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Community college presidents: perceptions of leadership demands and competencies

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS:
PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP DEMANDS AND COMPETENCIES

by
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Dedication

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to my parents, Francisco and Marta Pando.

You have always been my greatest source of love and support. I love you more

than words can express, and I hope that with each of your children's

accomplishments, you are reassured that all of the sacrifices you made have

been worthwhile.

to express my gratitude and love for everything you have done for me and for my children. Te adoro mami.

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Abstract

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The purpose of this study was to explore community college presidents'

perceptions of the demands and competencies of leadership at the community

college presidential level. The study focused on the experiences of four sitting

community college presidents to understand their perceptions of leadership at

the presidential level. The study employed qualitative research and case study

methodology. Interviews were conducted at the participants' respective college

campus, each lasting approximately 90 minutes. A demographic questionnaire

was also provided to the participants. Once the interviews were completed and

other supportive data collected, a thematic analysis of the responses was

conducted to generate potential themes or patterns. Based on the responses of

the participants, and consistent with the literature, there is a great deal of

versatility that is required of the community college president. However,

according to the participants, leadership positions do not confer any leadership

abilities. While there was consensus on many of the demands and

competencies necessary for effective leadership, such as the importance of fiscal

understanding and responsibility, communication skills, political acumen,

managing the board of trustees, and social responsibility, there was no

consensus on *how to attain* these necessary skills.

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Chapter 1

Introduction/Problem Statement

In a recent study on the community college presidency, Weisman and Vaughan (2002) found that 79% of the presidents surveyed intended to retire by 2012, creating over 900 openings for community college presidents by the end of this decade. There is widespread concern not only about the record numbers of presidential retirements but also about college presidential tenures being so short. According to McFarlin (1999), there is about a 30% turnover of community college presidents every two years. Korschagen, Fuller, and Gardner (2001) ask the pointed question: "Is the fact that many presidents serve less time at a single institution than the probationary periods for most of our untenured assistant professors a good thing?"

There is also a vast array of issues impacting the community college in its attempt to achieve its mission. Hodges and Milliron (1997) stated that "massive fluctuations in national, state, and local economies, wide legislative swings, significant demographic shifts, and expensive and seemingly unending technological improvements" underlie challenges for these institutions. President Emeritus of the League for Innovation Terry O'Banion (2008) writes:

> How many paradigm shifts can we manage at the same time – shifts in learning and teaching, in governance and management, in federal and state funding, in our basic mission? To what extent are these shifts the fads of the moment? If these are substantive and long-term shifts, how do we prepare our institutions, our faculties, our trustees, our communities for

the changes? How do we prepare ourselves to provide leadership for these changes?

Given the changing times and challenges confronting our institutions, perhaps one of the greatest challenges facing community colleges in the new millennium is filling the leadership pipeline with individuals who possess the necessary skills and traits to be successful and are committed to upholding the community college core values and mission. With so many of the community college presidents, upper-level administrators, and faculty, who began their careers during the advent of the community colleges in the 1960's and 1970's nearing the end of their careers, the amount of history, experience and expertise that will be lost with their retirement is immeasurable.

The combination of this leadership exodus and the challenging times ahead for the community college have many in the field thinking about what is needed for the next generation of community college leadership. In the summer of 2003, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation awarded the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) a grant called Leading Forward to address the national need for community college leaders. AACC began Leading Forward's work by hosting a series of four, day-long leadership summits with different constituent groups to build consensus around key knowledge, values, and skills needed by community college leaders and to determine how to best develop and sustain leaders. Experts in community college leadership from AACC affiliate councils, college and state "grow-your-own" programs, colleges in underserved areas, and university programs convened between November 2003 and March

2004. In July 2004, ACT submitted an AACC-commissioned report, A Qualitative

Analysis of Community College Leadership from the Leading Forward Summits.

The report provided AACC with a wealth of qualitative data, providing a broad

picture of the competencies. This data was refined and contextualized to fit more

closely with the community college environment, resulting in *A Competency*

Framework for Community College Leaders. In broad categories, the six

competencies identified were (1) organizational strategy; (2) resource

management; (3) communication; (4) collaboration; (5) advocacy; and (6)

professionalism.

      The respondents to the study, who made up a significant percentage of

U.S. community college leaders and leadership development program personnel,

expressed that each of the six competencies identified in the report are essential

to community college leadership, but the integration of these competencies is not

as well established (AACC, 2005). These findings provide evidence for the

crucial need to establish this framework and to promote these competencies in

the curricula of community college leadership programs.

      Reinforcing the need for competent leadership, Hockaday & Puyear

(2000) contend that the issues that upcoming community college leaders will

have to address will be different and more complex than those faced by

community college leaders in the past. The challenges that they expect will face

community college leaders in the new millennium include: preparing graduates to

participate and compete in a global economy, competing with an increasing

number and variety of providers of instruction, utilizing distance education

effectively to reach special populations, defining programs in terms of competencies and skills rather than the length of the instructional program, preparing for the blurring of mission boundaries, and facing new funding challenges. O'Banion (2008) concurs, positing that "being a leader in today's environment and dealing with enormous change are challenges that require special skills and abilities, patience, humor and courage that exceed by far that required of leaders 40 years ago." In reference to these changing tides, he goes on to ask:

> What is the proper role of a leader in managing institutional change? What are the limits of leadership, authority and power? Who has the right and the responsibility to summon the institution to embrace change? How do we tap into the natural needs for change that exist in all organizations? Does the leader herald change, herd change, ride change, follow change or lie back and enjoy change?

The American community college is confronting complex issues that call for informed, insightful, and visionary leadership at a time when experienced leadership is stepping down in high numbers.

Significance of the Study

This study contributed to the literature on leadership in the American community college and the community college presidency itself from the perspective of sitting community college presidents. By documenting the perspective of selected community college presidents, the study responded to the need to gain greater understanding of what competencies are necessary for

the next generation of community college presidents to lead increasingly complex institutions and external environments. The study also has the potential to help inform the curricular development of community college leadership programs by identifying key competencies necessary for effective presidential leadership.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore community college presidents' perceptions of the demands and competencies of leadership at the community college presidential level. The study focused on the experiences of four sitting community college presidents to understand their perceptions of leadership at the presidential level.

Research Questions

The following questions were developed to better understand, from the presidents' points of view, the decision-making process as well as the necessary educational and professional experiences to lead and act as a decision-maker.

1. What background in terms of personal and professional experience and education do community college presidents identify as necessary to act as a decision-maker in a community college environment?

2. How does the president experience decision-making? What qualities help or hinder?

Limitations

Marshall and Rossman (2006) note that limitations define what a study is, and is not. Creswell (2007) writes, "limitations identify potential weaknesses in the study." This study relied on the willing participation of sitting community college

presidents to be candid in relating their experiences associated with the position. Given the qualitative nature of the study which solicits the participants' stories in their own words, participants may not have answered with complete candor. Further, given the nature of qualitative research, the findings may be subject to multiple interpretations.

