Leader resignations: An examination of public communications patterns of American university presidents during high-profile crises

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I, Amanda Walker, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

American university presidents increasingly risk losing their jobs and the perils of an already challenging role may be elevated during crises. The convergence of a crisis and a president’s sudden abbreviated tenure can damage a university. Presidential crisis leadership involves communicating with anxious constituents eager to interpret ambiguous circumstances. In the modern digital communications environment, presidents communicate offline and online, with constituents who expect frequent, rapid, and timely information during crises. In response to increases in sudden presidential departure, higher education’s endemic crises, and the attention of news media and social media users to university crisis episodes, this study asks: when presidents resign during high-profile crises, what patterns can be found in pre-resignation communications? Uniquely, this empirical investigation was designed to generate new knowledge about abbreviated presidential tenure during university crises, in contrast to prior studies that examined abbreviated tenure and crisis leadership separately.

This research integrates case study methods and discourse analysis to examine public communications during crisis episodes ending in resignation, including media coverage, presidential statements, and social media responses. After conducting a pilot study, two high-profile 2018 crisis episodes involving presidential resignation were selected for investigation using an emergent, purposeful sampling technique.

Analyses yielded four overarching findings identified by conducting and comparing the two full cases. Constituents indirectly influence and also directly seek to influence the presidents, although sources of influence vary. Multiple constituents develop and share specific, public interpretations of presidential
actions and identities. Presidential relationships appear challenged in ways that have been found to contribute to abbreviated tenure. Presidents communicate infrequently, while minimal time elapses between critical statements from potentially influential constituents. Results of the study enabled the development of a preliminary theory of discursive university leadership during crisis, as well as produced implications for practicing leaders.
Impact statement

The results of this empirical study may be put to beneficial use both inside academia and in leadership practice. For academic research, this investigation contributes to emerging fields of enquiry, produces an original method for examining university leadership, and suggests avenues for future scholarship. For working university leaders, the study contributes a set of preliminary implications for practice.

For scholarly research, the knowledge, analysis, and insights produced and described below contribute to fields of study still limited in scope and depth. First, very few studies have examined presidential leadership when tenure is unexpectedly cut short. Second, more broadly, study of the presidency has been criticised for lacking rigour, often relying on the personal reflections of currently serving or former leaders, rather than empirical methods. Third, empirical investigations of university crisis leadership are similarly limited in number. Fourth, while communication has been identified as an important element of presidential leadership, investigation into discursive leadership within higher education has also been limited.

Also, this study incorporates two qualitative research approaches, case study methods and discourse analysis, thereby contributing a unique methodology for investigating leader resignations in crisis. The study is original not only in its investigation of the intersection of crisis leadership and abbreviated tenure, but also in its approach to examining the phenomenon by integrating discourse analysis with case study methods.

In addition to making original contributions to academic research, this study has the potential to be of benefit to practicing university presidents, their institutions,
the boards that hire, evaluate, and sometimes terminate presidents, and advisors working most closely with leadership. To complement study findings, a proposed theory of discursive university leadership in crisis appears in Chapter 9. Chapter 9 also includes preliminary implications for leadership practice in crisis, requiring further exploration and validation.

Impact may be brought through a combination of future engagement in scholarship, public engagement, and practical application. For example, scholarly impact may involve publishing the results of this study in peer-reviewed journals, presenting at academic conferences, and using the study as a basis for future academic research. Practical application and associated impact of study results may involve dissemination of preliminary implications for practice to professional organisations enabling presidential leadership or, more directly, to practicing higher education leaders. Public engagement may involve conference presentations or publication in periodicals where other authors similarly incorporate counsel for university leaders and governing boards.
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Chapter 1. Introduction
American university presidents risk losing their jobs. The university presidency may even be increasingly perilous. Presidents may be suddenly terminated or forced to resign from a post characterised as amongst the most challenging of leadership positions. In 2016, Selingo published the provocative article ‘The job nobody can seem to keep: College president’ in *The Washington Post* following Temple University President Neil Theobald’s abbreviated tenure (2013-2016) in America. In the article, Selingo (2016) itemises modern scenarios in which American university presidents, equivalent to vice chancellor, president, or provost in global settings, lost their jobs. A month after Selingo’s article, *Inside Higher Ed*’s Seltzer published ‘Universities struggle with spate of contested presidential ousters’, reporting: “This year has seen no shortage of public, controversial and often messy breakups between institutions and presidents who have dug in to try to keep their jobs…the different sides aren’t always seeing eye to eye. When they don’t, conflicts are bubbling over in very public, very sensational ways” (Seltzer, 2016). Moreover, in 2018, the outgoing University of Texas system head, who served as a military commander orchestrating special operations critical to American national security prior to assuming an academic leadership post, claimed that the university presidency is “the toughest job in the nation” (Ellis, 2018). Barden (2020), an experienced executive recruiter specialising in presidential appointments, even claims the presidency is "impossible". If the role of the contemporary university president is the “impossible” “job nobody can seem to keep” and is “the toughest” in America, what are the implications for universities and their leaders of this purported trend and the demands of the role?

In the United States, university presidents have lost their jobs during crises, which are defined as unexpected, disruptive episodes that threaten people,
property, and reputation (Zdziarski II et al., 2007). University crises originate in natural events, failure in institutional infrastructure, or in the actions of people inside or outside the university. For instance, natural disasters caused by extreme weather, wildfires, or flooding can damage physical infrastructure and threaten lives (Cowen, 2018). A natural occurrence, the 2020 global coronavirus pandemic forced every president to lead their institution in crisis (Inside Higher Ed & Hanover Research, 2020). University information technology systems are at risk of cyberattacks from hackers, who compromise confidential data and expose institutions to legal liability (McKenzie, 2019). Protests at universities staged by students, academic staff, or public citizens can turn violent (Jaschik, 2017b). Sexual misconduct perpetrated by university employees or students can result in lawsuits and widely-publicised trials (Thomason, 2018). Even a leader’s poorly chosen words may trigger a controversy that damages institutional and individual reputation while undermining a university’s future progress (Jaschik, 2016; Trachtenberg, Kauvar & Bogue, 2013).

After a president’s tenure is cut short in a crisis, governing boards appoint an interim leader (Tichenor, 2019), who must resolve the crisis, restore operations, and return the institution to a sense of stability and security (Sanaghan, Goldstein & Gaval, 2008). For some institutions, recovery after abbreviated presidential tenure challenges progress toward strategic goals (Eckel & Kezar, 2012; Esterberg & Wooding, 2012; McLaughlin, 1996a), mission fulfilment (Martin & Samels, 2004), and university community member morale (Basinger, 2001). These challenges may become more pronounced during or after crises. When a president’s sudden resignation and a crisis converge, negative consequences for universities may persist for months or even years.
Furthermore, American presidents increasingly manage crises under intense, often public scrutiny from the many constituents they are expected to lead and to influence (Cowen, 2018). Constituents may be defined as all people represented by a president, similar to the constituency of an elected politician (Anon, nd, 'constituency, n.'), including individuals and groups served by a university, supporting a university, or invested in future university direction. The broad range of constituents influencing presidents include governing board members, academic staff, elected officials, students and their families, other university staff, alumni, donors, journalists, community leaders, and any concerned citizen who views universities as integral to the fabric of society. Intense constituent scrutiny during crisis can be enhanced by news media attention and social media commentary, at times rapidly propelling stories into the national spotlight (Gigliotti, 2020).

When presidents leave unexpectedly, journalists may sensationalise presidential transitions (Ashburn, Leubsdorf & Strout, 2006; Fain, 2006; Selingo, 2016; Seltzer, 2016b). Stories involving sex (Savage, 2019; Haag & Tracy, 2018), power (Green, 2018), sport (Addo, 2015b), violence (Hanlon, 2017), and extravagant lifestyles (Manning, 2019) sell, as news media corporations cover events that increase monetised views (Filloux, 2012), and articles involving the sudden departure during crisis of those to whom we entrust our cultural and intellectual institutions attract attention (Gigliotti, 2020). University crises may be “high-profile”: when events are covered by national, mainstream media, thereby exposing a university to many readers, viewers, or listeners who learn of crisis events. In some high-profile crises, this enhanced scrutiny and intense pressure may even prompt presidents to resign abruptly, abbreviating what might have been a complete, successful period of service.
Purpose and significance of the study

In this study, I explore and analyse episodes during which presidents resign in university crises using publicly available communications. In communications, presidents influence possible interpretations of their actions and perspectives and constituents respond by affirming, negotiating, refuting, re-interpreting, or negating presidential leadership. This study contributes to research on the university presidency, specifically adding to emergent and yet limited areas of enquiry: sudden presidential resignation, university crisis leadership, and discursive presidential leadership. This empirical investigation is designed to generate new knowledge about abbreviated presidential tenure during university crises, whereas prior studies have examined abbreviated tenure and crisis leadership separately. Furthermore, the analysis points to preliminary implications for practice, which, once validated by further research, may aid leaders increasingly challenged by the pressures of frequent, even overlapping university crises. My research design, involving a multiple case study method incorporating discourse analysis, was developed to ensure robust study operations and to understand patterns emerging in public discourse in each of the episodes examined, thereby also contributing to discursive leadership studies.

study significance for empirical research: Abbreviated presidential tenure, crisis leadership, and discursive leadership

This study builds knowledge about university presidents who are unable to complete their tenures. Empirical research on abbreviated presidential tenures in higher education is emerging (Cafley, 2015; Harris & Ellis, 2018; Longmire, 2010; McNeal, 2009). Empirical studies investigating length of tenure have also been defined as “sparse and sporadic” (Reid, 2018, p. 11) and lacking in cohesiveness
(McNaughtan, 2017). Few studies published to date have focused on possible factors and conditions that influence unexpected resignation or termination using qualitative methods, as described in Chapter 3.

Second, this examination also adds to another emerging area of scholarly investigation: the study of crisis leadership in higher education. Gruber and colleagues (2015) identify a lack of evidence about the influence of leadership in crisis within published research. Fortunato and colleagues (2018) suggest that empirical research examining multiple crisis situations and their unique features advances the study of crisis leadership. This aligns with my decision to use multi-case study research methods incorporating discourse analysis. Gigliotti (2020), in the recently published *Crisis leadership in higher education: Theory and practice*, asserts that research on higher education crisis leadership is “scarce” (p. 6).

Third, I examined presidential leadership in crisis by investigating public discourse generated by both presidents and constituents, and as such contribute to discursive leadership studies. Enactment of leadership using discourse has also not been fully examined in the mainstream leadership literature (Iverson, Allan & Gordon, 2006) and few studies analyse how leadership is achieved through discourse (Clifton, 2012), especially online. Discursive leadership as a concept and approach to understanding leadership has, however, gained momentum in the last decade (Schnurr & Schroeder, 2018). Schnurr and Schroeder’s (2018) call for discursive leadership researchers to employ methods commonly used in applied linguistics, such as discourse analysis, to facilitate investigation of “how leadership is done in and through discourse” (p. 2) aligns with my choice to incorporate discourse analysis into case study methods to examine pre-resignation communications. Although researchers consistently identify the importance of leading by communicating with constituents during
university crises (Abraham, 2014; Bataille & Cordova, 2014; Brennan & Stern, 2017; Genshaft, 2014; Gigliotti, 2017, 2020; Gigliotti & Fortunato, 2017; Hincker, 2014; Menghini, 2014; O’Rourke, 2014; Parrot, 2014), discourse generated by leaders during crises have not been fully investigated. The dearth of evidence-based knowledge about leadership discourse in crisis may be holding back the development of effective university crisis leadership practices in the modern era of widely, rapidly disseminated digital communications. Equally, constituent communication in response to a crisis remains a topic not yet considered comprehensively (Menghini, 2014). This investigation therefore contributes to the university crisis leadership evidence base by investigating leadership communication and constituent response in public discourse, especially as it emerges and is circulated via online platforms such as news media sites and social media.

Study significance: Preliminary implications for practice

By generating knowledge about leadership and communication in crisis through this examination of abbreviated tenure, I develop preliminary implications for leadership practice, which, once validated through further research into additional cases and by using alternative research methods, may assist working leaders at risk of abbreviated tenure during crises. News media commentators (Selingo, 2016; Seltzer, 2016b) and scholars (Harris & Ellis, 2018) suggest that cases of abbreviated presidential tenure are increasing: therefore, the risk of failing to persist in a leadership role may be elevated for contemporary presidents. Notably, prior claims also asserted that the frequency of presidential tenures unexpectedly cut short were increasing (Ashburn et al., 2006; Fain, 2006; Padilla, 2004; Padilla et al., 2000). Determining if abbreviated tenures are now more prevalent is challenging. Regardless of the frequency of abbreviated tenure, each
presidency abruptly cut short before its anticipated conclusion carries the potential to harm individuals and institutions.

The American university system faces unprecedented presidential vacancies and increased turnover, an “epidemic” according to one former university president (Duderstadt, 2007, p. 115, 130). A robust pipeline of candidates to fill the coming vacancies may not exist (Selingo, Chheng & Clark, 2017), thereby making my study of presidential leadership and transition timely. More than half of currently serving presidents plan to step down by 2022 (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Only 24 percent would consider another presidency and another 24 percent of presidents report their universities have a succession plan in place (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Candidates who might traditionally have advanced to the presidency may be uninterested due to the pressures associated with being a president, such as the need to raise money and produce results with fewer resources in an increasingly competitive landscape (Martin & Samels, 2004). The challenge of leading during a crisis may be more pronounced when a president lacks experience. Institutions in distress may struggle to attract candidates for the presidency (Seltzer, 2016b), especially following abbreviated presidential tenure occurring during high-profile crises. The seemingly endemic crises in higher education (Gigliotti, 2020; Gigliotti & Fortunato, 2017) and associated risks of the role (Barden, 2020) may diminish the pool of experienced applicants open to assuming the presidency. Future presidents with less experience may be ill-equipped to navigate crisis. As such, less-experienced presidents may also be at greater risk of leaving suddenly: a threat to institutional stability which carries the potential to undermine progress toward university goals.

Presidents are, at times, appointed from outside academe. When presidents lead academic institutions for the first time after experience outside the sector, they
may encounter “heavy weather” (Bok, 2013, p. 49). Their ways of working may not reflect the norms of academe, such as top-down decision making in private industry, which is at odds with expectations of university constituents who assume they will be consulted about institutional decisions (Azziz et al., 2019).

From 2006 to 2011, the percentage of university presidents whose immediate prior position was outside higher education increased from 13 to 20 percent (Cook, 2012), although this dropped in 2016 to 15 percent (Gagliardi et al., 2017). This decline corresponded with an increase in the percentage of serving presidents whose immediate prior position had been another university presidency (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Governing boards may seek entrepreneurial leaders with experience managing large, complex businesses and generating revenue (Pierce, 2011), thereby leading them to hire presidents with records of success in government or private industry. Presidents from outside academe may serve out successful presidential tenures, but they may also struggle to adapt to university culture (Bok, 2013). The risk of abbreviated tenure may increase as external presidents may be critiqued for espousing leadership techniques considered incompatible with academic culture (Jaschik, 2016a; Woodhouse, 2015), such as acting quickly without consultation or viewing the university as a business rather than an intellectual, cultural, and moral social institution.

Furthermore, the need for knowledge about presidential leadership in times of crisis is pressing due to numerous and often irreconcilable expectations and demands made on presidents by their constituents (McLaughlin, 1996b), and increasing associated risk of public criticism. Now, critique will likely be shared online as it has become more permissible to comment on the actions, attributes, or behaviours of other people on the Internet. Individuals appear to express criticism and issue personal attacks online in ways they may not in person. Users
may harass others or advance unsubstantiated, even cruel, stories (Stein, 2016). In universities, it has long been understood that gaining constituent support is a necessary component of effective leadership (Birnbaum, 1992a). Leadership in an era of social media may become increasingly difficult when a president experiences harassment, criticism, or threats online. When presidential decisions and actions are interpreted and recounted via the Internet in ways that provoke conflict or sow distrust, a president’s ability to maintain support may be diminished (Gardner, 2016a; Zaiontz, 2015).

My study is also important due to a paradox: presidents may be unable to complete a contract even while succeeding. Prior to the abbreviated end of a presidency, some constituents may perceive a president as meeting or exceeding expectations. Abbreviated tenures may occur due to error or misconduct, but abbreviated tenures also occur in the absence of non-performance or egregious acts (Trachtenberg et al., 2013). Leaders may be scapegoats for problems as constituents grasp for understanding during confusing and ambiguous circumstances (Boggs & Smith, 1997; Coombs, 2019; Kezar et al., 2006). As such, constituents may blame university presidents for institutional crises that have little to do with presidential actions or competencies.

**Presidents resigning during crisis and communications: Concepts defined**

Designed to investigate sudden presidential departure during crisis in the modern era of rapid digital communication, this study explores the question: when presidents resign during high-profile crises, what patterns can be found in pre-resignation communications? Digital communications, including social and mainstream media, may significantly influence university leadership in crisis by amplifying events and allowing for unofficial interpretations of actions, decisions,
and statements to be shared widely and quickly online. Exploring digital communication gathers evidence of patterns when crisis and presidential resignation occur simultaneously. To support the study design and fully explore presidential abbreviated tenure during crisis, next I define and discuss concepts in the research question: presidents, resignation, crisis, and communications.

**Presidents and leadership**

**Theory of discursive leadership**

This thesis examines crisis leadership through the lens of public communications. In anticipation of in-depth exploration of the American university presidency (Chapter 2), I draw from discursive leadership theory definitions, which inform my study and through which I investigate presidential leadership. I selected this leadership theory due to my interest in leadership communication and constituent response in crisis. Discursive leadership theory and research attends to organisational discourse and the social, linguistic, and cultural dimensions of leadership (Fairhurst, 2007). As such, communication is central to discursive leadership studies (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014). Researchers interested in this type of leadership analyse communications to examine and to build knowledge of leadership in context (Fairhurst, 2007). Fairhurst’s (2007) *Discursive leadership*, considered to be the foundational work in the field (Schnurr & Schroeder, 2018), defines discursive leadership as follows:

> First, leadership is a process of influence and meaning management among actors that advances a task or goal. Second, leadership is an attribution made by followers or observers. Third, the focus is on leadership process, not on leader communication alone…Finally, leadership as influence and meaning management need not be performed by only one individual appointed to a given

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**Research question:**

When **presidents** resign during high-profile crises, what patterns can be found in pre-resignation communications?
role; it may shift and distribute itself among several organizational [sic] members (p. 6).

Fairhurst's definition signals that studies of discursive leadership are not wholly focused on leaders, but rather conceptualise leadership as an ongoing, relational process. Through relationships, leaders communicate to influence interpretation (Clifton, 2012; Hosking, 1997; Uhl-Bien, 2006; Wood, 2005). Leadership, therefore, is not a trait or characteristic inherent in an individual, but emerges through exchanges between leaders and constituents (Walker & Aritz, 2014). Leadership is not static, but rather created and recreated through communications grounded in interpersonal relationships (Goffee & Jones, 2006; Ruben, Lisi & Gigliotti, 2017). This perpetual process of co-creation involves leaders and other actors, rendering the enactment of leadership fragile and unstable as it depends on interpersonal relationships and is generated in part by discourse.

As suggested by Fairhurst’s (2007) definition above, relationships are necessary for the successful enactment of discursive leadership, a “process of influence and meaning management among actors” (p. 6). This is especially true in universities, where presidents may have the structural authority to act, but relationships can also make it both possible and difficult for presidents to lead. Sanaghan and colleagues (2008), who identify relationship building as a primary concern for presidents, find that interpersonal relationships significantly influence a president’s success or failure. Fisher, Tack, and Wheeler (1988) also assert that productive, responsive relationships with diverse constituents are critical for presidential success. Bornstein (2003) observes that presidential legitimacy is built on developing and sustaining relationships of trust and influence. Presidents need strategic and mutually supportive connections with constituents throughout
the university community and beyond (American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), 2016; Sanaghan et al., 2008). This requires presidents to sustain attention to constituents in real life and online, realised in part through communication involving attempts to influence and to interpret.

As discursive leaders, presidents must develop mutually influential relationships with not one but many constituents and groups. Externally, presidents engage governing board members (AASCU, 2016; Sanaghan et al., 2008), elected political officials (AASCU, 2016; Duderstadt, 2000; Kezar, 2014; Kirp, 2003), corporate leaders (AASCU, 2016; Duderstadt, 2000; Kirp, 2003), news media journalists (Sanaghan et al., 2008), alumni (AASCU, 2016; Duderstadt, 2000; Lombardi, 2013), donors (AASCU, 2016; Kirp, 2003), philanthropic foundations (Duderstadt, 2000; Kezar, 2014), and community members (Duderstadt, 2000).

Inside universities, presidents relate to academic staff (AASCU, 2016; Duderstadt, 2000; Lombardi, 2013; Sanaghan et al., 2008), senior leaders (Sanaghan et al., 2008), other staff, and students (AASCU, 2016; Duderstadt, 2000; Kirp, 2003; Lombardi, 2013). Constituent support (Birnbaum, 1992a) and satisfaction (Bogue, 1994) have been identified as proxy measures of presidential success. Furthermore, the critical need to establish, nurture, and sustain relationships may be explicitly incorporated into presidential performance reviews (Morrill, 2010a).

**Resignation, a type of abbreviated tenure**

My investigation focuses on presidential communications and constituent responses occurring during the two weeks prior to presidential resignation or the “pre-resignation

**Research question:**

When presidents resign during high-profile crises, what patterns can be found in pre-resignation communications?
phase”. In Chapter 3, I describe and synthesise previously published research on sudden presidential departure. I define abbreviated tenure as the end of a president’s tenure when the leader resigns or is terminated prior to the anticipated conclusion of the president’s employment contract. Resignation occurs when a president initiates the end of tenure by giving notice to their employer, either a governing board or university system leader, of intent to resign immediately or at a specified or yet to be negotiated date. Resignation may appear voluntary, but may actually be involuntary if a governing board asks a president to resign in lieu of termination (Padilla, 2004).

**Crises**

To examine abbreviated presidential tenure in crisis, I briefly define and discuss university crisis characteristics, impacts, phases, and types, as well as current knowledge of university crisis leadership. Next, I identify the crisis phase selected for this study and my rationale. Finally, I describe three university crisis types and justify the type selected for this study: crises caused by the actions of people.

**Characteristics of university crises**

Organisational crises are “low probability/high consequence events that threaten the most fundamental goals of an organization [sic]” (Weick, 1988, p. 305). A crisis involves systems breakdowns that stress and challenge people and organisations (Perry, 2007). Coombs (2019) defines crisis as “the perceived violation of salience [sic] stakeholder expectations that can create negative outcomes for stakeholders and/or the organization [sic]” (p. 16).
In the university setting, a crisis has been defined as “an event, which is often sudden or unexpected, that disrupts the normal operations of the institution or its educational mission and threatens the well-being of personnel, property, financial resources, and/or reputation of the institution” (Zdziarski II, 2006, p. 5). Defining features of a university crisis include unpredictable events (Gigliotti & Fortunato, 2017; Rollo & Zdziarski II, 2007), threat of harm to the well-being of people (Gigliotti, 2020; Gigliotti & Fortunato, 2017; Rollo & Zdziarski II, 2007), and a need for quick response (Gigliotti, 2017, 2020; Rollo & Zdziarski II, 2007).

Crisis impacts on universities and constituents
Crises impact universities in significant ways (Gigliotti & Fortunato, 2017), potentially causing damage to institutional reputation (Gigliotti, 2017, 2020; Gigliotti & Fortunato, 2017; O’Neill, 2019; O’Rourke, 2014; Parrot, 2014) and financial sustainability (Gigliotti, 2017, 2020; Gigliotti & Fortunato, 2017; Parrot, 2014). Crises disrupt operations (Gigliotti, 2017; Rollo & Zdziarski II, 2007) and university performance, often increasing liability (O’Neill, 2019) and undermining institutional values (Gigliotti & Fortunato, 2017).

Crisis phases
Organisational crises involve three phases: pre-crisis, crisis events, and post-crisis (Coombs, 2019). The pre-crisis phase involves detecting signs of a coming crisis (Coombs, 2019; Fink, 1986; Mitroff, 1994), preparing for crises (Coombs, 2019), and crisis prevention (Coombs, 2019; Mitroff, 1994). The crisis event phase involves an initial trigger that begins the crisis (Coombs, 2019; Fink, 1986), coupled with the recognition amongst leaders or constituents that a crisis is occurring (Coombs, 2019), and ending when a crisis is contained (Coombs, 2019; Mitroff, 1994). After a crisis, leaders take steps to ensure the crisis does not resurface (Coombs, 2019), learn from the crisis to prepare for the next crisis
(Coombs, 2019; Mitroff, 1994), and manage and foster positive impressions and healing amongst constituents (Coombs, 2019). Higher education crisis research adopts the crisis phases defined in the organisational management literature, while problematising the interpretation of crises as linear, with coherent beginnings and endings: “they [crises phases] provide a coherent ordering of crisis moments; yet, crises, by their very nature are unpredictable” (Gigliotti, 2020, p. 26). This study focuses on the crisis event phase, once a crisis may be considered underway, but prior to crisis resolution.

**University crisis types defined**

Crisis situations common to higher education often arise due to environmental causes, facility failure or malfunction, or human action or error (Bataille & Cordova, 2014a; Gigliotti, 2017; Zdziarski II, Rollo & Dunkel, 2007) (Table 1). One type of crisis carries additional risk for a university’s public profile: organisational management and leadership researchers suggest that crises caused by the actions of people are more likely to damage an institution’s reputation as constituents view this crisis type as avoidable (Lerbinger, 1997; Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). Mitroff (2001), for example, asserts: “human-caused crises are not inevitable. They do not need to happen. For this reason, the public is extremely critical of those organizations [sic] that are responsible for their occurrence” (p. 6).

In this study of presidential resignation in crisis, I analyse episodes in which crises are caused by the actions or errors of people due to the potential for increased risk of reputational damage and associated, heightened public pressure on leaders. In this type of crisis, constituents may hold university leaders accountable (Menghini, 2014) because circumstances may be interpreted as preventable (Lerbinger, 1997). Crises caused by human action are especially
Table 1: University Crisis Types and Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crisis Type</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>“…any event or situation that originates with the environment or nature” (p. 40)</td>
<td>• Earthquake&lt;br&gt;• Flood&lt;br&gt;• Hurricane&lt;br&gt;• Pandemic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility</td>
<td>“…any event or situation that originates in a facility or structure” (p. 41).</td>
<td>• Building fire&lt;br&gt;• Power outage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human</td>
<td>“…any event or situation that originates with or is initiated by human beings, whether through human error or conscious act” (p. 42).</td>
<td>• Accidents&lt;br&gt;• Criminal acts&lt;br&gt;• Free speech activity&lt;br&gt;• Mental health incidents&lt;br&gt;• Reputational crises</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Potent for university presidents today as reputational threats to institutions may also be more quickly and easily exposed on social media (Gruber et al., 2015). Digital communication presents new risks for university leaders facing crises because stories about crisis events and leadership actions can be rapidly and extensively shared online (Gigliotti, 2020). As such, leadership response and the interpretation of that response to human-caused crises can be especially important (Brennan & Stern, 2017).

Presidential leadership during university crises

Contemporary university presidents often lead during crises (Hodge-Clark et al., 2019; MacTaggart, 2019) as crises are endemic and frequent (Gigliotti, 2020; Gigliotti & Fortunato, 2017). Due to the breadth and types of activities occurring at universities, such as students living in residential accommodation and political activity, crisis risk may be even greater in higher education than in other industries (Sanaghan et al., 2008). Therefore, a critical presidential skill has become leading an institution during and after a crisis (MacTaggart, 2020a; 2020b). Crisis leadership will likely increase in importance as the demands of the presidency continue to evolve (McDavis, Schwartz & Trotta, 2020).
Constituents assigning blame to crisis leaders

Individuals subjectively identify responsibility during and after negative events (Weiner, 1986), often blaming leaders. Individuals tend to believe that outcomes are attributable to identifiable causes, for instance, other people (Hunt, 1984). Organisational outcomes are generally attributed to individual actions even if no causal relationship is discernible (Pfeffer, 1977). By associating causes and perceived outcomes, constituents reinforce the widely held view that events are indeed controllable by people. Blame may be reinforced by the news media (An, Gower & Cho, 2011) as journalists report or, at times, suggest causal relationships between individuals and events in news story plotlines. In uncertain situations like crises, individuals, often out of fear or discomfort, feel a greater need to regain control, increasing the likelihood of associating an individual’s actions with an outcome (Pfeffer, 1977). Coombs, who investigates and publishes on crisis leadership in higher education (2008) and other organisational settings (1998; 2006; 2013), defines this tendency, called attribution, as the extent to which constituents place blame on an organisation for a crisis event. In higher education, Brennan and Stern (2017) also find that reputational damage may lead observers to place blame on a president or university executive team for mishandling a crisis.

Presidential relationships in crisis

During times of crisis, relationships are especially important. Crises demand that presidents engage frequently with constituents (Fortunato et al., 2018) and maintain social ties. Coombs (2019) defines relationships in crisis management as the dependence and connectedness of two or more people. Dependence is necessary for a university navigating crises to ensure mutual support and understanding. In a university crisis, interpersonal relationships can be strained.
(Varma, 2011) and threatened (Gigliotti & Fortunato, 2017). Crises may ensue if constituencies perceive presidents are neglecting their relationships. For example, academic staff who feel their views have been disregarded during strategic planning or students experiencing racially motivated harassment who perceive leaders to be unresponsive may prompt crises. To lead in a crisis, presidents’ understanding of constituent perspective and needs (Gigliotti & Fortunato, 2017) necessitates thoughtful, ongoing relational engagement, beginning prior to a crisis, continuing during a crisis, and sustaining after normal operations resume.

**Communications**

This section discusses my understanding of and approach to communication and briefly introduces discourse, which is further defined in Chapter 4. Communication may be defined as talk, or conversation, and text. Described by Gee (2014c), communication is oral as it is produced in conversation:

Oral language is not just a set of conventions for how to mean with words. It is also a tool for having conversations. Conversation is a turn-taking system. When we speak we design what we say in anticipation of a response. When we get a response, we design what we say next with due regard for the response we just got. Our listeners do the same as they engage with us. We each take our turns. We each shape what we say based on the responses we seek, anticipate, or actually get. In the end, conversation in language is co-constructed, co-designed, and performed collaboratively. Conversation is the product of “us”, not just “I” as an isolated individual. It is like a dance. (pp. 6-7).

Gee (2014c) also defines another form of communication, writing. Writing involves text that is distinct from conversation, but similar in its anticipation of reader response. Also, Gee (2014c) notes some digital communication exchanges approximate oral speech:
Unlike speech, writing ("literacy") is not good for conversational turn taking. Writing is responsive in the sense that writers must anticipate and hope to shape the reader's response. But writers do not and cannot respond back to the reader's response while the reader is reading. Letters are a form of conversation, but they are slow and they seriously constrain the range of responses that can be displayed. Well, this was all true for most of the history of writing. But, perhaps, not anymore. Text messaging and some other forms of social media are quick turn-taking systems. In text messaging, we anticipate, shape, and respond to responses and, in the act, together co-shape, co-design, co-construct what we say (p. 7).

Communication may, therefore, involve quick or delayed responses. Digital exchanges may resemble oral conversation in which speakers co-construct what is said. Communication may be synchronous, occurring in real time and eliciting immediate response, such as oral conversation or even online chat, which may mirror the tempo of conversation. Communication may also be asynchronous, or not coinciding in time (Anon, nd, 'asynchronous, adj.'), involving delays between speaking or writing and response, such as when a letter, document, email, or social media post is read some time after being sent or shared. Communication incorporates words, phrases, and sentences, such as the words used in oral statements, written letters, or the text of social media posts.

**Computer-Mediated Communications (CMC)**

In this study, I collected and analysed a form of communication, Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), defined by Herring and Androutsopoulos (2015) as text-based communication occurring via the Internet including but not limited to email, blogs, microblogs, and news feeds with comment features. Originally produced as typed or read text using computers, CMC now incorporates multi-modal features such as audio, video, and graphics (Herring, 2018) (Figure 1). I selected text-based CMC to analyse in this study due to its influence on and importance during crisis, including its potential to inform or misinform constituents about crisis events and leadership actions. Open access
to digital communication tools and the speed of information dissemination increase the possibility of and the need for rapid communication from institutions and their leaders during crises (Brown, Brown & Billings, 2015; Men & Stacks, 2014; Schultz, Utz & Goritz, 2011; Veil, Buehner & Palenchar, 2011).

Individuals impacted by or observing a crisis interpret ambiguous and uncertain circumstances rapidly and at times inaccurately. Online communications that influence shared understanding are becoming especially critical during crisis situations (Fortunato et al., 2018). Constituents who actively construct and circulate interpretations of crisis events online via CMC may directly or indirectly contribute to the unfolding of a university crisis episode (Gigliotti, 2020).

**Figure 1: Multi-Modal Computer-Mediated Communication**

![Diagram of Computer-Mediated Communication](image)

*Figure 1: CMC defined as multi-modal. Source: Herring, 2018*

**Computer-Mediated Communications and social networks**

CMC creates connections between users as they enact relationships through online social networks (Zappavigna, 2012), sharing content, interacting with other users, and collaborating (Gnach, 2018). Omori (2018) describes social networks as: “Web-based networks created by a variety of individuals and organizations
[sic] accessed through social network Web-based services such as Facebook and Instagram….Other popular social networking sites include Twitter, Google+, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, Vine, and Tumblr”. The most prominent social media sites attract millions of global users (Page, 2018). Users produce interpersonal meaning when they share information or affirm mutual values with people in their online networks, which build or maintain social bonds. Gnach (2018) asserts: “The exchange and discourse between members of communities can be seen as a constant co-construction process of meaning, which leads to a new perception of social realities” (p. 190). Therefore, social networks structurally and functionally produce online relationships and reproduce offline relationships, while shaping individual and collective perceptions of social reality. CMC is unique in that it may be immediately accessible by users who respond and contribute new content or interpretations as facilitated by digital platforms. The social world as created online is also persistent as it continues to be available for review or response after a communication is produced. As it functions, online communications can build the social world quickly, dynamically, and persistently. Social networks, according to van Dijk (2012), not just generate the social world, but may even form a new way of organising society: “…with an infrastructure of social and media networks that characterizes [sic] its mode of organization [sic] at every level: individuals, community/organizational [sic] and societal. Increasingly, these networks link every unit or part of this society (individuals, groups, and organizations [sic])” (p. 24).

Social media platforms produce and reproduce interpersonal relationships between people in a social network (Herring & Androuutsopoulos, 2015). Online content is generated in this network while communal attention may be directed to a message or series of messages (Zappavigna, 2012). Twitter, for example, a
micro-blogging platform for sharing news articles or other websites, allows users to post brief commentary or opinions (Bouvier, 2015). Micro-blog posts to Twitter are called tweets. Twitter users, for instance, “follow” other users, who read, share, and comment on tweets in their network. John’s (2012) qualitative study of the concept of ‘sharing’ on social media yields three primary meanings: a) sharing as data transfer, time-sharing, or file-sharing, b) sharing as the distribution of digital content such as links, images, or videos, and c) sharing as a form of giving or selflessness:

First, the notion of sharing is tightly interwoven with the history of electronic computing, from time-sharing through to file-sharing. As such, it was a term that was known by and very much available to developers of SNSs [social network sites], who were certainly not the first to talk about transfers of data and information in terms of sharing.

Second…Sharing on SNSs involves the distribution of digital content in the form of links, photos, video clips and more. In this sense, I share something by letting someone else have it as well…

The third part of the explanation for the spread of the notion of sharing lies in its positive connotations of equality, selflessness and giving, in combination with its resonance with what is viewed as the proper mode of communication between intimates. In brief, sharing is associated with positive social relations, as expressed through the popular phrase, ‘sharing and caring’, which has been appropriated by SNSs to infuse their services with the positive implications of that term.

Social network users may share content by tagging posts so other users may easily find them. For example, tweets may include hashtags, or the symbol “#” prior to a word or words, which enable users to search for coded content and find opinions relating to a particular topic, as well as find other users sharing the same sentiment (Zappavigna, 2012, 2018).

As Internet users share and communicate, they connect online with individuals with whom they may not have interacted directly (Zappavigna, 2012). For
example, Facebook users “friend” other users, thereby linking to other people in communities that may be loosely or tightly affiliated (Georgalou, 2017). Social media produces “ambient affiliation”, or social bonding through language, especially on sites like Twitter (Zappavigna, 2012). As in real life, online interpersonal relationships may have varying degrees of closeness or distance and formality or informality. Social media is often structured around already existing social ties, such as family, friends, and colleagues (Georgalou, 2017).

Social ties between Internet users are therefore made, affirmed, or reaffirmed when people share content, acknowledge the content of others, and engage in dialogue about topics of mutual interest.

Of course, interpersonal relationships and social networks can also be disrupted and damaged through online exchanges or sharing that generates discord and fosters polarisation. Not all social connections produced via the Internet are affirming. Online platforms carry the potential for harmful interactions. Many social media users operate anonymously, which may reduce inhibitions and increase the likelihood of harassment (Crystal, 2011). The anonymity afforded by the Internet often allows users to share disturbing content without the worry of personal identification or retribution (Nagle, 2017). Fuchs (2017) highlights social media’s capacity to facilitate group mobilisation to achieve negative outcomes: “the collective intelligence and activity of cultural communities and fandom can easily turn into a fascist mob” (p. 73). Ill-intended social media use can suppress or erase certain voices. Voices of dissent and of individuals from traditionally marginalised communities may be targeted on the Internet.

As universities—and the nation—continue to become increasingly diverse, nationalism and racial tensions are rising (Douglas & Shockley, 2017). In America’s increasingly polarised society, the Internet offers a new environment in
which people express hatred motivated by fear of different ideas, identities, and values divergent from their own or an idealised norm. Use of the Internet as a platform to spread hate and bigotry may be especially potent for university presidents leading in contemporary crises involving activism and social unrest (Gardner, 2016a).

Even so, social media has made public communication participatory and widened access (Gnach, 2018), to some extent. Online networks can give voice to those who previously did not have access to the means of disseminating their ideas widely and as such many more people are now visibly and publicly creating the social world using CMC. Although, different users have differential capacities for influence. New platforms enable individuals and groups to advance perspectives and socio-political agendas (Chiluwa, 2015; Nagle, 2017). Online social tools have virtually eliminated the costs associated with collective action and reduced the time it takes for groups to cohere, albeit loosely, or to mobilise around a common cause (Shirky, 2008). However, despite easy access to online communication platforms, equipment needed to communicate may still be prohibitively expensive for some groups. Internet-based content production remains very concentrated amongst a relatively small number of users and media corporations and as such social media reproduces networks that privilege some voices over others. Fuchs (2017) suggests that “not all voices have the same power and that produced content and voices are frequently marginalized [sic] because visibility is a central resource in contemporary culture that powerful actors, such as media corporations, can buy” (p. 74).

Despite the concentration of online power, authority on the Internet mimics and expands real-life fragility. Users often engage sceptically online, viewing messages as opinion rather than fact (Bouvier, 2015). "Fake news", as it is
labelled, or news articles intentionally written, posted, and circulated that are false spread via social media can mislead users (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Berghel, 2017). “Bots”, or automated social media accounts, may spread disinformation for the purpose of exercising political or social influence (Gorwa & Guilbeault, 2020). While intentional attempts to misinform or distract persist, social media users may engage and disengage sporadically, without sustaining their attention, focus, or involvement in a topic (Zappavigna, 2012). Scepticism, the fragility of authority, and sporadic user engagement challenge formal and informal leaders to develop and sustain influence online.

**Computer-Mediated Communications and the news media**
Since the widespread adoption of Facebook (2004) and Twitter (2006) (Carlson, 2010, 2011), news media outlets have increasingly established digital platforms and used social media channels to disseminate content and engage audiences (Gnach, 2018). Twitter serves as a worldwide, instant newsfeed for many individuals (Gruber et al., 2015) and the platform is a locus for the dissemination and debate of news stories (Bruns & Burgess, 2012). In the first quarter of 2018, when the episodes described in Chapters 7 and 8 occurred, Twitter reached 336 million worldwide monthly active users, 69 million of whom resided in the US (Twitter, 2018). Topics that receive significant attention online are typically linked to emerging news events identified and reported by media corporations (Bouvier, 2015). In addition to sharing news via social media channels, mainstream news media stories now often integrate tweets and other online sources into story content (Fortunato et al., 2018). Brown and colleagues (2015) suggest that news media amplifies the influence of social media when posts are integrated into coverage. People reading the news may follow links to social media embedded in online news articles. A single social media post might typically reach only the
Internet users who follow the originating account, as well as anyone in that account’s network who shares content with their own, unique network. However, if a news media outlet shares a social media post, many more people will read the post and may in turn share the content with others.

**Computer-Mediated Communications and university presidents**

In all modern organisations, constituents have a greater appetite for information, often desiring heightened transparency (Turco, 2016). Increasingly, university leaders are challenged to meet contemporary expectations for communication. Information in society flows quickly and freely in ways that were unfamiliar to university presidents prior to the introduction of the Internet and social media (Gardner, 2016a). University constituents now espouse new expectations for university leaders. Constituents expect to receive messages in real-time as university events unfold (Gardner, 2016a; Menghini, 2014). To succeed in the new communications environment, presidents must effectively communicate offline and online (Zaiontz, 2015), with multiple constituencies, quickly, transparently, and frequently (Gigliotti & Fortunato, 2017).

When constituents desire greater transparency and CMC conveys information quickly and frequently, university presidents may face greater scrutiny. As public figures, university presidents are already exposed by living and working in view of many constituents. Exposure now occurs online as well as offline. Presidential communications, actions, and behaviours are scrutinised, interpreted, and sometimes shared in real life and online by constituents. In many states, university presidents are subject to Freedom of Information (FOI) laws that afford access to their daily lives (Duderstadt, 2000; Pierce, 2011) such as their schedules and details of presidential meeting attendees, agendas, and locations.
Details may be released in FOI requests and then shared on the Internet by private citizens or journalists.

The interplay between mainstream news media and other social media users also heightens online attention to university leadership. News media covers the actions, behaviours, and images of the university president similarly to elected political officials (Trachtenberg et al., 2013). News journalists engage presidents directly, by seeking statements or interviews, and indirectly, by requesting comment on presidential leadership from other people. Presidential comment on any topic to news reporters requires discretion to ensure comments will not negatively impact the president or the institution (Sanaghan et al., 2008). Care in communicating publicly, particularly with journalists, is now even more critical due to the extended reach of online communications and their permanence once posted. What previously would remain a local issue pertinent only to a university’s primary constituents can quickly spread to other interested people located anywhere in America or around the world (Gardner, 2016a). Broad exposure to national and global audiences can be propelled and accelerated by this interplay between news media coverage and CMC as information is shared and journalists report on social media discussions.

**Analysing Computer-Mediated Communications: Discourse and Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA)**

To analyse presidential leadership in crisis, I identified and investigated discursive patterns in CMC, similar to other researchers who examine language practices conducted via digital networks “under the umbrella term of ‘computer mediated communication’ (CMC)” (Gnach, 2018, p. 195). Herring (2018) originated Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA), which has been used
to analyse discourse by collecting and examining CMC. Herring (2004) describes CMDA broadly:

CMDA at its core is the analysis of logs of verbal interaction (characters, words, utterances, messages, exchanges, threads, archives, etc.). In the broadest sense, any analysis of online behavior [sic] that is grounded in empirical, textual observations is computer-mediated discourse analysis (p. 339).

CMDA “applies methodological paradigms that originate in the study of spoken and written language” including text analysis and discourse analysis (Gnach, 2018, p. 196). To understand my application of CMDA, I first define discourse as a concept and its origins.

Phillips (2018) describes discourse, according to the primary discourse analytic research approaches, as grounded in:

…social constructionist premises that social phenomena are, at least to some extent, created in social interaction and that all knowledge is a contingent, socially and historically specific, product of our ways of categorizing [sic] the world through meaning-making in language (p. 392).

Discourse, therefore, enables “meaning-making”. Stated more simply, discourse involves building and negotiating interpretations using language in interactions, informed by the social and historical domains in which communication occurs.

The result of this process of interpretation using language is no less than the creation of social phenomena, such as institutions, relationships, and social identities.

Discourse as a concept originates in political studies, largely informed by Foucault, whose writing on discourse to some extent undergirds all types of discourse analytic approaches (Phillips, 2018). Discourse, for Foucault (1972, reprint 2010), involves language use as it is positioned within and informed by
social systems of thought and knowledge, which shape “what was being said in what was said”:

There too a system of thought can be reconstituted only on the basis of a definite discursive totality…we must…rediscover the silent murmuring, the inexhaustible speech that animates from within the voice that one hears, re-establish the tiny, invisible text that runs between and sometimes collides with them…..what was being said in what was said? The analysis of the discursive field is orientated in a quite different way; we must grasp the statement in the exact specificity of its occurrence; determine its conditions of existence, fix at least its limits, establish its correlations with other statements that may be connected with it, and show what other forms of statement it excludes (pp. 27-28).

By interrogating language use in specific conditions, or “the exact specificity of its occurrence” and “its conditions of existence”, the discourse analyst may uncover the “silent murmuring” or “tiny, invisible text that runs between and sometimes collides with” speech and text grounded in social and historical systems of knowledge (Foucault, 1972, reprint 2010, pp. 27-28). The social systems in which discourse is produced exclude and limit the breadth of possible correlations between statements and possible meanings. Rather than viewing language use as purely involving speech or text and the original intention of speaker or writer, discourse theory views language in a discursive field, which both adds to and circumscribes possible interpretations arising from speech or writing.

My study is informed by Gee’s (2014a, 2014b) definitions, who describes discourse by its capacity to reflect and to shape perception and understanding in social situations. Gee (2014a, 2014b) suggests that discourse reflects the social world and also projects ways of interpreting aspects of the world, such as university crises and leadership identities. Discourse is influenced by unique individual interpretation (Gee, 2014a, 2014b), but is also systemic as “all language is part of the way we build and sustain our world, cultures, and institutions” (Gee, 2014a, p.10). As such, the continual shaping of the world
through language use is contingent, fluid, and at times fragile. Gee (2014a, 2014b) defines discourse as language used to create the social world by emphasising this contingency:

We always actively use spoken and written language to create or build the world of activities (e.g., committee meetings), identities (e.g., committee chairs, members, facilitators and obstructionists) and institutions (committees in universities and universities themselves) around us…Nonetheless, these activities, identities, and institutions have to be continuously and actively rebuilt in the here and now. If we do not rebuild them again and again, they will cease to exist. If we start rebuilding them in different ways, which modify them, then they change (Gee, 2014b, p. 91).

The dynamism and contingency of the social world made by discourse encompasses institutions and identities. Identity created by language use may be understood as “different ways of being in the world at different times and places for different purposes” (Gee, 2014a, p. 3). Gee’s definition applies to all social identities and therefore also applies to leadership identity, which is built through communication between a leader and constituents (Walker & Aritz, 2014). Leadership identity may cease to exist if the identity is no longer reinforced by discourses affirming a leader’s authority, legitimacy, and competency.

Gee (2014a) identifies two approaches to discourse analysis, informed by different world views, “descriptive and “critical”:

Some approaches to discourse analysis, which we can call “descriptive,” answer this question [how is language being used to say things, do things, and be things in the world] by saying that their goal is to describe how language works in order to understand it…Some other approaches to discourse analysis, which we can call “critical,” answer this question differently. Their goal is not just to describe how language works or even to offer deep explanations, though they do want to do this. They also want to speak to and, perhaps, intervene in, institutional, social, or political issues, problems, and controversies in the world. They want to apply their work to the world in some fashion (p. 9).
A number of foundational texts on discourse were published in the 1980s and 1990s in the critical tradition. The authors of these publications sought to uncover, and disrupt, the dynamics of institutionalised power and privilege enacted and embedded in language use. Examples include Fairclough’s *Language and power* (1989) and *Discourse and social change* (1992) and Laclau and Mouffe’s (2001) *Hegemony and socialist strategy*, originally published in 1985. Gee (2014a) also problematises the separation of the descriptive and critical traditions:

…all discourse analysis needs to be critical, not because discourse analysts are or need to be political, but because language itself is…political…all language is political and all language is part of the way we build and sustain our world, cultures, and institutions. So then, too, all discourse analysis is “practical” or “applied,” since it uncovers the workings – for good or ill – of this world building (pp. 9-10).

My analytical approach to discourse is descriptive, as outlined in Chapter 4, rather than explicitly critical or designed to surface and understand power and privilege. However, I acknowledge, like Gee, that all discourse is inherently political. Therefore, this study, which examines language use within and about institutions involving social actors with differential power cannot be disentangled from the critical tradition in the field of discourse analysis.

While drawing on Gee's conceptualisation of discourse, as well as his tools for discourse analysis, I also align my approach with CMDA tools. Herring (2018), the originator of CMDA, defines the discourse analysis “toolkit” used to examine CMC Herring developed in the decade after introducing the term in 1994:

a “methodological toolkit” organized [sic] around four linguistic levels: structure, meaning, interaction management, and social behavior, reflecting a progressive broadening of focus from the micro (structure) to the macro (social) level. Associated with each level is a set of issues, language phenomena, and methods adapted, for the most part, from linguistics (p. 2).
To seek meanings, CMDA asks what is communicated and accomplished, as well as explores possible meanings of words, utterances, and exchanges (Herring, 2018). The “meaning” linguistic level described by Herring (2018) above corresponds to the tools included in the discourse analysis protocol designed to conduct this study (Chapter 4).

**Presidents communicating in crisis**

Successful presidential crisis leadership involves communicating with anxious constituents eager to interpret ambiguous circumstances (Brennan & Stern, 2017; Menghini, 2014). University leaders are viewed by others as the “principal meaning makers in crisis” and leaders’ words “signal to others their management and control of the situation at a time in which people are reassured by a sense of control in leadership” (Menghini, 2014, p.199). In crisis, a president is perceived to speak for the institution and can play a key role in shaping the crisis story (Bataille & Cordova, 2014a). Through communication, presidents influence constituents’ interpretations and perceptions to build a sense of mutual understanding about events and actions underway, to engender confidence, and to enable a post-crisis return to normalcy. The importance of perception and interpretation increases during a crisis as constituents seek to identify and assign responsibility and compile information to build a coherent crisis narrative. Leaders can influence this interpretive process.

Communicating in crises to shape interpretation is distinct from everyday presidential leadership communication. For example, Menghini (2014) finds four, interconnected ways that leaders communicate to influence interpretation during university crises:

First, leaders manage communications on campus directly, using established communication tools and outlets. Second,
leaders create symbols and cues that can be interpreted through their actions and behaviors [sic] in response. Third, leaders sometimes intentionally manage the messaging to guide the perceptions of stakeholders. And finally, there is an external dimension to meaning making in crisis that plays out through the media. All four dimensions play a role in the way members of the internal university community come to understand the crisis itself, the institutional response, and the actions of their leaders (p. 163).

These components of university leader crisis communication require open channels of communication with constituents (Abraham, 2014; Gigliotti, 2020) and compassion for those affected (Kezar & Fries-Britt, 2018). Crises evoke strong feelings and emotions, requiring sensitive communication from university leaders to restore a community’s emotional welfare (Menghini, 2014).

Social media can also amplify controversial stories about universities (Gardner, 2016a; Gigliotti, 2020). Zaiontz (2015) observes that higher education leaders may be ill-equipped to handle rapid dissemination of university crisis stories online and the large volume of interpretations generated almost instantly:

Part of what makes social media such an exciting but also dangerous place for higher ed leaders is the fact that it is a democratized [sic] space in which users can instantaneously share information with a mass audience without going through any kind of filtering process…users can also share founded and unfounded comments and feedback about whatever’s on their minds, and there’s little anyone can do to stop that (Kindle edition, locations 525-528, 529-530).

This unfiltered, rapidly evolving communications environment in which anyone can say anything has the potential to undermine as well as to aid presidential communication during crisis. A university leader is one of many voices communicating about an institution (Gardner, 2016a; Menghini, 2014; Zaiontz, 2015) and users are often active in shaping crisis responses (Brown, Brown & Billings, 2015). As the multitude of voices increases, the likelihood of divergent
perspectives and critique also rises. Online comment may express support online for a president during a crisis or be critical of a president (Gruber et al., 2015).

Beyond official or unofficial presidential or institutional communications, many internal and external constituents contribute to the online arc of a university crisis story. Inaccurate interpretations of crisis events made by constituents may be construed as fact by social media users and news media (O’Neill, 2019). Alternative narratives may emerge rapidly online and therefore necessitate regular monitoring and rapid factual responses to correct misinformation (Bataille & Cordova, 2014a). Unofficial narratives can evolve quickly, at times undermining the leadership’s intended course of action or creating false information about crises that must be addressed or corrected with official statements. University leaders remaining silent during crises may risk university reputation and authority (Genshaft, 2014), as information which may or may not be accurate will be shared about the crisis by constituents if official communications are not forthcoming. For example, on the basis of studying a single university crisis, Gruber and colleagues (2015) suggest that university leaders develop social media strategies and build an active presence on social media. The authors recommend that leaders engage with constituents online directly, visibly, and transparently.

Social media not only facilitates the development and dissemination of inaccurate information and potentially damaging narrative about crisis events, social media also offers university crisis leaders an opportunity to communicate proactively and responsibly. Presidents communicating online in crises can communicate inclusively and broadly (Genshaft, 2014). Brennan and Stern (2017) recommend strategic use of online communication to facilitate interpretation during crises: “Rapid, frequent and clear communications in the voice of the president can help
dispel public alarm” (p. 130). Despite the ubiquity of the platforms, some university presidents do not engage constituents in their official capacities via social media directly, including the three presidents who resign during crises investigated in this study.

Also, in the modern era, presidential communications during crises are shared online, whether originally intended for online dissemination or not (Menghini, 2014). Of course, a president may intentionally communicate online and most do so to some extent. Some presidents leverage rather than resist the role’s lack of privacy, using CMC to generate online profiles and sharing curated versions of professional and personal events or views with constituents (MacTaggart, 2017; Zaiontz, 2015). However, a statement made by a president not originally intended for broadcast may also be shared on the Internet by other constituents. Extensive online sharing and re-sharing of presidential communications occurs during crises when individuals struggle to interpret ambiguous circumstances and attempt to discern reality from falsehoods.

The interdependence of mainstream and social media can be especially potent during university crises. Social media amplifies news media during a crisis (Gruber et al., 2015) and vice versa. For example, Rao and Haina (2017) analysed Facebook posts specific to student protests at University of Missouri-Columbia, Ithaca College, and Yale University between September 2015 and January 2016. They found 24 news media outlets writing and sharing their own social media posts about the protests and also sharing other users’ social media commentary about the incidents. Menghini (2014) also highlights the interconnection of social media and news media and finds the relationship influences university crises:
There is little doubt that the growth of the social media sector has influenced if not the number of crises on campus, the publicity they receive. News goes viral so much more quickly than it did even a decade ago, putting institutional leaders in the limelight not just during traditional news cycles, but twenty-four hours a day, and during each phase of crisis (p. 12).

During and after a crisis, a university and its president may be the subject of extensive media attention (Gigliotti & Fortunato, 2017) and this news coverage contributes to constituent interpretation (Menghini, 2014). Once coverage appears, including a president’s direct or indirect quotes, or when words are paraphrased, presidential communications reach a much larger number of individuals. In crises, effective presidents speak honestly with the media to avoid future investigative reporting revealing inconsistencies or evasion (Parrot, 2014). Often news media will sensationalise university crises (Gigliotti, 2017) as a sensational story will likely garner greater attention from listeners, viewers, and readers. The crisis narrative as reported by news media may also persist after a crisis has abated (Bataille & Cordova, 2014a), even fuelling secondary crises.

Although presidential communications in crisis are critical, when, how, and what a president communicates to others is no longer wholly controlled by a president or university public relations department due to the influence of online social and news media. Gigliotti (2020) notes that prior crisis communication research and guidance for leaders has emphasised the importance of protecting institutional reputation and managing public opinion. University external relations staff, in partnership with solicitors, have typically written presidential crisis messaging to external and internal constituents. Now, as discussed above, there remain few communications channels that involve one-way transmission of messages. Digital communication platforms facilitate two-way conversation and affiliated dialogue about a topic amongst many people, rendering delivery of key messages
insufficient. As such, management of public opinion grounded in delivering a set of agreed, institutional messages is usually ineffective (Gigliotti, 2020).

**Researcher’s position**

Clarification of the researcher’s potential biases and world view enhances qualitative study validity (Merriam, 1998) as qualitative studies are conducted through investigators’ values, world views, and perceptions. Therefore, qualitative research may be subject to the fallibility of human investigators, who may miss opportunities, and have biases (Merriam, 1998). While studying social phenomena, the researcher, by interpreting data and presenting findings, constructs a new version of each case through the lens of the investigator’s world view (Merriam, 1998). A qualitative researcher cannot exit the sociocultural setting and claim objectivity (Sjoberg et al., 1991). The researcher’s world view, therefore, introduces subjectivity (Stake, 1995). In qualitative research, the primary instrument for analysing data is human (Merriam, 1998), and although this introduces subjectivity into the endeavour, it is also beneficial. If one researcher is the primary vehicle for data analysis, then there is one central location for the filtering and consideration of data, which produces a unified and holistic approach to a study (Feagin, Orum & Sjoberg, 1991).

My world view and professional position provide me with access to the sociocultural setting in which presidents lead institutions, particularly during public crises. Throughout the years in which this study has been conceptualised, conducted, and completed, I have served as Vice President for Advancement at a small, American higher education institution classified as a master’s-degree granting university. In this capacity, I am a member of the executive leadership team and my line manager is the President. My research focus, question, and methods were defined during my initial eighteen months after matriculating at
UCL and prior to upgrading to full PhD candidacy: April 2015 through October 2016.

The multiple case study I conducted was shaped by my pilot investigation of presidential resignation in crisis at the University of Missouri occurring in 2015 (Chapter 5). Having conducted a preliminary examination of the pilot case by my upgrade meeting in February 2017, I had sufficient knowledge about abbreviated presidential tenure in crisis to embark on the full study. Unexpectedly and not long after my research agenda was approved through the upgrade process, in May 2017, a high-profile crisis which attracted national and international media attention occurred at the institution where I serve as Vice President. As a researcher with a growing body of knowledge about crisis leadership, I worked during and after the crisis beyond my remit in support of the President, the leadership team, and the institution. In the more than three years since this inflection point as I have developed knowledge about crisis leadership, abbreviated tenure, and discursive leadership while conducting this study, I have also provided strategic advice to the President, as well as contributed to national conversations about crisis leadership through professional organisations dedicated to enabling presidential leadership and board governance. Conducting this study has enabled me to build my capacities for enacting leadership, for providing counsel to executives, and for developing leadership talents in others.

While my research has influenced me, inevitably this study has also been influenced by my experience as a higher education leader at an institution during and after crises. My case analysis is mediated through this experience. Sensitivity, or being highly intuitive, is a trait required for conducting qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). My positioning heightened my sensitivity to potential
influences on presidential leadership in crises, to risks of abbreviated tenure, and to presidential leadership communications and constituent responses.

Even as I acknowledge the benefit of my positioning, I am attuned to the necessity of maintaining critical distance to ensure a robust, empirical research study. I reduced the potential for personal bias to influence this study, such as by using discourse analysis to view the data in atypical ways (Gee, 2014b). For example, I investigated unique features of language like pronoun usage not immediately apparent to a reader. I also tolerated a higher degree of ambiguity when reviewing the case data (Merriam, 1998) and remained open to contradictory evidence during analysis (Yin, 2009). Additional measures taken to ensure a valid, robust study are outlined in Chapter 6.

**Study overview**

Chapters 2 and 3 enable analysis of episodes in which university presidents abruptly leave during crisis by fully exploring the modern higher education presidency (Chapter 2) and prior studies of abbreviated tenure (Chapter 3). With the core concepts defined and related research explored in depth, Chapter 4 describes the research design, which combines discourse analysis and case study methods, used to conduct the preliminary, exploratory pilot study. Keenly attentive to the analytical complexity introduced by combining these two methods, as well as the complexity of each episode of resignation in crisis, I present all cases in detail, chronologically, and sequentially, aided by case timelines. In Chapter 5, the pilot study case involves the resignation of Tim Wolfe, president of the University of Missouri (UM), who abruptly resigns during a high-profile crisis involving racial tensions and student activism. Chapter 6 details refinements and enhancements to the research design developed following reflection on and adjustment of the pilot study methods. Chapter 7 provides a case study involving
President Lou Anna Simon, the long-serving leader of Michigan State University (MSU), who resigned following a lengthy sentencing hearing in which over 150 women testified that former MSU employee Larry Nassar sexually assaulted them (Thomason, 2018). Chapter 8 involves President Fred Walker of Edinboro University. Walker resigned after *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Stripling, 2018a) published an interview with the President. Chapter 9 concludes the study with results of cross-case analysis, theory, preliminary implications for leadership practice, and opportunities for future research.
Chapter 2. Presidents and the presidency
To build appreciation for presidential leadership, and the institutions and constituents they aspire to lead, this chapter reviews profiles of currently serving presidents and the expectations of the presidency. A brief discussion of the value of American higher education institutions provides a view into the institutional types and models led by contemporary presidents. Next, a description of currently serving presidential profiles, briefly summarising demographics, educational backgrounds, professional experiences, and other key features, such as average length of presidential tenure, outlines the lived, professional, and educational experiences of the modern president, and is supported with a detailed review in Appendix C. Then, I outline common expectations associated with the presidency. To establish and explore potential constituent influence on presidential leadership in anticipation of considering constituent actions, interpretations, and response in case analysis, I introduce and discuss constituencies involved in the work and lives of presidents in the context of common expectations of the role. Finally, after a brief discussion of presidential influence, I conclude by discussing how features of the presidency can relate to abbreviated tenure as a precursor to the review and synthesis of research into unexpected presidential transition that follows in Chapter 3.

Research on the university presidency is often sparse (Esterberg & Wooding, 2012), ambiguous in its findings (Birnbaum, 1999), too reliant on practitioner perspectives, and framed as personal narratives (Kezar, 2014). Research into university presidents can be overly descriptive and prescriptive (Birnbaum, 1992a), methodologically weak (Levin, 2000), and unhelpfully focused on seeking universal traits and behaviours (Bensimon, Neumann, & Birnbaum, 1989; Eckel & Kezar, 2011). At the extreme, higher education leadership research was even described as trivial and offensive (Dennison, 2001).
Contemporary peer reviewed empirical studies of the presidency are uncommon. For example, by searching ProQuest (University College London, 2018b), a comprehensive multidisciplinary database of business and social science subject areas and encompassing over 11,000 titles, I could identify five peer reviewed studies published in the last three years explicitly focused on presidents. Using ProQuest’s advanced function, I searched for publications with “president” and “(universit*)” in the document title, including “*” to ensure results would include ‘universities’ and ‘university’ and excluding the word “press” after finding that several publication titles also included the name of the publisher in the title field. This search produced 13 results, of which five were not empirical studies of presidents or the presidency and another five were narrowly focused on presidential compensation. Then, I conducted a duplicate search, replacing the search term “(university*)” with “college”, as American postsecondary institutions are commonly referred to as “colleges”. This second search produced 20 results, of which 10 were not conducted using empirical methods and seven were not about contemporary university presidential leadership. Of the three remaining, one result was found to be a duplicate from the prior search with a narrow focus on compensation. The searches described above are not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to illustrate the limitations of contemporary, published research.

To provide a comprehensive view of presidential leadership, synthesis of scholarly research, published presidential perspectives, and other sources ensures a broad and deep discussion of presidents who currently serve, the constituents and institutions they aspire to lead, and the expectations of modern presidents. Owing to the shortage of recent empirical, peer reviewed research, to prepare to analyse episodes in which university presidents resign in high-profile
crises, I use a wider array of sources. First, although this study focuses on the contemporary presidency, I follow scholars researching presidential leadership broadly and draw on foundational studies of university presidents that have influenced the field, such as Birnbaum’s (1992a) *How academic leadership works: Understanding success and failure in the college presidency* and Fisher’s (1984) *Power of the presidency*, amongst others. Second, academic presses publish works on the presidency written by currently serving or former presidents, as well as publications that combine empirical methods with views from working or former leaders. For example, former University of Michigan President Duderstadt (2007) describes his book, *The view from the helm: Leading the American university during an era of change*, as personal memoir, history of the Michigan presidency, and commentary on the contemporary presidency. While presidents are published scholars in their own disciplines, public scholars of the presidency like Duderstadt write reflectively about their personal experience and make observations in context as active tertiary education leaders. Professional associations, consulting firms, and sector-specific news media outlets also maintain research teams that conduct surveys of currently serving presidents using quantitative methods, including the American Council on Education, Deloitte, and *Inside Higher Ed*. National datasets, maintained by the National Center [sic] for Education Statistics, albeit typically two or more years out of date due to data collection and publication timelines, publish information about the institutions presidents lead. Professional associations, such as the Association of Governing Boards of Colleges and Universities (AGB), employ researchers and publication staff, who produce research and implications for practice aimed at presidents and boards grounded in the perspectives of practitioners and empirical research. Sector-specific news coverage published in *The Chronicle of Higher
education and Inside Higher Ed provide examples of presidential leadership in practice. Reference lists accompanying studies of presidential leadership, abbreviated tenure, and crisis leadership often incorporate a similarly comprehensive approach. This broad array of sources is drawn upon to define and to describe the modern presidency.

Value of American universities led by presidents
Americans’ views of contemporary university value can influence presidential leadership. Multiple, competing perspectives on the role of the contemporary American university and its benefits for the public and for private individuals challenge presidents to lead such that constituent expectations are met. For example, universities’ contributions to contemporary American society have been characterised as a public benefit and as a private benefit. Former Harvard University president Bok (2013) asserts that American universities exist to educate students, produce knowledge through original research, and foster innovation by applying research in practice, thereby contributing to both the public and private domains. As social and cultural institutions, universities contribute to public life and economic development (Bok, 2013; Duderstadt, 2000). Georgetown University’s Center [sic] for Education and the Workforce find an individual with an undergraduate degree will accrue more lifetime earnings than an individual who only completes secondary school (Carnevale, Strohl & Melton, 2011), thereby demonstrating the individual benefit of university education while also highlighting the potential economic value of tertiary-educated workers in a knowledge-based economy.

Increased attention to university contributions to individual, private benefit, coupled with concern about degree affordability, has led to doubt expressed by scholarly researchers, elected policy writers, and journalists about American
higher education’s contributions to the common social good (Duderstadt, 2000; Newfield, 2016). For example, Jaschik (2019), reporting for Inside Higher Ed, suggests recruiting and admissions practices, such as preferential recruitment of the children of a university’s graduates or wealthy students whose families may donate to the university, reinforce systems of inequality. Recruitment practices in the most extreme instances, such as when bribes are exchanged, even lead to criminal investigations (The New York Times, 2019). Zumeta and colleagues (2012) find the cost of attending university has consistently outpaced other consumer expenses in their quantitative, empirical research, thereby potentially excluding some individuals from accessing postsecondary education. To ensure balanced budgets and in response to competition amongst institutions, university fees have increased while “discounting”, or the practice of offering individual students reduced fee rates to entice them to enrol, has proliferated (Azziz et al., 2019).

Universities are also expected to contribute to American intellectual life in ways that are politically neutral, which may be difficult for presidents who are pressed by students, academic staff, and others to assume positions on controversial issues. Elected officials and journalists often, and increasingly publicly, criticise academic staff for espousing liberal views to the exclusion of conservative or libertarian views. Critiques often accuse university personnel of indoctrinating students into narrowly-defined, left-leaning ideologies (Jaschik, 2017a). These critiques, and the constituents who advance these views, influence university presidents who necessarily balance the expectations of constituents who may espouse competing or even irreconcilable views.
The American higher education sector

American higher education institutions are varied in size, corporate model, funding sources, and degrees awarded. To situate presidential leadership examined in this study within the national American tertiary education context, I briefly describe and discuss institutional types and American university corporate models.

**Higher education institutional types**

As of 2017, more than 4,360 postsecondary institutions operate in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2018). Institutions are classified by Carnegie Classification, which was originally conducted by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and in 2015 assumed by Indiana University Bloomington’s Center [sic] for Postsecondary Research (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2014) (Table 2). Classification is based on degree level or certificate awarded, the volume of degrees awarded by level if more than a single degree type is conferred, and research productivity. Categories also include institutions dedicated to serving students identifying as indigenous people or members of first nations (tribal) and institutions focused narrowly on a single or small group of disciplines, such as art or design. The diversity of institutional types allows students to select an institution for university study that meets their needs and also offers those who work in universities a variety of contexts in which to conduct research, to teach, or to support the academic enterprise.

