

# Women at the Threshold of the Presidency: Interim Female Leadership and Male-Dominated Headship at Northern Caribbean University

Paul Andrew Bourne<sup>1</sup>, PhD, DrPH & Feliciano Thorpe<sup>2</sup>, MSc.

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, University of the Commonwealth Caribbean, Kingston, Jamaica, WI

<sup>2</sup>Student Success Coach, Excelsior Community College, Kingston, Jamaica, WI

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## ABSTRACT

Women have become increasingly visible throughout higher education as students, academics, administrators and senior managers, yet the university presidency remains disproportionately male in many national and institutional contexts. This study examines that leadership paradox at Northern Caribbean University (NCU), Jamaica, through the interim presidencies of Professor Marilyn J. Anderson in 2016–2017 and Dr Vivienne L. Quarrie in 2026. Using a qualitative historical-comparative case-study design, the paper reconstructs NCU's presidential succession, analyses the professional trajectories of Anderson and Quarrie, and integrates gendered-organisational theory directly into the interpretation of institutional evidence rather than treating theory as a detached exposition. The study addresses a gap in the literature because research on women in higher-education leadership has extensively examined glass ceilings, role congruity, leadership capital and the glass cliff, but comparatively little work has investigated how interim female presidencies coexist with male-dominated permanent headship in Caribbean faith-based higher education (Acker, 1990; D'Apice, 2024; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Ryan & Haslam, 2005). Comparative analysis with Harvard University, the University of Oxford, the University of Guyana and the University of Cape Town shows that historically male institutions can follow different pathways from exclusion to female access, permanent appointment and eventually normalised female executive leadership (Harvard University, 2007; University of Guyana [UG], 2020; University of Oxford, n.d.; University of Cape Town [UCT], 2019). The paper develops the Interim Leadership Paradox and concludes that NCU should move from episodic female headship towards transparent, gender-inclusive succession systems that recognise demonstrated interim performance, diversify leadership pathways and reconcile mission-based governance with equitable access to permanent executive authority.

**Keywords:** Northern Caribbean University; women presidents; female leadership; higher education; interim presidency; gendered organisations; glass ceiling; glass cliff; Jamaica; Seventh-day Adventist education; university leadership; Marilyn Anderson; Vivienne Quarrie

## INTRODUCTION

Women participate extensively in higher education as students, lecturers, researchers and administrators, yet their numerical presence throughout universities has not translated automatically into proportional representation at the highest executive level. International research repeatedly demonstrates that women become less visible as academic hierarchies rise, with the university presidency remaining one of the clearest sites of persistent gender inequality (D'Apice, 2024; Reis & Grady, 2019a). This vertical disparity is particularly important because university presidents exercise considerable influence over strategy, appointments, fundraising, external relations, institutional culture and the distribution of organisational resources. Leadership exclusion concerns not simply occupational advancement for individual women but the broader question of whose perspectives and experiences are represented in institutional decision-making. The paradox becomes especially striking when women possess extensive academic and administrative experience yet reach the presidency only temporarily rather than through permanent appointment. Northern Caribbean University provides an unusually revealing Caribbean case through which to examine this phenomenon.

NCU's historical development stretches from the West Indian Training School founded in 1907 through West Indies College to university status in 1999, creating more than a century of institutional headship in a faith-based educational system. Its documented presidential history has been overwhelmingly male, including Herbert Thompson, Trevor Gardner and Lincoln Edwards among the long-serving modern presidents, while earlier institutional lists likewise identify men throughout much of the leadership sequence (Bignall & Palmer, 2020; Northern Caribbean University [NCU], 2012). Professor Marilyn Anderson became an important exception when she was appointed interim president following Gardner's departure in 2016 and before Lincoln Edwards assumed the permanent presidency in 2017 (Bignall & Palmer, 2020). Almost a decade later, Dr Vivienne L. Quarrie became interim president after Edwards's departure in June 2026 while a presidential search was conducted (NCU, 2026a). The Board subsequently selected Dr Balvin B. Braham as permanent president effective September 2026, meaning that both documented female occupants of NCU's highest office served temporarily rather than through permanent presidential succession (NCU, 2026b). This repeated female-interim/male-permanent sequence makes NCU especially useful for examining whether executive visibility, executive legitimacy and permanent executive institutionalisation are distinct organisational outcomes.

The NCU case is also important because women are not marginal to the university's academic workforce. Publicly reported staffing data indicated that women constituted 67 of NCU's 114 academic staff members in 2021, meaning that women were already a numerical majority in the academic workforce even while executive headship remained male-dominated (Jamaica Gleaner, 2021). The same report noted that women were considerably less dominant in the senior executive structure, illustrating the familiar higher-education pattern in which women's representation declines as organisational authority increases. Such a pattern cannot itself prove discrimination in any individual presidential appointment because selection decisions involve qualifications, availability, institutional priorities and candidate pools. It does, however, establish the structural conditions necessary for a legitimate gender-leadership research question. The central puzzle is why substantial female participation and proven interim executive capacity have not yet translated into permanent female presidential leadership at NCU.

**Section synthesis:** NCU's historical pattern establishes that women have reached presidential authority without yet attaining permanent presidential succession. Women's substantial presence within the academic workforce means that the problem cannot be reduced to simple numerical exclusion from the institution. Anderson and Quarrie instead direct attention to the final conversion between senior leadership and substantive executive appointment. The distinction between access and permanence therefore defines the central research problem. NCU should be understood as an institution in transition rather than one that has either fully excluded or fully institutionalised female presidential leadership. This framing provides the foundation for the comparative and faith-based analysis that follows.

## Statement of the Problem

The problem examined in this study is not that NCU has never allowed a woman to exercise presidential authority. On the contrary, both Anderson and Quarrie were entrusted with the university's highest executive responsibilities during periods of institutional transition, demonstrating that women have been viewed as sufficiently competent and trusted to provide organisational continuity. The more theoretically significant issue is that these opportunities occurred in interim rather than permanent form. Temporary executive leadership can provide women with visibility, decision-making authority and institutional legitimacy, but it may also reproduce a pattern in which women stabilise organisations between male presidencies without becoming the default candidates for permanent succession. The distinction between interim and substantive appointment is central rather than semantic. Organisational gender equality requires attention not simply to whether women can occupy the office, but to the conditions under which they are considered legitimate long-term owners of executive authority.

This distinction is particularly relevant to NCU because Anderson's interim presidency occurred after the permanent presidential successor had already been selected. Lincoln Edwards was elected president in June 2016, but because he could not assume office immediately, Anderson, then Vice-President for Academic Administration and Provost, was appointed to lead during the transition (Bignall & Palmer, 2020). Her interim appointment demonstrated institutional confidence in her capacity to govern while simultaneously occurring in

a succession process that had already selected a man for the permanent position. Quarrie's 2026 appointment emerged under somewhat different circumstances because she became interim president following Edwards's departure while a presidential search committee sought a successor (NCU, 2026a). The subsequent selection of Braham as permanent president reproduced the broader gender pattern even though the procedural context differed from Anderson's appointment (NCU, 2026b). Examining these two cases together permits analysis of temporary female headship under different succession conditions.

**Section synthesis:** The problem is not whether NCU has ever trusted women with presidential responsibilities, because the historical record demonstrates that it has. The problem is that female authority has appeared in interim form while substantive succession has remained male. Anderson's and Quarrie's appointments arose under different procedural circumstances, which prevents simplistic assumptions about a single discriminatory mechanism. Their common outcome nevertheless warrants analysis because temporary authority and permanent authority carry different degrees of institutional security and mandate. The study therefore evaluates structural patterns without attributing unsupported motives to individual decision-makers. This distinction protects both analytical rigour and the legitimacy of the gender-leadership question.

## Research Gap

Scholarship on women in higher-education leadership has established several important explanations for persistent inequality. Researchers have documented the glass ceiling, gendered organisational cultures, role-congruity pressures, restricted professional networks, unequal mentoring opportunities and gendered expectations surrounding authority (Acker, 1990; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Reis & Grady, 2019a, 2019b). More recent scholarship has investigated the glass cliff, showing that women may receive high-level leadership opportunities disproportionately during precarious or transitional organisational circumstances (Ryan & Haslam, 2005; Samuel, 2021). Studies of women university presidents also show that women often navigate organisational cultures in which executive leadership historically has been coded as masculine (D'Apice, 2024; Reis & Grady, 2019a). However, most of this scholarship is concentrated in North America and Europe, with considerably less research focusing on Caribbean universities and still less on faith-based institutions in the Caribbean. NCU consequently provides a theoretically important setting in which established gender-leadership theories can be examined outside their most common geographical contexts.

A second and more specific gap concerns interim female headship. Existing research has frequently treated the achievement of the presidency as a binary outcome in which an individual either becomes president or remains excluded from the position. Such a formulation overlooks the organisational significance of acting and interim roles through which women may exercise presidential authority without receiving permanent presidential status (Boulay, 2022). Interim leadership can serve as a developmental pathway to substantive leadership, but it can also become a holding pattern in which women provide continuity during transition while permanent succession remains associated with men. The cases of Anderson and Quarrie reveal a dimension of leadership inequality not adequately captured by conventional measures counting only the number of women who have ever occupied presidential offices. This study addresses that gap through the concept of the Interim Leadership Paradox, defined as a condition in which women are institutionally recognised as capable of exercising top-level authority temporarily but remain absent from permanent succession outcomes.

A third gap concerns the relationship between gender, religion and higher-education governance. NCU is not only a private Jamaican university but also an institution owned and operated in the Seventh-day Adventist educational system, meaning that university governance exists in a wider ecclesiastical organisational culture. Faith-based institutions can reproduce leadership expectations differently from secular universities because institutional leadership intersects with denominational traditions, mission, governance structures and conceptions of spiritual authority. Research on women presidents in Catholic higher education has introduced the metaphor of the stained-glass ceiling to describe gender barriers operating where university leadership is embedded in religious organisational traditions (Giglia & Smith, 2024). Although Adventist governance differs significantly from Catholic structures, the broader analytical insight remains relevant: faith-based institutional culture can influence expectations concerning who appears natural or legitimate as an organisational leader. This study does not presume that denominational culture caused NCU's succession outcomes, but it identifies the

interaction between gender and faith-based governance as an important underexamined dimension requiring further empirical investigation.