Summary

Chapter One provided a background to the current crisis in community college leadership in that 79% of the presidents surveyed intended to retire by 2012, creating over 900 openings for community college presidents by the end of this decade (Weisman & Vaughan, 2002). Furthermore, the issues that upcoming community college leaders will have to address will be different and more complex than those faced by community college leaders in the past (Hockaday & Puyear, 2000). While several strategies are being employed to fill this looming void, such as graduate programs to train future leaders, there seem to be no systems or clear guidelines for hiring the next generation of community college presidents. This case study research sought to identify those leadership qualities in current presidents that might inform future presidential candidates as they prepare to pursue a presidency.

Chapter Two explores the researcher's own leadership journey, innate qualities, espoused leadership theories, and theories in use.

Chapter 2

Leadership Platform

"Is this person the same on the inside as he or she seems to be on the outside? Children ask this about their parents, students about their teachers, employees about their supervisors, patients about their physicians, and citizens about their political leaders. When the answer is yes, we relax, believing that we are in the presence of integrity and feeling secure enough to invest ourselves in the relationship and all that surrounds it."

- Parker J. Palmer

When I think about who I am, these things immediately come to mind: I am a Hispanic woman, raised steeply in Chilean traditions. I am a wife, and the mother of three beautiful children. I am a cancer survivor. I am highly aware of, and secure about my intellectual and natural abilities; yet I also recognize that I have some significant physical insecurities. And I am an educator.

Who I am today as a person and as a leader, has a great deal to do with my life experiences, both the ones I chose, and the ones chosen for me. Today, I most fully embody the role of transformational leader in that I am considered to be charismatic, (Judge & Piccolo, 2004) and that I communicate and inspire others to work toward a vision of a student-centered future. In many cases, I am the driving force for change for the college, particularly in areas that have enjoyed the status quo for a year too long. I am the eternal task-master, and I live by the "to-do" list, which is usually three pages long. This energy and enthusiasm has served me well in terms of accomplishments, but has also come at a cost.

There are several factors that have influenced and shaped who I am today as a leader: my family, core values, beliefs, personality traits, educational philosophy, professional, and personal experience. As a person who aspires to serve as a community college president one day, I am very interested in the demands, competencies, and leadership traits and actions that make an effective community college president. It has been argued that under the trait theory of leadership, leaders can be made only if they have been born with the right traits. The behavioral leadership theory proposes that leaders are made and not born. The factors that affect, inform, and define who I am as a leader will be explored in this leadership platform. One thing is for certain: The past has informed my present, and the person into which I will evolve tomorrow is being shaped today.

Knowledge and Skill

Education is important. I have great respect for scholarly activities, books, theory, and all things associated with the academy. The greatest amount of knowledge I have gained, however, has been in the school of hard knocks, through which I put into action the theories I learned in the classroom. For example, as the college's chief disciplinarian, I have noted that many faculty members, while experts in their field, know very little about classroom management. This deficiency has an adverse effect on their ability to teach effectively. Administrators also face a similar challenge. Many of us are trained in traditional student development theory. Graduate programs across the country are preparing higher education professionals with readings by the greats like Dewey, Chickering, and Tinto. As prepared as I felt to do the work of a student

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development professional after graduate school, I did not consider that I would be facing challenges not covered in the textbooks. I would be working with people with different personalities, work ethics, and philosophies, and these differences would, for better or for worse, affect my work.

Theoretical knowledge certainly informed my work, but learning to work with other people toward a common goal was perhaps the most important skill I learned as a young professional. It is a skill that I continue to work on and build. As my responsibilities increase, and the stakes get higher, I have come to believe that, perhaps above all, the ability to work and communicate well with others is essential to a leader.

Cura Personalis

My first job out of graduate school was in student life at Saint Peter's College, which is a Jesuit institution. I hold dear so many of the guiding principles I learned while working there. The Latin words *Cura Personalis* are etched into the walls of all 28 Jesuit Colleges and Universities in the United States, and in 1994, they were etched into my mind and heart as well. The phrase translates to *care of the person* and since 1994, I have committed myself to offering programs and services in a way that demonstrates our caring for the individual student. A student who feels valued and supported is likely to persist. As our institutions get larger, and our campuses more diverse, our challenge is to find creative ways to recognize the dignity and uniqueness of each student, and provide programs that are customized to meet their needs. One size does not fit all.

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I also learned that *cura personalis* must also apply to colleagues. Early on in my professional career, I fostered very strong relationships with folks who had little power according to the organizational chart, but had all of the power to help me be successful in my role. They were the facilities people, food service staff, and security officers. These people always came through for me in ways that went above and beyond what their job descriptions called for. Perhaps it had to do with the thank you cards, or the public recognition I always made sure to give them, but I would like to think it had more to do with the fact that they took pride in their work, knew I cared for them as people, and sincerely appreciated their contributions to the college. These folks are usually overlooked, and often the subject of blame, and yet they are the ones who keep us safe, keep our bathrooms clean, and feed us when we are hungry. To this day, I continue to foster relationships at every level. I know every guard and maintenance man, and greet each of them by their first name. Knowing the people who work with you and for you is important for any person in leadership.

The Moral Compass

It has been said that the person who stands for nothing, falls for anything. My upbringing provided me with a very strong moral compass, and a sense that I could accomplish anything I set my mind to. My parents believed very strongly in earning things based on merit and hard work, and unlike many Hispanics, felt that affirmative action was condescending to minorities. While very proud of their Chilean heritage, they did not permit me to check off "Hispanic" on my college application because they wanted me to be accepted purely on academic merit.

This position they took made me work extra hard to earn the kinds of grades that would grant me acceptance regardless of race or ethnicity. I inherited this ethic of work from my parents, as did my brothers.

Always critical of people who cheated the system for financial gain, my parents instilled in us the importance of honesty, self-respect, and working hard for what we wanted. This respect for honesty and work has created a strong moral compass in me. I strive to be the kind of leader who is trusted and respected by peers, colleagues, and subordinates at every level. I want to be known as a woman of integrity through her words and actions. Jaworski (1996) writes,

> It's not about positional power; it's not about accomplishments; it's ultimately not even about what we do. Leadership is about creating a domain in which human beings continually deepen their understanding of reality and become more capable of participating in the unfolding of the world. Ultimately, leadership is about creating new realities (page 3).

This is the work I strive to do: Creating new realities, for our students, and our institution.

Laying the Foundation: To Sir, and Madame, with Love

Unlike his siblings, my father views education to be of paramount importance. His views on women have always been ahead of his time given the South American patriarchy in which he was raised. A professional athlete, my father traveled the world in the 1960's, and was exposed to many ways of living. In his travels, he met women who were engineers and architects, and compared

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their lives to the lives and culturally imposed limitations of women in Chile. Growing up, his message to me was clear and consistent: He wanted me, his only daughter, to be a financially independent professional. It literally pained him to see women stay in bad or abusive marriages because there were no options available to them. Both of my brothers and I are the only college-educated people in our family, and this has everything to do with the way we were raised by our parents.

