

# CHAPTER I



## WHAT THE SURVEY REVEALED



*Diane Skomars Magrath*, University of Minnesota, has two partnerships: one with President C. Peter Magrath, in which he pays her a salary (from his personal income) for University public relations and entertaining functions; her other partnership is with Jane Hanger Seeley, with whom she shares a position as Executive Director of the Minneapolis Council of Camp Fire, Inc. She is an avid photographer, and her exhibition, "Travels With the President," opened at the Minnesota Governor's Residence and toured the state in 1983. The Magraths married in 1978 when Diane was the University's Student Activities Center Director, and together they have two daughters, Mo and Valerie.




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# INTRODUCTION



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he time seemed right. It was 1983 and higher education in the United States had been well served by the spouses of campus presidents and chancellors. (Hereafter, the term “president” will stand for both “president and chancellor” and the spouse will be referred to as female since, by and large, she is.) Weathering the years of campus protest, political change, the women’s movement, and budget crises, the married partners of campus presidents had delivered critical consultation to their husbands, created homes and family environments despite the pressures and demands of public life, volunteered countless hours for their institution and in their community, and often pursued professional goals, career choices, or outside work. At times, the personal price was high. Who are they? How have they managed their multiple roles and remained true to themselves? What does the future hold for these spouses? The time indeed seemed right to explore these and other questions related to the subject of the contributions and the choices of the partners to presidents at institutions of higher learning.

## *Background*

The National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) created the Committee of Presidents’ and Chancellors’ Spouses in 1981 in a step that typifies the progressiveness of the organization. This higher education association, a coalition of 144 state universities and land-grant colleges, recognized that the issues and problems involving presidential spouses comprise a story in itself—a story of the job and role of the relationships that must be managed, of the spouse as a person, and of future trends for the spouses of university chief executives that seem to be emerging. To provide contemporary insights into these matters, the University of Minnesota agreed to conduct a survey of the spouses of presidents and chancellors of NASULGC member institutions.

Our review of the literature revealed quality but not quantity. Although several articles and a few books addressed the issues of presidential partners, we



chose to focus on books written by spouses themselves. Muriel Beadle, Marguerite Walker Corbally, and Jean Alexander Kemeny each wrote a significant book on the subject of the life of the president's spouse. We are indebted to Muriel Beadle for her book, *Where Has All The Ivy Gone?*, for its insightful view of the complexities of institutional governance as well as for the candid review of her experiences at the University of Chicago as "first lady" during the 1960's. Her well written memoir, which included her own philosophy of the presidency and spouse partnership, suggested a supportive attitude that many spouses have held dear:

"A university presidency can similarly absorb all one's time and energies, and it is an advantage if both husband and wife are equally committed to it. George and I never agreed absolutely on the degree to which we should practice nose-to-the-grindstone versus self-indulgent activity, but our attitudes were similar enough, praise be, so that we never wasted our energies arguing about how much of our time the University should command. . ." (Beadle, 1972 pp. 62-63)

In 1977, Marguerite Walker Corbally of the University of Illinois wrote a landmark book, *The Partners*. For the first time, a knowledgeable practitioner employed the methodology of social science to explore the dilemmas involved in being the president's partner. In her treatise, "Betty" Corbally succeeded in identifying the simultaneous roles, the various job functions, the price one pays for the "perks" and the myriad of relationships the spouse has with a diverse constituency. In *The Partners* she commented on the relationship of the couple who form the partnership:

"In many cases husband and wife are forced into a working relationship unlike any they have experienced before. Even if they enjoy working together, they may find the isolation and the intensity of their relationship emotionally exhausting. Though each may be busy with separate activities and each is independent and resourceful, the couple are apt to find themselves totally dependent on each other for human contact and communication they used to find with friends, relatives, and colleagues. "When a couple have a strong commitment to each other and to the husband's work, their relationship will still be subject to stress from the demands of his job. . ." (Corbally, 1977 pp. 16-17)

The editors of *The President's Spouse* acknowledge the use of Betty Corbally's survey as a source of inspiration and guidance in formulating their survey; they appreciate her generosity, consultation, and support of their project.