**Section synthesis:** The literature explains many barriers to women's senior leadership but has paid less attention to the space between interim access and permanent executive ownership. Caribbean faith-based universities remain particularly underrepresented in this scholarship. NCU therefore provides an opportunity to connect gendered-organisation theory with a historically specific succession system. The research gap also requires attention to denominational governance because mission and ecclesiastical networks may shape definitions of executive legitimacy. The Interim Leadership Paradox addresses this neglected institutional middle ground. The study contributes by distinguishing female capability, temporary access, permanent appointment and the later normalisation of female headship.

### Aim and Research Questions

The primary aim of this study is to examine the significance of the interim presidencies of Professor Marilyn Anderson and Dr Vivienne Quarrie in the historically male-dominated pattern of presidential headship at Northern Caribbean University. The first research question asks how women's representation in NCU's presidential history compares with their broader presence in the academic and administrative workforce. The second examines the professional qualifications and leadership trajectories through which Anderson and Quarrie reached the interim presidency. The third asks whether temporary female headship can be interpreted as evidence of executive inclusion, institutional constraint or some combination of the two. The fourth considers how theories of gendered organisations, role congruity, the glass ceiling and the glass cliff illuminate the NCU experience. The final question asks what institutional reforms could convert demonstrated female executive capacity into more equitable access to permanent presidential succession.

**Section synthesis:** The research questions move from description towards institutional explanation. They examine representation, professional trajectories, interim status, theoretical interpretation and practical succession reform. Together, these questions prevent the study from reducing gender inequality to a simple count of male and female presidents. They also allow comparative evidence to identify alternative pathways through which historically male institutions changed. Faith-based governance is treated as an empirical dimension rather than an assumed cause. The resulting design links NCU's history to broader debates about how leadership capital becomes permanent executive legitimacy.

### Integrated Analytical Framework: Gendered Organisations, Leadership Capital and Succession

Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organisations is used in this study as an empirical lens rather than as a detached theoretical destination. The framework proposes that apparently neutral organisational routines can reproduce gender because assumptions about authority, ideal workers and legitimate leadership become embedded in structures and practices. At NCU, this proposition becomes empirically relevant because women have been numerous in academic employment and have advanced to senior administration, yet substantive presidential succession has remained male-dominated (Jamaica Gleaner, 2021). The theory therefore directs attention away from whether women are formally permitted to lead and towards how leadership pathways, search conventions and definitions of presidential readiness operate at the final conversion point. Anderson's and Quarrie's interim appointments demonstrate that women can satisfy the institution's immediate test of executive trust, making the remaining question one of how temporary legitimacy is valued when permanent leadership is selected. The revised analysis consequently applies Acker's framework throughout the empirical sections instead of repeatedly restating the theory in abstraction.

Role congruity theory provides a second mechanism for interpreting the evidence because leadership expectations may be evaluated differently when gender stereotypes and executive stereotypes do not align (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Women may be rewarded for communal, educational and service-oriented leadership while simultaneously encountering stronger expectations of decisiveness, external authority and strategic command at the presidential level. This possibility is particularly relevant to Anderson and Quarrie because both advanced substantially through academic-administrative portfolios involving teaching, curriculum, research, accreditation and institutional stewardship (NCU, 2014; NCU, 2026a). The empirical question is therefore whether academic-

administrative leadership is weighted as strongly as financial, denominational, fundraising or external executive experience when permanent presidential readiness is assessed. The study does not assume that different weighting occurred in either NCU search because confidential deliberations and complete candidate data are unavailable. Instead, role congruity is used to generate a testable proposition about whether formally neutral definitions of the ideal president can interact with gendered career pathways.

The glass-ceiling perspective remains relevant, but the NCU evidence suggests that the ceiling may be located unusually close to the institutional apex. Anderson served as Vice-President for Academic Administration and Provost before her interim presidency, while Quarrie progressed through department leadership, denominational educational administration, graduate studies and research leadership, associate vice-presidential responsibilities and the vice-presidency for academic administration (NCU, 2014; NCU, 2026a). Their careers demonstrate substantial accumulation of the administrative capital normally associated with presidential readiness and weaken explanations based simply on insufficient female preparation. Because both women actually crossed into presidential authority, the more precise question is whether a permanence ceiling separates interim access from substantive appointment. Leadership-capital scholarship similarly shows that women presidents accumulate cultural, professional and organisational resources while navigating historically male executive structures (Reis & Grady, 2019a, 2019b). The revised framework therefore connects glass-ceiling analysis directly to the observable narrowing between senior female leadership, interim presidential authority and permanent succession.

The glass-cliff literature adds a more cautious interpretation because women may receive senior leadership opportunities disproportionately during periods of organisational difficulty, instability or transition (Ryan & Haslam, 2005; Samuel, 2021). Interim presidencies occur by definition during leadership transitions, but transition alone does not establish the precarious conditions required for a glass-cliff classification. Both Anderson and Quarrie assumed presidential responsibility during succession periods, yet the available documentary evidence does not demonstrate that either inherited a failing institution or an unusually high probability of leadership failure. Recent research on Black women in higher-education leadership similarly cautions that high-level opportunity can coexist with heightened organisational risk, but such findings should not be projected mechanically onto every female interim appointment (Allen & Roberts, 2025). The NCU cases are therefore treated as potentially relevant to glass-cliff theory without being labelled definitive glass-cliff appointments. This evidential restraint allows theory to sharpen empirical questions without converting conceptual similarity into unsupported causal proof.

Leadership capital completes the integrated framework by focusing on the experience, credentials, networks and organisational legitimacy accumulated before executive selection (Reis & Grady, 2019a). Anderson and Quarrie possessed extensive institutional knowledge, advanced academic qualifications and senior administrative experience before becoming interim presidents, so neither case can plausibly be interpreted as the unexpected elevation of an inexperienced administrator. Their appointments show that NCU itself recognised sufficient leadership capital to entrust each woman with the university's highest operational responsibilities. The analytical problem therefore shifts from asking whether women are prepared towards asking how institutions convert women's preparation into permanent executive opportunity. This question is especially important in faith-based higher education, where theological culture, mission expectations and leadership networks can shape the experiences regarded as legitimate preparation for executive office (Giglia & Smith, 2024; Stockton, 2024). By integrating leadership capital with the NCU evidence, the revised study reduces theoretical repetition and places institutional conversion mechanisms at the centre of the analysis.

**Section synthesis:** The revised theoretical framework is deliberately integrated with the empirical evidence rather than developed as a repetitive standalone review. Acker's theory directs attention to organisational rules and routines, role congruity examines leadership expectations, and the glass ceiling identifies narrowing opportunities near the apex. Glass-cliff theory is applied cautiously because transitional leadership does not automatically indicate organisational crisis. Leadership capital focuses the analysis on whether proven preparation is recognised during substantive succession. Faith-based scholarship adds the possibility that mission, theology and denominational networks influence which experiences appear presidentially legitimate. Together, these concepts function as tools for interpreting the NCU pattern rather than as predetermined explanations.

## Conceptual Framework: The Interim Leadership Paradox

This paper proposes the Interim Leadership Paradox as its principal conceptual contribution. The paradox occurs where women are appointed to exercise the highest executive authority temporarily, thereby demonstrating institutional confidence in their leadership, yet permanent presidential succession remains systematically or repeatedly male. Temporary appointment consequently operates as evidence of both inclusion and incompleteness because women cross the operational threshold of the presidency without necessarily receiving long-term institutional ownership of the office. The concept challenges explanations that women lack executive capability because the institution itself has already entrusted them with executive authority. It also avoids the opposite error of treating interim access as equivalent to substantive gender equality when appointment security, mandate and succession status remain different. The Interim Leadership Paradox therefore directs empirical attention to the organisational mechanisms that determine whether temporary legitimacy becomes a bridge to permanent authority or an endpoint of transitional stewardship.

The paradox contains four analytical stages. The first is leadership accumulation, during which women acquire qualifications, institutional knowledge, administrative responsibility and reputational credibility. The second is transitional activation, in which that accumulated leadership capital is mobilised when the organisation requires immediate executive continuity. The third is interim legitimation, during which women demonstrate that they can exercise presidential authority and represent the institution publicly. The fourth is succession displacement, which occurs when permanent executive ownership moves to another candidate and the woman returns to, or exits into, a different organisational role. Not every interim presidency follows this pathway, but Anderson and Quarrie provide cases through which the model can be examined.

**Section synthesis:** The Interim Leadership Paradox describes the coexistence of female executive trust and incomplete permanent inclusion. Its four-stage logic distinguishes leadership accumulation, transitional activation, interim legitimation and the eventual succession outcome. The concept is useful because it neither erases women's real exercise of presidential authority nor exaggerates temporary appointment as complete equality. It also allows comparison among institutions where interim leadership becomes a bridge, remains an endpoint or is followed by broader normalisation. The concept therefore operationalises the institutional space between capability and permanence. NCU's two female interim presidencies provide critical cases through which that space can be examined.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a **qualitative historical-comparative case-study design** centred on Northern Caribbean University from its institutional origins to 2026, with particular analytical attention to the modern university period and the interim presidencies of Professor Marilyn Anderson and Dr Vivienne Quarrie. A qualitative case-study approach is appropriate because the research problem concerns the interaction among gender, presidential succession, organisational history and institutional norms rather than the estimation of a single causal effect (Yin, 2018). Historical case analysis is especially useful where current leadership arrangements can only be understood by tracing how earlier patterns of authority, appointment and organisational culture became established over time (George & Bennett, 2005). The study therefore reconstructs NCU's presidential history and examines whether the two female interim presidencies represent isolated exceptions, evidence of organisational transition or manifestations of a broader pattern in which women gain temporary executive authority without permanent presidential succession. Documentary evidence is used to establish verifiable institutional facts, while comparative higher-education evidence is employed to position the NCU case against universities in other national and organisational settings. This design is consistent with the study's broader objective of explaining the institutional significance of female interim headship rather than producing a biographical account of Anderson and Quarrie.