My mother was, and continues to be, equally influential in shaping the woman I am and will eventually become. In 1972, she did something that was simply unheard of for a woman to do in Chile during that era. During one of my father's many sporting excursions, my mother packed up her bags, her children, and left my father. She had nothing and no place of her own to go to, but she was determined to stand up for the life she wanted to live. She gave my father, the man she loved so dearly, a choice: He could stay in Chile and continue to live his quasi-celebrity existence as a single man, or he could embrace his life as a family man with his wife and children. There was one more condition: They would have to move to America. In her infinite wisdom, she knew that the trappings of celebrity would always be lurking around the corner for my father in Chile. To this day, my mom says that she would rather live alone in a one room apartment with her peace of mind and a clear conscience, than to live in a large and beautiful house in a state of moral compromise and anguish. This strength of character and commitment to living truthfully has been a cornerstone in our lives.

My mother took the kind of risk that was simply unheard of for a woman of her generation, and helped to shape the man who influenced me so deeply.

Eating Humble Pumpkin Pie, and the Importance of Life Experience

As a sophomore in college, I took Latin American History to satisfy a general education requirement. We read a great deal about the *coup d'etat* in Chile, the death of Salvador Allende, and the crimes of Agusto Pinochet, the country's long-standing dictator. I vividly recall sitting around the table with my family at Thanksgiving, lecturing them about all the crimes of Pinochet, and the nobility of the fallen Allende. My elder relatives seemed quite uncomfortable with my discourse, but were too polite to say anything. My grandmother finally stopped me mid-sentence and said (translated from Spanish) "My little girl, do not speak about that which you do not understand. Until you have had the experience of standing in line on the street, hopeful that at the end there will be food to feed your child, then you really are not in a position to judge."

She said these words in the most loving tone, and, yet, I remember feeling so stupid and so small. They lived a very dark period of desperation and decline that I have never known. They lived in a period of overwhelming demand in which there was an overwhelming shortage of supplies. That Thanksgiving, my aunts, elegant and proud women, talked about the things they experienced. Of greatest impact to me was the image of these women I loved joining other middle class mothers marching the streets, banging the interior of their empty pots with wooden spoons to symbolize the absence of food to cook for their families.

What did I learn on this Thanksgiving Day in 1986? I most certainly did not

become a fan of Pinochet, but I did learn two important things that I have carried with me throughout my adult life and leadership. I learned about shades of gray and the value of life experience. I was in college becoming "educated" and I felt completely authorized to make blanket statements about something I never experienced myself, to people who lived through it. It did not occur to me at the time that I had an incredible opportunity to ask questions of my relatives and possibly gain greater insight on something I was learning in school. Rather, I told them about their history, and spoke with authority about a time, place and experience I never knew. They did not suggest that Pinochet was a saint, but in their eyes, he was an extreme, but necessary, agent of change to bring order back to a period of extreme desperation and chaos. And while I may sit on a different side of the political fence, their experiences cannot be dismissed because of the words in a text book.

We make similar assumptions all of the time in higher education. We make curricular and programmatic decisions that affect different segments of our student population, assuming we know what they need, or what is good for them based almost exclusively on a reading. We rarely ask questions of the right people. Reitzug and O'Hair (2002) argued that when we as educators think about what is best for students, we often think about white, middle-class students. I would also add that we think of our own experiences. Rarely do we consider the effects programs designed for one group will have when applied to an altogether different group.   As an educator, I often use student focus groups to gain better insight on the needs of our students. I also love to hold brainstorming sessions

with my managers to take apart an issue, and find creative solutions to problems. While it is easier to see the world in black and white, or right and wrong, there are many shades of gray that make our work complex, and challenge us to dig deep. That humbling experience with my family that day 23 years ago impacted my perspective. I do not make assumptions about the feelings or opinions of our students, and I do not take things at face value.

The Coat of Armor, and Transformational Leadership

I have struggled with weight since my middle twenties, when I quit smoking. Prior to weight issues, men referred to me as a "bombshell" as I seemed to have curves in all of the places that appealed to the opposite sex. I was very much aware, from the age of 16 on, that men reacted to me in a certain way. And while I was not sexually active until much later in life, people perceived me to be a sexually mature woman, or as my aunts would call it, "una mujer vivida" which translates to *a woman who has lived*. That feeling of power through my own sexuality gave me great confidence.

After enduring four cancer-related surgeries, two pregnancies, and engaging in very bad eating habits, for the bulk of my professional life, I was obese. From my middle twenties and all of my thirties, I had the reverse problem of many career dieters, and women with eating disorders: Most women who diet, regardless of how much weight they have lost, never see a thin person looking back in the mirror. The exact opposite was true for me. I felt like the same woman I was during my physical prime, and yet, when I saw myself in a picture, or in a reflection, I was horrified and shocked that the woman looking back at me

was not the outwardly attractive, confident woman I thought I was. This affected my leadership in many ways. While I may have seemed confident to the observer, inside, there was a fragility that allowed me to be hurt quite easily. This was a deeply personal cross I carried, and perhaps the most painful one. While this might seem vain, it actually has little to do with outside beauty or vanity. Rather, it has everything to do with losing a big part of my identity. And so, I developed armor to protect that fragile part of me. And while I may not have been comfortable wearing this armor, it did project an image of strength and stability that served me well professionally.

This strength and stability comes on the form of transformational leadership. A great deal has been written about transformational leadership, and in recent years, it has garnered a great deal of support in the literature (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). It has also been referred to as a powerful response to a somewhat cold, impersonal world (Leithwood, 2007). Burns (1978) defined transformational leadership as a process where leaders and followers engage in a mutual process of 'raising one another to higher levels of morality and motivation.' My motivation stems from my love for, and commitment to students, and the community college. Simply stated, my guiding philosophy is *students first*. The student-centered college is one in which we look out for the best interest of our students. *Students first* does not mean that the student is always right. *Students first* is a value that I embrace. When considering a particular action, policy or procedure, the first question I ask myself is whether or not the action, policy or procedure will benefit the student. If it does not, I go back to the

drawing board. A commitment to putting the best interest of the students helps to guide virtually all of my decisions.

Each day, we witness the struggle so many of our students face. Many of them do not have a support system at home. I've often said that sometimes, we need to dream bigger dreams for our students than the ones they have for themselves. A great Jesuit priest once said that students cannot want, desire, or aspire to something they do not know exists. And so, it is incumbent upon us, the student advocates, to expand their horizons to the countless opportunities that exist for them. As leaders, it is incumbent upon us to advocate for programs, resources and policies that put the best interests of our students first. We must offer them in a way that demonstrates our caring for the unique needs of each student. This is the new reality, as Jaworski (1996) might call it, that I speak about to my staff: The moral imperative to serve our students in the best possible way.