**University corporate models**

Universities operate under one of four types of corporate governance models (Table 3) to ensure alignment with university mission: to provide a benefit to
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Degrees Awarded</th>
<th>Additional Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Doctoral</strong></td>
<td>• &gt;20 research/scholarship doctorates</td>
<td>• High or low research production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• &gt;30 professional practice doctorates in ≥2 programmes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Typically, also award master’s and baccalaureate degrees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Master’s</strong></td>
<td>• &gt;50 master’s degrees conferred and &lt;20 research doctorates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Typically, also award baccalaureate degrees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Baccalaureate</strong></td>
<td>• ≥50% of total degrees are baccalaureate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• &lt;50 master’s degrees awarded</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Baccalaureate/Associate’s</strong></td>
<td>• ≥1 baccalaureate programmes</td>
<td>• May also award certificates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ≥50% of total degrees are associate’s (two-year degree)</td>
<td>• Focus may be on transfer to baccalaureate or career/technical preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Associate’s</strong></td>
<td>• Highest degree offered is associate’s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Special focus</strong></td>
<td>• &gt;75% degree programmes in 1 field (e.g. arts or design), or</td>
<td>• Members of American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 70-74% in one field with remaining degrees ≤2 fields, or</td>
<td>• Serve Indigenous students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 60-69% in 1 field and remaining degrees in 1 additional field</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tribal</strong></td>
<td>• Varies</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: American higher education institutional types. Sources: Center for Postsecondary Research, Indiana University School of Education (2018) and American Indian Higher Education Consortium (2016)
Table 3. American Higher Education Corporate Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-Profit</th>
<th>For-Profit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>Government / non-profit</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Independent / non-profit</td>
<td>Independent / for-profit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

students and researchers served by the university, to the public, or to shareholders.

American universities funded by state governments are typically referred to as “public” universities. To avoid confusion amongst international readers, I refer to universities funded by state governments as “government” or “government-funded” universities.

**Government-funded universities**

State governments provide funding to universities which are governed by state regulatory laws (Bok, 2013). As institutions dedicated to serving the state in which an institution is located and the citizens of the state, rather than private shareholders, these universities also maintain non-profit status and as such are exempt from taxation. In 2016-2017, 37 percent (1,623) of all American universities operate as units of state governments and receive state-government funding (NCES, 2018). As described and justified in the case selection criteria in Chapter 6, episodes of abbreviated presidential tenure selected for examination in this thesis occur at government-funded, non-profit universities. For reference, Appendix B describes other types of American university corporate models identified in Table 3 above.
Non-profit, government universities operate as units of state government, but governance structures vary significantly from state to state and no two structures are the same (Education Commission of the States, 2019b), making the national higher education ecosystem complex. State-wide university systems may operate with an elected or appointed coordinating board established by the state government to oversee all member universities. State-level oversight boards, typically comprised of volunteer citizens of the state, set state-wide policies, while in some instances also maintaining and supporting local boards at each individual institution (Education Commission of the States, 2019a). Other state-level systems have established centralised system offices with professional, paid leadership who coordinate the strategies, policies, and direction of a number of institutions, each with its own president (Duderstadt, 2007; Education Commission of the States, 2019a). Other universities operate as independent state agencies in the absence of centralised administration or coordination, each with a separate volunteer governing board appointed by an elected official or officials, typically the governor of a state or members of a state legislature (Education Commission of the States, 2019a). The variety and complexity of government-funded institutional and system-wide governing board structures challenge university boards to assume standard, national approaches to governance. Even so, professional associations such as AGB and the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) provide guidance for governing boards and the senior leaders who enable board governance.

Institutional types influence presidential leadership. For example, doctoral institutions are often viewed as critical to regional economic development (Lombardi, 2013). Presidents leading doctoral institutions viewed as critical contributors to regional development may be pressed by external constituents on
university direction and outcomes due to their institutions’ significant contributions to and dependence on local communities. Typically, research-intensive, doctoral institutions enrol more students, employ more personnel, and require a much larger annual operating budget than other types. At these larger institutions, presidents have many more internal and external relationships to navigate and develop, requiring extensive efforts and systematic coordination. At smaller institutions, such as smaller, government-funded, master’s institutions, relationship development is also critical for presidents. In smaller institutions, presidents are traditionally expected to be active members of the university community, engaging deeply (Duderstadt, 2007), while maintaining the highest level of visibility at university activities (Pierce, 2011). This pressure may reduce the time presidents spend attending to critical external constituents, such as elected officials and donors, challenging presidents to make progress in communicating to build and sustain constituent relationships required to lead successfully.

Profile of modern American presidents: Lived, educational, and professional experiences

The American Council on Education (ACE) publishes the most comprehensive report on the university presidency every five years: the American College President Study (Gagliardi et al., 2017). In the last survey cycle, ACE requested responses “from all identified presidents of accredited, degree-granting, U.S. higher education institutions” by sending a survey instrument by email to “3,615 presidents, chancellors, and CEOs on April 18, 2016” (Gagliardi et al., 2017, p. 2). Respondents held the role in the 2015 and 2016 academic years. The latest study, authored by Jonathan S. Gagliardi, Lorelle L. Espinosa, Jonathan M. Turke, and Morgan Taylor (2017), reflects responses received from 1,546
presidents, chancellors, and CEOs, representing a 43 percent response rate (Gagliardi et al., 2017). To highlight briefly the current demographic backgrounds and career preparation of currently serving American university presidents and to contextualise the study, this section draws on the ACE survey as it provides rich demographic data necessary for examining contemporary presidents, which is complemented by a thorough review in Appendix C.

In 2016, the average American university president is 62, white, and male (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Seventy percent of university presidents identify as male and 83 percent identify as white (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Eighty-five percent are married. 84 percent have children (Gagliardi et al., 2017). In 2017, most presidents (85 percent) moved from an immediate prior role as either a president or a senior leader at another higher education institution (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Twenty-four percent of presidents serve in at least their second presidential appointment and, as such, the majority (76 percent) of presidents are serving for the first time as president (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Most presidents hold a terminal degree (80 percent) and presidents typically follow a career path that involves increasing responsibility in teaching or research, with 81 percent reporting they previously served as academic staff members (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Most institutions lack succession plans (76 percent) (Gagliardi et al., 2017): it is not common for senior executives to be prepared for assuming a presidency and therefore many presidents lack formal training for the role (Davis, 2011; Gmelch, 2002; Selingo et al., 2017).
Presidential tenure duration

As this study examines abbreviated, or unexpectedly shortened, presidential tenure, a review of the ACE study results on presidential tenure provides context for examples of presidential resignation investigated below. While this information enables the cases of abbreviated tenure to be considered in the context of tenure length, tenure duration is not this study’s focus. The investigation endeavours to examine the events, communications, and influential constituents reflected in public discourse during episodes that involve abbreviated presidential tenure.

The ACE survey instrument asks respondents to disclose the date they were appointed to the presidency or similar chief executive role (Gagliardi et al., 2017). As such, the survey results include the average duration presidents report to have served as of the date they respond. Presidential tenure is shortening (Figure 2). In 2011 presidents served seven years. The average duration of service in 2016 contracted to 6.5 years (Gagliardi et al., 2017). In another study conducted by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), a national association of government-funded postsecondary institutions, Bowman (2017) reports that 45 percent of presidents leading government-funded institutions in the association had served for four years or less. The ACE survey finds that average tenure varies by institution type, corporate model, and presidential gender and ethnicity, as described below.

![Figure 2: Average Years in Role](image)

*Figure 2: Average presidential tenure duration. Source: Gagliardi et al. (2017)*
**Average tenure duration by institution type**

President’s leading master’s institutions in 2016 had served longer than presidents leading other types of institutions: on average seven years in their present role (Figure 3) (Gagliardi et al., 2017).

![Figure 3: Years in Post by Institution Type](image)

**Figure 3: Average presidential tenure duration by institution type. Source: Gagliardi et al. (2017)**

Baccalaureate institution presidents serve the least number of years on average, 5.8 (Figure 3) (Gagliardi et al., 2017).

Presidents leading other institutional types serve terms of 6.2 years on average.

**Average tenure duration by corporate model**

Presidents of government-funded institutions serve on average six years, whereas presidents at independent institutions serve seven years on average (Figure 4) (Gagliardi et al., 2017).

![Figure 4: Years in Post by Corporate Model](image)

**Figure 4: Average presidential tenure duration by corporate business model. Source: Gagliardi et al. (2017)**
**Average tenure duration by gender**

Men had served on average 6.8 years in their current position, whereas women serve a full year less than their male counterparts, 5.8 years on average (Figure 5) (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Tenure length of presidents identifying as neither male nor female is not reported.

**Average tenure by race/ethnicity**

Racial/ethnic minority presidents also report serving fewer years than white presidents. Black and Hispanic presidents serve less than six years on average, 5.5 years and 5.7 years respectively, compared to white presidents reporting 6.7 years of service on average (Figure 6) (Gagliardi et al., 2017).

**Tenure and presidential contract duration**

Related to duration of tenure, many presidents work under employment contracts that specify a term of service, and which may be extended. Close to one-third of presidents have contracts specifying a term of five years or more and another third have contracts with terms of three years (Figure 7). Finkelstein and White (2017) also find that most presidents work to three- to five-year contracts and report that renewal contracts typically specify a five-year term of service.
Expectations of modern university presidents

Former Harvard president Derek Bok (2013) claims the expectations of presidents are extensive, carrying significant demands. Presidents are expected to be visibly engaged in campus life (AASCU, 2016; Pierce, 2011) and visibility requires a significant commitment of time out of normal business hours (MacTaggart, 2017), and physical and mental stamina (Trombley, 2015). Presidents are expected to subordinate personal matters in service of their institutions (Bornstein, 2003). McLaughlin (1996), a Harvard academic who also leads professional development programs for new and continuing presidents, observes the president’s “extraordinarily broad array of responsibilities” can become “all-devouring” (p. 12). Former president Duderstadt (2007) describes the role of president as: “chief executive officer, intellectual leader of the faculty [academic staff], educational leader, occasional parent to the students, political lobbyist with both state and federal government, cheerleader for the university, spokesman to the media, fund-raiser, entertainer, and servant to the governing board” (p. 111). Scholar/practitioner Eckel and higher education researcher Kezar
(2011) suggest that the presidency requires: "a single individual to be a leader, academic, planner, mediator, politician, advocate, investment banker, conductor, showman, church elder, supporter, cheerleader, and, of course, manager" (p. 279). More recently, another experienced university president Scott (2018), writing for Johns Hopkins University Press, labels presidents as "chief narrators, budget masters, lobbyists, sales representatives, high-stakes "panhandlers," promoters, and entrepreneurs" (p. 33). As such, researchers and former presidents agree that the role involves many expectations, engagement of many constituents, and the assumption of multiple public and private identities.

To understand the array of demands placed on university presidents and to prepare to examine instances of abbreviated presidential tenure, I discuss the expectations of presidents embraced by those who fill the role, governing board members, and other university constituents organised according to Morrill’s (2010b) leadership contexts and questions for comprehensive presidential evaluation published by AGB press:

1) Strategic leadership
2) Educational leadership
3) Organisational management
4) Financial management
5) Fundraising
6) External and internal relations
7) Board and government relations
8) Personal characteristics and values (pp. 68-71).

To meet expectations in these areas, university presidents relate to constituents, often navigating potential constituent influence and endeavouring to meet constituent needs and desires.

**Presidential expectation 1: Strategic leadership**

Presidents are expected to lead strategically, which involves university culture, history and storytelling, creation and articulation of institutional vision, university
strategy development, and execution of strategy once finalised. The AASCU (2016) suggests a president “develops, articulates, advocates, and executes a clear vision for the … university’s future that others will accept, support, and advance. This includes orchestrating effective change management via short- and long-term strategic thinking” (p. 8). To meet this expectation, presidents are required to understand university culture and communicate the institution’s unique history (AASCU, 2016; Morrill, 2010), while charting a course for an institution’s future direction in alignment with culture and history. Presidents are expected to convey a compelling and pragmatic vision for the institution’s future (MacTaggart, 2017; MacTaggart, 2020a; McLaughlin, 1996b; Morrill, 2010b), which responds to contemporary challenges facing higher education institutions (MacTaggart, 2017), which may require an entrepreneurial approach and the openness to taking risks to guide institutional transformation (Fisher & Koch, 2004). Proposing a unique vision and leading change efforts to realise a vision may result in a short tenure, according to former Michigan president Duderstadt (2007). However, more recently leadership scholar and former university system chief executive Terrence MacTaggart (2017) argues:

That vision needs to be strategic in taking into account market realities and current or potential institutional strengths. It combines a data-driven appraisal of today’s realities with the ability to scan the horizon, especially with respect to competition and technological change. And while quantitatively grounding it is crucial, personalizing [sic] the vision with narratives that build support for the change journey and celebrate its accomplishments is equally important (p. 4).

Vision is a “clear picture of a desirable end-state” linked to strategy outlining anticipated steps to achieve a “promised future” (Bolman & Gallos, 2010, p. 123). Presidents inspire confidence by presenting a vision and encouraging “the belief that their [constituents’] present success is a precursor to even higher
achievement in the future” (Birnbaum, 1992a, p. 124). Constituents, who may be dissatisfied with a president’s predecessor (Birnbaum, 1992a), may look to newly-appointed university presidents to articulate an aspirational future picture that generates optimism and excitement (Duderstadt, 2000), while simultaneously honouring the institution’s history and culture (Bolman & Gallos, 2010; Pierce, 2011).

Presidents are expected to incorporate constituent input into strategy development (Morrill, 2010b). The articulation of institutional vision by presidents is expected, but co-creating a shared vision with constituents may be more effective in universities (Kezar et al., 2006). Leaders who collaborate to develop vision using ideas promoted by campus constituents bind universities together in ways that facilitate positive growth for institutions and university personnel (Eddy, 2010). Constituents typically view a collaborative visioning process as more legitimate (Bornstein, 2003). Process is highly valued in academe and if presidents do not involve constituents in processes, their plans may fail, as presidents who are perceived to be violating process are likely to be negatively viewed by constituents (Bolman & Gallos, 2010).

After shaping a vision of the future, presidents are responsible for leading strategy execution to ensure institutions adapt competitively (MacTaggart, 2017, 2020a; Morrill, 2010b), but despite the importance of this expectation for institutional health, strategic plan development and execution may not be highly valued by university presidents. In the recent ACE survey, less than 20 percent of presidents identify strategic planning as an area of importance (Gagliardi et al., 2017). American universities had previously established ten-year plans in the past, but two- to five-year plans are more prevalent now (Seltzer, 2016b). Selingo and colleagues (2017), interpreting a survey of university presidents conducted...
by Deloitte’s Center [sic] for Higher Education Excellence, suggest that presidents may emphasise “short-term wins at the cost of long-term planning” (p. 3).

A changing environment for postsecondary American enrolment is becoming an increasingly important driver of university strategy development (MacTaggart, 2017), which also relates to the fourth expectation of presidents discussed below, financial management. The size of the American student body both is declining and growing more diverse. In autumn 2017, American postsecondary enrolment was 19,765,598 down 6 percent from the highest enrolment level recorded of 21,019,438 in autumn 2010 (NCES, 2019b). Enrolment is declining primarily due to population trends precipitated by a decrease in the total number of pupils completing secondary school (Grawe, 2016), which has intensified competition amongst postseondary institutions seeking to attract enough new students to remain viable, many of whom have not typically enrolled in the past, and also retain the students who do enrol. Nationally, 42 percent of students identify as ethnic minorities and the percentage has been increasing (Figure 18), compared to 38 percent in 2012 and 28 percent in 2000 (NCES, 2018c). Whereas in the past, racial/ethnic minority students have been less represented, now white students are not in the majority at many universities and at 41 percent of institutions less than half of the students enrolled are white (Douglas & Shockley, 2017). Government-funded institutions enrol 43 percent racial/ethnic minority students (NCES, 2019c). In addition to the percentage increase in racial/ethnic minority student enrolment, the total number of minority students is also steadily rising annually (Figure 8).
Based on birth rate analysis, demographers anticipate decreases in the number of secondary school pupils finishing high school and associated decreases in the number of students progressing to tertiary studies from secondary school in the coming years. The total number of students completing secondary school who could proceed to postsecondary study is projected to decrease by 2032 by 4 percent (Grawe, 2016). The most significant regional decrease is projected to be 19 percent in New England, while some regions will experience increases, such as the West South Central region, where pupils completing secondary school are expected to increase by 16 percent (Grawe, 2016). The reduction in total secondary school completion will likely diminish the volume of prospective students typically considering attending university. The American Department of Education projects tertiary institution total enrolment to 2027 and estimates a decrease of 1 percent by 2027 compared to 2012 (NCES, 2018b). In contrast to the Department of Education’s projection, Grawe (2016) estimates future enrolment by incorporating population trend data and likely future demand amongst segments of the population to arrive at a projected decrease of 11 percent by 2029 in total American postsecondary enrolment. Moreover, Grawe (2016) suggests that some regions will experience more significant decreases in

![Figure 8: Total autumn enrolment of racial/ethnic minority students in degree-granting postsecondary institutions 2012 through 2017 (in thousands). Source: NCES (2018)](image-url)
tertiary-level enrolment, such as New England, which Grawe anticipates will enrol 24 percent fewer students by 2029. When combined, these projections suggest that the environment for recruiting students to enrol in universities will be increasingly challenging in the next decade, thereby increasing the need for and challenges associated with strategic presidential leadership.

**Presidential expectation 2: Educational leadership**

Presidents are expected to lead university teaching, learning, and research such that academic quality is assured, resources support the academic mission, and an evidence-based approach is applied to evaluating teaching, learning, and research (Morrill, 2010b). Presidents exhibiting educational leadership encourage curricular innovation, as well as understand and participate in shared governance, which facilitates collaborative decision-making processes and input from academic staff (Morrill, 2010b). In practice, presidents typically delegate responsibility for executive-level, educational leadership to a Chief Academic Officer (CAO). In some institutions, CAOs may focus on internal affairs, while presidents focus externally on the governing board, public relations, fundraising, and advocacy with elected political officials (Selingo et al., 2017), despite calls for presidents to serve as “chief education officer” of university teaching, learning, and research (Scott, 2018), thereby maintaining presidential leadership of educational mission. Academic staff expect their universities and the presidents who lead institutions to ensure the rights of academic staff to academic freedom, to provide a voice to academic staff in institutional decisions, and to assure satisfactory working conditions, which I discuss in the sections that follow. In turn, presidents may be expected by their governing boards to lead academics in ways that differ from their predecessors. For example, MacTaggart (2017) asserts that the contemporary president should exercise:
Respect for academic values and shared governance, plus the strength to make unpopular decisions when shared governance fails to yield consensus. Historically, working with faculty members [academic staff] often meant accommodating their preferences to preserve peace in the valley or forestall a no-confidence vote. And presidents must always support the faculty [sic] when it comes to upholding the institution’s core academic values. But now is a time when administrative leaders must often offer their faculty [academic staff] colleagues uncomfortable choices rather than easy answers. In response to reducing programs and staff or changing time-honored practices such as teaching loads, the president will face strident opposition from faculty [academic staff] members, especially those in the humanities and social sciences. Moreover, today’s competitive environment frequently demands quick response times, not the leisurely schedules of traditional shared governance. In such cases, the practice of shared governance needs to be recalibrated to clearly define the boundaries of authority (pp. 5-6).

**Academic freedom**

American university academic staff embrace the concept of academic freedom, which defines the rights and expectations of academic staff to freely teach and conduct research (AAUP, 1970). Academic freedom is based on two core academic values: “advancing knowledge through research and creativity” and “educating students to develop their own independence of mind” (Franke, 2011, pp. 2-3). Academic staff expect to exercise the right to conduct research and publish their findings without restriction. Academic staff also expect to teach controversial subject matter if it relates to course content without fear of punishment or reprisal and expect to express their views as private citizens freely without fear of “institutional censorship or discipline” (AAUP, 1970, p.14).

In principle, academic freedom allows academic staff to engage in debate without fear of retaliation from those with the power to impact their working conditions, such as deans or leaders overseeing promotion to higher levels of academic rank, and to express their views unless those views impair the rights of others (Franke, 2011; Nelson, 2010). Academic freedom affirms that academic staff
should not be negatively impacted by the political, religious, or philosophical beliefs of influential or powerful people such as presidents, other leaders, elected political officials, or members of the public and academic staff are assured the right to challenge others’ views without penalty (Franke, 2011; Nelson, 2010). However, academic freedom does not protect academic staff from consequences in some instances. For example, academic staff are not protected by academic freedom when they impose their views on other people, such as expecting students to adhere to ideological perspectives in their research, or engage in harassing or intimidating behaviours (Nelson, 2010). Academic freedom also does not give students or faculty protection from penalties if they break the law or ignore institutional regulations (Nelson, 2010). Academic freedom should not be confused with American First Amendment rights, which guarantee free expression in public spaces and prohibit government censorship of controversial or offensive speech (Post, 2017). The First Amendment prohibits government institutions from restricting expression, whereas academic freedom affirms individual rights in all educational settings where teaching, learning, and research occur (Levinson, 2007). American courts acknowledge the relationship between the two related but differentiated concepts (Levinson, 2007). While distinct, the concepts overlap and courts have not made clear the extent of protection afforded under either (Levinson, 2007), which creates ambiguity and uncertainty for academic staff and leaders endeavouring to oversee employees who exercise their rights under these two related, but distinct concepts. Academic freedom and First Amendment rights influence universities by requiring oversight of academic staff that ensures staff responsibilities are fulfilled without encroaching on the rights afforded staff. Rights associated with academic freedom and the First Amendment allow academic staff to speak publicly about controversial issues,
which can lead to difficulty for university leadership if individuals inside or outside the university disagree with academic staff perspectives and seek to influence leadership decisions regarding academic staff member employment.

Student activism can challenge academic staff values and in doing so lead academic staff to influence presidents, at times straining relationships between leaders, academic staff, and students. Student views can bring free speech, a core value of academe, and social justice into conflict, placing pressure on presidents to reconcile competing expectations (Gardner, 2016b; Schmidt, 2016). Gallup (2016) finds that the majority (78 percent) of university students believe institutions should expose them to all viewpoints, rather than prohibit biased or offensive speech. In the same study, Gallup (2016) also finds that students believe universities should be able to restrict speech or behaviours that intend to offend particular groups. The AAUP (2017) “strongly supports freedom of expression on campus and the rights of faculty and students to invite speakers of their choosing”, some of whom may be deemed offensive (Hanlon, 2017; Svrluga, 2018). Presidents responding to student requests to prohibit certain speakers from visiting universities risk undermining relationships with academic staff who view prohibitions against speakers as a violation of academic freedom or First Amendment rights. Even so, many academic staff support student activism that promotes the exclusion of speakers deemed offensive from universities.

**Collegiality and shared governance**

Academic staff expect the opportunity to contribute to university decisions shaped by a collective and historical expectation of shared governance, which is another way that academic staff influence presidential leadership. Shared governance is “a fundamental principle of inclusion in key areas of institutional responsibility and
decision making” (AGB, 2017). Shared governance acknowledges the interdependence of a university’s constituent parts:

The variety and complexity of the tasks performed by institutions of higher education produce an inescapable interdependence among governing board, administration, faculty [academic staff], students, and others. The relationship calls for adequate communication among these components, and full opportunity for appropriate joint planning and effort (AAUP, 1990).

Shared governance in university planning is credited with fostering innovation within the sector (AGB, 2017) and through shared governance academic staff influence institutional vision, strategic direction, and overall university identity (Mitchell & King, 2018). Ambiguity about the limits of shared governance and the responsibilities of each constituent group leads shared governance to be inconsistent in practice (Pierce, 2011). Additionally, while broad input from academic staff may foster innovation, the practice can also result in slow change processes (AGB, 1996) and test the limits of presidential decision making and authority (MacTaggart, 2017).

**Academic staff working conditions and unions**

Academic staff may influence presidents to ensure university working conditions support productive teaching and research. Academic staff are hired on one of two contract types: permanent or part-time. Part-time academic staff typically identify with one of the following circumstances: a) they are part-time, but would prefer permanent, full-time contracts, b) they prefer part-time work due to other commitments, including creative or freelance activities or family needs, c) they are also employed elsewhere, or d) they have retired from an academic career but wish to return to teach a course (AAUP, 1980). In 2017, 47 percent of academic staff employed nationally work on part-time contracts (NCES, 2019a). In the past two decades, this percentage has increased from 43 percent (1999) to
47 percent (2017) (NCES, 2019a). More recently, in 2017, five percent (722,000) fewer academic staff are employed on part-time contracts compared to 2011 (762,000) (NCES, 2019a). Part-time academic staff are typically paid much less than full-time academic staff and may not receive benefits. The cost of engaging a full-time academic staff member can be 4.5 times the cost of hiring a part-time employee (Long, 2015). Part-time academic staff often deliver high-quality instruction due to critical industry knowledge they bring or the incentive to perform well and remain on contract, but also may lack engagement in the institution, which can result in lower job satisfaction (Long, 2015).

To ensure satisfactory labour conditions, many American university academic staff have unionised and unions can influence presidential leadership. Compensation and working relationships between academic staff and university leadership are informed by negotiated, collective contracts (Duderstadt, 2000), which, at times, create relationships that may be adversarial (Lombardi, 2013). Although labour union and university management relationships may produce tension, contract negotiation processes also provide paths for conflict resolution. Union negotiations may focus primarily on economic issues, such as compensation, and as such may subordinate academic staff concerns relating to curriculum or research that may not fit easily into a set of objectives for collective bargaining (Lombardi, 2013). Tension may not only arise between labour union leaders and university leaders, but also between union members and union leadership such as when unionised academic staff view labour union leaders as ineffective representatives of the views and needs of union members.

Academic staff also expect university leaders to ensure an environment free from discrimination, harassment, or sexual misconduct which at times may be perpetrated by students, colleagues, line managers, institutional leaders, or
people outside a university. Universities write and implement policies in compliance with national and state laws to mitigate the risk of discrimination, harassment, and misconduct, as well as establish processes for handling threats and complaints to ensure due process for individuals alleging wrongdoing and individuals accused of inappropriate or criminal behaviours. Even so, academic staff may experience harassment perpetrated by colleagues (McKinney, 1990) or students (Grauerholz, 1989; McKinney, 1990). Black academic staff may experience greater discrimination and harassment (Smith, 2004). Female academic staff may be more likely to experience exclusion, demeaning behaviours, or discrimination in hiring and promotion decisions (Bronstein & Farnsworth, 1998). Academic staff may also be harassed or threatened by external constituents who disagree with their ideological or political perspectives (Kamenetz, 2018).

**Presidential expectation 3: Organisational management**

Presidents are expected to make timely decisions, manage effectively, ensure compliance with laws and regulations, and ensure institutional functions are periodically reviewed and renewed (Morrill, 2010b). To lead successfully, presidents manage universities by stimulating and overseeing the results of key functional areas and associated staff such as enrolment, teaching and learning, research, resource development, finance, and estates, while holding others accountable to performance measures across institutions (Morrill, 2010b). If presidents are unable to ensure success in functional areas, financial difficulty can place an institution at risk of budget reductions, merger, or even closure. To achieve organisational results, presidents hire and develop an executive leadership team (MacTaggart, 2017, 2020a; Morrill, 2010b). A capable team of leaders is required to navigate the scope and complexity of a university’s
challenges (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Presidential effectiveness may be extended when networked executive teams comprised of individuals with varying strengths, skills, and perspectives collaborate (Eckel & Kezar, 2011; Neumann, 1991).

**Executive leaders**

Executive leaders who are line managed by presidents influence presidential leadership through frequent collaboration and close working relationships. Presidents build senior teams over time in response to changing conditions and needs of an institution, a president’s vision for expanding or consolidating functions under a senior leader’s purview, and executive leadership talents and transitions (MacTaggart, 2017). Presidents may also build new teams shortly after arriving at a new university by terminating the contracts of the senior leaders who served under the former president and hiring new executives to replace the outgoing direct reports (Pierce, 2011). Leaders reporting to the president at the executive level typically manage major institutional functional areas and work together to make university-wide decisions (Duderstadt, 2007; Pierce, 2011). Functions typically represented within senior-level university executive teams include academics (Duderstadt, 2007; Eckel, Cook & King, 2009; Scott, 2018), typically led by a CAO, business and finance (Duderstadt, 2007; West, 2000), student affairs (Duderstadt, 2007; NASPA (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators): Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, 2019; Scott, 2018), marketing and communications (Scott, 2018; Stoner, 2018), government relations (Duderstadt, 2007), enrolment (Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO), 2016; Scott, 2018), fundraising (Duderstadt, 2007; Croteau & Smith, 2011; Scott, 2018), and diversity, equity, and inclusion (Worthington, Stanley & Lewis, 2019). Leadership team size varies at each institution (Eckel, 2017), as some functions may be consolidated under
one executive’s portfolio. Executive teams are critical to enabling the success of presidential leadership and can contribute to problem solving that incorporates multiple, diverse perspectives (Bensimon & Neumann, 1994).

**Compliance**

Organisational management also involves the president’s work to ensure a university complies with laws and regulations to protect people served by universities, typically by mandating certain institutional operational procedures and regular reporting. Government policies guide how universities handle campus safety (US Department of Education, 2014), gender equity and sexual misconduct (US Department of Education, 2018b), student privacy (US Department of Education, 2018a), student financial aid eligibility (US Department of Education, 2016), transparency (Hearn, 2017), and freedom of expression (AASCU Government Relations, 2017). For example, national tertiary education policymakers require universities to standardise practices for preventing sexual assault and conducting investigations when incidents occur (Russlyn, 2011). This policy responds to a common, troubling occurrence at American institutions: the Association of American Universities (AAU) finds that 13 percent of students experience sexual contact that is not consensual, involving either physical force or inability to consent (Cantor* et al.*, 2019). At one university, a survey of students revealed that 48 percent of female, undergraduate students had experienced sexual assault (Bradham, 2019). If university leaders and staff fail to follow nationally-mandated guidelines designed to protect students from harm and ensure due processes when allegations of sexual misconduct are made, penalties may be significant, including losing national government funding (Nelson, 2014) or significant fines (Dwyer, 2019).
For government-funded institutions, state-level policy can also influence presidents through FOI requirements established in law by elected officials. FOI laws vary from state to state and require the activities of government entities such as universities to be openly available to citizens. The possibility of disclosure following a request under FOI laws heightens accountability to the general public, the media, and to elected political officials (Bennis, 1989; Birnbaum, 1988b; Duderstadt, 2000; Ekman, 2010; Pierce, 2011; Tisley, 2010). Institutional deliberations and written materials produced by employees and governing boards are generally available to anyone who submits a request for documents or attends a public meeting. This practice can make candid deliberation on important or potentially controversial issues challenging (Duderstadt, 2000) as university officials may fear statements will lead to negative public interpretation of university operations, such as when university governing board members discuss an institution’s declining enrolment in an open meeting attended by news media journalists (Boone, 2020). During crises, the number of requests for records increases, many from journalists seeking story ideas or key details (Menghini, 2014). If the words and actions of a president in a crisis do not align with information emerging through FOI requests, constituents may not view a president as trustworthy or legitimate (Menghini, 2014).

**Safety**

The expectation of organisational management requires presidents and their teams to create safe environments for teaching, learning, conducting research, and working. In the extreme, universities now prepare to deal with external threats posed by active shooters who target university students (Yang, 2014) or violence perpetrated by members of fringe groups, such as white nationalists who marched on the University of Virginia (Jaschik, 2017). Growing frustration from
university students about the prevalence on campuses of sexual misconduct and assault discussed above, including nonconsensual sexual contact, sexual harassment, stalking, and rape, as well as the respective rights of survivors and alleged perpetrators has led to high-profile protests (Turkewitz, 2019; Smith, 2014). Emma Sulkowicz attracted global attention for carrying her mattress to classes and across the graduation stage at Columbia University upon completion of her degree to raise awareness of sexual assault after the University did not expel her alleged rapist (Gambino, 2015). Physical harm perpetrated by members of the university community or external actors challenge institutions and their leaders to establish effective, preventative systems to mitigate risk of harm and also ensure appropriate responses to safeguard the well-being of their students when incidents occur.

Threats of harm at American universities may also be psychological. Students may be the subject of harmful social media posts, which threaten their physical or emotional safety (Sun & McClellan, 2020), but universities are ill-equipped to prevent these threats if they are anonymous or originate outside the institution (Reynolds et al., 2017). Mental illness amongst university students also presents a potent threat: suicide is the second leading cause of death for people under 24 years old in America (National Institute of Mental Health, 2019). Threats to psychological wellness increase the need for counselling and health services on university campuses, as well as test institutional capacity for rapid response when students are in personal crisis.

Safe environments for some students present risks to others. For instance, implicit bias may inform university police interactions with racial/ethnic minority students (Wootson, 2018). Some students may expect increased law enforcement presence to mitigate risk of threats, such as individuals with guns
targeting university communities intent on taking the lives of people on campuses, whereas students most likely to be impacted by systemic bias may experience law enforcement as a source of potential harm (Balko, 2018). Students express resistance to university police presence and raise awareness of bias in policing by submitting demands to leaders or mounting demonstrations. At one university in Washington, DC students demonstrate after a video of a Black student being removed from university accommodation is widely shared online (Calitri & Crummy, 2019). At another university in 2019, students occupy an administrative building for more than a month to resist the university’s plan to establish an armed campus police force (Gardner, 2019b). Creating safety for all constituencies within a university challenges presidents when a single solution, such as establishing a police force on campus, may not meet the needs of all members of a university community.

**Presidential expectation 4: Financial management**

Presidents are also expected to ensure ongoing institutional financial integrity (Duderstadt, 2007) by regularly monitoring metrics and financial management processes (MacTaggart, 2020a), while communicating authentically and candidly to constituents about a university’s financial position (Morrill, 2010b). Financial management requires “understanding of pertinent financial considerations; possessing the ability to identify, recognize [sic], assess, and capitalize [sic] on opportunities; taking calculated risks and tolerating ambiguity; and developing partnerships that will secure financial and non-financial resources” (AASCU, 2016, p. 6). Presidents lead the efficient deployment of resources (Morrill, 2010b). Presidents responding to the ACE survey also identify revenue management and new revenue generation as primary areas of focus and presidents dedicate much of their time to raising new funds, budgeting, and
financial management (Gagliardi et al., 2017). University presidents responding to a survey administered by the Deloitte Center [sic] for Higher Education Excellence indicate that fundraising ability, financial acumen, and operational oversight are amongst the top five most important areas of knowledge, skill, and ability required when assuming the role (Selingo et al., 2017). Preoccupation with finance reflects concern amongst presidents regarding institutional viability, which encompasses individual university financial health and the overall American higher education sector’s ongoing sustainability (Mitchell & King, 2018). In a 2020 Inside Higher Ed survey of presidents, 57 percent of respondents indicate their institution will remain financially sustainable over the next decade (Jaschik & Lederman, 2020). The other 43 percent, therefore, question the financial viability of their institutions. After the COVID-19 pandemic destabilised institutions and surrounding economies, presidents have become even more concerned about university finances, especially overall financial stability, likely declines in future enrolment, and institutional capacities to maintain staffing levels (Inside Higher Ed & Hanover Research, 2020).

**Enrolment, fee revenue, and university finance**

Modern university student enrolment trends discussed above can also influence presidents’ abilities to meet financial management expectations. Falling national student enrolment are precipitating financial challenges at universities (Kelderman, 2019). These trends can drive university leaders to make decisions to increase revenue and remedy a poor financial outlook without extensive consultation. Authoritarian decision making (Birnbaum, 1992a), regardless of whether decisions are actually authoritarian or decision making is simply perceived to be autocratic, can prompt a crisis as changes in curriculum, recruitment practices, or internal organisational structure implemented to mitigate
falling enrolment may not be embraced enthusiastically by everyone inside a university. MacTaggart (2007) describes possible presidential leadership styles, informed by Tom Longin, a contributor to MacTaggart’s work on academic turnaround, including “The Autocrat” noting that extreme financial circumstances may require “a dictatorial leadership style” (p. 14), adding that although this may work in the immediate term, the style is rarely appropriate to ensure long-term institutional sustainability. If university direction efforts to forestall enrolment declines are rejected by academic staff and other people working and studying inside a university, institutional progress can stall as a university’s financial position further deteriorates until eventually drastic action is required (Azziz et al., 2019), such as leadership transition (MacTaggart, 2007), a radical overhaul of a university’s programmes and costs structures (Massy, 2017), merger with another university (Azziz et al., 2019), or closure (Zemsky, Shaman & Baldridge, 2020).

Another driver of enrolment revenue involves setting fee levels, although most American institutions and the presidents who lead universities are constrained by market forces and political pressure in their capacity to set student fees (Duderstadt, 2000). For instance, government universities are typically subject to policy decisions limiting fee increases (American Association of State Colleges and Universities Government Relations and Policy Analysis Division, 2019), established by policymakers, often in response to citizen concerns about university affordability and government mandates to increase degree attainment. In contrast, independent institutions are not subject to government-mandated, fee-setting policies, and yet typically adjust fees modestly to keep pace with competitor institutions while discounting published fees on average 46 percent to
entice students to register (National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO), 2019).

Even with the pressures of government policy and market forces, student fee increases have outpaced other expenditures incurred by families, such as healthcare (Newfield, 2016), which is a significant family expenditure in America’s privatised healthcare system. From 1982 to 2010, student fees rose by 439 percent while median family income grew by only 147 percent (Bok, 2013). High fee levels disadvantage students from less affluent backgrounds seeking access to tertiary education. For example, low-income students rarely apply to institutions advertising high fees on the basis of the high expense, despite available discounts and financial aid (Hoxby & Avery, 2012).

**Government subsidies for university student fees: Grants and loans**

To offset university fees, many students and families use government-funded and institutional financial aid, another critical university revenue source. The availability of student aid administered by the national government in the form of grants, loans, and income-based repayment schemes increased significantly in the past 40 years, enabling enrolment growth as part of national policy (Kezar, 2014). National grants not requiring repayment awarded to low-income undergraduate and certain postgraduate students represent the single largest source of American student fee grant funding (US Department of Education, 2015).

In addition to grants, students and their families also use government-administered and private student loans to pay for university. Average debt levels upon completion for individual borrowers are under $30,000 per person (Figure...
9). Fifty-nine percent of students earning baccalaureate degrees leave university with student loans (College Board, 2018). Seventy-seven percent of all borrowers accrue total debt less than $40,000 (College Board, 2018). In 2018, total national student loan debt currently owed by all students and families has increased to over $1.5 trillion (Friedman, 2018). The individual circumstances of students, the large total volume of individual and family debt, and extreme cases of student loan debt rising to over $100,000 (Urizar, 2015) contribute to student concerns about the affordability of American postsecondary education.

**Government funding**

Attention paid by presidents to renewing and managing university resources also reflects concerns about government support for American higher education. Fifty-six percent of presidents leading government-funded institutions anticipate that funding allocations will continue to diminish (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Presidents engage in political advocacy to encourage increases in state-level funding as support declines (Esterberg & Wooding, 2012), but in many instances advocacy results in maintenance-level funding rather than increased funding levels. State funding allocations at times bolster university operations through funding increases but now are often constraining as annual, government-allocated operating funds have declined (Lombardi, 2013), at times resulting in employee
redundancies or academic programme elimination (Hazelrigg, 2019). State
government funding reductions pre-date the 2008 recession as state-allocated
institutional revenues at government-funded universities dropped from 32 percent
in 1980 to 19 percent in 2009 (Bok, 2013). Following the recession in 2008, the
drop was significant: on a per-student basis, state government funding dropped
10.1 percent in 2008-09, followed by three consecutive years of decreases,
reaching the most significant annual reduction in 2011-12, 10.7 percent (College
Board, 2017). In response to state-mandated funding reductions, institutions
increased student fees (College Board, 2017) to balance budgets and ensure
continued operations. Even so, as noted above, most institutions are constrained
in their capacity to raise fees significantly due to market forces, political pressure,
and policies preventing increases of more than a mandated percentage directed
by politicians (Duderstadt, 2000), thereby constraining university finances when
efforts have been made to redress budget shortfalls with student fee increases.

Even though government-funded institutions are influenced most significantly by
government funding policies, all institutional types benefit from national funding
received indirectly in the form of student financial aid, research grants, or funding
for university health systems (Duderstadt, 2000). Through the efforts of academic
staff, universities receive research funding from national government
organisations (Kezar, 2014) such as the National Science Foundation, National
Institutes of Health, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the National
Endowment for the Arts.

In the future, national government funding for institutions is expected to
negatively influence universities as government spending becomes increasingly
constrained. Future national subsidies are at risk due to a growing imbalance
between government spending commitments and revenues (Sheiner, 2018), and
an even greater gap is projected as revenue is less likely to cover expenses in the future. This gap between revenue and anticipated government spending will continue to increase as a large generation enters retirement and claims entitlement programme benefits, straining a challenged system (Duderstadt, 2000). Without significant sources of replacement revenue, funding for higher education programmes nationally will be at risk when government programmes are prioritised for budget reduction or elimination. Policymakers will be forced to select between student grant aid programmes or research funding and other programmes which may require immediate investments such as medical coverage for vulnerable populations, pension benefits, national security measures, environmental protection, or the national prison system.

**Presidential expectation 5: Fundraising**

Presidents are expected to develop relationships with high-net-worth individuals and philanthropic foundation representatives to obtain gifts and grants exceeding past levels of generosity and investment (Morrill, 2010b), thereby increasing contributed institutional revenue. Many university presidents are considered to be the institution’s primary fundraiser (Mitchell & King, 2018; Selingo et al., 2017). Despite this expectation to raise funds, opportunities to increase revenue through philanthropy or endowment distributions are limited for all but a few premier institutions (Duderstadt, 2000), namely large, prestigious government-funded and independent research institutions and small, independent, highly-regarded baccalaureate institutions. For the majority of American universities, fundraising is not a promising source of sustainable revenue (Mitchell & King, 2018). Only a small number of American universities have endowments capable of underwriting a large portion of expenses through annual returns on investment. For example, in 2015, only 85 universities in the United States held endowments over $1 billion
and 120 institutions with the largest endowments accounted for about three-quarters of the total, combined endowments for all institutions (NCES, 2016b). Therefore, three percent of American postsecondary institutions hold 75 percent of the total endowed funds in the nation (NCES, 2016b, 2016a). The largest endowments are held by Harvard University, Yale University, University of Texas system, Princeton University, and Stanford University (NCES, 2016b). Eighty-five percent of presidents anticipate that charitable donations will be an increasing source of revenue in the coming years (Gagliardi et al., 2017), but this projection may be overly optimistic. Most institutions are not able to attract the most significant philanthropic investments or subsidise operations with private donations and grants. Therefore, despite expectations and associated efforts, presidents may be unable to increase revenue from charitable gifts or grants significantly.

Direct influence by donors investing in university programmes is somewhat contained by regulations established by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), but even so, donors have a profound impact on the nature and shape of universities and institutional leadership through charitable investments (Bok, 2013; Newfield, 2016). Presidents often prioritise the work of cultivating relationships with affluent individuals to secure donations: 58.1 percent of presidents indicate that fundraising is primarily how they use their time (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Presidents identify fundraising, alumni relations, and donor relations amongst their most important responsibilities (Selingo et al., 2017). As such, affluent donors and philanthropic foundation leaders are frequently engaged by university presidents. Presidents share institutional priorities with prospective and current supporters, who may seek to influence university direction by investing in projects and programmes that align with their interests and values.
Presidential expectation 6: External and internal relations

Presidents are expected to establish credibility with and have the capacity to influence an array of external and internal constituents (Morrill, 2010b), as well as manage and negotiate constituent counterinfluence. For example, presidents influence the media, increase the visibility of their universities, and enhance reputation (Morrill, 2010b). Internally, presidents are expected to develop an organisational climate and programmes to promote diversity, demonstrate interpersonal skills in building relationships with administrative and academic staff, as well as students, while conveying a commitment to the welfare of university community members (AASCU, 2016; Morrill, 2010). To meet these expectations, presidents are required to communicate effectively and authentically, formally and informally, across multiple communications channels, while listening actively to understand the needs and priorities of internal and external constituents (AASCU, 2016).

Relationships with students

Governing boards who hire and evaluate university leaders expect presidents to use interpersonal skill and sensitivity to build relationships with students, while maintaining a commitment to the ongoing development of students and their well-being (Morrill, 2010a). It may be difficult for presidents to establish and maintain strong relationships with students, considering the increasingly transactional nature of student engagement in university. The rising cost of attendance and the use of student loans to pay for university can lead students to view their interaction with a university and its leadership as transactional. Multiple sources of revenue contribute to the costs incurred by universities of providing education, as noted above. Even so, Desrochers and Hurlburt (2014) estimate that students pay between 50 and 60 percent of the cost of delivering their education incurred
by universities. Increases in total fees for university paid by students and associated increases in institutional reliance on student fees to cover operating costs influence a president’s dependence on students. Students will expect value for and return on their investment and presidents require satisfied students who will enrol, persist, and graduate to ensure institutions are sustainable and institutional missions are realised. Presidents and students, therefore, relate to each other interdependently and transactionally.

**Students and other constituents involved in activism**
The presence of social movements in American university life and the influence of activism on university presidents is not new (Cox, 2017; Jason, 2018; T’ien Duffy, 2016). Activism involves “an intentional, sustained connection to a larger collective”, “developing and exercising power”, and is distinct from political campaigning (Cabrera, Matias & Montoya, 2017, pp. 404–405, 408). In the 1960s and 1970s, demonstrations were frequently staged at American universities or by university students to raise awareness of racial injustice and segregation (Anderson, 2015), discrimination based on gender (Chen, 2015), freedom of expression (Cox, 2017), and the atrocities of war (Chen, 2015). In contemporary American society, inequitable treatment of individuals based on race and ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, and income disparity persists. Following escalating national political tension and discord, people and groups have responded by engaging in university-based activism with renewed vigour (The Economist, 2016). Social movements that gain prominence in the wider social milieu, such as the #BlackLivesMatter movement, which originated in 2013 (Chokshi, 2018), and the #MeToo movement, which surged late in 2017 (Harris, 2018), have profoundly influenced university activism. Additionally, targeted acts of provocation on university campuses further stimulate students, academic staff,
and other concerned citizens to demonstrate about social issues. The American Department of Education (2018e) reports a 24 percent increase in hate crimes occurring at higher education institutions between 2015 and 2016. In response to persistent inequity, increasing national tension, and direct provocation, such as hate crimes, youth activism on university campuses has surged as protestors combine traditional tactics, such as sit-ins or rallies, and digital communications to advance causes (Jason, 2018). Contemporary university-based activism has primarily focused on race relations (Bradley, 2016; Gardner, 2016a; Heller, 2016; Regan, 2016; The Economist, 2016), fee increases (Newfield, 2016), sexual misconduct (Izadi, 2015a; Smith, 2017), and university employee working conditions (Noguchi, 2017; West, 2015).

When student activists present demands to presidents and in doing so ask presidents to confront issues like racism directly, presidents may be influenced by social activists (Trachtenberg, 2018; Cole & Harper, 2017). Demands may include requests for presidents to implement stronger policies aimed at preventing biased behaviours, increased resources for marginalised students, and the resignation or removal of university employees or governing board members from post (#StudentPowerHU, 2018). Presidents may communicate with student activists by engaging in dialogue (Frederick, 2018), by limiting engagement (LCBLM, 2015), or by endeavouring to respond while meeting the needs of other constituencies, such as employees who work under collective bargaining agreements preventing sudden employee removal from post without due process (Bridges, 2017). Students share their experiences and perceptions widely and rapidly online, which can increase and accelerate awareness of insensitivity, racism, and discrimination (Gardner, 2016a), leading to wider discontent amongst university constituents. Presidential leadership is critical in
episodes triggered by activists as Kirwan (2016), writing about racial justice activism, observes:

…efforts to address the underlying causes of the protests cry out for presidential leadership, leadership that permeates the entire campus community so that diversity and inclusion goals are shared with all and progress toward them becomes a prominent measure of the university’s success.

Many presidents understand the importance of presidential leadership in addressing social problems: 56 percent of presidents indicate that racial climate is a higher priority for them than it had been three years earlier (Gagliardi et al., 2017). However, the view into each president’s university compared to the sector varies significantly when presidential views of racial climate at their own institutions are compared to their views of the climate at other universities: Jaschik and Lederman (2020), in a survey of presidents for Inside Higher Ed, find that although 77 percent of presidents describe race relations at their institutions as excellent or good, only 19 percent indicate that nationwide university race relations could be considered excellent or good. This gap in presidential perspectives on racial climate at each president’s own institution compared to the broader sector may signal an area of risk: leadership may not view racial climate accurately or be open to communicating a candid assessment of racial climate. As such, presidents may misinterpret climate issues impacting constituents.

**Student athletes and university sport**

In America, students play in and attend university sporting events, which can be a major driver of campus culture, sponsorships and donations, and national media coverage (Mitchell & King, 2018). Sport can generate revenue and enhance institutional reputation amongst communities in proximity to universities and amongst team supporters (Ferguson & Davis III, 2019). In the largest and most influential national university sport association during 2018-2019 academic year,
498,691 American student athletes played on teams (National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), 2018). Of those, 28 percent identify as racial/ethnic minority students and 4 percent identify as nonresident, for whom America is not their country of origin (NCAA, 2018). University sport participation is divided by institution into conferences and divisions. In some sports, such as American football in the most prestigious division, many more racial/ethnic minority students play: in 2018-2019, 48 percent of male students playing American football identified as Black (NCAA, 2018). University sport unifies campus constituents who rally to support teams and create community by attending sporting events (Mitchell & King, 2018). University sport may entice students to enrol who wish to play on teams or attend events, thereby boosting attendance and fee revenue (Mitchell & King, 2018). However, most athletic programmes are not self-supporting and may draw upon core operational revenue to be sustained (Mitchell & King, 2018). Former University of Michigan president Duderstadt (2007) reports presidents will privately, but not necessarily publicly, confess that many problems they face originate in university sport, such as pressure to win, overinvolvement of governing board members, or an ongoing requirement for new resources to buy equipment and facilities. Tensions exist in universities regarding university sport, especially if academic staff view sport as taking precedence over academics or if the power of a coach overshadows the authority of a university president (Mitchell & King, 2018).

**University employees**

Many types of employees work inside universities, in addition to academic staff and executive leaders discussed above, including administrative and support staff who are tasked with university operations, and student employees. Degree-granting, American, higher education institutions employs 3,914,542 people
Of those, 39 percent are academic staff, 10 percent are postgraduate student assistants, and 51 percent are staff or managers (NCES, 2018d). Sixty-five percent of all employees work full time and 35 percent are employed part time. On average, across the 4,360 degree-granting institutions, each president leads 898 employees (NCES, 2018f, 2018d). Similar to academic staff, professional and support staff at American universities participate in labour unions. Many support staff in administrative, custodial, or estates maintenance roles are unionised. University staff similarly expect satisfactory working conditions, living wages, and to work in environments free from discrimination or harassment. Unlike academic staff, administrative and support staff are not afforded the rights to academic freedom and therefore are typically more restricted in expressing their views.

**Student employees**

Universities also employ students, who typically work for less than it would cost to employ professional staff, and in return students gain work experience that enhances post-degree employability. Students may legally work in every department or office of a university. For example, graduate assistants support academic staff in teaching, grading, and conducting laboratory experiments. Classes at large universities may number in the hundreds, requiring a team of graduate assistants to support a professor. With this experience, graduate assistants may be prepared to teach and oversee research after completing degrees early in their academic careers. The US Department of Education offers a national work program for students that subsidises employment for university student employment and offsets the cost of attendance for those who participate (US Department of Education, 2017). Without student employees, many functions in a university, including the core work involving teaching, learning, and research,
may be inadequately resourced. If students lack opportunities to work at universities while enrolled, they may not enjoy practical application of learning that predicates successful post-degree employment.

**Presidential expectation 7: Board and governance relations**

Presidents are also expected to develop productive relationships with engaged governing boards (Duderstadt, 2007; MacTaggart, 2011, 2017), underscored by trust and open communication channels (Morrill, 2010b). Presidents establish priorities and strategies collaboratively with governing boards that will allow institutions to realise educational missions and attain aspirational future visions (Scott, 2018). Presidents engage in collaborative decision making with multiple constituencies while honouring the respective, unique responsibilities of the board, executive leadership, and academic staff (AGB, 2019; Morrill, 2010). An effective president enables and orients the board’s work on governance toward mission, vision, strategy, fiscal integrity, academic quality, and institutional policy (AGB, 2019; Morrill, 2010b; Scott, 2018).

Governing board members, appointed by political officials or elected by private citizens, serve as fiduciaries as they oversee individual government-funded institutions or state-wide systems (Education Commission of the States, 2019a). A fiduciary is responsible for overseeing a university’s “administration, investment, monitoring, and distribution of property—in this case, the charitable or public assets of the institution” (AGB, 2015). Appointed and elected governing board members, as fiduciaries, are not just responsible for estates and a university’s financial position, but for all real and intangible assets of a university, such as institutional reputation, mission fulfilment, and community relationships (AGB, 2015, 2019). Governing boards hire presidents or system leaders, and evaluate their performance (AGB, 2019; Novak, 2012; Morrill, 2010; Thorndike,
As such, presidents are directly accountable to their boards (Esterberg & Wooding, 2012; Olscamp, 2003).

Governing board members are, ideally, intended to be critical partners in a president’s institutional leadership (AGB, 2019; Bacow, 2018; MacTaggart, 2017, 2020; Mitchell & King, 2018; Scott, 2018), requiring thoughtful, consistent relationship building through frequent, open communication (Bacow, 2018; Morrill, 2010a; Scott, 2018) to ensure fruitful relationships between boards and presidents. Boards perform an oversight role, delegating daily leadership and management to the president, although it is common for boards to engage in micromanagement (Holt, 2014; Olscamp, 2003; Pierce, 2011). Relationships between presidents and board members may become strained if responsibilities are not clearly defined. Many people serving on boards have had success in business, law, or other sectors (Esterberg & Wooding, 2012; Smerek, 2011), and as such boards may find the structure and culture of the academy unfamiliar, even perplexing and full of norms lacking purpose (Mitchell & King, 2018). Boards may find leading in a collaborative environment in which change occurs slowly and all members expect to provide input frustrating, at times leading board members to press or even remove presidents in an effort to accelerate change (Rice, 2012). Despite the importance of this partnership and the conflicts that can arise detailed above, only one-third of presidents identify working with the board as the primary focus of their time (Gagliardi et al., 2017).

The potential for conflict between a president and a board may increase during crises (O’Rourke, 2014) and conflict arising involving the president’s relationship with a board can also accelerate or cause crises. For instance, in times of crisis, boards may issue public statements (Mobley, 2018; Breslin, 2018). If these statements do not align with the president’s communications, the legitimacy of
messages from either president or board may be questioned, thereby intensifying the crisis (O’Rourke, 2014). Conversely, boards have been identified by presidents as the most supportive external constituency (Gagliardi et al., 2017). During crises, board members may remain supportive of presidents, even when other constituencies are critical (Fujita, 1994). In one example, a board publicly endorses a President during a crisis (Mobley, 2018) while academic staff vote no confidence in the President (Svrluga & Douglas-Gabriel, 2017).

**Presidential expectation 8: Personal characteristics and values**

Presidents are expected to meet these obligations while engaging and exhibiting key skills and abilities, such as persistence, clear and compelling communication abilities, listening, openness to alternative viewpoints, the capacity to reconcile conflict and build consensus, honesty, integrity, and the ability to inspire trust and confidence (AASCU, 2016; Cowen, 2018; Morrill, 2010). MacTaggart (2017) emphasises “integrity, high energy, resilience, a positive demeanor [sic], and the ability to sustain one’s personal mental health in a fraught milieu” (p. 6) as critical qualities of presidential leadership. These skills, values, and personal characteristics have been considered necessary for fulfilling the presidential expectations outlined in this chapter.

**Is presidential influence real?**

Presidential influence, as it is enacted through the fulfilment of the expectations outlined above in relation to constituents presidents aspire to lead, is debated by researchers, constituents, and current and former presidents. By some accounts, presidents are highly influential. Researchers and presidents, however, identify disconnection between presidential action and institutional results to suggest that presidents may not be influential. Former president Duderstadt, amongst others, claims that “the position has surprisingly little authority” (Duderstadt, 2007, p. 
Steven Muller (1994), president emeritus of Johns Hopkins University, asserts that in the research university, presidents lack “authority commensurate to their truly enormous responsibility” (p. 127), which suggests presidents may not be as influential as might be expected considering the scope of modern university activities, public profile, and list of expectations discussed above. Below, I consider both views, identify key domains in which presidents tangibly exercise influence, and consider constituent views of presidential influence.

Unsurprisingly, former presidents affirm that the role is influential (Bok, 2013) and essential to delivering major, university-level achievements (Duderstadt, 2000). Presidents often view their own actions as effective, because their previous professional successes have primed them to do so (Birnbaum, 1990). Birnbaum’s (1986) early research on the presidency suggests that presidents suffer from cognitive biases that reinforce perceived yet unproven relationships between their own leadership actions and outcomes. Therefore, presidents often view themselves as the source of the most critical, positive changes at their universities (Birnbaum, 1990) and may resist associating negative outcomes with their actions (Birnbaum, 1986), which is probably not dissimilar to the orientations of most leaders.

However, presidential actions and institutional results historically are not strongly linked (Birnbaum, 1989, 1992a). Birnbaum (1988) asserts that “...it is virtually impossible to follow the trail of presidential influence through the myriad of actions, interpretations, departments and decisions that characterize [sic] the everyday life [of the university]” (p. 179). Birnbaum (1999) does concur with presidents that the role is influential, but observes that presidents are less influential than constituents are generally willing to believe, due to the “highly romanticized [sic], heroic views of leadership—what leaders do, what they are
able to accomplish, and the general affects they have on our lives” (Birnbaum, 1988a, pp. 24–25). Tierney (1999) also challenges the belief in university presidential influence that “harkens back to the theoretical paradigm of positivism, which assumes that individuals can comprehend, coordinate, and manipulate reality” (p. 57). Overestimating presidential influence on outcomes can overshadow the influence of external and internal constituents and context on presidents, especially university history, culture, and leaders situated at all levels of an institution (Birnbaum, 1999). Most recently, the case has been made for presidents to exercise influence in executing organisational change efforts owing to the fragility of the higher education business model (MacTaggart, 2017).

Despite the ambiguity of presidential influence, presidents exercise influence as they fulfil the expectations outlined above. Presidents are authorised to make decisions, including critical financial decisions. Senior university leaders control resources, hire academic staff and grant tenure, and affirm authority in governance processes and collective bargaining agreements (Esterberg & Wooding, 2012). As such, presidents influence strategic direction, the composition of a university’s employees and working conditions for personnel, and resourcing for university departments.

Presidents are also influential due to the significance attributed to them by constituents (Birnbaum, 1988a). Constituents may attribute both positive and negative institutional changes to presidents (Fujita, 1990). As such, if constituents believe leaders matter, they do. If constituents believe leaders can cause events to occur (Birnbaum, 1988a), they are likely to identify the causes of unusual or extreme events with leadership (Brennan & Stern, 2017). The attribution of leadership influence allows constituents to feel a sense of control (Pfeffer, 1977), especially in ambiguous or uncertain circumstances. By believing that those in
leadership positions exert influence, constituents reinforce widely-held perceptions that individuals control circumstances (Pfeffer, 1977). When leadership is understood as symbolic of a belief in the individual capacity to exercise control, it logically follows that higher education leaders are critiqued by constituents when leaders are unable to control events or influence outcomes (Bolman & Gallos, 2010; Esterberg & Wooding, 2012). No-confidence votes, which occur when constituents express disappointment in a president, symbolically reject the leader who is deemed by individuals participating in the vote as no longer fit to lead and steward the institution. Through the lens of attribution, no-confidence votes may be constituent attempts to identify and to label the cause of uncertainty. Often no-confidence votes occur when internal constituents are dissatisfied with challenging financial circumstances (Trachtenberg et al., 2013b).

**Conclusion: Leading universities, presidential expectations, and abbreviated tenure**

Presidential expectations espoused by currently serving presidents, the constituents they aspire to lead, and the governing boards to whom they are accountable are numerous (Morrill, 2010b), and in some cases may be unrealistic. The measurement of presidential effectiveness is especially challenging due to the tenuous relationship between presidential actions and institutional outcomes (Birnbaum, 1989; Birnbaum, 1992a; Bolman & Gallos, 2010) such as enrolment levels and student fee revenue, fundraising revenue, financial health, research productivity, or strength of reputation. While expected to influence universities positively through effective presidential leadership grounded in mutually beneficial relationships, the pressures and challenges endemic to the contemporary university outlined above provide ample
opportunities for leaders to misstep and make enemies (Trachtenberg et al., 2013b), transgress perceived and historic institutional culture (Bornstein, 2003), and in the worst cases, find that continuing to lead is no longer tenable. I conclude this review of presidents and the presidency by providing brief examples of how the requirements of the role can relate to abbreviated presidential tenure, which is explored fully in the next chapter.

Certain institutional types and models may be more likely to experience financial difficulty, which threatens institutions and presidential leadership, especially as population trends diminish the total number of prospective students likely to enrol. If financial difficulty at a university is left unchecked, the end of a president’s tenure or even institutional closure may ensue. McNaughtan and colleagues (2019) identify a relationship between institutional type and model, combined with enrolment trends, and presidential transitions: small institutions experiencing difficulty competing for enrolment revenue in states with smaller populations are more likely to experience a presidential transition. If institutions are able to increase enrolment and/or population increases occur in the state where a university is located, presidential transitions are less likely to occur (McNaughtan, et al., 2019). Presidential transition following enrolment and population declines may increase in the coming years as demographic trends challenge presidents and their teams to meet enrolment targets. However, presidents may not be anticipating this difficulty, which may result in a lack of preparedness to meet the challenge. Seventy-seven percent of presidents leading government institutions responding to the ACE survey expect revenues from student fees to increase in the next five years (Gagliardi et al., 2017), but increases may not be attainable due to national population trends. A declining postsecondary population also increases the likelihood of presidential transition (McNaughtan, DeMonbrun &
Warshaw, 2019) and if presidents are unable to achieve the revenues they expect in the coming years, institutions will risk significant challenge or closure while presidents may find they face abbreviated tenure.

The expectation of strategic leadership may prompt abbreviated tenure and, in turn, abbreviated tenure can also undermine an institution’s capacity for pursuing a strategic change agenda. Shortened presidential tenure places universities at risk of failing to innovate or to adapt to changing conditions (Bornstein, 2003; Korschgen, Fuller & Gardner, 2001; McLaughlin, 1996b). Overall, as presidents serve shorter tenures, presidents also have fewer years to design and implement change at their universities (Seltzer, 2016b). Researchers Eckel and Kezar (2012) suggest that university transformation takes years to design and to implement. Writing on the 21st century presidency, scholar and former university system chief executive MacTaggart (2017) highlights the tension between length of presidential tenure and organisational change efforts in American higher education:

Unfortunately, the length of service for presidents is declining. And waiting out a change leader is a common response to vigorous leadership, especially if the executive doesn’t stay in office long enough to institutionalize [sic] a new way of doing business. Yet a minimum of seven years is usually required to convince enough members of the academic community that a new order is here to stay, and most enduring change requires a decade or more of sustained leadership (p. 5).

Given presidential tenures are shortening, the capacity for university leaders to influence their universities may be diminished and the benefits that accrue from longer tenures, such as innovation and sustainable change, may be out of reach at many universities. With less time to achieve goals, presidents may attempt to accelerate change initiatives, which may not be possible in an academic environment (Bornstein, 2003). If presidents fail to meet expectations for strategic
leadership and demonstrate visible results associated with institutional strategic
direction, presidents risk termination or may be forced to resign. Conversely, if a
leader is perceived as quickly acting without sufficiently consulting with
constituents, a president can also risk abbreviated tenure even if actions are
designed to fulfil this expectation.

Educational leadership of academic staff and associated functions of teaching,
learning, and research can also cut a president’s contract short. In one example
of abbreviated presidential tenure, a president celebrated for significantly
improving student graduation rates, is the subject of a no-confidence vote by
academic staff (Smith, 2016b). In the episode, academic staff raise multiple
concerns about the President’s leadership, including an absence of
communication from the President’s office, course consolidations, and lack of
opportunity to influence decisions (Smith, 2016b). A few months later, the
President announces her resignation, effective following a transition period
(Smith, 2016a).

Presidents may experience abbreviated tenure when government funding makes
achieving a balanced operating budget untenable, or if their universities fail to
comply with government-mandated policies designed to protect the people they
serve. Government officials may also contribute to abbreviated tenure by
engaging in public dialogue about a president’s capacity for leadership. For
example, if elected political officials call for a President’s resignation during a
crisis (Stamm, 2018), it may become more difficult for a governing board to
maintain support for the leader.

Declining enrolment, which reduces revenue, in turn has the potential to increase
the likelihood of presidential transition (McNaughtan et al., 2019). For example,
Hampshire College, a postsecondary institution with a higher than average annual total cost of attendance of $67,395 (approximately £50,477) including student fees, accommodations, and other costs (Hampshire College, 2018), experienced a public crisis and an abbreviated presidential tenure. The institution carries a high level of debt (Berg, 2019), and enrols a small, declining student population of 1,191 as of Fall 2018 (Hampshire College, 2019; Office of the President, 2019). When the enrolment decline is considered in the context of high student fees, enrolment may be understood in part as an expression of concern amongst students and families regarding anticipated returns on investment when paying to pursue a postsecondary degree. The President announces that the institution seeks a partner for a merger (Nelson, 2019). Constituents organise, responding negatively to the suggestion that the institution might merge with another (Seltzer, 2019b). Students express concern for the anticipated loss of their institution’s distinctive experimental approach to education by staging protests and mounting an online campaign opposing the President’s direction (Hampshire College Rise Up 2019, 2019). Academic staff attempt a no-confidence vote in the President, governing board, and chief financial officer (Gardner, 2019a). The President resigns suddenly (Osei, 2019).

Early in his tenure, another president implements cost savings and reduces the university’s workforce to resolve a budget shortfall, fund new initiatives, and complete facilities improvements (Farkas, 2015). The President and his administration also spend almost $1 million early in the president’s tenure on renovating the presidential residence (Jaschik, 2015a). The internal university community interprets this investment as a counterpoint to austerity measures at the institution, which includes the elimination of 200 employees (Seltzer, 2016a). Graduates parody the President’s spending (Graduates over Greed, 2015) and
journalists draw attention to the episode online (Thomason, 2015; Jaschik, 2015b). In financial crises, university community members lose jobs, grieve for the loss of eliminated programs and former colleagues, and assume new duties after colleagues have gone. The university community scrutinises the president’s actions and statements during this financial crisis, attentive to misalignment between goals, values, and action. Issues arising for this president also involve a perceived lack of commitment to working within a shared governance context, which can place presidents at risk of an abbreviated tenure (Trachtenberg et al., 2013b). In this example, academic staff are excluded from decisions they believe should be in their purview and vote no confidence in the President (Anon, 2016). In 2016, the trustees and the President agree to end the President’s tenure after two years in the role (Seltzer, 2016a).

Expectations for universities to become more inclusive have also led to high-profile crises and presidential resignation. For example, following reports of a series of bias incidents at an institution, students mount a no-confidence vote in the university’s president and suggest that more should be done to foster inclusion (Lisker, 2015b). While students initiate the vote, academic staff also participate (Lisker, 2015a). Of the students participating in the vote, over 70 percent vote no confidence while seventy-five percent of academic staff also vote no confidence in the President (Lederman, 2016). Finally, administrative employees respond to a survey issued by the institution’s staff council: the majority of administrative staff state their morale is damaged and view senior leadership as unaccountable (Lederman, 2016). The President, after publishing an article articulating presidential responsibility to remain in post during crisis (Rochon, 2015), announces a date by which his retirement will be effective (Casler, 2016; Jaschik, 2016; Maycan, 2016; Svrluga, 2016).
Finally, presidents may also be forced to leave their posts after experiencing conflict with governing boards (see Chapter 3). If relationships unravel and communication channels are weak, crises may be exacerbated, and a president may be terminated or resign. In one example, a governing board issue a letter to a President in advance of a public hearing about possible termination of the President’s contract under the provision, “failure to maintain the confidence of the board” (Board of Trustees for Alabama State University, 2014). The President’s leadership and Board responses attract significant attention from local news media (Moon, 2014). The Board (Walker, 2016) indicate that the President failed: “to be responsive to the Board’s concerns and requests for information, and to keep Board members adequately informed about University operations” (p. 1), “to ensure that Board minutes are prepared in a timely manner:” (p. 2), “to be forthright in communications with Board members” (p. 2), and also allege the President had been “misinforming the faculty, staff, and students about the action of the Board…” (p. 2). In this case, the Board terminate the President’s contract (Davis, 2016).
Chapter 3. Abbreviated presidential tenure: Previously published research review and synthesis
When vacating a presidency prior to the end date of a contract, a president experiences abbreviated tenure, or a tenure which is cut short before its anticipated conclusion, and evidence appears to indicate that abbreviated tenure amongst higher education chief executives is increasing (Harris & Ellis, 2018). Although abbreviated tenure is not monitored systematically at the national or state-level, involuntary departure examined in one study suggests that involuntary transitions account for up to 15 percent of presidential transitions (Sanaghan et al., 2008). Another study of the American university sector identifies 50 unexpected presidential departures in 2009 and 2010 (Trachtenberg et al., 2013). Harris and Ellis (2018) examine presidential transitions occurring between 1988 and 2016 to find the highest level of American university presidential involuntary turnover—termination or forced resignation—in three decades occurring between 2008 and 2016 with more than half of all involuntary presidential turnover occurring after 2008.

To build context for case analysis and to situate this study in an existing body of knowledge about abbreviated tenure, this research review began with and is informed by Trachtenberg and colleagues’ (2013) study of presidencies cut short before their anticipated conclusion: *Presidencies Derailed: Why university leaders fail and how to prevent it*. Doctoral dissertations and journal articles have also been written and published on abbreviated presidential tenure, but *Presidencies Derailed* remains the most prominent monograph wholly dedicated to the topic. Trachtenberg and colleagues (2013) cite research published in the 1980s and 1990s to define “derailment", a term for abbreviated tenure originating in business management research now applied in American higher education leadership research. To understand previously published research conducted in corporate settings on which contemporary abbreviated presidential tenure research is
based, I read Trachtenberg and colleagues’ (2013) reference list to identify, collect, and review past publications the authors used to synthesise research into a summary of “enduring derailment themes from the corporate sector” (p. 9).