The documentary case-study strategy is particularly suitable because the central questions concern institutional patterns that can be reconstructed from publicly accessible organisational records. Primary institutional sources include Northern Caribbean University bulletins, official leadership biographies, presidential announcements, accreditation materials, institutional reports and archived communications concerning presidential transitions. Additional evidence is drawn from the University Council of Jamaica, the Encyclopedia of Seventh-day

Adventists, government sources and official denominational records where these provide independent information concerning NCU's governance history. Jamaican newspaper reporting is used selectively to corroborate dates, appointments, public statements and significant institutional developments, while peer-reviewed scholarship supplies the analytical concepts used to interpret gender and leadership. Documentary analysis requires attention to authorship, institutional purpose, credibility and corroboration because public statements can communicate both factual information and organisational self-presentation (Bowen, 2009). Sources are therefore treated hierarchically, with official institutional and regulatory records given greatest weight for factual matters such as appointment status, qualifications and dates of office, while media and archival commentary enrich interpretation of how leadership transitions were publicly understood.

The study further incorporates a comparative institutional component involving selected universities internationally in order to determine whether NCU's pattern is institutionally unusual or consistent with wider gendered leadership transitions. Comparative cases include Harvard University, the University of Oxford, the University of Guyana and the University of Cape Town because each has a documented history of prolonged male executive leadership followed by significant female leadership breakthroughs. Harvard and Oxford demonstrate eventual substantive female appointments after exceptionally long male traditions, whereas Guyana provides the most direct Caribbean pathway from transitional female authority to permanent female vice-chancellorship (Harvard University, 2007; University of Oxford, n.d.; UG, 2020). The University of Cape Town represents a different pathway because its importance lies less in interim-to-permanent conversion than in the later repeatability and broader normalisation of substantive female executive authority (UCT, 2011, 2019a). These cases are not intended to form a statistically representative sample but to provide theoretically informative contrasts across access, permanence and institutionalisation. Comparative case selection therefore follows a purposive logic designed to sharpen the mechanisms through which historically male universities can move towards gender-inclusive executive succession (George & Bennett, 2005; Yin, 2018).

The principal unit of analysis is **presidential succession at NCU**, with Anderson and Quarrie treated as embedded critical cases within the larger institutional history. The study distinguishes between permanent, interim and acting leadership because appointment status is central to the research gap concerning the difference between female access to presidential authority and female access to substantive presidential succession. Each leadership transition is coded according to the gender of the institutional head, appointment status, duration of service, prior leadership role, succession circumstances and gender of the permanent successor. The analysis also records whether the individual entered the presidency through a competitive search, transitional appointment, predetermined succession arrangement or another identifiable route where documentary evidence permits. This coding strategy makes it possible to identify whether the two female appointments represent structurally similar or procedurally different forms of interim headship. It also allows the study to distinguish a recurring gendered outcome from identical appointment processes, thereby avoiding an overly deterministic interpretation of the evidence.

A second analytical layer examines the broader **leadership pipeline** within NCU. Evidence concerning women's representation among academic staff, department chairs, deans, vice-presidents, provosts and other senior administrators is reviewed where reliable data are available. This layer is necessary because persistent male presidential leadership can arise either from a weak internal pipeline of qualified women or from a conversion problem in which women reach senior administration but do not progress proportionately into permanent headship. The careers of Anderson and Quarrie are therefore analysed not only at the moment of interim appointment but across their preceding academic and administrative trajectories. Their qualifications, executive responsibilities and institutional experience are compared with the types of leadership capital commonly identified in the literature as relevant to presidential readiness (Reis & Grady, 2019a, 2019b). The study thereby shifts from counting women in leadership to examining where within the organisational hierarchy female progression appears to narrow.

The data are analysed using **directed qualitative content analysis**, with coding categories derived from the theoretical framework developed in the study. The principal theoretical categories include gendered organisational structure, role congruity, glass-ceiling effects, glass-cliff conditions, leadership capital and the proposed Interim Leadership Paradox (Acker, 1990; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Ryan & Haslam, 2005). Documentary evidence is first coded descriptively to establish what happened, after which interpretive coding is used to assess

which theoretical mechanisms are consistent with the observed pattern. For example, evidence that women progressed through senior academic administration before receiving interim appointments is examined through leadership-capital and glass-ceiling perspectives, while the transitional timing of their presidencies is evaluated cautiously against glass-cliff scholarship. The coding process does not assume that any theory is correct in advance, and contradictory evidence is retained where it weakens or qualifies a proposed explanation. This approach helps prevent theoretical concepts from being imposed mechanically upon events whose institutional circumstances may differ from those in the literature.

Comparative analysis is conducted through a **structured, focused comparison** using the same questions across each selected institution. These questions include how long male leadership persisted, whether women first entered headship through interim or permanent appointment, whether a female acting role converted into substantive appointment, and whether later female executive leadership became repeatable or remained exceptional. The same framework is applied to NCU, Harvard, Oxford, Cape Town and Guyana so that comparison is based upon equivalent leadership dimensions rather than anecdotal institutional differences. Particular attention is given to the distinction between a first female breakthrough and the later institutionalisation of female authority, because the latter provides stronger evidence of organisational transformation. This comparative logic supports the study's proposed distinction between **female presidential access, female permanent succession** and **normalised female headship**. It also allows NCU to be located along a leadership-development continuum rather than judged in isolation.

The study adopts an explicitly **non-causal and non-accusatory evidential standard** when interpreting individual succession decisions. Publicly available documentary evidence can establish that Anderson and Quarrie served as interim presidents and that men subsequently occupied permanent presidential office, but it cannot establish confidential deliberations within presidential search committees or governing boards. Unless evidence of candidate pools, applications, selection criteria or board deliberations is available, the study does not claim that either woman was denied permanent appointment because of gender. Instead, it identifies an objectively verifiable institutional pattern and assesses whether that pattern is consistent with mechanisms established in the wider gender-and-leadership literature. This distinction is methodologically essential because pattern recognition is not equivalent to proof of discriminatory intent. The analysis therefore remains critical of structural outcomes while avoiding unsupported attribution of motive.

Triangulation is used throughout the study to strengthen credibility and reduce dependence upon any single institutional narrative. Appointment dates and leadership roles are checked across NCU records, denominational histories, regulatory sources and reputable media where possible. Claims concerning global gender inequality are supported through scholarly literature and institutional or sector-wide reports rather than isolated newspaper commentary. Comparative cases are documented using official university archives and leadership histories to minimise errors concerning the status or timing of female appointments. Where sources conflict, priority is given to contemporaneous official records or multiple independent corroborating sources. This triangulation strategy is particularly important in historical leadership research because institutional memory can become simplified over time and interim leaders may be omitted from conventional presidential lists.

The methodology also recognises the importance of **researcher reflexivity** because gendered leadership analysis involves interpretive judgement. The study therefore separates descriptive findings from theoretical interpretation and avoids presenting conceptual categories such as the glass ceiling or glass cliff as self-evident factual labels. For example, an interim appointment occurring during organisational transition is treated as potentially relevant to glass-cliff theory but is not classified as a glass cliff unless evidence indicates unusually precarious or crisis conditions (Ryan & Haslam, 2005). Similarly, the repeated selection of men for permanent presidencies is treated as evidence of male-dominated succession, but not automatically as evidence of deliberate exclusion. This reflexive approach increases analytical transparency by making explicit where the study moves from documentary evidence to theoretical inference. It is particularly important for maintaining the scholarly neutrality expected of comparative higher-education research.

Several limitations follow from the documentary design and require explicit treatment. First, the study cannot access confidential search-committee deliberations, candidate shortlists, voting records or the private career preferences of Anderson and Quarrie, limiting the ability to explain why particular permanent appointments were

made. Second, only two female interim presidencies are available for detailed analysis, making statistical generalisation impossible and requiring caution in treating recurrence as proof of a universal institutional mechanism. Third, comparisons with Harvard, Oxford, Cape Town and Guyana involve institutions with different governance systems, histories, resources and cultural contexts, so comparison remains theoretical rather than strictly controlled. Fourth, publicly available gender-disaggregated leadership data at NCU are incomplete across the entire institutional period, constraining precise reconstruction of the female leadership pipeline. Fifth, the lack of primary interviews means that lived experiences must be represented through archival statements, institutional records and media commentary rather than invented retrospective voices, and the study therefore prioritises analytical transferability and historical explanation over causal generalisation.

Despite these limitations, the design offers substantial advantages for addressing the paper's central research gap. It permits the study to recover female interim leadership that could disappear from conventional accounts focused only on substantive presidents, while simultaneously preventing interim appointments from being treated as equivalent to permanent succession. The historical dimension reveals whether male-dominated presidential leadership is recent or deeply institutionalised, while the comparative dimension demonstrates that similarly male-dominated institutions have followed different pathways towards female executive inclusion. The theoretical coding framework connects the institutional evidence with established scholarship without presuming discriminatory intent. Most importantly, the methodology directly operationalises the Interim Leadership Paradox by measuring temporary executive access separately from permanent presidential appointment. This makes the design suitable not only for the NCU case but also for future comparative research on gender and interim leadership in universities globally.

**Section synthesis:** The methodology combines historical reconstruction, documentary analysis, comparative case study and directed qualitative interpretation. Official records establish appointments and institutional facts, while media and archival statements provide limited access to the public meaning attached to leadership events. The absence of original interviews is treated transparently rather than concealed through speculative claims about lived experience. Structured comparison with Harvard, Oxford, Guyana and UCT distinguishes several pathways from male dominance towards female executive inclusion. Triangulation and reflexivity are used to separate documentary fact from theoretical inference. This design is appropriate for identifying institutional patterns while remaining cautious about causal claims and private decision-making motives.

