

Inside—Outside: Finding Future Community College Leaders

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Over the next decade, as the community college's current generation of leaders and administrators begin retiring in large numbers, important steps must be taken to identify and develop future leaders for the institution. A variety of internal opportunities (e.g., internships, leadership development programs, graduate school programs) provide effective training for potential future leaders already working in higher education. Yet there remains a need for comprehensive leadership and an understanding of issues—besides academics—impacting the community college: business-industry partnerships, instructional technology centers, media relations, development, facilities and planning, budgeting, and risk management. Current college and board leaders must look critically at potential leaders inside and outside the institution, developing programs and making necessary changes to ensure future leaders are available to fill the impending void.

Introduction

A wealth of literature indicates a large percentage of senior community college administrators and leaders—deans, chief academic officers, vice presidents, and presidents—will retire within the next decade (Cooper & Pagotto, 2003; Eddy, 2007; Floyd & Ladden, 2007; Fulton-Calkins & Milling, 2005; Hammons & Miller, 2006; Hull & Keim, 2007; Keim & Murray, 2008; McPhail, Robinson, & Scott, 2008; Mitchell & Eddy, 2008; Romero, 2004; Wallin, 2006). In a study published by the American Association of Community Colleges

(AACC), Weisman and Vaughan (2007) used the 2006 Career and Lifestyle Survey (CLS) to collect data from 545 community college presidents completing the survey and compared these most recent results with those of four previous CLS studies conducted in 1984, 1991, 1996, and 2001. The most recent data show the percentage of presidents planning to retire within the next 10 years increased dramatically from 68% in 1996 to 84% in 2006.

“There is great concern that the pipeline is not producing new leaders rapidly enough to fill all the resulting vacancies” (Wiessner & Sullivan, 2007, p. 88). To address this growing concern, McNair, Duree, and Ebbers (2011) evaluated the leadership competencies developed by AACC to prepare future community college presidents and identified three additional reasons for this shortage. First, fewer advanced degrees focused on community college leadership were being awarded than in the past, leading to fewer fully credentialed leaders. Secondly, as the institution expanded its missions and the diversity of the students attending the institution increased, the complexity of leading a community college increased as well. Finally, many typical barriers to advancement remained—no doctorate; reluctance to relocate for available opportunities; and

limited local opportunities for those qualified, but unwilling to relocate. The researchers acknowledged that “there is no one set of experiences that lead to the acquisition of skills required of today’s community college presidents” (McNair, Duree, & Ebbers, 2011, p. 4).

College leaders and boards, despite this clear realization over the past several years, continue to struggle with how to best meet this growing need for the next generation of community college leaders (Amey, VanDerLinden, & Brown, 2002; Mitchell & Eddy, 2008; Wallin, 2006). In fact, the literature gives little consideration “as to why and how certain administrative paths evolve, or what organizational strategies might be appropriate for developing and supporting alternative trajectories” (Amey et al., 2002, p. 574). McNair et al. (2011) concluded with a similar research finding, noting that “little is known about how presidents believe they might have better prepared for the role” (p. 3).

Literature Review

Research and literature propose two realistic solutions to the increasing need for community college leaders. The first, generating the vast majority of research, is growing leaders from within the institution (Amey et al., 2002;

Cooper & Pagotto, 2003; Eddy, 2005; Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006; Hammons & Miller, 2006; Mitchell & Eddy, 2008; Phelan, 2005; Pope & Miller, 2005; Twombly & Townsend, 2008; Wallin, 2006); in fact, entire issues of peer-reviewed educational journals, such as *New Directions for Higher Education* and *New Directions for Community Colleges*, have been dedicated to transitioning faculty and other midlevel administrators into senior leadership positions within the institution (see Henry, 2006; Hoppe & Speck, 2003; Piland & Wolf, 2003b). The second solution, discussed to a lesser extent in the literature, is hiring leaders from outside of the institution (Amey et al., 2002; Pope & Miller, 2005). This latter solution uses the private sector as a *learning lab* to develop future academic leaders. Independently, neither solution is likely to solve the problem; a combination of the two may ultimately be required to meet the national demand for this new wave of college leaders.

Internal Leadership Growth

Much of the literature and research on programs and methods designed to build future leaders from current institutional employees focus on three themes: (a) on-the-job training or internships, (b) leadership training programs, and (c) graduate school programs.