Research into university leadership derailment remains in its early stages (Cafley, 2015). I queried academic journal databases and reviewed the reference lists of any previously published study on abbreviated tenure to create a comprehensive list of relevant, current research. To identify empirical research examining abbreviated presidential tenure in higher education, I searched ProQuest ERIC for the word “derailment”, which generated 27 results, one of which related to presidential leadership in universities. I identified additional publications by searching for any research study citing Trachtenberg and colleagues’ (2013) *Presidencies derailed* on Google Scholar, which produced 61 results. I searched within these results for publications referring to university presidents by using the search term “president”, which generated another 55 results. I read the titles of all publications in the search results to identify research examining abbreviated presidential tenure. Using UCL Explore and ProQuest Dissertations and Theses global database, I searched for research examining abbreviated presidential tenure by authors who contributed chapters to *Presidencies Derailed* (Carver, 2013; Longmire, 2013; McNeal, 2013; Touzeau, 2013), but the queries did not produce results. I then searched via Google using the author’s first and surnames (“Julie Longmire”), and the word “dissertation” to identify four, publicly-available American doctoral theses investigating presidential abbreviated tenure (Carver, 2009; Longmire, 2010; McNeal, 2009; Touzeau, 2010). Each time I identified a new research study, I read the study’s reference list to identify any other published examinations of abbreviated tenure.
Using this body of previously published research, I define presidential abbreviated tenure in this chapter by discussing and synthesising definitions of derailment, unfinished mandate, turnover, and transition. Resignation is defined as a form of abbreviated tenure. Next, using Trachtenberg and colleagues’ (2013) presidential derailment themes contributing to abbreviated tenure, combined with the findings of selected empirical studies investigating abbreviated tenure in corporate settings and universities, I describe leadership actions, communications, and behaviours associated with six contributors to abbreviated tenure derived from my review of the literature: 1) problems with interpersonal relationships, 2) inability to build and lead teams or key constituencies, 3) governing board challenges, 4) difficulty meeting business objectives, 5) inability to adapt, and 6) ethical lapses. After I conducted this review, I identified common elements in contributing actions, communications, and behaviours associated with abbreviated tenure found in past published research and synthesised three of the six contributors—1) problems with interpersonal relationships, 2) inability to build and lead a team or key constituencies, and 3) governing board challenges—into one: relationships. The previously identified factor, “problems with interpersonal relationships”, significantly influences my definition, however, a broader view encompassing interaction with constituencies addressed in prior research, namely governing boards and teams, allows me to consider possible constituent influence in abbreviated presidential tenure across multiple internal and external presidential relationships.

Possible institutional impacts of abbreviated presidential tenure

Prior to describing the six contributors to abbreviated tenure, and to contextualise this examination of abbreviated tenure in crisis, I first consider the potential
negative and positive influence of sudden presidential departure on institutions. Unexpected presidential transition may undermine an institution (Padilla, 2004) by damaging the financial, emotional, and strategic dimensions of a university. Presidents interviewed for an early study published by Korschgen, Fuller, and Gardner (2001) indicate that short presidencies may create “enormous disruption and problems for the institution” (p. 5). Abbreviate tenure at times can also be viewed positively by constituents and used by a university governing board to strengthen an institution, for instance if the departure of a president is perceived as heralding a new beginning after a period of tumult.

First, abbreviated tenure may negatively influence the views, connections, and emotions of university constituents who expect stability, vision, and strategic direction from leadership. Constituents may become negative when a president’s tenure is cut short. Even in the absence of unexpected or sudden departure, leadership transitions produce anxiety for constituents who remain at the institution following the end of a president’s tenure (Sanaghan et al., 2008). When a president leaves after a period of institutional stability, morale may decline (Basinger, 2001; Scott, 2018) and a sense of insecurity may emerge amongst members of the university community (Davis & Davis, 1999; Trachtenberg et al., 2013b; Wolverton, Wolverton & Gmelch, 1999). The consequences of anxiety following leadership transitions include low productivity and lack of attention to mission (Martin & Samels, 2004). Presidential transition whether sudden or not can damage or alter critical relationships (Basinger, 2001; Martin & Samels, 2004). After new leadership is appointed, relationship rebuilding is necessary to ensure critical constituents such as academic staff, board members, and other staff understand the new president’s vision for the institution and may use this understanding to fulfil the institution’s mission.
Institutional strategic direction and its implementation may also be negatively influenced by abbreviated presidential tenure. Universities evolve and change due to the efforts of many constituents and leaders. The continual evolution toward a university’s desired future state needs time to be realised, while requiring guidance and stewardship from a president. Therefore, abbreviated presidential tenure, especially when occurring within a few years of appointment, may disrupt work underway toward realising a strategic vision and therefore undermine institutional progress (Eckel & Kezar, 2012; Esterberg & Wooding, 2012; McLaughlin, 1996a). The timely achievement of key milestones that signify forward momentum in achieving a university’s future vision may suffer (Basinger, 2001; Fretwell Jr, 2004; Sanaghan et al., 2008; Trachtenberg et al., 2013b). A long-term, institutional vision embraced by constituents during a president’s tenure may be questioned or abandoned when the leader, who serves as steward of the vision, leaves suddenly (Martin & Samels, 2004; Padilla et al., 2000). If the future vision was developed by the president, in the absence of the vision’s institutional steward the academic staff, governing board members, donors, and other concerned members of a university community may view the former president’s vision as irrelevant. Following a president’s departure, constituent perceptions of organisational stability and continuity may also be weakened (Logue & Anderson, 2001; Pierce, 2011; Vaughan, 1996). Recruitment for a new president may take up to a year to complete and during this period an institution may falter (Basinger, 2001), especially if constituents view temporary leadership as lacking in authority, vision, or legitimacy. After a president’s sudden departure, an interim president is typically appointed, who may be already employed within the university or may be selected from outside the institution (Sanaghan et al., 2008). Interim presidents are expected to provide stability
during a period of change, while preparing the institution for new leadership (Sanaghan et al., 2008). The direct and indirect financial costs of presidential transition may also be significant (Basinger, 2001; Glick, 1992; Howells, 2011; McNaughtan et al., 2019; Scott, 2018; Trachtenberg et al., 2013b). Key business objectives may be missed (Padilla, 2004). Reputation, institutional confidence, fundraising revenue or enrolment levels may decline (Basinger, 2001; Trachtenberg, 2018).

Furthermore, Padilla and colleagues (2000) describe the challenges associated with frequent executive turnover as weakened internal leadership and an increased likelihood of external influence, such as from elected political officials or governing board members. Padilla and colleagues (2000) add that extreme shifts in approach or strategy may arise following a leader’s departure that can make university employees less responsive. Trachtenberg and colleagues (2013) characterise the impact even more dramatically: “In the chaos of a derailment [abbreviated tenure], the loss of organizational progress, waste of financial and human resources, and damage to the morale and reputation of those caught in the debris are not fully accounted for in a quantitative analysis but are nonetheless real and sizable [sic]” (p. 1). Others disagree. For instance, Birnbaum’s (1989) study of presidential succession reveals that some university activities are not affected by presidential turnover (p. 123). Even so, presidential turnover can be significant. Constituents assign responsibility to leaders, expecting them to provide strategic direction and institutional vision. Even if the actions of presidents may or may not directly impact an institution, if constituents view leadership as critical to institutional success, then abbreviated tenure and the real or perceived consequences that follow a president’s sudden departure certainly matter.
Sometimes abbreviated tenure may be viewed positively by constituents. For instance, when a governing board pressures a president to leave, the board may view the resignation positively. Or, if a president is viewed as unfit to lead by some or many constituents, the president’s departure may be received well by critics who had sought the president’s removal. If a president leaves following controversy, or if actions have been interpreted as unwise, inappropriate, or inept, constituents may feel “relief, even euphoria” following a sudden departure (Stanley & Betts, 2004, p. 83). Harris and Ellis (2018) identify instances in which forced presidential resignation have transitioned universities following controversy to new, more optimistic phases. Constituents may view a leader’s departure as an opportunity to re-establish or reinvigorate an institutional agenda. As such, abbreviated tenure may be viewed as an occasion to increase the power and profile of individuals, such as academic staff, students, or other university community members, critical of the outgoing leader (Lombardi, 2013). Governing board members may be able to use abbreviated tenure to improve an institution if the outgoing president’s transition is handled fairly and with decency (Fretwell Jr, 2004). Institutional improvement following presidential transition can involve re-establishing norms of behaviour amongst community members as a new leader models and communicates expectations or sets new institutional direction to address difficulty meeting key performance measures, such as enrolment targets.

**Defining abbreviated tenure**

To define abbreviated tenure as related and yet distinct from similar terms in published research, I define derailment, turnover, transition, and unfinished mandate. While all the terms are related, to add clarity and specificity to the subject of this study I define abbreviated presidential tenure as the unexpected
end of a university president’s tenure due to resignation or termination. Like other researchers, I distinguish presidential tenure from academic tenure, or the practice of securing a permanent academic appointment at a university (Reid, 2018).

**Cohen and March’s 1974 definition of presidential tenure**

Cohen and March (1974) provide a foundational definition of presidential tenure, which incorporates multiple ways of defining tenure based on the length of time a president serves and the date presidential service concludes. First, they define tenure based on presidents leaving office in a particular year by determining the total number of years served between presidents’ initial dates of service and the conclusion of tenure in the given year, or “the backward cohort” (p. 155). Second, they note that tenure may be defined based on the longevity of presidential service for all presidents whose tenure begins, rather than ends, in a specific year, or “the forward cohort” (p. 155), for instance presidents who began to serve institutions in 2015 and who left office at varying times. Rather than measuring length of tenure by year in which a presidency concludes or ends, Cohen and March also suggest that tenure may be defined either as the length of tenure of presidents currently in office, regardless of start date or end date, or “completed tenure” (p. 155), similar to the ACE study which surveys currently serving presidents (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Tenure may also be defined as the full length of tenure a president serves in office, or “full tenure” (p. 155). Cohen and March (1974) also define “additional tenure” or “the distribution of additional tenure for presidents now in office…knowable at some later date” (p. 155). Langbert (2012) indicates that presidential tenure is typically, in popular discussions, considered to mean completed tenure. For the purpose of this study, I define tenure in the phrase “abbreviated tenure” to be completed tenure, or instances in which a
president’s service abruptly ends prior to the conclusion of their employment contract. As discussed in Chapters 4 and 6, I select instances of abbreviated tenure that occur in particular years, namely 2015 and 2018. That said, Cohen and March’s definitions of presidential tenure are more relevant to researchers investigating presidential tenure length using quantitative methods, in contrast to this qualitative study, which investigates communications preceding abbreviated tenure. Researchers have investigated the longevity of presidential tenure using survey instruments or publicly available data and statistical methods to find associations between relevant variables (Howells, 2011; Langbert, 2012; Levine, 2020; McDonald, 2012; McNaughtan, 2016; Reed, 2002; Röbken, 2007; Wofford, 2014). Reid’s (2018) recent study uses quantitative methods to test a possible causal model of presidential longevity. Quantitative studies of the presidency that investigate length of tenure, although peripherally related, are not comprehensively reviewed in this chapter as the focus of my investigation is not presidential tenure length per se, but rather patterns in public communications preceding abbreviated tenure.

**Corporate leader derailment**

In private business, derailed executives are “people who were very successful in their careers…but who, in the eyes of the organization [sic], did not live up to their full potential” (McCall & Lombardo, 1983, p. 1). They are “involuntarily plateaued, demoted, or fired below the level of anticipated achievement or reaching that level only to fail unexpectedly” (Lombardo et al., 1988, p. 199). A derailed leader can be “one who, having reached the general manager level, finds that there is little chance of future advancement due to a misfit between job requirements and personal skills” (Val Velsor & Leslie, 1995, p. 62). Executives who derail are “no longer considered to be high potential” or their “careers have gotten off track”
(Williams et al., 2013, p. 90). Derailed leaders persist in leading in ways that are not effective and fail to adjust to new circumstances (Lombardo & Eichinger, 1989).

**University presidential derailment**

Informed by previously published derailment research, Trachtenberg and colleagues (2013) examined derailment amongst university presidents, defining derailment narrowly as “the termination or resignation of a president before the end of his or her first contract” (p. xii). Similarly, my study defines abbreviated tenure based on the concept of derailment, but acknowledges that abbreviated tenure can occur at any time in a president’s tenure. In contrast to Trachtenberg and colleagues’ (2013) definition, abbreviated presidential tenure in this study is therefore not restricted to a president’s first contract.

In the business management research, derailment includes phenomena that are also not relevant to the university presidency, such as “plateauing” before reaching one’s potential or demotion. Most universities lack succession plans that develop internal leaders into the presidency and therefore candidates rarely “plateau” at a level lower than their anticipated potential as might be defined in business by senior executives or a corporate board of directors. Demotion to a lower level of executive leadership is not typical in higher education, although presidents may assume academic staff appointments following abbreviated tenure. After leaving a presidential appointment, former presidents may assume other responsibilities at their current university, for instance, conducting research or teaching (Finkelstein & White, 2017; Jasinski, 2019).

**Unfinished mandates of university presidents**

Cafley (2015a) investigates university presidents with unfinished mandates, or presidential appointments that are “not renewed or terminated before their end”
(p. 2), including presidents who resign or are involuntarily terminated. “Unfinished mandates” are similar to abbreviated tenures. I adopt abbreviated tenure rather than unfinished mandate to enhance specificity for three reasons. First, “unfinished” suggests the question: in whose view is the mandate unfinished? “Unfinished” may signify a president’s wish to conclude unfinished business. However, a president who suddenly resigns may decide they are finished with their mandate. Second, tenure is a term more commonly used than “mandate” amongst American university presidents and tenure is measured by the ACE national survey of presidents discussed in Chapter 2 (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Third, Cafley (2015a) focuses on unfinished mandate in the first term of a president’s contract, similar to Trachtenberg and colleagues’ (2013) definition of presidential derailment whereas abbreviated tenure as defined in this study may occur at any stage in a president’s tenure.

**Presidential turnover or transition**

University leadership turnover involves any type of presidential transition. Turnover may occur if a president retires, takes another university appointment, assumes a non-academic appointment, such as heading a philanthropic foundation, or another presidency (Monks, 2012). Turnover also occurs when presidents resign, including resignation for health reasons, or when a president dies in office (Monks, 2012). Other research uses the term “transition” similarly (Sanaghan et al., 2008, James & Samels and Associates, 2004). Turnover may occur on a predictable schedule, such as at a contract’s end agreed upon by board and president, whereas abbreviated tenure occurs when the transition happens prior to the end of a contract and is sudden. While abbreviated tenure may be considered a form of turnover, abbreviated tenure is used in my study instead of turnover to focus on presidential resignation that suddenly cuts a
president’s tenure short, rather than turnover precipitated by other factors, such as death or retirement.

**Abbreviated presidential tenure**

By synthesising the terms identified in previously published research discussed above and considering the terms’ distinctive features (Table 4), I define abbreviated tenure as the sudden end of a president’s tenure when the president resigns or is terminated by a governing board prior to the anticipated end of the president’s employment contract.

**Table 4: Abbreviated Tenure: Related Terms Defined**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviated tenure</th>
<th>Triggering Event</th>
<th>Occurs During Tenure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviated tenure</td>
<td>Termination</td>
<td>Anytime</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Resignation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Corporate derailment</td>
<td>Termination</td>
<td>Anytime</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Demotion</td>
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<td></td>
<td>&quot;Plateaued&quot;: unable to achieve leadership potential</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential derailment</td>
<td>Termination</td>
<td>During president's first term</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Resignation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unfinished mandate</td>
<td>Termination</td>
<td>During president's first term</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Resignation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transition or turnover</td>
<td>Termination</td>
<td>Anytime</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Resignation</td>
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<td>Retirement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Contract end date</td>
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<td>Death</td>
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*Table 4: Abbreviated tenure and related terms defined*

Abbreviated tenure may be voluntary or involuntary. For instance, an involuntary abbreviated presidential tenure may be inevitable due to physical or health problems that force the president to resign suddenly and unexpectedly before the end of a contract (Padilla, 2004; Fretwell Jr, 2004). Another type of involuntary abbreviated presidential tenure involves termination: a governing board can decide to fire a president with little or no notice (Padilla, 2004; Fretwell Jr, 2004; Finkelstein & White, 2017). Abbreviated tenure may be voluntary, such as when a
president retires or resigns unexpectedly (Padilla, 2004; Fretwell Jr, 2004). Resignation, however, may appear voluntary, but may actually be involuntary if a governing board or system leader asks a president to resign in lieu of termination (Padilla, 2004).

Abbreviated tenure may occur at any point in time while a president serves. Presidents may be new to an institution or may have led a university for many years. Presidents who leave suddenly or are removed work under contracts that may have been recently executed or negotiated many years before the end of the president’s tenure. A president who suddenly departs before the end of a contract may be employed under an initial university employment contract, under a renewed employment contract (Finkelstein & White, 2017), or in some cases, may have no official employment contract defining the terms of their service at all (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Some presidential employment contracts allow the president to take a new role, such as an academic staff appointment (Jasinski, 2019; Finkelstein & White, 2017), which may lead a president who resigns unexpectedly or is removed from post to remain in a university community.

To synthesise current knowledge of factors contributing to presidential abbreviated tenure and to prepare for case analysis, next I describe the findings of research investigating corporate and university derailment, unfinished mandates, and turnover involving termination or resignation according to six known contributors to abbreviated tenure: 1) problems with interpersonal relationships, 2) inability to build and lead teams or key constituencies, 3) governing board challenges, 4) difficulty meeting business objectives, 5) inability to adapt, and 6) ethical lapses.
Contributors to abbreviated tenure
Informed by Trachtenberg and colleagues’ (2013) six derailment themes defined in *Presidencies Derailed*, in this section I describe the real or perceived actions, behaviours, and communications contributing to abbreviated tenure found in previously published research. The six contributors include four identified in the business research that also are found in studies of abbreviated presidential tenure. The last two contributors to abbreviated presidential derailment are identified by Trachtenberg and colleagues (2013) and are also found in other published investigations of university presidential abbreviated tenure. To introduce the discussion, contributors to abbreviated tenure identified in published research by study are summarised in Table 5. Research studies conducted in business settings and in higher education institutions are grouped. In each section of the table, I list publications in alphabetical order by last name of the primary author. I include selected, early studies conducted in business settings to highlight the alignment between contributors identified in corporations and in universities. A description of each abbreviated tenure contributor found in the research reviewed follows.

**Leaders’ problems with interpersonal relationships**
Business researchers find difficulties establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships contribute to cases of abbreviated tenure, which can manifest in a leader’s inward focus, isolation of the leader from other people, or volatile and insensitive behaviours or statements. First, leaders experiencing abbreviated tenure who focus on oneself are perceived to be self-serving (Cullen, Gentry & Yammarino, 2015), overly ambitious (Lombardo, Ruderman & McCauley, 1988; Morrison *et al.*, 1987; Lombardo & Eichinger, 1989; McCall & Lombardo, 1983), self-interested (Calabrese & Roberts, 2001), and boastful (Cullen *et al.*, 2015).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Research Method</th>
<th>Interpersonal Relationships</th>
<th>Team/Constituent Leadership</th>
<th>Board Challenges</th>
<th>Business Objectives</th>
<th>Adaptation</th>
<th>Ethical Lapses</th>
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Table 5: Primary abbreviated tenure contributors based on summary of behaviours related to derailment in Hogan, Hogan & Kaiser (2011) and the six themes of presidential derailment in Trachtenberg et al. (2013)
Second, leaders experiencing abbreviated tenure may be isolated (Morrison et al., 1987; McCall & Lombardo, 1983). Leaders in corporate settings experiencing abbreviated tenure may make decisions that are perceived to be unilateral and authoritarian, rather than grounded in input from others (Lombardo & Eichinger, 1989). Third, interpersonal relationship issues also may arise from a leader’s volatile behaviour. For example, leaders demonstrating anger, unpredictable behaviour (Lombardo & Eichinger, 1989), and bullying or intimidating behaviour (McCall & Lombardo, 1983) may experience abbreviated tenure. Fourth, leaders may be perceived to be insensitive or abrasive (Lombardo & Eichinger, 1989; Lombardo et al., 1988; McCall & Lombardo, 1983). Leaders experiencing problems with interpersonal relationships, therefore, struggle to build trusting relationships with other people (Lombardo et al., 1988; McCall & Lombardo, 1983).

Cases of university abbreviated presidential tenure also involve the behaviours and communications associated with corporate leaders who struggle with interpersonal relationships described above. Presidents experiencing abbreviated tenure who are challenged to build interpersonal relationships may focus on themselves, specifically by adopting what is perceived to be an arrogant attitude (Trachtenberg et al., 2013b) or signalling to constituents they are unwilling to improve (Gentry, Katz & McFeeters, 2009). Presidents experiencing abbreviated tenure who struggle with interpersonal relationships can be isolated from critical constituents, such as executive teams, governing boards, or academic staff, and as such may be perceived as distant and detached (Carver, 2009), or aloof (Touzeau, 2010). In some cases, presidents experiencing abbreviated tenure may be inclined to seek an enemy to fight against (Longmire, 2010), and can be perceived as dictatorial, cliquish, or secretive (McNeal, 2009). Presidents
experiencing interpersonal difficulties contributing to abbreviated tenure may also fail to include constituent input in decisions (Touzeau, 2010), thereby violating university norms associated with shared governance, which require presidents to consult broadly with academic staff, students, board members, and other constituents prior to making institutional decisions. Similar to business leaders, university leaders experiencing interpersonal relationship challenges may be viewed as volatile (Trachtenberg et al., 2013b), angry (Longmire, 2010; McNeal, 2009), badly tempered (Carver, 2009), and intimidating (Touzeau, 2010). Insensitivity to other people can be evident in harsh and unforgiving (McNeal, 2009) or stubborn and demanding (Touzeau, 2010) behaviours, either real or perceived. For leaders experiencing interpersonal problems leading to abbreviated tenure, actions, behaviours, and communications can suggest that the president lacks trust in other people (Longmire, 2010; Cafley, 2015).

Researchers identify additional challenges contributing to abbreviated presidential tenure associated with interpersonal relationships. For example, presidents experiencing abbreviated tenure may lack strategic relationships with mentors and predecessors (Cafley, 2015), academic staff (Harris & Ellis, 2018; Longmire, 2010), university system leadership (Harris & Ellis, 2018; Longmire, 2010), political officials, alumni, donors, and the local community (Longmire, 2010). The absence of key relationships undermines a president’s network of influence (Tekniepe, 2014) and can contribute to the sudden end of tenure.

Finally, presidential communications can contribute to relationship difficulties and in turn abbreviated tenure (Tekniepe, 2014; Touzeau, 2010; Trachtenberg et al., 2013b). Presidents experiencing abbreviated tenures may fail to communicate a vision (Touzeau, 2010) or build understanding of a vision for the future amongst constituents (Tekniepe, 2014). Presidents who suddenly resign or are removed
may communicate infrequently with key constituents (Touzeau, 2010) and also may use communication skills interpreted as ineffective by constituents (Trachtenberg et al., 2013b).

**Inability to lead a team or other key constituencies**

In business, successful leaders build and lead effective teams, whereas, in contrast, the inability to build and lead a team or to lead key constituencies contributes to abbreviated tenure. Business leaders experiencing abbreviated tenure attempt to exert inappropriate levels of control over operations, communications, and people associated with their organisation rather than delegating appropriately and as a result are unable to hire, manage, or retain a senior leadership team. Leaders experiencing abbreviated tenure in corporate settings may attempt to micromanage in efforts to attain unrealistic expectations of perfection (Hogan et al., 2011), while failing to delegate (McCall & Lombardo, 1983), or undervaluing input from others (McCall & Lombardo, 1983). Leaders unable to build and maintain a team may not hire executive leaders effectively (McCall & Lombardo, 1983; Lombardo et al., 1988) or, once hired, manage senior staff effectively (Morrison et al., 1987).

In higher education institutions, presidents experiencing abbreviated tenure may also attempt to control and micromanage all parts and details of the organisation, which can also lead to difficulty hiring, managing, and retaining members of a leadership team. To lead, presidents are required to select and develop “diverse and cohesive groups of individuals who can work together to achieve the institutional mission” through effective supervision and delegation (AASCU, 2016, p. 8). Controlling presidents experiencing abbreviated tenure may surround themselves with staff who will always agree with them (Longmire, 2010). Failure to staff, manage, and retain a senior team can alienate all executive team
members (Longmire, 2010) and can prevent a president from building trusting relationships with senior university executives (Cafley, 2015). Presidents who struggle to lead a team or key constituencies also may have issues with leaders appointed to specific roles that require close alignment with presidential vision and priorities, such as the CAO (Longmire, 2010). Executive team members reporting to presidents perceived to be unable to lead a team may choose to resign rather than continue serving under a president at risk of abbreviated tenure (McNeal, 2009). Finally, similar to problems arising with interpersonal relationships described above, presidents who have problems leading their teams also lack key interpersonal connections required to succeed, namely strategic advisors often found in executive teams (Carver, 2009; McNeal, 2009), who are able to successfully bridge relationships with different constituents and create an effective network of presidential relationships.

**Governing board challenges**

Challenges involving president and governing board relationships feature prominently in the abbreviated tenures of university presidents previously examined. Challenges can arise from board dysfunction, such as conflict (Tekniepe, 2014; Boggs & Smith, 1997), misguided action (McNeal, 2009; Trachtenberg et al., 2013b), or lack of attention to institutional vision amongst board members (McNeal, 2009). Issues may occur that can lead to abbreviated presidential tenure when board members lack knowledge of or insufficient training in higher education governance (Cafley, 2015). Challenges that can suddenly end a president’s tenure can be found in governing board participation in presidential employment processes such as hiring, expectation setting, and evaluation (Cafley, 2015b; McNeal, 2009; Tekniepe, 2014; Trachtenberg et al., 2013b). In some cases of abbreviated presidential tenure, communications
between the board and the president present challenges to fostering a continued, positive partnership between a president and the board (Cafley, 2015; McNeal, 2009). External influence can also lead a board to cut a president’s contract short (Tekniepe, 2014).

**Dysfunctional boards**

Governing board challenges contributing to abbreviated tenure involve board cohesion, conflict between board members or between presidents and boards, ethical issues, conflicts of interest, board composition changes, and lack of attention amongst boards to institutional direction. First, boards overseeing presidents who experience abbreviated tenure can be dysfunctional due to a lack of cohesion (Boggs & Smith, 1997). Dysfunctional boards can be divided (Tekniepe, 2014; Boggs & Smith, 1997), which may manifest if members choose to act independently rather than in unison with the whole governing board (Boggs & Smith, 1997). Conflict between the board and president represents another form of dysfunction that contributes to abbreviated presidential tenure (Tekniepe, 2014). Board members eschewing ethics (Boggs & Smith, 1997; McNeal, 2009; Scott, 2018) and acting in ways that create or ignore conflicts of interest (McNeal, 2009; Trachtenberg et al., 2013b) can also contribute to abbreviated presidential tenure. If board composition changes significantly, presidents can be left to navigate a series of new, critical relationships (Boggs & Smith, 1997), finding that new board members are unsupportive of the president’s leadership, which can cause abbreviated tenure. A board may also fail to articulate a clear vision for the institution or find the vision espoused by the board is misaligned with the president’s views (Lovett, 2018). Boards may also disregard policy implementation processes (McNeal, 2009), which can undermine a president’s ability to fulfil key expectations, such as executing a vision or managing an
institution, thereby making presidents vulnerable to abbreviated presidential tenure.

**Boards’ lack of higher education governance knowledge**

In some cases of abbreviated presidential tenure, boards lack the critical knowledge or experience needed to fulfil their oversight duties and steward the university successfully. Boards contributing to abbreviated presidential tenure may be deficient in knowledge of university governance (Cafley, 2015), norms, and culture. Board members may lack training or experience needed to approve policy, to set priorities, and to oversee the president’s leadership, all of which may undermine the confidence of the president and damage the relationship between board and president (Tekniepe, 2014).

**Board involvement in presidential employment processes**

Issues with the board’s involvement in the president’s employment process contribute to abbreviated tenure. Challenges arising with board involvement in the president’s employment that can lead to abbreviated tenure have been found as early as a president’s recruitment to an institution, described in Appendix D, such as when a board does not engage sufficiently in the recruitment process (Cafley, 2015), if the search process itself is flawed (Trachtenberg et al., 2013b), or if onboarding of a new president is insufficient (Lovett, 2018). Presidents who work without employment contracts, or whose contracts do not include provisions to guide boards when the end of an employment relationship with a president is desired, can experience an abbreviated tenure (Tekniepe, 2014). Problems involving boards that can cause abbreviated tenure may occur during presidential evaluation (McNeal, 2009), which can include confusing and unsystematic approaches to assessment of a president’s performance (Morrill, 2010b). Termination or resignation of a president may occur when a board and a
president do not embrace a unified view of expectations associated with the presidency or the board’s governance work (Lovett, 2018; Scott, 2018). Harris and Ellis (2018) find that loss of board confidence in a president is amongst the primary reasons for involuntary turnover.

**Board communications**

Finally, some incidents of abbreviated tenure have been preceded by issues with board communications, involving either the president or influential individuals outside the university. Presidents and boards benefit from communicating openly and regularly such that board members are aware of key issues and events, and presidents benefit from strategic partnerships with board members (AGB, 2019; Scott, 2018). In some cases of abbreviated presidential tenure, presidents and governing board members do not communicate sufficiently or much at all (Cafley, 2015; McNeal, 2009). In the absence of a strong relationship between a president and a board, influential community members dissatisfied with a president’s actions or statements may press board members to remove a president (Tekniepe, 2014), triggering abbreviated tenure. For example, in one case of abbreviated presidential tenure published in a scholarly article, a series of controversies leads a board to decide a change in leadership would signal the end of controversy and the beginning of a new phase in the institution’s history (Harris & Ellis, 2018).

**Failure to meet business objectives**

Failure to meet business objectives, another contributor to abbreviated tenure, is defined by researchers working in corporate settings as problems developing and executing organisational strategy. In some cases of abbreviated tenure in the business sector, business leaders are not able to think strategically (McCall & Lombardo, 1983; Lombardo *et al.*, 1988; Lombardo & Eichinger, 1989) or handle
the complexity of their organisation (Lombardo et al., 1988). Some business leaders experiencing abbreviated tenure do not follow through on commitments made (Lombardo & Eichinger, 1989) or have specific problems delivering expected performance (McCall & Lombardo, 1983; Morrison et al., 1987).

In higher education institutions, presidents whose tenure is cut short can also be found to have problems meeting business objectives, specifically when key institutional goals remain unmet. Unmet goals may be financial (McNeal, 2009), including a balanced budget (McNeal, 2009; Tekniepe, 2014). Goals may also be related to university operations, such as the number of students enrolled (McNeal, 2009; Trachtenberg et al., 2013b) or funds received from donations and grants (McNeal, 2009; Trachtenberg et al., 2013b), that are linked to revenue projections. Presidents may experience a sudden end to their tenure if their institution’s financial position significantly worsens or if key performance targets, such as the percentage of students persisting in their studies from year to year or the percentage of students graduating in four or six years following matriculation, are missed (Trachtenberg et al., 2013b). Langbert (2012), in a quantitative study of 200 private institution presidents in 1999 and again in 2006, finds a significant increase in tenure for presidents achieving business objectives: presidents who successfully executed institutional turnaround, such as increasing standardised test scores of enrolled students, increasing enrolment or endowment by at least 25 percent, had served 18.8 years while other presidents served an average of 13.4 years.

**Leaders’ inability to adapt**

In business, inability to adapt also contributes to abbreviated leadership tenures. Leaders at risk of being fired or forced to resign can find it difficult to adapt to a new supervisor’s style (Lombardo & Eichinger, 1989; McCall & Lombardo, 1983)
or a supervisor's expectations (Morrison et al., 1987). Leaders who struggle to adapt can be overdependent on input or guidance from other people (Lombardo & Eichinger, 1989; McCall & Lombardo, 1983), lacking the capacity to act autonomously when needed, or can be excessively cautious (Hogan et al., 2011), both of which can undermine a leader's ability to produce outcomes in a new organisational culture and potentially cause abbreviated tenure. Leaders who are unable to adapt and experience abbreviated tenure may be unresponsive to feedback (Morrison et al., 1987), which is critically important to adapting to a new role, a new supervisor, a new organisational culture, or new environmental conditions. Resistance to feedback can perpetuate cycles of frustration between a new leader and colleagues, supervisors, or subordinates who offer input and guidance, but fail to see measurable, visible change in the leader.

In cases of abbreviated tenure in universities, a president's inability to adapt may relate to institutional culture, for example if presidents struggle to work across the multiple, distinct cultures of a university (McNeal, 2009), if they have difficulty understanding the culture or values of the university (Longmire, 2010), or use leadership styles that do not match institutional cultural norms (Harris & Ellis, 2018). Presidents experiencing abbreviated tenures can struggle to adapt to a new organisational culture if they are hired from outside the university (Carver, 2009; Harris & Ellis, 2018; Longmire, 2010; McNeal, 2009; Trachtenberg et al., 2013b; Touzeau, 2010). If a new president is unfamiliar with higher education, they may fail to adapt to the expectations and nuances of the presidency and an abbreviated tenure can occur (Trachtenberg et al., 2013b). Presidents may also signal that they are not willing to adapt and constituents may view this unwillingness negatively (Gentry et al., 2009). Presidents experiencing abbreviated tenures may not adapt to a university's larger, external community
context (Trachtenberg et al., 2013b), including local and regional customs or communication styles. Cafley (2015a) suggests that governing boards may hire presidents who reflect a board’s aspirations for a desired culture, rather than the university’s authentic culture and associated norms. When the institution’s actual culture is not ready or able to adapt to the new leader’s style and ways of working, a president’s tenure may be cut short.

**Leaders’ ethical lapses**

When presidents engage in unethical behaviour, or are perceived to be unethical, they may experience abbreviated tenure. This includes financial and relational ethical lapses, as well as perceptions of a lack of integrity. Presidents who commit ethical lapses and experience abbreviated tenure may be irresponsible with funds (Harris & Ellis, 2018; Longmire, 2010), spend excessively (Harris & Ellis, 2018; Trachtenberg et al., 2013b) or mismanage budgets (Carver, 2009). They may engage in relationships that are ethically questionable (Carver, 2009). Constituents may perceive presidents in these cases to be dishonest (Longmire, 2010).

**Relationships and abbreviated tenure**

To analyse cases of abbreviated presidential tenure in crisis, while acknowledging the study’s definition of discursive leadership, “a process of influence and meaning management among actors” requiring attribution (Fairhurst, 2007, p. 6), I synthesise three contributors to abbreviated tenure into one: relationships. Discursive leadership is relational, involving leader and constituents. As a social construct continually created and recreated through language and in relationships, leadership is enacted when leaders communicate with other people and connections involving leaders and the people they aspire to lead are formed and sustained (Goffee & Jones, 2006). The ability to build and
maintain relationships significantly influences presidential success (Sanaghan et al., 2008). One of the contributors identified in this review and synthesis of previously published scholarly research on abbreviated tenure involves interpersonal relationship challenges. Two additional abbreviated tenure contributors, the inability to lead a team or key constituencies and governing board challenges, can produce significant issues if a president struggles to build and to sustain fruitful partnerships with executive leaders, governing board members, or other constituents. Together, these contributors to abbreviated presidential tenure underscore the critical importance of fruitful, mutually beneficial relationships for successful presidential leadership.

Based on published abbreviated tenure research described above, challenges associated with relationships (Figure 10) that can lead to the unexpected end of a president’s tenure may manifest in real or perceived issues, including but not limited to isolation or disconnection from other people, volatility, insensitivity, or controlling behaviour, or a president’s tendency to orient to oneself, rather than to other people. Presidents withholding information, communicating infrequently or ineffectively may also risk abbreviated tenure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connection and orientation</th>
<th>Regard for others</th>
<th>Communication attributes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oriented to self</td>
<td>Volatile</td>
<td>Witholding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolated</td>
<td>Insensitive</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disconnected</td>
<td>Controlling</td>
<td>Ineffective</td>
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Figure 10: Synthesis of relationship issues contributing to abbreviated presidential tenure identified by reviewing previously published research
Relationship challenges prompting abbreviated tenure may involve a president’s orientation to or consideration for other people or groups, which can involve isolation or disconnection from critical constituents. Relationship complications may arise if a president’s actions or communications are perceived as lacking consideration for other people. Difficulty in relationships may also be caused by poorly received communication approaches. Relationship difficulties arise, therefore, in exchanges between a president and constituents and issues potentially contributing to abbreviated tenure may be identified in discourse associated with intentional and unintentional interactions and official and unofficial communications.

Even though relationships potentially contributing to abbreviated tenure might originate in presidential character flaws or traits, for instance, the tendency to be volatile or insensitive, this study investigates how public discourse shapes perceptions of presidential leadership in crisis, rather than focusing on individual, inherent, presidential characteristics. Through the lens of discursive leadership, if a president is sensitive, but viewed as insensitive by constituents, the president’s leadership may still be interpreted as insensitive, potentially undermining relationships and contributing to abbreviated tenure. Similarly, if a president is abrasive privately, but is viewed publicly as warm, the president’s abrasiveness may or may not contribute to abbreviated tenure. Challenged relationships, therefore, may be real or perceived to have influence on presidential leadership and potentially contribute to abbreviated tenure. In the contemporary digital communications environment, relationships with constituents are shaped online through presidential intention, such as through a president’s presentation and interactions on social media, and also unintentionally, when others portray a president’s character by commenting on or circulating details of statements,
actions, and relationships, thereby circumscribing a president’s capacity to control perceptions of interpersonal complications based on comments and stories about the president shared by other people.

**Conclusion: Abbreviated tenure in crisis**

Hogan and colleagues (2011) suggest that the importance of context in the abbreviated tenure leadership research has not been fully considered: “research should ask which derailment factors matter most in different circumstances and why this is the case” (p. 560). In universities, McNaughtan (2017) also observes that studies of presidential turnover have not comprehensively considered contextual influences. This study examines presidential leadership abruptly cut short in the context of crisis, high-stakes situations which test leadership and can accelerate the abrupt end of a president’s tenure. To conduct this investigation, I identify and analyse patterns in communications occurring in presidential statements and constituent responses in crises just prior to the end of each president’s tenure. I search for, find, and analyse evidence that may be interpreted as producing or undermining relationships potentially contributing to abbreviated tenure.
Chapter 4. Pilot study research design
To gain insight and frame the full, multi-case study of abbreviated presidential tenure in crisis, I conducted a preliminary, exploratory, in-depth pilot investigation of a president resigning during a high-profile crisis, which allowed me to refine research methods prior to conducting the multi-case study. A broad, yet deep, initial pilot prepared me to conduct the case study research by generating insights into the chosen phenomenon—abbreviated, university presidential tenure in high-profile crisis—as well as by refining data collection procedures (Yin, 2009). In this chapter, I first discuss social constructivism, the theoretical framework informing my research. In turn, I define methodological approaches and data used in this study, including case study research, documentary evidence, and discourse analysis. I describe guiding questions and research design used in the pilot study stages and finally how the pilot influenced the multi-case study research design described in Chapter 6. The multi-stage method described below incorporating case study research approaches and discourse analysis has not been used to study abbreviated, university presidential tenure in crisis and therefore represents a new approach to exploring episodes like those selected for investigation in this study.

**Theoretical framework: Social constructivism**

Social constructivist research is underpinned by the belief that the world is known through human interpretation (Crotty, 1998) and as such constructivism is grounded in the perspectives of individuals (Crotty, 1998). For social constructivist researchers, the social world is understood to be created by individual interpretation in social settings (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Berger and Luckmann define social reality, or the “world of every day life”, as originating in subjective, human thought:
The world of everyday life is not only taken for granted as reality by the ordinary members of society in the subjectively meaningful conduct of their lives. It is a world that originates in their thoughts and actions, and is maintained as real by these (p. 19).

Through the lens of social constructivism, the world is observed and understood through the individual interpretations of people who subjectively interpret events, actions, and communications. Social constructivist researchers acknowledge and investigate unique responses to the social world originating in the subjective views of individuals, including the multiple meanings and perspectives simultaneously held by different individuals in society (Merriam, 1998). Stake (1995) suggests that belief in constructivism does not necessarily require equal attention to every individual's view, even though individual views all have the potential to influence the social construction of everyday life.

To investigate individual interpretation, social constructivist researchers explore and examine human interpretation in context as individuals and groups subjectively interpret communications, events, and actions using their personal or collective context or knowledge of the social world, past experiences, previously developed opinions, and unique positions in relation to other people or groups. Interpretation, therefore, does not occur in isolation, but rather originates in social systems (Crotty, 1998) and therefore is based in communication exchanges occurring in social relationships. To examine abbreviated presidential tenure through a social constructivist world view, analysis of presidential communications and potential constituent influence on presidential leadership in media coverage and social media enable identification of multiple, possible individual interpretations in the selected crisis episodes.
**Social constructivism and leadership communication**

Furthermore, social constructivist research, such as the discursive leadership research informing this study, frames the enactment of leadership as a social construct created through communications and associated interpretations (Kezar et al., 2006). As such, speaking and writing are understood to be the vehicles for constructing leadership (Walker & Aritz, 2014). Language serves as the primary site for enacting and constructing university leadership, involving leaders and those they aspire to lead, and through language interpretations of leadership are developed and negotiated in relational, socially-situated communication exchanges (Kezar et al., 2006). Therefore, social constructivist leadership research examines how university leaders influence others’ perceptions by communicating to shape meanings and interpretation (Birnbaum, 1992a; Bolman & Deal, 2013), as well as how leaders’ attempts to influence interpretation are received and the associated counterinfluence of constituents on the social construction of leadership. To explore the social construction of leadership, research methods used in this study include collecting and analysing both leader and constituent communications to investigate how speaking, writing, and interpretation construct perceptions and indirectly influence or directly attempt to influence leadership during crisis episodes ending in abbreviated presidential tenure.

The social constructivist world view acknowledges the plurality of interpretation originating in human thought expressed in part through relational communication exchanges. Online, via accessible social media and other digital communication channels, this plurality is made visible, persistent, and rapidly shareable with Internet users. Online communication allows individuals to share interpretations, and, almost instantaneously, many views may be expressed on a topic,
statement, or event online. Online communication multiplies the views and interpretations potentially influencing leadership and crisis episodes, thereby extending the social construction of everyday leadership to a digital environment. The study research design acknowledges and incorporates multiple, possible interpretations shared online that may contribute to the social construction of leadership.

**Case study research method**

Case study methods have often been used to explore abbreviated presidential tenure. As such, I opted to use a descriptive case study method to investigate presidents resigning during crisis in detail. Specifically, descriptive case study research is appropriate for research questions seeking to explain present circumstances (Yin, 2009), such as my research question which is oriented to recent episodes in which presidents resign during high-profile crises. Descriptive, case study research involves in-depth investigation of a single, contemporary phenomenon conducted in extensive detail (Merriam, 1998; Orum, Feagin & Sjoberg, 1991; Yin, 2009) and the result of descriptive case study research is a “thick” description: a complete, literal description of the phenomenon under investigation, embedded in context (Geertz, 1973; Merriam, 1998).

As in social constructivism, context and individual interpretation are critical to case study research, which makes this method appropriate for this investigation which considers, identifies, and examines possible constituent influence on and public interpretation of presidential leadership. Case studies offer a view into social life in natural settings (Merriam, 1998; Orum et al., 1991; Yin, 2009). As such, case study investigators try not “to disturb the ordinary activity of the case, not to test, not even to interview, if we can get the information we want by discrete observation or examination of records” (Stake, 1995, p. 12). In this type
of research: “individuals can be seen in relation to their contexts and their relationships to other individuals” (Feagin et al., 1991, p. 275). Case study investigators, therefore, focus on the perspectives of participants involved in the phenomenon and surface multiple interpretations in the varying and sometimes contradictory views of participants (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). Therefore my focus on potentially influential constituents communicating about and with leadership during episodes of abbreviated presidential tenure in crisis is enabled by using case study research methods.

**Case study theory building**

Tobin (2010) defines the value of the descriptive case study as: “its potential for mining for abstract interpretations of data and theory development”. Case study approaches provide an empirical method to guide data collection and analysis from which to offer conclusions and build theories (Orum et al., 1991). Therefore, this case study research design enables me to add to existing knowledge of presidential leadership by developing a theory of discursive university leadership in crisis. To build theory, I analyse findings in each case and across multiple cases.

**Documentary evidence**

Presidents and university constituents communicate with each other in person and online, informally and formally, through official and unofficial channels. Communications involving presidents and constituents may be inscribed in documentary evidence, either in full or in part. Using documents in case study research rather than conducting interviews or surveys was appropriate for this study due to the availability of data in a natural, public setting and its potential influence on shaping public interpretation of presidential leadership. Documentary evidence includes "...a wide range of written, visual, and physical material
relevant to the study at hand” (Merriam, 1998, p. 112). The study relies on three distinct yet overlapping sets of data: news media coverage, presidential communications, and constituent response. Stake (1995) advocates that case study research benefits when phenomena are investigated without disrupting the natural flow of events, for instance by observing or studying documentary evidence generated contemporaneously with the events of a case, rather than conducting surveys or interviews, which are newly created during the research process. When used to investigate presidential resignation in crisis, documentary evidence does not require the researcher’s engagement with individuals involved in each episode under investigation to produce data for analysis (Gibson, 2015). Documents, therefore, are not subject to shifting participant perspectives or the researcher’s influence on interviewees (Merriam, 1998), and may be considered stable, fixed evidence. Using documents for analysis of public communications preceding presidential resignation in crisis therefore enables examination of discourse as originally published or posted online. This approach mitigates the risk of constituents introducing retrospective interpretations into the data collected, which can occur during post-crisis interviews with individuals involved who may create new crisis event interpretations, for instance by speculating about the origins of crisis or placing blame on other people involved. Taking steps to avoid introducing post-crisis rationalisation is especially germane to this study which seeks patterns in pre-resignation communications issued and interpreted during crises, but prior to the critical turning point of presidential resignation.

Exclusive use of documents, news media coverage, presidential communications, and constituent response presents limitations to the study of abbreviated presidential tenure in crisis. For instance, documentary evidence published or posted during the crisis may be incomplete since it is organically
generated by constituents to fulfil a variety of purposes during the natural course of events rather than for research purposes (Merriam, 1998). Also, researchers using documentary evidence cannot attend to every detail of a phenomenon under investigation and equal attention cannot be given to all sources. Although documentary evidence may be considered ‘stable’, by selecting, preparing, and organising the data, the researcher may reorder or omit certain documents or parts of documents, as well as remove the original documents from their natural, original locations in order to collect and to analyse data. Also, communications enable constituents to create interpretations which construct the social world (Crotty, 1998), which often involves introducing inaccuracies. For the purpose of this investigation, an inaccurate statement may be considered as worthy of analysis as a supposedly accurate statement, because inaccuracies offer interpretations that may be viewed as legitimate by constituents and therefore influence socially constructed views of presidential leadership and crisis events.

As in all research studies, the overall research design necessitated decisions about which data to include and to exclude (Stake, 1995). In addition to the choices I made as researcher, the original authors of the documents also made choices about details or statements to include or exclude. For example, journalists choose to include some aspects of a story and exclude others (Fairclough, 2003). Therefore, any single document in this study presents and reflects some aspects of the social world while excluding or omitting others. I addressed this data collection limitation by seeking multiple sources of documentary evidence, tracing details to primary sources, and pairing collection and analysis of leadership communications with constituent responses. Inaccuracies, inauthenticity, and biases in documentary evidence also introduce possible limitations for the researcher (Merriam, 1998). I mitigate possible
limitations by approaching documents as attempts by presidents and constituents to shape interpretation of presidential leadership in crisis.

**Discourse analysis**

To identify patterns in communications when presidents resign during crisis, the research method incorporates discourse analysis into case study methods to investigate presidential communications and constituent response. Analysing discourse allowed me to identify and to understand possible interpretations of presidential leadership during crisis advanced by presidents and also by constituents who may influence presidential leadership.

As discussed in Chapter 1, I adopt Gee’s (2014b) specific framing of discourse and, as such, view language as conveying information and building the social world. Furthermore, according to Gee (2014a, 2014b), discourse analysis involves examining language use to identify, describe, and to analyse the social world as reflected and projected in communication. Discourse analysis explores and develops interpretations of communications to understand how parts of the social world, such as socially-recognisable identities or relationships, may be created through language.

Consideration of possible constituent interpretation is essential to discourse analysis, as findings rely on identifying the range of interpretations associated with communications shaped by knowledge shared amongst people in social settings. For example, and as I found in the pilot case, a president might issue an official public statement indicating that a strategic plan under development will address persistent inequities adversely impacting students, and in doing so suggest that it is a priority matter for the president, whereas students may interpret the president’s emphasis on strategy as an unwillingness to act urgently.

Gee (2014a) asserts that speakers and writers assume listeners and readers will
use social and historical knowledge to create interpretations of communications. Communications are therefore never complete or understood without being complemented by additional information, but rather are always dependent on listeners and readers contributing knowledge as they receive communication and develop interpretations. During analysis, discourse analysts incorporate information that may be introduced by constituents in context to generate possible interpretations (Gee, 2014a).

**Ethics**

This study analyses and presents cases of university presidents resigning during high-profile crises and, inevitably, the data include critical points of view. All university presidents are criticised by constituents. The aim is not to critique the actions or statements of constituents or presidents or pass judgment on them. Rather, it is to describe patterns in communications prior to resignation, identify findings, and build theory and conclusions based on the patterns observed. Even so, in describing the cases, critical perspectives are included. The study endeavours to avoid critiquing actions or adopting an ideological perspective, but rather to describe patterns and present the cases as observed and analysed using the research methods. The ethic of respect informs the investigation (British Educational Research Association, 2011), and care has been taken to present the cases in ways that respect those involved, while presenting sufficient detail to ensure a robust study. By providing an in-depth and detailed presentation of the cases, readers will also be able to engage critically with the data and form their own conclusions, thereby increasing the impact of the study and enhancing its validity (Stake, 1995). In case study research it can, at times, be impossible to protect the identities of participants and in some instances it may not be preferable due to the loss of contextual detail (Merriam, 1998; Yin,
In this study, it is not possible to anonymise the cases without omitting salient details required to describe the dynamics of each episode (Yin, 2009). The identities of institutions and presidents included in this study are, therefore, presented, rather than anonymised.

Publicly available data has been used to conduct the study. All events and actions have been reported in the public domain and are therefore open to public scrutiny (Merriam, 1998). University presidents are public figures, similar to elected government officials or, in some cases, celebrities (Trachtenberg et al., 2013). Transparency in the presentation of the cases is consistent with the social norms of the American university presidency. Moreover, the cases in the study occur at government universities that are subject to FOI laws. Therefore, in addition to the social norms of the presidency, the presidents lead in contexts that require a high degree of transparency by law. Details presented in this study are therefore accessible online and, if requested, via disclosure under FOI laws.

Even though the cases are identified, constituent response is anonymised if the user posting is not a public figure. For instance, if a social media user is an elected political official or the leader of a social movement, the constituent is considered a public figure and the response is attributed accordingly. If a reaction is posted on a social media website, such as Twitter, which is publicly available, but the constituent typically does not assume a public identity, the user is anonymised. This aligns with Merriam's (1998) recommendation that individuals who post online have a right to privacy even though their statements are available to the public. Care has therefore been taken to preserve the privacy of individuals involved in cases who are not public figures, while ensuring the study includes sufficient detail such that the complexity of each case is conveyed and the examination of language capitalises on the strengths of the chosen methods.
Pilot research stages

To develop and test methods, I first developed and conducted a pilot study (Figure 11). During the pilot study, I identified a case of abbreviated tenure in crisis then created and tested a framework for gathering and analysing data to enable pattern identification in pre-resignation communications. In turn, with refinements, this process was used to guide data collection and analysis in the full, multi-case study. The pilot study was guided by the following questions:

1) What is the scale of coverage of university presidents in the national news media defined as articles published in a subset of news media websites attracting the most online readers?

2) Are there constituents influencing university presidents in national news media coverage as defined in question 1? If so, what constituent influences are present in national news stories about the president who receives the most national press attention?

3) Are there patterns in the formal and informal communications made by and in response to the president who receives the most national press attention? If so, what patterns occur in formal and informal presidential communications and in response to the president?

The pilot research design included three stages. In Stage 1, I collected and analysed national news media coverage. From the coverage, I selected an example of abbreviated presidential tenure in crisis for in-depth, exploratory study. In the second stage, I collected regional and sector-specific news
coverage related to the identified abbreviated presidential tenure in crisis. I searched for and collected scholarly publications specifically related to the identified crisis and the President’s abbreviated tenure. In this stage, using collected news coverage, I identified and collected formal and informal presidential communications reported in the coverage. I also collected constituent responses to presidential statements and actions shared online.

In the third stage of the pilot, I analysed communications collected in Stage 2(a) to (c) for possible constituent influences and conducted discourse analyses of presidential communications and constituent responses. I analysed the sequence of communications and events occurring in crisis by creating a case timeline of the pre-resignation phase, defined as the two weeks prior to resignation. First, I analysed national, regional, and sector-specific news coverage and scholarly publications collected to identify potential constituent influences and crisis triggers or accelerators, such as moments of conflict, turning points, rallies and demonstrations, and communications. Using the data set of presidential communications, I analysed discourse in the president’s public communications to identify patterns. I also conducted discourse analysis of tweets to identify patterns in constituent responses. Finally, I analysed the sequence of events and communications identified in data collected by creating a timeline of the pre-resignation phase. Amalgamating the analyses, I wrote a case narrative describing the president’s journey to abbreviated tenure and the associated crisis. At the conclusion of the pilot study, I refined study operations to prepare for data collection and analysis in the remaining stages of the research project, during which I completed two full, descriptive case studies. The following sections describe the stages and phases of the pilot study in detail.
Stage 1: Pilot study sampling and case selection

Stage 1(a): Search term selection and media coverage search

In Stage 1(a) (Figure 12), by searching for mainstream news media stories in which a university president appears as the subject of an article, I identified national news media coverage of American university presidents in 2015, the year prior to beginning the pilot study, to ensure a contemporary view of the presidency. This led me to select a single case of presidential resignation in crisis for in-depth investigation. I selected search terms using LexisNexis Academic, a database of full-text news, business, and legal publications with over 15,000 sources (LexisNexis, nd). Search criteria included the words “university” or “college” and the word “president” within five words of each other including articles with the phrases “University president [surname]…” or “The president of the university…”.

After conducting the initial search, I refined the search by identifying terms to exclude. Excluding selected terms ensured results featured articles about universities presidents active in their institutions. For example, I excluded several search terms because the 2015 national American presidential election cycle was underway, overlapping with the publication dates of articles relevant to the pilot study.
study. To exclude national presidential candidate coverage, I expanded the search criteria to exclude the names of national presidential candidates: “Clinton”, “Sanders”, and “Trump”. Next, I excluded any death notices or obituaries of current or former university presidents by limiting “death notices”, “paid notices”, and “obituary”. This ensured the finalised dataset was limited to articles focused on university presidents who were active in their universities. Although articles about the death of a president were excluded, articles announcing the appointment of a president just beginning a period of activity at a university remained in the data set. To create a robust process for identifying articles and managing the data collected, I conducted twelve searches using the criteria, one for each month of 2015 bounded by the first and last day of each month.

Sources of news media coverage
To identify news coverage with national rather than local or regional readership, I included four publications to identify constituents and their concerns influencing presidential leadership attracting broad, national news coverage, which subsequently allowed me to identify an episode of abbreviated presidential tenure during high-profile crisis. The publications selected for inclusion ranked first, second, fourth, and seventh in the top 25 newspapers by digital traffic in January 2015: USAToday.com (54,548 unique digital visitors), NYTimes.com (53,966 unique digital visitors), WashingtonPost.com (47,815), and LATimes.com (25,185) (Pew Research Center, 2015). To ensure focus on American universities exposed to a national audience, media outlets with a high volume of digital visitors headquarter headed internationally (DailyMail.co.uk and TheGuardian.com) or with a local focus (NYDailynews.com) were omitted. In this study, when a university president and the events associated with that president’s leadership are covered in selected national media outlets ranking highly for
attracting unique, digital readers, I use the adjectival phrase “high-profile” to describe the episode.

The same news article is often published, with minor edits, in multiple publications on the same or consecutive days. Therefore, to avoid repetition of very similar articles in the data set, I excluded duplicate results during the search process to ensure a complete data set, while reducing repetition and duplication. Final search criteria, as described above, are included in Appendix E.

**Stage 1(b): Media coverage collection and organisation**

In Stage 1(b) (Figure 13), after eliminating unrelated articles, monthly search results totalling 1,099 articles for the year (Table 6) were collected and organised. I downloaded articles in two formats, as full-text results in Word documents and article lists saved in Word documents for reference. Article list details were transferred to an Excel workbook for classification, including article title, publication, date published, section (if applicable), number of words, and author. Next, I read each individual article to ascertain if the subject focused on a university president and the president’s current leadership. If not, I removed the article from the dataset. In this phase, I eliminated 741 articles. The total article count for each month was
recorded to ascertain if overall coverage peaked in any single month during 2015 or if coverage remained consistent throughout the year (Table 6). News media coverage increased in November when 218 articles were published about university presidents in the selected, national news media publications.

**Table 6: 2015 News Media Coverage of University Presidents by Month**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>November</strong></td>
<td><strong>218</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,099</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 6: National news media coverage of university presidents in selected publications by month in 2015*

**Stage 1(c): Pilot case selection**

Stage 1(c) (Figure 14) involved an inductive approach, beginning with the pilot study research questions, data collection, and examination of data to find patterns (O’Leary, 2007) across the 1,099 identified news articles. Analysis involved identifying the primary concerns or expectations of constituents potentially influencing university presidential leadership described in each of the 1,099 sources by searching for constituents influencing presidents, as well as their expectations and concerns, described in Chapters 2. Using the Excel
workbook of all 1,099 sources, I noted the primary constituent influence or issue of concern for constituents in each article. This analysis identified constituent concerns and associated attempts to influence, revealing if any single constituency or constituency’s concern potentially influencing presidents occurred more frequently across the entire data set and in any single month of 2015.

By organising the articles by constituent influence, I found student concerns relating to race, equity, and inclusion influenced university presidential leadership most frequently in the data (370 articles), followed by 2) student fee levels (122), 3) university sport and involved constituents including student athletes (132), 4) university finance (100), 5) safety related to sexual misconduct perpetrated against university community members (93), 6) safety at university related to other forms of physical violence similarly involving university constituents (71), and 7) student recruitment (36). Sixteen percent (175) of the articles in the data set do not include any of these seven most frequently found areas of constituent concern or involvement possibly influencing presidents (Figure 15).

**Figure 14: Pilot Study Stage 1(c)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sampling and case selection</td>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a)</td>
<td>Search term selection and media coverage search</td>
<td>Media coverage and scholarly research collection</td>
<td>Constituent influence analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b)</td>
<td>Media coverage collection and organisation</td>
<td>Presidential communication identification, collection, and organisation</td>
<td>Presidential communication discourse analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c)</td>
<td>Pilot case selection</td>
<td>Computer-Mediated Communication collection</td>
<td>Computer-Mediated Discourse analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Timeline analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In this research phase, I also found constituent concerns in November 2015 relating to race, equity, and inclusion on university campuses featured prominently in these data. The data include 218 articles published in November 2015, which represents a 58 percent increase over the second month in which the greatest number of articles were published and an increase of 138 percent over the average of all twelve months in 2015.

After concluding this phase of the pilot research, I re-read the articles published in November 2015 associated with the increase in coverage to determine if one university president’s leadership was the focus of news media attention. I discovered that one president, who resigned during a crisis, received more

Figure 15: Constituent concerns and possible influence on presidents found in national media coverage, January to December 2015
national news media attention than any other university leader in the data set: University of Missouri (UM) President Timothy (Tim) Wolfe received the most national news coverage in 2015. On this basis, I selected Wolfe’s high-profile presidential leadership for in-depth investigation in this pilot study.

Stage 2: Pilot study data collection

Stage 2(a): Expanding case media coverage collection and adding scholarly research

To search for and collect a comprehensive data set of news media articles about Wolfe and the incidents that led to increased coverage in November 2015, in Stage 2(a) (Figure 16), I used ProQuest US Newsstream, an online news media database that provides comprehensive access to local, regional, and national news sources (ProQuest, nd). I used two search criteria, delimiting the search to the pre-resignation phase, to generate a data set of news media articles relating to President Wolfe:

1) **University**: The abbreviated name of the university commonly used in America most likely to appear in news media coverage

2) **President**: The name of the president, without initials, in quotes

3) **Date range**: Pre-resignation phase, defined as the two weeks prior to the president’s resignation, including the first day, through the day of the president’s resignation
Searching these criteria on ProQuest US Newsstream, I identified 202 local, regional, and national news media articles about President Wolfe. I downloaded full-text versions of the article reference details including author, date, article title, publication in which the article appears, and web links to the article in the ProQuest US Newsstream database, while saving the full-text versions of articles to a OneNote Notebook.

I supplemented this data set by searching for articles produced by higher education news publications such as The Chronicle of Higher Education (chronicle.com) and Inside Higher Ed (insidehighered.com) by using the first two search terms describe above: the name of the university and the name of the president. By searching The Chronicle of Higher Education and Inside Higher Ed, I found six additional articles published about Wolfe and the UM crisis.

I also created a Google news alert on 7 February 2016, shortly after the episode that gained so much media attention in November 2015, using the first two search terms in the ProQuest search: Wolfe’s name and the abbreviated common name of the university he led, “Missouri”. The Google alert allowed me to monitor and collect ongoing news media coverage or other publications about the president and the university following Wolfe’s resignation during a high-profile crisis.

During this Stage, I identified the start date of Wolfe’s tenure by searching the university website where the President served and then searching for media coverage spanning the full duration of Wolfe’s tenure using ProQuest US Newsstream by using the president’s name and the name of the university. I expanded the search date range to include the first month of the president’s tenure up until the start of the pre-resignation phase. This search produced 370
articles. I downloaded the full text and reference information for all search results, including weblinks, and saved full-text article data in a OneNote Notebook.

As I conducted this investigation, other scholars studied and published articles about Wolfe’s resignation in crisis, ranging from brief opinion pieces in peer-reviewed journals, discussion of Wolfe and events at UM to establish context for a wide-ranging study involving additional cases, or as a single case study conducted using empirical methods. To incorporate this data into collection procedures, scholarly publications were identified in three distinct, yet overlapping, ways. First, I conducted a search using University College London’s (2018a) Explore website, a single search tool for finding journal articles, books, and other library materials, including the search criteria outlined above—the name of the university and the president’s name—from November 2015 through July 2018, including peer-reviewed journals. This search produced 26 articles. Second, one study (Kezar & Fries-Britt, 2018) was published by a national association and was identified through ongoing monitoring of The Chronicle of Higher Education, which covers the release of the study (Brown, 2018a). Third, one journal article (Cole & Harper, 2017) is referenced in a paper on university presidential responses to racist incidents presented at a conference I attended in 2018 (Delmas & Morton, 2019). Finally, I attended a conference presentation in 2017 focusing on the 2015 UM crisis events, leadership responses, and associated communications (McCubbin, 2017). As I reviewed the scholarly publications, I recorded potential constituent influences on presidential leadership, crisis triggers, and key events that accelerated or escalated the crisis described by researchers in their publications.
**Stage 2(b): Presidential communication identification, collection, and organisation**

The news media coverage collected in Stage 2(a) referenced statements made by President Wolfe during the crisis. Oral and written public statements made by the President during the pre-resignation phase found in the news media articles were identified, collected, and then organised into a Word document in chronological order by date of each statement in Stage 2(b) (Figure 17). Presidential communications reported in the news articles included direct and indirect, or paraphrased, quotes, as well as official and unofficial communications. Each presidential statement found in the news media coverage was reviewed to determine if the news article itself could be considered the primary source, such as when a journalist interviews the President and publishes a quote from the interview in the body of a news article. However, if a journalist reports on presidential communications published in another source, I sought the original by gathering the primary source documents. For example, if a journalist included direct quotes from a president’s official statement issued by the university, I searched the university’s website to identify the complete, original, official statement, if available. Any new documents identified in this process of identifying, collecting, and organising the president’s public statements from the
news media coverage were saved as full-text versions in a workbook in OneNote where I collected raw data. Full presidential statements were added to the data set organised chronologically in a Word document. In the pilot study and multi-case study chapters, if a President or another constituent is quoted by the news media, the speaker is attributed in the case description (e.g., “Tim Wolfe says…”) and the author of the news media article is included in the reference.

Using this method, I found four public, presidential communications published in the pre-resignation phase. Wolfe’s communications included formal and informal presidential communications, some of which, but not all, were issued by Wolfe’s office. Informal communication occurred in real time, without advanced preparation or rehearsal, including unexpected encounters with student activists captured on video. Formal communications include those written either by Wolfe’s office or in collaboration with professional public relations staff, represent a university’s official position on a topic, and often involve multiple reviewers before publication (Gardner, 2016a). Wolfe meets with and speaks with students (3 November). Next, Wolfe issues an official university statement, which is posted to the UM website (6 November). Wolfe also communicates informally and unofficially on 6 November with a group of student protestors who talk to him as Wolfe enters a UM fundraising event. Two days later on 8 November, Wolfe issues another official, university statement, which is posted to the UM website.

**Stage 2(c): Computer-Mediated Communication collection of constituent response on social media**

During Stage 2(c) (Figure 18), to create a data set of Computer-Mediated Communications, or text-based communication occurring via the Internet such as microblogging (Herring, 2018; Herring & Androutsopoulos, 2015), reflecting responses to President Wolfe, I selected Twitter to source constituent response
due to the public availability of the data and the interdependence of news media and Twitter, as described in Chapter 1. Tweets are publicly available and searchable unless a user actively selects a private mode for their stream of posts (Zappavigna, 2012), whereas many other online social platforms require that users connect to each other first prior to making shared content visible. The availability of most Twitter content makes it not only accessible, but also more likely to influence public perceptions and constituent interpretations. Journalists now regularly disseminate coverage via Twitter (Gnach, 2018). As this study focuses on high-profile crises attracting national media coverage, selecting Twitter as the site for collecting constituent response on social media allowed me to incorporate data in which constituent views and news media intersect and users generate and negotiate interpretations of communications.

In Stage 2(c), I searched collected news media articles about Wolfe to identify references to social media posts. One regional news article reported that social media users created a hashtag including Wolfe’s name to advocate for his

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**Figure 18: Pilot Study Stage 2(c)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phases</td>
<td>(a)</td>
<td>Search term selection and media coverage search</td>
<td>Media coverage and scholarly research collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b)</td>
<td>Media coverage collection and organisation</td>
<td>Presidential communication identification, collection, and organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(c)</td>
<td>Pilot case selection</td>
<td>Computer-Mediated Communication collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(d)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Timeline analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
resignation or termination: #WolfeGottaGo (Missourian Staff, 2015). To collect social media communications responding to the president, I searched Twitter for this hashtag. I identified and recorded 283 tweets that include #WolfeGottaGo, the hashtag calling for Wolfe’s removal. In this data set, I found 392 uses of the hashtag because some users repeat the hashtag in a single Tweet. For example, one Tweet repeats the hashtag three times: “@UMPrez You're embarrassing. #WolfeGottaGo #WolfeGottaGo #WolfeGottaGo #MizzouFootballStrike #MizzouFootballStrike #MizzouHungerStrike”. All publicly available Tweets including the hashtag were copied and pasted from Twitter in late May and early June 2016 to a OneNote workbook.

**Stage 3: Pilot study analysis**

**Stage 3(a): Constituent influence analysis**

Stage 3(a) (Figure 19) identified potentially influential constituent actions and communications covered by the media relating to Wolfe’s leadership and the crisis episode. In this phase, I read the data collected in Stage 2(a) through (c), and recorded notes on constituent influences evident in the data. I identified external and internal constituents, their actions, and their communications possibly influencing Wolfe commanding the attention of journalists or potentially precipitating further action or response from the President or other key
constituents involved, such as moments of conflict or public statements made by
the President covered by journalists. Analysis of the media coverage for
constituent influence on presidential leadership in crisis reflects the study’s
understanding of leadership as discursive: a process of influence among social
actors involving language and the management of meaning, distributed among
leaders and constituents, also involving attribution of leadership by constituents
(Fairhurst, 2007).

**Stage 3(b): Discourse analysis of presidential communications**

To identify patterns within the collated data set of presidential communications, in
Stage 3(b) (Figure 20) I designed and ultimately re-designed a discourse analysis protocol, by combining analytical ‘tools’, or questions to apply to the communications during discourse analysis:

A tool for discourse analysis is a specific question to ask of data. Each question makes the reader look quite closely at the details of language in an oral or written communication. Each question also makes the reader connect these details to what speakers or writers mean, intend, and seek to do and accomplish in the world by the way in which they have used language (Gee, 2014b, p. 2).
To create my initial discourse analysis protocol, I developed questions relevant to this study based on Gee’s (2014a, 2014b) “tools” or discourse analysis questions, and Fairclough’s (2003) discourse analysis for education research, initially endeavouring to be comprehensive by combining tools to explore as many aspects of discourse as possible. As such, I created a 35-part protocol of discourse analysis tools (Appendix F). Using this protocol, I attempted to analyse discourse in presidential communication by first asking each question of every presidential statement collected in Stage 2(b). Then, I recorded possible answers to each discourse analysis question based on the data, including answers that may be contradictory. I then reviewed recorded answers to discourse analysis questions for patterns emerging across more than one answer.