## Historical Pattern of Presidential Headship at NCU

NCU's documented leadership history demonstrates remarkable continuity in male permanent headship. Institutional lists beginning with the West Indian Training School identify a succession of male leaders throughout much of the twentieth century, while Herbert Thompson later led the institution through its transition from West Indies College to Northern Caribbean University and remained president for approximately twenty-one years (NCU, 2012; Bignall & Palmer, 2020). Trevor Gardner followed after an interim male presidency by Daniel Fider, and Gardner was subsequently succeeded by Lincoln Edwards in 2017 (Bignall & Palmer, 2020). Anderson's 2016–2017 interim tenure interrupted the male sequence at the level of operational authority without changing the gender of the permanent succession outcome. Quarrie's 2026 appointment created the second documented female interim presidency before permanent presidential authority again passed to a man (NCU, 2026a, 2026b). The historical pattern therefore supports a distinction among female presence in presidential office, temporary executive legitimacy and the institutionalisation of permanent female headship.

Table 1 Selected Modern Presidential Succession at Northern Caribbean University

| Period    | Institutional head     | Gender | Appointment status  | Succession significance                                     |
|-----------|------------------------|--------|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1990–2011 | Dr Herbert J. Thompson | Male   | Permanent president | Long-serving president; led transition to university status |
| 2011      | Dr Daniel Fider        | Male   | Interim president   | Transitional head before Dr Trevor Gardner                  |
| 2012–2016 | Dr Trevor Gardner      | Male   | Permanent president | Permanent presidential succession                           |

|                     |                               |        |                     |                                                            |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|--------|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2016–2017           | Professor Marilyn J. Anderson | Female | Interim president   | First documented woman to exercise presidential authority  |
| 2017–2026           | Prof. Lincoln P. Edwards      | Male   | Permanent president | Permanent successor following Prof. Anderson               |
| June–August 2026    | Dr Vivienne L. Quarrie        | Female | Interim president   | Second documented woman to exercise presidential authority |
| From September 2026 | Dr Balvin B. Braham           | Male   | Permanent president | Permanent successor following Dr Quarrie                   |

*Note.* The table concentrates on the modern period most relevant to the current analysis rather than reproducing the complete institutional list from 1907. Sources include NCU historical bulletins, Bignall & Palmer (2020), institutional announcements and contemporary reporting.

The table reveals an especially important distinction between presence and institutionalisation. Women have been present at the apex of NCU leadership, but female presidency has remained transitional rather than substantive. This pattern should not be described simply as "NCU has never had a woman president", because Anderson and Quarrie did exercise presidential authority and should not be erased from institutional history. However, describing NCU as having achieved gender equality in presidential leadership would be equally misleading because neither woman obtained the permanent presidential mandate. The historically accurate formulation is that women have reached NCU's presidency in an interim capacity but not yet through permanent presidential appointment. This wording captures both the advancement and the unresolved inequality.

**Section synthesis:** NCU's modern succession history shows that female presence at the presidential apex has occurred twice but only in interim form. The evidence therefore contradicts any account that erases Anderson and Quarrie from the university's presidential history. It simultaneously contradicts any claim that female presidential leadership has already been fully institutionalised. The gendered pattern is strongest when appointment status is examined rather than when officeholding is counted without qualification. This historical distinction is the empirical foundation of the Interim Leadership Paradox. Permanent succession remains the unresolved threshold.

### Professor Marilyn Anderson: Leadership Before the Presidency

Professor Marilyn Anderson's career demonstrates extensive accumulation of academic and administrative capital before her interim appointment. NCU records identify her as a professor of music with an EdD from Florida International University, an MA in Music Education, additional bachelor's-level preparation in music and business, and professional music qualifications (NCU, 2024). She had served NCU for decades, including as Chair of the Music Department, Vice-President for Academic Administration and Provost before being appointed interim president (NCU, 2014; Bignall & Palmer, 2020). Her career contradicts explanations suggesting that women fail to reach permanent executive leadership simply because insufficient numbers possess the necessary institutional experience. Anderson had worked across academic administration, governance and institutional quality functions before assuming presidential responsibility. Her appointment was a logical extension of a long executive trajectory rather than an emergency elevation of an inexperienced administrator.

Anderson's interim tenure also involved substantive institutional representation rather than ceremonial custodianship. In December 2016, she represented NCU in signing a memorandum of understanding with the Jamaica 4-H Clubs to expand technical, vocational and agricultural training, demonstrating direct engagement with national-development partnerships (Ministry of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture and Fisheries, 2016). She also publicly addressed student-security concerns during her interim presidency, illustrating responsibility for institutional welfare and crisis response. Her subsequent role in the university's institutional-accreditation process further demonstrates continuity between interim executive leadership and long-term institutional development (Jamaica Observer, 2018). Anderson later received national recognition for her contributions to music education and a Lifetime Achievement Award from Jamaica's Joint Committee for Tertiary Education (Jamaica Observer, 2020). These achievements strengthen the argument that the female interim presidency reflected established leadership credibility rather than symbolic appointment.

**Section synthesis:** Anderson's trajectory demonstrates extensive leadership capital before she entered the interim presidency. Her responsibilities during the interim period included substantive external representation and institutional stewardship rather than ceremonial occupancy. Her career therefore weakens explanations based simply on inadequate female experience or preparation. The evidence also shows why interim service should be treated as genuine executive capital in later succession systems. Anderson's case does not prove that she should have been the permanent successor because that decision had already been made before her appointment. It does establish an institutional precedent that a woman could legitimately exercise presidential authority at NCU.

### **What Anderson's Interim Presidency Reveals**

Anderson's case is theoretically significant because the permanent presidential successor had already been identified before she assumed interim headship. Edwards had been selected by the Board but was unavailable to assume office immediately, creating a transitional leadership gap (Bignall & Palmer, 2020). The institution chose Anderson to fill that gap, indicating that she was trusted to exercise executive authority during a period requiring institutional continuity. However, because the permanent succession decision had already been made, her interim service did not constitute a direct opportunity to compete for conversion from acting to substantive president. This limits the extent to which her case can be interpreted straightforwardly as evidence of gender exclusion from that particular search process. Its significance lies instead in demonstrating that a highly experienced woman was presidentially capable in an institutional structure whose permanent leadership tradition remained male.

The Anderson case exposes a fundamental contradiction in conventional leadership-pipeline explanations. Organisations sometimes defend low female representation by arguing that women have not yet accumulated sufficient executive experience to become credible presidential candidates. Yet interim presidency is itself among the strongest forms of executive experience available in higher education. Once a woman has successfully exercised presidential authority, the argument that women as a category lack presidential readiness becomes substantially less persuasive. Anderson's case thus becomes historically important even though she was not necessarily a candidate for permanent succession in 2016. Her interim presidency established institutional precedent that a woman could legitimately lead NCU.

**Section synthesis:** Anderson's interim presidency reveals that executive capability and permanent candidacy are analytically different questions. Because Edwards had already been selected, her temporary appointment cannot be treated as evidence that she lost a gendered competition for the substantive presidency. Its significance instead lies in the Board's willingness to entrust her with the highest executive responsibilities during transition. That trust weakens categorical claims that women lacked presidential readiness within NCU. It also means that subsequent succession systems operate in an institutional history containing demonstrated female presidential competence. The case therefore contributes evidence of access while leaving the problem of permanence unresolved.

### **Dr Vivienne L. Quarrie: From Academic Leadership to Interim Presidency**

Dr Vivienne L. Quarrie entered the interim presidency after extensive preparation in education and university administration. NCU identifies her as trained across education, English, religion, history, psychology and higher-education administration and leadership, including a PhD in Higher Educational Administration and Leadership (NCU, 2026a). Her professional experience included teaching, department leadership and educational administration providing oversight across the Bahamas, Cayman Islands, Jamaica and Turks and Caicos Islands. At NCU, she served in graduate studies and research leadership, associate vice-presidential responsibilities and eventually as Vice-President for Academic Administration (NCU, 2026a). Her career consequently demonstrates disciplinary breadth, regional denominational experience and executive preparation accumulated before the interim appointment. Like Anderson, she reached the presidency from immediately adjacent senior academic leadership rather than from outside the institution.

Quarrie's appointment became effective on 16 June 2026 following Lincoln Edwards's departure and while the Board established a presidential search committee (NCU, 2026a). Unlike Anderson's appointment, which occurred after the permanent successor had already been selected, Quarrie assumed office while the substantive

succession remained unresolved. Her case therefore provides a particularly strong test of the Interim Leadership Paradox because she exercised presidential authority while a permanent search was actively underway. In July 2026, the Board announced Balvin B. Braham as the next permanent president effective 1 September 2026 (NCU, 2026b). The succession preserved the broader female-interim/male-permanent pattern, although available evidence does not establish whether Quarrie applied for the substantive role, sought consideration or appeared on a shortlist. The case is consequently analytically significant as an institutional outcome without constituting proof that gender determined the Board's decision.

**Section synthesis:** Quarrie's career, like Anderson's, demonstrates substantial academic, administrative and regional leadership preparation before the interim presidency. Her appointment is especially important because she assumed office while the permanent search remained active. The later appointment of a man reproduced the historical female-interim/male-permanent outcome. Available documents do not reveal whether Quarrie sought the permanent position or how she was evaluated relative to other candidates. The study consequently treats the outcome as structurally significant without inferring discriminatory intent. Quarrie's case strengthens the need to distinguish observable succession patterns from explanations that require confidential or interview evidence.

### Comparing Anderson and Quarrie

The two interim presidencies share several important characteristics. Both women emerged from academic-administrative leadership rather than from primarily financial, pastoral or external executive pathways. Both possessed advanced qualifications and extensive institutional experience, and both occupied senior academic administration immediately before assuming presidential responsibility. Their appointments consequently demonstrate that the academic side of NCU has generated women with the leadership capital required to manage the institution at its highest level. Both cases also involved a transition between permanent male presidents. The repeated sequence transforms what might otherwise appear as an isolated historical event into a pattern deserving systematic attention.

The cases nevertheless differ in ways that should prevent overly simple interpretation. Anderson served after the permanent successor had already been selected, whereas Quarrie served while the search process remained active. Anderson's tenure lasted through the transition into Edwards's presidency, while Quarrie's tenure occurred in a shorter 2026 succession window. Anderson's subsequent work remained closely connected to institutional accreditation and academic leadership, while Quarrie's longer-term post-interim trajectory cannot yet be evaluated because the case is contemporary. These differences indicate that interim leadership is not a single organisational condition. The common gendered feature is the temporary character of presidential authority rather than identical succession processes.