*It's Different at Dartmouth*, written by Jean Alexander Kemeny in 1979, is a highly entertaining book that graphically describes the pressures and demands of the role of the president's spouse. The Dartmouth memoir is especially appealing to presidential couples because it captured the truth of Jean



Kemeny's situation in a humorous vein. And humor, after all, is one of the safety valves for people in the job of the president and partner. Here are some of Kemeny's comments on the partnership:

"The 'support role' has been a tradition. Wives of public figures, wives of college presidents, have been expected to be an uncrumbling, uncomplaining column of strength. But the 'support role' has expanded into one of increasing personal responsibility, and love has become a many-pillared thing."

"As life has become more complex, so has the job of the university president. He has to deal with an almost infinite number of problems that didn't exist a generation ago. And each year the problems multiply." (Kemeny, 1977 pp. 30-31)

As good as the Beadle, Corbally, and Kemeny books were, there were but three. The motivation for *The President's Spouse* was, therefore, rooted in the fact that the amount of writing on the subject was limited, and that an important earlier survey (the 1977 Corbally study) needed updating. In addition, it was anticipated that, since spouses were asked to identify and articulate their needs, the book would help people who work with and need to understand spouses. This study, therefore could lead to a greater awareness which could in turn lead to improved working relationships among the spouse, president, board members, and other constituents. Beyond that, NASULGC recognized that, as a group, campus spouses hold unique and privileged positions of influence that can have a direct bearing on the campuses and the communities they serve.

## *The Chapters and Authors*

This book has five chapters with a total of 13 essays and an epilogue. The first chapter and essay is this review of the survey. The second chapter is devoted to "Job Functions and the Role of the Spouse" focusing on an overview of these spouse functions and roles. There have been, and currently are, so few such spouses to presidents relative to the total population that it is no wonder that the role of the spouse is by and large unknown, ignored, or misunderstood.

Karen O'Neil of the University of Wisconsin System answers the question "What is it like to be the wife of a university president?" which, as one spouse has put it, "is a little like being a fiddler on a roof." Adele McComas, Mississippi State University, explores the partnership with the president and how it works for some. As the survey reveals, the marriage itself seems to be at the core of the success of the partnership. We chose to include the partnership with the president in this chapter because it relates directly to what the spouse accepts and performs in her role.



The idea to single out one very specific role, that of fund raiser, came from a program of the Spouses' Committee of NASULGC by Deborah Toll, University of Maryland, the author of another commentary. Spouses have often been reticent about linking the work they do in entertaining and public relations to the reality of financial donations and yet, as Deborah Toll describes it, a link exists.

Chapter Three examines the "Critical Relationships of the Spouse," and in her essay Vera Olson, University of Missouri, analyzes the delicate relationship between the president's spouse and the governing board. One of her compelling assertions is that volunteerism can be an important basis for understanding between the spouse and the board members because both give so freely of their time to the institution. In addition, since spouses and board members have considerable contact with each other, the spouse can contribute additional understanding to the President's relationship with the board.

Another delicate situation exists between system and single campus heads and their respective spouses. Judy Ikenberry of the University of Illinois carefully explores the myth and the reality of these relationships and offers sound advice. Community relationships are explored by Beatrice Chaikind Ross Winkler. How Bea built a sense of community involvement with her campus, the University of Cincinnati, is an inspiration to all spouses. Finally, but perhaps most critical of all, are the family considerations of the spouse. "Our main concern is for our children. We feel they might have lost out somehow, living in a 'fish bowl,'" one survey respondent told us. Polly Davis, of the Oregon State System of Higher Education, considers the implications of the presidency of the entire family and gives the reader humorous insights into the Davis family.

The fourth chapter is "Myself as the Spouse of the President/Chancellor." Ina Fitzhenry-Coor of the University of Vermont focuses on the importance of self-identity of spouses in her essay. This important chapter grew out of her presentation at a Committee of Spouses' session at a NASULGC annual meeting and our growing interest in who we are as people and how we survive in these jobs.