For example, discourse analysis tool seven (7) in the protocol (Appendix F) is designed to examine values in discourse and includes two questions: “How are the leader’s values presented” and “Are the leader’s values presented as consistent or misaligned with actions?”. To identify and describe values in the discourse evident in a presidential communication using the two questions, I read communications in the dataset, asked these questions about values in the data, developed possible answers to the questions using the data, and recorded all viable answers I could develop based on the data in a protocol worksheet, noting answers recorded in a separate column. My answers, for example, to the questions about values following an exploratory examination of Wolfe’s transcribed resignation speech which I conducted to test the protocol, were recorded as follows:

President Wolfe’s speech (italics added):
"I am resigning as president of the University of Missouri system today."
"My motivation in making this decision comes from love. I love MU, Columbia, where I grew up, and the state of Missouri. I have thought greatly about this decision, and it's the right thing to do. The response to this announcement I'm sure will bring joy to some and anger to others, and that's why we're here today. So let me speak to why this is so important at this time.

"To our students: from Concerned Student 1950 to our grad students, football players and other students, the frustration and anger that I see is clear, real, and I don't doubt it for a second.

"To the faculty and staff who have expressed their anger, their frustration, this, too, is real.

"To my friends and my supporters that have been so gracious and have sent so many emails in the past and calls with support, I understand that you might be frustrated, as well.

"So the question really is, is why did we get to this very difficult situation. It is my belief we stopped listening to each other. We didn't respond or react. We got frustrated with each other, and we forced individuals like Jonathan Butler to take immediate action and unusual steps to effect change.

"This is not, I repeat not, the way change should come about. Change comes from listening, learning, caring and conversation. We have to respect each other enough to stop yelling at each other and start listening, and quit intimidating each other. …

"Unfortunately this has not happened. And I just want to stand before you today, and I take full responsibility for this frustration, and I take full responsibility for the inaction that has occurred."

… "I truly love everybody here and the very institution, and my decision to resign comes out of love, not hate. I’d like to read some Scripture that’s given me strength. I hope it provides you with some strength as well, as we think about this next. I have to also to give credit to my daughter, who reminded me of the Scripture.

"Psalm 46 verse 1: ‘The Lord is my refuge and my strength, my very present help in trouble.’"

"We need to use my resignation — please, please — use this resignation to heal, not to hate as we move forward today for a brighter tomorrow. God bless all of you, and thank you for this wonderful opportunity to" serve "the University of Missouri system. Thank you." (Wolfe, 2015c).

**Discourse analysis notes:**

The president’s statement presents his values as:

a) Loving, caring (repetition of love)
b) Pious (reference to scripture)
c) Committed to taking responsibility (for frustration and for inaction)
d) Willing to give others credit (daughter)
e) Willing to do the right thing (resigning to catalyse healing)
f) Committed to the institution, Missouri, and where he grew up (opening)
g) Values civility, open dialogue, and respect (not intimidation, yelling, not listening)

Also, contrasting values in the statement:
Unwilling to take or eschewing full responsibility by using the first-person plural when referring to certain actions, but at the same time taking responsibility for inaction

Value alignment:
Misalignment between professed values (loving, caring, piety) and described actions (lack of listening, lack of action, intimidation)

Discourse analysis protocol review and redesign
Not surprisingly, during my initial attempts to analyse communications, I found that the scale of this extended discourse analysis protocol was not conducive to identifying patterns. The number of questions in the protocol, each of which yields many possible answers for every communication, were too numerous. I was not able to organise and manage analytical notes to find communication patterns. Following Gee (2014a), who suggests that any discourse analysis necessarily attends to only some of the questions that may be asked of the data, I selected discourse analysis questions that would allow me to identify and analyse evidence of potential constituent influence on perceptions of presidential leadership and relationships to align with the definition of discursive leadership informing the study, with pilot research questions, and to reflect the prominence of relationship difficulties found in previously published research on abbreviated tenure. I designed a revised protocol (Table 7) focusing on six features of discourse: i) representation of constituents, ii) presidential identities, iii) pronouns and nouns, iv) relationships, v) difference, and vi) actions, which are described below.
Table 7: Final Discourse Analysis Protocol Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>i. Representation of constituents:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Who is included, excluded, foregrounded, or backgrounded?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Who is presented personally or impersonally?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Who is presented as part of a category?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Who is presented with specificity or without specificity?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ii. Presidential identities:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) What traits and life histories are identified with the leader?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>iii. Pronouns and nouns:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) How are pronouns used and are presidents or constituents presented as nouns or pronouns?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>iv. Relationships:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) What relationships are created between presidents and constituents?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) What relationships or social relations between presidents and constituents are enacted?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>v. Difference:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) How is difference explored, accentuated, negotiated, bracketed or suppressed?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>vi. Actions:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) What is the action present in the words involving relationships between the president and constituents (informing, advising, promising, warning, promoting, etc.)?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Final discourse analysis protocol incorporating analytical tools suggested by Fairclough (2003) and Gee (2014a, 2014b)

Discourse analysis: Representation of constituents

To identify and to analyse the representation of social actors in communications, I asked four questions of each presidential communication and recorded possible answers in a discourse analysis protocol worksheet:

(a) Who is included, excluded, foregrounded, or backgrounded?
(b) Who is presented personally or impersonally?
(c) Who is presented as part of a category?
(d) Who is presented with specificity or without specificity?

To reveal and to analyse representations of constituents in presidential communications, the questions draw on Fairclough’s (2003) discussion of the presentation of social actors in discourse. Specifically, the questions ask how social actors are included or excluded, positioned in the foreground or the background, or presented with specificity or without specificity in discourse. For example, if suppressed or excluded, a person who might otherwise be included due to their profile in a crisis does not appear in the data at all (Fairclough, 2003).
If “backgrounded”, a person is referenced in the data, but is not placed as prominently as might be expected given an individual’s power, status, or other important role in the crisis (Fairclough, 2003). Constituents who are referenced by name or described in detail are presented personally and/or with specificity and, in contrast, if a person is not described or presented as such they are presented impersonally and/or without specificity (Fairclough, 2003). If represented as part of a group, such as academic staff, governing board members, or students, a person is presented as part of a group, or rather, constituency (Fairclough, 2003).

By asking and answering these questions regarding the presentation of constituents, I began to identify and examine presidential relationships as reinforced and projected by discourse in presidential communications (Figure 21). By asking the questions designed to reveal the representation of constituents in discourse, I sought to illuminate patterns of relationships that may have contributed to public perceptions of presidential leadership. Patterns identified using this discourse analysis tool may be interpreted as evidence of a president’s real or projected interpersonal connections with constituents and orientation to or regard for other people. Therefore, analysing discourse by identifying the representation of constituents in presidential communications reveals patterns that may provide evidence of publicly perceived relationships or relationship difficulties that could relate to abbreviated tenure.

**Discourse analysis: Presidential identities**

To identify and analyse the presentation of presidential identities in communications, I recorded possible answers to the question: “What traits and life histories are identified with the leader?”. All communications, including presidential statements, allow a speaker or writer to be recognised for taking on a
Figure 21. Representation of Constituents: Discourse Analysis Example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourse analysis questions</th>
<th>Presidential communication</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Who is included, excluded, foregrounded, backgrounded? (b) Who is presented personally or impersonally? (c) Who is presented as part of a category? (d) Who is presented with specificity or without specificity?</td>
<td>Today I again had the opportunity to meet with MU graduate student Jonathan Butler who continues a hunger strike protesting the inequalities, inequities, and obstacles faced by students, faculty and staff at the University of Missouri. I am very concerned about Jonathan’s health. His voice for social justice is important and powerful. He is being heard and I am listening. I am thankful for the leadership provided by him and the other student leaders in raising awareness of racism, injustice, and intolerance. This afternoon I also met with representatives of several student groups and I value their input and hear their voices. [paragraph break]. Racism does exist at our university and it is unacceptable. It is a long-standing, systemic problem which daily affects our family of students, faculty and staff. I am sorry this is the case. I truly want all members of our university community to feel included, valued and safe. [paragraph break] I regret my reaction at the MU homecoming parade when the Concerned Student 1950 group approached my car. I am sorry, and my apology is long overdue. My behavior seemed like I did not care. (Wolfe, 2015a).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Included, presented personally, with specificity</td>
<td>a) MU graduate student Jonathan Butler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Included, presented impersonally, without specificity or as a group or category</td>
<td>b) Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c) Concerned Student 1950 group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>d) Faculty and staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>e) Student leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>f) Student groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>g) “Family” (of students, faculty and staff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>h) Members of our university community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foregrounded</td>
<td>i) Jonathan Butler</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 21: Example of presidential communication discourse analysis to identify constituent representations
certain identity or role in a given context (Gee, 2014b), which can influence constituent relationships. Presidents inhabit and convey multiple social roles, while also always necessarily using language to be acknowledged as inhabiting the role of 'president'. In social groups, people are expected to speak and behave in ways that are “appropriate” for a given role or identity (Gee, 2014b). Constituents expect presidents to use language in ways that align with their views of presidential leadership identity and presidents wishing to continue leading may choose to speak in ways that affirm their embodiment of the role. Examination of identity in discourse does not seek to reveal a “core self” per se, but rather illuminates individual expression or projection of social identity in relation to other people by examining how features of identity are conveyed in language (Gee, 2014b). The presentation, projection, and reception of presidential identity through discourse is especially relevant to this study's emphasis on digital communications as CMC has been found to shape the presentation of identities online (Livingstone, 2008; Turkle, 2016; Turkle, 2017). By asking this discourse analysis question of presidential communications and recording possible answers in the protocol worksheet, I identified and analysed evidence of the presentation of presidential identities in discourse (Figure 22).

Discourse analysis: Pronouns and nouns
To extend my identification and analysis of patterns associated with identities and the representation of constituents, next I asked a question focused on nouns and pronouns and recorded possible answers: “How are pronouns used and are presidents or constituents presented as nouns or pronouns?”. Gee (2014a) identifies speech or writing that uses the first-person, singular pronoun (“I”) as building identity through language. Like the representation of constituents and of presidential identity explore above, pronouns can position a president in relation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourse analysis question</th>
<th>Presidential communication</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) What traits and life histories are identified with the leader?</td>
<td>...I am very concerned about Jonathan’s health. His voice for social justice is important and powerful. He is being heard and I am listening. I am thankful for the leadership provided by him and the other student leaders in raising awareness of racism, injustice, and intolerance. This afternoon I also met with representatives of several student groups and I value their input and hear their voices. [paragraph break] Racism does exist at our university and it is unacceptable. It is a long-standing, systemic problem which daily affects our family of students, faculty and staff. I am sorry this is the case. I truly want all members of our university community to feel included, valued and safe. [paragraph break] I regret my reaction at the MU homecoming parade when the ConcernedStudent1950 group approached my car. I am sorry, and my apology is long overdue. ... I am asking us to move forward in addressing the racism that exists at our university – and it does exist. Together we must rise to the challenge of combatting racism, injustice, and intolerance (Wolfe, 2015a).</td>
<td>Traits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>a) Apologetic and regretful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b) Concerned and caring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c) Listening and hearing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>d) Thankful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>e) Knowledgeable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>f) Responsible</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>g) Reflective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>h) Forward-thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>i) Committed to community members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>j) Committed to combating racism and intolerance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 22:** Example of presidential communication discourse analysis to identify presidential identities
to constituents, such as by using the first-person, plural pronouns “we” or “us” or by turning the focus into the president by using the first-person, singular pronouns “I”, “me”, or “my”. For example, if a president frequently uses the first-person plural pronoun and in doing so is positioned as a member of a university community, the president’s identity as part of the larger group may be reinforced. In contrast, Pennebaker’s (2011a) research into pronoun usage finds that increased use of first-person, singular pronouns creates a focus on oneself. By asking this discourse analysis question and recording possible answers in the protocol worksheet, I found and analysed evidence of pronoun and noun usage in presidential discourse to reveal possible connections with constituents and additional patterns associated with public presidential identities (Figure 23).

Discourse analysis: Relationships

Using the first three tools in the discourse analysis protocol described above, I began to find and analyse patterns associated with constituents and presidents represented in presidential communications, while the “relationships” analytical tool I used explicitly asks: “(a) What relationships are created?” and “(b) What relationships or social relations between participants are enacted?”. Gee (2014a) suggests that in discourse, language is used to create, sustain, damage, or harm relationships. Speakers and writers communicate to build relationships and to indicate to listeners or readers what type of relationship is desired or expected (Gee, 2014a). Presidents enact relationships with constituents and necessarily communicate in ways that establish and sustain critical relationships. By asking this discourse analysis question and recording possible answers in the protocol worksheet, I found and analysed evidence of relationships built, reinforced, or undermined by discourse (Figure 24). Relationships produced and reproduced in discourse can convey connection or disconnection (Gee, 2014b) and social
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourse analysis question</th>
<th>Presidential communication</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| How are pronouns used and are people presented as nouns or pronouns? | Today I again had the opportunity to meet ... Jonathan Butler who continues a hunger strike ... I am very concerned about Jonathan’s health. His voice ... He is being heard and I am listening. I am thankful for the leadership provided by him ... This afternoon I also met with representatives of several student groups and I value their input and hear their voices ... Racism does exist at our university and it is unacceptable ... which daily affects our family of students, faculty and staff. I am sorry this is the case. I truly want all members of our university ... I regret my reaction ... when the Concerned Student 1950 group approached my car. I am sorry, and my apology is long overdue. My behavior seemed like I did not care. That was not my intention. I was caught off guard ... Nonetheless, had I gotten out of the car to acknowledge the students and talk with them perhaps we wouldn’t be where we are today. I am asking us to move forward in addressing the racism that exists at our university – and it does exist. Together we must rise ... (Wolfe, 2015a). | l/my: 19  
We/Our/us: 7  
He/His/Him/Who: 4  
Their/Them: 2  
Extensive use of I words, with use of the first-person, plural at the end of his statement indicates:  
a) No sense of ‘groupness’ throughout most of the statement  
b) An endeavour to create ‘groupness’ at the end of the statement with repetition of we/our/we  
c) Focus on one’s self – either for the sake of apology or for other reasons  
d) Lower status  
This is in contrast to limited use of first-person, singular pronouns in other statement. |
**Figure 24. Relationships: Discourse Analysis Example**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourse analysis questions</th>
<th>Presidential communication</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) What relationships are created?</td>
<td>Today I again had the opportunity to meet with MU graduate student Jonathan Butler who continues a hunger strike protesting the inequalities, inequities, and obstacles faced by students, faculty and staff at the University of Missouri. I am very concerned about Jonathan’s health. His voice for social justice is important and powerful. He is being heard and I am listening. I am thankful for the leadership provided by him and the other student leaders in raising awareness of racism, injustice, and intolerance. This afternoon I also met with representatives of several student groups and I value their input and hear their voices. [paragraph break]. Racism does exist at our university and it is unacceptable. It is a long-standing, systemic problem which daily affects our family of students, faculty and staff. I am sorry this is the case. I truly want all members of our university community to feel included, valued and safe … (Wolfe, 2015a).</td>
<td>Wolfe, in his statement, seeks to enact a relationship with student leaders and with Butler, particularly by noting his concern for him. Wolfe talks about his relationships, but they are not necessarily enacted by the other parties or reciprocated.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 24: Example of presidential communication discourse analysis to identify relationships*
distance or closeness, including degrees of closeness such as intimates, who are socially very close, or associates, who are somewhat close (Gee, 2014a).

**Discourse analysis: Difference**
To further identify and analyse patterns in discourse, I next asked and developed answers in response to the question: “How is difference explored, accentuated, negotiated, bracketed, or suppressed in the data?” (Figure 25). Fairclough (2003) outlines approaches to difference in discourse, including openness to, acceptance of, and recognition of difference, or exclusion or suppression of difference as expressed in social identities through social relationships.

Fairclough (2003) defines five orientations to difference occurring in dialogue between people. First, speakers and listeners may engage in dialogue about and explore difference, which signals an openness to and acknowledgement of difference. Next, dialogue may accentuate difference and as such produce conflict or struggle over social norms. Third, dialogue between people may seek to overcome difference, thereby minimising difference in contrast to exploring and accepting difference. Fourth, people may “bracket” difference and focus on common experiences, identities, or norms of behaviour. Finally, if people are oriented to consensus, power differences may be accepted and differences in norms or identities may be suppressed.

The discourse analysis question focused on difference was designed for its potential to illuminate relationships arising in a president’s publicly shared orientations to difference. If a president communicates an openness to exploring, accentuating, acknowledging difference, relationships with constituents may be strengthened. For instance, a president who conveys an openness to exploring
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourse analysis question</th>
<th>Presidential communication</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How is difference explored, accentuated, negotiated, bracketed or suppressed?</td>
<td>Today I again had the opportunity to meet with MU graduate student Jonathan Butler who continues a hunger strike protesting the inequalities, inequities, and obstacles faced by students, faculty and staff at the University of Missouri. I am very concerned about Jonathan’s health. His voice for social justice is important and powerful ... leadership provided by him and the other student leaders in raising awareness of racism, injustice, and intolerance ... Racism does exist at our university and it is unacceptable. It is a long-standing, systemic problem which daily affects our family of students, faculty and staff. I am sorry this is the case. I truly want all members of our university community to feel included, valued and safe ... I am asking us to move forward in addressing the racism that exists at our university – and it does exist. Together we must rise to the challenge of combatting racism, injustice, and intolerance (Wolfe, 2015a).</td>
<td><strong>Accentuated</strong> Wolfe’s statement acknowledges that racism and intolerance exist on campus, thereby acknowledging that different people have different experiences. Wolfe uses words signifying knowledge of difference, especially the different experiences of individuals on campus, in contrast to other statements in which he does not use these words. Words accentuating difference include: 1. Inequalities 2. Inequities 3. Obstacles 4. Social justice 5. Racism 6. Injustice 7. Intolerance 8. Systemic problem 9. Daily affects 10. Included, valued and safe 11. Racism 12. Racism 13. Injustice 14. Intolerance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
difference may communicate in ways that strengthen connections with diverse constituents, minimising disconnectedness and reducing the risk of isolation from constituents who are different in perspective, approaches, identities, or backgrounds. In contrast, a president who suppresses difference or seeks consensus that reinforces established systems of power may be viewed as controlling difference. If a president fails to acknowledge and to celebrate differences amongst those with whom the president communicates, communication may be deemed ineffective by constituents. For instance, if marginalised students describe to a president their experiences of discrimination or harassment and the president does not acknowledge these experiences in responses, either formal or informal, the lack of acknowledgement may be interpreted negatively by constituents.

Discourse analysis: Actions
Using the final discourse analysis tool in the protocol, I asked and recorded possible answers to the following: “What is the action present in the words involving relationships between the president and constituents (informing, advising, promising, warning, promoting, etc.)?”. Language is used to perform actions, such as encouraging or mentoring (Gee, 2014b). In discourse, actions performed with language are sequenced into socially-recognisable activities or practices (Gee, 2014b), such as leading a meeting, protesting a social problem, or negotiating an employment contract. By focusing on actions produced by language, I investigated what is, according to Gee (2014b), the action in the president’s language, such as justifying, thanking, or apologising, which in context is combined with other actions to form acknowledged social practices enacted in language, such as resigning from the role of president.
By asking this discourse analysis question focused on actions and recording possible answers in the protocol worksheet, I identified and analysed patterns of actions involving presidents and constituents manifesting in presidential discourse (Figure 26). In addition to actions present in the act of communicating, such as informing or advising, I also identified and examined past or future actions described in communications.

Actions in discourse can contribute to relationship difficulties. For example, if a president uses communication to direct or to demand action from other people, and the listeners or readers are disinclined to take the recommended action, a president may be interpreted as controlling, a known contributor to abbreviated tenure. If other people expect a president to commit to a strategic direction or sequence of actions, but listening or hearing are the dominant actions in a president’s communications, a president’s communication may be interpreted as ineffective when listening does not inform expected next steps. If a president’s communications include actions that may be interpreted as disregarding other people’s feelings, such as criticising, judging, or belittling, patterns of insensitive action may be perceived in the president’s language and may undermine relationships.

3(c) Computer-Mediated Discourse analysis of constituent response

In Stage 3(c) (Figure 27), I analysed Tweets including the hashtag urging the president’s removal or resignation (#WolfeGottaGo) by using the discourse analysis protocol tools described above in Stage 3(b) of the research design. To complement analysis of presidential communications, questions asked and answers developed focused on representation of constituents, representation of presidential identities, use of nouns and pronouns, relationships involving
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Presidential communication</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
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</table>
| What is the action present in the words involving relationships between the president and constituents (informing, advising, promising, warning, promoting, etc.)? | Today I again had the opportunity to meet with MU graduate student Jonathan Butler who continues a hunger strike protesting the inequalities, inequities, and obstacles faced by students, faculty and staff at the University of Missouri. I am very concerned about Jonathan’s health. His voice for social justice is important and powerful. He is being heard and I am listening. I am thankful for the leadership provided by him and the other student leaders in raising awareness of racism, injustice, and intolerance. This afternoon I also met with representatives of several student groups and I value their input and hear their voices. [paragraph break]. Racism does exist at our university and it is unacceptable. It is a long-standing, systemic problem which daily affects our family of students, faculty and staff. I am sorry this is the case. I truly want all members of our university community to feel included, valued and safe. [paragraph break] I regret my reaction at the MU homecoming parade when the ConcernedStudent1950 group approached my car. I am sorry, and my apology is long overdue. My behavior seemed like I did not care. That was not my intention. I was caught off guard in that moment. Nonetheless, had I gotten out of the | **Actions present in the leader’s words**  
Within Wolfe’s statements:  
a) **Informing** – of his meeting with Butler and his concern for his health.  
b) **Acknowledging** – inequality, inequity, racism  
c) **Apologizing** – for actions at homecoming parade  
d) **Requesting** – “I am asking us to move forward in addressing the racism…”  
e) **Demanding** – “Together we must rise to the challenge”  
f) **Judging** – see below  

**Judging**  
a) Judges his own actions – regretful, apologetic  
b) Judges Jonathan’s “voice for social justice” – “important and powerful….I am thankful for the leadership provided by him and other student leaders…”  
c) Judges input from students as valuable – “This afternoon I also met with representatives of several student groups and I value their input and hear their voices.”  
d) Judges university as a place where racism exists  
e) Judges escalation of protests as in part due to his lack of response |
presidents and constituents created by the language used, orientation to difference, and presidential actions present in the communications.

3(d) Timeline analysis of events and communications

To create a case timeline in Stage 3(d) (Figure 28), I added potentially influential actions or communications identified in media coverage or on Twitter to an Excel spreadsheet in chronological order and according to constituency: external constituents, governing boards, the president, and internal constituents. Although governing boards are external, unpaid volunteers who represent the citizens of the state in which a government university is located, the significant
influence of boards over presidents led me to identify board influence separately rather than group board members with other external constituents. I used a vertical Excel timeline template produced by vertex42.com (Figure 29). Using this timeline and supplemental details about each crisis trigger, critical moment, or key communication found in the expanded data set, I wrote a sequenced case narrative describing crisis triggers, accelerators, turning points, and, ultimately, the president’s resignation.

**Figure 29: Example of Vertical Case Timeline**

In the same Excel workbook in which I created the case timeline, I tracked potential constituent influences found in case data according to the day communications were published or posted to Twitter in the pre-resignation phase to analyse evidence sequentially and chronologically. Tracking constituent influence by day enabled me to view emergent interpretations of presidential leadership as each crisis unfolded prior to resignation (Figure 30).
Also in the same Excel workbook, I tracked evidence of potentially challenged presidential relationships in the data sequentially and chronologically by day. Like the chronological constituent influence analysis outlined above, by analysing communications that may contribute to abbreviated tenure by day published or posted, I was able to discern when perceptions of presidential leadership related to known abbreviated tenure contributors appeared in discourse. In the Excel workbook, by day I indicate when challenged presidential relationships potentially contributing to each leader’s resignation are found in a presidential statement or in constituent response. Statements may be reprinted in subsequent articles, but in this phase of analysis, I only recorded evidence of relationships when the first publication or post appeared (Figure 31).

**Conclusion: Refining the pilot study research design**

Using the first three stages described above to conduct the pilot study exploration of abbreviated presidential tenure in crisis and also to test the research design methods led me to refine the study operations in anticipation of conducting the multi-case study. Throughout each stage of the pilot, I noted observations that guided the refinement of operations and the design of the multi-case study, described in Chapter 6. My observations resulting in methods improvements
pertained to case selection in Stage 1(c), the scale of media coverage collected in 2(a), the scale of social media coverage collected and limitations of criteria used to collect social media in 2(c), and the scope and focus of the discourse analysis protocol in 3(b). Additionally, I made refinements to analytical tools tested in the pilot study in anticipation of the multi-case study which are described in Chapter 6.

**Stage 1(c): Refining case selection criteria using pilot case features**

Stage 1(a) allowed me to explore national media coverage of presidential leadership, as well as identify the pilot test case of abbreviated presidential tenure in crisis. Defining features of the case informed criteria used to select the information-rich, cases for inclusion in the multi-case study. Based on the pilot, I developed case selection criteria to identify abbreviated tenure resulting in
national news media coverage during a high-profile crisis. Based on my investigation of the pilot case, in the criteria I also included calls for the termination or resignation of the president by one or more constituents during the crisis. The crisis in the pilot test case occurs at a university funded by a state-level government. Presidents leading government institutions are subject to greater scrutiny due to FOI laws that allow access to meetings and documents. Therefore, government-funded university presidents lead during high-profile crises in full view of the public through the norms of online communication and government policy requiring transparency. Presidents leading government-funded institutions are also more likely to experience turnover (Padilla et al., 2000). As such, presidents resigning in crises at government-funded institutions were selected for inclusion in the full study.

**Stage 2(a): Scale of news media coverage collected**

First, the scale of news media coverage collected in Stage 2(a) proved difficult to analyse due to the volume of available data. In Stage 2(a), I collected news media coverage published during the crisis in the two weeks prior to the president’s resignation, as well as throughout the president’s tenure. The research question guiding the full study—when presidents resign during high-profile crises, what patterns can be found in pre-resignation communications?—led me in the multi-case study to limit news media coverage collected to articles published only in the pre-resignation phase: two weeks prior to a president’s resignation. By delimiting the data collection to this phase, the multi-case study examines communications produced during crisis, rather than produced prior to crises in which presidents resign. Of course, events and communications occurring prior to the pre-resignation phase influence crisis communications and critical incidents, but to respond to the research question’s orientation to pre-
resignation communications during crisis, I collected and analysed data from this specific, limited, time period in the multi-case study.

**Stage 2(c): Scale of tweets produced during the episode and implications for data collection procedure**

Similarly, collecting, organising, and analysing the high volume of social media commentary produced during the crisis, which by one account reached three million Tweets (McCubbin, 2017), led to a decision to limit data collection in the pilot that I refined in the multi-case study. To limit the social media coverage collected in the pilot stages, I searched for Computer-Mediated Communications including a hashtag used to advocate for the President’s removal or resignation. Not surprisingly, tweets collected were uniformly critical of the President. In contrast, in the multi-case study I redesigned the criteria for collecting social media coverage to create a data set of responses to presidential leadership representing a broader set of views.

**Stage 3(b): Discourse analysis protocol refinement**

The discourse analysis protocol was redesigned during Stage 3(b) of the pilot, as the initial protocol design inhibited pattern identification. To respond to the research question, identify patterns in pre-resignation communications, and build on previously published research focused on relationship difficulty leading to abbreviated tenure, I refined the discourse analysis questions as described above (Stage 3(b)). Discourse analysis in the multi-case study was therefore focused to best enable recognition of patterns in communications associated with constituent influence on presidents and presidential relationships.
Chapter 5. Student activists “take down a university president in 36 hours”: President Tim Wolfe’s resignation in crisis at the University of Missouri, a pilot case study
I selected for exploratory, in-depth investigation the sudden resignation in 2015 of Timothy (Tim) Wolfe, President of the University of Missouri (UM). Informed and inspired by a surging, national social movement to advance racial justice, student activism in 2015 at UM triggered a high-profile crisis, eliciting widespread media coverage and vigorous critique of President Wolfe’s responses. Wolfe and the events leading to his resignation were found to be the most frequently covered episode involving university presidential leadership in selected national news media articles in 2015. University of Missouri is referred to as Mizzou, Missouri, MU, and UM in the documentary evidence collected. For clarity and consistency, I use “UM” to refer to the University of Missouri.

**Wolfe’s presidency prior to the crisis**

To situate this analysis of pre-resignation communications and crisis events in the context of Wolfe’s entire presidency, I briefly review key features of Wolfe’s tenure based on analysis of media coverage published prior to the pre-resignation phase and identified by monitoring articles published about Wolfe and UM post-resignation. First, I define the scope of Wolfe’s responsibilities as UM President. Second, I discuss his leadership experience prior to assuming the presidency. Third, Wolfe’s personal and family connections to UM are described. Finally, critical moments of controversy occurring during earlier phases in the President’s tenure are identified and described.

In December 2011, Timothy Wolfe was appointed president of the University of Missouri (UM) System (Husted & Sable-mith, 2016), a government-funded, non-profit university system in the state of Missouri, located in the American Midwest. The UM System President is responsible for overseeing the four campuses of the System, each classified as doctoral institutions (Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d), including the flagship
campus in Columbia, Missouri, the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC), the University of Missouri-St. Louis (UMSL), and the Missouri University of Science & Technology (Missouri S&T) (Pojmann, 2015).

While Wolfe brought extensive corporate sector leadership experience to the UM presidency, he lacked academic leadership experience. Prior to serving as UM’s president, Wolfe’s professional life was spent in private industry (Gilbert, 2016). When marking Wolfe’s acceptance of the UM presidency, Wolfe described his two decades of leadership at IBM, his experience as Executive Vice President at global consulting firm Convansys, and leadership as President of the Americas for software company Novell (Wolfe, 2011). A graduate of the UM’s Trulaske College of Business, Wolfe grew up in Columbia, Missouri where the UM System is located. When he began his presidency, Wolfe emphasised his connections to the institution, including his father’s long tenure as an academic staff member and his mother’s University of Missouri degrees (Wolfe, 2011). Prior to appointment as president, Wolfe served on UM’s College of Business Strategic Development Board (Wolfe, 2011).

Wolfe’s presidency follows multiple leadership transitions at UM and his appointment occurs in a period of financial challenge in the wake of a recession. President Wolfe follows Steve Owens, who serves as interim president for a year after President Gary Forsee resigns in January 2011 (Silvey, 2011) citing his spouse’s health issues (Husted & Sable-mith, 2016). Wolfe’s tenure begins officially in February 2012 (University of Missouri System, 2014), coinciding with a period of declining state-level government funding and increased reliance on student fee revenue, made possible by enrolment increases at UM (Husted & Sable-mith, 2016; Trachtenberg, 2018).
After beginning his tenure in February 2012, Wolfe experiences difficulty in the first years of his presidency, navigates controversy, and wins the approval of the governing board for his early performance as evidenced in Wolfe’s employment contract extension in 2014 (Eligon & Pérez-Peña, 2015). For example, in the first six months of his tenure Wolfe announces the closure of the UM academic press due to financial strain (Silvey, 2012a). Wolfe’s decision to close the press is unpopular amongst academic staff (Silvey, 2012b), who urge the president to revitalise rather than close the UM press (Silvey, 2012a). Wolfe acknowledges he made the decision without consulting academic staff (Silvey, 2012a) and the President reverses the decision in August 2012 (Barker, 2012).

In 2014, a crisis originating in events pre-dating Wolfe’s tenure resurfaces when an investigation concludes that UM failed to appropriately respond to a sexual assault. In February 2010, UM student Sasha Menu Courey reports that she was raped. In June 2011, Menu Courey commits suicide. In early 2014, as Wolfe begins the third year of his presidency, a major, national cable sport network and online content provider, ESPN, publishes a documentary alleging UM failed in Menu Courey’s case to follow nationally-mandated university procedures for responding to sexual assault (Farrey & Noren, 2014). Wolfe engages independent solicitors to review Menu Courey’s case (Addo, 2015b). By April 2014, an independent report reveals that ESPN’s allegation is accurate: UM failed to follow nationally-mandated protocols in Menu Courey’s case (Associated Press, 2014).

**Emerging patterns observed in pre-resignation communications**

Using pilot study research Stages 3(a) to (d), I analysed data collected to answer the third pilot study research question:
Are there patterns in the formal and informal communications made by and in response to the president who receives the most national press attention? If so, what patterns occur in formal and informal presidential communications and in response to the president?

In the sections below, I present the results of data analysis in chronological order by the day each communication was published or posted or an event occurred. For each day during the pre-resignation phase, I organise and present evidence and associated analysis involving (a) possible constituent influence based on analysis of news media coverage, (b) presidential communication discourse analysis, (c) discourse analysis of constituent responses on Twitter, all according to the sequence identified in (d) timeline analysis of key events and communications. This chronological presentation of the evidence is followed by a synthesis and discussion of findings based on patterns in the data.

**Wednesday 28 October: Student leaders discuss and encourage activism**

Early in the defined pre-resignation phase on Wednesday 28 October 2015 (Figure 32), three UM student government candidate interviews are published which demonstrate internal social activists attempt to influence presidential leadership. Student activists expect Wolfe to build and sustain relationships with UM students by creating inclusive learning environments, safeguarding working conditions for postgraduate student employees, and ensuring access to reproductive health services at UM. Student activism is presented in media coverage on 28 October as prevalent at UM and student leaders encourage other students to engage in social issues, especially issues relating to UM student experiences.
Two weeks until end of President’s tenure

Student activism encouraged and discussed by student government candidates

President resigns

Figure 32: 28 October, Student Leaders Discuss and Encourage Activism

Figure 32: 28 October 2015, 13 days prior to end of President Wolfe’s abbreviated tenure
28 October: Student activists for racial justice seek to influence Wolfe

On 28 October, UM Student Association presidential candidate statements affirm the candidates’ involvement in social issue activism, including anti-racist efforts to increase equity and to reduce discrimination against Black students. All candidates participated in a “MU4MikeBrown rally” in 2014 (Mitzel, 2015). In 2014, in the nearby city of Ferguson, Missouri, an unarmed Black youth, Michael Brown, was shot by a white police officer, who was not prosecuted for Brown’s death (Forsgren, 2017; Rochester, 2019; Trachtenberg, 2018). Brown’s death prompted national and local protests, attracting nationwide attention (Eligon & Smith, 2015), including activism at nearby UM (Mitzel, 2015).

The students assert that “the administration could do more to address the recent string of discriminatory events that have occurred, such as the experiences of current MSA President Payton Head and the Legion of Black Collegians Homecoming royalty with racism” (Mitzel, 2015). Specifically, students criticise Wolfe directly for his responses to this series of incidents: “they [students] want to see (UM System President) Tim Wolfe, respond as a person, not as a political talking head” (Mitzel, 2015). To provide context for the crisis and Wolfe’s resignation as it relates to student anti-racist activism, incidents to which students refer in 28 October media coverage are described briefly below.

In September 2015, Payton Head, President of the Missouri Student Association, began to speak openly about being subjected to racial slurs on-campus (Addo, 2015a; Gilbert, 2016; McCubbin, 2017; Miller, 2015a; Trachtenberg, 2018), which had been directed at him while walking by a group of men riding in the back of a truck (Addo, 2015a; Hensley, 2015). Due to a perceived lack of action from UM after Head’s experience and public comments (Boren, 2015), student activists
staged a rally to raise awareness of racism at UM (Gilbert, 2016; McCubbin, 2017).

In October 2015, unidentified individuals again targeted Black students at UM with more racial slurs and some students resist anti-racist activism (Addo, 2015a; Kezar & Fries-Britt, 2018; McCubbin, 2017; Miller, 2015a; Trachtenberg, 2018). An intoxicated student yelled racial epithets at Black students preparing for a performance to be staged during UM’s annual homecoming celebration on one of UM’s main public spaces (McCubbin, 2017). In late October, a swastika was drawn in faeces on the wall of a university residence hall (Kezar & Fries-Britt, 2018; McCubbin, 2017; Miller, 2015a). Students also staged a protest, which is met with a counter-protest, using a UM statue of Thomas Jefferson, the former American president (Kezar & Fries-Britt, 2018; McCubbin, 2017; Miller, 2015a), who is known to have owned slaves (Bates, 2012). Anti-racist student protestors wrote “racist”, “rapist”, and “slave owner”, along with other messages, on sticky notes affixed to the statue (Guthrie, 2015) and student activists began an online petition to remove the statue (Little, 2015). In response, opposing students engaged in counter-protest, by draping the statue in an American flag and placing sticky notes on a bench next to the statue with the words “patriot”, “freedom”, “fighter”, and “president” (McClain & Serven, 2015).

Also in October 2015, constituents began calling for Wolfe’s resignation or removal (McCubbin, 2017; Resmovits, 2015). A student group issued a list of demands for racial justice to the President (Concerned Student 1950, 2015a). Students share their demands to a Google drive and post the link to Twitter on 20 October (Concerned Student 1950, 2015a).
28 October: Student activists for workers’ rights influence leadership

In 28 October media coverage, the student government presidential candidates advocate for postgraduate student rights, affirm their involvement in recent postgraduate activist efforts, and suggest that all students should have been involved in recent postgraduate student employee activism at UM (Mitzel, 2015). In August 2015, prior to the racially-motivated incidents described above, tensions began escalating when UM postgraduate students responded to changing working conditions (Forsgren, 2017; Gilbert, 2016). Following an Internal Revenue ruling preventing employers from giving funds to employees to pay for health insurance (Huguelet, 2016), UM postgraduate student workers received email notification that their health insurance subsidies and fee waivers would be cut with little notice as the new term began, leading to campus demonstrations (Addo, 2015a; Gilbert, 2016; Kezar & Fries-Britt, 2018; McCubbin, 2017; Trachtenberg, 2018). One account indicated that postgraduate students “revolted”, issued demands, and staged walkouts (Miller, 2015b). The decision and method of communicating the cut to health subsidy are criticised. On 28 October, one student government candidate expresses a belief that some postgraduate student employees discovered the cut to healthcare subsidies via Twitter (Mitzel, 2015). The decisions negatively impacting UM postgraduate students are subsequently mitigated (Trachtenberg, 2018) after pressure from postgraduate students and a state-level elected political official prompt UM to provide postgraduate student employees with fellowships to cover their health insurance (Serven, 2015).

28 October: Student activists for reproductive health seek to influence leadership

Student government candidate statements published on 28 October also include evidence of student involvement in reproductive rights activism (Mitzel, 2015). In
September 2015 visible activism at UM not only raised awareness of racial injustice, but also of another divisive issue in America: abortion. September demonstrations increased awareness of abortion service reductions in Columbia, Missouri and UM’s decision to end relationships with affiliated organisations providing abortion services (Addo, 2015a; Gilbert, 2016; McCubbin, 2017; Trachtenberg, 2018). Several hundred people, including state-level, elected officials, attended a Planned Parenthood-organised rally on UM’s campus aimed at pressing UM leaders to reverse the decision to cut relationships with the affiliated organisation (Kovacs & Cagle, 2015). All three candidates included in the article on 28 October advocate for the reinstatement of the UM contracts with Planned Parenthood (Mitzel, 2015).

Monday 2 November: Postgraduate student activist Jonathan Butler’s hunger strike begins

On 2 November (Figure 33), eight days prior to Wolfe’s resignation, a student begins a multi-day campaign to influence the President. On 2 November 2015, Jonathan Butler, who identifies as Black, begins a hunger strike that he pledges to continue until Wolfe is terminated or resigns (Addo, 2015a; Butler, 2015; Fortunato et al., 2018; Gallion, 2015; Kezar & Fries-Britt, 2018; McCubbin, 2017; Miller, 2015a). Butler’s strike aims to elevate awareness of systemic racism at Missouri and catalyse action, which he feels is lacking under Wolfe’s leadership (Butler & Andress, 2015). Butler tweets a letter to announce the beginning of his hunger strike (Miller, 2015a), thereby integrating direct action with online activism. Butler completed a bachelor’s degree in business administration at UM and at the time of the hunger strike is pursuing a master’s degree in educational leadership and policy (Lowery, 2015). On the same day, a hashtag, #WolfeGottaGo, is used on Twitter to call for President Wolfe’s removal or resignation (Andress & Toombs, 2015).
Figure 33: 2 November, Postgraduate Student Jonathan Butler’s Hunger Strike Begins

27-Oct

Two weeks until end of President's tenure

28-Oct

Student activism encouraged and discussed by student government candidates

29-Oct

30-Oct

31-Oct

#Wolfegotago first use on Twitter

1-Nov

Student (Butler) begins hunger strike

2-Nov

President resigns

3-Nov

4-Nov

5-Nov

6-Nov

7-Nov

8-Nov

9-Nov

Figure 33: 2 November 2015, eight days prior to end of President Wolfe’s abbreviated tenure
**Tuesday 3 November: Wolfe meets with students**

On 3 November (Figure 34), President Wolfe communicates informally with students, with one account reporting Wolfe tells students:

"We have got to create an environment on this beautiful campus and the other three campuses that we have where all students can be successful regardless of where they came from, their race, or their degree program," Wolfe told a group of students on Tuesday. "We have got to maximize [sic] everything that we can do focusing on student success and I can only do that through conversation and understanding the hurdles and obstacles that are in front of Jonathan [Butler] or anyone else."

Wolfe told the students that he would like to meet with Butler and said he was open to arranging a meeting between the hunger striker and the university's board of curators, according to KBIA (Miller, 2015a).

Although a full account of Wolfe's engagement with students on 3 November is not reported in accessible data collected according to research design procedures, I analysed Wolfe’s available statements to identify patterns, if any, using the discourse analysis questions described in Chapter 4.

### 3 November: Discourse analysis of Wolfe's communications

On 3 November, Wolfe’s communications connect him to students by focusing on student experience, but by asking the discourse analysis questions associated with the representation of constituents and relationships, “Who is included, excluded, foregrounded, or backgrounded?” and “What relationships are created between presidents and constituents?”, discursive details were found representing an alternative view of Wolfe’s relationship to this influential internal constituency. Wolfe emphasises a commitment to ensuring students are successful, “regardless of where they came from, their race, or their degree program” (Miller, 2015a). The President demonstrates his orientation to
Two weeks until end of President's tenure

Student activism encouraged and discussed by student government candidates

Student (Butler) begins hunger strike

President meets with students

President resigns

Figure 34: 3 November, Wolfe Meets with Students

Figure 34: 3 November 2015, seven days prior to end of President Wolfe’s abbreviated tenure
student experiences by expressing interest in learning about challenges and obstacles UM students encounter (Miller, 2015a). Wolfe’s 3 November communications may therefore be interpreted as evidence of the President’s sensitivity to student experiences: he expresses an interest in learning about hurdles students must overcome and obstacles to their success. Wolfe indicates that conversation and understanding are priorities for him as he develops awareness of student issues. Therefore, Wolfe’s personal engagement of students, his professed sensitivity to students, and openness to learn suggest the President is prepared to engage positively and relationally with student activists. Even so, the discourse analysis question focusing on constituent representation asks who is excluded, and by considering this I found that Wolfe’s statement implies disconnection from hunger-striking student Jonathan Butler. Even as he expresses willingness to meet with Butler, Wolfe indicates he has not yet met with the student hunger striker. Overall the President’s published discourse on 3 November reinforces relationships with and expresses sensitivity to students, but he signals a disconnection from Butler, a prominent student activist seeking to exercise influence over Wolfe, which may be interpreted as discontinuity in the President’s stated position.

**Thursday 5 November: Concerned Student 1950 march on campus**

On 5 November (Figure 35), Concerned Student 1950, a student activist group, stage a rally and a march involving several hundred students at the UM campus in Columbia, Missouri (Addo, 2015a). Prior to the rally, Concerned Student 1950 issued demands addressed to “The University of Missouri” on 20 October, including demands for an apology from the President and his immediate removal:

I. We demand that the University of Missouri System President, Tim Wolfe, writes a handwritten apology to the Concerned Student
Figure 35: Two weeks until end of President’s tenure

Student activism encouraged and discussed by student government candidates

Student (Butler) begins hunger strike

President meets with students

Students rally on campus

President resigns

Figure 35: 5 November 2015, five days prior to end of President Wolfe’s abbreviated tenure
1-9-5-0 demonstrators and holds a press conference in the Mizzou Student Center reading the letter. In the letter and at the press conference, Tim Wolfe must acknowledge his white male privilege, recognize [sic] that systems of oppression exist, and provide a verbal commitment to fulfilling Concerned Student 1-9-5-0 demands. We want Tim Wolfe to admit to his gross negligence, allowing his driver to hit one of the demonstrators, consenting to the physical violence of bystanders, and lastly refusing to intervene when Columbia Police Department used excessive force with demonstrators.

II. We demand the immediate removal of Tim Wolfe as UM system president. After his removal a new amendment to UM system policies must be established to have all future UM system president and Chancellor positions be selected by a collective of students, staff, and faculty of diverse backgrounds (Concerned Student 1950, 2015, p. 3)

Addo (2015a) reports that during the protest on 5 November, students continue calling for changes in leadership and university operations. Students protestors also boycott university services, such as dining and retail shops (Addo, 2015a).

**Friday 6 November: Wolfe releases official statement, meets with Butler, and student activists confront the President**

On 6 November (Figure 36), Wolfe issues an official statement expressing concern for Jonathan Butler, discussing engagement with students, calling on the UM community to create an inclusive university, and apologising for his silence during the the homecoming parade protest (Wolfe, 2015a). Wolfe meets with Butler on 6 November, and indicates Wolfe and Butler meet at least twice as he states they met “again”. Wolfe’s official statement of 6 November, posted to the UM website, reads:

> Today I again had the opportunity to meet with MU [sic] graduate [postgraduate] student Jonathan Butler who continues a hunger strike protesting the inequalities, inequities, and obstacles faced by students, faculty and staff at the University of Missouri. I am very concerned about Jonathan’s health. His voice for social justice is important and powerful. He is being heard and I am listening. I am thankful for the leadership provided by him and the other student leaders in raising awareness of racism, injustice, and intolerance. This afternoon I also met with representatives of several student groups and I value their input and hear their voices.
Figure 36: 6 November 2015, four days prior to end of President Wolfe’s abbreviated tenure
Racism does exist at our university and it is unacceptable. It is a long-standing, systemic problem which daily affects our family of students, faculty and staff. I am sorry this is the case. I truly want all members of our university community to feel included, valued and safe.

I regret my reaction at the MU [sic] homecoming parade when the ConcernedStudent1950 group approached my car. I am sorry, and my apology is long overdue. My behavior [sic] seemed like I did not care. That was not my intention. I was caught off guard in that moment. Nonetheless, had I gotten out of the car to acknowledge the students and talk with them perhaps we wouldn’t be where we are today. I am asking us to move forward in addressing the racism that exists at our university – and it does exist. Together we must rise to the challenge of combating racism, injustice, and intolerance (Wolfe, 2015a).

**Wolfe’s reference to 10 October homecoming parade protest**

In the President’s 6 November statement, Wolfe refers to the protest during UM’s 10 October homecoming parade. At the protest, a group of 10 to 12 Black UM students mounted a non-violent demonstration against racism (Kingkade, 2015).

For approximately 10 minutes students using megaphones to amplify their voices linked arms to form a line in front of the President, who was riding in a topless convertible automobile; the students denounced white supremacy and voiced concerns by chanting and describing UM’s racist history and their contemporary experiences (Addo, 2015a; Concerned Student, 2015; Fortunato et al., 2018; Kezar & Fries-Britt, 2018; Kingkade, 2015; McCubbin, 2017; Miller, 2015a; Serven & Reese, 2015). Neither Wolfe nor his spouse engaged the students or exited the vehicle (Kingkade, 2015). The President’s driver moved the car back and forth, while students repositioned themselves more closely to Wolfe’s car, until the driver bumped one of the students (Serven & Reese, 2015).

Bystanders not involved in the protest grew impatient with the disruption of the parade and began to yell at the protesters (Serven & Reese, 2015), telling the students to move on and performing a chant commonly used to express support for UM (Kingkade, 2015). Several bystanders approached the student activists
after approximately three minutes to encourage an end to the demonstration (Kingkade, 2015). Seven or eight bystanders linked arms to form a barrier between student activists and Wolfe’s car and some bystanders used profanities when speaking with students (Kingkade, 2015). Other parade watchers, including an academic staff member, demonstrated support for student activists by linking arms with them (Kingkade, 2015). Police intervened, moving in between the students and the car, which prompted cheers from some bystanders (Kingkade, 2015). One journalist reported that police threatened arrest, while holding pepper spray (Miller, 2015a). The students left after police engaged them verbally, instructing them to move out of the road (Kingkade, 2015), and no arrests were made (Serven & Reese, 2015). John Fougere, chief communications officer for UM, reported that: "after conducting an investigation that included reviewing video footage and interviewing eyewitnesses, [the police] determined that there was nothing to indicate that the driver [of Wolfe’s car] did anything to cause the car to strike anyone and that they did not commit any traffic violations." (Jaschik, 2015c).

The protest was intentionally directed at Wolfe. Student hunger striker Jonathan Butler addressed the homecoming parade protest afterward and the activists’ intention to capture Wolfe’s attention:

"We disrupted the parade specifically in front of Tim Wolfe because we need him to get our message," …"We've sent emails, we've sent tweets, we've messaged, but we've gotten no response back from the upper officials at Mizzou to really make change on this campus. And so we directed it to him personally" (Izadi, 2015b).

**6 November: Student activists confront Wolfe en route to event**

Also on 6 November, after Wolfe’s official statement appears on the UM website, student demonstrators confront Wolfe outside a University fundraiser, pressing him to define ‘systematic oppression’ (Prohov & Knott, 2015; Trachtenberg,
The President’s ensuing conversation with students is recorded on video by a private citizen using a mobile device, then disseminated on the Internet, resulting in online discussion and national and local news media coverage (WebsterAAAC, 2015). The format of Wolfe’s remarks in the video differ significantly from his official communication published earlier on 6 November. When student activists ask Wolfe for an impromptu definition of 'systematic oppression', Wolfe initially responds: “I will give you an answer, and I’m sure it’ll be a wrong answer” (Addo, 2015b). Urged to respond by the student activists, Wolfe says: "Systematic oppression is because you don't believe that you have the equal opportunity for success," (Addo, 2015b). In the video, students react strongly and negatively to Wolfe’s answer, with one student stating: "Did you just blame us for systematic oppression, Tim Wolfe? Did you just blame black students?" (Addo, 2015b).

6 November: Butler’s hunger strike covered by news media

Also on 6 November, the influence of racial justice activism on Butler, sparked by the 2014 shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, is reported in national news media coverage (Miller, 2015a). In The Washington Post, Miller (2015a) states that Butler was beginning his postgraduate course when Ferguson protests occurred. According to Miller, Butler “was surprised, as he sees it, to see his university do little to address the racial tensions simmering in the same state” (Miller, 2015a), adding that seven percent of the 35,000 students who typically enrol at UM’s flagship Columbia location identify as Black. Miller (2015a) also publishes Butler’s description of his hunger strike experience, which he pledges to continue until Wolfe resigns or is removed:

“My body feels like it's on fire,” Jonathan L. Butler, 25, told The Washington Post on Thursday night, four days into his one-man protest. “I have pain all over. I'm exhausted. Of course, I'm hungry. I've got an ongoing headache.”
6 November: Discourse analysis of Wolfe’s statements

Discourse analysis of Wolfe’s 6 November written and oral statements suggests the President’s communication may undermine critical constituent relationships. In the sections that follow, I present illustrative, selected discourse analysis of Wolfe’s 6 November statements by providing one or more questions asked of the discourse and possible answers based on the questions, including references to key phrases or linguistic details.

Presidential identities: Insensitivity, appearing “like I did not care”, and moving forward without full acknowledgement of racism

To understand presidential identities in discourse, the protocol asks: “What traits and life histories are identified with the leader?”. On 6 November, Wolfe’s official statement acknowledges past perceived insensitivity toward student activists, thereby associating Wolfe with a trait, insensitivity, during the homecoming parade, a key public moment in Wolfe’s recent life history. Wolfe states that his behaviour at the homecoming parade seemed “like I did not care”. This statement signals that Wolfe understands constituents may view his response at the parade as uncaring or insensitive to their feelings or views, although this acknowledgement seeks to affirm that he did not intend to appear uncaring. Wolfe’s impromptu exchange with student activists outside the fundraiser on 6 November may also publicly associate the trait of insensitivity with the President’s identity. Students respond to Wolfe’s definition of ‘systematic oppression’ by asking Wolfe if he is blaming Black students. If constituents perceive that Wolfe blames Black students for racism or oppression which originates in systems of power and privilege, Wolfe’s language may be perceived as evidence of insensitivity toward Black student perspectives and experiences.
Pronouns: Focusing on oneself by using I, me, and my

Wolfe’s pronoun usage on 6 November may be interpreted as discursively isolating himself from constituents by asking the discourse analysis question: “How are pronouns used and are presidents or constituents presented as nouns or pronouns?”. Throughout the 6 November official statement, Wolfe uses first-person, singular pronouns extensively to refer to himself, which may signal a speaker’s inward focus (Pennebaker, 2011b). Although the President’s frequent use of the first-person, singular pronoun may be interpreted as a turn inward and therefore away from important relationships with constituents, it may also be interpreted as Wolfe’s assumption of individual responsibility.

Distance in relationships: “Had I gotten out of the car to acknowledge the students and talk with students”

In Wolfe’s 6 November official statement, almost a month after the parade protest, the President apologises for his lack of reaction, which suggests Wolfe may be viewed as isolated from students:

I regret my reaction at the MU [University of Missouri] homecoming parade when the ConcernedStudent1950 group approached my car. I am sorry, and my apology is long overdue. My behavior seemed like I did not care. That was not my intention. I was caught off guard in that moment. Nonetheless, had I gotten out of the car to acknowledge the students and talk with them perhaps we wouldn’t be where we are today (Wolfe, 2015a).

When I analysed Wolfe’s statement using the discourse analysis questions in the protocol designed to understand relationships generated by language use, “What relationships are created between presidents and constituents?” and “What relationships or social relations between presidents and constituents are enacted?”, I identified Wolfe’s description of relationships with student protestors enacted at the homecoming parade. Wolfe states he did not leave the car, acknowledge the students, or talk with them during the demonstration, despite the student protestor’s
attempts to engage President Wolfe. Although he apologises, Wolfe’s discourse presents his relationship with the students involved as separate and distant, rather than engaged and interactive.

**Difference: Disconnection in definition, ‘Systematic Oppression’**

Using the discourse analysis question “How is difference explored, accentuated, negotiated, bracketed, or suppressed?”, I analysed Wolfe’s statement to find the President’s spontaneous definition of ‘systematic oppression’ may discursively disconnect the President from student activists, thereby accentuating different world views espoused by Wolfe and student activists. The definition likely expected by students pressing Wolfe to respond is described by Barker (2014) who defines oppression as:

> ...the social act of placing severe restrictions on an individual, group, or institution. Typically, a government or political organization [sic] that is in power places these restrictions formally or covertly on oppressed groups so that they may be exploited and less able to compete with other social groups (p. 303).

Wolfe’s definition situates ‘systematic oppression’ in the minds of the oppressed, rather than in systems and institutions. In this exchange, therefore, the President’s definition disconnects him from student perspectives, which differ from Wolfe’s own views.

Moreover, by omitting UM’s history of racism and emphasising the future, Wolfe’s statement may be interpreted by student activists and other stakeholders who identify as student allies as evidence that the President suppresses the lived knowledge of those who experience racism (italics added):

> Racism does exist at our university and it is unacceptable. It is a long-standing, systemic problem which daily affects our family of students, faculty and staff. I am sorry this is the case. I truly want all members of our university community to feel included, valued and safe…
I am asking us to move forward in addressing the racism that exists at our university — and it does exist. Together we must rise to the challenge of combating racism, injustice, and intolerance (Wolfe, 2015a).

During the crisis, currently-enrolled student activists consistently and explicitly connect their contemporary experiences of racism to UM’s long history of racial injustice (Concerned Student 1950, 2015a), as well as the University’s more recent history of racist incidents (Fortunato et al., 2018; Kezar & Fries-Britt, 2018; McCubbin, 2017). The President acknowledges that racism is a “long-standing, systemic problem”, but he does not specifically describe or acknowledge any incidents in detail. Cole and Harper’s (2017) study of university presidential statements following racist incidents found that presidents often avoid explicitly describing racist incidents and infrequently mention social systems upholding racism. In Wolfe’s statement, he uses vocabulary to describe systemic oppression, but still semantically substitutes general terms such as “racism, injustice, and intolerance” for the experiences of Black and other racial/ethnic minority students that lack detail or evoke emotion. The President’s emphasis on future action rather than a full, detailed acknowledgement of the University’s racist past and present may be received negatively by students mounting anti-racist protests and even as suppression of their lived experiences.

Disconnected from action: “He is being heard and I am listening”

Discourse analysis of Wolfe’s 6 November statement also identified a disconnection between Wolfe’s own actions and student activist expectations. The President positions himself as a listener, rather than an active participant in the struggle against racism (italics added):

I am very concerned about Jonathan’s health. His voice for social justice is important and powerful. He is being heard and I am listening. I am thankful for the leadership provided by him and the other student leaders in raising awareness of racism,
injustice, and intolerance. This afternoon I also met with representatives of several student groups and I value their input and hear their voices (Wolfe, 2015a).

The action in Wolfe’s statement involves listening, identified by asking the discourse analysis question: “What is the action present in the words involving relationships between the president and constituents?”. Wolfe asserts that Butler is “being heard” and the President “is listening”, while also valuing input of other students and hearing the voices of concerned students. When the President’s statement is published on 6 November, Jonathan Butler is four days into his hunger strike. UM students expect the President to prevent Jonathan’s physical decline and to reduce racism at UM through rapid response, rather than just listen. By indicating that he is listening, but not acting, Wolfe may be interpreted as disconnected from the lived experiences of students, especially the increasing urgency of Butler’s situation.

Actions in Wolfe’s words: Withholding, ineffective listening, and inconsistently communicating

By further investigating the actions present in Wolfe’s 6 November statement using the question designed to identify actions in discourse noted in the previous section, I found that Wolfe’s statement includes actions such as withholding information, communicating infrequently, listening ineffectively, and conveying messages inconsistently. First, Wolfe withholds by hesitating to respond to student activists outside the fundraiser, initially saying: “I will give you an answer, and I’m sure it’ll be a wrong answer” (Addo, 2015b). Wolfe also describes failing to talk to UM students at the homecoming parade, another example of withholding. Second, by remaining silent for many weeks after the homecoming parade incident, Wolfe appears to communicate on critical issues infrequently. Third, Wolfe’s emphasis on listening, combined with a lack of specificity about next steps to reduce racism and resolve the crisis, may be interpreted as failing
to translate what he learns from listening into action. Fourth, Wolfe’s definition of ‘systematic oppression’ is inconsistent with his earlier statement on 6 November, thereby undermining the effectiveness of a statement which demonstrated knowledge of racial injustice.

**Contrasting discourse interpretations: Wolfe’s sensitive identity and understanding**

In contrast to possible interpretations of Wolfe’s discourse described above, Wolfe’s 6 November official statement may also be interpreted as exhibiting sensitivity. For example, in answering the discourse analysis question “What traits and life histories are identified with the leader?”, I found the President portrays himself as concerned, thankful, appreciative, regretful, and apologetic. Wolfe acknowledges and accentuates difference in racial/ethnic minority students’ lived experiences by affirming that “racism” and “intolerance” exist at the University (Wolfe, 2015a). His statement embraces a vocabulary that conveys an understanding of and commitment to reducing discrimination and promoting inclusion, including “racism”, “intolerance”, “inequalities”, “inequities”, “obstacles”, “social justice”, “injustice”, “systemic problem”, and “daily affects” of racism (Wolfe, 2015a). Wolfe also expresses a desire for members of the University community to feel “included, valued and safe” (Wolfe, 2015a). UM students who are knowledgeable about systemic oppression use similar terms in demonstrations and in written communications (Concerned Student 1950, 2015a; WebsterAAAC, 2015). By using the language of social justice advocates in his official statement, Wolfe closes the distance in the relationships between him and students, signals his understanding of student issues, and demonstrates empathy for racial/ethnic minority UM student experiences.
On 6 November, #WolfeGottaGo is used more frequently on Twitter, especially to suggest Wolfe does not deserve to remain at UM and also to describe the President as insensitive. Investigating 6 November tweets that include #WolfeGottaGo using the discourse analysis question designed to identify presidential identities presented in language, “What traits and life histories are identified with the leader?”, yielded negative constituent views of Wolfe’s identity.

Twitter users address Wolfe as @UMPrez, although the account is not active (@UMPrez, nd). One tweet (Figure 37) rejects President Wolfe from the UM community, casting Wolfe as an outsider in the company of racists:

```
We will not stop fighting. It’s not us that don’t belong here. It’s you, @UMPrez and racists that don’t belong here. #WolfeGottaGo
```

*Figure 37: 6 November tweet including #WolfeGottaGo*

Several Twitter users suggest that Wolfe lacks understanding and fails to take direct action in support of students, for example (Figure 38):

```
@UMPrez clearly has done nothing to understand his students and their struggles #ConcernedStudent1950 #WolfeGottaGo twitter.com/qiana_jade/sta...
```

*Figure 38: 6 November tweet including #WolfeGottaGo*

Another tweet asserts that Wolfe should: “Know your students”. As such, the constituents writing these tweets associate a trait with Wolfe: ignorance about students. Tweets also cast Wolfe as a person who blames oppressed or victimised individuals (Figure 39):

```
while Tim Wolfe is blaming racism on those oppressed #MizzouHungerStrike #ConcernedStudent1950 #WolfeGottaGo
```

*Figure 39: 6 November tweet including #WolfeGottaGo*

Tweets, therefore, reinforce an interpretation of the President as insensitive to people who experience racism. This interpretation undermines the President’s
official message issued the same day which expresses sensitivity toward racial/ethnic minority students experiencing racism.

**Saturday 7 November: Football team joins protest and media coverage surges**

Marking an escalation of conflict, on 7 November (Figure 40) the UM American football team declares support for Butler’s hunger strike and refuses to play (Gilbert, 2016; Horowitz, 2015; Kezar & Fries-Britt, 2018; Knott, 2015; McCubbin, 2017). The football team’s unprecedented declaration of solidarity (Ferguson & Davis III, 2019), issued on and reiterated by Butler via Twitter (Knott, 2015), triggers widespread national media coverage (Tompkins, 2017). Reinforced by viral dissemination on social media, the story garners three million Tweets and comments in three days (McCubbin, 2017). The football team’s decision introduces the risk of significant financial loss as UM will owe $1 million if the team does not consent to play (The Maneater, 2015a). The action also risks future revenue losses, for example if ticket buyers express their dissatisfaction by no longer attending following reputational damage caused by failing to appear at a game, or if sponsors withdraw support (Gilbert, 2016; Horowitz, 2015; The Maneater, 2015a). Reputational damage arising from the boycott also jeopardises future possible student fee revenue.

**7 November: Student athlete activists influence President Wolfe**

On 7 November, the UM football team’s action triggers media coverage and social media commentary potentially influencing Wolfe. From inside the university, student athletes endeavour to exert influence by demonstrating in support of Butler. News media report on the team’s profiles, noting that 58 of
**Figure 40: 7 November, Football Team Joins Protest and Media Coverage Surges**

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<tr>
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<th>President</th>
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<td><strong>30-Oct</strong></td>
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<td>President meets with students</td>
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<td>President meets hunger striker; responds to students at fundraiser</td>
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<td><strong>8-Nov</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>9-Nov</strong></td>
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<td>President resigns</td>
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Figure 40: 7 November 2015, three days prior to end of President Wolfe’s abbreviated tenure, including Wolfe’s last day as President
the 84 athletes are Black (Knott, 2015). Student athletes report that UM staff support their protest, including one Tweet from a player affirming that "Our coaches are 100% behind us. Including the white ones." (Addo, 2015b; Knott, 2015). Although the influence on Wolfe’s leadership arising from the team’s boycott is grounded in the actions of student athletes, the public and popular nature of university sport threatens significant external constituent interest in the outcome of the crisis. Risk of external influence on Wolfe to resolve the crisis and return the football team to the field now extends to alumni, the local community of fans, other universities scheduled to play UM, media outlets that cover UM games, and sponsors who expect their products and advertisements to be viewed by live spectators and viewers who watch televised or streamed UM sporting events.

7 November: Discourse analysis of Twitter responses to Wolfe

Beginning on 7 November, the UM football team message is tweeted and retweeted, which is posted as an image on Twitter (Figure 41):

![Tweet announcing UM football team boycott](Figure 41)

The UM football team’s statement, retweeted with #WolfeGottaGo and other comments about Wolfe such as “he's out of there”, suggest constituents reject Wolfe from UM. When the discourse analysis question “What traits and life
histories are identified with the leader?” is asked of 7 November tweets, I found constituents associate negligence with President Wolfe’s identity and portray Wolfe as unfit to lead. Constituents use language to project Wolfe’s resignation or removal to imagine and to advocate for a new phase in Wolfe’s life history when he is no longer president. When 7 November tweets were analysed using the discourse analysis question “What is the action present in the words involving relationships between the president and constituents (informing, advising, promising, warning, promoting, etc.)?”, I found constituents assert that Wolfe acts by communicating, but ineffectively. For example, a 7 November tweet suggests Wolfe communicates infrequently: “I suppose we will get a quicker response time from Wolfe now that we are national news”.

**Sunday 8 November: Wolfe releases official statement and media coverage continues**

On 8 November (Figure 42), the sixth day of Butler’s hunger strike and the day before the President resigns, Wolfe (2015b) issues an official, public statement:

> It is clear to all of us that change is needed, and we appreciate the thoughtfulness and passion which have gone into the sharing of concerns. My administration has been meeting around the clock and has been doing a tremendous amount of reflection on how to address these complex matters.

> Clearly, we are open to listening to all sides, and are confident that we can come together to improve the student experience on our campuses. We want to find the best way to get everyone around the table and create the safe space for a meaningful conversation that promotes change. We will share next steps as soon as they are confirmed.

> In conjunction with campus representatives, the university began work on a systemwide diversity and inclusion strategy, plan and metrics for the University of Missouri System as part of my strategic goals (see 1.4.i of the System Strategic Plan) as approved by the Board of Curators in summer 2015.

> Our due date for announcing the strategy was April 2016, having allowed for multiple stakeholders (e.g., faculty [academic staff], staff, students, consultants) across the system to provide input into the plan.
Figure 42: 8 November, Wolfe Releases Official Statement and Media Coverage Continues

External Constituents | Governing Board | President | Internal Constituents
--- | --- | --- | ---
27-Oct | Two weeks until end of President’s tenure |  |  
28-Oct | Student activism encouraged and discussed by student government candidates |  |  
29-Oct |  |  |  
30-Oct |  |  |  
31-Oct |  |  |  
1-Nov |  |  |  
2-Nov | Student (Butler) begins hunger strike |  |  
3-Nov | President meets with students |  |  
4-Nov |  |  |  
5-Nov |  |  |  
6-Nov |  |  |  
7-Nov |  |  |  
8-Nov |  |  |  
9-Nov |  |  |  

Figure 42: 8 November 2015, the day prior to Wolfe’s resignation
The majority of items listed on the Concerned Student 1950 List of Demands were already included in the draft of the strategy. While the student list provides more detail and more specific metrics than had been established in the UM System plan, we had anticipated providing specificity and detail to the plan over the coming months.

In the meantime, I am dedicated to ongoing dialogue to address these very complex, societal issues as they affect our campus community (Wolfe, 2015b).

On the same day, elected political officials, UM’s governing board, an influential graduate, and students seek to influence Wolfe. As of 8 November, a petition entitled ‘Remove University of Missouri System President, Tim Wolfe, from office’ had been signed by 3,000 people (Bull, 2015; Concerned Student 1950, 2015b).

Discourse analyses of Wolfe’s statement and constituent responses generate possible, public, unfavourable interpretations of Wolfe’s relationships, identity, and actions and also affirm Wolfe acts in his authority as president, in concert with the governing board.

8 November: Elected political officials critique President Wolfe

On 8 November, elected state-level political officials begin to voice their concerns about the UM crisis and suggest a change in leadership (Breland, 2015; Long, 2015; Roberson, 2015c; The Maneater, 2015b). For example, Missouri’s Governor, an elected politician overseeing and leading state-level government, issues an official statement on Twitter emphasising racism is not welcome at UM (Breland, 2015). Reported in the media, one state-level politician calls on UM’s governing board to express a clear, unqualified dedication to reducing racism at UM (Breland, 2015). Another state-level elected official suggests publicly that Wolfe should resign (The Maneater, 2015b). Politicians who exercise influence over state-level budget decisions comment publicly about Wolfe, such as Republican Steve Cookson who says Wolfe “can no longer effectively lead and should step aside” (Miller, 2015b). Another state-level politician, Republican
Caleb Jones, also comments: "the lack of leadership Mizzou has been dealing with for months has finally reached the point of being a national embarrassment…it's time for a change in leadership and start the healing process" (Miller, 2015b). Democrat Gail McCann Beatty (Anon, nd, 'Representative Gail McCann Beatty'), a high-ranking Black member of the Missouri legislature, joins the 8 November calls for Wolfe’s resignation (Associated Press, 2015). In contrast, one former elected state-level politician, Wayne Goode, who previously served on UM’s governing board during Wolfe’s tenure, but is no longer serving at the time of the crisis, supports Wolfe, claiming that he is "one of the best managers I've ever worked with" and asserting that the President has "very strong support on the board" (Roberson, 2015c).