**Section synthesis:** Anderson and Quarrie share the crucial experience of reaching NCU's presidency from senior academic-administrative leadership. Their appointments occurred under different succession conditions, so interim presidency should not be treated as one uniform organisational process. The repeated feature is instead that female executive authority remained temporary in both cases. This recurrence justifies systematic gender analysis even though it does not establish a common causal mechanism. Comparing the two women also demonstrates that highly qualified female leadership existed within the institution across different historical moments. The institutional question is therefore how such leadership capital is translated into substantive succession.

### Female Numerical Presence versus Executive Power

NCU illustrates the broader higher-education phenomenon in which women can be numerically strong in the workforce yet comparatively weak at the apex of authority. In 2021, women represented 67 of 114 academic staff members at NCU, amounting to a clear majority of the academic workforce (Jamaica Gleaner, 2021). Yet the same reporting indicated substantially weaker female representation in vice-presidential leadership, illustrating vertical rather than horizontal gender inequality. This distinction matters because simple measures of workforce representation can obscure power distributions. An institution may appear gender inclusive when examining total employees while remaining highly gendered when examining positions controlling strategy,

resources and institutional representation. NCU provides an example of the difference between feminisation of participation and feminisation of authority.

This pattern is consistent with international higher-education research. Women frequently constitute substantial proportions of university students and professional employees while remaining less likely to occupy presidencies, rectorships and equivalent senior posts (D'Apice, 2024). Recent international analyses similarly report that women remain underrepresented among university rectors despite broad gains elsewhere in higher education. The phenomenon demonstrates that increasing the number of qualified women in lower organisational strata does not automatically dissolve the leadership gap. Organisational transition from academic participation to executive authority requires separate analytical attention. NCU's two interim female presidencies are important because they demonstrate how far women have progressed through the pipeline while simultaneously revealing where the pipeline appears to narrow.

**Section synthesis:** Women's numerical strength in the academic workforce has not automatically produced equivalent representation in permanent executive headship. This difference illustrates why aggregate employment figures can obscure vertical distributions of organisational power. NCU's pattern is therefore better described as feminisation of participation without equivalent feminisation of permanent authority. The two interim presidencies show that women have advanced farther through the pipeline than a simple glass-ceiling narrative might imply. The narrowing appears at the conversion between senior or temporary executive leadership and substantive presidential appointment. Gender analysis should consequently focus on progression rates and succession outcomes rather than numerical presence alone.

### The Faith-Based Dimension

NCU's faith-based identity introduces an institutional layer that distinguishes it from many universities examined in mainstream gender-leadership research. The university forms part of the Seventh-day Adventist educational system and operates through governance structures that connect higher education with denominational mission, institutional trust and wider religious networks (Bignall & Palmer, 2020). Research on Christian higher education indicates that theological understandings of gender and traditional role expectations can interact with leadership identity development even where women are formally eligible for executive responsibility (Stockton, 2024). This does not establish that Adventist theology caused NCU's succession outcomes, and denominational differences make it inappropriate to transfer findings from other Christian traditions without qualification. It does, however, justify asking whether experiences accumulated through denominational leadership networks are weighted differently from academic-administrative experience when presidential readiness is evaluated. The faith-based dimension is therefore treated as an empirical governance question concerning pathways, mission legitimacy and executive selection rather than as an assumed explanation for male headship.

The stained-glass-ceiling literature provides a useful comparative lens while requiring careful denominational distinction. Giglia and Smith's (2024) interpretive phenomenological study of 16 current and former women presidents of Roman Catholic colleges and universities found that gendered religious structures shaped leadership experiences and required women to navigate mission, legitimacy and organisational expectations. Seventh-day Adventist governance differs from Catholic ecclesiastical structures, so those findings cannot simply be transplanted to NCU. Nevertheless, the study demonstrates why generic corporate models may overlook the interaction between gender and faith when universities are embedded in religious organisational traditions. Stockton (2024) similarly shows that women presidents in Christian higher education can identify advocacy, theological congruence and organisational culture as important elements of their leadership journeys. Together, this scholarship supports a more original NCU question: whether mission-based executive criteria can be defined through sufficiently diverse career routes to permit women and men comparable opportunities to become credible permanent presidential candidates.

**Section synthesis:** NCU's Adventist identity adds a distinctive governance context that should neither be ignored nor treated as an automatic explanation for male succession. Research from Catholic and evangelical Christian higher education shows that theology, mission, organisational culture and gender expectations can interact with executive leadership pathways (Giglia & Smith, 2024; Stockton, 2024). Denominational traditions therefore matter most as empirical questions about networks, valued experience and definitions of leadership legitimacy.

The key issue is whether mission-based competence can be accumulated through career routes that are comparably accessible to women and men. This formulation preserves denominational specificity while avoiding unsupported theological determinism. It also gives the manuscript a more original contribution to research on gender and faith-based university governance.

### Interim Presidency as Opportunity

Interim leadership should not be portrayed only as evidence of inequality because it can provide genuine professional opportunities. Acting and interim appointments allow women to gain executive experience, demonstrate leadership capacity, expand networks and become visible to boards and external stakeholders (Boulay, 2022). Anderson's presidency strengthened her already extensive leadership record and publicly established the fact that a woman could govern NCU. Quarrie's appointment similarly places a woman at the centre of contemporary institutional leadership during an important period of transition. Both cases can contribute positively to the development of organisational expectations concerning women and executive authority. Symbolic precedent can matter because future search committees operate in an institutional history that now includes women who have successfully occupied the presidency.

Interim roles may also provide a lower-risk mechanism through which historically male organisations become accustomed to female executive authority. Once stakeholders have experienced women leading effectively, some role-congruity stereotypes may weaken because organisational experience contradicts assumptions about the incompatibility of women and leadership. This mechanism suggests that interim appointments can become stepping stones towards permanent gender transformation. However, such transformation depends on whether temporary leadership opens permanent pathways rather than functioning as an organisational endpoint. Repeated interim appointments without permanent succession can normalise a different stereotype: women as trusted caretakers during transition but men as legitimate long-term presidents. The meaning of interim leadership depends on what follows it.

**Section synthesis:** Interim presidency can operate as a meaningful opportunity because it provides executive experience, visibility and institutional legitimacy. Anderson and Quarrie demonstrate that temporary appointments can place women at the centre of organisational authority and public representation. Such experiences may weaken stereotypes by making female presidential leadership familiar to institutional stakeholders. The developmental value of interim service, however, depends on whether it is later recognised as evidence of readiness for substantive leadership. Temporary office becomes constraining when women are repeatedly trusted to steward transitions but are not part of ordinary permanent succession pathways. Interim status is therefore neither inherently inclusive nor inherently exclusionary; its meaning is determined partly by what follows.

### Interim Presidency as Constraint

This potential limitation forms the core of the Interim Leadership Paradox. Temporary appointments often require individuals to manage uncertainty while possessing less time to implement long-term agendas or establish independent executive mandates. Interim presidents may inherit priorities they did not design and may be expected primarily to maintain continuity until the substantive leader arrives. Women occupying such positions can demonstrate competence without receiving equivalent opportunity to define the future direction of the institution. The distinction resembles the glass-cliff literature insofar as women may gain leadership when organisations require stabilisation rather than during normal succession. However, the NCU evidence does not establish that either woman was appointed under unusually dangerous institutional conditions, so the glass-cliff interpretation should remain a hypothesis rather than a conclusion.

The repeated female-interim/male-permanent sequence is nevertheless organisationally significant. If institutions repeatedly draw women from internal academic leadership for transitional governance while selecting men for substantive presidency, gender may become encoded in the distinction between stewardship and ownership. Women become associated with institutional continuity, academic care and transitional competence, while men remain associated with strategic mandate and permanent executive identity. This outcome could emerge without discriminatory intent if candidate networks, search conventions and

denominational pathways remain historically male. The resulting structural inequality would arise from institutional processes rather than necessarily from individual prejudice. Gender equity policy must consequently examine systems of succession as well as attitudes.

**Section synthesis:** The Interim Leadership Paradox becomes most visible when temporary authority repeatedly fails to alter permanent succession patterns. Women can demonstrate competence while operating under short mandates that limit opportunities to establish long-term agendas and performance records. Repeated female-interim/male-permanent sequences may also create symbolic distinctions between stewardship and organisational ownership. Such patterns can arise through search networks and career structures without requiring consciously discriminatory intentions. Gender-inclusive policy must therefore examine succession systems as well as individual attitudes. The central question is whether interim service expands future opportunity or becomes a recurring institutional endpoint.

### **Role Congruity and the Female Academic Leader**

The professional trajectories of Anderson and Quarrie are also consistent with a broader gendered distinction between academic leadership and executive headship. Women in universities frequently gain recognition through teaching, student development, academic administration and service-oriented leadership, roles that can be perceived as more congruent with stereotypically communal expectations. Presidential leadership, by contrast, often emphasises financial authority, external representation, fundraising, strategic power and organisational command. Eagly and Karau's (2002) role-congruity theory predicts that women may face additional evaluative barriers when seeking positions associated strongly with agentic leadership expectations. NCU's interim women both emerged from academic-administrative portfolios, making this theoretical distinction especially relevant. Future empirical work should examine whether NCU's permanent presidential searches privilege career profiles more commonly accumulated by men in denominational administration.

This question should be examined without devaluing academic leadership. Academic administration is central to university governance because curriculum, accreditation, research, teaching quality and student learning constitute the core functions of the institution. Anderson's involvement in institutional accreditation and Quarrie's responsibilities for graduate studies and research demonstrate precisely the strategic importance of these portfolios. The relevant gender question is whether such experience is valued equally when presidential selection occurs. If academic leadership makes women suitable to hold the presidency temporarily but is weighted less heavily than other forms of leadership when permanent appointments are made, the succession system can become gendered even where criteria appear formally neutral. This constitutes a testable institutional proposition rather than an assumption.

