6.7%	52.8%	9.4%	31.1%
University of California - Riverside	26,434	46.5%	53.5%	5.5%	36.6%	13.4%	44.5%
University of California - San Diego	39,576	50.6%	49.4%	2.9%	18.4%	20.5%	58.2%
University of California - San Francisco	3,201	35.7%	64.3%	7.9%	14.3%	29.9%	47.9%
University of California - Santa Barbara	26,179	45.2%	54.8%	4.0%	26.0%	31.6%	38.4%
University of California - Santa Cruz	19,161	51.6%	48.4%	4.5%	24.7%	31.1%	39.7%
NEW MEXICO	**44,534**	**42.5%**	**57.5%**	**2.5%**	**51.3%**	**30.1%**	**16.0%**
New Mexico State University	**22,360**	**42.0%**	**58.0%**	**2.6%**	**57.8%**	**27.0%**	**12.6%**
New Mexico State University	22,360	42.0%	58.0%	2.6%	57.8%	27.0%	12.6%
University of New Mexico	**22,174**	**43.0%**	**57.0%**	**2.4%**	**44.8%**	**33.3%**	**19.5%**
University of New Mexico	22,174	43.0%	57.0%	2.4%	44.8%	33.3%	19.5%

Table 4 (cont.)

University System / Institution Name	Campus Enrollment Demographic Characteristics, Fall' 2020						
	Enrollment	Male %	Female %	African American %	Hispanic %	White %	Other Groups %
TEXAS	**682,031**	**42.9%**	**57.1%**	**11.2%**	**36.2%**	**35.7%**	**17.0%**
North Texas University System	**47,036**	**43.8%**	**56.2%**	**16.3%**	**28.0%**	**39.8%**	**15.9%**
University of North Texas	40,653	45.0%	55.0%	15.0%	25.5%	42.5%	17.0%
University of North Texas at Dallas	4,164	32.6%	67.4%	28.9%	52.0%	13.7%	5.3%
University of North Texas Health Science Center at Fort Worth	2,219	38.7%	61.3%	6.9%	12.5%	43.8%	36.8%
Texas A&M University System.	**149,116**	**45.5%**	**54.5%**	**11.5%**	**32.2%**	**43.6%**	**12.7%**
Prairie View A&M University	9,248	33.4%	66.6%	86.0%	8.0%	1.5%	4.5%
Tarleton State University	14,022	36.6%	63.4%	9.8%	21.7%	63.2%	5.3%
Texas A&M International University	8,270	39.0%	61.0%	1.1%	92.4%	3.8%	2.7%
Texas A&M University	66,925	53.4%	46.6%	3.2%	22.7%	55.2%	18.9%
Texas A&M University–Central Texas	2,339	40.2%	59.8%	26.5%	25.4%	39.2%	8.8%
Texas A&M University–Commerce	11,624	40.3%	59.7%	20.8%	20.9%	43.7%	14.7%
Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi	10,820	39.1%	61.0%	6.1%	47.9%	37.2%	8.8%
Texas A&M University–Kingsville	6,915	49.3%	50.7%	4.8%	70.9%	14.9%	9.5%
Texas A&M University–San Antonio	6,741	36.7%	63.3%	6.7%	74.2%	14.0%	5.0%
Texas A&M University–Texarkana	2,161	37.4%	62.6%	21.3%	16.2%	53.4%	9.2%
West Texas A&M University	10,051	41.5%	58.5%	6.5%	28.7%	56.0%	8.8%
Texas State University System.	**86,956**	**39.1%**	**60.9%**	**16.2%**	**32.2%**	**44.4%**	**7.2%**
Lamar University	15,799	39.8%	60.2%	26.3%	22.2%	42.4%	9.1%
Sam Houston State University	21,650	37.1%	62.9%	18.6%	25.5%	48.9%	7.0%
Sul Ross State University	2,345	36.5%	63.5%	7.2%	55.3%	34.3%	3.2%
Texas State University	37,812	40.2%	59.8%	11.1%	38.7%	43.3%	6.9%
Lamar Institute of Technology (2-Year institute)	4,402	46.7%	53.3%	30.1%	22.6%	42.4%	4.9%
Lamar State College-Orange (2-Year institute)	2,382	32.9%	67.1%	18.2%	8.6%	70.6%	2.6%
Lamar State College-Port Arthur (2-Year institute)	2,566	42.5%	57.5%	31.1%	34.3%	27.4%	7.1%
Texas Tech University System.	**61,356**	**47.2%**	**52.8%**	**8.1%**	**28.2%**	**53.0%**	**10.7%**
Angelo State University	10,489	39.8%	60.2%	6.9%	37.1%	50.7%	5.2%
Midwestern State University	5,387	36.9%	63.1%	16.6%	22.0%	50.3%	11.1%
Texas Tech University	39,574	50.5%	49.5%	7.3%	26.7%	53.9%	12.1%
Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center	5,141	26.7%	73.3%	7.8%	20.4%	50.8%	21.0%
Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso	765	39.2%	60.8%	5.1%	47.6%	24.4%	22.9%
Texas Woman's University System.	**18,484**	**12.3%**	**87.7%**	**18.4%**	**27.9%**	**39.2%**	**14.5%**
Texas Woman's University	16,032	12.3%	87.7%	18.4%	27.9%	39.2%	14.5%
TWU T. Boone Pickens Institute of Health Sciences - Dallas Center	1,255	12.5%	87.5%	18.0%	27.1%	40.3%	14.6%
TWU Institute of Health Sciences - Houston Center	1,197	11.3%	88.7%	18.5%	27.6%	39.5%	14.4%
University of Houston System	**76,283**	**43.7%**	**56.3%**	**13.5%**	**38.2%**	**23.0%**	**25.3%**
University of Houston	47,060	48.2%	51.9%	11.4%	33.2%	23.0%	32.4%
University of Houston–Clear Lake	9,053	36.4%	63.6%	10.0%	39.7%	34.9%	15.4%
University of Houston–Downtown	15,239	37.6%	62.4%	20.9%	52.4%	13.7%	13.0%
University of Houston–Victoria	4,931	33.9%	66.1%	17.7%	38.6%	30.1%	13.6%
University of Texas System	**242,800**	**44.6%**	**55.4%**	**7.4%**	**45.8%**	**25.6%**	**21.3%**
The University of Texas at Arlington	42,733	38.8%	61.3%	15.5%	29.6%	31.2%	23.7%
The University of Texas at Austin	50,282	45.6%	54.5%	5.3%	26.1%	38.9%	29.7%
The University of Texas at Dallas	28,669	56.2%	43.8%	5.8%	14.9%	28.0%	51.3%
The University of Texas at El Paso	24,867	44.1%	55.9%	2.9%	82.8%	6.3%	8.0%
The University of Texas at San Antonio	34,402	47.9%	52.1%	9.7%	57.1%	22.2%	11.1%
The University of Texas at Tyler	9,408	37.6%	62.4%	11.8%	22.2%	55.4%	10.5%
The University of Texas Permian Basin	5,530	40.0%	60.0%	8.3%	49.1%	35.5%	7.2%
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley	32,220	40.3%	59.7%	0.8%	90.9%	3.2%	5.0%
The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center	2,299	48.6%	51.4%	3.5%	11.2%	28.7%	56.6%
The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston	3,314	28.8%	71.2%	8.6%	18.3%	45.3%	27.8%
The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston	5,317	30.0%	70.0%	10.9%	17.7%	34.7%	36.7%
The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio	3,383	38.0%	62.0%	4.8%	34.0%	38.9%	22.3%
The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center	376	22.9%	77.1%	5.6%	31.6%	28.2%	34.6%

