
■ At Issue

Preparing the Next Generation of Community College Leaders: The Role of Community College Leadership Programs

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Now more than ever, leading community colleges is a complicated and challenging endeavor. According to the American Council on Education's (ACE) American College President Study of 2017, 33.9% of community college presidents planned to retire from their positions within three to five years. Consequently, this gap in community college leadership demands a need for the emergence of competent, qualified leaders to offer intellectual leadership, embody institutional values, and shape institutional practice and policy. Building upon the research of Forthun and Freeman (2017), this paper seeks to identify and analyze the effectiveness of historical and modern-day community college leadership programs geared toward preparing the next generation of community college leaders.

Keywords: higher education, community college, leadership programs

Since their inception, community colleges have been the cornerstone of higher education. Initially, community colleges were established to offer two-year programs post-high school education. They were also an alternative to the four-year higher education institutions by providing terminal education. The colleges maintained their original aims throughout the 20th century and would provide educational opportunities to students regardless of socioeconomic background, race, and gender. However, the purpose of community colleges has changed over time to include other programs such as baccalaureate degrees. Moreover, in recent years, community colleges have experienced heightened pressure to meet national education objectives, increased technology, budgeting demands, increased accountability measures for leaders, diversity of students and faculty, and reduced funding (Cooney & Borland, 2018; Romano & Palmer, 2016). The new developments in community colleges bring new challenges that require leaders with a broad skill set.

The biggest challenge is that the changes in community colleges are happening under new leadership due to the imminent retirement of leaders in the institutions. A 2001 American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) Leadership Survey was the first to report the high retirement rate among community college leaders. Approximately 45% of the institutions' presidents were likely to retire within six years, and the incoming presidents did not feel prepared for the role (Eddy & Garza Mitchell, 2017). Other estimates report the retirement of community college leaders ranged from 84% in 2007 and 75% in 2013 (McNair, 2015). The retirement was abated, as many presidents delayed their retirement due to the 2007–2009 recession when their personal retirement plans were negatively impacted (Eddy & Garza Mitchell, 2017). Nevertheless, a study conducted in California's community colleges indicates how the tenure for community college presidents is three and a half years compared to the term of four-year colleges, which is approximately seven years (Wheelhouse, 2016). The AACC also reported about 80% of community college chief executive officers and presidents would retire within 10 years (Philippe, 2016). The ongoing high retirement rates of community college leaders equate to a dramatic decline in the number of experienced leaders to ensure the success of the institutions. Therefore, there is a need to train replacements for the retiring leaders.

Community colleges represent an indispensable component of the American higher education system, enrolling almost half of all students in higher education. The new leadership needs and challenges due to changes in community colleges, the high rate of leaders' retirements, and the lack of confidence among the incoming leaders demand different thinking about preparing the next generation of leaders.

Purpose of the Study

Recognizing the leadership crisis in community colleges, AACC began as early as 2000 to organize multiple summits with incumbent community college leaders to advance and establish guidelines and programs for the development of future community college leaders. The objective was that an increased number of proficient leaders would emerge. The community college boards and trustees would follow suit by developing in-house programs to train and prepare future college leaders. This paper will employ a literature review to discuss the historical context, current status, and future leadership development roles geared toward preparing the next generation of community college leaders. Specifically, this paper answers the following questions:

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1. What is the historical context of leadership development programs for community colleges?
 2. What is the current state of leadership development programs for community colleges?
 3. What are the future opportunities and roles of leadership development programs for community colleges?

Literature Review

Community College Leadership Development Programs: A Historical Context

The attention on community college leadership development began in earnest when the expansion of the systems occurred in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Forthun and Freeman (2017) noted that finding properly prepared and competent leaders for many community colleges was a major concern. Therefore, the dynamic growth of community colleges was a catalyst to develop formal programs to prepare community college leaders. University-based programs were the pioneer of community college leadership development. Accordingly, universities began adding leadership development programs into their education programs. As a strategy for preparing the next generation of community college leaders, graduate programs received significant support during this period. For example, in the 1960s and 1970s, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation developed graduate programs for community college leadership (Eddy & Garza Mitchell, 2017). The purpose of the initiative was to conduct research, including workshops, to address community colleges' leadership issues. The foundation also awarded grants and fellowships to graduate students to participate in community college leadership programs offered in leading universities in the United States. As a result, graduate programs would continue to be the most common pathway to community college leadership until the early 2000s.