**Section synthesis:** Role congruity is particularly relevant because Anderson and Quarrie emerged through academic-administrative careers that are central to university mission but may be culturally interpreted differently from other executive pathways. The study does not assume that NCU devalued academic leadership in either permanent search. It instead asks whether presidential criteria give equal recognition to accreditation, curriculum, research and academic governance alongside finance, fundraising and denominational administration. If some valued experiences are historically more accessible to men, neutral criteria may produce gendered candidate pools. This proposition can be tested through future analysis of search criteria and candidate pathways. The section therefore turns role-congruity theory into a concrete institutional research question rather than a retrospective label.

### **Leadership Performance and the Problem of the Counterfactual**

Assessing Anderson and Quarrie also requires caution because interim presidents normally serve too briefly for conventional measures of presidential performance to be applied fairly. Long-term outcomes such as enrolment growth, fundraising, research expansion and infrastructure development often require several years and cannot reasonably be attributed to transitional leaders. Anderson's tenure nevertheless included external partnerships, student-security responses and institutional continuity, while her wider academic leadership contributed materially to NCU's accreditation process. Quarrie's contemporary tenure likewise occurs over a period too short for meaningful longitudinal performance evaluation. The appropriate question is consequently not whether either

woman achieved more than male presidents with multi-year mandates. The relevant evidence is that the institution itself considered both women sufficiently capable to assume full executive responsibility when presidential continuity was required.

The counterfactual remains unknowable because neither Anderson nor Quarrie has received a permanent presidential term through which her long-range executive performance could be evaluated. This creates an epistemic problem common to gender-leadership research because organisations may seek evidence of long-term presidential effectiveness while the absence of substantive opportunity prevents women from generating precisely that evidence. Interim presidency partially interrupts this cycle by providing real experience of executive authority, institutional representation and organisational decision-making. NCU therefore possesses direct institutional evidence that women can perform presidential responsibilities even if their temporary terms were too short for conventional longitudinal performance indicators. Future selection processes can no longer plausibly treat female presidential leadership as an entirely untested proposition within the institution. The appropriate comparison is consequently not whether interim women outperformed multi-year male presidents, but whether demonstrated interim competence is recognised as meaningful leadership capital in subsequent succession systems.

**Section synthesis:** Conventional presidential performance comparisons are inappropriate when interim leaders serve only briefly. Anderson's and Quarrie's significance lies primarily in the institution's decision to entrust them with full executive responsibility during transition. Their temporary mandates do not permit fair comparison with multi-year presidents on enrolment, fundraising, research or infrastructure outcomes. The absence of permanent terms also creates a counterfactual problem because long-range female presidential performance cannot be observed without substantive opportunity. Interim service nonetheless provides direct evidence of executive readiness within the institution. Future searches should therefore treat such service as documented leadership capital rather than as administratively disposable transition work.

## DISCUSSION

The evidence supports a nuanced interpretation of gender and presidential leadership at Northern Caribbean University because women's access to executive authority has advanced further than their access to permanent presidential succession. NCU has developed highly qualified women who have occupied senior academic and administrative positions and, in the cases of Professor Marilyn Anderson and Dr Vivienne Quarrie, have twice been entrusted with the full operational responsibilities of the presidency. These appointments constitute meaningful institutional progress because they demonstrate that women are regarded as capable of managing the university during important periods of presidential transition. Nevertheless, the pattern remains incomplete because more than a century of institutional history has not produced a documented permanently appointed female president, despite women's substantial presence within academic employment and senior administration. The distinction between temporary access and substantive succession is therefore central to understanding gender inequality at NCU rather than a technical difference in employment status. Women have entered presidential space and exercised presidential authority, but female presidential leadership has not yet become institutionalised as an ordinary outcome of permanent succession.

This finding directly addresses the research gap identified in the study because conventional measurements of gender diversity in university leadership frequently fail to distinguish interim, acting and permanently appointed heads. If all individuals who have exercised presidential duties are counted identically, NCU might appear to have broken its gender barrier through Anderson and Quarrie, even though neither became the substantive permanent president. Conversely, excluding both women from the history of presidential leadership would erase their genuine exercise of executive authority and underestimate the progress represented by their appointments. The proposed **Interim Leadership Paradox** resolves this methodological problem by distinguishing **female presidential access** from **female permanent presidential succession** as related but analytically separate dimensions of gender equality. This distinction has wider relevance because universities internationally often use acting or interim appointments during leadership transitions, yet gender statistics frequently report only the officeholder without examining the duration or security of the appointment. Comparative higher-education research should therefore distinguish women who temporarily exercise institutional headship from women selected through permanent competitive succession processes.

The NCU pattern must also be situated within the broader international reality that women remain underrepresented in university presidencies despite their extensive participation in higher education. In the United States, women constituted only approximately 33% of college and university presidents in the American Council on Education's 2023 study, despite women earning many higher-education degrees, while men continued to occupy approximately two-thirds of presidencies (American Council on Education [ACE], 2023). The disparity becomes more pronounced within doctoral institutions, where only approximately 29% were led by women, suggesting that gender inequality intensifies within institutions possessing greater research prestige and organisational complexity (ACE, 2023). International evidence similarly shows that women have achieved numerical strength as university students while remaining substantially underrepresented as rectors and vice-chancellors, with women holding only about 15% of rectorships among European University Association members in 2020 and similarly low representation in parts of Latin America (UNESCO, 2026). NCU's experience should therefore not be interpreted as an isolated institutional anomaly but as a local manifestation of a global vertical leadership inequality in which women's participation declines as authority and institutional prestige increase. The comparative evidence reinforces the argument that increasing the number of women lecturers, students, or middle managers does not automatically generate proportionate female representation at the presidential apex.

The history of Harvard University provides a useful comparison because its transition from exclusively male presidential leadership eventually resulted in permanent rather than merely interim female succession. Harvard was established in the seventeenth century but did not appoint its first female president until Drew Gilpin Faust became the institution's twenty-eighth president in 2007, demonstrating the extraordinary persistence of male executive norms even within one of the world's most prominent universities (Harvard University, n.d.). Importantly, Faust was not appointed merely to maintain continuity during a search but was selected through a substantive presidential process and served for eleven years, thereby converting female access into sustained institutional authority (Harvard University, 2007). Her appointment illustrates how an institution can move from historical male domination to permanent female headship once governing bodies become willing to conceptualise women not simply as capable senior administrators but as legitimate long-term holders of executive authority. The comparison with NCU is consequently instructive because Anderson and Quarrie have already demonstrated the first element of that transition—presidential capability—while the second element, permanent presidential institutionalisation, remains unrealised. Harvard's experience suggests that a long history of male leadership does not make permanent female headship institutionally impossible, although breaking such a tradition may occur very late in an institution's development.

The University of Oxford provides an even more striking illustration of the historical durability of male executive leadership and the possibility of eventual institutional transformation. Although Oxford's institutional history extends across many centuries, Professor Louise Richardson did not become its first female Vice-Chancellor until 2016, after a succession list overwhelmingly composed of men (University of Oxford, n.d.). Richardson's appointment demonstrates that even universities with deeply established traditions can revise the gendered assumptions surrounding their highest executive office without abandoning academic standards or institutional continuity. The significance of such appointments lies not simply in symbolic representation but in their capacity to change organisational expectations concerning what a university leader looks like and which career trajectories are regarded as compatible with executive authority. NCU's two female interim presidencies may perform part of this symbolic function because they expose faculty, students, governing bodies and external stakeholders to women exercising presidential responsibility. However, the Oxford comparison highlights that symbolic familiarity achieves its strongest institutional expression when female authority is confirmed through a substantive appointment rather than confined to transitional administration.

A particularly relevant Caribbean comparison is provided by the University of Guyana, where Professor Paloma Mohamed-Martin became the institution's first female Vice-Chancellor in 2020 following a comprehensive search that received 46 applications (UG, 2020). Before permanent appointment, Mohamed-Martin had served as a dean, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Chair of the Transitional Management Committee for almost a year in the absence of a substantive Vice-Chancellor (UG, 2020; UG, n.d.). The University Council reported that candidates were assessed through due diligence, structured engagements with institutional stakeholders and a public lecture before Mohamed-Martin emerged with the highest tabulated scores among the final contenders (UG, 2020). This sequence is theoretically important because transitional female authority became evidence

within, rather than separate from, a competitive process leading to substantive executive succession. In contrast, Anderson's and Quarrie's interim appointments have so far remained transitional episodes followed by permanent male appointments, although the available record does not establish whether either woman pursued permanent candidacy. Guyana therefore provides the clearest regional pathway showing that interim or transitional female leadership can function as a bridge to permanent executive legitimacy rather than as a terminal leadership category.

The University of Cape Town provides a different comparative pathway because its significance lies in the institutionalisation and repeatability of substantive female authority rather than a direct interim-to-permanent conversion. Dr Mamphela Ramphele became both the first woman and first Black Vice-Chancellor of UCT, while Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng later became another substantive female Vice-Chancellor (UCT, 2011, 2019a). By 2019, UCT publicly celebrated an all-women academic executive leadership composed of the Vice-Chancellor and three female deputy vice-chancellors, indicating transformation beyond a single symbolic breakthrough (University of Cape Town, 2019b). Former Chancellor Graça Machel similarly observed that all academic executive positions were held by women from different disciplines, races and backgrounds by the end of that year (Machel, 2020). UCT therefore demonstrates that the strongest evidence of organisational change emerges when female executive leadership becomes repeatable, institutionally supported and dispersed across the senior leadership structure. For NCU, the comparative lesson is that the goal is not merely another female interim appointment or even a single historic permanent appointment, but the eventual normalisation of women's substantive access to executive authority.

These comparisons strengthen Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organisations because they demonstrate that formal access to employment and senior administration does not necessarily remove gender from the organisational construction of authority. NCU's female academic majority and the senior careers of Anderson and Quarrie indicate that the problem cannot plausibly be explained simply by an absence of educated or administratively experienced women within the institution. Instead, the gender disparity emerges most clearly at the final conversion point between senior leadership and permanent presidential authority, which is precisely where informal understandings of the ideal executive can become consequential. Role-congruity theory similarly predicts that women may be regarded as highly suitable for academic administration, continuity, collaboration and institutional care while encountering different expectations when leadership is defined through long-term strategic control and executive authority (Eagly & Karau, 2002). The NCU pattern is consistent with this interpretation because both female presidents emerged from academic-administrative leadership and were trusted with institutional stewardship during transitional periods. However, the evidence does not establish that gender stereotypes directly determined any particular search outcome, making these theories explanatory frameworks to be tested rather than retrospective proof of discrimination.