8 November: Governing board members call a special meeting
On 8 November, the UM governing board’s potential influence is evident in the published news coverage. Known as the Board of Curators, the UM Board announces a special board meeting on the following day at 10am on UM’s Columbia campus (Roberson, 2015a). The announcement indicates that part of the meeting will be closed to the public, whereas UM meetings are typically open (Roberson, 2015a). The meeting announcement indicates that Curators intend to exercise their right to meet in a closed session to work on legal issues with UM solicitors or on personnel matters (University of Missouri System, 2015). The meeting notice leads journalists to highlight that UM representatives remain silent on whether Curators will discuss President Wolfe’s ongoing employment at the meeting (Roberson, 2015a), although this is not confirmed.

8 November: UM graduates support student athletes' activism and community members display a racist symbol
Other potentially influential external constituents were identified in published media on 8 November, including a prominent UM graduate and unidentified
community members. A professional, American football player and UM alumnus, New York Jet Sheldon Richardson, publicly supports the UM student athlete’s effort to prompt the resignation or removal of Wolfe. Richardson explicitly states that Wolfe “does need to go” due to his inadequate response to recent racially-motivated harassment at UM (Roberson, 2015c).

In contrast to expressions of support for Butler, the football team, and other student activists, on 8 November Columbia, Missouri community members driving a truck fly a Confederate flag as they drive by UM protestors. This act is interpreted by the press as “a likely attempt at intimidation” (Pearce & Raab, 2015). The Confederate flag is viewed as a symbol of white supremacy, oppression, hatred, and discrimination, which is used to demonstrate opposition to the civil rights movement and to remind Black Americans of past violence perpetuated, while threatening contemporary harm (Parker, 2015).

8 November: Students and their allies seek to influence Wolfe

By 8 November, student efforts to influence Wolfe mount significantly, as student-led activism continues and escalates. One report indicates that approximately 150 students on 8 November demonstrate support for Butler, some of whom sleep in 20 tents erected on UM’s Carnahan Quadrangle (Brannan & Witthaus, 2015), despite dropping temperatures (Pearce & Raab, 2015). Postgraduate students express solidarity with other students seeking Wolfe’s removal and, on 8 November, postgraduate student worker groups plan walkouts to demonstrate support on Monday 9 and Tuesday 10 November (Roberson, 2015a).

Staff form public alliances with student activists. Head UM football coach Gary Pinkel joins the UM football team protest on 8 November by tweeting: "The Mizzou Family stands as one. We are united. We are behind our players" (Anon, 2015b). UM Athletic Director Mack Rhodes states that all football activities are
suspended until Butler ends the hunger strike (Ballentine & Zagier, 2015), which Butler pledges to continue until Wolfe resigns or is terminated (The Daily Beast, 2015).

8 November: Discourse analysis of Wolfe’s statement
Discourse analysis of Wolfe’s official 8 November statement, described using selected, illustrative examples in the sections that follow, suggests Wolfe’s statement may be interpreted as evidence of isolation and disconnection from constituents, while the President also remains connected to key UM constituents such as the governing board. Wolfe’s statement may be interpreted as insensitive or inattentive to the experiences of students, as well as possibly even controlling. Finally, actions in Wolfe’s 8 November statement may also be interpreted as informing, reminding, and also ineffectively communicating or even withholding information. Wolfe’s discourse also enacts strategic planning, an action associated with presidential leadership.

Constituent representation and relationships involving Wolfe and constituents: Isolated from people, while connected to organisational management tools
When discourse analysis questions designed to identify constituent representation and relationships created between presidents and constituents were asked of the President’s 8 November statement, possible answers suggest Wolfe may be perceived as isolated from constituents. In Wolfe’s statement, constituents are represented without specificity, and as groups, as contributors to a strategic planning process, or as approvers of the plan, rather than in direct relation to the President (italics added):

In conjunction with campus representatives, the university began work on a systemwide diversity and inclusion strategy, plan and metrics for the University of Missouri System as part of my strategic goals (see 1.4.i of the System Strategic Plan) as approved by the Board of Curators in summer 2015.
Our due date for announcing the strategy was April 2016, having allowed for multiple stakeholders (e.g., faculty [academic staff], staff, students, consultants) across the system to provide input into the plan.

The majority of items listed on the Concerned Student 1950 List of Demands were already included in the draft of the strategy. While the student list provides more detail and more specific metrics than had been established in the UM System plan, we had anticipated providing specificity and detail to the plan over the coming months (Wolfe, 2015b).

Constituents present in Wolfe’s statement include “campus representatives”, “Board of Curators”, “multiple stakeholders (e.g., faculty [academic staff], staff, students, consultants)”, and “Concerned Student 1950”. Constituencies listed by Wolfe are positioned in relation to the President and his strategic planning process. Future diversity and inclusion work will be finalised with input from “multiple stakeholders” into strategic processes, listed by group, and authorised by the governing board. In Wolfe’s statement, “students” and more specifically the student activist group “Concerned Student 1950”, are not primary influencers, but rather are one of many stakeholder groups. Albeit typical in higher education institutions, this positioning of students stands in opposition to the power students seek to exercise during the episode by mounting demonstrations, embarking on a hunger strike, and publicising a list of demands. In the pre-resignation phase, as well as in activism mounted previously, students vigorously endeavour to influence diversity and inclusion work at UM in contrast to other constituencies.

**Pronouns: First-person, plural pronouns maintain Wolfe’s connections**

Contrastingly, after asking “How are pronouns used and are presidents or constituents presented as nouns or pronouns?”, I found that Wolfe’s 8 November official communication demonstrates he is not completely isolated or disconnected from constituents. The communication uses the first-person, plural pronoun frequently, thereby connecting him to the UM community, unlike the
potentially isolating first-person, singular pronouns used in Wolfe’s 6 November communication. By reinforcing the collaborative aspects of the University’s strategic planning process, Wolfe connects to the UM community through association of (italics added) “my [Wolfe’s] strategic goals” to “multiple stakeholders” (Wolfe, 2015b). Also, by emphasising the governing board’s role in his strategy (italics added), “my strategic goals” … “as approved by the Board of Curators in summer 2015”, Wolfe (2015b) establishes his connection to the Board of Curators. Wolfe also refers to his work with the UM executive team by using the first-person, plural pronoun, demonstrating another connection to a key constituency and formal positions of authority, in contrast to public interpretations of Wolfe as isolated during the crisis.

**Difference: Student demands and strategic planning**

By asking the discourse analysis question “How is difference explored, accentuated, negotiated, bracketed or suppressed?” of Wolfe’s 8 November statement, I identified linguistic details present in Wolfe’s statement that may be interpreted as the suppression of difference. Wolfe’s statement represents student actions, specifically demands for racial justice, adding that the majority of “Concerned Student 1950 List of Demands were already included in the draft of the strategy” (Wolfe, 2015b). By suggesting students are not asking for anything new that had not already been included, Wolfe’s language suppresses the difference of the demands by repositioning student expectations in the draft strategic plan. Student’s original and continued demands for racial justice are replaced in this official statement with the language of organisational management and subsumed by a formal planning process. Wolfe’s description may be interpreted by constituents as an attempt to control student input, which may be perceived as negating students’ uniquely expressed needs by
assimilating them into institutional process. Wolfe continues by saying: “While the student list provides more detail and more specific metrics than had been established in the UM System plan, we had anticipated providing specificity and detail to the plan over the coming months” (Wolfe, 2015b). Wolfe’s move to reposition student demands into the UM System plan may be viewed as suppressing the emotional power of the original demands or may even be interpreted as exerting control over student expectations and voices. Wolfe’s 8 November statement coincides with Jonathan Butler’s seventh day on hunger strike to demand racial justice at UM and Wolfe’s removal or resignation. When Wolfe is facing a matter of life or death—Butler’s—reliance on a plan with a timeline that stretches over many months may be interpreted as a lack of compassion in responding to immediate crisis conditions.

Furthermore, the President’s 8 November statement may be perceived as suppressing the difference in racial/ethnic minority student experiences. While affirming that student concerns are included in UM’s strategy and erasing the distinctive content of the student demands, Wolfe also uses language to describe racism that may be perceived as disregarding the experiences of people identifying as ethnic minorities (italics added):

> It is clear to all of us that change is needed, and we appreciate the thoughtfulness and passion which have gone into the sharing of concerns. My administration has been meeting around the clock and has been doing a tremendous amount of reflection on how to address these complex matters.

Clearly, we are open to listening to all sides, and are confident that we can come together to improve the student experience on our campuses...

In the meantime, I am dedicated to ongoing dialogue to address these very complex, societal issues as they affect our campus community (Wolfe, 2015).
Rather than refer to “racism”, “inequities”, “systemic problem”, or “injustice”, as Wolfe had on 6 November, now Wolfe refers to “concerns”, “complex matters”, “the student experience”, and “complex, societal issues”. By using neutral terms, Wolfe does not acknowledge with specificity the racist and intolerant behaviours experienced by UM’s racial/ethnic minority students, academic staff, and other staff. Students demonstrating are acknowledged for “passion” in “the sharing of concerns”, but racism, discrimination, and harassment are not explicitly acknowledged by Wolfe. Describing a student on a hunger strike as passionately sharing concerns is likely to be perceived as suppressing Butler’s unique experiences, or as insensitivity, by students and other constituents who are eager for Wolfe to acknowledge fully and explicitly the UM minority student experience and the seriousness of Butler’s hunger strike.

**Actions: Informing, reminding, and withholding, plus strategic planning actions**

The past, current, and future actions described in Wolfe’s statement, identified by asking the discourse analysis question, “What is the action present in the words involving relationships between the president and constituents?”, focus on structural aspects of organisational management, which have been defined by management researchers as involving strategic planning, metrics, timelines, hierarchy, and formal authority (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Bolman & Gallos, 2010).

For example (italics added):

In conjunction with campus representatives, the university began work on a *systemwide diversity and inclusion strategy, plan and metrics* for the University of Missouri System as part of *my strategic goals (see 1.4.i of the System Strategic Plan)* as approved by the Board of Curators in summer 2015.

Our due date for announcing the *strategy* was April 2016, having allowed for multiple stakeholders (e.g., faculty, staff, students, consultants) across the system to *provide input into the plan*.

The majority of items listed on the Concerned Student 1950 List of Demands were already included in *the draft of the strategy*. While
the student list provides more detail and *more specific metrics than had been established in the UM System plan, we had anticipated providing specificity and detail to the plan over the coming months* (Wolfe, 2015b).

The actions represented by the President’s words involve informing and reminding. Wolfe reminds constituents of the strategic plan, the process for incorporating input, and provides an anticipated date for completing the plan. Additionally, Wolfe not only performs these actions of informing and reminding, he also describes past, present, and future actions associated with strategic planning, an expectation of the presidency, with specific reference to diversity and inclusion planning and metrics. For some constituencies included in Wolfe’s statement, such as the governing Board of Curators, the actions present in Wolfe’s words may be viewed as positively emphasising Wolfe’s attentiveness to organisational systems that facilitate timely, systematic progress on university issues of concern, especially as he represents the series of actions as already underway. For other constituencies, such as student activists, this statement may associate Wolfe with the professional bureaucracy responsible for perpetuating oppressive systems and fail to respond to urgent matters with rapidity. In his 8 November statement, Wolfe focuses on institutional strategy and university business while, in contrast, Butler remains on a hunger strike. While Wolfe’s orientation to actions associated with organisational management may be well received by some constituents, the statement may further isolate Wolfe from students expecting immediate action from the President to ensure Butler lives and discrimination is no longer tolerated at UM.

In addition to the actions present in the statement outlined above, Wolfe’s 8 November communication includes linguistic details that may be perceived as withholding information and communicating ineffectively. On 8 November, Wolfe asserts: “My administration has been meeting around the clock and has been
doing a tremendous amount of reflection on how to address these complex matters” and promises to “share next steps as soon as they are confirmed” (Wolfe, 2015b). Wolfe is not forthcoming with next steps in the statement, which may be perceived by constituents as withholding. Wolfe’s indication that next steps are not yet forthcoming may be interpreted as Wolfe listening but not translating information into action. If Wolfe is interpreted as unable to translate information into concrete action, he may be perceived negatively by constituents demanding an immediate remedy from Wolfe.

8 November: Discourse analysis of tweets responding to Wolfe

8 November tweets about Wolfe continue to critique him, to advocate for his removal or resignation, and to associate traits with Wolfe, identified especially by applying the discourse analysis questions: “What traits and life histories are identified with the leader?” and “What is the action present in the words involving relationships between the president and constituents (informing, advising, promising, warning, promoting, etc.)?”. For example, tweets include statements that Wolfe remains “unaware of racist microaggressions” and that “he still doesn’t get it”, while “being paid six figures to be uneducated on oppression and leave his students begging for change”. The President is accused of insensitivity on Twitter, with users suggesting Wolfe is “tone deaf” in his communications. One tweet (Figure 43) specifically addresses Wolfe’s perceived inaction, while linking the inaction to a perception that Wolfe lacks concern for students:

Figure 43: 8 November tweet including #WolfeGottaGo

Other tweets label Wolfe as “arrogant, unfeeling, unfit [sic]” and “ridiculously selfish”, unwilling to “treat black folk right” and the cause of “so much harm”.

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Twitter users allege that Wolfe “downplayed hatecrimes [sic] as 'bias incidents', legitimizing [sic] racism” and interpret his 8 November statement as an attempt to silence student activists (Figure 44):

![Twitter post](image)

Figure 44: 8 November tweet including #WolfeGottaGo

Wolfe’s statement is also interpreted as ineffective: “that press release was pointless and just said everything that he had already said” and “too little, too late for this kind of PR speak”. One Twitter user rhetorically states: “did anyone expect Wolfe's statement to be productive?”.  

**Monday 9 November: Wolfe resigns at a Board of Curators meeting after further student demands for his removal**

On 9 November (Figure 45), Wolfe resigns, prior to the end of his contract, which had been extended by the governing board in August 2014 to 30 June 2018 (University of Missouri System, 2014). Wolfe resigns by addressing the Board of Curators at a special governing board meeting, which is broadcast live, transcribed by a regional reporter from the *Columbia Missourian*, Emma Vandelinder (Wolfe, 2015c), and recorded and posted online to Facebook by another newspaper, *The Kansas City Star* (Anon, 2015c). These publicly accessible presidential statements lead to widespread sharing on the Internet of Wolfe’s resignation speech by journalists and citizens. According to the governing Board minutes, their meeting begins at 10.10am and, as per Missouri state law, is open to the public (Harmon, 2015). The meeting begins with general business, which includes a board decision to hold part of the meeting as
Two weeks until end of President's tenure

Student activism encouraged and discussed by student government candidates

#Wolfegottago first use on Twitter

Student (Butler) begins hunger strike

President meets with students

President apologises for 10 October parade incident

#Wolfegottago use on Twitter increases

Washington Post links UM events to Ferguson activism

Media coverage surges

President meets hunger striker; responds to students at fundraiser

Hunger striker meets President; students confront President at fundraiser

UM football team joins protest, begins boycott

Coach supports UM football team protest

Petition signed by 7,000

President issues official statement

Student ends hunger strike

President resigns

Figure 45: 9 November, Wolfe Resigns

Figure 45: 9 November 2015, the final day of Wolfe’s tenure at UM
a closed session, without public access, which is only allowable under law for a limited range of purposes, including handling personnel matters and legal matters (Harmon, 2015). President Wolfe asks to address the Board, other university employees, media representatives, and citizens attending the open meeting and announces his resignation (Harmon, 2015). After twelve minutes in open session, the Board adjourns the open meeting at 10.22am, followed by the closed, private board session at 10.30am (Harmon, 2015). According to the meeting record, the Board’s closed session, therefore, occurs after Wolfe’s resignation and should not be interpreted as an instance in which the Board influenced the end of Wolfe’s tenure (Harmon, 2015). Although news media infer that Wolfe’s resignation followed action by the Board (The Daily Beast, 2015), a member of the Board states that Wolfe was not asked to leave (Eligon & Pérez-Peña, 2015). Senior staff at Missouri report that the Board was surprised by Wolfe’s resignation and confirm that Wolfe was not asked to resign (McCubbin, 2017). On the last day of Wolfe’s tenure, in the few hours before the President resigns, constituents continue to call for Wolfe to end his tenure. As of the day Wolfe resigns, the petition calling for Wolfe’s removal had been signed by 7,000 people (Concerned Student 1950, 2015b; Svrluga, 2015). Prior to Wolfe’s announcement, the student government urges the UM Board to act by issuing a formal letter demanding Wolfe’s removal and posting it publicly to Twitter (MSA, 2015). Also prior to Wolfe’s resignation speech, academic staff begin mobilising to support the student protestors by staging walkouts (Izadi, 2015b) and canceling classes (Eligon & Pérez-Peña, 2015).

On the same day Wolfe resigns (Roberson, 2015b), Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin, who oversees the flagship UM campus in Columbia, also resigns (Fortunato et al., 2018; Trachtenberg, 2018; Wolfe, 2015c). Loftin announces that his tenure as
Chancellor would end at the conclusion of the year when he would begin leading research initiatives (Ballentine & Suhr, 2015). Wolfe’s resignation speech does not occur during the pre-resignation phase defined in the research design and as such discourse analysis of neither the President’s speech nor associated constituent responses are included in the data or analysis.

**Synthesis and discussion of findings**

As described above, I analysed documentary evidence published or posted in the pre-resignation phase using overlapping analytical approaches: analysis of media coverage to identify potential constituent influence, discourse analysis of presidential communications and constituent response via Twitter, and timeline analysis of events and communications, which when combined led to five findings:

1. Wolfe resigns during a crisis caused by human actions.  
2. External and internal constituents endeavour frequently and publicly to influence President Wolfe prior to his resignation.  
3. Multiple constituents develop and share interpretations of Wolfe’s identities and actions.  
4. The President’s relationships may be publicly interpreted as challenged in ways that contribute to abbreviated tenure.  
5. The president communicates infrequently, while minimal time elapses between critical statements from potentially influential constituents.

**1. Wolfe resigns during a crisis caused by human actions**

By conducting overlapping analyses to identify publicly available, sequential patterns of possible constituent influence in media coverage, I found human action influencing the crisis in which President Wolfe’s resigns. Events leading to the end of Wolfe’s presidency may be defined as a crisis caused by human actions, similar to assessments of the episode by Fortunato and colleagues (2018) and Kezar and Fries-Britt (2018). The episode matches the definition of
crises outlined in the introduction and, more specifically, I determined that events leading to Wolfe’s abbreviated tenure were caused by the actions of people rather than originating in nature or infrastructure failure. Events are unexpected, requiring rapid response; normal operations are disrupted and the well-being of personnel, financial resources, and reputation are threatened (Zdziarski II, 2006). Constituent influence is evident in Butler’s hunger strike, the football team’s expression of solidarity with Butler, and the sudden, extensive media and social media attention are unexpected events requiring a quick response from leadership. Normal university operations are disrupted when students spend time and energy protesting or sleep in tents on the quadrangle, rather than attending to studies and staying in university accommodations. Interruptions such as the protest at the homecoming parade are likely to be viewed by university leaders as disruptive to normal operations. External relations, including staff responsible for liaising with the media, government officials, donors, and alumni also experienced interrupted operations as they fielded enquiries about the crisis from external constituents (McCubbin, 2017). Jonathan Butler’s well-being is threatened as he persists in a hunger strike and students experiencing racism and discrimination are also threatened, likely facing heightened risk when conditions escalate as American university racial crises attract attention from extremists and Internet trolls. Prier (2017), who analysed social media about the episode posted following Wolfe’s resignation, found automated social media accounts spreading false information about racially-motivated attacks and white nationalists near the University. Financial resources are threatened during the crisis as the loss of reputation has the potential to undermine future revenue, such as fees from student enrolment, and the possibility of paying a fine for forfeiting a football game. Extensive, local, regional, and global news media and
social media attention spotlighting the crisis, student activism, racism at UM, and Wolfe’s leadership threatens UM’s reputation.

2. External and internal constituents influence Wolfe

Analysis to identify potentially influential constituents, discourse analysis, and timeline analysis enabled me to identify sequentially the frequent, public evidence of external and internal constituents endeavouring to influence President Wolfe prior to his resignation, as well as Wolfe’s acknowledgement of influential constituents as they are represented in his statements. Constituents seeking to prompt Wolfe to act include students, elected politicians, and academic staff. The Board of Curators may have also sought to influence Wolfe in the episode, but the data is equivocal, as discussed below.

Students and their allies inspired by regional and national activism

Regional and national activism aimed at challenging racial injustice and dismantling systems of racial oppression influenced the UM crisis and, likely, Wolfe’s resignation. UM students cite disappointment at the University’s response after Michael Brown’s 2014 death and protests in Ferguson (Kezar & Fries-Britt, 2018; Miller, 2015a). Butler, who demands that Wolfe resigns or is removed, explicitly states he is inspired by demonstrations in Ferguson following Brown’s death (Miller, 2015a; Oide, 2016). On-campus racist incidents, a high-profile, nearby case of a white police officer killing an unarmed Black youth, and a surge in national and regional activism combine to influence presidential leadership.

Notably, student athletes join forces with other student activists to raise the profile of the social movement efforts. In The New York Times, Nocera (2015) asserts the power of the UM football team: “One wonders what athletes at other universities are thinking, now that they’ve seen a football team take down a
university president in 36 hours”. A student journalist at another university suggests that the football team created the “breaking point” that led to Wolfe’s resignation (Anon, 2015a). Coaches, as powerful, highly paid, university employees, express support for student athletes and thereby also may influence presidential leadership. Journalists and Twitter users credit student protests with precipitating President Wolfe’s departure. Whether Wolfe resigned out of pressure from student activists and their allies or not, a perceived relationship between student action and the President’s response is evident in the data.

The racial climate at UM and constituent critique of Wolfe’s response to repeated racist episodes influences public perceptions of Wolfe’s leadership. At the start of the 2015-16 academic year, seven percent of UM students in Columbia identify as Black, 23 percent identify as a member of a racial/ethnic minority group, and 77 percent identify as white (Institutional Research & Quality Improvement University of Missouri, 2019). Published research studies on events at UM in 2015 present varied assessments of campus racial climate. Trachtenberg (2018) suggests that UM is similar to most American universities in the frequency and harmful impact of racist incidents that occur, but claims that incidents are not more frequent. Kezar and Fries-Britt (2018) found that constituents involved in UM’s crisis experience ongoing, unchecked racism at UM shaped by the regional and national context of persistent racial injustice as expressed by both racial/ethnic minority and white majority students, faculty, and staff at UM who describe feeling unsafe and unwelcome because of racial climate. Trachtenberg (2018) also acknowledges that in 2015 Americans are more aware of biased policing and university students are more likely to use Computer-Mediated Communications to raise awareness of specific racist incidents. Throughout the news coverage, constituents express the expectation that Wolfe should lead UM
responsively to racial/ethnic minority student experiences and create an inclusive learning environment free from bias or discrimination.

**Elected politicians**
In the last two days of the crisis episode, elected political officials also express support for UM student activists and condemn the President. Politicians begin speaking publicly about the episode and criticizing Wolfe’s leadership the day after the UM football team expresses solidarity with Butler, which is also the day prior to Wolfe’s resignation.

**Academic staff**
During the crisis, academic staff are critical of the President’s leadership but do not share a unified view: some academic staff support Jonathan Butler and other student protesters, thereby advocating for Wolfe to resign or be removed. Other academic staff view Wolfe as failing to lead by allowing student protests to interrupt university operations. Academic staff are involved in protests, including but not limited to the homecoming parade protest (Concerned Student, 2015), plans to cancel classes (Eligon & Pérez-Peña, 2015), and action at UM the day of and following Wolfe’s resignation, when an academic staff member controversially endeavours to bar news media from a public space (Vaughn, 2015). In contrast, other academic staff oppose student activism. For example, one UM academic staff member writes:

The Mizzou [UM] protests not only intimidated the highest echelon of Missouri academic leadership into submission, but also emboldened the radical Left to hold campuses hostage to threats of disruption all across the country, in a chain reaction that eventually encompassed both elite private universities and large public ones. Perhaps I was horrified because never before had we seen quite this combination of totalitarianism and foolishness at work on college campuses, making a mockery of higher education (Rochester, 2019, p. 40).
Another UM academic criticised the perceived philosophy underpinning the student protests, claiming that civilisation itself is threatened, and itemising alternative responses to student demands that would have negated Wolfe’s need to resign (Block, 2018).

**Board of Curators**

Like politicians, the Board of Curators charged with oversight of UM and President Wolfe are similarly absent from the press coverage until the last two days of the episode. On the day prior to Wolfe’s resignation and after the football team begins to act, the Board of Curators announces a special meeting to occur on Monday 9 November during which President Wolfe ultimately resigns. The governing board does not comment publicly on the crisis or on Wolfe’s leadership. Lack of public comment from the UM Board should not necessarily be interpreted as lack of support. However, the absence of board involvement suggests this critical, external constituency most likely to align with the President was not active publicly in the crisis. Scheduling a board meeting may have been intended to prompt presidential action, but it is not possible to ascertain within the scope of this study.

**3. Constituents publicly interpret Wolfe’s identities and actions**

Influential constituents emerge in any crisis and in this episode a few constituents communicate publicly, frequently, and vigorously. They include postgraduate student hunger striker Jonathan Butler, the UM football team and affiliated coaching staff, and elected political officials, all of whom develop and share critical interpretations of Wolfe, his leadership, and his actions. Constituent interpretations of Wolfe, arranged sequentially using timeline analysis, were identified by conducting constituent influence analysis of news media coverage, by examining Wolfe’s responses to constituents in presidential communications.
using discourse analysis, and by analysing discourse in tweets. Although President Wolfe’s public communications on 3, 6, and 8 November contribute to shared, public interpretations, his communications prompt negative interpretations of his identity and actions shared by constituents online and in news media. Social media is used actively by constituents responding to Wolfe’s leadership to advance negative views of the President. In this episode, Twitter is a site where the crisis escalates and constituents who might not normally interface, such as politicians and students, develop shared interpretations about Wolfe’s leadership and the crisis at UM.

Constituent response online to the crisis, Wolfe’s crisis leadership, and the President’s abbreviated tenure is vast and varied and the scope makes it difficult to chronicle and analyse. At the apex of the crisis, 3 million tweets were posted about Missouri in three days after the football team expresses solidarity with Butler (McCubbin, 2017). Another account suggests that on Friday, 6 November, a few hundred tweets had been posted to Twitter about UM, whereas on Sunday, 8 November 16,000 had been posted (Bump, 2015). One analysis published on 9 November found that over 90,000 Tweets posted contained one or more of the hashtags #Mizzou, #ConcernedStudent1950, #MizzouHungerStrike (Today in #BlackTwitter, 2015).

In addition to the volume of commentary, the influence of social media in this crisis episode is potent and yet difficult to gauge with accuracy. One Tweet, for example, boldly states: “#WolfeGottaGo isn't just a hasgtag. Tim Wolfe just resigned”, thereby linking online activism to real world results. In 2015, social media fuelled the #BlackLivesMatter movement (Gibson, 2018; Rao & Haina, 2017), connecting activists in many locations through online organising. In this episode, as in the movement more broadly, many students at other institutions
voice their support for UM activists (Ndemanu, 2017; Rao & Haina, 2017). A wide range of constituents respond via social media to the events at UM, many expressing views with force and strong emotion. Rao and Haina (2017) analysed a social media dataset of comments about protests at Missouri and two other universities and found evidence of “outrage language”, or “insulting and emotional language, name-calling, character assassination, mockery, and ideologically extreme language” (p. 5) in posts written by supporters and critics.

4. Wolfe’s relationships appear challenged

Using discourse analysis, I identified possible, public interpretations of President Wolfe and his connections to constituents that, when combined, suggest Wolfe’s relationships appear challenged in ways that have been found to contribute to abbreviated tenure. In this finding, I emphasise the appearance of challenged relationships based in linguistic details and possible interpretations, rather than suggest that Wolfe’s relationships are challenged. Although the research design provides an original approach to examining episodes which end in abbreviated presidential tenure, the method limits what can be known: this finding is not intended to suggest a causal relationship between relationship challenges and Wolfe’s resignation, but rather assert that the combined, linguistic details offer a public view of Wolfe that may be interpreted by individuals involved or observing the President as evidence of challenged relationships. Proving conclusively a causal link between relationship difficulties and Wolfe’s abbreviated tenure would require further investigation using alternative research methods.

By asking discourse analysis questions, I identified and described who and how constituents are represented in Wolfe’s communications and traits Wolfe associates with himself, as well as traits constituents associate with the President. Wolfe usually represents constituents generally and without specificity,
especially in his 8 November statement about the strategic planning process. Wolfe’s identities and life histories identified in his own statements and constituent response are varied. On 3 November, Wolfe casts himself as sensitive to student needs. On 6 November, the President acknowledges that he has been perceived as not caring about students and avoids fully acknowledging the racism and discrimination experienced by UM students. Also on 6 November, the President is accused of blaming students who experience racism. Tweets on 6, 7, and 8 November associate negative traits with Wolfe’s identity, suggesting he is unfit to lead, ignorant, insensitive, rejected by the UM community, out of touch with his surroundings, arrogant, insensitive, and focused on himself.

Discourse analysis also identified examples of Wolfe’s pronoun usage, relationships enacted in his language, and the President’s discursive orientation to difference. On 6 November, Wolfe uses the first-person singular pronoun frequently, which suggests a focus on himself, whereas on 8 November, he emphasises connections with executive leaders and the Board of Curators in part by using the first-person plural pronoun. Wolfe presents himself as connected to students, but his statements also suggest he is at times disconnected from Butler and signals his isolation from student protestors at the homecoming parade. I identified several examples of Wolfe suppressing or accentuating difference. On 6 November, Wolfe blames students and accentuates the difference in their views when he describes “systematic oppression”. On 8 November, the President also suppresses difference by positioning student demands in the context of the strategic planning process, as well as by using very general terms rather than specifically describing racism and discrimination.

Discourse analysis also allowed me to identify words or phrases that signify presidential actions in Wolfe’s statements and in constituent responses. On 6
November, Wolfe listens and hears, whereas constituents demand action that eliminates racism. The actions present in Wolfe’s discourse on 6 November also may be interpreted as withholding and inconsistently communicating. On 8 November, Wolfe informs and reminds, as well as describes past, current, and future strategic planning actions. Tweets posted on 6, 7, and 8 November allege that Wolfe fails to act, while communicating ineffectively and infrequently.

Results of discourse analysis detailed in this chapter and summarised above in my discussion of this finding align closely with relationship difficulties leaders have been found to experience prior to resignation or termination. Wolfe appears isolated and disconnected from other people, as well as insensitive to student experiences, even controlling in one instance. Wolfe may be perceived as focusing on himself, both in his pronoun usage and in alleged disregard for the welfare of other people during the episode. Wolfe may also be perceived as communicating infrequently, ineffectively, and at times, even as withholding information, all known contributors to abbreviated tenure. In the tweets collected and analysed, Wolfe is presented as disconnected, “selfish”, and not representative of racial/ethnic minority communities at the University. Perceived attributes assigned to Wolfe indicate he is viewed as isolated and disconnected from constituents. Tweets accuse the President of blaming victims of racism and contributing to a racist climate at the University. Twitter users refer to racially-motivated microaggression by Wolfe and, in turn, the President’s downplaying of racism as “bias incidents”, which a Twitter user suggests legitimises racism. Wolfe is characterised on social media as arrogant, unfeeling, uncaring, and hurtful. Users post that he communicates poorly, is ignorant, lacks understanding of education, and lacks knowledge about UM students. His statements are characterised as “tone deaf” and “PR speak”. One reporter alleges: “In response
to the race complaints, Wolfe had taken little public action and made few statements. As students leveled more grievances this fall, he was increasingly seen as aloof, out of touch and insensitive to their concerns” (Ballentine & Suhr, 2015).

Moreover, news media coverage of Jonathan Butler’s view of Wolfe reflect and reinforce an interpretation of Wolfe as disconnected or insensitive to students. In an interview, Butler says: “Being in a meeting with Tim Wolfe … he doesn't acknowledge our humanity, he doesn't acknowledge that we exist, we're nothing to him” (Kovacs, 2015). Butler also critiques Wolfe by describing ineffective communications in another interview when he says: "All we get is emails and empty promises,"… "and we're here to say we're not going to be OK with just emails or empty promises anymore" (Serven & Reese, 2015). Butler, referring to Wolfe and UM leadership more broadly, also claims: "They weren't listening to us--they really weren't listening to us," he said. "It shouldn't have taken for me to put my life on the line for us to get to this place.” (Terlep & Belkin, 2015).

5. Wolfe communicates infrequently

By conducting overlapping analyses of communications sequentially, I found that Wolfe issues official public statements and communicates informally with students during the crisis, but public presidential communications are infrequent, another known contributor to abbreviated presidential tenure. At times Wolfe even notes his delay in responding. For example, the President acknowledges his delay in responding to the 10 October homecoming parade protest until 6 November. One student, speaking about Wolfe’s lack of response at homecoming, says: “His silence is violence,” (Pearce & Raab, 2015). A news journalist characterises Wolfe’s response as “sluggish” (Miller, 2015b). After Wolfe resigns, the UM Board chair says: “To those who have suffered, I
apologize [sic] on behalf of the university for being slow to respond to experiences that are unacceptable and offensive in our campus communities and in our society" (Svrluga, 2015).

In contrast to Wolfe’s infrequent communications, little time elapses between critical communications issued by potentially influential constituents. Butler’s hunger strike began on 2 November, the football team joined his effort on 7 November, elected political officials began commenting publicly on 8 November, and Wolfe resigns shortly after 10am on 9 November. One Tweet claims: “They got him [Wolfe] to resign. That was fast”. In The New York Times, Nocera (2015) also says of the episode and Wolfe’s resignation: “Well, that was fast” and in The Washington Post, Svrluga (2015) labels Wolfe’s resignation an “unseating”, which “was a swift victory for student activists”. Journalists even publish hour-by-hour updates as the crisis unfolds primarily focused on the statements and communications of influential constituents (Roberson, 2015b). The pace of communications during this crisis is rapid, resulting in quickly-changing conditions as new information emerges and statements made by influential individuals circulate almost instantaneously online.

**Conclusion: What happens after Wolfe resigns? UM post-crisis**

Wolfe’s resignation in crisis significantly influenced UM, not just during the crisis episode but afterward. University crises can become what an institution is known for not just for years but for decades (Cartwright, 2014). In conclusion, I review indicators that the crisis both may have and also may not have had impact on UM’s forward progression: enrolment decline, fundraising results, and university capacity for diversity, equity, and inclusion.
Scholars, news media journalists, and UM employees attribute the University’s 2016 to 2018 enrolment decline to the crisis in 2015. UM’s flagship campus in Columbia experiences a decline in enrolment (Figure 46) in the three years following events in 2015 (Keller, 2017b; Keller, 2016; Keller, 2017a; Hartocollis, 2017; Institutional Research & Quality Improvement University of Missouri, 2019), resulting in budget reductions (Keller, 2016; Keller, 2017a; Seltzer, 2017; Williams, 2017), and elimination of employee positions (Keller, 2017b; Keller, 2017a). Autumn term 2018 enrolment was 16 percent lower than autumn term 2015 (Figure 46) (Institutional Research & Quality Improvement University of Missouri, 2019). Trachtenberg (2018), however, cites multiple environmental factors relating to reduced enrolment and also attributes the precipitous decline to the crisis and ensuing issues. In an interview with the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, University of Missouri Admissions Director Barbara Rupp also attributed the decline to the 2015 crisis (Addo, 2016).

While enrolment, a critical institutional performance metric, was likely influenced by the crisis, overall fundraising performance, another key metric, did not lose momentum. The University completes the initial phase of a comprehensive fundraising campaign and launches the public phase in October 2015 (McCubbin, 2017). Compared to the financial year ending in 2015, philanthropic donations
increased in the financial years ending in 2016 and 2017 (McCubbin, 2017). In 2019, Missouri achieves a record year for fundraising and approaches the conclusion of its $1.3 billion comprehensive fundraising campaign (McKinney, 2019). However, smaller donations to Missouri’s annual giving programme and alumni association membership dropped following the crisis in the financial years ending in 2016 and 2017 (McCubbin, 2017). Fundraising results suggest not every university function may have been undermined to the extent enrolment suffered.

As I finish this chapter in 2020, ACE publishes another report resulting from a multi-year case study of UM. Progress has been made on building UM’s capacity for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). However, almost five years on, UM has not fully healed from the crisis and the institution’s legacy of racism that led to the episode described above:

For all its good work, however, Missouri remains at a point of challenge. Community members at once praise the direction, are fatigued by it, and continue to expect greater progress. Several factors account for this juncture where the campus is accomplishing much good work and building its DEI capacity, yet is not perceived by some to be making adequate progress. This fragmentation of perspectives, tensions, and emotions is not uncommon for campuses working to recover from racial crises…(Kezar & Fries-Britt, 2020, p. vii).
Chapter 6. Multi-case study research design
A case study design encompassing multiple, varying cases allows an investigator to build convergence, or the degree to which data suggests similar interpretations, by comparing the facts of each case (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). In multi-case research, each case is a whole, comprehensive study (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). Multi-case studies investigate the details of each unique case, and then build theory by comparing the case findings across two or more individual cases (Merriam, 1998). This approach is preferred over arriving at conclusions based on a single case (Yin, 2009).

My multi-case study design follows the stages of the pilot study with enhancement and refinements. This chapter describes sequentially how the research design stages and phases were adapted to improve research methods described in Chapter 4. In Stage 1, rather than selecting a case using the approach described in the pilot study methods, I opted to use purposeful sampling of emergent phenomenon to select two information-rich cases of abbreviated presidential tenure in crisis unfolding in real time. In Stage 2(a), I collected and organised media coverage of each selected case of abbreviated tenure in crisis. To improve on operations used in the pilot study, I delimited data collection in this Stage by date to focus on communications occurring in the pre-resignation phase—the two-week period prior to each president’s resignation—when crises are underway. In Stage 2(c), I collected Computer-Mediated Communications, also delimited by time to ensure a focus on communications occurring during the crisis episode. Finally, in the new Stage 4, I compared case findings across the two cases. In this Stage, I first compared possible constituent influences on presidential leadership evident in each case. Second, I compared discourse analysis findings between the two cases. Finally, I compared the case timelines.
Multi-case research stages

**Stage 1: Multi-case study sampling and case selection**

*Figure 47: Multi-Case Study Stage 1*

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The pilot enabled me to select and to explore an information-rich case of abbreviated tenure in crisis after gathering and analysing a large volume of media coverage, however, I approached multi-case selection by using a purposeful sampling strategy in multi-case research Stage 1 (Figure 47). Patton (2015) describes the value of this strategy:

> The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting *information-rich* cases for in-depth study. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling. Studying information-rich cases yields insight and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations [*sic*] (p. 264).

This sampling approach identified information-rich cases likely to yield many insights and from which much could be learned (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2015). More specifically, of the multiple types of purposeful sampling, I selected...
emergent phenomenon purposeful sampling, which enabled me to make decisions about cases to investigate as events emerged (Patton, 2015). Crises are unpredictable and unexpected (Coombs, 2019; Gigliotti & Fortunato, 2017; Rollo & Zdziarski II, 2007). Abbreviated tenure is also often sudden and unanticipated. Emergent phenomenon purposeful sampling, therefore, matches the emergent character of both crises and abbreviated presidential tenure.

To purposefully sample emergent phenomena, I used the pilot case to create selection criteria, monitored sector-specific media coverage for cases that matched the criteria, and selected cases as instances of abbreviated presidential tenure in crisis emerged. Case selection criteria in multi-case study Stage 1 were based on pilot episode features including:

1. **High-profile:** The crisis is covered by a national online newspaper site that ranks in the top two for unique digital visitors: *The New York Times* and *USA Today* (Pew Research Center, 2015). National coverage may occur before or after the president’s resignation.

2. **Resignation, a type of abbreviated tenure:** The president resigns suddenly, before the anticipated end of tenure.

3. **Crisis and crisis type:** The president resigns during a crisis caused by the actions of people, during which the possibility of reputational damage increases as constituents view this crisis type as avoidable (Lerbinger, 1997; Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). A crisis is “an event, which is often sudden or unexpected, that disrupts the normal operations of the institution or its educational mission and threatens the well-being of personnel, property, financial resources, and/or reputation of the institution” (Zdziarski II, 2006, p. 5).

4. **Constituent attempts to influence presidential resignation:** A constituent or constituents publicly communicate a desire for the president to resign or be removed from post.

5. **University type and corporate model:** The president leads an American, government, non-profit university. The institutions selected for inclusion in this study are all non-profit, government-funded institutions as government institutions are more likely to experience turnover (Padilla et al., 2000). Presidents leading institutions of this type and model are 50 percent more likely to leave in the first five years after appointment (Monks, 2012).
6. Specified timeframe: The crisis and president’s resignation occur in 2018 to enable near contemporaneous initial data collection.

Assessment of alignment with criteria involved six steps reflecting the six criteria above. As I identified presidents resigning, I evaluated the details to ascertain alignment with the criteria, entering the information about each case into a case data collection and analysis protocol worksheet. First, a daily review of Inside Higher Ed and The Chronicle of Higher Education beginning 1 January 2018 ensured that cases met criterion six: the abbreviated tenure occurred in 2018.

When a presidential resignation or termination was reported, I used the name of the president and the name of the institution as search terms to seek other coverage about the presidential transition in Inside Higher Ed and The Chronicle to determine if the events occurring prior to abbreviated tenure fit the criteria of a crisis. To do so, I read each article and asked: (a) are the events leading to abbreviated tenure sudden or unexpected, requiring a quick response?; (b) were institutional operations disrupted?; (c) were people, property, or reputation threatened?; and (d) was the crisis caused by the actions of people? While reviewing the articles, I also determined if either Inside Higher Ed or The Chronicle reported constituents calling for the president’s resignation or removal.

If I found the abbreviated tenure occurred in crisis and constituents called for the president’s abbreviated tenure, using the National Center [sic] for Education Statistics College Navigator, I determined if the university was government-funded (NCES, nd). Finally, to establish if the abbreviated tenure occurred during a “high-profile” crisis, I searched The New York Times and USA Today websites to determine if the crisis and associated abbreviated presidential tenure were reported in one or both of the top two online, news publications for unique, digital visitors (Pew Research Center, 2015). Using this process, two information-rich
cases of abbreviated presidential tenure in crises were selected for examination, which occurred in January and March 2018 respectively.

**Selecting the resignation of President Lou Anna K. Simon, Michigan State University**

Following research design Stage 1 described above, I selected President Lou Anna K. Simon’s resignation from Michigan State University (MSU) in January 2018 for investigation by monitoring *Inside Higher Ed* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* beginning 1 January 2018 and evaluating alignment of the episode with the criteria for case selection. The episode attracted national media attention (criterion 1). Simon’s tenure ended suddenly (criterion 2), during a crisis (criterion 3), and following calls for the President’s resignation (criterion 4). In the two weeks prior to Simon’s resignation in January 2018, seven articles about President Simon and MSU were published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Brown, 2018b; Brown & Zamudio-Suaréz, 2018; Gluckman, 2018a, 2018b; Thomason, 2018; Zamudio-Suaréz, 2018a, 2018b) and two articles were published in *Inside Higher Ed* (Bauer-Wolf, 2018; Jaschik, 2018a). President Simon’s resignation during crisis occurred in 2018, which enabled near contemporaneous data collection (criterion 6).

Case selection criterion 1: High-profile abbreviated tenure in crisis

Simon’s resignation from the MSU presidency occurs in a high-profile crisis, the first criterion for case selection. In the pre-resignation phase, the top two American newspapers by digital traffic (Pew Research Center, 2015) cover the crisis and mention Simon (Brennan, 2018; Editorial Board, 2018; Haag & Tracy, 2018; Manzullo, 2018; Tracy, 2018; Wolken, 2018).
Case selection criterion 2: The President resigns

President Simon’s resignation represents an abbreviated tenure, the second criterion for case selection. Simon resigns suddenly. The President’s resignation occurs prior to the anticipated end of the President’s contract.

Case selection criterion 3: The President resigns during a crisis caused by human action

President’ Simon’s resignation occurs in a crisis caused by human actions, the third criterion for case selection. MSU’s crisis is induced by the actions of people and therefore carries a heightened risk of reputational damage (Lerbinger, 1997; Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). Human actions triggering crisis and its phases include sexual abuse perpetrated by a former MSU employee, Larry Nassar, but also the actions of survivors of his abuse who speak publicly, the presiding judge in Nassar’s sentencing, and the media who bring national attention to the sentencing hearing. Although Nassar had been terminated by MSU in 2016 and allegations about his conduct were known, the crisis may be considered unexpected due to a large number of survivors who testify at Nassar’s sentencing hearing and the content of their statements. Their testimony elicits attention from external and internal constituents. Institutional operations are interrupted during the crisis in several ways. An emergency Board meeting is held. Academic staff governance is interrupted as a no-confidence vote in Simon is organised, while students prepare to protest MSU and Simon. Resources are directed to legal counsel and investigations are launched that require staff involvement. The crisis also threatens the well-being of University community members. Nassar sexually abuses students and other youth at MSU. This brings MSU’s legally-mandated systems for protecting women from sexual assault into question. The institution’s resources are threatened as numerous lawsuits are filed against MSU and resources are dedicated to support survivors’ wellness. Although Nassar’s abuse
occurs over decades, the highly-publicised sentencing hearing presents a situation requiring rapid leadership response.

Case selection criterion 4: Constituent attempts to influence resignation
Constituents attempt to influence the President by calling for Simon’s resignation or removal align with the fourth criterion for case selection. Demands for President Simon to resign are advanced by numerous constituents, including the news media, elected political officials, survivors of Nassar’s abuse, members of the governing board, students, academic staff, and community members. Simon maintains constituent support during the episode, but those individuals and groups who express support for the President are quickly criticised in public communications and subjected to requests for their own removal or resignation.

Case selection criterion 5: University type and corporate model
Finally, this episode meets the fifth criterion for case selection: President Simon leads an American, government-funded, non-profit university. Presidents at these institutions are more likely to experience turnover (Padilla et al., 2000). National Center [sic] for Education Statistics (nd) indicate that Michigan State operates as a government-funded, non-profit university.

**Selecting the resignation of President H. Fred Walker, Edinboro University**
Using research Stage 1 procedures, I selected a second case: President H. Fred Walker, who is not related to me, resigned from Edinboro University in March 2018, by monitoring *Inside Higher Ed* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* from 1 January 2018 (case selection criterion 6). I assessed the episode for its alignment with five additional criteria outlined above to determine if Walker’s resignation could be considered high profile (criterion 1), occurring before the scheduled end of a president’s tenure (criterion 2), in a crisis (criterion 3), following calls for the president’s resignation (criterion 4) at an American,
government-funded university (criterion 5). In March 2018, five articles were published about Walker's leadership and abbreviated tenure in The Chronicle of Higher Education (Stripling, 2018a, 2018b, 2018f, 2018g; Stripling & Thomason, 2018) and one article was published by Inside Higher Ed (Jaschik, 2018b)
(criterion 6).

Case selection criterion 1: High-profile abbreviated tenure in crisis
Walker's resignation meets the first case selection criterion I used: the crisis receives coverage on a national, online news site ranking in the top two for unique digital visitors (Pew Research Center, 2015). Walker's resignation and associated events were reported on 5 April 2018 in The New York Times (Green, 2018).

Case selection criterion 2: The President resigns
Walker's resignation occurs suddenly and before the end of his contract, thereby meeting the second case selection criterion. Walker's resignation is announced the evening of Tuesday, 27 March 2018, and is effective three days later on Friday, 30 March 2018 (Stripling & Thomason, 2018). Stripling (2018f) reports that Walker had 15 months left on his contract and estimates that the President forfeits $334,000 in compensation by resigning before the anticipated end of tenure.

Case selection criterion 3: The President resigns during a crisis caused by human action
Walker's abbreviated tenure occurs in crisis, the third criterion used to select cases, which defines a crisis as "an event, which is often sudden or unexpected, that disrupts the normal operations of the institution or its educational mission and threatens the well-being of personnel, property, financial resources, and/or reputation of the institution" (Zdziarski II, 2006, p. 5). First, using The Chronicle of Higher Education and Inside Higher Ed coverage of the case, I determined if the
events leading to Walker’s abbreviated tenure were sudden or unexpected, requiring a quick response. Walker apologises quickly after Stripling’s (2018a) article is published and Pennsylvania System leadership announces Walker’s resignation nine days after the article released, suggesting that individuals involved viewed the episode as requiring rapid action. Furthermore, during subsequent stages of data collection and analysis, additional evidence supports my assumption that this series of events unfolded unexpectedly. For example, speaking prior to the publication of the news article that sparks the crisis, President Walker indicates that he believes the article will benefit rather than harm the University: “This is a compelling story that, if accurately written, will serve the university well” (Palmer, 2018d). Walker’s comment suggests that the negative views of the President in the article and strong responses to the article’s content were not only unexpected, but rather the opposite of what Walker expected.

Next, I examined articles about Walker and Edinboro University in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Ed* in March 2018 after Stripling’s article was published to ascertain if institutional operations were disrupted and if people, property, or institutional reputation had been threatened, additional features of university crises required to meet the criteria for case selection. University standard operations were disrupted in multiple ways. First, the crisis interrupts the work of some groups inside Edinboro University. One academic staff member reports that in the week after the article is published, work stops for academic staff as they determine how to respond (Stripling, 2018g). A sudden, unplanned change in leadership, particularly at an institution that experiences frequent leadership turnover (Stripling, 2018a), interrupts forward momentum and requires relationships to be renegotiated and reestablished, while negative publicity poses
a potential threat to future enrolment, increasing risk to the institution’s already
tenuous financial position (Stripling, 2018b, 2018g). Although an immediate threat
to people is not evident, additional financial stress may lead to a further reduction
in Edinboro’s diminished workforce, which at the time of the crisis had already
experienced employee attrition (Stripling, 2018a).

Finally, I found that this episode met selection criteria in that the crisis was
caused by human action, specifically, Walker’s interview with The Chronicle of
Higher Education and Stripling’s (2018a) publication of the article based on the
interview with Walker. The circumstances in which Walker resigns therefore
involved a human-induced crisis, which can carry a greater risk of reputational
damage (Lerbinger, 1997; Pearson & Mitroff, 1993).

Case selection criterion 4: Constituent attempts to influence resignation
Next, the fourth criterion for case selection specifies that constituents
communicate a desire for the president to resign or be removed from post.
Articles published in The Chronicle of Higher Education report students,
academic staff, and academic staff union leadership call for Walker’s resignation
(Stripling, 2018b, 2018g).

Case selection criterion 5: University type and corporate model
Finally, the fifth criterion for case selection specifies that the president should
lead an American, government, non-profit university, which are more likely to
experience turnover (Padilla et al., 2000). National Center [sic] for Education
Statistics (nd) report that Edinboro operates as a government-funded, non-profit
university.
Stage 2: Multi-case study data collection

Stage 2(a): Media coverage collection

Figure 48: Multi-Case Study Stage 2(a)

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For each selected case, in Stage 2(a) (Figure 48) I collected media coverage published in the pre-resignation phase: two weeks prior to the day each president resigns. Unlike the pilot study, news articles from earlier periods in each president’s tenure prior to the crisis were not included. Delimiting data collection to the pre-resignation phase reflects the definition of university crisis informing this study: crisis is defined by the element of surprise and a limited response time (Rollo & Zdziarski II, 2007). By delimiting the time in which communications were produced, data collection procedures align with the study’s focus on patterns in communications occurring during crises rather than pre-crisis. The end date is defined as the date the president’s resignation is announced publicly.

To collect the media coverage, I searched for news media articles using ProQuest Newsstream according to the following search criteria:
1) **University**: The abbreviated name of the university: first or first and second words of the university’s name (e.g., Edinboro or “Michigan State”) and

2) **President**: the name of the president, without initials, in quotes, e.g. “Fred Walker”, and

3) **Date range**: Between and including the days two weeks prior to the president’s resignation and the day of resignation.

Selected or identified news article text was exported in full to Word documents in chronological order.

I conducted additional searches for coverage to supplement the data set, a) on student newspaper websites and b) in *Inside Higher Ed* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, both of which were reviewed initially during case selection. Articles written by student journalists provide a view from inside a university based in the perspective of some, but possibly not all, students. I used Google search to identify the names of any university student newspapers. Searches were conducted on student newspaper websites using the name of the president to identify articles published in the pre-resignation phase. I searched www.insidehighered.com by the abbreviated name of the university and the name of the president as I had done when searching ProQuest Newsstream. *Inside Higher Ed* does not have a date range search field, and as such I reviewed search results and selected articles for inclusion in the data set if published within the pre-resignation phase. Using LexisNexis power search, similar searches were conducted to find articles in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. If results were not generated using LexisNexis, a second search was conducted using www.chronicle.com. For media coverage from *The Chronicle*, *Inside Higher Ed*, and student newspapers, full-text articles were saved to a workbook in OneNote. In a case data collection and analysis protocol worksheet,
the details of data collected in this stage and phase were recorded, including the number of articles found in each source.

Collecting news media articles about President Simon’s resignation during crisis
In research Stage 2(a), I collected news media coverage about the crisis and President Simon’s resignation. News coverage published in the two weeks prior to Simon’s resignation collected according to the defined research procedures includes 174 articles. ProQuest Newsstream search produces 133 articles. LexisNexis Academic produced no results from *The Chronicle of Higher Education* in the date range, but a second search on chronicle.com produced seven results. *Inside Higher Ed* published two articles in the date range. MSU’s student newspaper, *The State News*, published 32 articles in date range.

Collecting news media articles about President Walker’s resignation during crisis
In Stage 2(a), I identified and collected 17 news media articles for inclusion in the Edinboro dataset. Three articles were identified using ProQuest Newsstream search. Five articles were published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and one article was published by *Inside Higher Ed*. The student newspaper, available online at edinboronow.com, published eight articles in the pre-resignation phase.

*Stage 2(b) Presidential communication identification, collection, and organisation*

In Stage 2(b) (Figure 49), I replicated the process used to identify, collect, and organise presidential communications found in media coverage collected and organised in the pilot study. This included oral and written, official and unofficial, public statements made by presidents in the pre-resignation phase reported in the news media articles, which I excerpted and copied into a Word document chronologically by date of the statement. In a case protocol worksheet, I recorded
the number of words, including direct and indirect presidential quotes, included in each final data set of presidential communications.

**Figure 49: Multi-Case Study Stage 2(b)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a)</td>
<td>Sampling and case selection</td>
<td>Media coverage</td>
<td>Constituent influence analysis</td>
<td>Comparative analysis of constituent influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b)</td>
<td>Presidential communication identification, collection, and organisation</td>
<td>Presidential communication discourse analysis</td>
<td>Comparative analysis of pre-resignation discourse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c)</td>
<td>Computer-Mediated Communication collection</td>
<td>Computer-Mediated Discourse analysis</td>
<td>Comparative analysis of timelines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Timeline analysis</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Identifying, collecting, and organising President Simon’s statements**

In Stage 2(b), I identified, collected, and organised Simon’s presidential communications identified in the media coverage collected. Including indirect quotes, description of Simon’s comments or the context in which she speaks, and introductory phrases such as “Simon said”, this data set totals 2,437 words.

**Identifying, collecting, and organising President Walker’s statements**

Stage 2(b) involved excerpting direct and indirect quotes attributed to President Walker prior to resignation. In total, 2,856 words were excerpted for analysis, including statements such as “Walker said” and associated descriptive text that provides context for the communications. The presidential communications
Informal constituent responses to the presidents' statements and actions in the pre-resignation phase were collected in Stage 2(c) (Figure 50), but rather than creating a data set by searching for tweets including a critical hashtag as I did in the pilot study, I collected constituent response online by defining search terms more broadly. I also improved my approach to data management by using Zotero to download, organise, and manage tweets. Using the Twitter advanced search function, I searched for tweets meeting the following criteria, which produced a data set of tweets defined by a two-part search and retrieval process. First, I searched using the criteria:

1) President’s name: “First name Surname” in quotes in the field “all of these words” and
2) **Date range**: Between and including the days two weeks prior to the president’s resignation and the day of resignation

Tweets were downloaded to Zotero, including content and links. If the volume of tweets generated by the search was small (<25), a second search was conducted with new criteria to expand the possible results:

1) **University**: The abbreviated name of the university: first or first and second words of the university’s name (e.g., Edinboro or “Michigan State”) and

2) **Date range**: Between and including the days two weeks prior to the president’s resignation and the day of resignation

Tweets were downloaded to Zotero, including content and links. From Zotero, tweet content as text was exported to a Word document for discourse analysis. This procedure did not enable the collection of the full multi-modality of social media communication and as such photos, audio, and video content are excluded from the data set. The rationale for excluding this content is based in the study’s focus on discourse, or language use that reflects and projects the social world (Gee, 2014a, 2014b). The decision to focus this study of presidential abbreviated tenure in crisis on language, rather than other details of online communication, introduces the possibility of interpreting social media commentary out of context, without reference to visual content intended to accompany the commentary. Images and videos included in social media posts typically reinforce and amplify messages, and as such, the risk of misinterpretation is reduced. Also, I collected and analysed multiple sources of pre-resignation communications and by doing so reduced the potential for arriving at inaccurate conclusions based on misinterpretation of a tweet or a small group of tweets.
Collecting Computer-Mediated constituent responses to President Simon
In research design Stage 2(c), I collected Computer-Mediated Communications responding to the crisis and President Simon’s leadership. The Twitter query produced a data set of 660 tweets posted in the two weeks prior to Simon’s resignation. Simon does not communicate via Twitter. Twitter users create hashtags to advocate for President’s Simon’s resignation or termination, including #FireLouAnna, #firelouannasimon, #FIRESIMON, #notmypresident, #ResignNow, #SeeYa, #SimonOut, #stepdown and #louannasimon used together, and #stepdownsimon.

Collecting Computer-Mediated constituent responses to President Walker
In Stage 2(c), I identified and collected 58 tweets posted to Twitter during the two weeks prior to President Walker’s resignation. Walker does not communicate via Twitter and therefore all 58 tweets are posted by constituents, including journalists.

Stage 3: Multi-case study analysis
Stage 3(a): Potential constituent influence analysis
Using the news media coverage collected in Stage 2(a), constituents attempts to influence presidential leadership were identified in Stage 3(a) (Figure 51). In a case data collection and analysis protocol worksheet, I recorded references to possible constituent influence found in the data to identify patterns in pre-resignation communications, namely, in media coverage and constituent statements reported in the coverage. For each possible influential external or internal constituent or constituency included in the protocol (excerpt below, Table 8), I asked a) what evidence of constituent influence can be found in the data and b) how might constituents seek to influence abbreviated presidential tenure in crisis?
Table 8: Possible Constituent Influences on Presidential Leadership Preceding Resignation in Crises, Stage 3(a)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External constituents</th>
<th>Internal constituents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elected political officials</td>
<td>Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government regulators and other policy makers</td>
<td>Academic staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governing board members</td>
<td>Executive leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News media journalists</td>
<td>Other essential staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External social activists</td>
<td>Student employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alumni and donors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I used analytical notes recorded in Stage 3(a) to describe in chronological order possible constituent influence on presidential leadership prior to resignation during crisis.
To enable identification of patterns in pre-resignation presidential communications as I did in the pilot study, during Stage 3(b) (Figure 52) I analysed presidential statements identified, collected, and organised in Stage 2(b) according to the discourse analysis protocol. I recorded analytical notes in the protocol worksheet after asking the questions of the presidential communications and developing possible answers, as I did in pilot research Stage 3(b). Once analysed using the discourse analysis protocol, I wrote a narrative of the results of discourse analysis, including examples from the data to support observations made, based on the analytical notes in the protocol worksheet. Finally, using the analytical notes and the narrative, I examined the complete results of discourse analysis to identify and understand public perceptions of presidential actions, identities, and relationships potentially related
to abbreviated tenure, such as disconnection from other people and an orientation to oneself, disregard for other people, or communication attributes such as withholding and infrequent or ineffective communications. Finally, I entered notes about public perceptions of presidential relationships identified through discourse analysis into the case protocol worksheet.

3(c) Computer-Mediated Discourse analysis

Figure 53: Multi-Case Study Stage 3(c)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sampling and case selection</td>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>Cross-case analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Sampling and case selection</td>
<td>Media coverage</td>
<td>Constituent influence analysis</td>
<td>Comparative analysis of constituent influence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Presidential communication identification, collection, and organisation</td>
<td>Presidential communication discourse analysis</td>
<td>Comparative analysis of pre-resignation discourse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Computer-Mediated Communication collection</td>
<td>Computer-Mediated Discourse analysis</td>
<td>Comparative analysis of timelines</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Timeline analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Like in the pilot study, in Stage 3(c) (Figure 53) I analysed tweets collected in Stage 2(c) using the discourse analysis protocol questions. I asked the discourse analysis questions of the data and developed possible answers. I recorded analytical notes in a section of the case data collection and analysis protocol worksheet detailing the discourse analysis of constituent social media responses to presidential leadership. Using the analytical notes, I investigated discourse
analysis results to find evidence of public perceptions of relationships and interpretations of leadership in constituent responses.

3(d) Timeline analysis of events and communications

Figure 54: Multi-Case Study Stage 3(d)

Like pilot study Stage 3(d), in the multi-case study (Figure 54) I analysed the data to understand the chronological sequence of communications and crisis turning points involving and potentially influencing presidential leadership in each case. I read each news media article, presidential communication, and tweet collected in Stages 2(a) through 2(c) to identify key turning points in the episode, triggers or crisis accelerators, influential communications, and associated responses. In the news media coverage collected in Stage 2(a), I identified breaking stories that provoked, accelerated, or escalated crisis conditions for inclusion in the case timeline. If a single journalist significantly influences the crisis, such as when a journalist’s articles reveal previously unknown, controversial information, and are
referred to in other news articles covering the crisis, the articles published by the influential journalist are reflected in the timeline. Significant presidential statements or actions reported by the media are also included in the timeline. Finally, although all constituent response, like news media coverage, cannot be included in the timeline, statements or responses from constituents that appear to have the potential to publicly and significantly influence presidential leadership, such as calls for resignation or governing board meetings, are included. As in the pilot study, I tracked and recorded chronologically the emergence of possible constituent influence and potentially challenged presidential relationships.

Stage 4: Cross-case analysis

4(a) Comparative analysis of constituent influence

Figure 55: Multi-Case Study Stage 4(a)

To identify patterns of possible constituent influence on presidential leadership expressed in communications across cases, in Stage 4(a) (Figure 55) I compared analytical notes recorded in the case data collection and analysis protocol.
worksheets for each episode. For each constituent or constituency attempting to influence directly or possibly indirectly influencing presidential leadership, I described similarities and differences by comparing influence on presidential leadership across the two cases, recorded as analytical notes, for example:

**External constituent influence: governing boards**

In one case, the governing boards at the system-level and institutional-level do not figure prominently, although a local trustee offers brief comment to the news media. The system board, which retains the authority to hire and fire university presidents, is silent.

In contrast, the elected Board of Trustees features prominently and likely influences presidential leadership in the other case. Like other elected officials, they are responsible to the citizens who elect them. In the crisis, they endorse the president’s leadership in a public statement. This is followed by two trustees calling for the president’s resignation publicly. The Board’s support of the president is criticised and every trustee is asked to comment individually by the news media, although some are more forthcoming than others.

Stage 4(a) of the research project enabled the identification of potential, public constituent influence found in both cases and unique to each case. Conducting cross-case analysis in this way builds on findings arising from individual cases by enabling understanding of possible external and internal constituent influence arising across the two cases.

**4(b) Comparative analysis of pre-resignation discourse**

In Stage 4(b) (Figure 56), I compared analytical notes about presidential actions, identities, and relationships found in presidential communications and constituent response recorded in the case analysis worksheets. Once compared, I wrote a narrative of the differences and similarities identified through this analysis.
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4(c) Comparative analysis of timelines

In Stage 4(c) (Figure 57), I compared the case timeline analyses to ascertain similarities and differences between the sequence of news media coverage, presidential communications and actions, and constituent response, as well as to compare the emergence and persistence of constituent attempts to influence presidents across the two cases. I recorded analytical notes of observations in a OneNote notebook as I conducted the comparative timeline analysis.

Validity and limitations

Although the research design is robust, it has limitations. The research methods were selected to ensure a valid study, by using clearly defined procedures and multiple sources of data. Case study research and discourse analysis, while valid
research methods, have been criticised and the limits of the methods are acknowledged below.

Validity

Qualitative studies are considered valid when sufficient detail is provided such that readers find the conclusions ‘make sense’ and capture with accuracy the social phenomenon under investigation (Firestone, 1987; Merriam, 1998).

Reliability in social science research is typically defined as “the extent to which research findings can be replicated” (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). However, Merriam (1998) suggests that replication in qualitative research is not possible:

…replication of a qualitative study will not yield the same results. That fact, however, does not discredit the results of the original study. Several interpretations of the same data can be made, and all stand until directly contradicted by new evidence (p. 206).
As such, other approaches to ensuring quality are necessary. For instance, a valid qualitative study incorporates a verifiable ‘audit trail’ in which readers may follow the operations of the study and verify the findings as authentic based on the methods used (Merriam, 1998). Strategies for ensuring quality and validity used in this study include clarity of research operations, multi-case design, triangulation, coverage, agreement, convergence, and linguistic details. Additionally, acknowledgement of limitations of the research design, further support the study’s validity.

**Case study methods and validity**

Clearly defined case study operations including data collection procedures that could be replicated by another researcher, as outlined in this Chapter and in Chapter 4, increase the quality of research (Yin, 2009). In addition, selection of a multi-case design, rather than a single-case design, also improves the quality of the study, by enabling investigation into multiple phenomena to build theory from findings (Yin, 2009).

**Triangulation, coverage, agreement, and convergence**

Using multiple sources of data yielding similar analytical results facilitates triangulation of findings (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009), and coverage (Gee, 2014a, 2014b), both of which increase this study’s validity. By presenting the data and findings using multiple sources such that readers may make their own assessment of the validity of the study, the reader becomes a partner in triangulation, also increasing validity:

> To describe the case, we try to present a substantial body of uncontestable [sic] description. We want to tell quite a bit about the case that almost anyone, who had our opportunity to observe it, would have noticed and recorded…we even look for information to report that the reader is likely to know in order to assure the reader that we can see straight and think straight…that gives readers their chance to triangulate (Stake, 1995, pp. 110–111).
Multiple data sources also provide the opportunity to increase validity through achieving coverage. Coverage occurs when it is clear that the analysis of data is applicable to related types of data (Gee, 2014a, 2014b). This is facilitated in this study by including multiple cases and multiple data sources.

The reader may also find the study valid due to agreement. Agreement involves the reader, as a speaker of the social languages in the data, finding that “the analysis reflects how such social languages actually can function in such settings” (Gee, 2014b, p. 196). This study incorporates multiple data sources and presents the cases in sufficient detail to support the reader in acting as a partner to determine agreement.

In addition to triangulation, coverage, and agreement, discourse analysis may be considered valid when the researcher finds convergence and alignment with linguistic details (Gee, 2014a, 2014b). Convergence occurs when answers resulting from asking the questions in the case analysis protocol increasingly ‘converge’ in a way that offers “compatible and convincing answers to many or all of” the questions asked of the data (Gee, 2014b, p. 195). The more intimately linked the analysis is to the language in the communications collected for analysis, the more valid the findings of discourse analyses (Gee, 2014a, 2014b).

**Limitations**

Case study research and discourse analysis have been criticised. Yin (2009) itemises criticisms typical of case studies including lack of rigour, lack of systematic procedures, introduction of biased views or equivocal evidence, lack of basis for scientific generalisation, and concern that case studies result in massive, unreadable documents. Discourse analysis is also critiqued, especially as analyses “are always vulnerable to change as we widen the context within which we interpret a piece of language” (Gee, 2014a, p. 86).
This research design lessens the vulnerabilities of case study research and discourse analysis to allow the benefits of using these methods in combination to be leveraged to investigate a complex phenomenon: presidential resignation in high-profile crises. Orum et al. (1991) affirm the value of this type of research: “Although the case study must rely on a good deal of judgment, exercised by the observer, the great strength of this form of research is that it does permit the observer to assemble complementary and overlapping measures of the same phenomenon” (p. 19).