Scholars have recognized popular leadership theories that have historically guided leadership development programming for community colleges. Generally, research acknowledges four eras of community college leadership development. First, the "great man" theory primarily dominated from 1900–1930. Second, the community college leaders pursued independence from high schools and developed their own identity in the 1940s and 1950s. Third, the 1960s to 1970s was an established period where community colleges were led by strong and dominant leadership. During this period, committed and transformational leaders emerged to guide the community colleges through a historical era of growth and

development (Eddy, 2009). This generation of leaders would shape the professionals who would become the future community college leaders. Fourth, the 1980s to 2000s was an era where resources were a priority, and business models of leadership were used to emphasize efficiency and strategic planning. Furthermore, Bensimon, Neumann, and Birnbaum (1989) developed a comprehensive list of leadership theories within higher education that helped shape leaders in community colleges, including trait theories, cognitive theories, influence and power theories, contingency theories, symbolic and cultural theories, and behavioral theories (Eddy, 2009). Many of the leadership models are still in place today in the community college leadership practices.

The question that arises is whether the university-based graduate programs were effective in preparing potential community college leaders. One gap is the lack of diversity and inclusion in traditional leadership development programs. Female and racial minorities have historically not been represented in community college leadership ranks. For instance, males have occupied senior-level and mid-level leadership roles in college campuses from the 1950s (Parker, 2015). This is despite women earning more than half of all the administrative graduate programs meant to prepare future leaders of community colleges (Parker, 2015). However, in the 1970s, the American Council on Education (ACE) recognized and supported the leadership endeavors of women by establishing the Office of Women in Higher Education (OWHE) in 1973 (Parker, 2015). The purpose of OWHE was to advocate for higher education leadership to ensure the advancement of women to senior-level leadership. It was also envisioned to identify women leaders, encourage their abilities, and develop their leadership skills. However, by 2012, the American Association of University Professors noted 86% of all college presidents, provosts, and chancellors were males (Parker, 2015). The statistics indicate historical leadership programs have not been successful in preparing diverse leaders for community colleges.

In agreement with the ineffectiveness of traditional leadership development programs, Forthun and Freeman (2017) reviewed the work of Young (1996), who stated, “in view of today’s needs, the challenge of providing administrative leadership for two-year colleges exists in a vastly different social milieu than that of the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s” (p. 16). Forthun and Freeman (2017) recommended future community colleges be responsive to the changing needs of institutions. The next section of the review will discuss the current state of leadership development programs in community colleges.

Current State of Leadership Development Programs

In recent years, community college leaders have emerged from a variety of pathways. Unlike traditional development routes of graduate programs, 38% of the community college leaders have never held a faculty role and 67% come from outside of higher education (Eddy, 2009). Beyond the experience-based routes to leadership, formal leadership development programs do exist across the United States. In the current study, four formal community college leadership programs are discussed: university-based programs, AACC's Future Leaders Institute and Future Presidents Institute, the League for Innovation in the Community Colleges, and grow-your-own (GYO) leadership programs.

University-Based Programs

Traditionally, many colleges and universities offered grants for degree students to participate in community college leadership programs. Even today, the Council for the Study of Community Colleges lists over 70 institutions of higher education that still offer grants toward preparation for the next generation of community college leaders (Eddy & Garza Mitchell, 2017). However, unlike traditional community college leadership programs where the degree was a core requirement, considerable research has found that universities such as Princeton, Harvard, and Cornell offer dedicated non-degree training for future community college leaders (Eddy et al., 2015). For example, the Princeton Mid-Career Fellowship Program—a partnership between New Jersey community colleges and Princeton University—offers professionals in community colleges the opportunity for “professional development” centered on a variety of disciplines (Eddy et al., 2015). Therefore university-based programs are important strategies for the development of community college leaders.

AACC's Future Leaders Institute and Future Presidents Institute

In acknowledgment of the impending retirement of community college leaders, the AACC instituted the Leading Forward Initiative to help plan for the imminent leadership demands in community colleges. Subsequently, the AACC established a series of competencies to help mold future community college leaders, specifically for mid-level leaders. The competencies also allow for debates about desirable traits and skills to lead the modern two-year colleges (AACC, 2018). Apart from the competencies for leadership development, AACC developed the Future Presidents Institute. The program is open to chief executive officers (CEOs) from member institutions. The five-day sessions for the institute are held

during summer and include sharing best practices on issues critical to community college presidents (Viniar, 2017). The discussions surround many of the competencies outlined by AACC, including managing conflict, politics, maintaining work-life balance, communications, the role of the spouse, and navigating relationships with the board of trustees. The Future Presidents Institute is particularly essential because it prepares new presidents who do not have direct experience with reviewed leadership situations. It also allows presidents to contextualize the information. However, the membership-only approach of the Future Presidents Institute limits the participation of presidents from resource-poor community colleges or newly appointed presidents whose institutions are not members of AACC.