The concept of duo careers is the subject examined by Carolyn DiBiaggio of the University of Connecticut. One of the founders of the NASULGC Spouses Committee, Carolyn herself has held two positions at her university—one as the partner to President John DiBiaggio, and one as a Specialist II in Extended and Continuing Education Program Development, specializing in women and government. In another essay in this chapter, Kim Burse of Kentucky State University describes her role as partner to her husband while maintaining a commuting, full-time position in her own field. She shares with the reader



what the first year was like on her campus. Veteran spouses who have gotten “used to things” can easily forget the initial agonies and ecstasies of the role.

Finally, the topic of remuneration for spouses completes this chapter as Sue Young, UCLA, explores one of the hottest topics of debate among partners of presidents. Do we believe that reward, respect, and credibility are fulfilled through the intrinsic rewards of the partnership or should they also be fulfilled through remuneration?

“The Years Ahead,” the final chapter of *The President’s Spouse*, is written by Joan E. Clodius, co-editor of this book and partner to the President of NASULGC, Robert Clodius. She considers what the future holds by characterizing three different concepts of the spouse and she poses what the dilemmas and values are for each. Joan makes a strong case for role definition and clarification—even job descriptions for the spouse. “The Last Word” offers a humorous commentary by Chancellor William E. Davis, the spouse of Author Polly Davis.

These 13 essayists tell the story of *The President’s Spouse*. The authors are as different from one another as are the presidents from each other. They hold in common an incredible dedication to their college or university, to their mate and family, and to the belief that spouses need clarity of expectations, support, and choices to survive on campus. The decision to write a book collectively, using a survey to generate contemporary perspectives of the spouse for the writing effort, was an attempt to suggest that no single point of view can capture the diversity of experiences and insights of the president’s spouse. And the very process of using multiple authors to write the book was the most rewarding experience for the editors. The epilogue by David Riesman of Harvard offers a unique perspective by one who has devoted considerable time and attention to campus presidents and their spouses. The editors are indeed grateful for Dr. Riesman’s critical insights.

### *The Results of the NASULGC Survey: A Summary*

On March 29, 1983, 138 surveys were mailed from the University of Minnesota to the spouses of presidents or chancellors who are members of NASULGC. The survey contained 109 questions grouped into the following sections: 1) Your Community; 2) The Campus You Serve; 3) Your Home; 4) Your Family; 5) Your Role and Job with the President/Chancellor; 6) Yourself and; 7) Future. A total of 104 surveys were returned by May 27, 1983, for a response rate of 73 percent. Many of the open-ended questions were coded for subsequent computer analysis. These items, in addition to all of the coded (numbered response categories) items in the survey, were keypunched for



analysis on the University's Cyber 74 computer. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilized to generate frequency distributions of all items, and selected items were cross-tabulated using Chi-square analysis to determine statistical significance. Some of the significant results follow.

### *Community and Campus*

Most of the respondents tended to live in the Midwest (25 percent) or in the South, Northeast, Southwest, and Southeast (between 10 percent and 14 percent each). Fewer live in the West, Mountain region, or noncontinental United States. Forty percent of the spouses dwell in "small community" locales and 32 percent live in urban settings. Information about geographic location and the size and type of community in which one resides is important because it can affect the opportunities available for both volunteer and paid work and, perhaps, suggest life style choices.

Most respondents described the role of the president or chancellor as the "head of a single campus" (36 percent), or the "head of a single campus of a multicampus system" (32 percent). Clearly, two-thirds of the respondents do not have multicampus duties. Ninety-eight percent of them indicated that their campus is "public," with the majority (59 percent) having student enrollments of 20,000 or more. Fifty-eight percent of the student populations live on or near campus. Sixty-three percent of the institutions represented are a century old or older.

### *Home and Family*

Eighty-five percent of the survey respondents live in an official house. More than one-half of these residences are located on campus, and more than half are over 50 years old. Ninety-six percent of the respondents own at least some of the furnishings, and almost 70 percent pay for replacement of private furnishings. Two-thirds dwell on three acres or less and live in homes of 12 or more rooms (68 percent). Official residences are generally sufficient for entertaining, according to three-fourths, and 82 percent agree that the residence meets the needs of the family.

Children are a major part of the lives of the spouses. Three-fourths of those surveyed have or have had their children living with them while the mate was president or chancellor, and respondents report that the greatest advantage for those children is the opportunity to meet interesting people and to be part of the campus. More frequently stated disadvantages include having no privacy, little family time, and the problem of high visibility.



