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AHEAD OF THE LEARNING CURVE

## One place where the glass ceiling has cracked open



**Megan Rogers**

Reporter-  
Albany Business Review  
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During the course of her day, Nancy Zimpher is often introduced as the first female chancellor of the state's 64-campus university system.

Similarly, Zimpher was the first female chancellor and president at both the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and the University of Cincinnati.

"One day I had a young man shadowing me and I think I was giving a speech at a local Rotary and on the way back to campus he said, 'Don't you get tired of being introduced as the first woman dot dot dot?' I said back to him, 'When it doesn't have to be said anymore, it won't be.'"

Zimpher may often be in the gender-minority at national education gatherings, but is among many female college presidents in the Capital Region, where women lead 13 of the 25 higher education institutions.

Nationally, female college presidents are outnumbered by men three to one.

Outside of education, these numbers are worse. According to Catalyst, a nonprofit organization based in New York City that works to expand gender equity in business, only 4.8 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs are women. That figure was 2.4 percent just three years ago. Compare that to college presidents in 2011: 26.4 percent were women.

The Capital Region, where 52 percent of college presidents are women, stands out on the gender equity front.

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute president Shirley Ann Jackson is the longest-tenured female college president in the region.



Donna Abbott-Vlahos

Shirley Ann Jackson is president of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy

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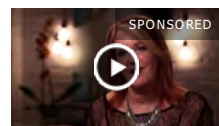
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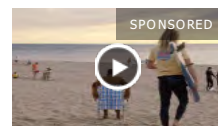
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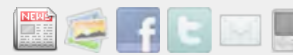


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Her leadership extends beyond the Troy university. She is a member of President Obama's Advanced Manufacturing Partnership Steering Committee. She also sits on boards at the Smithsonian Institute, IBM and FedEx Corp., among others.

Jackson joined Rensselaer in 1999. Even then, when women represented about 19 percent of college presidents nationally, more than 40 percent of Capital Region colleges were led by women.

For this week's Cover Story, the 13 female college presidents shared some insight from their career paths: What it was like to start in academic fields with few other women, when they knew they were seeking top leadership positions and even if their gender has an important impact on their leadership style.

Zimpher says being a woman has had a mostly positive effect on her career.

"People are so eager to see women in leadership roles that I think it's an advantage," she says. "When it's the voice of the minority, people tend to listen more carefully."

She adds: "I'm not advocating to stay in the minority."

Megan reports breaking news and covers education.

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