Much like the Future Presidents Institute, the Future Leaders Institute is a five-day seminar for mid-level community college leaders who are inspired to move up the leadership ladder. Most of the participants are deans or higher positions. While similar issues are discussed and addressed in each institute, Austin (2015) noted the Future President Institute involves assessments of leadership styles and guiding leadership ethics. However, the Future Leaders Institute limits leaders to understand broader cultures since it is based on a classical positivist approach and single representation of issues in community colleges. Consequently, the leaders may be somewhat detached from the diverse people they serve and lead.

League for Innovation in the Community College

The League for Innovation in the Community College was established to develop curriculum templates for graduate programs that focus on community college leadership development. Since its inception in 1968, 48% of the League's trainees have obtained a presidential position. The League has several programs that support its purpose. For instance, the Executive Leadership Institute focuses on developing senior-level college administrators for a community college presidency. A specialized program, Expanding Leadership Diversity in Community College, focuses on preparing mid-level administrators in urban community colleges for senior-level positions (O'Banion, 2016). Two-year colleges need to focus on diversity and inclusion since the number of leaders of color increased by only 5% in 20 years (Eddy, 2009). The Expanding Leadership Diversity program is focused on increasing the diversity in community college leadership and has also followed a similar outline for upcoming minority administrators. The League has also partnered with the American Association of Women to develop women leaders (Eddy, 2009). Therefore,

the League is an integrated leadership development program that offers mentorship and guidance for potential leaders from both senior and mid-level positions, women, and minorities to ascend to community college leadership.

Grow-Your-Own Leadership Programs

Due to the high cost of organizational leadership programs, grow-your-own (GYO) programs have become prevalent in community colleges. AACC defines GYO leadership programs as leadership development programs internally created within a learning institution or organizational system. GYO leadership programs typically focus on developing leaders from various employee classifications. Literature suggests internal leadership programs are more valuable than national and state-level leadership development programs since they can be customized to the institution's objectives, features, culture, and challenges of the college. Hinojoza (2017) also identifies the practices in GYO leadership programs that are critical in the development of competent community college leaders, such as “mentoring, assessment tools for creating professional development plans, and experiential work projects” (p. 33). In particular, GYO leadership programs have been widely adopted in the present day due to the intimate interaction current and aspiring leaders have in the workplace and the college macro-environment.

In spite of numerous benefits, GYO leadership programs are not sufficiently effective in the development of future community college leaders. Eddy and Garza Mitchell (2017) pinpointed a potential for the trainings in GYOs to be too institutional, thus difficult to transfer the same skills in a different community college. This perspective is not uncommon, given that each community college has its own set of challenges, culture, and needs. Rowan (2012) also raised concerns on the lack of infrastructure to implement the GYO programs in many community colleges as well as to conduct a rigorous evaluation of GYO effectiveness. The limitations could easily cloud the importance of GYO programs in developing competent future leaders of community colleges and therefore need a strategic plan to be addressed. Rowan (2012) recommends institutions be aware of local biases, strive to understand the needs of campus by conducting a risk assessment, and ensure the programs align with national leadership guidelines and best training practices.

Future Opportunities and Role of Community College Leadership Programs

The future holds increasing demands on community college leaders as the need for accountability increases, student demographics change, funding diminishes, and the employers' expectations broaden for new leaders (Eddy & Garza Mitchell, 2017). Accordingly, the dynamic environment of community colleges necessitates leaders who can take risks, mediate pressures within the environment, and identify opportunities for college growth. Community colleges, trustees, and higher education stakeholders need to rethink and reinvent leadership development programs to meet these leadership demands. In a report by Aspen Institute (2017), researchers recommended three foci areas for developing future presidents of community colleges: (a) improving and expanding leaders' development and mentorship opportunities for aspiring and experienced individuals, (b) providing institutions' boards with the right support to employ and develop college presidents, and (c) by advancing and expanding strategy of identifying and developing a diverse talent pool of presidents. Although the Aspen Institute focused on college presidents, the same necessities exist in mid-level leadership positions in community colleges.