Table 4 (cont.)

Sources:

Arizona University System (2022)	https://uoia.asu.edu/content/arizona-university-system
California State University System (2022)	https://www.calstate.edu/
New Mexico State University (2022)	https://nmsu.edu/
North Texas University System (2022)	https://www.untsystem.edu/
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University of California System (2022)	https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/
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University of Texas System (2022)	https://www.utsystem.edu/
US Census Bureau 2020. State visualization of key demographic trends from the 2020 C	https://www.census.gov/library/stories/state-by-state.html

Notes:

Other groups refers to: Native American, Asian, Pacific Islanders, Two or more, International , Unknown

APPENDIX B

Demographic Questionnaire

The Roles and Influence of U.S.-Mexico Borderlands Public University Board Systems on Student Diversity

Instructions

You are being asked to voluntarily participate in a research project. Your honest responses will provide valuable input to the study. Please ask the study researcher to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand.

For each question, please indicate the option with which you identify the most:

1) Gender Male ____ Female____ Other _____

2) Race

Non-Hispanic White	___
Hispanic, Latino	___
African American	___
Native American / Alaska Native	___
Asian	___
Multi race	___
Other	___

3) Age _____

4) Your current occupation _____

5) How many total years have you served on this board? _____

6) How many days per month do you dedicate to your work on the board? _____

7) How many years have you served as this board's Chair or Vice-Chair?_____

8) What is your highest academic degree earned? _____

9) Are you an alumnus of any of the institutions in your university system? _____

10) What System Institutions did you attend?

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

d) _____

11) Have you served on any other higher education boards previously? (i.e., State Higher Education board, a private or public college or university board, a public university system board? Yes _____ No _____

12) Are you currently serving on any other board? Yes _____ No _____

What type? Public _____ Private _____ Corporate _____ Not-For-Profit _____

13) How many total years have you served on any board (public or private) _____

Thank you for your participation

APPENDIX C
Interview Protocol and Specific Research Questions

Interview Questions	**Specific Research Question**
1. How does the board support implementation of student diversity policies?	
2. How does the board allocate financial resources for student diversity?	
3. How does the board include student diversity into their strategic plan?	
4. How does the board receive professional development about student diversity?	
5. How does the board make sure they hire chancellors or presidents that advance student diversity?	
6. How does the board make sure that it listens to all student voices?	
7. How does the board discuss student diversity in their meetings?	
8. How does the boars make sure that university admission policies advance student diversity?	
9. How does the board make sure that its universities are implementing the board's student diversity policies?	