In my view, which is supported by the literature, transformational leadership can only be effective when built upon the foundation of strong transactional leadership (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Trust and credibility are built upon follow-through. Followers will not likely follow a leader who promises, and fails to follow-through. A transformational leader cannot successfully invite followers on a higher journey if they cannot see beyond unfinished business or unaddressed issues. I work very hard to be a sound transactional leader so that I am regarded as a person who is true to her word. To me, this is the first, and

most important step in true transformational leadership: The foundation is strong enough to allow for transformation to take place.

As our field changes, transactional leadership will be necessary for survival. We are increasingly being called upon to provide evidence of effectiveness. Terms like outcomes assessment, benchmarking, and balanced scorecards are not going away, and so there is a strong press for transactional forms of leadership to meet the demand for accountability (Leithwood, 2007). As such, a transformational leader without the transactional foundation runs the risk of being perceived as a dreamer who cannot manage critical elements of administrative responsibilities. I believe that the best kind of leader successfully balances business-sense with vision, and I strive to that ideal.

One of the challenges of being a transformational leader is that it can be very taxing on the leader herself. I am highly visible, and I spend a lot of time communicating with members of my staff, and the larger campus community. I am known for my endless enthusiasm and energy. I offer feedback, and keep an open door. And while these are positive attributes, I sometimes feel as if I am on a treadmill, and that if I stepped off, no one would keep it going. It is a prime example of first order change. And so I keep running. In 2003, I was hired at Hudson County Community College, which was, at the time, an institution desperate for transformational leadership. The division I would be leading was the equivalent to what Lundlin, Paul and Christensen (2000) refer to as the toxic energy dump. I took on the role of transformational leader by unabashedly believing in and spreading the word about what the organization could be. I had a

vision, and I strategically focused on the raw talent; for I knew that teaching someone a skill was far easier that changing a poor attitude or outlook. I believed that if enough people successfully emerged from the energy dump, others would follow. Privately, I reveled in the fact that most people said it could not be done. Perhaps this competitive spirit is a byproduct of being the daughter of an athlete. Dad would often joke, "the person who says winning isn't everything has never won a damn thing."

At the same time, I was also faced with another problem in my division. It was a problem not exclusive to the division of student affairs, but certainly very prevalent. There was a complete lack of regard for process, policy, or procedure in many of the areas for which I was responsible. Part-time people were hired left and right without the appropriate corresponding paperwork to Human Resources, resulting in countless employees working for weeks without pay. Time sheets were not submitted by anyone, allowing for limitless time off as sick, personal, and vacation days taken were not recorded anywhere. The laissez-faire leadership (Judge & Piccolo, 2004) that had been utilized resulted in poor working habits, and bad business practices.

And so, for several years, I employed both a transformational and bureaucratic leadership style to affect the kind of change that needed to occur to move the organization forward. Timesheets were due the first Monday of the month, charged time was recorded, and several workshops on process were held. Some people reacted in very positive ways to the changes, and some, needless to say, saw the change as an assault to the lifestyle to which they had

become accustomed. Some survived and thrived, and many did not make it at all and were asked to, or chose to leave. This was not easy, but given the environment the division of student affairs had become, it was necessary. Given the political realities of community colleges, I had to adjust my style of leadership depending on the situation, and the person with which I am working. Bolman and Deal (2007) call it multiple frame leadership, shifting from frame to frame dependent on the situation. I have been heard saying to my president, "just let me know who I am playing with in the sandbox so that I may adjust my playing style." In my quest to find and be my most authentic self in all aspects of my life, this is where I am challenged most.

My signature transformational leadership style came, and continues to come, very naturally to me. Most of the time, this style has served me well as I work with enthusiasm, perseverance, and sheer joy. Passion from the top has inspired other student affairs professionals to reach higher, and feel a part of something positive. Jaworski (1996) contends that the capacity to inspire is central in good leadership. The enthusiasm brought forth by passion can also have a wonderful impact on students' perceptions of how college administration feels about them. In contrast, passion has also on occasion adversely affected the way I responded to situations or people without necessary evaluation or honest assessment. I have been known to move forward on something I feel strongly about by steamrolling over dissenters, rationalizing the action by assuring myself that it was done with the best interest of our students (or the institution) in mind. While this authoritarian style can be effective in terms of

quickly moving a project forward, it can have a very negative impact in the long run if employed too often. Greenleaf (as cited in Spears, 1998) promotes the notion that it is with the consent of followers that legitimate power is achieved.

The Cautious Emergence of the Servant Leader

As my institution has moved forward, and more higher education professionals are in key positions (as opposed to patronage appointees who have left) I find that the servant leader in me has truly started to emerge. I rely on my team of professionals to communicate their needs, and see my role as being the person who advocates for them and the resources they need to get the job done. I value respect shown to me, and I find that the more I listen and respond to people, the more respect I seem to garner. This is a shift for me as for many years, I carried the burden, and made the decisions on my own. I was convinced that if the job was going to be done well, I had to do it myself. I attribute this shift in style almost exclusively to the development of trust in and among my team members. Greenleaf (as cited in Spears, 1998) stated, "A fresh, critical look is being taken at the issues of power and authority, and people are beginning to learn, however haltingly, to relate to one another in less coercive and more creatively supporting ways".

Perhaps one of the most profound lessons I have learned as a professional is the love/hate relationship associated with the change agent. I have probably served on about thirty search committees in the last fifteen years. Invariably, the external candidates who talk about being an agent of change get the most positive responses from search committee members. However, internal

candidates associated with change rarely get the same kudos. For change is not always pretty: Agents of change are confronted with difficult decisions that more often than not adversely affect some segments of the college community. Change in its abstract form can be very attractive.

The reality of change, however, is that it is often difficult, and sometimes ugly. On one hand, the first few years I spent at HCCC were incredibly productive and positive. Students sensed a difference in the way they were being treated, an improvement in the quality, quantity, and frequency of services offered, and many professionals felt that the division finally had the leadership and vision it desperately needed. On the other hand, those years were also difficult and ugly for some. As I previously stated, some people did not make it. For better or for worse, my face and my name were associated with that change, and it cost me deeply in some circles. Several of the folks that were let go or left were African-American. And while my hiring record speaks volumes of my commitment to diversity (I have filled most of my key management positions with very talented African-American and Hispanic professionals) there was a perception among some groups that I was culturally insensitive.

It has taken me three years to rebuild some of those relationships. This has been achieved primarily through actions and programs that authentically reflect my values and ethics. Fullan (as cited in Furman, 2000) stated that "the absence of problems in change efforts is usually a sign that not much is being attempted." I attempted a great deal in those first few years at HCCC, and in as

much as we made incredible strides in how were served out students, we also had plenty of problems to show for it.