The historical and contemporary community college leadership programs will only serve as the foundation for future programs. Future leadership programs should focus on developing standards and competencies required for community college leaders. Some of these competencies include team building, interpersonal skills, problem-solving, conflict management, advocacy, customer service, and transparency (AACC, 2018). In relation to institutional infrastructure, community college leaders have to be adept in strategic and operational planning, budgeting, accreditation, technology master planning, facilities management and prioritization in the allocation of resources (AACC, 2018). Each of the competencies contains a listing of skill acquisition, thus offering potential community college leaders a template to understand how they could acquire the attributes. Besides, they could use the template to recognize areas of skills and competency deficiency areas. The efforts of AACC contribute to the current model of a leader as a learner. Thus, community colleges could use the competencies as a road map to design leadership development programs for any individual interested in community college leadership. However, the AACC competencies should only act as a guide. Adelhoch (2015) recorded the experiences of incumbent community college presidents and noted that a significant number of study participants recommended personal competencies such as ethics, humility, passion,

listening skills, and motivation as the core aspects of community college leadership. In this light, the role of future community college leadership programs is to integrate organizational competencies and personal traits to ensure effective identification and preparation of community college leaders. In addition, to accomplish the current and future changes in the community college leadership system, there are opportunities available for enhancing the leadership programs.

Diversity Opportunities

It is imperative to acknowledge and address the diversity of desires and personnel within a community college in leadership development programs. Ongoing leadership programs are important for aspiring leaders beyond the doctorate. Eddy and Garza Mitchell (2017) affirm that community colleges have the opportunity to consider all college staff, including women and minorities, as prospective leaders and then create opportunities for leadership development. For example, Eddy et al. (2015) reviewed the strategy of James Lorensen, president of Gogebic Community College, to incorporate support staff and custodians in leadership training programs. The author noted that the inclusivity helped to incorporate diverse conceptions of leadership in the leadership programs. Community colleges should, therefore, rethink inclusivity and diversity in the preparation of future leaders.

Community Colleges Learning from Business

Higher education institutions have the opportunity to acquire leadership development and training from the private sector. Businesses have, for a long time, successfully achieved the preparation of competent and adequate leaders. Translated to education, business skills such as human resources, transportation, project management, and budgeting can be utilized to increase the quality of learning in community colleges. Business leadership also entails personal qualities and skills that can be transferred to community leadership programs, such as people skills, communication, emotional intelligence, and conflict management. Some community colleges have incorporated skills of business leaders in order to enhance future community college leaders' preparation.

Conclusion and Implications for Practice

This paper provides insight, identifies gaps, and offers recommendations for current and future community college leadership programs that can be utilized by the following stakeholder groups: national and state organizations for evaluating and developing community college leadership

development programs; community college hiring boards for identification of job requirements and employing competent leaders; and existing, new and aspiring community leaders to help them understand which leadership programs best suit them and their organizational needs. Concerning national and state organizations such as AACC, the findings from this paper could help strengthen guidelines for leadership programs such as graduate, organizational, university-based, and GYO leadership programs. The organizations could take into consideration the present recommendations, such as focusing on both organizational and personal skills, ensuring diversity, and partnering with the private sector during the leadership training and development. The reviewed literature recommends reinventing and re-envisioning community college leadership programs to ensure their relevancy in the dynamic and unique community college environment by addressing skills, competencies, and diversity.

Community college institution boards—which are responsible for hiring leaders—may use these findings in order to help them develop appropriate selection criteria, improve onboarding training programs, and create evaluation criteria for leadership development programs. Consistent with the literature reviewed in this paper, community colleges should consider candidates outside of the traditional leadership pipelines that advocated for a doctorate. For example, they should consider business leaders, support staff, and other potential individuals to join leadership training programs. Being knowledgeable of the current challenges facing the community college environment is critical for aspiring leaders and administrators of community colleges (Martin, 2020). This paper identifies the gaps and strengths in existing leadership programs, and therefore, aspiring leaders will be able to weigh which specific type of program will best suit their unique needs. In summary, this paper brings together a variety of findings and recommendations from literature useful to scholars, community colleges, and their governing bodies as they seek to develop practical and sustainable options to develop successors of the already retiring community college leaders.

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