10. How does the board establish specific benchmarks for student diversity?	
11. How does the board analyze campus data on student diversity?	
12. What else would you like to share about the board's role in student diversity?	

APPENDIX D
Invitation to Participate in Study (First email)

From: Dominguez, Daniel R.
To:
Subject: You are invited to participate in a research study: What are the roles and influence of U.S.-Mexico Borderlands public university board systems on student diversity?

Dear Regent xxx,
Chair of the Board of Regents of the XX University System

My name is Daniel Domínguez, and I am a doctoral candidate student at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) in the Educational Leadership and Administration program. As a former Student Regent at the University of Texas System Board of Regents (June 2019 – May, 2020), I had the privilege to serve and represent all University of Texas System students, lived a once-in-a-lifetime educational experience, and witnessed first-hand the very important work that Boards of Regents do on behalf of their system's campuses.

For my doctoral dissertation, I was inspired by the dedicated Regents I met and collaborated with. I am currently in the process of writing my doctoral dissertation and am collecting data for this purpose. My goal is to conduct research that will expand my understanding of the roles that Boards of public university systems along the U.S.-Mexico borderland have on student diversity, as well as understanding how boards' decisions and policies influence student diversity in their campuses. The attached letter provides additional information on this invitation.

As the current Chair of the Board of Regents of the XX University System, you have a unique perspective on the roles and influence that the board's policies can have on student diversity. Because of this privileged position, I am respectfully extending you an invitation to participate in my study by sharing your thoughts and lived experiences.

Your participation will consist of completing a brief demographic questionnaire, followed by a one-hour interview scheduled at your convenience. Ideally, the interview meeting will be held via an MS TEAMS video conference call. Alternatively, the meeting could also take place via telephone or in person if you prefer.

To confirm your participation, or if you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at 915-XXX-XXXX or email me at drdominguez@utep.edu .

I am looking forward to your response. Thank you for your time and overall consideration to my study.

Respectfully,

Daniel R. Domínguez
Doctoral Student

APPENDIX E
Reminder of Invitation to Participate in Study (Second email)

From: Dominguez, Daniel R.
To:
Subject: RE: You are invited to participate in a research study: What are the roles and influence of U.S.-Mexico Borderlands public university board systems on student diversity?

Dear Chair XXX,

Recently, you were contacted via email to request your participation in a doctoral dissertation research. You have not yet responded to the invitation, and I would like to respectfully extend a reminder that the invitation is still open to you. Please consider participating in this study.

With your expressed consent, I will proceed to send a link to a brief demographic questionnaire estimated to take no more than five minutes from your time. Upon completion, I will follow up via email to schedule the approximately one-hour interview at your convenience. This interview is the primary method of data collection for my dissertation research.

I appreciate your time and assistance in providing information and input that will help enhance the field of higher education board governance.

Sincerely,

Daniel R. Domínguez
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX F
Final Reminder of Invitation to Participate in Study (Third email)

From: Dominguez, Daniel R.
To:
Subject: Reminder: You are invited to participate in a research study: What are the roles and influence of U.S.-Mexico Borderlands public university board systems on student diversity?

Dear Chair XXX,

You are one of a small group of board chairs of university systems in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands who have been selected to provide input for my dissertation research. My study's window will be closing soon. Please consider participating in my study.

With your expressed consent, I will proceed to send a link to brief a demographic questionnaire estimated to take no more than five minutes of your time. Upon completion, I will follow up via email to schedule the approximately one-hour interview at your convenience. This interview is the primary method of data collection for my dissertation research.

I appreciate your time and assistance in providing information and input that will help enhance the field of higher education board governance.

Sincerely,

Daniel R. Domínguez
Doctoral Candidate

Vita

Daniel R. Domínguez was born and raised in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, México. He earned a Bachelor's degree in Accounting from the Instituto Tecnológico de Ciudad Juárez. After graduation, he went to work in the manufacturing industry for the next twenty-eight years. During the term of his employment, he enrolled in UTEP's College of Business in the Master of Science in Economics program, where he wrote a master's thesis on "Human Capital Investment in the Maquila Industry." A few years later, he returned to school and earned a Master of Business Administration degree from UTEP.

At the beginning of the 21st century, Dr. Domínguez migrated with his family to the United States. In the middle of the 2010 decade, he shifted his work interests from private industry to higher education. For the last eight years, he has been employed by UTEP as Director of General Accounting and Financial Reporting. In the summer of 2018, he enrolled in the Educational Leadership and Administration Doctoral program. During his student tenure, he received a one-year appointment from the Texas Governor to serve as Student Regent in the University of Texas System Board of Regents. In this position, Mr. Domínguez was honored to represent UTEP and the interests of 240,000 students statewide. This service experience inspired him to learn more about the influential work of boards of regents in their campus communities.

Dr. Dominguez's dissertation "Rising Responsiveness: The roles and influence of U.S.-Mexico borderland public university board leaders on student diversity" was supervised by Dr. Eduardo Arellano.

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