

Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges

**2010** *Policies,  
Practices,  
and Composition*

of Governing Boards of Public  
Colleges, Universities, and Systems

**Executive Summary**



TIAA-CREF institute

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# Introduction

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In 2010, the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) surveyed higher education governing boards in the United States regarding board composition and selected policies and practices. AGB has conducted similar research since the mid-1980s. This report summarizes the data and examines trends for public college, university, and system governing boards based on surveys completed by 195 public institutions. A separate report summarizes the results of a survey of independent colleges and universities.

The report provides board members, chief executives, staff, and scholars with a basis for comparing the attributes of their own institutions' boards with those of other institutions. Data are reported for all public institutions (195) and by type of institution (associate's, baccalaureate, master's, doctoral and research, and systems). The survey results reveal a range of practices and trends with regard to the following:

- board member demographics including age, gender, race and ethnicity, and occupations;
- student, faculty, and alumni board members;
- board size;
- length of terms for trustees and chairs;
- written policies for removing board members;
- attendance;
- annual contributions from trustees;
- trustee service on other types of boards;
- use of executive sessions;
- frequency and length of meetings;
- most common committees;
- board Web sites, voting electronically, and participating in committee meetings electronically;
- presidential search; and
- board education and assessment practices.

Historic data were drawn primarily from previous surveys published by AGB in 2004, 1998, 1997, 1991, 1986, and 1985. Additional sources are noted in "References" at the end of this report.

Board leaders can use these findings to consider best practices and evaluate their own board's performance.

Survey invitations were sent to chief executives and board professionals of approximately 332 AGB-member public colleges, universities, and systems in the United States, and completed surveys were returned by 195 institutions, a response rate of 58.7 percent. The number of respondents to each question varied. The chart below displays the Carnegie classifications of respondents. We believe the survey data reflect the universe of public college, university, and system governing boards in the United States except for associate's institutions and those with very small numbers of peers, such as tribal colleges.

### CARNEGIE CLASSIFICATION OF PUBLIC COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY, AND SYSTEM SURVEY RESPONDENTS

14	Associate's Colleges (AA)
19	Baccalaureate Colleges (BA)
63	Master's Colleges and Universities (MA)
53	Doctoral and Research Universities (DRU)
46	Systems
<b>195</b>	<b>Total number of respondents</b>

Frequent comparisons are made in this report between results of AGB's 2010 and 2004 surveys. Of the 195 public institutions that participated in the 2010 survey, about two-thirds (124 institutions or 63.6 percent) also participated in the 2004 survey. The distribution of institutions by Carnegie classification was similar in both of these surveys, except for associate's colleges. The 2010 survey population was limited to AGB-member institutions, which included most public four-year institutions and systems in the United States, but few public associate's colleges; the number of associate's colleges participating declined by 161, from 175 to 14. Variability in data between 2004 and 2010 is reported with regard to Carnegie classification, in consideration of this difference in survey populations. (See Table 1, below.) To address concerns about whether any reported changes or trends may be due to variations in population, additional analyses were performed on race and ethnicity and gender data, comparing the matched population and total respondents for 2004 and 2010. Differences in trends for the matched population and all respondents are noted in the report.

**TABLE 1. 2004 AND 2010 PUBLIC COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY, AND SYSTEM SURVEY RESPONDENTS**

<i>Carnegie</i>	<i>2004</i>		<i>2010</i>	
	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>
AA	175	49.7	14	7.2
BA	13	3.7	19	9.7
MA	58	16.5	63	32.3
DRU	53	15.1	53	27.2
Systems	38	10.8	46	23.6
Other	15	4.3	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>352</b>	<b>100.1</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100.0</b>

# I. Executive Summary



## SIZE

Using a historical survey base ranging from 1986 to 2010, findings reveal that the *average number of voting board members remained relatively stable* over the years, at about 11 or 12.