## *Role and Job*

Most spouses are very clear about what they have accepted as their responsibilities. The majority function as hostess, supervisor of staff and maintenance, entertaining coordinator, director of the official house, food arranger, campus correspondent and representative at national meetings, tour guide, community leader, and all-around public relations person. Seventy-five percent of the respondents report that they entertain more than 1,000 people each year in the official residence, with 45 percent hosting 2,001 or more guests. In general, the spouse or family issues work instructions for the interior of the official house in such areas as major repair work (56 percent), cleaning (77 percent), decorating (80 percent), security (60 percent), arrangements for (67 percent) and scheduling of (80 percent) the house for events. (Other university and college personnel give instructions for work outside the house related to snow removal (58 percent) and yard work (50 percent), with the house manager and other personnel sharing the issuance of maintenance work (28 percent to 25 percent respectively.)

With respect to "who does the work," in all categories of official work, other university personnel clearly save the day. The only exception is with decorating, in which case 35 percent of the decorating is performed through private contractors. The university almost universally pays the bills related to official house work.

Not surprisingly, spouses generally do not enjoy the routine functions (arranger of food, correspondent) or administrative functions (supervisory, director of official house). Thirty-seven percent indicated they do not have adequate secretarial staff. And when asked which arrangements regarding official house work were not satisfactory, the two most frequent answers given were "dealing with unqualified staff" (21 percent) and "having to 'nag' to get the job done" (11 percent). But they do enjoy representing their institutions at national meetings and alumni gatherings, and overwhelmingly enjoy being the hostess at events. Almost one half of those surveyed give their institution 21 or more hours a week, with 1 out of 7 donating over 40 hours per week. Those who also accept community leadership roles are generally pleased to do so.

With respect to qualifications for the myriad roles assumed by spouses of presidents and chancellors, 53 percent of the respondents said the most important qualification is to enjoy people. As for training or preparation, respondents cited "all previous experience" (26 percent), "previous experience on the current campus" (17 percent), and "previous experience as the spouse of a campus administrator" (12 percent). Ironically, although one-half of the presidents or chancellors and spouses have previously served at another institution,



for 72 percent their current position is their first chief executive position. Seventy-one percent have served seven years or fewer in that position.

It is clear that the presidencies and chancellorships of the major institutions represented in this survey are unique positions with little opportunity for previous related experience, educational training, preparation, or even meaningful job descriptions. Similarly, the spouses of these administrators have had little opportunity for previous related experience, educational training, and preparation. Still, only four percent of spouses surveyed had a written job description, only half of the spouses were included in the interview process when the governing board members considered the president or chancellor for the position, and a revealing 88 percent answered "no" to the question, "Did anyone at the institution explain the expectations of your role and job as spouse of the president or chancellor?"

Although nearly 30 percent believed that a job description would have been helpful, and 84 percent believed that the spouse should be included in the interview process in order to learn expectations of the spouse and to present a "partnership of two people," spouses learned what was expected of them on campus by on-the-job training (34 percent), observing others (19 percent), predecessors (15 percent), and common sense (11 percent). Indeed, for chancellors or presidents, many of whom are "first timers" on the job, their partnerships become even more critical in terms of survival and growth. And yet, 95 percent of the spouses surveyed indicated that there is no job evaluation other than that given by their mate; 98 percent have never been asked to submit a review of their activities and roles by the governing board. (Interestingly, about 20 percent wished they were asked for such a report.)

The responses to the questions about roles and preparation suggest the spouses are employed in unique positions for which it is difficult to prepare. Obviously, college and university governing boards need to be clearer with spouses about role expectations and the job of being a campus spouse. Perhaps because they themselves could not benefit from relevant previous experience or a thorough orientation as to expectations, the spouses were generous about giving advice to those who might assume their role. Of the 80 percent who responded, the most frequently mentioned advice was "to be yourself." Others suggested carving out personal time, getting your own career, making sure of expectations at the time of the interview, fully understanding the budget, setting priorities, hiring your own staff, keeping files, and talking to other experienced spouses.