Piland and Wolf (2003a) found “community college leadership development has included a mix of on-the-job training, graduate education, and short-term, unconnected leadership training opportunities” (p. 94). Ironically, one barrier to developing internal leaders is the growing power of faculty in the shared governance process (Kerr & Gade, 1987). The authors noted that as faculty take on more of the decision-making traditionally reserved for college presidents, they become either anti-administration or find they can promote their initiatives through collective bargaining contracts and participatory governance initiatives, lessening the need to take administrative positions to effect change. According to Kerr and Gade (1987), “only 20 percent of college presidents are involved in the most primary aspects of academic life on their campuses” (p. 34). The rise of shared governance and faculty control of many academic matters has led to challenges in motivating internal leaders to become future administrators.

On-the-job training, internship, and mentorship

In many ways, on-the-job training and internship experience become self-directed. Those within the institution aspiring to be leaders in the future should build personal portfolios of experiences that

support increased responsibility, such as committee assignments, governance participation, community development, and public speaking (Land, 2003). Raines and Alberg (2003) noted formal internships provide three important outcomes to emerging higher education leaders: (a) hands-on experience, (b) comprehensive view of the world of higher education administration, and (c) greater opportunity for permanent administrative positions. When internships are conducted outside of an individual's normal department or college, more beneficial mentorships often take place by providing an interdisciplinary look at issues or challenges that would otherwise not be available (Raines & Alberg, 2003).

Amey (2006) organized higher education leadership resources into three themes: (a) learning and doing; (b) gender, race, and ethnicity; and (c) role-based. The literature on learning and doing moved "beyond acquisition of administrative and management skills" (Amey, 2006, p. 55)—typical outcomes of internship programs—and examined how leadership was cultivated and distributed throughout organizations. Through this thinking, transformative leadership, focused on change with direction and vision linked to an organization's past and present, becomes a dominant

model within internships and mentorships.

Despite leadership internships and on-the-job training programs being commonplace in many higher education institutions, not everyone agrees with the usefulness of these opportunities to effectively produce future educational leaders. In fact, Piland and Wolf (2003a) noted "on-the-job training was, and still often is, unorganized and entirely dependent on the aggressiveness of the individual administrator or faculty leader and the opportunities that present themselves" (p. 94). As a result, they advocated for a connection to continuous leadership development programs.

To provide the motivation for internal institutional employees to assume administrative and leadership roles, formal mentoring by current administrators and leaders may provide the best encouragement. Weisman and Vaughan (2007) noted in the 2006 CLS study of 545 community college presidents that 54% maintained formal mentoring relationships with potential future community college leaders. These mentoring relationships coupled with the active presidential participation in *grow your own leaders* programs show internal candidates the impact high-level administrators and leaders can have on the institution, its missions, and its students.

Leadership development programs

Leadership development programs take on a variety of characteristics and may be offered within or outside an institution. The Community College Leadership Development Initiatives (CCLDI) Leadership Academy, sponsored through the University of San Diego School of Leadership and Education Sciences, is one such program. The academy offers a four-day workshop covering such important leadership topics as communication, systems thinking, team building, and leading change (Cooper & Pagotto, 2003). The *Wo Learning Champions* initiative, administered through the University of Hawaii, focuses on leadership growth within the state's two-year colleges (Cooper & Pagotto, 2003). Using a cohort concept, each *generation* of *Wo Learning Champions* participants brings back into the community college system an understanding of leadership that focuses on the needs of colleagues. Two other programs in professional education at Harvard focused on leadership provide additional development opportunities for those individuals already in higher education considering advancement into administrative and leadership positions. According to the Harvard website, the Management Development Program (MDP)—focused on deans, direc-

tors, and department heads—provides a broader understanding of effective leadership and leadership teams in higher education and covers topics such as institutional and personal transformation; strategic planning, budgeting, and financial analysis; and professional development. The Institute for Educational Management (IEM) with its higher focus on presidents, vice presidents, and other executive-level cabinet members provides an opportunity to engage in learning and discussion on topics including internal and external leadership roles of higher education senior leaders, effective operation of a senior leadership or executive team, and institutional vision and the ability to motivate others to pursue that vision.

Regardless of focus, leadership training programs “are prevalent and...offered by many professional organizations and colleges that see the wisdom of grooming current administrators” (Land, 2003, p. 18) for future leadership positions within the institution. Kim (2003) developed an abbreviated list of local, regional, and national leadership development programs described in documents from the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) database. These programs are offered through such well-known organizations as the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC),

Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT), League for Innovation in the Community College, and Community College League of California (CCLC). Despite the importance of these leadership development programs, Piland and Wolf (2003a) found disconnects with other internal leadership training opportunities such as on-the-job training, internships, and graduate school programs.