## GENDER

*Men outnumbered women on governing boards by more than two to one in 2010, 71.6 to 28.4 percent.* The percentage of women on boards increased steadily for several decades, reaching a *high of 30 percent in 1997, but declining slightly in each of the last two surveys.*

## RACE AND ETHNICITY

*In 2010, 23.1 percent of board members were racial and ethnic minorities,* including 15.8 percent African Americans or Blacks, 4.1 percent Hispanics and Latinos, 2.1 percent Asians and Pacific Islanders, 0.7 percent American Indians and Alaskan Natives, and 0.4 percent other races; 74.3 percent were White non-Hispanic and 2.6 percent unknown races. Minority trustees increased from 21.3 percent in 2004 to 23.1 percent in 2010.

## AGE

*The average age of board members of public institutions has increased.* In 2010, most trustees (69.0 percent) were 50-69 years old, compared to 65.0 percent in 2004. Board members 50 or older increased to 80.6 percent in 2010, up from 76.4 percent in 2004; included in that bracket were those 70 or older.

## OCCUPATIONS

*The professional background of half (49.4 percent) of board members of public colleges and universities in 2010 was business.* Other occupations of board members (in the workforce and retired), included: 24.1 percent professional service (such as accountant, attorney/law, dentist, physician/medicine, and psychologist/mental health), 15.5 percent education, 9.3 percent other occupations (nonprofit executives, clergy, homemakers, artists, government officials, and others), and 1.7 percent agriculture or ranching.

## STUDENTS, FACULTY, AND STAFF ON BOARDS

*In 2010, 50.3 percent of public college boards included at least one student as a voting member of the board,* and 28.2 percent included at least one nonvoting student member. Among those institutions with a student board member (voting or nonvoting), the median number was one.

*Of public colleges, universities, and systems, 13.3 percent included at least one faculty member as a voting board member,* and 9.7 percent included a nonvoting faculty member. Among those institutions with a faculty member on the board (voting or nonvoting), the median number was one.

*Of public colleges, universities, and systems, 7.2 percent included at least one staff member as a*

voting board member, and 3.6 percent included one or more nonvoting staff. Among those institutions with a staff member on the board (voting or nonvoting), the median number was one.

### **CEO AS A MEMBER OF THE BOARD**

*Most public institutions (72.5 percent) did not include the chief executive as a member of the board, although 6.3 percent included the chief executive as a voting member and 21.2 percent as a nonvoting member.*

### **GOVERNOR AS A MEMBER OF THE BOARD**

*Most public institutions (83.0 percent) did not include the governor as a member of the board; 11.2 percent included the governor as a voting member and 5.9 percent as a nonvoting member.*

### **ALUMNI BOARD MEMBERS**

*On average, half of board members of public colleges and universities were alumni, though this varied by type of institution, with more alumni serving on boards of research and doctoral universities and systems.*

### **METHODS OF SELECTION**

*The majority of members of most public governing boards (77 percent) were appointed by the governor, 60 percent with confirmation by the state legislature and 17 percent without; 5 percent of boards were elected, 3 percent were appointed by legislatures, and 15 percent were selected in a combination of ways or in some other manner.*

### **TERMS FOR BOARD MEMBERS**

*The length of a single term was typically six years, and less than half of the institutions, 41 percent, had policies that limited the number of consecutive terms a board member may serve.*

### **MEETINGS**

*Public boards met an average of seven times a year, and the business portion of a meeting typically lasted four-and-a-half hours. Sixty percent of respondents reported typical meeting attendance of 91 to 100 percent of their board members; about one-third (36 percent) reported typical attendance levels at about 76 to 90 percent.*

### **COMMITTEES**

*Public college, university, and system governing boards reported an average of five standing committees in 2010, two more than in 2004. The most common board committees, in descending order, were finance (88.9 percent), audit (55.0 percent), academic affairs (52.4 percent), executive (42.9 percent), education (combination of academic and student affairs, 39.7 percent), buildings and grounds (35.4 percent), development (32.8 percent), student affairs/campus life (27.5 percent), trustees/nominating/governance (23.8 percent), personnel (21.7 percent), public/government/legislative relations (14.8 percent), investment (13.2 percent), and compensation (7.4 percent). It was more than twice as common for boards to have a separate audit committee in 2010 (55 percent) than in 2004 (23 percent).*