As to insights into the inherent frustrations, spouses included worrying about the effects of pressure on the spouse, the limitations on time available for



spouse and family, the unpredictable demands on time that take precedence over their own activities, too little time for their personal pursuits, the separation of "official life" from one's personal life, the lack of personal privacy, and time for friends and relatives. They often feel isolated from others because of their spouse's position, resent the criticism their spouses inevitably attract, worry about high personal overhead expenses, and the fact that their way of life has been altered (out of control), and they often feel frustrated by having responsibility without authority.

Their concern about the president or chancellor is the single greatest frustration they face, which suggests unusually close partnerships. In fact, when we inquired about the best aspects of the spouse role, the three most frequently mentioned were: 1) the opportunity to meet interesting people; 2) the ability to participate in a partnership with the president or chancellor; and 3) the opportunity to travel for the institution nationally and internationally. The participation in a meaningful partnership was mentioned more frequently than any other aspect except the opportunity to meet interesting people. As one spouse suggested, "President/President's spouse is a job we can do together. . ."

Ninety-eight percent of the spouses do not receive a salary. Of those spouses not receiving a salary, eighty percent do not believe they should be paid, because they like the volunteer aspect of the work and would consider a salary to be a mandate to perform (50 percent); 25 percent accept the work as a marital duty "which I do happily." Of the 20 percent who believe spouses should be paid, the "mean" salary suggested was \$19,000, with 59 percent suggesting it should come from general university funds.

### *Self and the Future*

Ninety-nine percent of the spouses surveyed were female. Almost one-half (48 percent) are between the ages of 50 and 59 years (with 34 percent between 40 and 49 years, and 15 percent over 60 years of age. Ninety-five percent have never been divorced, suggesting strong, stable partnerships, and 55 percent are part of a regular physical fitness program. Eighty-five percent have a B.A. or B.S. degree or more, 11 percent have earned doctoral degrees, and 15 percent are currently enrolled in an educational program, predominantly part-time.

Seventy-seven percent of the spouses participate in a long and impressive list of volunteer community activities, with more than one-half donating five hours or more per week. Volunteer commitments include church work, foundations and boards, musical associations and arts councils, nonprofit organizations, youth development groups, hospitals, drives and social service agencies, teaching, counseling, schools, restoration efforts, public television, Planned Parenthood, and such organizations as the League of Women Voters.



Interestingly, almost 30 percent work for pay outside the role of spouse. Averaging 25 hours per week, 73 percent work 20 hours or more per week. Motivation to work outside the partnership includes the following (the percent of respondents checking each motivation is indicated in parentheses):

1. self-fulfillment (83 percent)
2. independence (69 percent)
3. intellectual stimulation (69 percent)
4. utilization of professional training (65 percent)
5. association with different people (65 percent)
6. income (55 percent)

Forty-two percent of the spouses were professionally involved in their field of training prior to their mate's selection as a president or chancellor. One-half worked full-time and their professions were enormously varied and included writing, teaching and administration, work as artists, opera singers, computer programmer analysts, CPAs, professional development officers, and registered nurses. Fifty-eight percent of those spouses who were professionally involved continued some professional involvement after they became partners to a president or chancellor.

But working for pay outside the partnership requires juggling time, priorities, and responsibilities, and an ability to overcome some (perhaps) obvious obstacles. The following comments call attention to the obstacles spouses had to overcome to secure and maintain their job outside the role of spouse:

1. Scheduling.
2. Proper management of time and proper rating of priorities.
3. Many, not the least of which was role as president's spouse. It seemed to reduce credibility as an academic and serious researcher.
4. Maintaining a high energy level.
5. Criticism by certain members of the Board of Trustees and certain politicians and others of the University community . . .

Clearly, working for pay outside the partnership requires balancing time, priorities, and responsibilities. Some spouses reported they schedule as far in advance as possible, delegate, train helpers, work out careful organization, and set priorities. "But," said one respondent, "my role as the President's wife still comes first."

Some chose not to continue to work outside the partnership. Lack of time and family responsibilities were cited most frequently as the reasons, but some also volunteered the following comments:



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- Trustees said no! My duties were too numerous.
- I commuted for six months 110 miles per day. I became very tired of the long drive.
- I'm not a super human. . .