**Conclusion: A unique methodology for studying abbreviated presidential tenure in crisis**

This study uniquely combines two methods—descriptive, multi-case study methods and discourse analysis—to examine the convergence of abbreviated presidential tenure and university crises through communications. By using the research design described in this Chapter, communications preceding abbreviated tenure in crisis are considered and understood chronologically and sequentially. The potency of communications, including the speed and proliferation of interpretation online via news media coverage and social media commentary, is investigated for evidence of possible constituent influence on presidential leadership, public interpretations of the presidents, and potential issues arising in presidential relationships. The case chapters below embed the findings from each step in the analytical phases sequentially to demonstrate the emergence and persistence in time of interpretations of presidential leadership just prior to abbreviated tenure during crisis. Following the chronological presentation by day of evidence and analysis, I synthesise findings across the pre-resignation phase in each case. Cross-case analysis findings are presented in Chapter 9.
Chapter 7. “You are not a president”: President Lou Anna Simon’s resignation in crisis at Michigan State University
On 24 January 2018, Michigan State University (MSU) President Lou Anna K. Simon resigns. MSU is a government-funded, non-profit doctoral university based in East Lansing, Michigan. Simon’s tenure as president begins in 2005 (CBS, 2018; Erdley, 2018; Gluckman, 2018a; Haag & Tracy, 2018). After leading the University for thirteen years, and working at the institution for four decades, her resignation occurs suddenly and before its anticipated end during a high-profile crisis punctuated by the sentencing of former MSU employee, Dr. Larry Nassar, for sexually assaulting female students and young girls. Many of the women are gymnasts, including prominent athletes who represent America in Olympic games. 156 women testify against Nassar in the days immediately prior to his sentencing (Grinberg & Yan, 2018; Levenson, 2018; Macur, 2018). The hearing and President Simon’s resignation are covered extensively by local, regional, and national news media and generate extensive dialogue on social media. Prior to the end of the President’s tenure, calls for Simon’s resignation from potentially influential external and internal constituents, such as survivors of Nassar’s abuse, elected politicians, governing board members, students, and academic staff, are numerous.

In the foreground, the #MeToo movement informs the events and communications in the episode. #MeToo surges in 2017 (Harris, 2018), emboldening survivors of sexual assault to speak about their experiences when they had previously remained silent or had not been taken seriously. Inspired by #MeToo, university students at many American institutions, including MSU, expect higher education leaders to redouble efforts to prevent sexual violence (Smith, 2014; Turkewitz, 2019).

In the data, women who testify against Nassar are referred to as “victims” or “survivors”. I opt for the word “survivors” to reflect the term used by many of the
women testifying against Nassar and key figures who advocate for them, such as the presiding Judge Rosemarie Aquilina (Cacciola & Mather, 2018) and #MeToo movement founder Tarana Burke (Wolcott, 2018a).

Emerging patterns found in communications preceding Simon’s resignation

For each day in the pre-resignation phase, I chronologically present results of overlapping analyses: (a) analysis of news media coverage for potential constituent influence, (b) presidential communication discourse analysis, and (c) discourse analysis of tweets responding to or describing the president organised according to (d) timeline analysis. After presenting the evidence and analysis sequentially to reveal the emergence of patterns in time, I discuss and synthesise findings across all days preceding Simon’s resignation.

Thursday 11 January: President Simon expresses regret

At the start of the two-week, pre-resignation phase (Figure 58) on 11 January, Simon publicly expresses regret for the abuse suffered by survivors:

I am truly sorry for the abuse Larry Nassar’s victims suffered, the pain it caused and the pain it continues to cause today. We want to help victims and their families move forward with their lives and receive the support they need without the worry of cost…I remain committed to creating a safe, inclusive campus that strongly condemns and combats sexual violence (Targeted News Service, 2018a).

Media coverage published on 11 January includes evidence of possible governing board, university employee, and MSU student attempts to influence presidential leadership. Simon’s discourse on 11 January represents constituents, including Nassar and survivors. In the sections below, I describe potential constituent influence identified in media coverage and constituent representation in Simon’s statement identified using discourse analysis.
Two weeks until resignation

President resigns

Figure 58: 11 January 2018, 14 days until President Simon’s resignation
11 January: MSU Board of Trustees influence on President Simon’s leadership, affirming confidence and increasing presidential compensation

On 11 January, the MSU Board of Trustees’ potential influence on President Simon’s crisis leadership is evident in published media coverage. MSU is controlled by the independent Board of Trustees, who are elected by the citizens of the state (Lacy & Wolcott, 2018a). An MSU student newspaper (O’Connor, 2018a) reports that in December 2017, the MSU Board of Trustees established a $10 million fund for survivor counselling and health services, a fact that other media outlets also recirculate in the coming days (Mencarini, 2018b; Mencarini, 2018c; Pearce, 2018; Shamus, 2018b). At the December meeting, the Trustees affirmed their confidence in President Simon and sought to confer a pay increase on the President, which Simon directed to a student bursary fund (O’Connor, 2018a). Although the Board’s action regarding Simon’s compensation predates the pre-resignation phase, this detail appears repeatedly in the data, demonstrating the Trustees’ endorsement of the President in contrast to other calls for Simon’s resignation.

11 January: MSU student and alumni attempts to influence President Simon

Also on 11 January, student attempts to influence Simon’s leadership appear in media coverage. O’Connor (2018a) reports on 11 January that “more than a dozen student protesters and survivors of Nassar’s abuse” attended the December board meeting, which prompted apologies from the President and Trustees. Students who experienced abuse while studying at MSU advance their criticism of President Simon during this crisis episode after they are no longer enrolled.

11 January: Discourse analysis of Simon’s statement

Discourse analysis questions asked of President Simon’s 11 January statement above including “Who is included, excluded, foregrounded, or backgrounded?”,
“Who is presented with specificity or without specificity?”, “What relationships are created between presidents and constituents”, and “What is the action present in the words involving relationships between the president and constituents” produced interpretations highlighting Simon’s connections to constituents, namely Nassar and survivors. First, Simon’s language names Nassar with specificity, yet relates him most closely to survivors: "I am truly sorry for the abuse Larry Nassar's victims suffered, the pain it caused and the pain it continues to cause today" (Targeted News Service, 2018a). In contrast, Simon represents “victims” without specificity. Simon’s phrasing connects Nassar to survivors by the possessive “Nassar’s”. Furthermore, the President refers to Nassar’s abuse as the cause of survivors’ pain. Although Simon is situated in the sentence as an active subject, “I am…”, the sentence suggests the constituent responsible for causing the survivors’ pain is Nassar, thereby defining a relationship between Nassar and survivors, while Simon’s relationships with Nassar, his abuse, and survivors remains ambiguous. Action in Simon’s 11 January statement may be interpreted as expressing regret, but not owning or taking responsibility, an action likely interpreted as insensitive by survivors. Simon expresses regret and horror about the situation, while placing responsibility with Nassar (Targeted News Service, 2018a), thereby creating distance from the abusive acts.

**Friday 12 January: MSU seeks immunity and President Simon plans to attend hearing**

On 12 January (Figure 59), possible constituent influence on presidential leadership is observed in public communications, while, in contrast, Simon is not found to communicate publicly. The Michigan Attorney General, the lead state solicitor, appears to advise Simon. Constituents respond to Simon’s leadership by posting to Twitter.
Two weeks until resignation

President resigns

Figure 59: 12 January, MSU Seeks Immunity and President Simon Plans to Attend Hearing

Figure 59: 12 January 2018, 13 days until President Simon's resignation
\textbf{12 January: Michigan Attorney General advises President Simon}

The Attorney General (AG) is an elected political position in Michigan and other American states and the incumbent serves as the chief solicitor for the state government, providing legal counsel to state legislatures and government entities, including state government-funded universities (National Association of Attorneys General, nd). During the crisis, Michigan’s AG Bill Schuette is also a candidate for Governor (Crain’s Detroit Business, 2018). The AG provides legal counsel to MSU and its leadership. For instance, MSU seeks advice from the AG’s office about President Simon and Board Chair Brian Breslin’s possible attendance at Nassar’s hearing. On 12 January the AG’s staff are notified that President Simon and Chair Breslin will attend the first day of Nassar’s sentencing hearing scheduled for Tuesday 16 January (Mencarini, 2018b). However, early the following week, Simon and Breslin decide against attending, which is reported by the AG’s office (Mencarini, 2018b).

In 12 January news media coverage, MSU, under President Simon’s leadership, argues that the institution is immune from liability (Mencarini & Wolcott, 2018; Ryan & Hiyama, 2018) and submits to a judge a request to disregard lawsuits brought against the University by survivors’ of Nassar’s abuse. MSU argues that it "retains absolute immunity from liability" as a government-funded university (Mencarini & Wolcott, 2018). Also, MSU suggests that nationally-mandated policies designed to protect university constituents from sexual assault do not apply to survivors of Nassar’s abuse if they are not currently enrolled students or MSU employees (Mencarini & Wolcott, 2018).

\textbf{12 January: Discourse analysis of Twitter responses to Simon}

The discourse analysis question “What traits and life histories are identified with the leader?” applied to 12 January tweets yielded possible interpretations of
Simon circulated via Twitter. Tweets posted on 12 January by news media journalists and other constituents report that Simon plans to attend the first day of Nassar’s sentencing, scheduled for 16 January, thereby foreshadowing an upcoming event in the President’s life history. Constituents, therefore, highlight Simon’s intent to connect with survivors and other interested parties by attending. Tweets also call for Simon to resign, thereby characterising the President as unfit to lead.

**Tuesday 16 January: President Simon does not attend hearing and survivors begin testifying against Nassar**

On 16 January (Figure 60), 9 days before Simon’s resignation, public presidential statements are not identified, while constituent communications, especially survivor testimony, generate public perceptions of Simon’s leadership. On this first day of Nassar’s sentencing hearing, the President, contrary to prior reports that anticipated Simon would attend, does not appear in the courtroom, but rather views the hearing online (Levenson & Joseph, 2018). Twitter users are active on 16 January as discussion of President Simon’s leadership increases. Tweets suggest constituents attribute insensitivity to the President, portray her as isolated from key relationships or absent, and allege Simon withholds information.

**16 January: Survivor testimony against Nassar and attempts to influence President Simon**

From the first day of Nassar’s sentencing hearing (16 January), survivors testifying influence views of presidential leadership. Twenty-nine survivors of Nassar’s abuse testify on 16 January (Mencarini, 2018e), often graphically describing Nassar’s abuse and conveying with emotional intensity the trauma they experienced following Nassar’s assaults (Levenson & Joseph, 2018; Mencarini, 2018e). Survivors’ of Nassar’s abuse named in media coverage
Two weeks until resignation

MSU asks for lawsuits to be dismissed

Survivor testimony against Nassar begins

President views live stream of testimony

Board Chair Breslin views live stream of testimony

President resigns

Figure 60: 16 January 2018, 9 days before President Simon's resignation
published on 16 January include nationally-celebrated athletes: Simone Biles, Olivia Cowan, Gabby Douglas, McKayla Maroney, and Aly Raisman (Levenson & Joseph, 2018). Levenson and Joseph (2018) report female MSU students were abused by Nassar, and describe the positions Nassar held at MSU for two decades. Nassar worked for MSU as an associate professor and a physician for MSU gymnastics and women’s crew teams (Levenson & Joseph, 2018). Also reported on 16 January, MSU’s lead solicitor, Patrick Fitzgerald, affirms in a communication to the AG: "the evidence will show that no MSU official believed that Nassar committed sexual abuse prior to newspaper reports in the summer of 2016" (Levenson & Joseph, 2018).

16 January: Discourse analysis of Twitter response to Simon

Presidential identities: Insensitivity toward survivors

By asking “What traits and life histories are identified with the leader?” of the tweets, analysis yielded possible answers suggesting constituents characterise President Simon as insensitive to survivors abused by Nassar. A survivor, Lindsey Lemke (2018e), tweets on 16 January directly to President Simon: “I hope you were listening today to the amount of pain & hurt you have caused so many people”. Lemke (2018e) blames Simon for inflicting harm and trauma on the survivors, as well as suggests Simon may not have listened before to survivors. Another Twitter user asserts that President Simon should no longer be employed, adding that leadership now requires empathy, which the tweet suggests Simon lacks. Another tweet claims that President Simon “allowed sexual abuse and did not care to even try to make things right”.

Relationships: Isolated and absent

When asked of 16 January tweets, possible answers to the discourse analysis question “What relationships or social relations between presidents and
constituents are enacted?” suggest that constituents interpret Simon as failing to enact expected social relationships. Tweets posted on 16 January emphasise Simon’s choice not to attend the first day of the sentencing hearing. Twitter users quote survivor Olivia Cowan who directed her comments to President Simon: “how convenient that you decided not to attend today. You are a coward”. Another tweet suggests that “she [Simon] hides behind closed doors”, which represents the President as isolated from constituents. Furthermore, a survivor’s statement posted on Twitter also suggests Simon ‘hides’: “you hid behind this monster for over 20 years. Where were you when we needed you?”. By using language that portrays President Simon hiding, constituents generate interpretations of Simon as isolated from constituents, especially survivors, thereby forsaking social relationships expected of a president.

Actions: Withholding information

Constituents tweeting believe President Simon withholds information, which I determined by asking the discourse analysis question: “What is the action present in the words involving relationships between the president and constituents?”. One tweet satirises President Simon, stating that “Lou Anna Simon reflexively released a statement denying that she or anyone else at MSU heard anything, but that she would totally look into it”. Rahal (2018), a journalist, tweets that the AG requests President Simon release to the public the outcomes of an internal investigation into Nassar, which implies Simon is withholding the report. Another tweet claims that President Simon knew about Nassar’s abuse, but rather than making the information public, seeks to keep survivors from speaking: “Lou Anna Simon did absolutely nothing, she knew and instead offered money to silence victims”.

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**Wednesday 17 January: Survivor testimony continues and President Simon attends hearing**

On 17 January (Figure 61), constituent attempts to influence presidential leadership increase in the data, in part due to Simon's appearance as an observer at Nassar's hearing. Potential external influence on Simon's leadership involves news media, government officials, and the MSU governing board. Influence arising inside MSU involves a recent graduate of the University who reported Nassar, prompting an investigation. Simon speaks to news media journalists at the sentencing hearing and the President's statements suggest Simon's relationships may be perceived to be challenged.

**17 January: Journalists condemn President Simon**

Journalists influence perceptions of presidential leadership on 17 January. In Shamus' (2018c) widely circulated story about Simon's appearance, 'Michigan State's Lou Anna Simon's apology to Nassar's victims rings hollow, and distant', the author asks: “In the aftermath of such a horrific scandal, how can Simon offer victims such a hollow apology, and then further betray their trust with such an utter lack of transparency?” and claims that the President is unable to protect sons and daughters of Michigan families. Shamus (2018c) critiques Simon's leadership capacities directly:

> We deserve leaders who show up and face those who have been hurt by their failings. We deserve leaders who not only launch independent investigations, but also release those findings publicly and are accountable for their shortfalls. Right now, Lou Anna Simon and the Michigan State University Board of Trustees aren't doing any of those things (Shamus, 2018c).

Published online at the end of 17 January, another journalist, Kozlowski (2018), reports the findings of an investigation into MSU's handling of Nassar's abuse
Two weeks until resignation

MSU asks for lawsuits to be dismissed

Survivor testimony against Nassar begins

Board Chair Breslin views live stream of testimony

President views live stream of testimony

Social media surges

Survivor testimony

President attends hearing and speaks to news media

News media investigation claims MSU officials knew of abuse

President resigns

Figure 61: 17 January 2018, 8 days before President Simon's resignation
conducted by the *Detroit News*. The investigation finds that 14 or more employees at MSU had known that Nassar was sexually assaulting patients (Kozlowski, 2018), in direct contrast to MSU’s position that Nassar’s abuse was unknown by University officials. According to the investigation, reports of his abuse began in 1997 and the newspaper finds that at least eight different survivors had informed MSU staff of Nassar’s conduct (Kozlowski, 2018). Most notably, according to the *Detroit News* President Simon is alleged to have known about the reports (Kozlowski, 2018).

Gluckman (2018b) reports on this day that a review of MSU’s Title IX policies and procedures by an independent law firm finds the University’s systems are satisfactory. Title IX is a statute enforced by the American Department of Education prohibiting discrimination based on sex and sexual assault (US Department of Education, 2018b). The *Detroit News* investigation noted above concludes otherwise (Kozlowski, 2018).

17 January: **MSU Trustee Foster attends hearing with President Simon and a journalist critiques trustees for endorsing Simon**

Trustees serving on MSU’s governing Board also influence perceptions of presidential leadership on 17 January. Trustee Melanie Foster attends the second day of Nassar’s sentencing hearing with President Simon (Weidmayer & O’Connor, 2018; Wolcott, 2018c). Trustee Foster indicates that she is responsive to the pain experienced by survivors and intends to experience it in person (Mencarini & Wolcott, 2018). Also on this day, MSU Trustees are labelled “out-of-touch” (Shamus, 2018b) for continuing to support Simon by news media. Therefore, Trustee alignment with President Simon is evident in Foster’s attendance with Simon at the hearing, but this alignment garners public critique of the Board.
17 January: Survivor and MSU graduate Thomashow testifies

On 17 January, survivor and former MSU student Amanda Thomashow testifies in the hearing (Mencarini, 2018d), which introduces into the 17 January data survivors’ prior reports of Nassar’s abuse. Thomashow’s 2014 report of Nassar’s assault while enrolled at MSU prompted a criminal investigation by University police and a second investigation by the University office responsible for responding to sexual assault (Mencarini, 2018c; 2018d). In 2015, MSU police finished investigating Thomashow’s 2014 allegations and submitted a warrant request for a sexual assault charge against Nassar to the local prosecuting solicitor (Mencarini, 2018d). In December 2015, prosecutors decline to charge Nassar (Mencarini, 2018d; Wolcott, 2018c). Eight months later, another report of abuse was lodged with MSU police by Rachael Denhollander (Wolcott, 2018c) and a new criminal investigation was opened (Mencarini, 2018d). At least 12 survivors reported that Nassar abuses them after the investigations (Mencarini, 2018c, 2018d; Wolcott, 2018c). Other survivors indicated that they report Nassar’s abuse as early as the 1990s (Chavez, 2018; CNN, 2018; Mencarini, 2018b; Messer, 2018; Shamus, 2018a, 2018b) and the early 2000s (Shamus, 2018a, 2018b). MSU terminated Nassar in September 2016 (Mencarini, 2018e; Wolcott, 2018c).

17 January: Discourse analysis of President Simon’s communications

Simon’s pre-resignation communications on 17 January disconnect the President from survivors, Nassar, and the media. President Simon attends one day of the seven-day hearing: 17 January. When Simon attends the hearing on this day, news media journalists interview the President during a break. Simon’s limited statements, when analysed using the questions included in the protocol, were found to represent constituents, particularly survivors, presidential relationships,
and actions. Illustrative examples of discourse analysis of Simon’s 17 January communications are described in the sections that follow.

Constituents, relationships, and action: Simon listens to survivor stories

Discourse analyses of a statement Simon made on 17 January using four questions, “Who is included, excluded, foregrounded, or backgrounded”, “Who is presented personally or impersonally?”, “Who is presented with specificity or without specificity?”, “How are pronouns used and are presidents or constituents presented as nouns or pronouns?”, and “What is the action present in the words involving relationships between the president and constituents?” suggest Simon presents herself as a listener to survivors who tell personal stories. Simon represents survivors, which she does impersonally, using the third-person, plural pronoun, and repeatedly by including six instances of the pronoun, thereby foregrounding survivors. The President suggests she will listen to survivor stories, but not respond:

This is their stories and their lived experiences with their words, and I'm not going to challenge those words because it's important for them to say their words today in their own way (Wolcott, 2018c).

In this statement, Simon listens to survivors, but does not challenge or respond to them, however, this connection may be interpreted as insufficient by survivors who expect a full acknowledgement of their experiences and their identities by Simon, as well as an assumption of responsibility for Nassar’s abuse.

Simon’s representations of constituents on 17 January exclude salient details about survivors’ experiences, thereby lacking specificity that survivors may expect. Although the President emphasises survivors’ words and stories, she also distances their experiences, which may be interpreted as insensitive to survivors. Simon says (italics added):
This is their stories and their lived experiences with their words, and I'm not going to challenge those words because it's important for them to say their words today in their own way (Wolcott, 2018c).

…this is their moment to have their opportunity to tell their story…So what you’re hearing is the story of betrayal and broken trust (Shamus, 2018a).

Simon’s statements represent the survivors as storytellers who use words and stories. Rather than representing the survivors’ life experiences, Simon emphasises their stories, their words, and their accounts. The President’s emphasis on survivor stories does not focus on what may have occurred at MSU in the past but rather focuses on the present moment in which survivors tell stories through their individual perspectives. On social media, Simon is criticised for not listening to the survivors, despite her focus on their words. However, the emphasis on present storytelling, as opposed to survivors’ past lived experiences, may also be interpreted by survivors as insensitive when considered alongside survivor expectations that Simon acknowledge the abuse they suffered.

**Pronouns: Simon refers to herself as “you” and “I”**

Simon’s 17 January statements, analysed for pronouns by asking, “How are pronouns used and are presidents or constituents presented as nouns or pronouns?”, include an atypical usage of the second-person pronoun in which the President refers to herself as “you”. Simon uses the second-person pronoun to discuss the trust placed in Nassar (italics added):

> It's a challenge of trust and how you go below that level of trust and you listen and hear. And, in the case of medical procedures, those are ones that, if you're president, there's a lot of space between you and what happens in a clinic (Wolcott, 2018c).

In this statement, Simon describes the President’s distance from what occurs in a clinic. Instead of stating, “As President, I trusted…”, she uses the second-person
pronoun to speak hypothetically about what “you” as a President might do, even though there is only one President in this exchange: Simon. Also, using the first-person singular, Simon describes her response to hearing the testimonies as (italics added): “very, very painful if I were not the president of Michigan State” (Shamus, 2018a). This phrase signals a difference between the response of the “President” and the response Simon might have if she were not President but exposed to the survivors’ testimonies, suggesting that the survivor’s experiences are difficult to hear no matter one’s involvement or perspective. Simon’s pronouns shift the President from “I” to “you” in these statements. Simon’s shifting pronouns may serve to encourage the listener to imagine their response if they were in Simon’s position. Alternatively, Simon’s use of “you” to refer to the MSU president and “If I were not the president” almost disassociates Simon from the presidency.

**Relationship disruption and action: Simon and Nassar**

Simon’s 17 January statements also disrupt the relationship between President and Nassar, identified by asking “What relationships are created between presidents and constituents?” and “What relationships or social relations between presidents and constituents are enacted?”. The President defines Nassar as unworthy of calling himself a member of the University community and out of step with the University’s values (Shamus, 2018c), breaking the relational connection between them by projecting an image of Nassar as outside the community. Simon also describes decisive action she took when learning of Nassar’s abuse, "I fired him the day I knew about it" (Wolcott, 2018c), thereby emphasising the social relationship she enacted with Nassar of employer-employee and the specific past action of terminating his employment contract.
Constituent relationships, pronouns, and nouns: Simon and news journalists

Simon’s 17 January statements, examined using a combination of discourse analysis questions, “Who is included, excluded, foregrounded, or backgrounded?”, “Who is presented personally or impersonally”, “How are pronouns used and are presidents or constituents presented as nouns or pronouns?”, and “What relationships are created between presidents and constituents?”, suggest a relationship involving the President and news media journalists at the hearing. Simon represents news reporters who approach her at Nassar’s trial impersonally by using the second-person pronoun combined with the noun “guys” (italics added):

  "I came in today, and I didn’t want to be a disruption, but you guys are, you guys are reinforcing my view that I am a disruption for a process that is for the victims and the survivors and not about us at Michigan State today," Simon said (Shamus, 2018a).

On the day she attends the hearing, Simon’s pre-resignation communications include a rationale for not attending previously, indicating that her attendance is disruptive and the focus should be on listening to the survivors’ impact statements (Mencarini, 2018d; Shamus, 2018a), rather than seeking comment from Simon. President Simon represents her presence at the hearing as “oppressive” (Shamus, 2018a). The President suggests media attention enhances the disruption originating in her “oppressive” presence. Through this characterisation of journalist relationships with the President, Simon negatively recasts relationships between her and journalists seeking comment by criticising the media for engaging her and allegedly increasing the level of disruption she causes at the hearing. The President’s use of second-person pronouns with the media projects a separation from journalists: rather than using “we” or “our” to describe the President and others in the courtroom, e.g., “our conversation is disruptive”, Simon describes journalists as “you” in contrast to her first-person
singular “I” and also plural “us” to describe Simon and others at MSU. Using “you” to refer to journalists underscores Simon’s suggestion that the media may be blamed for increasing Simon’s disruption at the hearing.

**Constituent relationships and action: Academic staff advise Simon**

Using the questions outlined above that identified evidence of the President’s relationship with journalists, I determined that Simon’s 17 January statements also include evidence of academic staff relationships involving the President. Academic staff are represented impersonally by Simon, rather than by name, with reference to their research into sexual abuse: “my faculty [academic staff] members who deal with these kinds of issues and research them” (Shamus, 2018a). Simon describes her concern that she could be an “oppressive presence” who could distract survivors from telling their stories, which she attributes to advice received from academic staff (Shamus, 2018a). As such, Simon describes advisory relationships involving academic staff, signalling a connection to this important constituency.

**17 January: Discourse analysis of Twitter responses to Simon**

**Relationships: Simon’s connections with key constituents**

After asking the discourse analysis questions of 17 January tweets “What relationships are created between presidents and constituents?”, I identified possible answers based on constituent responses that portray the President as isolated and distant from key constituents with whom Simon should be connected, as well as continued calls for the President’s removal or resignation. One Tweet positions President Simon apart from survivors, suggesting that Simon needs “to get on the side of the victims, make them whole, and make sure this never happens again”. President Simon’s communications with survivors are also characterised on Twitter as “distant”, largely due to a number of Tweets
including Shamus’ (2018b, 2018c) news article entitled ‘Simon’s apology to Nassar’s victims rings holly, and distant’. A Twitter user criticises “Lou Anna Simon’s distance from this horrific Dr. Nassar scandal” and another tweet labels President Simon as “a coward trying to distance herself from this”. Twitter users continue commenting on Simon’s absence on the first day of the hearing, emphasising her disconnectedness from the initial survivor testimony.

In contrast, many tweets, most of which are posted by journalists, highlight President Simon’s relationships to survivors and journalists by highlighting Simon’s attendance at the second day of survivor testimony (17 January). Twitter users indicate she speaks with news media journalists during a break in the proceedings. While noting Simon’s presence, tweets also describe President Simon’s position in the courtroom: she sits in the back of the room, which suggests distance in her relationships with other constituents at the hearing even while being present.

On 17 January survivors criticise Simon at the hearing for not knowing their names, suggesting that Simon’s relationships with survivors are viewed as tenuous. For example, survivor Lemke (2018c) tweets (Figure 62):

![Figure 62: 17 January tweet posted by Lemke (Hull) (2018c)](image-url)
Journalist Mal Weil (2018) also recounts an exchange between President Simon and a survivor in the courtroom (Figure 63):

![Figure 63: 17 January tweet by Mal Weil (2018)](image)

In Simon’s statements throughout the episode, the President describes the women impacted by Nassar’s abuse impersonally and without specificity as “victims” or “survivors”, rather than using survivors’ names. During analysis, I did not find Simon referring to survivors as individuals or naming any single survivor, despite many survivors identifying themselves when denouncing Nassar (Mencarini, 2018e). Many women who testify in the trial share their identities, thereby eschewing anonymity and survivors use their names on social media to raise awareness of the trial. Survivors also emphasise the importance of sharing their names in testimony by calling out the choice to reject anonymity, “We are Jane Does [anonymous people] no more” (Levenson, 2018), and affirming identity: “I am a name. I am a real person” (Grinberg & Yan, 2018).

**Actions: Withholding and communicating ineffectively**

Analysis of 17 January tweets for actions involving relationships between Simon and constituents suggests President Simon’s statements may also be interpreted as withholding information and communicating ineffectively. One Twitter user suggests that “so many people knew of the allegations [against Nassar], including
Lou Anna Simon”, which suggests that Simon withheld information from investigators and law enforcement officers regarding Nassar’s misconduct. Another tweet claims President Simon’s use of the second-person pronoun described above renders her apology ineffective: “Saying “You have to be horrified and extremely sorry...” [sic] is not the same as saying that you are”. Tweets that re-circulate Shamus’ news article title, ‘MSU’s Lou Anna Simon’s apology to Nassar’s victims rings hollow…’, similarly suggest that the President’s apology is ineffective.

**Thursday 18 January: Survivor testimony continues while politicians and students call for President Simon’s removal**

In 18 January (Figure 64) data, possible constituent influence on President Simon is observed and Tweets attribute actions and traits to the President that portray Simon as experiencing relationship difficulties. Representatives of the judicial branch of government, elected political officials, and the governing board are identified as potentially, publicly influencing presidential leadership on 18 January. Students renew calls for President Simon’s resignation publicly and directly. President Simon communicates publicly, but not about the crisis, while Twitter users criticise the President’s actions and statements.

Judge Aquilina, who presides over Nassar’s sentencing hearing, shapes the trajectory of the episode by enabling survivor testimony. Judge Aquilina’s commentary during the hearing affirms that Nassar deserves punishment. On 18 January, Greene (2018) reports that Aquilina says Nassar “will never be free” and "the next judge he faces will be God". Moreover, on 18 January, Aquilina begins the day of testimony by dismissing a letter submitted to the court by Nassar in which he claims his health will not withstand the hearing, about which the Judge comments: “Spending four or five days listening to them is minor, considering the
Two weeks until resignation

MSU asks for lawsuits to be dismissed

Survivor testimony against Nassar begins

President views live stream of testimony

Social media surges

News media investigation claims MSU officials knew of

Trustee Foster attends hearing

President attends hearing and speaks to news media

Elected politicians begin calling for President’s removal

Student newspaper publishes editorial and cover “President Simon, RESIGN”

President resigns

Figure 64: 18 January 2018, 7 days before President Simon's resignation
hours of pleasure you've had at their expense, ruining their lives" (Householder & White, 2018).

18 January: Elected political officials call for Simon's removal and questions emerge regarding non-disclosure of information

On 18 January, politicians call for Simon’s removal and advocate for further investigation into the events, culture, and systems that led to Nassar’s unchecked abuse. Legislators, elected political officials serving in the state-level governing legislature comprised of two chambers, the Senate and the House of Representatives (State of Michigan, nd), make public statements critical of Simon’s leadership and urge the President’s resignation or termination.

Representative Sam Singh and Senator Curtis Hertel Jr, issue a joint statement (College Media Network, 2018b; Hinkley, 2018b; Lacy & Wolcott, 2018a; O’Connor, 2018b). Singh says: "It is clear that a lack of leadership amongst Michigan State University's highest ranks allowed victims to suffer in silence for far too long" (Householder & White, 2018). Singh and Hertel add: "We owe it to every survivor who had to endure this horrific torture to not only bring justice to the perpetrator, but also ensure that changes are made at the university to prevent this from ever happening again" (Hinkley, 2018b). Senators Arlan Meekhof and Jim Ananich also issue a joint statement (Hinkley, 2018b; Lacy & Wolcott, 2018a), which asserts:

In light of recent news, it is clear that the Michigan State University Board of Trustees should act swiftly to remove President Simon from her position at MSU…The Senate has lost confidence in President Simon's ability to lead one of our state's finest universities. The MSU community deserves better from its leadership (Hinkley, 2018b)

On 18 January, Senators Margaret O'Brien and Rick Jones also call for Simon to resign (Evans, 2018).
Also on 18 January, journalists question Simon’s decisions regarding non-disclosure of documents. As a government institution, MSU is expected to operate transparently under FOI law. Specifically, in an article published in multiple news outlets on 17 and 18 January, also circulated on Twitter, Shamus (2018a) critiques Simon’s non-disclosure of an investigation into Nassar’s sexual misconduct and suggests that the current crisis necessitates a high degree of transparency to restore trust in MSU. Legislators also advocate for MSU to increase transparency, with one journalist reporting that elected political officials seek to exert power by withholding government funding allocations from MSU to “get answers out of the university” (Hinkley, 2018b).

MSU Trustees, who are also elected officials, continue to affirm their confidence in President Simon on 18 January. An MSU employee speaks on behalf of the Trustees, noting that the Board has listened to the opinions of elected political officials but remains supportive of President Simon (Householder & White, 2018).

**18 January: Student newspaper demands “President Simon: Resign”**

Echoing MSU students and alumni survivors who testify and ask for Simon’s resignation, on 18 January student journalists vigorously advocate for Simon’s tenure to end. The MSU student newspaper publishes an editorial calling for the President to resign and alleging that Simon has not listened to survivors (The State News Editorial Board, 2018). The full-page cover issues a directive: “President Simon, RESIGN. For survivors and MSU to move on, you need to move on” (The State News Editorial Board, 2018).

**18 January: Discourse analysis of Twitter response to Simon**

Tweets posted on 18 January include calls for Simon’s tenure to end, while associating traits with Simon’s identity likely to be negatively perceived by constituents. Twitter users also emphasise calls issued by elected political
officials. State Representative Singh (2018) uses Twitter to share his request for Simon’s resignation. The student newspaper editorial asking for Simon’s resignation features in tweets posted on 18 January. In contrast, President Simon’s ongoing endorsement by the Trustees is also observed in tweets posted on 18 January.

Presidential identities: Attributed cowardice, separation from society, and insensitivity

The discourse analysis question focused on presidential identities “What traits and life histories are identified with the leader?” asked of 18 January tweets enabled me to identify constituents associating a lack of courage with Simon, while portraying the President as cast out or isolated from society or community. Survivor Lindsey Lemke’s prior characterisation of President Simon as a coward is repeated by Twitter users. Tweets portray President Simon as isolated by suggesting “the walls are closing in on Lou Anna Simon at Michigan State” (Andy Thomason is the Dreaded Laramie, 2018) and projecting Simon’s future barred from society, either in prison or in hell. On 18 January, Lemke (2018f) affirms her own role in the MSU community, while suggesting that Simon is no longer a member of that social group by referring to the MSU mascot, the Spartan (Figure 65):

Figure 65: 18 January tweet posted by Lemke (Hull) (2018f)
Tweets on 18 January suggest that constituents continue to interpret President Simon’s actions and statements as insensitive. As noted above, Shamus’ (2018a) article, which claims Simon lacks empathy, is circulated on Twitter. Tweets quote Lemke’s testimony, reinforcing a view that President Simon’s actions and statements provoke anger in survivors of Nassar’s abuse. One Twitter user even claims Simon “silenced other sexual assault and rape victims on campus”.

**Friday 19 January: MSU’s Board meets and affirms support for President Simon, while others call for Simon’s removal**

Six days before Simon’s resignation on 19 January (Figure 66), survivors, politicians, trustees, students, academic staff, and other staff endeavour to influence presidential leadership and shape public perceptions of Simon, while presidential communications and constituent response continue to associate traits, key relationships, and actions with Simon. Simon issues an official statement on 19 January via email to MSU academic and other staff (Staff Reports, 2018b) and constituent response on Twitter continues.

**19 January: Survivors continue to criticise President Simon**

Survivors testifying at Nassar’s sentencing hearing continue to direct their criticism at the President. Simon’s absence from the hearing, which continues on 19 January, draws further critique. For example, survivor Alexis Alvarado states: “Lou Anna Simon: Why are you not here…I do not want to hear another bullshit excuse from you” (Sherry, 2018).
Figure 66: 19 January, MSU’s Board Meets and Affirms Support for President Simon, while others Call for Simon’s Removal

- **External Constituents**
  - Survivors testify against Nassar
  - News media investigate claims MSU officials knew of abuse
  - Elected politicians begin calling for President's removal

- **Governing Board**
  - President views live stream of testimony
  - Trustee Foster attends hearing
  - Trustees meet and affirm support for Simon

- **President**
  - Two weeks until resignation
  - MSU asks for lawsuits to be dismissed
  - President attends hearing and speaks to news media
  - Judge adjourns sentencing hearing for weekend
  - Students publish editorial and cover "President Simon, RESIGN"

- **Internal Constituents**
  - News media investigation claims MSU officials knew of abuse

**Figure 66: 19 January 2018, 6 days before President Simon's resignation**
19 January: Elected political officials advocate for President Simon’s end of tenure

On 19 January, elected political officials call for an investigation into MSU’s response to Nassar’s abuse, as well as continue to ask publicly for Simon’s removal or resignation. Representative Tom Leonard calls for Simon’s resignation and an investigation into MSU’s actions in handling complaints about Nassar (Lacy & Wolcott, 2018a). Leonard is a candidate for AG. Gretchen Whitmer, a former elected official, MSU graduate, and a former prosecutor, also issues a public request for Simon’s resignation (Hinkley, 2018b). On 19 January, an elected Michigan state political official also proposes a budget amendment that would require universities to report on legal fees (Lacy & Wolcott, 2018a), which are anticipated to be significant following multiple lawsuits filed by survivors against MSU. State-level Representative Klint Kesto, chair of a legislative subcommittee on higher education funding allocations, says:

We're gonna look at why, when people were told and notified of these heinous crimes and these heinous actions, that nobody did anything about it...We're going to get transparency and we're going to get accountability, for the Legislature, for the people of Michigan, and most importantly, for the victims (Lacy & Wolcott, 2018a).

Following a request filed by a regional newspaper, Michigan Governor Rick Snyder avoids comment on whether Simon should remain as MSU President, while a Governor’s office representative reports that Snyder views decisions regarding President Simon’s continued employment as the responsibility of the Trustees (Hinkley, 2018b). The Governor in Michigan, like other states, is elected by citizens and serves as the chief executive officer of the state (National Governors Association, nd).
19 January: MSU Trustees meet in closed session and when finished endorse Simon’s leadership

On 19 January, MSU Trustees meet for a five-hour working session closed to the public (Lacy & Wolcott, 2018a; Michigan Daily, 2018). The private session contrasts with typical board meetings at government institutions required to conduct business in the open under FOI laws. Simon attends part of the Board meeting and Trustees indicate that they will meet again before the Board’s next scheduled meeting on 16 February 2018 (Jesse & Lacy, 2018a). At the end of the meeting, the Board issues a joint statement, which is read by Chair Breslin, affirming the Trustees’ support for President Simon (Jesse & Lacy, 2018a, 2018b; Lacy & Wolcott, 2018a, 2018b; Michigan Daily, 2018). In the statement, Breslin also acknowledges that the Board has been perceived as inactive and lacking in sensitivity to the survivors (Jesse & Lacy, 2018a, 2018b; Lacy & Wolcott, 2018a, 2018b; Staff Reports, 2018b). Journalists report that the Trustees discuss a succession plan for Simon in the closed session (Jesse, 2018a). Social media users also report this allegation, which is confirmed by a trustee (Jesse, 2018a).

On 19 January, journalists also report that the Trustees ask the AG to conduct an independent review of MSU’s handling of Nassar (Brown & Zamudio-Suaréz, 2018; Hobson, 2018a; Lacy & Wolcott, 2018a; Pearce, 2018; O’Connor, 2018c), and Chair Breslin states: “we will retain independent external assistance to support our responsibilities to the university community and the public at large” (Lacy & Wolcott, 2018a).

The Trustees’ confidence in President Simon provokes prompt, negative responses in the news media and on social media, as discussed below. For example, a current student states: "I'm angry…did the board not listen to what was being said in court? How can they say they heard the victims and then decide to keep her? We need complete new leadership" (Lacy & Wolcott, 2018a).
A prominent survivor, Rachael Denhollander, calls the Board’s support for Simon “appalling” (Lacy & Wolcott, 2018b).

**19 January: MSU student government publicly states loss of confidence in President Simon**

On 19 January, the University’s student government, the Associated Students of MSU, advance and approve a resolution stating: “we, as undergraduate students, no longer have the faith and confidence in the current administration of Michigan State University to carry out the duties of fostering a safe and secure campus atmosphere” (Lacy & Wolcott, 2018a). Students are disheartened that Simon maintains the Trustees’ support, which is characterised as the Board’s disconnection from students (Brown & Zamudio-Suaréz, 2018). Student government leadership suggests that the Trustees’ confidence in the President will catalyse protests staged by students who feel unheard by MSU leadership (Brown & Zamudio-Suaréz, 2018).

**19 January: Academic staff support and condemn Simon**

In an article published by *The Chronicle of Higher Education* on 19 January, MSU academic staff both support Simon and condemn the President. For instance, one academic staff member quoted in the article affirms President Simon’s “proven track record of supporting women at MSU”, adding that “I am confident that President Simon can lead the university through this maze of accusations, rumors [sic], and conflicting stories.” (Brown & Zamudio-Suaréz, 2018). Another academic staff member hopes a no-confidence vote in Simon will soon be forthcoming from academic staff (Brown & Zamudio-Suaréz, 2018).

**19 January: Prominent MSU coaches endorse Simon**

MSU staff, namely a university sports team coach, endorse Simon publicly on 19 January. MSU men’s basketball coach Tom Izzo affirms his confidence in
President Simon (Crawford, 2018; Harrison, 2018), which garners critique. Izzo describes his continued support of Simon, while emphasising the length of the President’s tenure at MSU "I have the utmost—the utmost—faith and respect for the leadership of our president, too, at Michigan State. That's a woman who has dedicated over 40 years—and I've been here 33 with her, and I think I know what she stands for" (Crawford, 2018).

19 January: Discourse analysis of President Simon’s statements
Simon’s 19 January statements, following analyses using questions in the protocol, “What traits and life histories are identified with the leader?” and “What relationships are created between presidents and constituents?”, were found to present traits associated with Simon and relationships involving the President, the Trustees, and other supporters. Illustrative answers to the discourse analysis questions identified by examining the President’s 19 January statements are described in the following sections.

Presidential identities: Risk manager, (in)sensitive to survivors
Simon’s statements on 19 January mitigate risk for the President and for the University, thereby portraying her as a risk manager, and yet may also be interpreted as evidence of insensitivity. Simon communicates directly about this interpretation in a 19 January official statement:

Simon addressed MSU’s recent motions to dismiss Nassar-related lawsuits against the university "for a number of arguments." MSU claims they are not legally responsible for Nassar’s actions, according to court documents.

“Given Nassar’s horrendous acts, these arguments can seem disrespectful to the victims…Please know that the defenses [sic] raised on MSU’s behalf are in no way a reflection of our view of the survivors, for whom we have the utmost respect and sympathy, but rather represent, as the Board has said, our desire ‘to protect MSU’s educational and research missions.’”
Simon said MSU is entitled to and required by its insurers to an "appropriate" defense [sic] of these cases, and that the actions of MSU's lawyers are typical at this stage of civil litigation.

"So, as the litigation progresses in the months ahead, you will likely continue to hear a variety of allegations and accusations against the university," Simon wrote. "I ask for your patience as well as your understanding that MSU cannot litigate the cases in the media and that many public assertions may go unchallenged unless or until they are addressed in open court." (Staff Reports, 2018b).

Furthermore, President Simon reiterates the results of an investigation into Nassar's conduct: "The FBI, in cooperation with the MSU Police Department, conducted an investigation earlier this year into whether any university employee engaged in criminal conduct relating to Nassar's actions; there were no charges filed" (Ly & Gast, 2018). The orientation to mitigating legal liability in this communication may be interpreted by constituents as insensitive to survivors' experiences, which Simon even highlights as she explains that MSU's legal defence is not intended to disrespect survivors. Even so, the President’s steadfast adherence to the results of the prior investigation coupled with MSU's legal defence, which suggests the University should be immune from liability, stands in stark contrast to survivors' testimony and growing public opinion that MSU and Simon failed to prevent Nassar's sexual abuse and should be held accountable.

On 19 January President Simon expresses sensitivity to survivors in her official statement, indicating that “the testimony of Nassar's victims this week made many of us, including me, listen to the survivors and the community in a different way" (Korn, 2018), and expressing “utmost respect and sympathy” (Staff Reports, 2018b) for survivors. Simon reiterates MSU’s establishment of a $10 million fund for counselling and mental health support for survivors (Ly & Gast, 2018).
The President’s 19 January statement also may be interpreted as an attempt to control. Simon asserts in the same communication: “MSU cannot litigate the cases in the media and that many public assertions may go unchallenged unless or until they are addressed in open court” (Staff Reports, 2018b). The communication attempts to control the “trial” of MSU by repositioning the discussion in a legal setting, even though many people make “public assertions” about the culpability of Simon and MSU “in the media” (Staff Reports, 2018b).

**Relationships: Simon, the Trustees, and other supporters**
Whereas Simon’s prior statements and constituent response emphasise the President’s disconnectedness from other people, Simon’s statement issued via email on 19 January suggests she maintains a network of support, including the Trustees. President Simon asserts:

> I continue to appreciate the confidence of the board and the many people who have reached out to me, and to them, who have the best interests of MSU at heart. I have always done my best to lead MSU, and I will continue to do so today and tomorrow (College Media Network, 2018a).

**19 January: Discourse analysis of Twitter responses to Simon**

**Presidential identities: Unfit to remain, isolated, absent, insensitive, and cowardly**
19 January tweets include interpretations of Simon as unfit to remain at MSU, isolated, and absent, which were identified by asking “What traits and life histories are identified with the leader?” of the constituent responses. Prominent survivor Lemke emphatically demands the end of Simon’s tenure (Figure 67). Other tweets suggesting Simon is not fit to continue as president include references to calls for Simon’s removal or resignation made by elected political officials serving in the Michigan Legislature, journalists, and students, while
consultant Dennis Lennox (2018b) tweets (Figure 68) that Governor Snyder has the legal authority, according to Michigan’s constitution, to remove the President:

A Twitter user isolates the Board and Simon, stating that: “The trustees at MSU may back Lou Anna Simon but nobody else does”. Like Lemke’s Tweet on 18 January, a Tweet posted on 19 January asserts Simon “is not a Spartan”.

Criticism of Simon’s absence from the hearing continues to be posted by Twitter
users on 19 January, including references to Boyce’s claim that the President said she was too busy to hear testimony in person and Alvarado’s pointed question during testimony aimed at Simon asking why she is absent.

The discourse analysis question designed to examine presidential traits and life histories also yielded interpretations of 19 January tweets that portray Simon as insensitive and cowardly. One tweet claims President Simon created “a poisonous environment for women on campus”. Survivor Alexis Alvarado (2018) reinforces critique of President Simon initially posted on 17 January when Simon visited the hearing (Figure 69):

Figure 69: 19 January tweet posted by Alvarado (2018)

Alvarado’s tweet interprets Simon as insensitive by highlighting the President’s alleged lack of knowledge of survivor names. A characterisation of Simon as ‘cowardly’ is also reinforced in another tweet posted.

Actions: Withholding information and communicating ineffectively

By asking the discourse analysis question “What is the action present in the words involving relationships between the president and constituents?”, I identified tweets posted on 19 January in which constituents interpret President Simon’s actions as evidence she withholds critical information. One Twitter user claims President Simon protects other culpable people by withholding information: “Lou Anna Simon did not get fired yesterday because there is a sea of people being protected behind her. The truth will come out, and you will all be
shamed”. Tweets also reinforce claims that eight survivors previously reported Nassar and 14 MSU employees knew about his abuse, including Simon.

Tweets posted on 19 January also portray Simon as communicating ineffectively. For example, one Twitter user responds with anger to Simon’s official statement sent via email on 19 January to academic and other essential staff, which the user labels as “bullshit”. One user who claims to be a former student tweets:

Lou Anna Simon championed her “see something, say something” campaign when I was a student at MSU. Yet, when girls did just that, SAY SOMETHING, Lou Anna turned a blind eye. There's no greater hypocrisy! For MSU’s Board to back her is an INSULT to the victims, an INSULT to us ALL.

This tweet suggests that President Simon’s public communications about sexual assault do not align with the President’s response to reported abuse. Lemke (2018b), retweeting (Figure 70) an acknowledgement by UCLA Gymnastics of Jordyn Wieber who testifies on 19 January, also characterises Simon’s actions as communicating ineffectively, stating:

![Tweet by Lindsey Hull](image)

Figure 70: 19 January tweet by Lemke (Hull) (2018b)

In this Tweet, Lemke interprets Simon’s attempts to represent survivors as ineffective: the President failed to listen to survivors and then speak on their behalf, in contrast to UCLA Gymnastics acknowledgement of Wieber.

**Saturday 20 January: MSU Trustee Lyons calls for Simon’s resignation while remaining trustees stand behind the President**

On Saturday 20 January (Figure 71), a Trustee publicly asks Simon to resign. Tweets posted on 20 January continue to portray Simon’s relationships as
Two weeks until resignation

MSU asks for lawsuits to be dismissed

Survivor testimony against Nassar begins
News media investigation claims MSU officials knew of abuse
Social media surges

Board Chair Breslin views live stream of testimony

President attends hearing and speaks to news media
Student newspaper publishes editorial and cover "President Simon, RESIGN"
Student government expresses lack of confidence in leadership

Judge adjourns sentencing hearing for weekend

Trustee Lyons publicly calls for President's resignation

Board reaffirms support for President

President resigns
challenged, similar to tweets described above, while contrasting evidence is also posted on 20 January. President Simon is not observed communicating in data published or posted on 20 January. Online petitions are launched and circulated via Twitter calling for the end of the President’s tenure (Eberhard, 2018; Huston, 2018).

20 January: Trustee Lyons calls publicly for Simon’s immediate resignation
On 20 January, the day after the Trustees collectively endorse Simon’s continued leadership, Trustee Mitch Lyons individually calls for Simon to resign immediately (Brown & Zamudio-Suaréz, 2018; College Media Network, 2018a; Erdley, 2018; Jaschik, 2018a; Jesse & Lacy, 2018a; Ryan & Hiyama, 2018; Stevens, 2018). Lyons states that the loss of public confidence in Simon is irrecoverable (Ly & Gast, 2018; Martin, 2018). Trustee Lyons asserts that he does not believe that Simon has committed a crime or intentionally acted to conceal unethical actions, but views MSU’s capacity for accountability as compromised under Simon’s leadership (Ly & Gast, 2018; Ryan & Hiyama, 2018). Lyons does not believe Simon “can survive the public outcry that has been generated by this tragedy and even less so after hearing the testimony of these brave survivors of Larry Nassar’s abuse” (Brown & Zamudio-Suaréz, 2018; College Media Network, 2018a; Erdley, 2018; Stevens, 2018). Trustee Lyons indicates that this is not a personal attack on Simon, adding that her legacy at MSU is significant (Staff Reports, 2018a). Lyons also speaks publicly about the board meeting, claiming that most of the five-hour meeting focused on the crisis and reporting that he expressed doubt during the meeting about Simon’s continued leadership (Jesse, 2018a). By the evening, the remaining seven trustees issue another statement of support for Simon’s leadership, attributed to Chair Breslin (Jesse & Lacy, 2018a, 2018b; Mencarini, 2018a). In the statement, Breslin acknowledges Lyons’ request
and reiterates the Trustees’ endorsement of 19 January, asserting that “all of the other trustees continue to support President Simon” (Mencarini, 2018a). Breslin adds: “We look forward to a prompt and thorough investigation by the Michigan Attorney General’s Office to help reassure the public that the university and its leadership have nothing to hide” (Mencarini, 2018a) and reaffirms the position that “no [MSU] official believed that Nassar committed sexual abuse prior to newspaper reports in the summer of 2016” (Mencarini, 2018a).

**Sunday 21 January: Remaining MSU trustees affirm support for President Simon, while regional news media renew calls for Simon to resign or be removed**

On Sunday, 21 January (Figure 72), the governing board and journalists continue attempting to influence President Simon’s leadership, while online, tweets sustain and promulgate interpretations of the President as isolated and disconnected. The Lansing State Journal reiterates the newspaper’s prior public call for Simon to resign published in December 2017 due to “a lack of leadership, not just on the Nassar case but because of broad problems with the university's handling of sexual assault and harassment on campus—policies so bungled that the US Department of Education officials said they created a sexually hostile environment on the campus” (Lansing State Journal, 2018b). After Trustee Lyons’ public call for Simon’s resignation on Saturday, other trustees continue to affirm the Board’s support for the President.

**21 January: Other trustees counter Lyons’ call for President Simon to resign**

Trustee Lyons’ call for Simon’s resignation on Saturday generates interest amongst news media in the remaining seven trustees’ views on Simon’s leadership. Jesse and Lacy (2018a) report that the rest of the Board supports
Two weeks until resignation

MSU asks for lawsuits to be dismissed

Survivor testimony against Nassar begins

President views live stream of testimony

Board Chair Breslin views live stream of testimony

President attends hearing and speaks to news media

Student newspaper publishes editorial and cover "President Simon, RESIGN"

Trustee Foster attends hearing

Trustee Foster affirms Board support

President resigns

Figure 72: 21 January 2018, 4 days before President Simon’s resignation
President Simon. Trustee Melanie Foster says of the Board’s support for Simon on Sunday: “I strongly believe that the seven of us are unified” (Jesse & Lacy, 2018a). Jesse and Lacy seek comment from other trustees regarding their views on President Simon. Trustee Dan Kelly refrains from commenting (Jesse & Lacy, 2018a). Trustee Perles, a former MSU American football coach (Crain’s Detroit Business, 2018), when asked about his own support for Simon and the Trustees’ endorsement of the President, offers no individual commentary but indicates that he remains committed to endorsing Simon as expressed by Chair Breslin on behalf of the full board (Jesse & Lacy, 2018a, 2018b).

21 January: Discourse analysis of Twitter response to Simon
On 21 January, constituent response on Twitter continues to interpret President Simon’s continued leadership negatively, associating traits identified above with Simon, especially isolation and lack of fitness to continue leading. One tweet isolates Simon by claiming the President is not a representative of MSU students: “Lou Anna Simon doesn’t represent MSU. Those supporting Lou do not represent MSU. MSU is the 39000+ students enrolled”. Tweets circulate and reemphasise Trustee Lyons’ public request for Simon’s resignation, which projects Simon’s disconnection from the MSU community. In contrast, other Twitter users report the confidence Simon maintains amongst the remaining seven trustees and emphasise statements of support made by coaches Tom Izzo and Mark Dantonio. Lacy (2018), a journalist, tweets about a phone call with Trustee Joel Ferguson, who expresses unwavering support for President Simon to Lacy. One Twitter user questions the Board’s continued belief in the President’s leadership:

Setting aside the kind of fantasy world you’d have to be living in to think that Lou Anna Simon could possibly be the best person to lead #MSU forward, how can an elected official [trustee] be thinking, ‘Boy, now seems like a good time to express our support for Lou Anna Simon’.

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Monday 22 January: Survivor testimony resumes, students seek leadership transition, and Trustee Ferguson speaks for President Simon

On Monday 22 January (Figure 73), three days before Simon’s resignation, the President’s leadership is potentially influenced by survivors, news media, elected political officials, governing board members, and by students, while Twitter users continue critiquing Simon and pressing for removal or resignation. Survivor testimony against Nassar continues on 22 January, during which survivors share interpretations of President Simon in their statements (Ly & Gast, 2018). News journalists report on proliferating, emphatic calls for Simon’s removal or resignation (Ly & Gast, 2018). Michigan’s Governor is petitioned to remove Simon (Egan, 2018). Trustee Joel Ferguson speaks in support of the President (Manzullo, 2018; Terada & Murdock, 2018), which provokes significant critique from survivors and other constituents, subsequently prompting Ferguson to apologise (Jesse, 2018a; Terada & Murdock, 2018). Journalists report statements made by Simon conveying concern for survivors, but tweets suggest that negative interpretations of the President’s actions and communications proliferate.

22 January: Survivor testimony continues to address President Simon

On 22 January, survivors resume criticism of President Simon during testimony. Survivor Clasina Syrovy labels Simon’s behaviour cowardly, highlights the President’s lack of attendance at the hearings, and suggests Simon should resign:

I would like to call out Lou Anna Simon, for her cowardly behavior [sic] ... [Simon] doesn’t deserve to hold the title of MSU president. Her recent behavior [sic] and comments are a joke. The least she could do is step down from her position and show us a little
Figure 73: 22 January, Survivor Testimony Resumes, Students Seek Leadership Transition, and Trustee Ferguson Speaks for President Simon

External Constituents | Governing Board | President | Internal Constituents
--- | --- | --- | ---
11-Jan | Two weeks until resignation | | 
12-Jan | MSU asks for lawsuits to be dismissed | | 
13-Jan | | | 
14-Jan | | | 
15-Jan | Survivor testimony against Nassar begins | Board Chair Breslin views live stream of testimony | 
16-Jan | News media investigation claims MSU officials knew of abuse | Trustee Foster attends hearing | 
17-Jan | Social media surges | President views live stream of testimony | 
18-Jan | Elected politicians begin calling for President's removal | Trustees meet and affirm support for Simon | 
19-Jan | Judge adjourns sentencing hearing for weekend | Trustee Lyons publicly calls for President's resignation | 
20-Jan | Regional news media renews call for President's resignation | Board reaffirms support for President | 
21-Jan | Sentencing hearing resumes survivor testimony | Trustee Foster affirms Board support | 
22-Jan | Michigan Governor petitioned to remove President | Radio journalist interviews Trustee Ferguson | 
23-Jan | | President resigns | 
24-Jan | | | 

Figure 73: 22 January 2018, 3 days before President Simon's resignation
courtesy… Her lack of attendance to these proceedings shows how much she really cares, sitting from the sidelines, being a bystander, just like she did while reports surfaced. She certainly isn’t showing any support for us (Ly & Gast, 2018).

Syrovy’s comments echo critique of Simon found in data discussed above, suggesting the President did not act, remaining apart as “a bystander”, as well as alleging that the President fails to show support for survivors.

22 January: Lennox petitions Michigan’s Governor Synder to remove Simon
On 22 January, political consultant Dennis Lennox, after tweeting on 19 January, petitions Michigan’s Governor Rick Snyder to remove President Simon from post (Egan, 2018; Gray, 2018; Lansing State Journal, 2018a; Lennox, 2018a; Lennox, 2018b; Press, 2018; WZZM13, 2018). Snyder’s office states that the Governor does not have the legal authority to do so (Egan, 2018), although a legal expert who specialises in Michigan’s constitution argues otherwise (Gongwer News Service, 2018b). The Governor’s office states that the authority for removing a president rests with the University’s trustees (Hinkley, 2018b). Notably, journalists report that the chair of the MSU board, Brian Breslin, is an employee of the Governor’s executive office during this episode (Hinkley, 2018b).

22 January: Crain’s criticises Michigan’s method for selecting university governing boards and the Trustees endorsing Simon
Crain’s (2018), a business publication based in Detroit, Michigan, criticise Michigan’s laws governing the appointment of trustees and the MSU Board. Crain’s (2018) call for the state’s Governor and the Legislature to change state law so that boards are appointed rather than elected in order to enhance the quality of appointees charged with overseeing government higher education institutions. Crain’s (2018) also question the Trustees’ motivations and their ability to exercise good judgement in the crisis. For example, Crain’s (2018)
identify the primary responsibilities of the board as hiring and, if needed, terminating the President and minimising risk to institutions, while suggesting the Board has failed in these duties. Crain’s (2018) also highlight board composition that may inhibit decisive action in contemporary matters involving sexual assault and university sport: two trustees are over 80 years old, one is a former football coach for MSU, and two others are former MSU football players. Crain’s explicitly ask Chair Breslin and Vice Chair Ferguson to resign (Crain’s Detroit Business, 2018).

22 January: Vice Chair Ferguson endorses Simon and subsequently apologises to survivors
Vice Chair Ferguson is interviewed on 22 January by a radio journalist (Manzullo, 2018; Terada & Murdock, 2018). In the interview Ferguson says: “There’s so many more things going on at this university than just this Nassar thing. …I mean, when you go to the basketball game, you walk into the new Breslin [sport centre] and the person who hustled and got all those major donors to give money was Lou Anna Simon” (Plaschke, 2018). Ferguson reiterates the Board’s support for Simon, describing her as “a fighter”, who has accomplished much for MSU, and as “the best president we’ve ever had” (Manzullo, 2018). In contrast to other Trustee accounts, Ferguson claims that only 10 minutes of the recent Board meeting involved discussing Simon’s presidency and describes the Board’s support in her continued leadership as unanimous (Manzullo, 2018). Trustee Lyons’ (Jesse, 2018a) and Trustee Mosallam’s post-meeting statements (Jesse, 2018a) contradict this claim. Unlike Lyons, Ferguson believes that Simon’s accomplishments will remain intact despite the public outcry (Manzullo, 2018). Ferguson places culpability for abuse suffered by survivors firmly with Nassar and asserts that senior leadership at MSU did not enable the abuse (Manzullo, 2018). Ferguson reports that donors and alumni have expressed support for
Simon during the crisis and the Board’s endorsement of the President’s leadership (Manzullo, 2018). Vice Chair Ferguson also alludes to payments to be made to survivors and suggests that Simon will continue to lead successfully once the survivors realise that Nassar acted alone (Manzullo, 2018).

Ferguson’s comments and endorsement of Simon are not well received, by fellow board member Trustee Byrum (Murphy, 2018; Gongwer News Service, 2018a; Strang, 2018), or by other constituents, prompting rapid, public requests for Ferguson’s resignation (Yan, 2018) and criticism of Ferguson for displaying insensitivity toward survivors. Ferguson’s emphasis on Simon’s talents and capacity for raising money, as well as his assertion that she will remain in post elicit negative reactions. One social media user suggests that Ferguson will be the object of future student protests. Rachael Denhollander, the survivor credited as leading others to speak up against Nassar (Macur, 2018), responds to Ferguson: “It’s nice to know that over 200 sexual assault victims rank below a basketball stadium” (Yan, 2018). Ferguson issues an apology stating that his comments were “inadvertent”, and expressing regret for minimising the survivors’ experiences (Jesse, 2018a; Terada & Murdock, 2018).

**22 January: Students plan protests to force President’s resignation**

Journalists begin reporting on 22 January that students plan to protest on 26 January to demand the President’s resignation (Anon, 2018b; Ly & Gast, 2018; Webber & Eggert, 2018; Zamudio-Suaréz, 2018a). The next day Webber and Eggert (2018) claim that “hundreds of students say they will march Friday to the school's administration building, calling on Simon to step down”.

**22 January: Simon publishes an apology**

On 22 January Simon’s public statements are few and brief. Simon says she heard the pain and suffering from survivors (Ly & Gast, 2018) and journalists
publish an apology attributed to Simon: "I am truly sorry for the pain his abuse caused and continues to cause. I have always led with passion and to the best of my abilities for Team MSU, and I will continue to do so for today and tomorrow." (Ly & Gast, 2018). Like statements made earlier in the episode, Simon’s communications may be interpreted as both connecting and distancing the President in key relationships, as well as expressing sensitivity and insensitivity, traits associated with Simon identified in analysis above. By apologising, Simon expresses sensitivity and care for survivors. By focusing on “his abuse”, the President creates distance between her action and Nassar’s.

22 January: Discourse analysis of Twitter response to Simon
Tweets produce and reproduce interpretations of President Simon’s identity and relationships, including isolation and disconnection from key constituents, while many tweets call for the end of Simon’s tenure, attributing a lack of fitness to continue leading. Survivor Syrovy’s testimony is highlighted by Twitter users who report Syrovy’s allegation that Simon has displayed cowardice. Syrovy’s characterisation of Simon as a “bystander” who is “sitting on the sidelines” again positions the President as disconnected from survivors and the crisis. Survivor Lemke (2018a) tweets again about President Simon on 22 January, highlighting her disconnectedness from the student athletes who suffered abuse by contrasting Simon’s appearance at another MSU team’s practice (Figure 74):

Figure 74: 22 January tweet posted by Lemke (Hull) (2018a)
Tuesday 23 January: Survivor testimony continues and academic staff begin no-confidence vote

On 23 January (Figure 75), the day before Simon resigns, pressure mounts on the President. Survivors continue to testify, the MSU governing board members continue to speak publicly, and the leading national association for university sport begins an investigation into MSU’s management of reports of Nassar’s abuse. Academic staff oppose Simon and initiate a no-confidence vote in the President. Simon’s communications are reported briefly by the media on 23 January, which increasingly suggest strained relationships. On Twitter, constituents reinforce and circulate a view of Simon that similarly suggests challenged presidential relationships.

23 January: Trustees are identified as responsible for President Simon’s employment and Trustee Mosallam apologises publicly

On 23 January, the MSU governing board’s potential influence on President Simon’s leadership is again evident. The governing board is identified as responsible for hiring and terminating MSU’s president (Egan, 2018). On 23 January, MSU Trustee Brian Mosallam posts to Twitter about the crisis and the recent board meeting (Jesse, 2018a). Mossallam offers a heartfelt apology for the suffering of survivors and for the Board’s lack of empathetic response, as well as emphasises that survivors should share their stories (Jesse, 2018a). Mossallam’s tweets confirm that the Board discussed a presidential succession plan during the Friday 19 January Trustees meeting (Jesse, 2018a). Also, Simon’s appointment in 2005 by the Trustees is described in the data, which notes that she assumed the post without an open, national recruitment process, eliciting critique at the time (Brown, 2018b).
Figure 75: 23 January, Survivor Testimony Continues and Academic Staff Begin No-Confidence Vote

External Constituents | Governing Board | President | Internal Constituents
---|---|---|---
11-Jan | | Two weeks until resignation | 
12-Jan | MSU asks for lawsuits to be dismissed | 
13-Jan | 
14-Jan | 
15-Jan | Survivor testimony against Nassar begins | Board Chair Breslin views live stream of testimony | 
16-Jan | Trustee Foster attends hearing | President views live stream of testimony | 
17-Jan | Social media surges | 
18-Jan | Elected politicians begin calling for President's removal | Trustees meet and affirm support for Simon | 
19-Jan | Judge adjourns sentencing hearing for weekend | Trustee Lyons publicly calls for President's resignation | 
20-Jan | Regional news media renews call for President's resignation | Board reaffirms support for President | 
21-Jan | Sentencing hearing resumes survivor testimony | Trustee Foster affirms Board support | 
22-Jan | Michigan Governor petitioned to remove President | Trustee Mosallam tweets about crisis | 
23-Jan | NCAA investigates MSU | 
24-Jan | 

Figure 75: 23 January 2018, day before President Simon's resignation
23 January: National Collegiate Athletic Association opens investigation into MSU’s handling of Nassar’s abuse

Also on 23 January, the NCAA, America’s largest and most influential governing body responsible for overseeing the well-being of American university student athletes (NCAA, 2015), launches an investigation into MSU’s handling of complaints about Nassar’s abuse, which is reported by the news media (CBS, 2018; The Daily Beast, 2018b; Tracy, 2018). Earlier in the episode, NCAA’s President Mark Emmert remains silent on the MSU crisis, indicating that he did not know enough to comment (Ryan, 2018).

23 January: Academic staff begin no-confidence vote in Simon

Journalists report on 23 January that two academic staff call for an emergency meeting of the University’s Faculty [academic staff] Senate, the internal governing body responsible for facilitating deliberation and input of academic staff in university affairs, with the intent of voting no confidence in President Simon (Brown, 2018b). MSU academic staff are organised into an Academic Congress of 2,200 members (Karimi & Sterling, 2018; Jesse, 2018a). On 24 January, prior to Simon’s resignation, reports suggest that the Senate intends to close voting on 27 January 2018 (Jesse, 2018a). Academic staff are also interviewed by journalists: one professor asserts that Simon’s resignation is necessary for MSU to “move on” (Jesse, 2018a).

23 January: President Simon asserts she did not withhold information, while declining to comment

On 23 January, news journalists report several statements made by Simon during the crisis. Simon declines to comment when asked about Nassar’s abuse: “those issues are points of dispute and part of civil litigation and I am not going to comment on” (Doyel, 2018). The President’s assertion that she did not receive a copy of the investigation into Nassar’s conduct previously is also reprinted on 23
January (Doyel, 2018). By declining to comment, Simon’s actions may be interpreted as withholding information although she is likely prohibited by legal counsel from publicly discussing the matter. In contrast, her claim that she did not know about Nassar’s conduct suggests that she did not withhold information.

**23 January: Discourse analysis of Twitter response to Simon**

23 January tweets provide additional interpretations of Simon as isolated and disconnected. One Twitter user suggests that Simon is “living in” a “fantasy world” apart from other people. Dennis Lennox, who asked the Governor to remove Simon from post, describes Simon’s attendance at an event in terms that isolate the President: “The elephant (or dare I say, Spartan) in the room at tonight’s #MISOTS18? #MSU president Lou Anna Simon” (Lennox, 2018c). Another Tweet isolates Simon by suggesting the President should be incarcerated. Simon is interpreted as disconnected, for example, in her absence from the MSU University Council meeting, where the Provost (CAO) provides a statement on Simon’s behalf (Wolcott, 2018b), and the President’s continued absence from Nassar’s hearing. Academic staff efforts to vote no confidence in Simon are reported on Twitter and the student protest intended to urge Simon’s resignation is also identified in Tweets posted on 23 January.

Constituents posting to Twitter on 23 January claim that Simon knew of Nassar’s abuse, thereby again suggesting that the President withholds information about Nassar’s abuse. One Tweet positions Simon’s past communications to the MSU academic and other essential staff in contrast to Simon’s approach to complaints about Nassar: “In 2012, Lou Anna Simon sent an email to 11,000 MSU employees that stated (in part) ... ‘you must report the alleged [sexual] assault’ ... to authorities. How’d that work out?”.
**Wednesday 24 January: Judge sentences Nassar and President Simon resigns**

The evening of Wednesday 24 January (Figure 76), after Nassar is sentenced, President Simon resigns (Grinberg & Yan, 2018; Haag & Tracy, 2018; Thomason, 2018). The presiding Judge Aquilina sentences Nassar to 40 to 175 years in prison and adds: "I've just signed your death warrant…I find that you don't get it, that you're a danger. That you remain a danger" (Levenson, 2018). 156 survivors of Nassar’s abuse testify in the week preceding the sentencing and Simon’s resignation (Grinberg & Yan, 2018; Levenson, 2018). On the day of, but prior to, Simon’s resignation, pressure continues to mount on the President. Elected political officials continue to ask for Simon’s removal or resignation. Trustee Byrum publicly encourages the end of Simon’s tenure. Finally, the President submits a resignation letter to the Board of Trustees which is published on the MSU website (Simon, 2018).