Who, Me? Contemplating a Community College Presidency

I never thought that I would want to become a community college president. For my entire professional life, I always aspired to be a vice president for student affairs at a 4-year institution. My experiences in student activities, residence life, and student discipline at a private, residential, Jesuit college were certainly preparing me to that end. The community college was never on my radar. I took two years off professionally to spend with my three children. I took an additional year off to battle cancer. When I got my life back, I realized that as much as I loved being home with my children, I desperately missed the work I loved so much; student affairs in higher education. I was hired by Hudson County Community College, and nearly seven years later, I cannot imagine ever leaving the community college sector.

The idea of one day becoming the president of a community college has started to seep into my consciousness. It was actually my president who first broached the topic with me. A little over two years ago, I was in his office sharing my plans to begin post-graduate work. During that conversation, he shared with me that he believed I had the talent to lead an institution as president, and strongly encouraged me to pursue the doctorate. Since that conversation, a little seed was planted, and with time and experience, I am starting to believe that I could someday become an effective president of a community college.

As these thoughts permeate into my psyche, there are leadership skills and

competencies above and beyond transformation and transaction which I know I will need to develop. As community Colleges depend on local government for a substantial percentage of their funding, a good working relationship with the political establishment is necessary to move the institution forward in its mission and goals. Bolman and Deal (2007) write, "The question is not whether organizations are political but rather what kind of politics they will have." As an aspiring community college president, I need to "develop political intelligence to set a direction, build a base of support, and manage relations with opponents and allies" (Bolman & Deal, 2007). Looking forward, I see this as my greatest challenge as my nature makes me distrustful of politics and political people. Perhaps naively, I have cherished the relative freedom from politics I have enjoyed to some extent. I cherish it, because I know that it will not last for long.

Ethics and Leadership

Simply stated, there are two aspects to ethics: discernment (knowing right from wrong) and discipline (having the moral willpower to do what's right). In these difficult economic times, people look to their leaders to do the right thing. In my life, I hold two important leadership positions: vice president of a community college, and mother. When I struggle with ethics, I try to think about my "legacy" and how I want to be remembered in any of my given roles.

At the core of it all, ethics is about how we meet the challenge of doing the right thing when it will cost more than we want to pay. A community college president once shared a story with me about her first week as president at a New Jersey community college. She attended a political event (which she was

expected to attend) as the politician had close ties to her college. At the end of the evening, when she was introduced to the politician, he remarked to her that each time an executive position became vacant, that she should let him know so that he could send over his "friends" to "fill the posts." She finessed the situation by simply stating to him that she loved good referrals, and that when friends of his were interested in positions, that he should contact her directly so that she may personally make sure that the resumes are handled with care through the college's search process. Such a statement (categorically affirming the college's process for filling open positions) could have cost her dearly, especially only days into her tenure as president. I asked her how she had the courage to stand her ground, and the ground of the college in such a way. She responded that (1) she needed to set the tone of who she was as a president immediately, and did so in a way that could not be seen as disrespectful or defiant of the politician, and (2) that you always need "walking away" money in case you need to resign. This true story told to me by a community college president represents what I want to be, and who, at my core, believe myself to be; a person of great integrity with equally great political acumen.

British art critic and social thinker John Ruskin said, "The highest reward for your toil is not what you get for it, but what you become by it." Ultimately, our jobs should make us better as well as happier people. I believe (perhaps it is more hope than belief) that with each experience, I am growing in a positive direction as a professional and as a leader. Some people become more cynical with time. I am not one of those people. Acclaimed poet Maya Angelou wrote, "I

did then what I knew how to do. Now that I know better, I do better." My

confidence in my abilities, my leadership, and ultimately in my own moral

compass strengthens with time and experience. I am committed to doing better,

because I know better. Ultimately, I am committed to doing better because I want

my legacy to be one of integrity and kindness as much as I want it to be about

accomplishment and success. Kant (as cited in Ciulla, 2003) summed it up best

when he wrote, "Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in

yourself or in other people, as an end in itself and never as a mere means."

Final Thoughts on My Leadership

There is a lesson taught to children in the Cherokee tradition about the

internal battle within each of us that resonates with me. As the Cherokee tell it,

there is a fight going on inside us between two wolves: One wolf is evil,

representing fear, anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, anxiety, self-

pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, competition, and superiority. The other wolf

is good, representing joy, peace, love, hope, sharing, serenity, humility, kindness,

benevolence, friendship, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, faith and

laughter. When asked by the children, "Which wolf will win?" the Cherokee elder

responds, "The one that you feed." I am quite cognizant of the dueling wolves the

Cherokee speak of inside of me. At the end of the day, the ability to look in the

mirror is my litmus test as to which wolf was triumphant. My authentic self is

greater good wolf than bad, but the bad wolf peaks its head more often than I

care to admit.

Life is not neat and tidy. It is messy, and often times painful. The beauty of

life is that the more we experience, the more we can offer to others and ourselves. Life lessons are carried with us as we progress as people and as leaders. Acclaimed poet Maya Angelou once said that when life presents you with pain or challenge, the first prayer that should be offered is one of thanksgiving. For it is through the process of overcoming the greatest challenges that we emerge as stronger and wiser people. The woman I am today is directly connected to the experiences and lessons of my youth. The grace, wisdom, and understanding I strive for tomorrow is based largely on the strengths and limitations I know about myself today. Ultimately, I hope to be the kind of leader Parker Palmer describes: the kind of person who is the same on the outside as on the in inside, eliciting from people through authenticity the belief that they are in the presence of integrity when around me, and that in turn, they feel secure enough to invest themselves in the relationship and all that surrounds it. I embrace my nature as both a transformational and transactional leader, with a servant leader emerging in strength. I want to challenge the status quo and take the kinds of risks that could affect considerable positive change in our field. I acknowledge my need to gain and practice political intelligence as I move forward, based in commitment to social justice. I envision myself growing into the kind of leader who fosters a trusting environment that encourages creativity and big thinking. And I pray that I can hold on to the strengths, follow the moral compass of conscience, effectively navigate the political streams of higher education, and do it all in an authentic and caring way which is transparent to anyone with whom I come into contact.

Summary

Chapter Two explored the researcher's leadership journey, and explored the how's and why's of the leader she is currently, and hopes to be in the future. Chapter Three will explore the literature relevant to this study.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

The Community College

In 1901, Joliet Junior College in Joliet, Illinois became the nation's first junior college. Established as an addition to secondary education, this institution made education accessible to all individuals (Vaughan, 2000). According to Vaughan, "Many people never would have attended college were it not for community colleges and their commitment to open access admissions." In the years following World War II, community and junior colleges served as a springboard for students wanting to transfer to four-year schools as well as for students interested in pursuing vocational and technical careers. The passage of the Higher Education Act in 1965 made financial support available to a broader pool of aspiring college students, and President Lyndon Johnson made access to higher education a major part of his political platform. The civil rights movement also helped "disenfranchised Americans to assert their rights to equal opportunity through education" (AACC, 2002). As such, the 1960's saw a significant growth in the number of junior and community colleges in the country. In today's post-secondary landscape, the nearly 1,200 community colleges in existence in the United States are indispensable primary agents of education for over eleven million students annually (AACC, 2007).