The glass-ceiling framework provides a related but slightly different interpretation by locating the problem in the narrowing of advancement opportunities near the apex of organisational hierarchy. Anderson and Quarrie had already crossed numerous conventional barriers by becoming senior administrators, vice-presidential leaders and eventually interim presidents, meaning that any remaining ceiling would be located extremely close to the highest organisational level. This phenomenon resembles what some leadership scholarship describes as a **leaky pipeline**, in which women's representation gradually declines through successive stages of promotion despite substantial representation at entry and middle-management levels (Reis & Grady, 2019a, 2019b). International statistics support this interpretation because women constitute large proportions of university students and academics while remaining substantially less represented among presidents, vice-chancellors and rectors (ACE, 2023; UNESCO, 2026). The NCU case adds an important refinement by suggesting that women can progress beyond the conventional glass ceiling sufficiently to enter the president's office temporarily while still confronting a **permanence ceiling** separating transitional authority from substantive appointment. The Interim Leadership Paradox can therefore be understood as a more advanced stage of vertical segregation rather than merely another example of women never reaching senior leadership.

The glass-cliff literature adds another interpretive layer because women sometimes receive high-level leadership opportunities during periods of organisational uncertainty, crisis or transition (Ryan & Haslam, 2005). Interim presidencies by definition occur during periods when the ordinary leadership structure has been disrupted, making them potentially relevant environments in which glass-cliff mechanisms could operate. However, the

available NCU evidence does not establish that either Anderson or Quarrie inherited a failing institution, unusually dangerous conditions or a presidency carrying heightened risk of failure, so characterising either appointment definitively as a glass cliff would exceed the evidence. A more defensible conclusion is that their appointments occurred under **transitional leadership conditions**, which overlap conceptually with but do not automatically satisfy the definition of the glass cliff. This distinction is important because gender scholarship becomes less credible when theoretical labels are applied whenever a woman receives a difficult leadership position without establishing the necessary organisational conditions. The NCU cases therefore extend the glass-cliff conversation by suggesting that scholars should distinguish crisis appointments from ordinary transitional appointments while investigating whether women are disproportionately represented in either category.

The comparison with the University of Guyana is particularly useful for distinguishing the glass cliff from a developmental leadership pathway. Mohamed-Martin chaired Guyana's Transitional Management Committee before being appointed substantive Vice-Chancellor, meaning that temporary leadership became evidence of executive capability within a subsequent competitive search (UG, 2020). NCU's Anderson and Quarrie similarly accumulated substantial leadership capital and exercised presidential authority, yet the institutional succession outcomes moved towards permanent male leadership. This contrast suggests that interim experience does not possess a fixed gender meaning but derives its significance from how governing bodies interpret and reward the experience during later succession decisions. If interim service strengthens women's candidacy for permanent appointment, it can function as leadership development and institutional inclusion. If it repeatedly results in women stabilising transitions before men inherit substantive authority, it can inadvertently reproduce a gendered division between temporary stewardship and permanent organisational ownership.

The comparative cases demonstrate that first female leadership matters, but what follows the first appointment matters even more for institutionalisation. Harvard's appointment of Drew Gilpin Faust broke an approximately three-and-a-half-century male presidential tradition, while Oxford's appointment of Louise Richardson interrupted an even longer history of male vice-chancellorship (Harvard University, n.d.; University of Oxford, n.d.). The University of Guyana moved from transitional female leadership to permanent appointment through a competitive process, whereas UCT subsequently demonstrated the repeatability of substantive female authority across its executive structure (UG, 2020; UCT, 2019a). NCU has reached an intermediate stage because its history now demonstrates female presidential capability without yet producing permanent female presidential succession. The institution's development can therefore be located on a continuum running from exclusion, through interim access, to permanent appointment and eventually normalised repeatability. This continuum clarifies why counting whether an institution has ever had a woman at the top is less informative than examining the security, pathway and recurrence of female executive authority.

This continuum also clarifies why simple claims of either progress or discrimination are analytically insufficient. It would be inaccurate to portray NCU as unchanged because Anderson and Quarrie represent significant departures from the institution's historically male presidential pattern and demonstrate women's executive legitimacy. It would be equally misleading to describe the existence of two interim female presidents as evidence that the gender barrier to permanent headship has been fully removed. The international comparisons demonstrate that permanent female appointment is achievable even within institutions characterised by centuries of male leadership, meaning that historical tradition cannot by itself explain continued male succession indefinitely. The appropriate question is therefore how institutional rules, denominational governance, search networks, candidate pipelines and definitions of presidential readiness interact to shape the conversion of female leadership capital into substantive authority. This formulation moves the study beyond descriptive representation towards analysis of **leadership conversion mechanisms**.

NCU's faith-based identity makes the comparative question particularly significant because the institution operates simultaneously within Jamaican higher education and a global Seventh-day Adventist organisational system. Presidential selection may therefore draw upon networks and experiences associated with both university administration and denominational leadership, potentially producing career pathways different from those operating at secular universities such as Harvard, Oxford, UCT or the University of Guyana. Research on women presidents in faith-based higher education suggests that mission leadership, theology, organisational culture and advocacy can shape executive identity in ways that conventional secular succession models may not capture (Giglia & Smith, 2024; Stockton, 2024). If senior denominational leadership experiences have historically been

more accessible to men, a search process that strongly values those experiences could reproduce male advantage even when the criteria are formally gender-neutral. Acker's (1990) framework is useful precisely because organisational rules can generate gendered outcomes through the unequal historical distribution of experiences rewarded by apparently neutral criteria. The relevant question is therefore not whether NCU should weaken its denominational identity, but whether mission competence can be recognised through sufficiently diverse leadership pathways to permit comparable presidential access for qualified women and men.

The global comparison ultimately strengthens rather than weakens the central argument of the NCU case study. Women's continued underrepresentation among university presidents demonstrates that NCU operates within an international higher-education system in which executive leadership remains gendered, but examples from Harvard, Oxford, UCT and the University of Guyana demonstrate that historically male headship can be transformed through substantive appointments. NCU's distinctive contribution to this literature is that women have already crossed the operational boundary of the presidency twice, making the institution more advanced than organisations where women have never occupied the executive office but less transformed than institutions where substantive female succession has become established. The research gap therefore concerns the institutional space **between capability and permanence**, rather than the simpler question of whether women can reach senior management. Anderson and Quarrie demonstrate that women can lead NCU; the unresolved empirical question concerns the structures through which demonstrated leadership is, or is not, converted into permanent presidential legitimacy. The Interim Leadership Paradox consequently provides a framework with potential application to universities globally where women repeatedly serve as acting, interim or transitional heads but remain underrepresented among substantive presidents.

Section synthesis: Comparative analysis locates NCU between complete exclusion and the institutionalisation of substantive female headship. Harvard and Oxford show that very long male traditions can eventually be interrupted by permanent female appointments. Guyana provides the strongest regional evidence that transitional female authority can become a bridge to substantive appointment through a competitive search (UG, 2020). UCT demonstrates a later stage in which substantive female leadership becomes repeatable and extends across the executive hierarchy (UCT, 2019a). These cases do not provide exact counterfactuals for NCU, but they demonstrate multiple institutional pathways towards change. The comparison therefore sharpens the central question from whether female leadership is possible to how succession systems convert capability into permanence and normalisation.

### Female Leadership and Organisational Legitimacy

The appointments of Anderson and Quarrie may have important symbolic consequences beyond the duration of their terms. Leadership representation affects organisational expectations because students, faculty and administrators observe who appears in positions of authority and internalise assumptions about who belongs in those roles. Female interim presidents can expand the imaginable leadership future of women in NCU. This role-modelling function is particularly important where women already constitute a substantial proportion of academic staff but remain less visible in top executive authority. Younger female academics can see evidence that progression to the presidency is institutionally possible, even if the temporary nature of that access simultaneously reveals an unresolved boundary. Symbolic representation possesses both empowering and critical dimensions.

Representation can also influence institutional recruitment and retention. Universities that visibly promote women into senior leadership may signal that professional advancement is genuinely available, strengthening organisational commitment among talented female employees. However, repeated failure to convert women's senior leadership into permanent headship can produce the opposite interpretation, suggesting that women may rise only to a particular threshold. The long-term organisational effect consequently depends on whether Anderson and Quarrie's interim presidencies become precursors to permanent female leadership or remain exceptional transitional episodes. Institutional history is still being written. The next permanent female appointment, whenever it occurs, will carry significance extending beyond one individual's career.

**Section synthesis:** Female interim presidencies can reshape organisational legitimacy even when the appointments are temporary. They give students, faculty and administrators direct evidence that women belong

in the institution's highest office. Symbolic representation may strengthen aspirations and retention when employees can imagine credible routes to executive authority. Its effect can reverse, however, if women repeatedly approach the apex without gaining substantive succession opportunities. Organisational legitimacy therefore depends not only on visibility but on whether visible leadership is converted into durable authority. Anderson and Quarrie have expanded NCU's imaginable leadership future, while permanent female succession remains the next institutional threshold.

### Policy Implications

NCU should first establish transparent presidential succession criteria that clearly identify the competencies, experiences and performance indicators used in substantive presidential searches. Transparency reduces the possibility that informal cultural expectations determine leadership suitability more strongly than measurable executive competence. Criteria should value academic leadership, accreditation experience, research administration, institutional governance, financial competence, external engagement and mission leadership in ways that do not privilege traditionally male career routes automatically. Search committees should examine whether candidate pools contain sufficiently qualified women before moving to final selection. Where women are absent, the institution should investigate the pipeline rather than interpret the absence as natural. Gender-responsive succession is compatible with merit because it improves the breadth and fairness of the process through which merit is identified.