Graduate school programs

There is a relatively small number of doctorate programs throughout the United States focused on community college leadership. Representative institutions include Colorado State University, Oregon State University, California State University at Long Beach, University of South Florida, University of Southern California, and University of Texas at Austin (Kim, 2003). In addition, to ensure more leaders are developed to eventually assume leadership roles at community colleges, AACC has focused on identifying leadership programs by state and degree, and making this information available on its website.

McPhail, Robinson, and Scott (2008) conducted a survey study of 50 cohort students enrolled in the Morgan State University (MSU) community college leadership doctoral program. The study also

included a separate group of 20 students serving as a focus group. While the study found some negative impacts of the cohort experience, positive results were discovered in structure, instructors, networking, and curriculum. Romano, Townsend, and Mamiseishvili (2009) also found 63.9% of students enrolled in these types of programs were female and 70.6% were white, non-Hispanic. And, although 94.7% of the students entering and completing community college leadership programs intended to “seek administrative leadership positions within the community college . . . not all students felt well prepared in all leadership competencies identified by AACC as necessary for effective community college presidents” (Romano, Townsend, & Mamiseishvili, 2009, p. 319).

To a certain extent, the faculty and administrators of these graduate programs ultimately determine a portion of the future leadership within the community college institution. This occurs through specific program admissions criteria, cohort diversity, and program-unique curriculum (Land, 2003). Through a national sampling of community college presidents that included nearly 400 responses, Hammons and Miller (2006) found university-based preparation programs “while well perceived, need to do a better job

of interacting with the practitioner community and using real-world cases in their instruction” (p. 373). Finally, while doctoral programs are desirable for future community college leaders and, in some cases, necessary for presidency, the degree does not serve as a termination point for leadership knowledge acquisition (Wallin, 2006). Ultimately, there is a continuing need for short-term, specific professional development opportunities.

External Leadership Growth

A very limited amount of literature discussed opportunities to locate future higher education leaders by searching outside of the institution. Proven leaders from business and industry as well as nonprofit organizations become applicants to consider as colleges begin to focus more on “business-industry incubators, continuing education units, instructional technology centers, and centers for teaching excellence” (Amey et al., 2002, p. 573). Pope and Miller (2005) also noted “the relationship and al- lusion of college management to private business management has grown substantially in recent years, especially as increased specialization of administrative units has become more sophisticated” (p. 746).

Business management experience

Current and future community college leaders are tasked with myriad duties unrelated to academics, leading some to question the traditional path to senior leadership positions through academics alone (Amey et al., 2002). In fact, “with tasks that range from handling investments and budgets, to public relations and risk management, college administrators are perhaps more akin to their private-sector colleagues in leadership positions than ever before” (Pope & Miller, 2005, p. 746). College leaders have been recruited and hired from nonacademic organizations, in part, because of this kinship (Seagren, Wheeler, Creswell, Miller, & VanHorn-Grassmeyer, 1994, as cited in Pope & Miller, 2005).

Community college leaders already emerge from three distinct labor sectors: community colleges, business and industry, and nonprofits (Pope & Miller, 2005). No one sector produces leaders knowledgeable of all the issues facing community colleges, such as academics, accreditation, media relations, development, facilities and planning, budgeting, and risk management. The challenge for those hiring future community college leaders is to find the appropriate balance of experience and talent that meets the needs of the institution.

Decision-making experience

Another area of concern for future leaders is the ability to make decisions. Pope and Miller (2005) noted leaders in business and industry follow rigid guidelines in making decisions and expect a set of strict outcomes. Conversely, leaders in higher education follow a more open and diffused decision-making process, leading to lengthier decision time lines and more flexible outcomes (Pope & Miller, 2005). The management and business aspects of the community college require more rigid decision guidelines and stricter outcomes than emerging leaders within higher education are accustomed.

Many leaders face special challenges in motivating tenured or represented faculty and staff to accomplish all aspects of their jobs. Maghroori and Powers (2006) noted, in academic environments, standard managerial consistency may not apply. When tenured faculty or contract employees refuse to serve on committees, miss deadlines, take advantage of liberal sick time, and, in general, refuse to do their share of the work, the morale of those who do work hard is affected. The authors argued against the traditional managerial principles that govern most organizations; instead, they noted that effective community college leaders must understand their organi-

zations, practice good judgment, and treat each person on individual merit. This means that in a noneducational system where progressive discipline actually leads to the dismissal of a poor employee, treating everyone equally works. In a public education institution, leaders may instead need to find ways to marginalize the substandard performer in order to set a higher standard in the academic system.