As community colleges have evolved, they have fulfilled several needs, namely, access to post-secondary education for students who are financially or academically underprepared for a four year college or university; access to

programs that award technical certificates and vocational training to meet the

workforce needs not served by high schools and four-year institutions; and a

local and responsive educational unit that can, depending on governance

structure, respond to the needs of the communities the college serves.

In their survey of the evolving nature of community colleges, Cejda and

Leist (2006) identified three aspects of this evolution: increased workforce

development and partnerships with local agencies (examples include nursing

programs and hospitals); the rapidly growing dual-credit process which partners

community colleges with high schools; and partnering with four-year institutions

to offer bachelor degrees at the community college site.

The Community College Presidency

Many of today's presidents were influenced, mentored, and trained by

founding presidents of the 1960's and 1970's, often adopting their philosophies

and practices. Vaughan (1989) stated:

> The founding presidents were active individuals with little time for
>
> reflection. Riding the crest of a movement that took all their time and
>
> energy, they had little of either to devote to the future, to reflection; every
>
> minute of every day was devoted to building colleges and selling the
>
> mission to legislators, the faculty, and the public, often simultaneously
>
> (p. 2).

According to Vaughan (1998), the "unbridled missionary zeal" of founding

presidents was perhaps the greatest contribution to promoting the community

college. The "telling of the story" was an important part of the founding

president's role. One of the major shortcomings of the founding presidents was their failure to involve faculty, administrators, support staff, and in some cases, the governing board in governing the college. It is perceived that, due to the lack of participatory governance, community colleges suffered in the following areas: (1) the image at the hands of much of the rest of higher education. (2) Trustees rarely questioned the president's word, rarely questioning the president's wisdom, judgment or fairness. (3) Faculty members were intimidated by presidents and deans, and important voices were ignored. (4) Many presidents who followed the founding presidents continued the practice of their predecessors, extending even in today's colleges some of the negative aspects associated with the aforementioned shortcomings.

Fortunately, the majority of today's presidents welcome the faculty and the trustees as equal partners in the educational enterprise (Vaughan, 1998). Today, the community college president plays many roles, and is at once a manager, spokesperson for the college, leader of the administrative team, and judge-arbitrator. The president is generally held accountable for all that transpires within the organization. Schuster et al. (1994) conveyed the importance of the college president by referencing the salience of skillful leadership at the presidential level and that presidential leadership continues to be depicted as critical to the health of an institution.

In 2006, the average age of community college presidents was 58, and nearly 90% were married. Most were Democrats. Over half had been president up to five years, and the average tenure in the present position was seven years.

More than a quarter (27%) came to the current presidency from another community college presidency. Prior to becoming president, 55% held an academic position, and 35% were internal hires. About 41% attended community colleges, and 89% held a doctorate (Ph.D. or Ed.D.), mostly in higher education. Community college presidents spent over half their time in meetings (33%) and administrative tasks. They met with local K-12 officials, local business leaders and politicians about once a month. Over 90% considered the job to be moderate-to-high stress. In 2006, 81.2% of community college presidents were Caucasian, and 72% were male. Both of these figures represent a growth in the number of female and minority community college presidents compared to data from previous surveys.

In a study conducted by Weisman and Vaughan, (2006) Presidents were asked to estimate the amount of time they spend performing the duties associated with the president's office, and how they allocate time for specific tasks each week. On average, presidents spend about 57 hours per week performing work-related activities, which include participating in an average of four evening or weekend activities. For greater precision, the presidents were asked to estimate the percentage of time that they spent on 11 different activities, which were presented in three major categories: Internal Activities (administrative tasks, college meetings, and informal meetings and interactions); External Relations (community activities, fundraising activities, and legislative activities); and Professional Development and Other Activities (professional meetings, professional reading, teaching, and other). Slightly more than half of the

presidents' time (53%) is devoted to internal operations, and approximately one

third (34%) of the presidents' time is spent with community and other external

relations. These figures indicate a slight shift away from internal activities (56% in

2001) and toward external relations (31% in 2001). In addition, presidents spend

almost one fifth (19%) of their time on professional development and other

activities. Table 1, based on 484 survey responses, provides more detailed

information on these findings.

Table 1.

Percentage of Time Spent on Presidential Tasks. The Community College
Presidency: 2006. American Association of Community Colleges.

Internal Activities	53.2%
Administrative tasks	19.8%
College meetings	22.0%
Informal meetings or interactions	11.4%
External Relations	34.0%
Community activities	13.1%
Fundraising activities	11.5%
Legislative advocacy	9.3%
Professional Development and Other Activities	18.5%
Professional meetings	6.2%
Professional writing	2.7%
Teaching	1.0%
Other	3.6%

Changing and challenging times. Several recent studies have

demonstrated a relationship between the effectiveness of community college

presidents and the quality of their institutions (Malm, 2008; Weisman & Vaughan,

2007). Traditionally, presidents of community colleges have been responsible for

ensuring that the institution is managed efficiently and effectively, for creating a

campus climate that allows students and employees the opportunity to achieve

their full potential as members of the college community, and for interpreting and

communicating the college mission to the students, employees, trustees,

legislators, and community at-large (Vaughn, 1989). However, as the demands

placed on community colleges have increased, "the issues that upcoming

community college leaders will have to address will be different and more

complex than those faced by community college leaders in the past" (Hockaday

& Puyear, 2000). In fact, expectations for community college presidents have

grown more complex, demanding, and even contradictory and have transformed

the presidency "…into a calling of high expectations, broad responsibility, and

limitless challenges" (Pierce & Pedersen, 1997).

According to Vaughan and Weisman (1998), surveys of community

college presidents consistently report that one of their major concerns is the lack

of sufficient resources to achieve the mission of their institutions. This lack of

resources related to cyclical fluctuations in the economic climate tends to create

uncertainty regarding how higher education is to be financed (Schuster et al.,

1994). Cohen and Brawer (1994) indicated that state legislators have become

central to the discussion of fiscal issues since community colleges must compete for funding with other state agencies. According to Schuster et al. (1994), there is "…a fundamental rethinking of how higher education is to be financed, raising anew basic questions about who pays and who benefits."

Changing demographic trends have also been identified as one of the more distinguishing features of the current environment for higher education. According to Vaughn (2000), there are approximately 1,100 two-year colleges, and about 970 are considered to be public institutions. These public colleges enroll about 10 million students annually, of which nearly 50 percent are minorities, and includes older students, under-prepared students, and an increased number of students attending part-time. According to Hawthorne (1997), the emphasis on access has resulted in an unprecedented cross-section of students, which distinguishes the American comprehensive community college from other educational institutions.