**24 January: Elected officials ask for President Simon to resign**

Elected political officials at the national and state levels join the calls to end Simon’s tenure. Two senators who represent the state of Michigan nationally in Congress, Debbie Stabenow and Gary Peters, publicly request Simon’s resignation (Hobson, 2018b; Targeted News Service, 2018b). Peters is identified as a graduate of MSU (Targeted News Service, 2018b). Jeanne Shaheen, a Senator from another state, New Hampshire, announces that she intends to ask national leadership in Congress to investigate how Nassar’s abuse occurred (Hobson, 2018b).

Prior to Simon’s resignation, the Michigan House of Representatives, a chamber of the Legislature, adopt a resolution calling for the President’s resignation, or, if
Figure 76: 24 January, Nassar is Sentenced and Simon Resigns

External Constituents | Governing Board | President | Internal Constituents
----------------------|----------------|-----------|----------------------
11-Jan                | Two weeks until resignation
12-Jan                | MSU asks for lawsuits to be dismissed
13-Jan                | Survivor testimony against Nassar begins
14-Jan                | News media investigation claims MSU officials knew of abuse
15-Jan                | Board Chair Breslin views live stream of testimony
16-Jan                | Social media surges
17-Jan                | Trustee Foster attends hearing
18-Jan                | Trustee Foster attends hearing and speaks to news media
19-Jan                | Judge adjourns sentencing hearing for weekend
20-Jan                | Elected politicians begin calling for President's removal
21-Jan                | Trustees meet and affirm support for Simon
22-Jan                | Sentencing hearing resumes survivor testimony
23-Jan                | Michigan Governor petitioned to remove President
24-Jan                | President resigns

Figure 76: 24 January 2018, day of President Simon's resignation
she is unwilling, the removal of Simon from post by the Board (Pearce, 2018; The Daily Beast, 2018a; Thomason, 2018). The resolution is sponsored by Representative Adam Zenka who asserts that Simon is responsible for creating a culture in which Nassar was enabled to perpetrate sexual assault that silences victims (Pearce, 2018). The majority of representatives vote for the resolution and it passes 96 for and 11 against (The Daily Beast, 2018a; Thomason, 2018).

State-level elected officials serving in the Legislature also call on the AG to examine Gretchen Whitmer’s involvement in a 2016 investigation into Nassar’s misconduct (Hinkley, 2018a). Like currently serving AG Schuette, Whitmer is a candidate for governor at the time of the crisis (Hinkley, 2018a).

**24 January: Trustee Byrum requests Simon’s resignation publicly**

On 24 January, Trustee Dianne Byrum joins Trustee Lyons in publicly requesting Simon’s resignation (Haag & Tracy, 2018; Gongwer News Service, 2018a; Murphy, 2018; Strang, 2018). Byrum also refutes Trustee Ferguson’s comments publicly (Gongwer News Service, 2018a; Murphy, 2018; Strang, 2018). After initially expressing support for Simon, once the President resigns Chair Breslin communicates again on behalf of the Board, indicating that it is time for transition and that trustees are working to appoint new leadership (Haag & Tracy, 2018).

**Synthesis and discussion of findings**

By investigating President Simon’s resignation during crisis using overlapping analytical approaches, a) analysis of possible constituent influence, b) discourse analysis, and c) timeline analysis, I set out to answer the research question: When presidents resign during high-profile crises, what patterns can be found in pre-resignation communications? Patterns emerging from evidence and analysis described above involve constituencies and constituents, or who communicates about and with Simon, and their attempts to influence presidential leadership.
Patterns include public interpretations of Simon’s identities, actions, and relationships identified by investigating possible constituent influence and analysing discourse sequentially. By combining timeline analysis with other analyses, I also identified patterns associated with the pace and frequency of communications and interpretation. Next, I synthesise and discuss patterns identified in the data into four findings:

1. **External and internal constituent influence**

   **Survivors**

   The #MeToo movement emboldens sexual assault survivors to speak up about their experiences at MSU, as well as call for President Simon to assume responsibility for enabling Nassar’s abuse and resign or be removed from post. As they endeavour to influence Simon, survivors emotionally and graphically convey their experiences of abuse and of being ignored or silenced. Jamie Dantzscher says: "We have a voice. We have the power now" (Householder & White, 2018). Survivor Aly Raisman says: "We have our voices, and we are not going away" (Hobson, 2018a). Nassar responds to the hearing: "I will carry your [survivors’] words with me for the rest of my life." (Davis O’Brien & Radnofsky, 2018). Survivor testimony, including commentary on Simon’s leadership, is posted to the internet by news media outlets (Plaschke, 2018), on social media
by news media, survivors, and citizens, and broadcast on television (Davis O’Brien & Radnofsky, 2018). Hobson (2018b) claims that the #MeToo movement stimulates national outrage about Nassar’s abuse that had not emerged previously even though allegations had been public since 2016. Webber and Eggert (2018) describe the sentencing as continuing the momentum of #MeToo and publish a statement by Dr Judith Lewis Herman, a Harvard psychiatry professor, who suggests that #MeToo influences the case. Tarana Burke, credited with founding #MeToo, affirms the actions and statements of the survivors (Grinberg & Yan, 2018). Throughout the testimony, survivors assign blame to MSU and to Simon, seeking to influence change at the University and prompt the end of Simon’s tenure.

**Journalists**

News media reporters influence perceptions of President Simon’s leadership during the crisis, indirectly by reporting on the crisis, Simon’s actions, and constituent critique of the President, and directly by publishing opinions of Simon. On news media websites and via Twitter, news journalists publish and share survivors’ statements made during the sentencing hearing, including criticism of Simon’s leadership and calls for the President to resign or be removed. Journalists criticise Simon’s actions, communications, and behaviours, as well as ask Simon to resign or, if unwilling, urge her removal. Direct calls for the President’s resignation issued by local and regional media are amplified in other news publications, thereby extending the reach of the message to a national audience (Blackistone, 2018; Haag & Tracy, 2018). Newspapers investigate MSU’s handling of complaints about Nassar independently and claim that MSU failed survivors under Simon’s leadership (Kozlowski, 2018).
Lawmakers and the judicial system

Simon (2018) states as she resigns: “tragedies are politicized [sic], blame is inevitable”, which likely refers to the influential political environment in which the President leads. Laws and lawmakers, as well as the judicial system and its representatives, indirectly influence and appear to attempt to influence Simon directly during the episode. For example, the public sentencing hearing, overseen by Judge Aquilina, made survivor testimony in the courtroom widely available on the Internet and via news media, during which Simon’s leadership is discussed, criticised, and made public. American universities are expected to comply with nationally mandated Title IX regulations designed to standardise the handling of sexual assault reports. In the data, I identified evidence that constituents believe MSU failed to comply with Title IX regulations. Elected political officials at the state and national levels actively and publicly voice concerns about MSU’s handling of Nassar’s abuse and demand Simon’s resignation or removal. Demonstrating the extent of lawmaker condemnation of the President, legislators bring forward and pass a resolution asking Simon to resign in the Michigan House, with a large majority: 96 for and 11 against (Pearce, 2018; The Daily Beast, 2018a; Thomason, 2018).

Board of Trustees

MSU’s governing board also potentially influence Simon’s leadership and shape public perception of the President. In the episode, communications are issued by the whole Board and by individual trustees. Despite public pressure, the Board remain supportive of President Simon, until Trustee Lyons breaks from the remaining trustees to request Simon’s resignation publicly. Other Trustees reaffirm their support by speaking individually and issuing a second statement on behalf of the Board. Individual trustees, such as Trustee Ferguson, garner
criticism after publicly supporting Simon. The Board’s patterns of communication oscillate between speaking with one voice, through Chair Breslin, and providing individual public commentary through official statements, news media, and social media. Despite Simon’s communications that connect the President to the Board and documented evidence of Board support, the Board’s lack of unity may influence Simon’s leadership and seems to prompt mounting critique of Simon.

**MSU students and graduates**

MSU students and graduates attempt to influence Simon’s leadership during the episode. As noted above, currently enrolled MSU students and graduates testify in Nassar’s sentencing hearing, conveying that MSU did not protect them from sexual abuse, and often blaming President Simon for enabling Nassar in their testimony. Currently enrolled MSU students also attempt to exert influence on presidential leadership by publishing calls for Simon’s resignation in the student newspaper, by expressing a lack of confidence in leadership via student government, and by planning a protest to press for the end of the President’s tenure.

**Current and former MSU employees**

Current and formerly employed academic staff and other employees also appear to influence President Simon in the episode. Most notably, Nassar served as an MSU employee for two decades, as both a physician and an associate professor. Many triggers and turning points propel this crisis, but Nassar’s persistent abuse may be considered the origin of the crisis, which escalates during the episode in which Simon resigns as the results of his conduct are disseminated widely during the sentencing hearing. Academic staff voice concerns about leadership and prepare to act within their governance system to express lack of confidence in Simon. Senator Hertel, one of the legislators who calls for Simon’s resignation,
claims that pressure from academic staff forces Simon’s departure (Haag & Tracy, 2018). Professional MSU staff, such as coaches, express support for Simon during this episode, which results in rapid, public, direct critique of supportive staff.

2. Constituents publicly interpret Simon’s identities and actions
Constituent interpretations of Simon’s identities and actions, arranged sequentially according to timeline analysis, were identified by seeking constituent commentary on Simon’s leadership in media coverage, by analysing Simon’s discourse, especially responses to perceived constituent views in presidential communications, and by analysing discourse in tweets responding to the President. Presidential identities manifesting in Simon’s communications and constituent response examined using the discourse analysis question, “What traits and life histories are identified with the leader”, were found to be open to negative interpretations. In Simon’s own discourse, the President identifies as a member of the MSU community, dedicated to leading the University, and empathetic to survivors’ stories. Her statements may also prompt perceptions that the President, in her leadership of MSU, is insensitive, as noted by Simon’s acknowledgement of legal defences mounted to protect MSU. Simon also describes herself as disruptive and oppressive when she visits the hearing. Discourse analysis of tweets identified traits and perceptions of actions associated with Simon by constituents, including a lack of fitness to lead, insensitivity, isolation, absence when presence is expected, cowardice, and disconnection from other people. Actions present in Simon’s discourse and responding tweets focus on communication and presence. The President’s discourse includes actions that may be interpreted as withholding information, such as limiting public statements, listening, and attending the hearing. Tweets
primarily associate actions involving communication with Simon, namely withholding information and communicating ineffectively. The public portrayal of Simon’s identities and actions are particularly influenced by selected constituents and constituencies who shape interpretations with specificity. For example, journalist Shamus publishes multiple, critical opinion pieces about Simon, which are frequently retweeted. Survivors are key influencers of public interpretation of Simon’s actions and identities, especially those who specifically mention Simon with specificity in testimony or on Twitter, some of whom do so repeatedly. Survivor Lemke tweets nine times during the episodes about Simon’s leadership. Trustees are important contributors to public perceptions of Simon’s leadership, especially Trustees Breslin, Lyons, Byrum, and Ferguson, as are other elected political officials, as they provide specific, detailed comments about Simon, her actions, and her leadership qualities on throughout the episode. Simon may be considered a primary source of interpretation of the president’s leadership, however, Simon’s own words are scrutinised by constituents and therefore her statements, and at times her silence, also shape negative public interpretations of her leadership.

3. Simon’s relationships appear challenged
Simon’s discourse and constituent response to the President include linguistic details that suggest presidential relationships may be, or may be perceived to be, challenged in ways that contribute to abbreviated tenure. As noted in the pilot study, my research method does not accommodate identification of causal relationships between actions or communications and events. Therefore, this finding does not intend to suggest that challenged relationships caused Simon’s abbreviated tenure. As in the pilot study, unequivocally proving a causal relationship between real or perceived relationship difficulties and abbreviated
tenure in this case would require further investigation using alternative research methods. By examining Simon’s discourse and constituent response, I did, however, find evidence that may signify challenged presidential relationships in public discourse.

Potentially challenged relationships involving the president and constituents present in Simon’s discourse involve survivors, Nassar, journalists, academic staff, and the Board of Trustees. Simon enacts a relationship with survivors that is not marked by deep engagement in that it involves listening rather than direct action. The President also recounts a relationship with Nassar that is similarly distant: she states as President she was not aware of Nassar’s abuse and that when she became aware of his abuse she terminated Nassar, thereby breaking the relationship of employer and employee. The President also enacts a relationship with journalists who approach her at the hearing, suggesting their engagement of her increases disruption in the courtroom, which suggests they should relate to her differently or not at all. In her communications, Simon affirms and enacts her relationship with the Trustees by noting their continued support for her leadership.

Combined with the traits that may be publicly associated with the president’s identity and actions identified in discourse and described above (Finding 2), namely insensitivity, isolation, absence, cowardice, disconnection from key constituents, as well as communicating ineffectively, and withholding information, a pattern of possible public perceptions of Simon emerges in which relationship difficulties known to contribute to abbreviated tenure are found in the evidence. Simon may be perceived as disconnected from other people, isolated, and even oriented to herself. Efforts to mitigate liability, lack of detailed comment about survivor identities or Nassar’s abuse, and the President’s absence from hearings
generate perceptions of Simon as insensitive to survivors suffering trauma. Combined, these patterns suggest Simon’s relationships may be publicly viewed as strained.

4. President Simon communicates infrequently

After analysing possible constituent influence and discourse sequentially, I identified patterns associated with pace and frequency of communications issued by key constituents potentially influencing the President and Simon’s statements. In contrast to the volume and pace of survivor statements, editorial opinion articles, elected official views, and other constituent voices identified, President Simon communicates infrequently in the pre-resignation phase. As Simon (2018) resigns, she says: “I have limited my personal statements”. When interviewed at Nassar’s sentencing hearing, the President responds to media by reorienting journalists to survivors, suggesting the President should not be the person speaking: “their attention should be on the people who are telling their story, and not on me and Michigan State” (CBS, 2018). Infrequent communication creates a gap in the interpretive work of constituents in this episode that could be filled by presidential leadership, but instead is filled by a multitude of other constituent voices commenting on President Simon and the crisis more broadly.

Finally, as noted above, new communications from influential constituents are published or posted frequently, sometimes daily, and even multiple times a day, after Nassar’s sentencing hearing begins. On some days, multiple influential constituencies communicate critical interpretations of Simon’s leadership. Therefore, on many days in the episode, conditions change every few hours, creating a perpetually, rapidly evolving network of information potentially influencing presidential leadership during crisis.
Conclusion: A long presidency ends in a public crisis

During the episode, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* publishes an article about Simon: ‘Many want Michigan State’s President to resign. Here’s why she still has campus support’ (Brown, 2018b). Brown (2018b) reports Simon’s record of meeting presidential expectations. President Simon is perceived as leading MSU strategically and successfully and during Simon’s tenure the University is acknowledged to have become an “academic powerhouse” and “an economic driver” (Brown, 2018b). Under Simon’s leadership, MSU rises in national league tables, expands research activities, builds new medical facilities, and increases enrolment (Brown, 2018b). Educational programmes developing under Simon’s leadership involve scientific research, medical research and education, and public health research (Brown, 2018b). Enrolment increases are also acknowledged as a success of her tenure (Brown, 2018b). During Simon’s tenure, MSU conducts a comprehensive fundraising campaign and elevates its donated revenue (Brown, 2018b). This includes a $28 million donation to build a contemporary art centre credited to Simon’s fundraising efforts (Brown, 2018b). Vice Chair Ferguson also remarks that Simon secures donations to build a basketball arena and adds that donors express support for Simon during the crisis (Manzullo, 2018). Simon is credited with successfully advocating for MSU with elected political officials to ensure continued state government funding (Brown, 2018b).

Despite these achievements, Simon’s presidency will be remembered for the crisis in 2018 in which the world learned of Nassar’s abuse on Simon’s watch and her subsequent resignation following pressure from many potentially influential constituencies. Following the conclusion of her presidency, Simon assumes a professorship at MSU until retiring in August 2019, when she receives a $2.5
million severance payment (Brown, 2019). In autumn 2018, the former President is charged with lying to the police about when she knew of Nassar’s abuse (Seltzer, 2019a), but a judge dismisses the charges in May 2020 (MacDonald & Clarke, 2020). In 2019 the American Department of Education orders MSU to pay a $4.5 million fine for non-compliance with regulations designed to prevent sexual assault (Dwyer, 2019). Simon may have excelled in many aspects of presidential leadership. Regardless, this episode demonstrates how public interpretations of presidential leadership in crisis may undercut critical relationships and shape constituent views of a president in ways that can preclude the continued ability to lead, as well as mark an institution’s profile for years after the sudden departure of a leader during crisis.
Chapter 8. “I’m going to see whether I’ve cut my throat professionally for a whole career”: President Fred Walker’s resignation in crisis at Edinboro University
On 27 March 2018, the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) announces that President H. Fred Walker of Edinboro University, a state-government funded, master’s institution, resigned effective 30 March 2018 (Stripling & Thomason, 2018; Jaschik, 2018b). The resignation followed a high-profile, reputational crisis triggered by Walker’s interview with Jack Stripling (2018a) in The Chronicle of Higher Education on 18 March. Walker begins his tenure in July 2016 (Schackner, 2018) and serves less than two years (Tierney, 2018), resigning before the scheduled end of his contract (Stripling, 2018f).

Walker’s abbreviated tenure follows calls for his resignation or termination from the University’s academic staff union (Palmer, 2018f; Palmer, 2018c), other academic staff (Palmer, 2018a), and students (Palmer, 2018f; Melchitzky, 2018; Palmer, 2018b). Stripling’s (2018a) article, which precipitates the public crisis, includes the President’s direct and indirect quotes, which link Walker’s identity to negative attributes. Shortly after Walker’s tenure ends, his resignation receives national attention in The New York Times (Green, 2018).

As in the prior chapter, I present evidence published in news media or posted to social media chronologically. Organised by day in the pre-resignation phase, I describe emerging patterns of possible constituent influence in news media coverage, as well as presidential identities, relationships, and actions represented by discourse in Walker’s statements and constituent response. By presenting findings chronologically, communication patterns are described as they unfold in time during the crisis in the days prior to Walker’s resignation, just as constituents involved in the episode would receive new information and use that information to interpret presidential leadership. After presenting the case evidence and analyses chronologically, I discuss and synthesise findings across all days in the case.
About President Walker

President Walker’s resignation occurs early in his tenure, unlike Simon’s, and as such his prior professional and academic experience is first presented briefly. President Walker’s career path includes almost nine years in the American Navy and training as a systems engineer (Stripling, 2018a), including attaining a PhD from Iowa State University in industrial education and technology (Walker, nd). Walker’s career as an academic began with his appointment in 1995 as assistant professor at the University of Southern Maine (Edinboro University, 2017). Immediately prior to his appointment at Edinboro, Walker served as Dean of the College of Applied Science and Technology at the Rochester Institute of Technology (Stripling, 2018a). Stripling (2018a) suggests that Walker had aspired to a presidency for several decades, an aspiration often viewed unfavourably by academics, and asserts that Walker is Edinboro’s fifth president in 10 years (Stripling, 2018a), highlighting the frequent leadership turnover at the University. Edinboro University is reported to be carrying annual operational deficits of $3.2 million or 1.2 percent of revenues (Stripling, 2018g), a significant challenge requiring Walker to develop strategies to achieve institutional financial stability.

Emerging patterns in communications preceding Walker’s resignation

**Sunday 18 March: The Chronicle of Higher Education publishes Stripling’s (2018a) article**

On 18 March (Figure 77), Stripling (2018a) publishes an article about President Walker and Edinboro University in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Stripling’s (2018a) article appears 13 days prior to the date Walker’s resignation becomes
Two weeks until end of President's tenure

President's resignation effective

Figure 77: 18 March 2018, 13 days prior to end of President Walker's abbreviated tenure
effective, marking the event that tips Edinboro and President Walker into crisis. Stripling’s (2018a) 18 March article contains evidence of likely constituent influence on presidential leadership including oversight of Walker and the institution he leads by the Pennsylvania system of higher education, Edinboro’s local Council of Trustees, and the news media. Student enrolment levels shaped by demographic trends and student expectations for academic programmes also appear to influence presidential leadership. Unionised academic staff expectations, shared governance, and presidential relationships with executive leaders are also identified and examined below. Multiple examples of possible external and internal constituent influence on Walker’s leadership are made public by Stripling. The President’s alleged approach to leading constituents is also made public as Walker’s statements suggest he is concerned that internal constituents, especially academic staff and students, will oppose his objectives (Stripling, 2018a). The article claims that the President acts to reduce this risk by attempting to influence internal constituent views, as well as external opinion, in ways that are inconsistent with academic culture and norms.

**18 March: Pennsylvania’s higher education System and Edinboro’s Council of Trustees influence President Walker**

The Pennsylvania university System is led by a board of governors overseeing 14 institutions and System duties include hiring each university’s president (Stripling, 2018a). State-level System financial challenges are identified as a possible source of influence on Walker as he attempts to guide Edinboro as President: the Pennsylvania System Chancellor explains that the System’s financial situation may require institutions to merge or, alternatively, close (Stripling, 2018a). At Edinboro, in addition to System oversight, a second governing board, the Council of Trustees, oversees the University (Stripling, 2018a). Walker’s deference to this second, local board is acknowledged on 18 March (Stripling, 2018a). The Council
of Trustees expect Walker to reduce the number of University employee positions to contain costs and to achieve financial stability (Stripling, 2018a). An Edinboro Trustee counters this by denying the Board’s alleged expectation in Striping’s (2018a) article.

**18 March: President Walker and the news media**

Stripling (2018a) pointedly suggests Walker uses news media to manipulate opinion in support of the President’s agenda. Through Walker’s comments, Stripling (2018a) compares the President to a “spin doctor” who uses questionable techniques to influence public perspectives. For example, Stripling emphasises Walker’s publication of report findings detailing the University’s deficiencies to state and local journalists (Stripling, 2018a). President Walker is presented as lacking integrity after attempting to influence opinion (Stripling, 2018a). Walker’s professed honesty and transparency are explicitly questioned by Stripling (2018a) as public allegations of deception are made.

**18 March: Student enrolment and expectations for academic programmes**

Edinboro University faces challenging demographic trends, described as “demographic headwinds” (Stripling, 2018a), including declining student population (Stripling, 2018a). A decision made prior to the crisis to become an open-access university is described in the article as contributing to negative perceptions of Edinboro’s value amongst the public and influencing downward enrolment trends (Stripling, 2018a). The student body profile at Edinboro University, combined with enrolment trends, suggests that conditions for ensuring continued enrolment levels and associated revenue may be challenging for President Walker. Half of Edinboro’s students qualify for and receive national grant aid designed to support low-socioeconomic-status students (Stripling, 2018a). Many students at Edinboro are the first in their families to attend
university (Stripling, 2018a). Most live away from the University and commute to attend classes (Stripling, 2018a). Stripling (2018a) reports that the University experienced a 35 percent student enrolment decline in seven years. Almost every applicant is admitted and less than half complete degrees (Stripling, 2018a), compared to 61 percent nationally (NCES, 2020). The prospects for recruiting students who attend university immediately following secondary school are not promising and as such the University’s strategic direction includes a goal of enrolling older students (Stripling, 2018a). Admissions criteria at Edinboro are also changing to make the University more selective (Stripling, 2018a) and to increase student achievement.

Walker’s strategic vision for the University includes a new ambition for the student experience, complemented by programmes to bolster student achievement (Stripling, 2018a). To develop new programmes, others are curtailed. Thirty-one courses of study or degree concentrations had been eliminated at Edinboro and a proposed graduate-level business degree is expected to generate revenue from student fees (Stripling, 2018a). The elimination of one degree programme in music prompts student activism at Edinboro; the student response is critiqued by the President (Stripling, 2018a) which is explored below in analysis of Walker’s discourse.

18 March: Academic staff influence President Walker’s approach to advancing a strategic agenda

Stripling’s (2018a) article includes evidence of Walker’s strategic leadership, including the President’s efforts to chart a ten-year course to renewing and stabilising Edinboro’s finances, acknowledging the improbability enrolment will rebound to previous levels. Academic staff union leadership acknowledged Walker’s efforts to steady the institution, but as of March 2018 when The
Chronicle article is published, academic staff remain concerned about the future of the University (Stripling, 2018a). Stripling (2018a) reports on academic programme elimination and workforce reduction led by Walker designed to improve the University’s financial position (Stripling, 2018a). During his presidency, but prior to the re-resignation phase, Walker declared that the institution had reached an extreme, unsustainable financial position so serious that the position justified reducing academic staff positions (Stripling, 2018a).

Walker and his leadership team assert they value input, collaboration, and transparency, when in contrast Stripling (2018a) suggests that Walker’s approaches had circumvented negative responses from academic staff. Edinboro’s academic staff union and the dynamics of collective bargaining feature throughout Stripling’s (2018a) article. In 2016, the same year Walker begins his presidency, unionised academic staff at Edinboro engaged in labour action for the first time in the Pennsylvania System’s thirty-five-year history (Stripling, 2018a). Programme elimination precipitated by falling enrolment and budget reductions threaten academic staff positions (Stripling, 2018a). Sixty-five percent of the University’s budget is dedicated to salaries and benefits, making it difficult to adjust the budget to match enrolment levels without eliminating staff (Stripling, 2018a). The Edinboro University academic staff union contract specifies that part-time, untenured academic staff, who are paid less than tenured professors, may be no more than 25 percent of all academic staff employed by the University (Stripling, 2018a). This contract provision ensures a robust pool of tenured academic staff at the University and protects the budget dedicated to paying them, except in extreme situations. Also in the 18 March data, Walker is reported communicating to the academic staff union that the extreme financial situation warrants a reduction in academic staff positions and in doing so the
President assumes an initially uncompromising stance in negotiations with the union (Stripling, 2018a). President Walker ultimately concedes to the union and indicates in a memo to the Council of Trustees that many academic staff had already left by attrition (Stripling, 2018a).

18 March: Discourse analysis of President Walker’s statements

Using the discourse analysis questions in the protocol, I examined Walker’s statements reported in Stripling’s (2018a) article. Answers developed to the questions allowed me to identify constituents represented by Walker, traits and life histories associated with the President, disconnected or disrupted presidential relationships, and presidential actions in the discourse.

Constituent representation: Academic staff, students, and senior leaders

By asking “Who is included, excluded, foregrounded, or backgrounded?” and the three additional discourse analysis questions associated with the representation of constituents in the protocol, I examined constituent representation in Walker’s communications. By doing so, I identified references to academic staff, students, and senior leaders, which may be interpreted as evidence of insensitive views of or communications directed at key constituents by the President. Walker’s statements regarding academic staff cast academics as unreasonable and prone to reacting irrationally (Stripling, 2018a). Stripling (2018a) also reports that in his interview Walker described a student’s protest of the proposed elimination of the University’s music degree, noting that Walker attributed the protest to the student’s experience of grief. Stripling (2018a) includes Walker’s statements in which the President speaks to senior leaders in ways that could be interpreted as condescending. The article includes few references to executive leaders or other staff, but in one instance Walker is described as engaging with executive leadership in ways that reinforce their subordinate status, asking one why he is
not “in uniform” and wearing an Edinboro University pin, as well as making a sarcastic remark to an executive leader in another setting (Stripling, 2018a).

Presidential identities, pronouns, and difference: Walker’s self-focus, different leadership style, isolation, and volatility
Combining the results of analysis using several discourse analysis questions, “What traits and life histories are identified with the leader?”, “How are pronouns used and are presidents or constituents presented as nouns or pronouns?”, and “How is difference explored, accentuated, negotiated, bracketed or suppressed?”, I identified possible interpretations of Walker’s discourse published in the article associated with the President’s identity. Results of analysis suggest Walker’s discourse may be interpreted as signifying inward focus, a leadership style unfamiliar in academe, isolation, and volatility.

In Stripling’s (2018a) article, Walker’s pre-resignation communications may be interpreted as evidence of the President’s focus on himself. Walker’s statements cast the president as the leader of a dramatic story, playing “three-dimensional chess”, a solo activity. Statements attributed to Walker emphasise his own individual agency, in which the President tells stories about his actions, such as negotiating with the academic staff union, or claiming that he is dismantling Edinboro University to rebuild it again. President Walker frequently uses the first-person, singular pronoun, “I”, which can convey a focus on oneself (Pennebaker, 2011a). In one example of Walker’s inward orientation, he emphasises himself in the planning process by projecting statements that others might make about him following Walker’s efforts to shape public opinion, referring to himself in the third person. Walker says (italics added): “This guy is being honest. He’s being open and transparent. He’s operating with a high level of integrity. He’s bringing external validations. He’s doing everything he said he was going to do,”
Walker also focuses on himself by accentuating difference, suggesting that his leadership approach diverges from past leaders who did little to transform the University.

Also, Walker’s pre-resignation communications published in Stripling’s (2018a) article may be interpreted as portraying the President as isolated. First, Walker’s statements indicate that he uses news media coverage to influence students, faculty, and other constituents, rather than influencing them directly, thereby isolating himself from direct constituent counterinfluence. Second, Walker positions himself as separate from the University and its community, which also isolates him. In the article, Walker says that he “had to break this place down to its lowest element before I could start to build it back up” (Stripling, 2018a). In this statement, he is apart from the University and acting on it, rather than acting as a member of the internal community together with other leaders, academic staff, administrative and support staff, and students.

Walker’s pre-resignation communications published on 18 March include evidence that may also be interpreted as characterising the president’s identity as volatile. The President’s language positions other people as adversaries. Constituents, such as academic staff or students, are characterised as oppositional forces whose views need to be managed to prevent a no-confidence vote in the President. In confrontational situations, such as academic staff union negotiations, Walker uses the second-person pronoun “you” (Stripling, 2018a), thereby positioning other people in opposition to the President. Walker’s language also includes words that warn, threaten, and confront. The President’s reported vocabulary evokes confrontational and violent situations, such as “bloodbath”, “nuclear bomb”, “blood in the water”, and “defeat” (Stripling, 2018a).
Relationships: Disconnection from key constituents
Walker’s communications reported in Stripling’s (2018a) 18 March article also may be interpreted as evidence the President might be perceived as disconnected from key constituents. First, Walker refers to University employees in ways that disconnect the President from the experiences of colleagues. The President is described as presenting the University’s position, indicating that it “should be alarming to everyone” and adding that “it is to me” (Stripling, 2018a). In this way, he indicates that the employees may not be alarmed, even if they should be, and adds that Walker already is alarmed, which disconnects his perspective from those at Edinboro who may not share his views. In another example of Walker’s disconnection in his constituent relationships, the President’s language and associated leadership approaches are characterised by military metaphors and associated leadership styles. Walker is colloquial and blunt in his communication style, while decisive in his decision making, which is atypical in the university environment where constituents expect their views to be respected and considered as decisions are made, as leaders are guided by the tenets of shared governance.

Actions: Controlling, withholding information, and communicating ineffectively
Walker’s attributed statements in the 18 March article also may be interpreted as representing actions involving relationships with constituents, another area for investigation included in the discourse analysis protocol. For example, the President attempts to exert control over the academic staff union during negotiations:

"Now we’ve got this retrenchment letter on the table," he recalled telling the union’s leaders. "So either we need to fundamentally cut the shit and get moving forward, or I’m going to start laying people off. How would you like to proceed? I said, 'Look, I will not blink.' " (Stripling, 2018a).
Walker adopts a military “boot camp” strategy (Stripling, 2018a). This phrase evokes the basic training provided upon registration for American military service, which builds trainee capacity for following commands after an initial, intense phase designed to develop habits of mind and body, overseen by senior leaders who exercise control over trainees (US Army, nd). The President also attempts to control the appearance of constituents by expecting them to be “in uniform” (Stripling, 2018a), wearing Edinboro University lapel pins. Walker’s alleged efforts to manipulate public opinion by engaging journalists in the strategic planning process may also be interpreted as actions present in words designed to control. Stripling (2018a), in a direct comment to his readers, underscores Walker’s actions that attempt to control the journalist: “This story, however, ends just as it began: with the president telling a reporter what to write”.

Walker’s communications published in Stripling’s (2018a) article include evidence that may also be interpreted as withholding information or communicating ineffectively. *The Chronicle* reports President Walker withholds the full list of University degree and concentration eliminations until Stripling’s (2018a) article is expected to be printed. As noted above, Walker also describes attempts to influence public opinion because he believes he “would never be able to reason with the faculty [academic staff],” (Stripling, 2018a). This indicates that Walker communicates without an openness to reaching shared understanding, which may be interpreted as communicating ineffectively.

**Monday 19-Tuesday 20 March: Walker apologises and constituents react**

On 19 March (Figure 78), constituents, including journalists, begin to discuss Stripling’s 18 March article, published in widely-read and esteemed *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, and President Walker’s leadership. On 19 March
Figure 78: 19 March, President Walker Apologises and Constituents React

- Two weeks until end of President's tenure
- President's statements published in Stripling's Chronicle article
- Stripling's 1st article in The Chronicle of Higher Education
- Twitter commentary about President begins
- President apologises for Chronicle article
- Students launch petition for President's resignation
- President's resignation effective

Figure 78: 19 March 2018, 12 days prior to end of President Walker's abbreviated tenure
Twitter users report that President Walker apologises and that students start a petition calling for Walker’s resignation. By analysing 10 Tweets posted on 19 and 20 March, shortly after Stripling’s article is published, I identified public constituent interpretations of Walker which indicate Twitter users emphasise Walker’s difference and associate negative traits with the President’s identity.

19-20 March: Discourse analysis of Tweets responding to Walker

Presidential identities and actions: Disconnected, divergent, controlling, and withholding

When asked of 19 and 20 March tweets, answers to the discourse analysis questions “What traits and life histories are identified with the leader?” and “How is difference explored, accentuated, negotiated, bracketed or suppressed?” suggest constituents disconnect and distance the President from the University by highlighting his divergence from academic norms and by suggesting that Walker should be removed or should resign. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2018), retweeting Stripling’s (2018a) article, explicitly distinguishes Walker’s language from the language typically used by college presidents (Figure 79):

![Figure 79: 19 March tweet posted by The Chronicle of Higher Education (2018)](image)

Another Twitter user suggests that “Fred Walker has got to go”, which projects a desire to disconnect the President from the University community, anticipating a future event in Walker’s life history. Similarly, a tweet claims that “Edinboro
students [are] calling for Dr. Walker’s resignation, particularly following his ‘apology’.

Answers to the discourse analysis questions “What traits and life histories are identified with the leader?” and “What is the action present in the words involving relationships between the president and constituents?”, when asked of tweets posted after publication of Stripling’s (2018a) article, suggest that Twitter users may interpret Walker as controlling and withholding information. One user reinforces Stripling’s (2018a) suggestion that Walker manipulates public opinion. Another refers to Walker’s own expression of regret for his interview with Stripling in quotes—“his ‘apology’”—suggesting the President’s apology may not be genuine or that Walker withholds his real views. One tweet suggests that Walker may have been withholding information about his identity: “The current students of Edinboro needed to see it and know what kind of man President Walker is”. This user suggests that the President’s motivations or character had not been clearly conveyed to currently enrolled students. However, contrasting evidence emerges in Tweets on 19 and 20 March. On Twitter Walker is reported to have apologised (Stripling, 2018c), which may be interpreted as sensitive and an openness to be vulnerable, rather than controlling. One user affirms Walker’s position: “…from what I read he [Walker] didn’t say anything wrong about Edinboro. This place does need a lot of help/work”.

**Wednesday 21 March: No-confidence vote discussed and calls for Walker’s resignation**

On 21 March (Figure 80), 10 days prior to the end of Walker’s presidency, three news media articles are published and two Tweets are posted about President Walker and Edinboro University. Stripling (2018g) publishes a follow-up article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, ‘The President has spoken, and Edinboro U.”
Figure 80: 21 March, No-Confidence Vote Discussed and Calls for Walker’s Resignation

- Stripling’s 1st article in The Chronicle of Higher Education
- Twitter commentary about President begins
- State academic staff union leader calls for President’s resignation
- Stripling’s 2nd Chronicle article

Two weeks until end of President’s tenure

President’s statements published in Stripling’s Chronicle article

President apologises for Chronicle article

Students launch petition for President’s resignation

President’s apology republished

Academic staff consider no-confidence vote in President

President’s resignation effective

Figure 80: 21 March 2018, 10 days prior to end of President Walker’s abbreviated tenure
is reeling’, detailing constituent responses to Stripling’s (2018a) previously published article of 18 March. Two articles are published by an Edinboro University student journalist (Palmer, 2018d, 2018e). Both tweets posted on 21 March are authored by The Chronicle’s Stripling (2018h; 2018i), to elevate readership of Edinboro coverage and increase circulation of article content.

21 March: System-level board oversight and Council of Trustees
In data published on 21 March, I observed evidence of System-level oversight and involvement of Edinboro’s Council of Trustees, both of which may influence presidential leadership. For example, one article published on 21 March describes a strategic planning forum led by Walker in which Edinboro University’s stated goal is described as achieving a ranking in the middle of the 14 Pennsylvania university System institutions (Palmer, 2018e). Edinboro is influenced by state-level budget policy that reduced the University’s available funding (Stripling, 2018g), thereby challenging Walker to steward operations when faced with both declining enrolment revenues and constrained government funding allocations. On this day, neither the Pennsylvania System governing board nor its representatives, which oversee Edinboro University, comment on the crisis or Walker’s leadership (Stripling, 2018g). System leadership remains silent until Walker’s tenure concludes. The University’s institution-level Council of Trustees also remains silent on the President’s leadership in the crisis, but does, at this juncture, criticise Stripling and The Chronicle article for omissions, and in doing so reiterates the Council’s commitment to collaboration with constituents and constituencies (Stripling, 2018g).

21 March: Academic staff explore no-confidence vote and academic union criticises Walker
Academic staff issues emerge in 21 March news articles. One student-authored article refers to Walker’s efforts to involve constituents, including academic staff,
in developing the University’s future. More specifically, to develop the vision of an enhanced student experience, Walker established seven working groups of staff, students, faculty, and alumni plus a group to develop the University’s mission, vision, and values (Palmer, 2018e). However, after Stripling’s article is published on 18 March, Walker is perceived to have endeavoured to influence opinions and outcomes through this process, rather than genuinely incorporating constituent input. The President’s alleged attempts at influencing constituent perspectives are poorly received by academic staff who begin to discuss a possible no-confidence vote in Walker (Stripling, 2018g). The leader of the Pennsylvania academic staff union publicly expresses concerns about Walker’s leadership and management approaches and advocates for Walker’s resignation (Stripling, 2018g).

**21 March: Walker’s efforts to support students and student reaction to Stripling’s original article**

21 March news media coverage includes details of Walker’s ambitions for improving student outcomes combined with strong, negative student reactions to Stripling’s (2018a) article. Edinboro admissions criteria are changing in an effort to increase student academic achievement (Palmer, 2018e) and to achieve Walker’s strategic ambition to enhance the student experience, with mentoring, post-degree job placement, experiential learning, wellness, life skills, and improved academic advising (Palmer, 2018e). Due to enrolment challenges and associated loss of revenue, Walker’s strategic plan incorporates metrics for student retention, student satisfaction, and graduation (Palmer, 2018e). Students, however, react negatively to Walker’s comments to *The Chronicle*, although the scale of student response is not evident in the data. Students use an online petition to encourage the removal or resignation of Walker, which is created the day after *The Chronicle* article is published (Stripling, 2018g). Edinboro students
are described by academic staff on 21 March as “in revolt mode” (Stripling, 2018g).

21 March: Discourse analysis of Walker’s statements

Presidential identities: Sensitivity and insensitivity

On 21 March, Walker’s published communications observed in news media express regret, which may be interpreted as sensitivity, or a trait associated with the President in discourse identified by asking “What traits and life histories are identified with the leader?”. Student journalist Palmer (2018d) reports that Walker states: “Trust is at the very core of community and I want to assure you that I regret any harm I have done to jeopardize [sic] your trust in me”. However, contrasting evidence published 21 March suggests Walker’s language may be interpreted as insensitive. Walker’s statements about a student, Dylan Hollingsworth, who protested academic programme elimination, are interpreted as insensitive to Hollingsworth (Stripling, 2018g). Walker’s perceived insensitivity toward the student is condemned by the head of the Pennsylvania state academic staff union as inappropriate (Stripling, 2018g). Academic staff at the university label Walker’s comments about the student as “devastating” (Stripling, 2018g). Hollingsworth responds by calling Walker “disrespectful” (Palmer, 2018d). Therefore, while President Walker apologises and expresses regret, thereby shaping possible new interpretations of the President’s identities, other constituents interpret Walker’s communications and behaviours as insensitive.

Pronouns and relationships: Walker connects to constituents

In contrast to possible interpretations of Walker’s statements in the 18 March Chronicle article noted above, which suggest his constituent relationships are disrupted or disconnected, Walker connects to constituents in his pre-resignation communications published 21 March according to analysis using the questions
“How are pronouns used and are presidents or constituents presented as nouns or pronouns?” and “What relationships are created between presidents and constituents?” For example, the President uses the first-person, plural pronoun “we” and its variants extensively in an article published on 21 March about an open forum on the University’s strategic direction (Palmer, 2018e). In this instance, which includes statements made on 8 March 2018, he attempts to connect to constituents as he promotes the strategic priorities and focus on student outcomes. For example (italics added):

“It’s really exciting from the standpoint that we are now moving past the conversations, the dialogue and the rhetoric to bringing things forward, which is what our community needs,” Walker said. “We need some tangible outcomes and some results, so this is the timeline that has unfolded.” …

“I think the [Edinboro University] moniker was ‘find your place.’ We’ve gotta do a better job of showing them what it is, what the structure is, [and] how they fit in.” …

“So, we are raising our admission standards, and that’s because we should have done that a long time ago to make sure that the students we bring in here are successful academically,” Walker added. (Palmer, 2018e)

Walker describes the next desired phase for Edinboro, which will yield “tangible outcomes and some results” by emphasising the work of the collective “we” to ensure students succeed.

21 March: Discourse analysis of Tweets responding to Walker

Stripling (2018h; 2018i) posts two Tweets on 21 March which both demonstrate Walker’s connection and disconnection from University constituents, further evidence that Walker’s relationships may be perceived as disconnected or disrupted. Stripling posts that “Fred Walker is truly something”, thereby emphasising how Walker is different from what one might typically expect from a person filling the post of university president (Stripling, 2018h). By emphasising difference with the phrase “truly something”, Walker is portrayed as behaving
inconsistently with the role of president of the University. In another Tweet, Stripling (2018i) also reports that President Walker will meet with students the next day, which highlights Walker’s anticipated connection to constituents.

**Thursday 22 March: Walker meets with students, total petition signatures swell, and constituent response grows**

On 22 March (Figure 81), or 9 days until Walker’s tenure ends, social media commentary focuses on the President’s controversial statements and his responses and a news article is published in the Edinboro student newspaper. Edinboro student journalist Palmer (2018b) links to both of Stripling’s (2018a; 2018g) *Chronicle* articles about President Walker published early in the crisis on 18 March, as well as the prior day’s *Chronicle* coverage (21 March). Palmer (2018b) reports that a petition against Walker has been signed by 700 people. Also on 22 March, Stripling (2018e) tweets that the interim leader of the Pennsylvania state System overseeing Edinboro University will not provide a comment about “anger over Fred Walker”. On 22 March, President Walker meets with concerned students, which is discussed on Twitter, and one Twitter user attending the meeting reports Walker states that he will not resign. Walker speaks to students on 22 March, but neither direct nor indirect quotes attributed to the President are published in 22 March news media coverage.

Although scant information is available in the 22 March data, the bodies overseeing Walker and Edinboro University are evident and the Council of Trustees begin to act. Palmer (2018b) reports that the Pennsylvania system board and the system’s interim leader remain silent on the crisis and Walker’s leadership. Edinboro’s Council of Trustees plan a meeting allegedly to discuss Stripling’s (2018a) 18 March article (Palmer, 2018b).
Figure 81: 22 March, Walker Meets with Students, Petition Signatures Swell, and Constituent Response Grows

External Constituents: Stripling's 1st article in The Chronicle of Higher Education, Twitter commentary about President begins, State academic staff union leader calls for President's resignation, Stripling's 2nd Chronicle article

Governing Board: President's statements published in Stripling's Chronicle article, Students launch petition for President's resignation

President: Two weeks until end of President's tenure, President apologises for Chronicle article, President's apology republished, Academic staff consider no-confidence vote in President, President speaks to students in open office hours, President's resignation effective

Internal Constituents: 700 sign student-led petition opposing President

Figure 81: 22 March 2018, 9 days prior to end of President Walker's abbreviated tenure
22 March: Student-led, online protest gathers momentum

Student journalist Palmer’s (2018b) 22 March story includes evidence that Walker’s capacity to influence internal constituents may be diminishing, by reporting the student-led, online petition at time of publication had been signed by more than 700 people and also that academic staff have lost their confidence and trust in President Walker, which could result in a no-confidence vote in the President. Palmer (2018b) also reiterates Walker’s statements published in The Chronicle (Stripling, 2018g) the day before, reprinting a quote that focuses on Edinboro’s future and Walker’s strategic direction, which the President states will involve:

…a vibrant future for Edinboro University. We have made strides to stabilize [sic] the university and ensure future growth. The primary focus must be on doing what is best for the university and our students, which means continuing our forward momentum (Palmer, 2018b; Stripling, 2018g).

22 March: Academic staff and their union leaders, “boy, you need to resign”

Academic staff and union leadership express disapproval of Walker on 22 March, thereby attempting to influence the President. 22 March coverage indicate academic staff expect to be included in strategic processes, whereas Walker’s actions are interpreted as manipulation toward a pre-determined end (Palmer, 2018b; Stripling, 2018g). Kenneth M. Mash, the leader of the Pennsylvania academic staff union, who represents academic staff employed at Edinboro University, says of Walker: “boy, you need to resign” (Palmer, 2018b; Stripling, 2018g).

22 March: Discourse analysis of Twitter response to Walker

By asking the discourse analysis questions of 22 March tweets, especially “What relationships are created between presidents and constituents?” and “What traits and life histories are identified with the leader?”, answers suggest Walker
appears disconnected from influential constituents and insensitive to students. For example, President Walker may be interpreted as disconnected and isolated from Pennsylvania university System leader, Karen Whitney, who when asked to comment on constituent responses to Walker, does not offer a statement. However, the System office reports that Whitney is “engaged” (Stripling, 2018e) in the episode at Edinboro University. If System leadership remained supportive of Walker, a statement endorsing the President might have been issued when the request for comment was received. Constituents also claim that Walker has negatively influenced and even ‘slandered’ students, which may be interpreted as insensitivity to student experiences. The student newspaper tweets that a student said to President Walker: “My work is being discriminated against and put down because people know I go to this school” (EdinboroNow, 2018b).

**Friday 23 March: More Chronicle coverage, “confidential” academic staff letter, and Council of Trustees meeting**

On 23 March (Figure 82), 8 days prior to Walker’s resignation becomes effective, Striping (2018b) publishes again in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Palmer (2018a) writing in the Edinboro University student newspaper also reports on Stripling’s latest *Chronicle* publication. Both articles discuss and link to a “confidential”, draft, open letter authored by academic staff at the University that condemns President Walker’s actions (Edinboro Faculty, 2018). On social media, constituents comment on Walker’s leadership and statements made earlier in the episode, thereby adding to public interpretation of the President. New communications issued by the President are not found in media coverage published on 23 March. No notable evidence is observed on 25 or 26 March.
Figure 82: 23 March 2018, 8 days prior to end of President Walker’s abbreviated tenure

- Stripling’s 1st article in The Chronicle of Higher Education
- Twitter commentary about President begins
- Stripling’s 2nd Chronicle article
- State academic staff union leader calls for President’s resignation
- Stripling’s 3rd Chronicle article
- Council of Trustees meet
- President’s apology republished
- President speaks to students in open office hours
- President’s resignation effective
- Academic staff letter opposes President
- 700 sign student-led petition opposing President
- Students launch petition for President’s resignation
- Academic staff consider no-confidence vote in President
- President apologises for Chronicle article
- President’s statements published in Stripling’s Chronicle article
- Two weeks until end of President’s tenure

Figure 82: 23 March, More Chronicle Coverage, "Confidential" Academic Staff Letter, and Council of Trustees Meeting
23 March: State governing board, local Council of Trustees, and President Walker’s leadership

State-level and local board governance are perceived to influence Walker’s leadership in coverage published on 23 March. Stripling (2018b) reports that the letter from academic staff published on this day in news media articles names both the Pennsylvania Board of Governors and the University’s Council of Trustees, indicating that “every day” the two governing bodies fail to condemn Walker or allow him to continue leading, the more the governing bodies will be interpreted as supportive of Walker’s “unteachable behavior [sic] and attitude” (Edinboro Faculty, 2018; Stripling, 2018b). Stripling reports that he is unable to ascertain if the Council of Trustees will meet or had already met to discuss the President and also indicates that the Pennsylvania System leader still declines to comment (Stripling, 2018b), although another Twitter user claims that the Council of Trustees plan to meet the same day, 23 March (GoErie, 2018).

23 March: Academic staff condemn President Walker as unfit to lead

Academic staff claim in the letter released on 23 March via news outlets that Walker has lost the “ability to lead” (Edinboro Faculty, 2018) and describes the crisis as a “PR and management debacle” (Edinboro Faculty, 2018). In the letter, Walker is perceived as failing to fulfil expectations of strategic leadership, educational leadership, and internal relations, specifically stating that the President’s “supposedly objective and transparent planning process was designed to reach predetermined outcomes, with indifference to and in defiance of the views of stakeholders in the community” (Edinboro Faculty, 2018). Walker’s approach to strategy, particularly his willingness to share an unflattering view of the University’s position publicly, is interpreted by academic staff as contributing to enrolment decline and financial challenges (Edinboro Faculty, 2018). Academic staff also question Walker’s leadership and organisational
management ability by asserting that the President employs a “deceptive, manipulative, and bullying style of management” (Edinboro Faculty, 2018) and label Walker’s comment about a student as “a cruel, unprofessional, and incredibly immature remark” (Edinboro Faculty, 2018), which suggests that the academic staff who author the letter view Walker as lacking the competencies, characteristics, and values necessary for presidential leadership. The academic staff letter even states that Walker “does not represent the values of the Edinboro University community” (Edinboro Faculty, 2018).

23 March: Discourse analysis of Twitter response to Walker
Discussion of Walker and the crisis on social media continues on 23 March, adding to public interpretations of Walker’s traits and projecting his possible future life history following removal or resignation from the presidency. Evidence posted on 23 March suggests constituents reject the President. The student newspaper, EdinboroNow, tweets an excerpt from the letter authored by academic staff members, including: “Dr. Walker does not represent the values of the Edinboro University community, and we have to recognize [sic] that Dr. Walker has irretrievably lost his ability to lead Edinboro” (EdinboroNow, 2018a). Stripling speculates on 23 March that Walker may soon be removed from the community, stating it may be “over” for Walker (Stripling, 2018d). Another user posts “Hey Hey Ho Ho Fred Walker has got to go!”.

Saturday 24 March: Academic staff union issues statement for Walker’s removal, more news coverage, and social media commentary
On 24 March (Figure 83), seven days prior to the end of Walker’s tenure, student journalist Palmer (2018c) publishes a brief news article about academic staff union calls for Walker’s removal. Media coverage does not include presidential
Table 83: 24 March, Academic Staff Union Calls for Walker’s Removal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External Constituents</th>
<th>Governing Board</th>
<th>President</th>
<th>Internal Constituents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stripling’s 1st article in The Chronicle of Higher Education</td>
<td></td>
<td>Two weeks until end of President’s tenure</td>
<td>Students launch petition for President’s resignation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter commentary about President begins</td>
<td></td>
<td>President’s statements published in Stripling’s Chronicle article</td>
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<td>Stripling’s 3rd Chronicle article</td>
<td>Council of Trustees meet</td>
<td>President speaks to students in open office hours</td>
<td>Academic staff letter opposes President</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Academic staff union issues media release calling for Walker’s removal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Figure 83: 24 March 2018, 7 days prior to end of President Walker’s abbreviated tenure
communications on 24 March. Social media commentary continues, which includes an assertion by one constituent that the Edinboro Council of Trustees met to “consider the path forward” (Erie News Now, 2018) after media scrutiny of Walker’s presidency.

24 March: Academic staff union leader calls governing board to remove Walker
Palmer’s (2018c) 24 March article reports the academic staff union communication, which states that academic staff “are sending a strong message to the Council of Trustees. We are calling for a new leader…” (Palmer, 2018c). The union statement suggests that the President is not fulfilling the common presidential leadership expectation of maintaining productive internal relationships (Morrill, 2010b) with academic staff and their union representatives.

Tuesday 27 March: Walker resigns
Walker’s resignation is reported by news media on 27 March (Figure 84), which indicates the President provides notice of his intent to resign effective 30 March (Anon, 2018a; Palmer, 2018f; Stripling & Thomason, 2018). When Walker’s resignation is announced via news release by the interim leader of the Pennsylvania state System, Karen Whitney, she thanks President Walker for his service, expresses “respect [for] his decision” and wishes Walker well. Whitney indicates that Edinboro Provost Michael J. Hannan will assume the interim presidency (Anon, 2018a; Palmer, 2018f). Walker does not comment publicly, nor does he issue a letter of resignation or deliver remarks to announce the end of his tenure (Anon, 2018a; Palmer, 2018f; Stripling & Thomason, 2018). Palmer (2018f) reports that by 27 March the student-led petition calling for the end of Walker’s tenure had been signed by 1,000 people.
Two weeks until end of President’s tenure

President’s statements published in Stripling’s Chronicle article

Students launch petition for President’s resignation

President apologises for Chronicle article

Academic staff consider no-confidence vote in President

President’s apology republished

700 sign student-led petition opposing President

President speaks to students in open office hours

President’s apology republished

700 sign student-led petition opposing President

President’s resignation reported by media

President resigns

1,000 sign student-led petition opposing President

President’s resignation effective

Figure 84: 27 March 2018, 4 days prior to end of President Walker’s abbreviated tenure and the day Walker resigns
In post-resignation coverage published on 28 March, journalists report details of Walker’s compensation and employment contract. The President’s base salary is $267,500 a year and his contract does not include a separation agreement or severance provision (Palmer, 2018f; Schackner, 2018; Stripling, 2018f). After Walker’s presidency ends, he is not hired into a new role in the Pennsylvania university System (Palmer, 2018f; Stripling, 2018f). If fired without cause for termination, rather than resigning, he would accrue $334,000, or compensation equivalent to the remainder of his contract term (Stripling, 2018f). When Walker resigned, the President had 15 months left on his employment contract (Stripling, 2018f).

**Synthesis and discussion of findings**

By investigating public communications produced prior to Walker’s sudden departure during crisis using overlapping analytical approaches, a) analysis of potential constituent influence, b) discourse analysis, and c) timeline analysis, I set out to answer the research question: When presidents resign during high-profile crises, what patterns can be found in pre-resignation communications? Above, I organised and presented evidence, combined with narrative of the results of constituent influence and discourse analysis, sequentially and according to the episode timeline, to provide the reader with access to the details of the case and thereby enable triangulation. Next, I synthesise and discuss patterns identified into four findings:

1. External and internal constituents seek to influence directly or indirectly influence President Walker. Constituents include journalists, students, academic staff, and academic staff union leadership.

2. Constituents develop and share interpretations of President Walker’s identities and actions. A few constituents contribute to public interpretations of Walker with more specificity, namely Stripling, Palmer, Hollingsworth, and Mash.
3. President Walker’s relationships appear challenged in ways that contribute to abbreviated tenure.

4. President Walker communicates infrequently, while minimal time elapses between critical statements from potentially influential constituents.

The four findings align with, but are distinct from, the findings described in the previous chapter. Comparative analysis of findings across the two cases appears in Chapter 9.

1. External and internal constituent influence

*The Chronicle of Higher Education’s Stripling*

Stripling influences perceptions of Walker’s presidential leadership in this episode. First, by publishing the 18 March article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Stripling prompts new public interpretations of Walker’s representation of constituents, the President’s identities and life history, relationships involving Walker and constituents, and presidential actions. The newly generated interpretations of Walker and his leadership are made public through a combination of Walker’s direct and indirect quotes included in Stripling’s article and Stripling’s commentary. After initial publication, Stripling promotes the story via social media and produces new articles about Edinboro, Walker, and reactions to his story on 18 March. It is not possible using the research method I designed to conduct the study to determine if Walker was already at risk of abbreviated tenure when Stripling’s 18 March article was published or to what extent Stripling directly influences Walker. However, Walker is reported to have anticipated a positive article in *The Chronicle* following his interview with Stripling. Stripling, by writing and publishing the 18 March article may, therefore, be understood as a significant, unexpected influence on perceptions of Walker and his presidency.
**Governing bodies: Pennsylvania System-level leadership and the Edinboro University Council of Trustees**

The potential influence of Edinboro University’s governing boards and associated leadership, including the state-level, Pennsylvania System board responsible for hiring system institution presidents, the System interim leader, and the university-level Council of Trustees, are evident in the data and yet their possible direct or indirect influence on Walker during the episode, according to the documentary evidence, appears equivocal. Boards and System leadership are identified as authorised to remove Walker or condemn the President’s actions. Journalists seek comments about Walker from institutional stewards, although statements are not forthcoming until after Walker resigns. Actions of governing boards are closely observed by journalists and other constituents. Constituent attempts, such as the efforts of academic staff and union leadership, to influence governing bodies to act against Walker are also observed. In this episode, governing bodies are acknowledged and constituents seek to influence those bodies to remove Walker, but I did not find evidence of direct attempts to influence Walker arising in the public statements of governing body representatives.

**Students**

Students indirectly influence and seek directly to influence Walker. Frequent references to Edinboro’s declining enrolment in the data, contextualised by journalists who describe population declines in Pennsylvania, suggest Walker’s leadership may be shaped by student enrolment trends. President Walker develops and implements a strategy designed to reverse the enrolment decline. In doing so, he speaks and acts in ways that elicit resistance to his strategy and tactics, provoking calls for the President’s resignation which precede his sudden departure. Hollingsworth, the student who petitions Walker prior to the crisis to prevent elimination of an academic programme, is identified in media coverage
and Walker’s alleged attitude to Hollingsworth is discussed by constituents as an example of the President’s lack of respect for student perspectives or experiences. Walker’s response to student enrolment decline prompts the President to take action which impacts students, who subsequently attempt to exert counterinfluence on Walker. Students also begin and circulate an online petition calling for the President’s removal following the publication of Stripling’s 18 March article.

**Academic staff and their union leadership**
Academic staff endeavour to exert direct influence on and may also indirectly influence presidential leadership in the Edinboro University crisis prior to Walker’s abbreviated tenure. As reported in Walker’s statements published by Stripling, the threat of negative academic staff influence on Walker’s leadership prior to and during the crisis allegedly provoke Walker to shape a strategic planning process designed to prevent academic staff opposition. However, when this is reported publicly by Stripling, academic staff, realising their input into the strategic planning process may have been disregarded, exert counterinfluence on Walker by considering a no-confidence vote and publicly calling on the Council of Trustees to remove Walker.

2. **Constituents publicly interpret Walker’s identities and actions**
One manifestation of attempts to influence presidential leadership exercised by constituents involves sharing interpretations of Walker and his leadership, especially by associating traits, life histories, and actions with the President. Multiple constituents contribute public interpretations of presidential statements and actions, while a few people are found to communicate about Walker with greater specificity, such as journalist Stripling, student journalist Palmer, Pennsylvania academic union leader Mash, and other students. Constituents
engage in developing and sharing interpretations of Walker online by writing and publishing news articles, tweeting, contributing to interviews with journalists, and even remaining silent when other people expect a public statement, such as System leadership. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* journalist Stripling publishes five articles and posts eight tweets about Walker. Edinboro student journalist Palmer publishes eight articles and the student newspaper posts five tweets. Academic staff union leader Mash is interviewed for news media coverage. The union issues a public statement and also tweets about the episode and Walker’s leadership. Two students who engage in activism to prevent academic programme elimination and to advocate for Walker’s removal are found contributing to interpretations of the President’s leadership in the data. Over 1,000 people are reported to have signed a student-led petition calling for Walker’s removal by the time his resignation is effective. Individuals who sign this petition develop and share an interpretation of Walker as unfit to lead by participating in the online action. While many individuals communicate about Walker, including the 1,000-plus who sign the petition, and in doing so contribute to interpretations of his presidency, a small number of people contribute interpretations of Walker’s presidency that are more specific. Therefore, in this case I find that a few, key individuals may exercise greater influence over public interpretations of the President which accrue and circulate in the last days of Walker’s tenure owing to the increased degree of specificity in their descriptions of Walker and his leadership, or, due to their repeated contributions to public discourse about Walker.

3. *Walker’s relationships appear challenged*

Analyses of Walker’s statements and constituent response suggest the President’s relationships as they are represented in discourse may be interpreted
as challenged, a known contributor to abbreviated tenure. Walker’s direct and indirect quotes suggest interpretations of Walker as inwardly focused, isolated, disconnected from key constituents, volatile, insensitive, and controlling. Walker’s actions present in his discourse may also be interpreted publicly as evidence the President withholds information and communicates ineffectively. Constituent responses to Walker’s leadership posted to Twitter may be similarly interpreted as casting Walker’s relationships as challenged. For example, Tweets include commentary about the President that also suggest isolation, disconnection, insensitivity, and a tendency to control or withhold information.

4. President Walker communicates infrequently

Walker communicates infrequently throughout the remainder of the episode once the crisis is underway, whereas constituent interpretations are developed and shared frequently. At the start of the episode, when Stripling’s (2018a) Chronicle article is published, President Walker communicates, through direct and indirect quotes included in the article. As the episode proceeds, I found few references to public, presidential communications in the data, even though Walker’s comments reported by Stripling (2018a) on 18 March are reprinted in news coverage in the days prior to the end of his tenure. In contrast, as the episode progresses, several people, and by association the organisations with which they affiliate, contribute repeatedly to developing and sharing interpretations of Walker’s presidency, his identities, relationships, and actions. While other people contribute and share interpretations through multiple communication channels, rapidly and frequently, Walker is not observed frequently contributing new interpretations during the crisis. In the absence of interpretations shaped by Walker, other perspectives are developed, shared, and established as valid by constituents in the days preceding Walker’s abbreviated tenure.
In contrast to Walker’s infrequent statements, in the digital communications environment potentially influential constituents respond rapidly to the precipitating crisis trigger, which was the publication of Stripling’s (2018a) first article (18 March), and minimal time elapses between public communications that shape interpretations of Walker’s presidency. On 19 March, just after Stripling’s (2018a) first article is published, students launch a petition calling for Walker’s removal. Within three days (21 March) of Stripling’s (2018a) initial publication, academic staff consider a no-confidence vote in Walker and the academic staff union calls for Walker’s removal. Within six days (24 March) of the *Chronicle* article’s release, the academic staff union issues a statement asking for Walker’s removal. Nine days (27 March) after Stripling’s (2018a) article is published, Walker resigns and his resignation is effective four days later (30 March).

Although the origins of the crisis predate the bounds of data collection, sudden, unexpected events, in part propelled by digital communications shared quickly and broadly by influential constituents, precipitate and escalate the crisis in the two weeks preceding Walker’s abbreviated tenure.

**Conclusion: A brief presidency ends abruptly**

At the time of Walker’s abbreviated tenure, Edinboro University is a struggling institution and, as of completing this study, it continues to be challenged. In 2020, Edinboro was listed as a potential merger partner in Pennsylvania’s System-wide consolidation plan (Greenstein, 2020). As evident in the case data, the University has suffered from reduced funding, declining enrolment, and a poor outlook for future student recruitment due to a declining population in its region. President Walker engaged the Edinboro University community in a strategic planning process and charted a course for the University’s next ten years. However, the President’s motivation behind these actions is challenged after Stripling’s (2018a)
article is published. As higher education institutions become more financially strained, leaders may need to pay greater attention to financial margins than academic mission (Massy, 2017). During institutional turnaround, presidents may even need to act decisively to balance budgets, especially when financial challenges are extreme (MacTaggart, 2007). Fisher (1984) observes that in universities, constituents desire a “strong, assertive figure who involves them in the decision-making process but makes the final decision and accepts responsibility for it” (p. 20). Some aspects of this case suggest that Walker is meeting expectations in difficult conditions, especially the expectation of providing strategic leadership. However, he is unable to maintain the trust of students and academic staff. This example of abbreviated tenure during high-profile crisis, therefore, illustrates how a president may be meeting some expectations while responding to institutional challenges and still find that continuing to lead becomes untenable.
Chapter 9: Comparison of findings across cases, theory, and preliminary implications for practice
This research study sought to identify communication patterns during crisis episodes involving presidential resignation by asking: *when presidents resign during high-profile crises, what patterns can be found in pre-resignation communications?* By conducting this study, I investigated presidential leadership in the modern era of digital communication. Presidents risk losing their jobs (Barden, 2020; Ellis, 2018; Seltzer, 2016; Selingo, 2016), especially when faced with the pressure and scrutiny that accompanies a high-profile crisis. During crises, news media attention and commentary on social media can heighten scrutiny on university leaders (Gigliotti, 2020). When presidents under pressure leave unexpectedly, the potential for achieving institutional strategic goals may be compromised (Eckel & Kezar, 2012; Esterberg & Wooding, 2012; McLaughlin, 1996a).

Following a thorough review of the presidency (Chapter 2) and previously published abbreviated tenure research (Chapter 3), I presented the pilot research design (Chapter 4), a pilot case study involving the University of Missouri’s President Wolfe (Chapter 5), and refinements to the research design (Chapter 6). The improved, enhanced research methods enabled the completion of two, full case studies. By examining President Simon’s abbreviated tenure in crisis at MSU (Chapter 7), I identified direct and indirect constituent influence on presidential leadership, public interpretations of Simon’s actions and identities, presidential relationships that appear challenged in public discourse, and patterns involving the timing and pace of Simon’s infrequent communications in contrast to frequent constituent commentary. My analysis of President Walker’s resignation in crisis at Edinboro University yielded similar findings, with notable differences, despite the distinct features of the circumstances in which Presidents Simon and Walker resign.
Through comparative analysis of the two full cases (Chapters 7 and 8), the study yields four findings, a theory of discursive university crisis leadership, and preliminary implications for practice. Comparison of the results of analyses of constituent influence, pre-resignation discourse, and case timelines, as detailed in Stage 4 (a) through (c) of the multi-case research design (Chapter 6), involved comparing analytical notes recorded in the data collection and analysis protocol for each case. After comparing analytical notes, I recorded similarities and differences and brief narrative descriptions of my observations. Findings unique to each case are aligned, with important variances described below. Cross-case analysis enabled the definition of a preliminary discursive university crisis leadership theory. Using the findings, and theory, I offer implications for practice requiring validation, as well as suggest opportunities for future research.

**Cross-case analysis: Pre-resignation communication patterns in crisis**

Patterns identified in public communications preceding abbreviated presidential tenure during crisis across the two episodes in Chapters 7 and 8 are similar. However, importance variances are observed related to the sources of potential influence on presidential leadership, specific, public interpretations of presidential leadership, and the appearance of relationship challenges involving presidents and constituents. Comparative analysis of the individual case findings point to four emerging findings across the two cases:

1. External and internal constituents seek to influence directly and indirectly influence public perceptions of the presidents. Sources of potential influence vary across the cases.

2. Constituents develop and share specific interpretations of presidential actions and identities. A few constituents in each episode contribute to public discourse about presidential leadership with greater specificity.

3. Presidential relationships appear challenged in ways that contribute to abbreviated tenure.
4. Presidents communicate infrequently, while minimal time elapses between critical statements from potentially influential constituents.

1. Direct and indirect, external and internal influence
In both cases, external and internal constituents seek to influence directly and indirectly influence public perceptions of the presidents. Sources of potential influence vary across the cases. Direct and indirect influence arises from both inside and outside the university communities.

External constituent influence
First, likely external constituent influence on presidential leadership is evident in both cases. Edinboro University’s President Walker is influenced by news journalists, especially The Chronicle’s Stripling (2018a). Similarly, at MSU President Simon’s abbreviated tenure in crisis is influenced by news media. The governing board’s potential influence on Simon features prominently in the MSU case, whereas Edinboro’s boards are identified in the evidence but their influence on Walker is equivocal. Survivors inspired by the #MeToo movement and elected political officials also endeavour to influence perceptions of Simon’s leadership and presidential actions in the MSU crisis.

News media potential influence
In both episodes, journalists publishing and posting content online influence perceptions of presidential leadership. In some cases, journalists endeavour to exert direct influence on presidential actions. For example, journalists cover Simon’s presidential leadership extensively. Investigative reporters produce stories about Nassar’s abuse and MSU’s handling of sexual assault complaints, while editorial boards and journalists advocate for Simon’s resignation. Shamus, for instance, produces news stories critical of Simon, at times including the President’s name in headlines circulated on social media, such as: ‘Michigan
State University’s Lou Anna Simon is a day late, short on empathy’ (Shamus, 2018a) and ‘Michigan State's Lou Anna Simon's apology to Nassar's victims rings hollow, and distant’ (Shamus, 2018c). Throughout the episode, news media journalists cover Nassar’s trial and survivors’ forceful condemnation of Simon’s leadership.

In the second episode examined above, Stripling’s (2018a) article in The Chronicle of Higher Education about Walker’s leadership precipitates the eruption of a crisis at Edinboro University. Throughout the pre-resignation phase, Stripling continues publishing stories about Walker and the University. Other journalists use Stripling’s articles as source material. Stripling also discusses Edinboro and Walker on social media.

