

Exploring Gender-Base Salary Disparities and Equities Among University Presidents

Authors : Daniel Barkley, Jianyi Zhu

Abstract : This study investigates base salary differentials and gender equity among university presidents across 427 U.S. colleges and universities. While endowments typically do not directly determine university presidents' base salaries, our analysis reveals a noteworthy pattern: endowments explain more than half of the variance in female university presidents' base salaries, compared to a mere 0.69 percent for males. Moreover, female presidents' base salaries tend to rise much faster than male base salaries with increasing university endowments. This disparate impact of endowments on base salaries implies an endowment threshold for achieving gender pay equity. We develop an analytical model predicting an endowment threshold for achieving gender equality and empirically estimate this equity threshold using data from over 427 institutions. Surprisingly, the fields of science and athletics have emerged as sources of gender-neutral base pay. Both male and female university presidents with STEM backgrounds command higher base salaries than those without such qualifications. Additionally, presidents of universities affiliated with Power 5 conferences consistently receive higher base salaries regardless of gender. Consistent with the theory of human capital accumulation, the duration of the university presidency incrementally raises base salaries for both genders but at a diminishing rate. Curiously, prior administrative leadership experience as a vice president, provost, dean, or department chair does not significantly influence base salaries for either gender. By providing empirical evidence and analytical models predicting an endowment threshold for achieving gender equality in base salaries, the study offers valuable insights for policymakers, university administrators, and other stakeholders. These findings hold crucial policy implications, informing strategies to promote gender equality in executive compensation within higher education institutions.

Keywords : higher education, endowments, base salaries, university presidents

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