Technology is another source of challenge for the leadership of the community college. Shuster et al. (1994) stated that the "explosion" of technology is transforming modes of teaching and learning in profound ways. Milliron, as cited in Mooney, (2008) points out that technology will play a crucial role at community colleges. Like all institutions, community colleges are searching for the "big blend" - the right mix of traditional and online instruction. He also foresees more discussion about the use of mobile-learning techniques, and more emphasis on "analytics," or the use of institutional research to determine priorities. Other trends Milliron suggests will be increasingly evident at two-year

institutions include more use of computer and video games in the curriculum and on campuses, the expansion of social-networking technology for educational reasons, the use of new, high-impact technologies in the classroom such as requiring students to use cell phones or other hand-held devices to provide instant feedback during an assignment, and the use of holographic projections to beam lifelike images into a science laboratory.

The additional challenge for the community college in meeting the technological demands is the need to equally maintain the human touch in the education process. Milliron, as cited in Mooney, (2008) concludes, "The human touch is especially important for community colleges, with at-risk students who feel disconnected. It isn't necessarily about not using technology - it's about leveraging technology in a way where the human touch can be improved."

The pressures surrounding declining resources, demographic shifts, and the advent of technology provide a basis for examining the political context within higher education functions. Most community colleges are public agencies. As such, their support is reflective on the perceptions of the public of their social value (Vaughn, 2000). Cohen and Brawer (1994) stated that "colleges function within a political arena where public relations coalitions, inter-institutional cooperation and image guide decisions regarding support". Aside from monies allocated toward student financial assistance, Shuster et al. (1994) commented that "education remains a politically handicapped contender for public monies – its appeal extends just so far". There seems to be a consensus in the literature: Higher education leadership must focus on ways to directly confront these

external realities. Shuster et al. (1994) stated that although the literature previously emphasized merely responding to the environmental conditions, the focus has shifted to the importance of a proactive stance. Bennis (1997) concurs. He states that "education leadership must create an environment that actually embraces change, not as a threat, but an opportunity. I think that's the only way to run an organization in a turbulent world".

In their study on the community college presidency, Weisman & Vaughan (2006) asked presidents how frequently they meet with high-ranking business and industry officials, as well as with local K–12 school officials in their service area. Presidents met more frequently with business and industry leaders in 2006 than they did in 2001. More specifically, there was a substantial increase in presidents who reported that they met with these officials at least once a week, from 27% in 2001 to 47% in 2006. Another 40% of the presidents stated that they met with these leaders at least once a month (see Table 2).

Table 2.

Contact with Community Leaders. The Community College Presidency: 2006. American Association of Community Colleges.

Contact with Business and Industry Officials	2001	2006
At least five times per week	3.4%	4.2%
At least once per week	27.2%	47.3%
At least once per month	58.0%	40.0%
Less than once per month	11.0%	7.7%
Contact with K-12 Officials	2001	2006
At least five times per week	0.9%	0.4%
At least once per week	19.1%	13.2%
At least once per month	56.2%	54.9%
Less than once per month	23.8%	31.0%

In addition to meeting with business, industry and K-12 officials, community college presidents continue to establish and maintain relationships with government officials. In the American Association of Community Colleges' study on the community college presidency, (Weisman & Vaughan, 2006) 97% of 2006 presidents reported that they had conversations with their state representatives and state senators at least twice per year. Fifty-one percent of the presidents said that they had spoken with their state representative more than 10 times in a year, and 45% of the presidents said that they had spoken with their state senator more than 10 times in a year. In addition, 93% of the presidents reported that they had visited the state legislature to advocate for or to promote their community college during the most recent legislative session.

At a 2003 Michigan Community College Association meeting, presidents identified politics, capital funding, local property tax support and partnerships as the most common issues facing their campuses along with instructional technology, leadership development for presidents, job training, manufacturing job losses, demographics, domestic relations, policy governance, community college baccalaureate degree, succession planning, quality and accreditation, competition, board succession, and increased accountability. Accordingly, Phelan (2005) emphasizes the importance for leaders to "…constantly evaluate their progress in relationship to the institutional membership, board, and community" and explains that "a solid commitment to learning is so essential for

current and future community college leaders because of the ever changing higher education landscape".

Presidents Stepping Down

In the midst of these rapidly changing times, the community college is faced with the daunting reality that nearly 80% of the seated community college presidents will be stepping down in the next few years (Weisman & Vaughn, 2002). Table 3 illustrates that the most noticeable difference in data on the community college presidency over ten years is the increased percentage of those planning to retire. Considered the "pioneers" of the community college movement, these presidents will be taking with them years of experience and knowledge that cannot easily be replaced. A great deal of literature has been published that warns that community colleges are facing an impending leadership crisis (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002; Evelyn, 2001; Schults, 2001; Weisman & Vaughn, 2002), and that colleges must be prepared to effectively select candidates to fill a large number of presidential openings.

Table 3.

Selected results from the 1996, 2001, and 2006 Career and Lifestyle Surveys completed by community college presidents. From Vaughn & Weisman, 1998; Weisman & Vaughn, 2002, 2007.

President Profile	1996	2001	2006
Average age	54	56	58
Average number of years in current position	7.5	7.3	7.0
Percentage who are female	18%	28%	29%
Percentage who are a racial or ethnic minority	14%	14%	12%
Percent holding a doctorate	89%	88%	88%
Percentage who were an internal candidate for their first presidency	33%	34%	35%
Percentage with full-time community college teaching experience	44%	45%	48%
Percentage having held two or more presidencies	30%	30%	33%
Percentage planning to retire within ten years	68%	79%	84%

Competencies for leadership. In April of 2005, the American Association of Community Colleges' Board of Directors approved a document specifying a newly revised set of six competencies to be used as a framework for community college leadership development (AACC, 2005). In broad categories, the six competencies identified are (1) organizational strategy (An effective community college leader strategically improves the quality of the institution, protects the long-term health of the organization, promotes the success of all students, and sustains the community college mission, based on knowledge of the organization, its environment, and future trends; (2) resource management (An effective community college leader equitably and ethically sustains people, processes, and information as well as physical and financial assets to fulfill the mission, vision, and goals of the community college; (3) communication (An

effective community college leader uses clear listening, speaking, and writing skills to engage in honest, open dialogue at all levels of the college and its surrounding community, to promote the success of all students, and to sustain the community college mission); (4) collaboration (An effective community college leader develops and maintains responsive, cooperative, mutually beneficial, and ethical internal and external relationships that nurture diversity, promote the success of all students, and sustain the community college mission; (5) advocacy (An effective community college leader understands, commits to, and advocates for the mission, vision, and goals of the community college); and (6) professionalism (An effective community college leader works ethically to set high standards for self and others, continuously improve self and surroundings, demonstrate accountability to and for the institution, and ensure the long-term viability of the college and community.