Seventy-five percent reported they were satisfied with the decision not to continue working.

The partners have made some attempt to plan for their financial futures: One-third of the respondents have savings plans, nearly one-fourth participate in self-initiated retirement programs, and one-fourth have purchased property. Only 13 percent have no financial plans for the future. Although more than half of the institutions provide pension plans, more than one-fifth of the campuses have no such plan for their chief executive officer. Some special arrangements, however, were mentioned, such as "President Emeritus" status with office and secretary when the person steps out of office.

### *A Spouse Profile Emerges*

There emerges from the survey findings a general spouse profile. The "typical" campus spouse is female, over 50 years of age, and in a stable marriage situation. She is in a regular physical fitness program and is well educated. She probably does not work for pay outside the role of spouse, but gives her institution 21 or more hours per week and donates five or more hours per week to a wide range of community volunteer work. Her husband previously served at another institution, but his current presidency or chancellorship is his first and the institution is public. More than likely the position does not have multicampus responsibilities.

The spouse lives in an official house and accepts a multiplicity of responsibilities including the work of hostess, supervisor of staff, entertaining coordinator, director of the official house, food arranger, campus representative at national meetings, campus correspondent, community leadership roles, tour guide, and general public relations person. She might or might not have been included in the governing board interview process, but strongly feels she should have been. No one explained her position or the expectations of her role; she learned through on-the-job training, observing others, talking to predecessors, and by common sense. She enjoys the role of hostess and representational work, in large part because she enjoys people in general. Her greatest concern is for the president or chancellor, the pressures he experiences, and the lack of time with him and her family.

This profile, it should be noted, generally supports the findings of the 1977 Corbally study in the areas where comparison is possible. (The Corbally study



included many more private and smaller institutions than the NASULGC study.) Nevertheless, the 1983 survey reinforces the assertion that spouses continue to work hard on campuses across the country, want choices as to the extent of their involvement with their partners, and are beginning to assert themselves in areas of their own careers, possible remuneration, and the expectations of their role.

Significant correlations were revealed when certain variables were cross-tabulated:

1. The higher the degree a spouse has earned, the more likely she or he will be employed outside the campus role.
2. Younger spouses have stronger feelings about the lack of personal privacy. They are more likely to be frustrated with the sense that their way of life is altered and out of control and that they spend too little time with their family.
3. Of the four who have written job descriptions, all are under 50 years of age.
4. Younger spouses enjoy editing the president's or chancellor's speeches and being public speakers more than older spouses.
5. Older spouses enjoy being the director of the official house and supervising the cleaning person more than younger spouses.

### *Conclusion*

The authors of this introductory chapter wish to conclude with two quotations. The first is from a spouse who chose not to complete the survey.

"This is just one of the many time-consuming things I'm asked to do as the president's wife, which I resent. I am his spouse, not his business partner and do my best to keep up the home front and family he's too busy to have time for anymore. I do as much as I have to to keep peace, and as little as possible to keep my sanity."

The second spouse completed the survey, and then added her own perspective:

"This has been a more difficult survey to complete than I anticipated. In many ways it has caused me to reflect upon aspects of my role that I best tolerate by ignoring—or at least by not dwelling upon them very often. I do deeply believe that this is one of the least understood and least valued roles in American culture today. Yet the time and effort given by most spouses is astonishing in its magnitude. And the price each of us pays in our own individual ways, through poor health, strained family relationships, loss of friendships and career, is often great. I also deeply believe that a wife needs to maintain elements of her private, personal identity that are not compromised by the role. How to do this easily,



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honestly, and effectively, I do not know for the role is ever present, persistent, and often an unspoken set of expectations. Because of the silence and ambiguity, one often does not realize that she has erred until it is already too late. It would be at least a beginning if there were greater openness on all parts during the interview process: by the board, the university leadership, the president-elect himself, and the spouse, as to what is expected and what is possible, given the circumstances. Once that is clarified, a just compensation should be an automatic part of the process and it should be negotiated with the dignity and respect for the person and the role."

We hope that this book helps all who care about America's colleges and universities to think through for themselves the questions and issues so forthrightly raised by these two spouses and by all spouses who participated in this survey and project.

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