**Governing board potential influence**

In both episodes, I found patterns of possible governing board influence on and authority over presidential leadership in pre-resignation communications, although in one episode the board influences public perceptions of the president, whereas in the other episode the boards are largely silent. The MSU Board’s public communications and reported actions influence public perceptions of MSU’s crisis and Simon’s abbreviated tenure. MSU board communications appear to undermine credibility of both trustees and President Simon, as well as escalate the institution's reputational crisis. The MSU Board endorses Simon, but the following day Trustee Lyons independently calls for Simon’s resignation.

Afterward, other Trustees endeavour to reinforce their support for Simon, but constituents observe and highlight the public revelation of divided trustee perspectives. Trustee Ferguson, attempting to express support for Simon, conveys insensitivity to survivors of Nassar’s abuse, which attracts additional negative news coverage and social media commentary focused on MSU, Simon,
and the Board. In the Edinboro episode, constituents seek comment from the governing bodies, and urge the bodies to remove the President, while institutional stewards remain silent on Walker’s leadership. Governing boards in both cases are criticised for failing to act when presidents are viewed as no longer fit to lead their universities. The MSU board’s public communications demonstrate the potential for board communications to influence public perceptions of presidential leadership negatively during crisis when trustees speak individually or fail to reach and sustain consensus on a president’s fitness for leadership.

**Elected political officials potential influence**

Although both cases involve government-funded universities, elected political officials are observed attempting to influence the crisis at MSU and Simon’s leadership publicly and vigorously, whereas political influence does not feature in the Edinboro episode. Politicians call for Simon’s resignation or termination, including an extreme example of attempted political influence on presidential leadership: an entire chamber of the Michigan Legislature entertains and ultimately votes on a resolution calling for Simon’s resignation or removal by the MSU Trustees, which passes 96 for and 11 against (The Daily Beast, 2018a; Thomason, 2018).

**Internal constituent influence**

In both cases, internal university constituents seek to influence presidential leadership, originating in communications issued by students and academic staff. At MSU, current and former academic staff, as well as students and former students, seek to influence the end of President Simon’s tenure. Survivors, many of whom are current or former students, vigorously advocate for the end of Simon’s tenure. Nassar, a former academic staff member, engages in sexual misconduct with students, who, in some instances have already graduated when
they testify at Nassar’s hearing. Therefore, in pre-resignation communications I observed current and former students and a former academic staff member influencing indirectly or directly seeking to influence Simon’s presidency as it concludes. Other University employees and students advocate for Simon’s resignation or removal.

Following publication of Stripling’s (2018a) article, academic staff and students publicly criticise Edinboro’s President Walker. Academic staff and students mount campaigns to precipitate Walker’s removal or resignation. In both cases, internal constituents reject the continuation of each president’s leadership and publicly affirm desires for a new president to be appointed. As events unfold in each case, urgent calls for removal or resignation are advanced by internal constituents, as well as by external actors.

2. Specific interpretations of presidential actions and identities
Multiple constituents develop and share specific interpretations of presidential actions and identities. In both cases, a few constituents in each episode contribute to public discourse about presidential leadership with greater specificity. In communications preceding Simon’s resignation from MSU, many potentially influential constituents voice criticism of Simon. Survivors, the news media, and elected political officials share interpretations of Simon’s leadership, often using intense, emotional language, circulating interpretations broadly via social media, and attracting coverage in news media outlets. As described in Chapter 7, prominent survivors, journalists, trustees, and elected officials offer specific commentary about President Simon, and some constituents contribute specific interpretations repeatedly through the episode.

In the other case, The Chronicle’s Stripling influences Walker’s presidency, the crisis at Edinboro, and presidential abbreviated tenure by publishing an article
about Walker, as well as producing additional stories and social media posts about the President. Student journalist Palmer frequently publishes during the episode about Walker’s actions and traits, while student activist Hollingsworth, who is the subject of Walker’s critique, responds publicly during the crisis episode, saying “he was aghast that the president appeared to misrepresent his sincere motivation” (Stripling, 2018a). Academic staff and their union leadership also shape interpretations of Walker’s actions and identities repeatedly and with specificity during the episode, conveying their views that the President is unfit to continue leading.

3. Presidential relationships appear challenged

Presidential relationships appear challenged in ways that are known to contribute to abbreviated tenure. As noted above in the review of abbreviated tenure research (Chapter 3), challenges that have been found to lead to the unexpected, early end of a president’s tenure may manifest in real or perceived relationship issues, including but not limited to isolation or distance from constituents, volatility, insensitivity, or controlling behaviour. Relationship challenges can arise when a president is oriented to oneself, rather than to other individuals. Presidents withholding information, communicating infrequently or ineffectively may also risk abbreviated tenure.

In both episodes, presidential communications and constituent responses on Twitter may be interpreted as evidence of strained presidential relationships. Both presidents communicate in ways that may be interpreted as self-oriented, isolated, disconnected, and insensitive. Both presidents may also be viewed as withholding information and communicating ineffectively. Uniquely, President Walker’s statements and associated response may be interpreted as volatile, whereas this pattern is not found in Simon’s statements and constituent
responses to the MSU President’s leadership. Regardless of the strength of actual presidential relationships in private exchanges, each president may be publicly interpreted as unable to sustain relationships, a known contributor to abbreviated tenure. Evidence of challenged relationships accrues and mounts in public discourse in the days preceding resignation, edging out the possibility of more favourable interpretations of presidential relationships that could forestall abbreviated tenure.

4. Presidents communicate infrequently
In the two episodes investigated, I found presidential communications are infrequently issued in the pre-resignation phase. Whereas the pace of communications issued by influential constituents is brisk. MSU’s President Simon expresses an intent to avoid issuing public statements to news journalists when she visits Nassar’s sentencing. Simon also highlights her own lack of communication as she resigns: “I have limited my personal statements” (Simon, 2018). In the crisis at Edinboro, once Stripling’s (2018a) article is published, President Walker makes few public statements. Communicating infrequently is a known contributor to relationship challenges that can prompt abbreviated tenure (Touzeau, 2010). In addition to contributing to abbreviated tenure, infrequent presidential communications during the crises investigated produce information gaps in public discourse. In the absence of presidential statements, information gaps are filled by constituents who develop and circulate critical interpretations of presidential leadership.

In contrast, throughout each episode I observed minimal time elapsing between critical statements made by influential constituents. This is perhaps not unsurprising given that many constituents can contribute interpretations of presidential leadership simultaneously on Twitter or other social media platforms.
For example, at MSU, the Board of Trustees endorse Simon, but within a day of issuing the endorsement an individual trustee calls for Simon’s resignation, which is then followed by another statement of support from the remaining trustees. Politicians’ calls for Simon’s removal or resignation begin on 18 January and continue and increase in the days prior to Simon’s resignation on 24 January. In the Edinboro episode, Stripling’s (2018a) article about Walker is published on 18 March. One day later, students begin an online campaign advocating for Walker’s removal or resignation. Three days later, academic staff begin to discuss a vote of no confidence in Walker. As potentially influential constituents communicate, their views of the presidents’ leadership are made public and circulate in real time in the news and on social media. This builds pressure on presidents to vacate their posts, as well as on governing boards responsible for hiring and terminating presidents. Constituent statements, issued frequently and rapidly, may further diminish the presidents’ capacities to shape public interpretation during crisis, especially as the presidents communicate infrequently.

**Theory of discursive university crisis leadership**

Building on the outcomes of my cross-case analysis, I believe that a context-specific redefinition of discursive leadership theory is possible. To review, my research is underpinned primarily by Fairhurst’s (2007) definition of discursive leadership, which involves “a process of influence and meaning management” (p. 6) aimed at enacting a task or achieving an aim. Discursive leadership is linguistic. Discursive leaders influence interpretation through communications intended to shape responses (Bolman & Gallos, 2010; Chaffee, 1985; Neumann, 1990). Discursive leadership also involves multiple social actors (Fairhurst, 2007). Leadership, therefore, does not reside in an individual, but exists in discursive connections between leaders and others (Walker & Aritz, 2014).
Moreover, leadership involves “an attribution made by followers or observers” (Fairhurst, 2007, p. 6). Constituents, therefore, attribute leadership to leaders, ascribing authority (Walker & Aritz, 2014) and assigning blame to leaders.

Based on the results of this research, I extend prior discursive leadership theory to establish a preliminary theory of discursive crisis leadership in universities. This theory does not intend to contradict Fairhurst (2007) or other discursive leadership researchers, but rather to theorise discursive leadership in the context of crises in which abbreviated tenure may occur. Prior discursive leadership theory is, therefore, a foundation on which I have built the following preliminary theory.

University presidents who resign in crises are unable to lead discursively. In the context of the crises investigated, presidential leadership lacks sufficient efficacy to influence the management or development of meaning through language in a network of potentially influential social actors. As such, presidents become unable to secure continued attribution of authority or legitimacy by constituents. In each case, presidents do not appear to communicate publicly in ways that enable their capacity to influence internal and external constituent interpretations of their leadership. During high-profile crises, if constituents cease to attribute leadership competency and authority to a president, a president may become unable to lead. Furthermore, if a president is not engaged relationally and linguistically to ensure reaffirmation of constituent attribution, continuing to lead may not be possible. To justify this emergent, preliminary, context-specific theory of discursive leadership involving abbreviated tenure during crises, I discuss the features of discursive leadership as observed in the MSU and Edinboro episodes that prompt me to assert this theory: leaders’ use of language broadly, presidential relationships as they manifest in discourse, the enactment of
leadership to influence interpretation, and constituent attribution of authority and competency to the presidents.

**Presidents communicating**

In crisis in the illustrated cases, presidential leadership is enacted using language, albeit in ways that render continuation in post possibly untenable. Formal and informal communications contribute to escalating crises, including statements made by presidents, lack of presidential communication, and constituent responses. At MSU, survivor statements made during Nassar’s sentencing, combined with Simon’s limited comments, which are perceived as insensitive or ineffective, escalate crisis conditions. President Simon is often silent while other compelling, plausible voices shape the interpretation of the escalating crisis. President Walker’s initial interview with Stripling produces a subsequent communication, the publication of Stripling’s (2018a) article, which triggers the crisis. In Walker’s case, the President speaks, but in doing so may undermine relationships with other constituents. Presidents lead by communicating, but the crises at MSU and Edinboro indicate that communications may disable rather than enable effective presidential leadership.

**Presidential relationships**

In the cases investigated, presidential leadership in crisis may be understood as relational, or performed within a network of social relationships. However, the Presidents are not effective in sustaining relationships using language, nor are they able to sustain the appearance of mutually supportive relationships with constituents. Evidence of relationship difficulties on public view in pre-resignation communications demonstrates the importance of leading relationally during crisis. When relationships are undermined publicly, presidents may find it difficult to continue leading credibly if constituents perceive presidential relationships to be
strained. In the episodes investigated, both offline and virtual relationships, which intersect and are interdependent, may have influenced the curtailment of presidential leadership.

**Presidents influencing constituent interpretation**

Presidents Simon and Walker are not observed influencing public interpretations such that constituents view the leaders positively. The presidents, therefore, may have unintentionally undercut their capacity for ongoing leadership. Bolman and Gallos (2010) compare presidential leadership to an actor’s performance, watched by spectators and considered successful if the president delivers a message that is interpreted as intended. Public interpretation of presidential statements in the cases was found to diverge from publicly stated presidential intentions. For example, before Stripling’s (2018a) article is published, Walker anticipates that the article will show Edinboro University in a positive light (Palmer, 2018d). However, Walker’s statements, as recounted in the article, do not reflect favourably on Walker or the University. In the Edinboro crisis, therefore, Walker fails to enact leadership in a way that produces the intended interpretation.

Similarly, President Simon states in an email, “these arguments can seem disrespectful to the victims”… "please know that the defenses raised on MSU’s behalf are in no way a reflection of our view of the survivors, for whom we have the utmost respect and sympathy" (Staff Reports, 2018b). Simon’s statement acknowledges that official communications had not been received as she intended. Both presidents also affirm in the days immediately prior to their abbreviated tenures that they intend to continue leading, despite public pressure to resign.
Constituent attribution to presidents

Attribution involves the assignment of leadership responsibility to a person by others (Walker & Aritz, 2014), which may be positive or negative. In the crises leading to abbreviated presidential tenure, constituents’ public attribution of leadership competency to the presidents diminishes while assignment of blame to presidents increases. Constituents may associate leaders with success, such as by assigning responsibility for catalysing positive outcomes. Attribution also involves assignment of blame to leaders for negative outcomes (Coombs, 1998).

Some communications issued during the MSU crisis associate Simon’s presidency with increased enrolment, funding success, and expanded research activities. However, constituents also assign blame to Simon for failing to implement sexual assault prevention measures, for allegedly enabling Nassar’s abuse, or failing to listen to survivors when complaints had been filed. In Edinboro University’s crisis, constituents accuse and blame Walker for alleged manipulation of internal and external constituent opinions.

Social media contributes to leadership attribution in both episodes. Social media users may be influenced by the infectiousness of emotional online communications (Schulz, 2017) as they interpret leadership statements and actions. Anger and outrage are directed online at university leadership in both cases. Hobson (2018b) also observes that “national outrage” is expressed in response to MSU’s crisis. Meadows and Meadows (2019), use content analysis to examine responses to Nassar’s case posted to Twitter in the days following sentencing, rather than preceding Simon’s resignation. They find that the most commonly expressed emotion in the data is anger, followed by disgust and joy (Meadows & Meadows, 2019). Joy, for instance, is associated with justice being served to Nassar (Meadows & Meadows, 2019). When attribution of responsibility
is identified in their data, they find anger and disgust are the most commonly expressed emotions (Meadows & Meadows, 2019). Although my research does not aim to identify emotions, attribution, which is a feature of discursive leadership, and outrage may intersect. When constituents assign blame in crises, strong emotions and intentional circulation of messages via social media may ensue. As constituents identify an individual to blame during crisis, leadership may become the focus. Expressions of anger may also heighten attribution of blame to presidents, as observed in both cases.

**Preliminary implications for practice**

In many instances, implications for practice based on this empirical investigation align with other crisis leadership practices recommended by researchers and practitioners working in or building knowledge about leadership practice in higher education and other settings. By using a small number of case studies, it is not possible to identify broad implications for practice conclusively, but preliminary implications may be drawn from case analyses and findings, which require validation using additional and alternative research methods. Presidential crisis leadership may be enacted through communication, as well as by sustaining relationships, mapping influence and impact, learning, acting, and iterating, and empowering a unified crisis leadership team. Like Gigliotti’s (2020) implications for practice suggest, I also posit that leaders may benefit from viewing communication as integral to crisis leadership, rather than simply viewing communication as a vehicle for influencing public opinion and safeguarding reputation. In the following sections, I describe preliminary implications for practice which may be of interest to those working as leaders, supporting leaders, or developing leaders in higher education.
**Communication**

University presidents leading in crises may benefit from communicating openly, frequently, rapidly, consistently, with empathy, online and in real life, in dialogue, and, finally, to create a crisis narrative. In crisis, frequent presidential communications to all constituencies may be critical (Genshaft, 2014; Hincker, 2014). A president’s crisis communications, preferably informed by measured optimism for a speedy resolution while remaining honest, can reassure anxious constituents eager to interpret periods of uncertainty and ambiguity (MacTaggart, 2020c).

**Open communication**

Echoing other crisis leadership studies in higher education and beyond (Bataille & Cordova, 2014a; Coombs, 2019; Genshaft, 2014; Kerrissey & Edmondson, 2020; Mitroff, 2001; Stafford, 2014), the findings suggest the importance of university presidents communicating in crisis honestly and transparently. Presidents should not be afraid to say if something is not yet known (MacTaggart, 2020c), but rather indicate when something is expected to be known, and then report back to constituencies. Crisis communication specialist Fink (2013) advises leaders to be honest, adding that facts will always become publicly known. Bataille and Cordova (2014) extend the potential consequences of failing to communicate openly when leading during a university crisis: "...honesty and forthrightness of the messages can make the difference in how the final story is slanted, and evasion and dishonesty will leave a mark forever on an institution's reputation" (p. 158).

Presidents in both cases are interpreted by constituents as failing to communicate openly. Constituents accuse MSU’s President Simon of concealing information about Nassar’s abuse and thereby enabling ongoing harm to
survivors. President Simon releases a statement during the crisis at MSU which suggests that public responses to accusations will be limited:

So, as the litigation progresses in the months ahead, you will likely continue to hear a variety of allegations and accusations against the university...I ask for your patience as well as your understanding that MSU cannot litigate the cases in the media and that many public assertions may go unchallenged unless or until they are addressed in open court (Staff Reports, 2018b).

Solicitors may advise presidents to remain silent to limit liability, but in doing so, presidents, as I found in the cases investigated, may appear disconnected, insensitive, or unwilling to disclose information. Despite solicitor guidance, Genshaft (2014) suggests that university crisis leaders who communicate openly minimise liability:

Institutions have long felt this level of openness would leave them vulnerable to liability; we have found it actually minimizes [sic] liability because those who have been harmed do not feel as if the situation is being swept under the rug (p. 16).

MacTaggart (2020c) similarly suggests that solicitors’ advice should be considered, but not followed to such an extent that presidents fail to express concern for the welfare of those impacted by a crisis. President Walker is also viewed as withholding his true motives when he launches a strategic planning process and communicates the state of the university’s finances in an open forum. Once reported in The Chronicle, Walker is interpreted by constituents as dishonest and at fault for failing to communicate openly.

Frequent communication
In the absence of communication from presidents, other people will fill the information gap, often speculating or sharing misinformation, even disseminating “rumor [sic] and innuendo” (Genshaft, 2014, p. 15). Presidents may benefit during a crisis by continually communicating, sharing what they know, and repeating critical information. President Simon tells reporters at Nassar’s hearing that they
are drawing unnecessary attention to her, effectively suggesting journalists should not speak to the President. Finally, as she resigns, Simon acknowledges: “I have limited my personal statements” (Simon, 2018). Once the Edinboro crisis is underway, President Walker communicates infrequently, while constituents fill the interpretive void, commenting on Walker’s intentions, actions, and communications. Whereas effective crisis leaders in any setting have been found to engage in continually updating constituents (Kerrissey & Edmondson, 2020), the presidents resigning during crisis investigated in this study are largely silent.

**Rapid communication**

After crisis triggers and critical incidents, presidents may benefit from communicating a response rapidly, even if not all details about an incident or proposed resolution are immediately known. Social media and 24/7 news cycles enable rapid comment from any perspective as observed in the episodes investigated. If presidents hesitate, they miss the opportunity to share their views and shape interpretations of crisis events. For example, President Simon is criticised for failing to appear or to communicate on the first day of Nassar’s sentencing hearing when survivor testimony begins. The start of survivor testimony is not the start of the MSU crisis, but it represents an important turning point, in which additional attention is focused on MSU and Simon’s leadership due to widely publicised courtroom statements. While survivors and journalists speculate about Simon’s absence and criticise the President, Simon does not communicate publicly, thereby missing the opportunity to shape interpretation rapidly.

**Consistent communication**

Presidents leading in crisis should consider communicating consistent messages to all constituencies. Lawson (2007) observes that inconsistent messaging can
be damaging: “inconsistent messages can, and will, increase anxiety and quickly undermine the credibility of an institution’s experts” (p. 101). Consistency in official, prepared statements and unofficial informal communications, as well as private and public communication may enhance confidence in leadership. If direction changes, presidents can describe the rationale for shifting focus to avoid the perception of inconsistency.

In both cases, presidential statements may be interpreted as inconsistent. President Simon expresses compassion for survivors, but a number of influential constituents criticise presidential actions and words, labelling them inconsistent with the President’s expressed concern for survivors. President Walker’s interview indicates that he may embrace motives inconsistent with public statements, even saying: “I don’t apologize [sic] for the way I think…but I don’t always use the words publicly” (Stripling, 2018a). Walker expresses deep feelings for Edinboro University, “I love this university” (Palmer, 2018f), but also indicates that he has been dismantling the institution: “I had to break this place down to its lowest element before I could start to build it back up” (Stripling, 2018a). Walker’s expressed love is a counterpoint to the violent language he uses to describe leading Edinboro University, such as “bloodbath”, “nuclear bomb”, “blood in the water”, and “defeat” (Stripling, 2018a).

**Empathetic communication**

Presidents who lead in crisis should consider the importance of exhibiting a high regard for the experiences, perspectives, and feelings of others, especially those suffering during a crisis. Organisational management and leadership researchers Kerrissey and Edmondson (2020) suggest that leadership “in an uncertain, fast-moving crisis means making oneself available to feel what it is like to be in another’s shoes — to lead with empathy”. Both cases of abbreviated presidential...
tenure include presidential communications that may be interpreted by constituents as insensitive, a counterpoint to empathy. President Simon is accused of enabling Nassar's assaults on girls and young women, failing to listen when complaints were filed against Nassar, and avoiding survivor testimony. President Walker is reported to have disregarded views of academic staff and blamed a student's protest of the closure of Edinboro University's music degree on the student's experience of grief.

**Online and offline communications, using multiple channels**
By communicating in real life as well as online, presidents may reach many more constituents with important messages and be better placed to navigate critique during crisis. In the crises investigated, people speak and act online. Although social media activity responding to presidential leadership likely influences both cases of abbreviated tenure in crisis, neither president speaks directly to constituents via social media, while other individuals use social media to share interpretations of presidential leadership forcefully and widely. Like Genshaft (2014) and MacTaggart (2020c), this study similarly suggests that higher education crisis leaders would benefit from communicating using social media. Gigliotti (2020) also urges higher education crisis leaders to send multiple communications to ensure their messages are received by individuals impacted by a crisis, which may be achieved directly through social media.

**Dialogic communication**
Presidents can create opportunities for two-way communication, especially with individuals impacted significantly by a crisis, through listening and responding. By using what is learned through listening, presidents can shape crisis strategy and tailor future communications. People expect to be heard, especially now that social media provides ample opportunities to speak. Like Gigliotti (2020), on the
basis of this study I suggest conceptualising university leadership communications during crisis as dialogic, involving exchanges with constituents designed to be responsive to constituent need and in which the leader’s primary concern involves the people impacted by a crisis. Neither president experiencing abbreviated tenure in crisis examined in this study is perceived as engaging effectively in two-way dialogue with constituents. For example, Walker’s alleged attempts to manipulate public opinion provoke constituent critique of the President, who is accused of engaging in a “supposedly objective and transparent planning process...designed to reach predetermined outcomes, with indifference to and in defiance of the views of stakeholders in the community” (Edinboro Faculty, 2018). Rather than listening to stakeholders’ views and incorporating them into the University planning process, Walker is viewed as disregarding and defying constituent perspectives. At MSU, survivors explicitly criticise President Simon for failing to listen or respond to individuals harmed by Nassar at two junctures: when survivors filed complaints prior to the episode investigated in this study and when survivors testify in the days immediately prior to Simon’s resignation.

**Collective authoring of the crisis narrative**

As events unfold and constituents build new stories during crisis, leadership may influence interpretation and the emerging narrative. The story of a college or university is carried by its constituents. However, during a crisis that story is disrupted. Constituents may grasp at fragments of information to interpret crisis events, which leads to the shaping of a new story through projecting, speculating, and rationalising. A significant moment in an institution's saga, a crisis can influence perception and action for years or even decades (Cartwright, 2014). Genshaft (2014) asserts that “a poorly managed campus crisis will change the
narrative of your institution” (p. 8). Leaders, by communicating and enabling interpretation, write the story of a crisis as they live through it (Spector, 2019). In the absence of a plausible story, constituents may craft a new narrative based on their own interpretations and speculation.

In both cases, leaders fail to communicate in ways that maintain their capacity to influence unfolding narratives. The presidents are not observed publicly chronicling or conveying their institution’s inflection points and their leadership of the crises as pressure mounts. In the episodes, narratives that cast the presidents as unfit to lead quickly take hold in traditional news media and on social media. Simon largely remains silent, which allows other people to tell a story of MSU’s failure to protect women and girls from Nassar and create the narrative of the end of Simon’s presidency. Walker defends his leadership and apologises, but does not chart a plausible course for re-establishing trusting relationships with constituents that is embraced and acknowledged in the public narrative. Perhaps Walker might have used the crisis as a breakthrough to rebuild honest, trusting relationships with academic staff and students, grounded in humility. Simon might have used the crisis as a catalyst for systemic change. Of course, it is impossible to know if either leader could have continued in post following the extreme events in which they led. Even if continuing may have been untenable, the persistence of their leadership becomes implausible as the crisis narratives unfold, thereby making abbreviated tenure likely, if not inevitable.

Presidents can author stories of upheaval as they lead through periods of crisis by communicating with constituents and systematically considering the range of possible, plausible, and accurate stories unfolding while they navigate uncertain circumstances.
**Relationships during crisis**

University presidents navigating crises at risk of abbreviated tenure may benefit from leading not just by communicating effectively but also by sustaining relationships. By connecting with and orienting to the experiences of other people, presidents can lead by attending to the emotional needs of individuals impacted by a crisis (Mitroff, 2001). Genshaft (2014) suggests that in university crisis, constituents who may be hurt or suffering due to a crisis should be acknowledged and embraced (p. 15). Gigliotti’s (2020) recommended competencies for effective university crisis leadership include care, aftercare, empathy and compassion, humility, and trust, all of which are required to sustain relationships during crisis.

In the crisis episodes, presidents communicate in ways that may undermine their relationships with their external and internal constituents. In an article about President Simon, Shamus (2018c) asserts: “in the aftermath of such a horrific scandal, how can Simon offer victims such a hollow apology, and then further betray their trust…”. President Walker’s relationships are diminished after Stripling’s (2018a) publication is released, prompting some academic staff to write: “Dr. Walker has irreversibly lost the trust of students, their families, and the faculty [academic staff] and staff” (Edinboro Faculty, 2018).

**Influence and impact during crisis**

Presidents leading in university crises at risk of abbreviated tenure navigate multiple sources of potential constituent influence, while also striving to mitigate the impacts of a crisis on constituents. Gigliotti’s (2020) competencies for effective university crisis leadership include analysis, synthesis, information gathering and dissemination, and learning. To enact these competencies, university presidents require tools that may be systematically used to enable
analysis and understanding during the uncertainty and chaos of crisis. Mitroff (2001) suggests that organisations prepared to handle crises identify the patterns and interconnections by creating visual maps of crises, as well as considering the perspectives of multiple stakeholders.

Constituent influence and crisis impacts may be systematically and iteratively identified. As such, presidents may develop strategies and deploy resources to navigate influences potentially contributing to crisis escalation and abbreviated presidential tenure. Derived from the independent analysis of the cases and cross-case analysis, Table 9 provides a short list of questions to use during crises to identify influence and impact arising from outside or inside universities and also involving the president. The questions may be helpful for university leadership teams as they seek to identify possible crisis impacts, constituent influences, critical communications, and response strategies. Questions are intentionally brief and few in number to enable rapid application in fast-paced crisis conditions.

Table 9: Questions for Leaders Mapping Influence and Impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who may be impacted by the crisis and how?</th>
<th>External</th>
<th>President</th>
<th>Internal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What action will mitigate crisis impacts?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who or what may influence the crisis?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What actions or statements will respond to each potential influence?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9: Questions for crisis leaders to use in plotting potential influences on and impacts during crisis on the university crisis leadership framework

After completing the questions, possible impacts and influences may be placed on a framework (Figure 85), analysed, continually expanded, and frequently
reviewed as leaders navigate rapidly evolving, high-stakes crisis situations. Presidents lead and risk abbreviated tenure in complex, rapidly changing crisis conditions, which may be challenging to interpret as events unfold. A university crisis leadership framework, based on study findings and theory of discursive university crisis leadership, visually presents the interplay between potential influences on presidential leadership, crisis impacts, and discourse.

First, presidential leadership in crisis associated with risk of abbreviated tenure may be influenced by external and internal constituents who communicate publicly and rapidly. Possible external and internal influence, frequently enacted in communications, has the potential to trigger, escalate, or accelerate crisis conditions. Constituents, therefore, may influence crises, while crises also impact constituents. Impacted individuals share their stories and in doing so seek to influence other constituents or presidential leadership. For example, survivors of
Nassar’s abuse are impacted, but also communicate, influencing the escalation of the crisis at MSU. Discourse in crisis is therefore multi-directional. This visual tool may be used to map influence and impacts in real time during crises, as below in Figure 86.

**Figure 86: Sample Influence and Impact Map of MSU Crisis on University Crisis Leadership Framework**

![Map of influence and impact during the MSU crisis](image)

**Knowledge of influence and impact: Building knowledge, acting, and iterating**

University presidents may enhance their leadership during crisis by learning, acting, and continually iterating. As the case timelines demonstrate, crisis conditions change rapidly, as constituents attempt to exert influence and crisis damage accrues. Crisis episodes unfold quickly, requiring agile and flexible leadership approaches. Mapping impacts and influence may be an iterative process to ensure rapid identification of new influences and impacts requiring
leadership response during a crisis. Analysis and understanding can inform action and allow leaders to build strategies iteratively for crisis resolution. Without continually learning and using this learning to inform action, presidents may risk appearing insensitive or inactive. For example, Presidents Simon and Walker communicate infrequently as the crises in which they lead escalate. As such, the presidents appear unresponsive to constituent concerns, constituent influence, and even the suffering of people impacted during crisis. The presidents are interpreted by constituents as inactive while pressure to resign mounts. Neither president is observed communicating clearly, rapidly, and publicly to constituents that concerns have been understood and direct, responsive action is being taken. Learning, acting, and iterating requires presidents to exercise previously identified crisis leadership capacities in organisational leadership and management studies such as critical thinking and learning from mistakes (Mitroff, 2001), while responding productively to errors or missteps (Kerrissey & Edmondson, 2020).

**Team leadership**

Presidential crisis leadership may be bolstered when presidents assemble a team that can operate cohesively in pursuit of a shared direction, while incorporating diverse perspectives. In the episodes investigated, presidents appear isolated. Senior leadership teams are notably absent from the public discourse. Governing boards are either silent or fragmented in their approach to acting with presidents leading in crisis. The research design only includes publicly available data. The work of crisis leadership teams may not be made public during the apex of a crisis. Even so, the appearance of presidential isolation in discourse and fragmentation amongst leadership, combined with the myriad of potentially influential constituents active in the episodes, suggests that presidents can
benefit from engaging collectively in the work of crisis leadership, rather than operating independently.

For example, during MSU’s crisis, the governing board do not remain unified in support of President Simon. Also, the Edinboro University student newspaper reporting on Walker’s resignation identifies the President’s disconnection from senior communications leaders: “And can we talk about the communications team for a second? Where were they during these disastrous interviews? Who should have been kicking Walker under the table when he was talking about faculty or individual students?” (The Spectator, 2018). The breadth and depth of presidential relationships needing attention in crisis requires more than one person, and therefore assembling and activating a crisis leadership team, which stands together, reinforces each other, and nurtures a constellation of critical relationships may be beneficial. Gigliotti (2020) and Harrison (2014) recommend that university crisis leadership teams should be drawn from across the divisions of an institution. Presidents who build a coalition of leaders working to not only resolve the crisis, but also identifying the emergence of potent, possible influence and enabling interpretation amongst constituencies may extend their capacities and reach.

To continue leading through and beyond a crisis, presidents will likely require an understanding of all perspectives and potential influences to see complexity and build solutions. Mapping influence and impact through the sole perspective of the president may result in a narrow conception of a crisis and an inadequately designed set of responses. Whereas, by engaging a team of crisis leaders, who hold multiple perspectives, many possible risks can be identified and multiple solutions may be created rapidly. Although a diversity of perspective on the crisis leadership team is critical (MacTaggart, 2020c), once decisions are made, the
team can lead in unity by delivering consistent, shared messages (Lawson, 2014).

Trustees may be both a potential source of influence on a crisis and may also participate as members of a president’s crisis leadership team. During a crisis the potential for conflict between presidents and boards can increase (O’Rourke, 2014). If presidents and boards are misaligned during a crisis: “the apparent dysfunction between them compounds the crisis that the institution already faces” (O’Rourke, 2014, p. 128). Trustees may influence a crisis, as observed in the MSU case. Involving a governing board member or members in crisis leadership activity may enable development of joint solutions involving the president and the board, plus enable the assessment of risk of abbreviated tenure. Governing board involvement should not impede the pace of decision making during a crisis, but rather enhance crisis response by integrating additional perspectives into solution development and ensuring alignment of governance and leadership direction.

Opportunities for future research
As I conclude this study, pressing, unanswered questions emerge about presidential leadership in crisis. Alternative methodologies may be employed to expand upon this investigation. I sought to generate theory based on a limited number of cases, which may be validated or generalised by conducting additional research into similar phenomena using new research questions and varying methods.

Next phase research questions
Several urgent questions arise from this study, which build on study findings, theory, and new knowledge developed. Three, preliminary research questions
may inform future investigations into presidential leadership in crisis in the age of digital communications:

1. What patterns, if any, can be found in the communications of university presidents who continue leading following calls for their resignation or termination?

2. How do presidents leading in high-profile crises use their knowledge of constituent perspectives to respond to and recover from crises?

3. When presidents communicate with constituents directly using social media during crisis, what patterns, if any, can be found in presidential communications and constituent responses?

The first question seeks to understand the communication patterns of presidents who continue leading, rather than resign from post or are removed. The results of a study which aims to answer this question may be compared to this study’s findings to develop knowledge about abbreviated presidential tenure in contrast to continuing presidential tenure. The second preliminary question is oriented to individual leaders’ use of constituent influence in making decisions during and after crises. I observed in public discourse direct attempts by constituents to influence presidents, as well as indirect influence. These patterns appearing in publicly available documentary evidence appear to, but may or may not have, influenced presidential actions or behaviours. The second question therefore builds on this study’s findings to explore relationships between presidential leadership and constituent influence in greater depth and through the perspective of leaders. Third, although the presidents in the cases are not active on Twitter during the crisis episodes, many presidents are adopting the platform, or others, to communicate directly with constituents (MacTaggart, 2017; Zaiontz, 2015). For example, President Santa Ono, who in 2020 leads the University of British Columbia and who previously led the University of Cincinnati in America, had 54,000 Twitter followers when a crisis ensued in 2015 (Stripling, 2015). A white University of Cincinnati police officer shot and killed an unarmed Black citizen,
Samuel Dubose, during a traffic stop (Stripling, 2015). A capable builder of online social community, Ono is an example of a president who engaged constituents in real life and online through a high-profile crisis. A comparison of communication patterns emerging in the University of Cincinnati crisis episode to those found in the University of Missouri episode, which occurred in the same year, may yield new knowledge of discursive presidential leadership during crises and in doing so expand existing knowledge, while developing preliminary implications for leadership practice.

**Diversification of cases and expansion of evidentiary base**

First, case studies of a small number of episodes may be used to develop theory, but are not appropriate for generalising more broadly (Orum et al., 1991; Tobin, 2010). Future studies can be designed around specific case selection criteria to increase knowledge of presidential leadership in crisis at different types of institutions, during different crisis types, or by focusing on different features of the presidency, such as length of tenure. Patterns can be identified by studying the communications of presidents leading particular institutional types or corporate models, similar to prior abbreviated tenure research (Carver, 2009; Carver, 2013; Longmire, 2010; Longmire, 2013; McNeal, 2009; McNeal, 2013; Touzeau, 2010; Touzeau, 2013). Different types of crisis may be selected for analysis. A study might focus on institutions experiencing a series of successive abbreviated tenures. For instance, Simon’s interim successor leads for less than a year when the Board ends his tenure suddenly (Jackson, 2019). At Edinboro, abbreviated tenures are frequent: Walker is the fifth president in ten years (Stripling, 2018a; Stripling, 2018g).
Incorporation of multiple data sources

This examination both benefits from and is limited by its exclusive use of documentary evidence. Analyses of documents reveal the emergence of potential constituent influence, key crisis events, and presidential actions. It is not possible to prove, using this study’s research design, if constituents actually influenced presidents, even if there is an abundance of evidence suggesting public interpretations of leadership may have indeed influenced the presidents. Future research might investigate, using knowledge of public discourse during crisis from this study, motivations and intentions of social actors involved through interviews and consideration of internal university documents used to conduct business during crisis to identify alignment or misalignment between interpretations arising in public and private, or less public, discourse. For example, examination of emails involving key personnel sent during the pre-resignation phase may identify relationships between constituent attempts to influence, public presidential communications, events, and actions. Also, the president and key personnel who advised the president during the crisis might be engaged, if willing, in structured or semi-structured interviews designed to build knowledge of leadership perceptions of constituent influence during crisis and to understand triggers leading to the president’s decision to resign. Presidents have generally been considered a difficult population to engage for research studies (Reid, 2018), therefore direct access for interview purposes may prove challenging. Also, as I noted when I presented the rationale for using documentary evidence to conduct this investigation, examining presidential leadership using interviews during crisis may introduce post-incident rationalisation into the data. Interviewing social actors involved in a crisis that ends a president’s tenure may prompt post-event blame or involve interpretations.
that have been developed after the crisis concludes. As such, although future research may use alternative methods to validate and to extend the findings in this study, seeking data by interviewing or surveying individuals involved should be approached with care.

**Multi-modal aspects of online communication**

Future studies may incorporate multi-modal aspects of online communication. Herring (2018), the originator of Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis, now conceptualises Computer-Mediated Communications as inherently multi-modal, incorporating text, video, audio, graphics, and communication generated by artificial intelligence. Gnach (2018) asserts: “The meaning-making process on social media occurs through the use of multimodal semiotic resources” adding “This has implications for linguistic methodology. Researchers need to determine what actors on social media are doing through their communicative acts and which modes they use to create particular meanings” (p. 199). Gee (2014c) also suggests that linguistic methods like discourse analysis may be updated to incorporate the breadth of phenomena in computer-mediated discourse. While conducting this examination, I found the multi-modality of online communication evident as traces in the text-based documentary evidence collected and analysed. For example, images are referenced in the text of tweets and news coverage and video footage of survivor testimony or student protests are similarly identified. The multi-modal quality of online communication, albeit not a primary object of analysis in this study, nonetheless is apparent and could be incorporated into analyses in future studies of the same or similar episodes involving presidents resigning during high profile crises.
Discourse analysis tools

Gee’s (2014b) handbook, How to do discourse analysis: A toolkit, which informed my research design, provides many more discourse analysis tools, or questions, that may be asked of the text-based communication collected and analysed in this study. Gee (2014b) asserts that in discourse analysis: “validity is never “once and for all.” All analyses are open to further discussion and dispute” (p. 195). Future research might narrow the aperture on discourse or widen it. Narrowing might involve a fine-grained focus on linguistic details, perhaps using Gee’s (2014b) vocabulary tool:

**Tool #8: The Vocabulary Tool**
For any English communication, ask what sorts of words are being used in terms of whether the communication uses a preponderance of Germanic words or of Latinate words. How is this distribution of word types functioning to mark the communication in terms of style (register, social language)? How does it contribute to the purposes for communicating? (p. 61).

Alternatively, the focus of future research may widen the aperture by conducting analyses designed to illuminate the way social actors are communicating as part of social and cultural groups, for example by using Gee’s (2014b) “Big D Discourse Tool”:

**Tool #27: The Big D Discourse Tool**
For any communication, ask how the person is using language, as well as ways of acting, interacting, believing, valuing, dressing, and using various objects, tools, and technologies in certain sorts of environments to enact a specific socially recognizable [sic] identity and engage in one or more socially recognizable [sic] activities. Even if all you have for data is language, ask what Discourse is this language part of, that is, what kind of person (what identity) is this speaker or writer seeking to enact or get recognized [sic]. What sorts of actions, interactions, values, beliefs, and objects, tools, technologies, and environments are associated with this sort of language within a particular Discourse? (p. 186).

Conclusions

Presidential leadership in American has become an increasingly complicated and fraught endeavour. Increasing pressure arising in public discourse from internal
and external constituents, especially in crisis, may make the presidency even less appealing to potential candidates for the role and may place institutions at risk of failing to achieve their aspirations. As a surge of presidential turnover is anticipated, due in part to upcoming retirements, American higher education may falter if robust pools of applicants for presidential vacancies are not forthcoming. Inattention to succession planning and the professional development of presidential candidates further complicates the challenges ahead. Even as I have conducted this study, the topic has become even more relevant: university crises and the associated challenges of crisis leadership are not only endemic, but universal. Many institutional leaders have faced not one but multiple, overlapping crises, such as the pandemic, escalating tensions associated with racial justice, and significant budget pressures on universities that result in workforce reductions, to name but a few.

Communications issued quickly and publicly, by multiple influential constituents, can create and escalate crises in the age of digital media, thereby challenging presidential leadership. Each crisis investigated is created, shaped, or escalated by communications issued by presidents and constituents. The crises investigated in this study are “real events” and are also constructed, in real time, through public communications. As each crisis episode unfolds, communications escalate crisis conditions, requiring new responses and building additional pressure on presidents called upon to end their tenures. In contrast to positivist approaches to crisis management, which view crises as material and actual, I conclude that in the cases investigated, university crises, which may originate in actions in the world such as manipulation or abuse, are also socially constructed through the language of leaders and the people they aspire to lead. Like Spector’s (2019) social constructivist definition of crisis, which is grounded in the
labelling of events as crisis, I conclude that the university crises ending in abbreviated presidential tenure examined in this study are in part created and fuelled by communication.

For example, when President Simon communicates, or remains silent, constituents react strongly, propelling the MSU crisis forward by generating public dialogue about Nassar’s abuse and MSU’s failure to prevent sexual misconduct. Nassar’s abuse at MSU occurs over decades and had been investigated prior to the episode described above. When survivors begin testifying against Nassar and highlighting MSU’s role in it, as well as vigorously criticising Simon, public attention on MSU rapidly escalates and the President resigns within a few days. Public discourse, created by many constituents and by President Simon, unfolds quickly, across many digital channels, propelling the crisis to a breaking point and a leadership transition.

Walker’s interview with The Chronicle of Higher Education reproduces purported presidential communications that undermine Walker’s credibility, precipitates a reputational crisis, and almost certainly diminishes the President’s ability to keep leading. External constituents, namely Stripling and academic staff union leadership, issue communications in the episode at Edinboro that trigger or escalate the crisis. Similarly, internal constituents, such as academic staff and students, also communicate negative interpretations of Walker and his leadership in response to Stripling’s (2018a) article, and in doing so escalate crisis conditions. After the President’s statements are reprinted in Stripling’s 18 March article, Walker appears in public communications to remain largely silent, while others fuel the crisis by communicating about the President, his statements, and actions.
By generating public interpretations of presidential leadership, constituents in the cases trigger and escalate crises, potentially influence presidential leadership, and may even contribute to abbreviated tenure, although proving a causal relationship is beyond the scope of this study. Communication patterns appear to diminish each president’s capacity to influence interpretation while other constituents fill in with strongly-stated, widely-circulated interpretations. Presidents in the cases do not communicate frequently, while news media journalists and other constituents offer commentary and publish articles about presidential leadership as each episode progresses. Presidents, therefore, are found in publicly available evidence to remain silent or speak infrequently while other influential constituents shape interpretation. Crisis leaders who understand crisis not as exclusively material events but rather as socially constructed through communication and interpretation, develop and share narratives to aid constituents as they interpret leadership actions (Spector, 2019). Presidents Simon and Walker, however, may have increasingly lost the capacity to shape interpretation as they communicate infrequently, while other constituents are observed filling interpretive gaps.

In conclusion, during a crisis, information received by leaders working to navigate influence and impact is fragmented, confusing, and difficult to interpret. In retrospect, patterns may be discernible, but during a crisis identifying patterns is difficult. Today’s online outrage culture increases the likelihood a president in crisis will be the subject of vigorous critique or even defamation. My study does not intend to erase risks and complexities, but rather offer new knowledge and suggested approaches grounded in empirical research that may support leaders faced with conditions that can end presidential tenure prematurely.
Appendix A. Acronyms

AACRAO: Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers
AASCU: American Association of State Colleges and Universities
AAU: Association of American Universities
AAUP: American Association of University Professors
ACE: American Council on Education
AGB: Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges
CAO: Chief Academic Officer
CIC: Council of Independent Colleges
CMC: Computer-Mediated Communications
CMD: Computer-Mediated Discourse
CMDA: Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis
FOI: Freedom of Information
IRS: Internal Revenue Service
MSU: Michigan State University
NACUBO: National Association of College and University Business Officers
NASPA: National Association of Student Personnel Administrators
NCAA: National Collegiate Athletic Association
NCES: National Center for Education Statistics
PASSHE: Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education
UM: University of Missouri
Appendix B. Additional American university corporate models

Independent universities
Independent institutions operate as private corporations, setting their own ambitions rather than adhering to goals established through state-level government mandates and policy. In 2016-2017, 63 percent (2,737) of American universities operated independently (NCES, 2018f). These universities can maintain non-profit status under the oversight of self-perpetuating, volunteer governing boards that are self-selected and sustained through nomination and election processes established by each institution’s governing board (Pierce, 2011). Independent institutions may be non-profit or for-profit corporations: 39 percent (1,682) of all independent institutions operate as non-profit corporations and 24 percent (1,055) are for-profit corporations (NCES, 2018f).

Non-profit universities
Non-profit postsecondary institutions, including all government-funded universities, meet IRS standards for non-profit status due to their service to the public good, rather than to individual private benefit (Scott, 2018), and as such qualify for exemption from national taxes. Non-profit universities may not benefit an individual or private shareholder (IRS, 2016b) and may only pursue charitable purposes as per the IRS “educational, scientific, literary” definition (IRS, 2016a). 39 percent (1,055) of American universities in 2016-2017 operated as independent, non-profit universities (NCES, 2018f). When combined with government-funded, non-profit institutions, 76 percent (3,305) of all American institutions operate as non-profit entities (NCES, 2018f).
For-profit universities

In contrast to non-profit institutions, for-profit, postsecondary institutions generate profits and provide returns to shareholders. Established as corporate entities and thereby approved to operate by state-level agencies that oversee the establishment of all corporations, for-profit institutions may also be recognised by undergoing accreditation, a process that affirms the quality of an educational institution is conducted by regional or national agencies (US Department of Education, 2016). Like non-profit institutions, for-profit universities offer programs that lead to degrees or certificates, but unlike non-profit institutions, they are primarily funded by student fees, rather than government subsidies paid directly to institutions or charitable donations. Independent, for-profit institutions represented 24 percent (1,055) of all institutions operating in 2016-2017 (NCES, 2018f). For-profit institutions have been criticised by the media and elected political officials for aggressive and misleading marketing techniques, low degree completion rates, high rates of student loan defaults, and misrepresentation of job placement rates and post-degree expected salaries (Troop, 2013). For-profit institutions have also been criticised for reliance on government funding, which they receive indirectly by accepting nationally-administered student grant aid as payment for student fees. By accepting this form of aid, national, government-funded student aid programmes at times provide nearly 90 percent of the revenues received by for-profit institutions (Nocera, 2011; Zumeta et al., 2012). Therefore, for-profit institutions serve investors, by providing a profit to those shareholders, but may only be profitable due to government subsidies.
Appendix C. Profiles of modern university presidents

Age of presidents

In 2016, the average age of American university presidents had increased to 62 (Figure 87) from 61 five years earlier. At inception of the ACE study in 1986, presidents were on average 52 years old (Cook, 2012; Gagliardi et al., 2017).

Gender of modern presidents

In 2016, presidential posts are still predominantly held by men (Figure 88). The percentage of female presidents increased four percent, from 26 to 30 percent, since 2011 (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Women are least likely to lead doctoral institutions (23 percent) and most likely to lead associate’s institutions and special focus institutions (Gagliardi et al., 2017). While it appears that opportunities for women to lead higher education institutions have gradually increased (Gagliardi et al., 2017), women remain less likely to lead the most selective and well-resourced institutions. Individuals who associate with a non-binary gender identity are not widely represented in presidential posts. In 2016, 0.1 percent of respondents defined their gender identity as ‘other’ (Gagliardi et al., 2017), indicating a gender identity that does not conform to binary categories.
of male or female, whereas an estimated 1 in every 250 people identify as such nationally (Meerwijk & Sevelius, 2017). In the 2011 survey, respondents did not have the option of identifying with a non-binary gender identity (Gagliardi et al., 2017).

**Race/ethnicity of presidents**

In 2016, 17 percent of presidents identified as a member of a racial/ethnic minority group, an increase from 13 percent in 2011 (Gagliardi et al., 2017) (Figure 89). However, racial/ethnic minority groups were not equally represented in this increase. The percentage of Black presidents increased from 6 to 8 percent, accounting for half of the total increase of racial/ethnic minority presidents (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Four percent of presidents in 2016 identify as Hispanic, two percent identify as Asian American, and one percent or fewer identify either as multiple races, of Middle Eastern origin or as American Indian (Gagliardi et al., 2017).

Presidents who identify as ethnic minorities are most likely to lead government-funded institutions, with the greatest number leading special-focus institutions (44 percent) and government, master’s-degree granting institutions (27 percent) (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Further, the intersection of ethnicity and gender results in
underrepresentation. Five percent (77) of university presidents identify as racial/ethnic minority women whereas men who identify as minorities served at over twice the rate (12 percent or 186 presidents) (Gagliardi et al., 2017).

**Marital and family status of presidents**

Most presidents regardless of gender are married (85 percent) (Figure 90) with children (84 percent) (Figure 91). Twenty-two percent of presidents have children under 18 (Gagliardi et al., 2017).

Ninety percent of male presidents are married (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Women presidents are less likely to be married (75 percent) than men (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Women minority presidents are even less likely to be married (68 percent) (Gagliardi et al., 2017).

Eighty-nine percent of male presidents have children, whereas 74 percent of women presidents have children (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Women are twice as likely to have altered their career progression, at some point, to care for a dependent, spouse/partner, or parent (32 percent) than men (16 percent) (Gagliardi et al., 2017).
Presidential compensation

Presidents are typically the most highly compensated employee at a university. Employment benefits for university presidents may include automobiles, deferred compensation, entertainment budgets, a residence or housing allowance, household staff, insurance, pension contributions, performance-based or retention bonuses, executive coaching, social club memberships, professional development, sabbaticals, and employment or support for a presidential spouse (Gagliardi et al., 2017). The Chronicle of Higher Education’s (2018) executive compensation survey of American higher education institutions reports the highest-paid president receives almost $4.3 million in total annual remuneration versus the least well-compensated who receives just over $190,000 annually (Bauman, Davis & O’Leary, 2018). Many presidential contracts also provide for an academic appointment after conclusion of tenure as president, and possibly a sabbatical, often for a year or more at the presidential salary level (Finkelstein & White, 2017). Contracts may provide for severance, or compensation made when a president’s contract ends through resignation or termination (Bauman, 2018).

Like in other industries, women and racial/ethnic minority senior executives in higher education are paid less. According to one account, university women senior-level staff receive 80 percent of the pay their male counterparts receive (Bichsel & McChesney, 2017). At the chief executive level, the gap narrows and also persists: women presidents make just over 90 percent of their male counterparts’ salaries (Bichsel & McChesney, 2017). In another study, male presidents leading independent institutions were found to be paid on average 23 percent ($104,074) more than female presidents (Wallace et al., 2014). White presidents were also found to be paid 7 percent ($36,845) more on average than Black presidents leading independent institutions (Wallace et al., 2014).
Career paths and education of presidents

To assume their current role, most presidents (85 percent) moved from an immediate prior role as either a president or a senior leader at a higher education institution (Figure 92). 15 percent held a prior position outside the higher education sector, compared to 20 percent in 2011 (Gagliardi et al., 2017).

Researchers, commentators, and practising leaders express concern and enthusiasm about presidents with experience beyond academia in business, law, or government (Kezar, 2009). Presidents whose experience leading organisations has accrued outside higher education without “direct experience in the heart of the enterprise as faculty members, department chairs, deans, or provosts” (Ekman, 2010) are often perceived as embracing a business-oriented view of leadership (Kezar, 2009). Boards may appoint presidents with experience outside the sector due to the complexity of modern academic institutions (Williams & Olson, 2009), which are multi-million or billion-dollar organisations comparable to a modern business (Duderstadt, 2000, 2007). Candidates from outside the academy may not view the university as a distinctive social institution. These leaders may instead apply business-oriented approaches, oriented toward efficiency, marketing, and selling university “products”, namely degrees and research (Ekman, 2010). Systems of shared governance may test the patience of leaders who are accustomed to leading and
directing in more hierarchical organisations (Bok, 2013). Even so, the anticipated gap in qualified presidential candidates suggests that interest in candidates from outside universities may increase in the coming years (Selingo, 2016).

Almost one quarter of presidents serve in at least their second presidential appointment (Figure 93) (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Twenty-four percent of presidents report that their immediate prior position was similar to their current role in level of responsibility (Gagliardi et al., 2017), an increase from 20 percent five years earlier.

Most presidents hold a terminal degree (Figure 94). Eighty percent hold an EdD or PhD (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Over 41 percent attain their highest degree in the field of education (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Thirty-two percent of presidents leading doctoral universities earned their highest degree in science, technology, engineering, or math (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Women are more likely to hold an EdD or PhD (86 percent) compared to men (77 percent) (Gagliardi et al., 2017). A typical president’s career path involves increasing levels of responsibility in teaching or research. 81 percent of presidents previously served as academic staff members, up from 70 percent in 2011 (Gagliardi et al., 2017).
Professional development, internal promotion, and succession planning

Despite their formal academic degrees, university presidents generally lack training to prepare for the role (Davis, 2011; Gmelch, 2002; Selingo et al., 2017) and few institutions develop senior executives in preparation for assuming a presidential post. As such, presidents may not be prepared to lead once appointed to the post. Esterberg and Wooding (2012) find few administrators interviewed for their study had any formal training to prepare for the presidency. University presidents indicate that they are most in need of fundraising training followed by leadership capacity development (Selingo et al., 2017).

Most presidents do not think about, identify, or develop their personal successors (Toner, 2016) and succession planning is often ignored (Bennett, 2015; Gagliardi et al., 2017). Twenty-four percent of institutions have succession plans in place (Figure 95) (Gagliardi et al., 2017). This distinguishes higher education from private sector businesses, where succession planning and internal promotion of senior executives to the level of chief executive officer is typical (Birnbaum, 1988a; Collins, 2001; Wecker, 2014). Without clear paths to the presidency coupled with professional development to prepare for the post, aspiring presidents may experience difficulty executing the role and fulfilling expectations once appointed.

![Figure 95: Succession Planning by Institution](image-url)

**Figure 95: Succession planning at higher education institutions. Source: Gagliardi et al. (2017)**
Selingo and colleagues (2017) observe that although the role of Chief Academic Officer (CAO), often titled provost or vice president for academic affairs in America, has been viewed as the path to the presidency, CAOs may be less likely to seek presidential appointments now and in the future. Forty-three percent of presidents previously held the role of chief academic officer (CAO), dean, or other senior executive positions (Gagliardi et al., 2017). However, scholars and presidents highlight the sector’s emphasis on seeking future presidents amongst the pool of CAOs as potentially problematic, in part due to a mismatch in presidential and CAO tenure duration, as well as lack of interest in presidential posts amongst CAOs. Pierce (2011) reports that CAOs experience shortened tenures because new presidents often replace CAOs rather than retain a CAO who served a former president. Therefore, even though the CAO is a common role to hold prior to serving as president, new presidents may remove CAOs rather than developing the CAO into a likely successor. In 2009, the average tenure for CAOs was 4.7 years compared to the 8.4 year average presidential tenure at the time (Eckel, Cook & King, 2009), and although more recent data is unavailable, shorter presidential tenure is likely precipitating shorter CAO tenure, too. CAO tenure length suggests that the role can be precarious, which can also undermine an incumbent CAO’s ability to prepare for greater responsibility in the presidency. CAOs may be removed before realising transformational, institutional change. Even if CAOs may be able to advance to a presidency, many also lack interest in the position. In 2009, only 30 percent expressed interest in the presidency (Eckel et al., 2009) due to the unappealing nature of presidential work, intent to retire, concern about time demands, and the pressure of public scrutiny (Eckel et al., 2009).
Appendix D. Recruiting presidents

The contemporary presidential recruitment process elicits rich comparisons: it has been described as a “circus” (Duderstadt, 2000), a “ritual” (Birnbaum, 1988b; Bolman & Deal, 1984; Hahn, 1996), a “beauty pageant” (Duderstadt, 2000), a “political campaign” and “election” in which candidates must “win votes” (Duderstadt, 2000; Hahn, 1996; Lovett, 2003), and similar to “casting” a film (Lovett, 2003), or “the selection of a pope” (Duderstadt, 2000). Influential participants and governing board members may be “lobbied” (Duderstadt, 2000; Lovett, 2003) by academic staff, students, other staff, alumni, donors, and politicians who seek to advance agendas through new leadership by ensuring allied individuals are appointed. In this section, I describe the constituents typically involved in recruiting presidents and the recruitment process. I conclude the section by discussing the influence of people and processes involved in presidential recruitment on the communications, relationships, and crisis leadership of university presidents.

**Recruitment committees and professional executive recruitment consultants**

During recruitment, governing boards often engage the services of professional, executive recruiters to coordinate presidential searches (Johnson Jr & Ferrare, 2018; Scott, 2018). Two-thirds of presidents report their appointments involved executive recruitment consulting firms (Gagliardi *et al*., 2017). Firms receive expenses and a percentage of the successful candidate’s first-year compensation (Lovett, 2003), which can be significant. In one case, a firm engaged to recruit a new president received $365,000 in compensation and the president only remained in post for two years (Stripling, 2019). As private corporations, in the early stages of a recruitment process consulting firms may be able to hold
confidential materials in states where government-funded universities are subject to FOI laws (Johnson Jr & Ferrare, 2018; Duderstadt, 2000).

Although governing boards are responsible for presidential appointments, boards often establish committees charged with overseeing the recruitment of a new president (AGB, 2019; Johnson Jr & Ferrare, 2018; Hahn, 1996; Marchese, 2012; Scott, 2018). Committees reflect the breadth of institutional constituencies (AGB, 2019) and include external and internal constituents, including students, academic staff, administrative staff, citizens, alumni, donors, and governing board members (Johnson Jr & Ferrare, 2018; Wecker, 2014). The size of each committee varies widely, from less than ten committee members to over 40 according to one recruitment specialist (Wecker, 2014).

**The presidential recruitment process**

Recruiting a president at an American university generally involves a lengthy, multi-stage process that takes an average of six months to complete (Wecker, 2014), while nine- to twelve-month processes are also common (AGB, 2019). Candidates are typically identified by the external consulting firm (Marchese, 2012; Poston, nd), prior to review of applicant materials by a recruitment committee. Shortlisted candidates may engage in many interviews with many different constituent groups (Poston, nd). Committees recommend a finalist or several finalists to the university’s governing board (Marchese, 2012; Poston, nd). Afterward, when a finalist is approved by the board, the candidate is offered the role. Once an offer is extended to the finalist, employment terms are negotiated, terms are finalised, and a decision is announced by the institution’s governing board (Olscamp, 2003).

Constituents may meet finalists at public presentations and in open interviews (Poston, nd). Public processes are typical at universities subject to FOI laws
(Duderstadt, 2000; Tisley, 2010), where public identification of candidates is commonly legally-mandated (AGB, 2019; Johnson Jr & Ferrare, 2018). The public nature of presidential searches makes some candidates hesitant to apply, fearing negative impacts on their current employment situation (Birnbaum, 1988b; Duderstadt, 2000; Tisley, 2010). The terms of presidential contracts at government-funded universities, including salary and benefits, are also usually publicly available (AGB, 2019). Birnbaum (1988b), however, counters this concern, suggesting that prospective candidates should be ready to “comfortably function as president with a high degree of public exposure” (p. 503).

Despite the investment of considerable time and resources, presidential recruitment processes may fail during any stage of candidate assessment and even shortly after a president is appointed and announced to the university community. Candidates may be shortlisted for multiple presidencies at the same time (Lovett, 2003), which can result in a narrowing pool if a candidate withdraws from a selection process before the recruitment is completed. Governing boards and candidates may not be able to negotiate employment terms to which both parties can agree. A candidate may emerge as the governing board’s finalist when academic staff oppose the appointment due to statements made by the candidate in the recruitment process, negative comments unofficially shared by colleagues at other institutions where the candidate has been employed, or if academic staff view the recruitment process as violating university norms and therefore illegitimate. Poor reviews of a candidate’s prior performance may emerge late in the process when references are checked.

Recruitment processes influence presidents, their communications, their relationships, and leadership in crisis. Aspiring presidents communicate while being recruited so that they may be offered the post. The recruitment process
begins the process of establishing relationships between a president and constituents a potential president aspires to lead. Crises may ensue following recruitment processes and presidential candidates may be less likely to apply to lead institutions experiencing crises. In the remainder of this section, I discuss the influence of recruitment on presidential communications, constituent relations, and crisis leadership.

Open, public searches significantly influence presidential communications. Everything a candidate says during a selection process may be broadcast live online or recorded and posted to the Internet, remaining indefinitely. This leads candidates to measure their responses and fear for the stigma that comes with professional rejection (Tisley, 2010). Public presentations during search processes favour candidates adept at communicating, especially those with public relations skills and charisma (Lovett, 2003; Pierce, 2011), even though charisma has not been proven to result in effective leadership in universities (Birnbaum, 1992a). Lovett (2003) observes that some candidates attempt to please all interest groups involved, thereby establishing an expectation of compromise following appointment that may translate into hesitation when courageous leadership is necessary. The design of a recruitment process may increase a candidate’s tendency to manage impressions through communications, thereby making it difficult for recruitment consultants, committees, and governing boards to acquire sufficient information to select amongst finalists (Birnbaum, 1988b).

Relationships also significantly influence the recruitment process. Constituents involved may advance irreconcilable objectives for a new leader, making it difficult for a presidential candidate to begin building relationships with all key groups during interviews. For example, governing board members may seek a
new president who will be entrepreneurial and generate new revenue (Pierce, 2011). Given the corporate backgrounds of many board members, they may not respond positively to presidential candidates who embrace academic culture, such as a commitment to collaboration and building consensus prior to making decisions (Barden, 2013). Academic staff often seek presidents who will provide resources to support their research and publication (Bennett, 2015). Although they also give preference to presidential candidates with academic backgrounds, academic staff realise that candidates with the capacity to secure, to manage, and to allocate financial resources may serve their longer-term interests best (Barden, 2005) as financially-robust institutions provide the best environment in which to conduct research, teach students, and publish.

Recruitment of a new president may also be influenced by crises and, conversely, crises may influence presidential recruitment. Institutions in distress may struggle to recruit presidents: candidates may not wish to assume leadership where they are likely to fail or spend considerable time managing crises (Tisley, 2010). These institutions may have cultures where even small errors are viewed as unforgivable, making it difficult to entice candidates with the potential to lead confidently (Seltzer, 2016b). Perceived illegitimate influence during a presidential recruitment can precipitate a crisis. In one example, an accrediting agency conducts an investigation into a university presidential recruitment and finds the highest-ranking elected politician in the state in which the university is located unduly influenced the process, precipitating negative media coverage of the recruitment and demonstrations against the president’s appointment (Daprile, 2020). In another example, a governing board is accused of designing a recruitment process in order to privilege a candidate who is criticised by
university constituents for lacking experience in higher education (Kelderman, 2015).

Presidential recruitment processes can also influence abbreviated tenure. If a selection process is considered illegitimate by constituents (Bornstein, 2003; Birnbaum, 1992b), or the recruitment is viewed as flawed in some way, an abbreviated tenure may ensue (Cafley, 2015; Carver, 2009; Touzeau, 2010). A presidential recruitment process may not allow for complete information to be exchanged between the parties (Gagliardi et al., 2017), which heightens the risk that one or more parties in the process can make a poor decision that leads to abbreviated tenure. For example, 29 percent of presidents report that the financial condition of their institution was not fully disclosed in the recruitment process (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Similarly, 29 percent report that the process did not provide information about current institutional challenges (Gagliardi et al., 2017). If aspiring presidents are unable to gain critical knowledge about the institutions they seek to lead, they risk accepting a position they may be unprepared to assume, which may result in short, unsatisfying tenures that disrupt both institutions and the president’s career trajectory.
Appendix E. Pilot study news media coverage search criteria example

This is an example of the criteria used during pilot study Stage 1(a) to identify media coverage in the first month of January 2015:

Terms: ((university OR college w/5 president AND NOT "death notice" OR "paid notice" OR obituary OR Clinton OR Sanders OR Trump) and Date(geq(01/01/2015) and leq(01/31/2015)))

Combined Source: USA Today;Los Angeles Times;The New York Times;The Washington Post

MODERATELY SIMILAR RESULTS DEDUPLICATED
Appendix F. Preliminary discourse analysis protocol

Table 10: Discourse Analysis Protocol Design, Version 1

1. Alleged incident(s) or issue(s) (description):
   (a) Who is involved, included, excluded?
   (b) What was involved?
   (c) What are they doing? Who takes action and who is affected?

2. Representation of social actors:
   (a) Who is included, excluded, foregrounded, backgrounded?
   (b) Who is presented personally or impersonally?
   (c) Who is presented as part of a category?
   (d) Who is presented with specificity or without specificity?

3. Identify the main parts of the world (including areas of social life)
   which are represented – the main ‘themes’.

4. Identify the particular perspective or angle or point of view from
   which they are represented.

5. Actions & social practices:
   (a) How are the leader’s actions described or presented?
   (b) What social practice is enacted by the leader and is that practice
       critiqued or sanctioned?

6. Words, action, commitments:
   (a) How are the leader’s words described or presented?
   (b) What is the action present in the words (informing, advising,
       promising, warning, promoting etc.)?
   (c) How are the leader’s words a commitment or a judgement? Is
       the commitment or judgement rated as high, medium or low?
   (d) What grammatical moods are used (declarative, interrogative,
       subjunctive (condition that is doubtful or not factual), and imperative)?
   (e) What speech functions are used (statements, questions,
       demands, offers, evaluations)?

7. Value alignment:
   (a) How are the leader’s values presented?
   (b) Are the leader’s values presented as consistent or misaligned with
       actions?

8. Critics:
   (a) Who is critical of the leader?
   (b) Why are they critical?

9. Supporters:
   (a) Who is supportive of the leader?
   (b) Why are they supportive?

10. Identities:
    (a) What traits are identified with the leader? What life histories are
        included?
    (b) With followers?

11. Genres:
    (a) Describe the document’s genre(s).
    (b) Is there a mix of genres?
Table 10: Discourse Analysis Protocol Design, Version 1

12. **Assumptions:**
   (b) What assumptions are made about what **exists** and about what **might be the case** (propositional)?
   (b) What assumptions are made about **meanings**?

13. **Contexts and figured worlds:**
   (a) What is the **context**?
   (b) How is context described or presented?
   (c) What **aspects of the world** are represented in the text?
   (d) Is there a **figured world** in the text that is presented as a current or future possibility?

14. **Words or phrases:**
   (a) Are there **words or phrases** used frequently (not pronouns)?
   (a) What effect does this have?

15. **Metaphors:** Are there **metaphors** used, particularly to describe the leader?

16. **Symbols:** Are there **symbols** used?

17. **Pronouns & nouns:** How are **pronouns** used? Are social actors presented as nouns or pronouns?

18. **What semantic relations between sentence and clause** are used or across longer stretches of text/whole text?

19. **Narrator/perspective:**
   (a) Is there a **narrator or mediator**?
   (b) What point of view does the narrator/mediator take?

20. **Reader & interpretation:**
   (a) Is there an assumed **reader**?
   (b) How does the document try to influence the reader’s interpretation of social actions?

21. **Power:**
   (a) Who has **power** and how is it enacted?
   (b) How is **social hierarchy** recognised, supported or challenged?
   (c) Who has the **right to speak** and how is that right assigned?
   (d) Does the story play a role in covert social relations between rulers and the ruled?

22. **Legitimation:**
   (a) What or who is made legitimate and how?
   (b) Through authorisation, rationalisation, moral evaluation or mythopoesis?

23. **Language, vocabulary, style, tone:**
   (a) What style of **language** is used and by whom?
   (b) What **vocabularies** are present?
   (c) Are there elements, such as **repetition, intonation, rhythm**, that create a style or tone?

24. **Relationships:**
   (a) What **relationships** are created?
   (b) What **relationships/social relations between participants are enacted**?

25. **Identities:** What **identities** are enacted or assumed?

26. **Difference:** How is **difference** explored, accentuated, negotiated, bracketed or suppressed?
Table 10: Discourse Analysis Protocol Design, Version 1

27. **Socially acceptable:**
   (a) What is proposed as good or acceptable in society?
   (b) What assumptions are inherent in the text about what is good or desirable?

28. **Connectivity or distance:**
   (a) How are things, events, social practices or ideas connected or distanced by the text?
   (b) Included or excluded or omitted, substituted or rearranged?

29. **Knowledge:**
   (a) What knowledge is presupposed?
   (b) What knowledge is privileged?

30. **Making meaning:**
   (a) How are textual elements related within the text to create meanings?
   (b) How are parts of texts connected with each other or with situational contexts?

31. **Intertextuality:**
   (a) What texts are referred to and how are they used to create meaning?
   (b) Are the references examples of direct or indirect speech or a narrative report of speech without context?
   (c) How are other voices framed?
   (d) What chains or networks are created between this texts and other?
   (e) How does the text serve to mediate other texts?

32. **Regulation and control:**
   (a) How are events in the real world regulated or controlled through reporting?
   (b) How might the responses of groups or individuals be regulated through this report?

33. **Images:** What images are included in the document?

34. **Space and time:** How is space and time used in the document?

35. **Social life and/or social actors aestheticised?**

*Table 10: Initial discourse analysis protocol designed using analytical tools suggested by Fairclough (2003) and Gee (2014a, 2014b)*
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