A second recommendation concerns deliberate executive leadership development. Women already occupy important academic and administrative positions in NCU, creating a substantial internal pool from which future presidents could emerge. Leadership-development programmes should provide senior women and men alike with experience in finance, fundraising, governance, strategic planning, external relations and denominational administration, reducing occupational segmentation among executive portfolios. Mentoring relationships with current and former university presidents could further strengthen presidential readiness. Interim leaders should receive formal post-tenure evaluation documenting competencies demonstrated during the presidency so that temporary experience becomes recognised leadership capital. Such systems would ensure that interim female leadership contributes to future permanent opportunities rather than disappearing once transition concludes.

A third recommendation involves institutional data. NCU should periodically publish gender-disaggregated information concerning academic rank, department leadership, deanships, vice-presidential appointments, board membership and presidential candidate pipelines where confidentiality permits. Such data would allow the institution to distinguish genuine progress from the appearance of progress created by overall female workforce representation. Gender audits are particularly valuable where women form a majority at lower organisational levels because aggregate numbers can hide vertical segregation. Monitoring should focus on promotion rates, length of time at leadership levels and transition from academic to executive authority. Evidence-based equality policy is preferable to assumptions that gender equity will occur automatically over time.

**Section synthesis:** Gender-inclusive succession requires process reform rather than predetermined selection outcomes. Transparent competency criteria can reveal whether apparently neutral requirements privilege historically male career routes. Leadership development can help women and men acquire balanced experience across finance, fundraising, strategy, mission, academic governance and external relations. Formal evaluation of interim performance can preserve temporary executive service as recognised leadership capital. Gender-disaggregated data can identify where progression narrows between academic employment, senior administration and permanent headship. These measures strengthen merit-based governance by making the definition and assessment of merit more transparent, evidence-based and broadly accessible.

### Implications for Adventist Higher Education

The NCU case has implications beyond one Jamaican university because the institution operates in a global Adventist educational network. Faith-based university governance must balance academic leadership standards with denominational mission, making executive selection particularly dependent on organisational trust, cultural legitimacy and definitions of mission competence. Scholarship from Christian higher education indicates that theological culture and gender expectations can influence women's leadership journeys, while advocacy and

reciprocal developmental relationships can help broaden access to executive leadership (Stockton, 2024). Increasing the visibility of women in permanent presidential roles could therefore demonstrate that mission fidelity and female executive leadership are compatible rather than competing organisational principles. Such development would have significance for female students, academics and administrators across Adventist education while expanding the leadership talent available to institutions facing complex challenges in finance, enrolment, digital education, research and public engagement. NCU can consequently serve as a valuable case for examining how faith-based universities preserve denominational identity while designing succession systems that are transparent, merit-based and gender inclusive.

The denominational context also creates opportunities for systematic comparative research. Future studies could compare the gender composition of presidencies across Adventist universities in the Caribbean, North America, Latin America, Africa and the Pacific. Such analysis could determine whether NCU's female-interim/male-permanent pattern is institutionally distinctive or part of a broader denominational leadership structure. Researchers could additionally examine whether institutions governed by boards with greater female representation are more likely to appoint permanent female presidents. Comparative evidence would permit stronger causal interpretation than the single-case design developed here. NCU can become an important starting point for a wider research programme on gender and leadership in faith-based higher education.

**Section synthesis:** The NCU case has wider relevance because Adventist higher education operates through a transnational network of faith-based institutions. Comparative denominational research could determine whether female-interim/male-permanent succession is distinctive to NCU or appears elsewhere. The literature from Christian higher education suggests that theology, advocacy and organisational culture can shape women's leadership trajectories (Stockton, 2024). Adventist institutions therefore offer an important setting for examining how mission fidelity and gender-inclusive executive opportunity can coexist. Wider study should compare governance structures, board composition, career pathways and presidential outcomes across regions. NCU can serve as a theoretically useful starting point for that broader research programme.

## Limitations

The study is limited principally by its documentary methodology. Public sources establish office-holding, qualifications and succession outcomes but do not reveal confidential presidential-search deliberations, candidate shortlists, individual applications or board voting rationales. It would be methodologically inappropriate to conclude that Anderson or Quarrie was denied permanent appointment because she was a woman. Neither can the study determine whether either woman actively sought the substantive presidency during the relevant search. The analysis instead identifies an objective historical pattern and uses established gender theories to formulate plausible institutional interpretations. Future interviews are necessary to test those interpretations directly.

The second limitation concerns the small number of female interim cases. Two women cannot provide statistical evidence concerning gendered presidential selection, particularly when the two appointments occurred under different succession circumstances. The historical male dominance of permanent headship strengthens the relevance of the research question but does not independently explain its cause. Additionally, NCU's faith-based governance, national location and institutional history may limit generalisability to secular Jamaican universities. The value of the study lies in theoretical transferability rather than statistical generalisation. The Interim Leadership Paradox should be tested across additional universities before being treated as a broadly established phenomenon.

**Section synthesis:** The study's principal limitations concern restricted access to private succession deliberations, the small number of female interim cases and incomplete historical pipeline data. These limits prevent causal claims about why individual permanent appointments occurred. They do not eliminate the empirical significance of the observable pattern in which women have held presidential authority only temporarily. The comparative cases are used for analytical contrast rather than as exact institutional equivalents. Documentary evidence is supplemented with public statements and media commentary but cannot substitute for direct accounts of lived experience. The conclusions should therefore be understood as historically grounded institutional interpretations that require further qualitative and quantitative testing.

## Future Research

A logical next stage is a qualitative interview study involving Anderson, Quarrie, former presidents, board members, senior administrators and presidential-search stakeholders. Interviews could examine perceptions of presidential readiness, gender, denominational leadership, search criteria, mentoring and the organisational meaning of interim appointment. Faculty, students and alumni could additionally provide perspectives on how female presidential authority was experienced publicly and whether interim status affected perceptions of legitimacy or influence. Attention should be paid to whether women themselves understand interim headship as opportunity, burden, recognition, exclusion or some combination of these experiences. Such research would provide the lived-experience evidence that archival statements, institutional records and media commentary cannot fully supply. It would also permit systematic comparison between the university's formal succession narratives and the interpretations of people who participated in or experienced those transitions.

Quantitative research should additionally reconstruct NCU's complete leadership pipeline by gender over several decades. Variables could include faculty rank, years of service, department chair appointments, deanships, vice-presidential positions, interim executive appointments and permanent executive outcomes. Survival or event-history analysis could then estimate whether similarly qualified men and women move through leadership stages at comparable rates. D'Apice's (2024) event-history approach to first female presidencies provides a useful methodological precedent for such work. Comparable data across Jamaican universities would further determine whether NCU is more or less gender inclusive than the broader tertiary sector. This would transform the present conceptual analysis into a systematic test of gendered succession.

**Section synthesis:** Future research should move beyond documentary reconstruction towards direct investigation of leadership experience and succession mechanisms. Interviews can reveal how women, board members, administrators and stakeholders understand presidential readiness, faith, gender and interim authority. Quantitative reconstruction of the leadership pipeline can identify where women and men move at different rates through successive organisational levels. Cross-institutional comparison can determine whether NCU is distinctive within Jamaica, the Caribbean or Adventist higher education. Event-history and comparative case methods could then test whether interim female leadership predicts later substantive appointment under particular governance conditions. Such research would transform the Interim Leadership Paradox from a case-derived concept into a broader empirically testable framework.

## CONCLUSION

The interim presidencies of Professor Marilyn Anderson and Dr Vivienne Quarrie constitute important milestones in the history of Northern Caribbean University because both women reached the presidency after extensive academic-administrative preparation. Their appointments demonstrate that NCU has developed and recognised women capable of exercising its highest executive authority, and those presidencies should therefore be treated as substantive components of institutional history rather than transitional footnotes. Yet both appointments remained interim, and each transition ultimately led to a permanent male president, producing the empirical pattern conceptualised in this study as the Interim Leadership Paradox. The comparative evidence shows that this outcome is not institutionally inevitable because the University of Guyana converted transitional female leadership into permanent appointment and UCT later normalised substantive female authority across multiple executive positions (UG, 2020; UCT, 2019a). The NCU evidence does not establish discriminatory intent, but it does demonstrate that temporary female executive legitimacy has not yet been converted into permanent presidential institutionalisation. The central practical challenge is therefore to design transparent, gender-inclusive succession systems that recognise demonstrated leadership capital, diversify mission-related executive pathways and make permanent female headship an ordinary possible outcome of merit-based governance.

The analysis does not establish intentional gender discrimination in either NCU succession process, nor should the absence of a permanent female president be explained through assumption alone. It does demonstrate, however, that more than a century of male-dominated permanent headship coexists with direct institutional evidence that women possess presidential capability. The appropriate scholarly question is therefore no longer whether women can lead NCU, because Anderson and Quarrie have already answered that question through

practice. What remains unresolved is whether NCU's governance and succession structures can convert temporary female executive legitimacy into permanent presidential opportunity while preserving mission, academic standards and institutional trust. Transparent search criteria, intentional executive development, gender-disaggregated succession data, formal evaluation of interim performance and attention to denominational leadership pathways provide practical mechanisms for strengthening that conversion process. NCU's next major gender-leadership milestone will occur not simply when another woman is asked to hold the presidency temporarily, but when substantive female leadership becomes a normal and legitimately attainable outcome of presidential succession.

**Section synthesis:** The study concludes that NCU has demonstrated female presidential capability without yet institutionalising permanent female presidential succession. Anderson and Quarrie should be recognised as genuine presidents in the history of executive authority while their interim status remains analytically important. The University of Guyana demonstrates that transitional female leadership can become permanent appointment, and UCT shows that substantive female authority can later become repeatable. Faith-based governance adds a distinctive requirement to examine how mission, denominational networks and leadership criteria interact with gender. Practical reform should focus on transparent searches, diversified leadership development, systematic recognition of interim service and evidence-based monitoring of succession pathways. The next stage of transformation is reached when permanent female leadership becomes a normal possible outcome of NCU's merit-based succession system rather than an exceptional or purely transitional event.

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