Further compounding the decision-making process is the influence of boards on campus operations. For colleges to be successful, presidents and boards must have clearly defined relationships that set the tone for decisions to be made on the campuses (Boggs & Smith, 1997). However, one of the most complex issues for the college president is directing the operations of the institution while reporting to the board (Kerr & Gade, 1987). In a study of 18 current or retired presidents, Boggs and Smith (1997) found “most of the presidents agreed that there is a trend toward boards micromanaging and not respecting the line between policy and campus operations” (p. 45).

Elected board members, in particular, often mistake community activism with establishing policy. In a study involving 59 college presidents and their experiences with board members, O’Banion

(2009) examined the issues arising when a trustee is motivated by a political agenda. The author concluded the problems caused by a rogue trustee were long-lasting, and few community colleges had policies in place to deal with or dismiss an errant trustee, despite the potential damage to an institution (O'Banion, 2009).

Not unlike trustees who struggle with a dual allegiance to constituents and the institution, Longanecker (2006) observed that appointed boards also have a difficult task of “serving multiple masters” (p. 105). Appointed board members have a legal responsibility to the institution or system served, but are also beholden to the state board or governor who appointed them, compounding the challenges for administrators hired by and accountable to the boards. Ultimately, it is the president who is the one to leave if the board and president cannot find a way to work together for the good of the institution and its students (Boggs & Smith, 1997).

Discussion

There is no clear process for internally developing leaders within the community college. In a survey of 389 incumbent community college presidents, Hull and Keim (2007) reached several conclusions. Most importantly, nearly

70% saw a need to expand and improve in-house development programs. The survey also found 86% of colleges offered leadership workshops and seminars; 49% offered internships; and 18% offered other opportunities, including graduate studies. While size of the institution resulted in a statistically significant difference in leadership development opportunities (smaller institutions offered fewer opportunities), 89% of the presidents found these programs valuable to participants and 87% found value for the institution.

It is also clear from the literature that no one sector is capable of producing the *perfect* leader for the community college. Any leader emerging from the community college, business and industry, or nonprofit sectors, brings a certain set of limitations based on the comprehensive leadership needs of the community college. With myriad issues community colleges are now facing, consideration should be given to a more integrative approach in finding future leaders. Combining the best portions of the internal leadership growth processes—on-the-job training, internship, mentorship, leadership development programs, and graduate school programs—may provide an opportunity to develop well-rounded community college leaders. At the same time, finding external applicants

with private sector, business, and industry acumen, willing to cross the bridge into the public sector may provide new and insightful leadership to the institution. This latter concept is often practiced in today's higher education environment. The Board of Regents for the University of Alaska—a state-wide system charged with overseeing university and community college missions in the state—recently appointed as its new president the former president and chief executive officer of the Alaska Railroad Corporation.

What is absent from the literature is discussion and analysis on the opportunity to find quality leaders in other sectors of higher education. While the primary missions of community colleges and universities may be different, the focus is similar—postsecondary education that allows individual students to pursue better lives. This is one area within the discussion on filling the impending leadership gap within the community college that warrants further analysis and review.

Higher education institutions must also find innovative ways to stem the tide of presidential attrition and encourage new constituents to take on leadership roles. As the college presidency becomes more challenging and less rewarding (Boggs & Smith, 1997), fewer leaders will seek administrative

positions to the detriment of students, faculty, and staff associated with community colleges.

Summary

An abundance of literature and research evaluates and analyzes internal community college leadership development opportunities, such as on-the-job training, internship, mentorship, leadership development programs, and graduate school programs. Yet, within this abundance, little is said about whether there is integrative power in combining these distinctly separate programs.

Conversely, the literature has begun to slowly recognize the leadership potential of business, industry, and nonprofit professionals to the community college. As community colleges begin to focus on an array of nonacademic issues—business-industry partnerships, instructional technology centers, media relations, development, facilities and planning, budgeting, and risk management—promoting only from the internal academic ranks into critical senior leadership positions within the community college may become self-destructive.

As a large percentage of senior community college administrators and leaders enter into retirement over the next decade, the institution must not stand idle, assuming

the leadership development and growth opportunities of the past will suffice for the future. To do so will potentially be a detriment to the community college, its missions, and the students it serves. Current college and board leaders must look critically at the avail-

able pool of potential leaders and the programs used to develop and grow these individuals and make swift and effective improvements to ensure the institution continues forward movement as the first community college leadership generation heads into retirement.

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