A 2002 study of 76 community college presidents in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia examined the professional development needs, opportunities, and limitations for community and technical college presidents. The results of the survey revealed that the three skills of most importance and value to presidents are budget management, developing positive relationships with local political leaders, and having positive relationships with state political leaders (Wallin, 2002).

Presidential leadership. How does one learn the art of leadership? Can it be learned? It is argued that under the trait theory of leadership, leaders can be made only if they have been born with the right traits. The behavioral leadership

theory proposes that leaders are made and not born. (Birnbaum, as cited in Goff, 2003).The study, analysis, and professional discussions about leadership are key to understanding the necessary traits and behaviors needed by the community college president. Hockaday and Puyear (2000) indicate that there are more than 125 definitions of leadership. Leadership, as described in *Community College Leadership in the New Millenium*, is "simply holding the goals of the institution on one hand and the people of the institution in the other and somehow bringing these two together in a common good."

The ambiguous nature of leadership is related to the split between theory and practice. According to Bensimon (1994), there is a split between theory and practice regarding scholarly publications relating to the topic of college leadership. Birnbaum (1998) concurred, stating, "We deny the discrepancy between our espoused theories and our theories-in-use, even when the gap is between what we say presidents do and what we see them do, is obvious."

Birnbaum (1998) addressed the topic of community college leadership through a discussion of three traditional models that are important for understanding the interfaces between leadership and college governance. The first model is bureaucratic, viewing the college as a large, complex hierarchy that requires the effective leader to establish goals, organize the work of the subordinates, and engage in planning. The second model is the collegiums, often referred to as the community of scholars. In this model, the effective leader listens, persuades and influences decision-making through sharing information and appealing to reason. The third model views the college as a political system

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in which conflicts exist among various groups and sub-groups, and the leader's

role is to manage processes and mediate conflict that pervades the organization

(Birnbaum, 1998). Table 4 illustrates the three models and their respective

characteristics.

Table 4.

Birnbaum's traditional leadership models (1998).

TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP MODELS	Bureaucratic	Collegiums	Political System
LEADERSHIP CHARACTERIZED BY:	establishing goals, organizing work of subordinates, engaging in planning	listening, persuading and influencing decision-making through sharing information and appealing to reason	Managing processes and mediating conflict

Bensimon (1994) advocated for a concept of leadership which "embraces

the multiplicity of viewpoints, rather than one that is based on the assumption of

a single and shared reality." He went on to state that "leadership needs to be re-

conceptualized as a collective practice." The task of leadership is to have "an

understanding of the plurality of voices vying for the right to reality – to be

accepted as legitimate expressions of the true and good" (Bensimon, 1994).

In their seminal study on community college leadership, Roueche et al.

(1989) identified a group of community college presidents who were defined as

exemplary leaders. In defining the concept of leadership within the context of the

community college setting, Roueche et al. (1989) stated, "Leadership is the

ability to influence, shape and embed values, attitudes, beliefs and behavior

consistent with increased staff and faculty commitment to the unique mission of

the community college." Using this definition of leadership, Roueche et al. (1989)

conducted a study on leadership that explored the qualities of top leaders.

Shared themes of teamwork, shared decision-making, empowerment, and a

strong value system emerged from the 50 "blue chipper" presidents interviewed.

Figure 1 illustrates a leadership paradigm for community college

presidents. According to Burnham, (2001) there are three levels of leadership

necessary for effective leadership at the executive level; (1) inherent leadership

elements, which includes a sense of personal security, communication skills,

political acumen, and innovation; (2) leadership traits and knowledge, which

include public relations and awareness, experience, community awareness,

personal growth and development, and student development knowledge; and (3)

leadership actions, which include promoting the mission, resource development

and management, academic leadership, board management, and human

resource management. This paradigm suggests a strong pairing of nature and

nurture, or the trait and behavioral leadership theories (Hockaday & Puyear,

2000).

A Community College Leadership Paradigm

Level 1: Inherent Leadership Elements

| A Strong Sense of Personal Security | Strong Communications Skills | Political Acumen | Commitment to Innovation and Risk-Taking |

Level 2: Leadership Traits and Knowledge

| Public Relations and Media Awareness | Applicable Experience | Community Awareness | Adaptive Organizational Ability |

| Personal Growth and Development | | | Student Development Knowledge |

Level 3: Leadership Actions

Promoting a Complex Mission

Resource Development and Management

Board Management

Academic Leadership

Staff and Human Resource Management

Dr. Peter F. Burnham
Fall 2001

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Figure 1: A Community College Leadership Paradigm (Burnham, 2001). Power and the Presidency.

How a college president deals with the various aspects of the job –

relations with faculty, staff, administration, local and state boards, and community

– is a common subject among those who have written on their presidential

experiences (both four-year and community colleges) from both an

autobiographical perspective (Keonane, 2006; Vaughan, 2000) and from a

biographical perspective, such as Arthur Padilla's 2005 case study of six notable

university presidential careers. The president of a post-secondary institution is

perceived to have a great deal of power and does in fact have a great deal of

power by virtue of the position. However, as Cohen and March (1986) write, the

president is rarely faced with problems that are clear-cut with simple solutions.

Decisions require long-range thinking that considers many factors, a sort of

chess game, where one move opens up a vast array of responses to

permutations on subsequent decisions. In analyzing the mix of leadership ability

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and management skills, Wallin (2003) notes, "one could be a skilled manager and not be a strong leader, but it is impossible to be a strong leader without good management skills."

There is a discrepancy between the actual power a community college president has and the perceived power she has. Indeed, followers' perceptions of the office can shape a president's managerial style. One president described perceptions of power as "having the hammer." She says that a president lets people know she has "the hammer" and as a result, she never has to use the hammer. However, the followers' perceptions of this power may actually hinder effective leadership. Cohen and March (1986) describe this situation:

> He [the leader] is faced with disparity between this potential power and beliefs about his power that assures his disappointment and the disappointment of others in his ability to act powerfully. He is resented because he is more powerful than he should be. He is scorned and frustrated because he is weaker than he is believed capable of being. If he acts as a "strong" president, he exposes his weakness. If he acts as a "democratic" president, people consider him timid. (p.117)

This dichotomy has an important implication. As Cohen and March note (1986), the personal and organizational expectations of college presidents are the root cause of overwork and reactionary stance. Therefore, in order for effective leaders to emerge and operate, and in order for meaningful change to occur, the very concept of the role of the community college president must be amended,

both from the president's perspective and from the organization's perspective. In a lecture on ethics and the community college presidency, Burnham concluded,

> In the end, the community college President is HUMAN [capital letters by Burnham]; forced by the role to practice the highest standards of leadership and ethics, hopefully grounded in "goodness" and values, in a Mission-centric, student-centered context, with clear perspectives in "real" success and not intimidated by failure. (March 18, 2009, Rowan University)

Summary

Community colleges, like other higher education institutions and many private sector organizations, face a generational transition period in which baby-boomer leaders are retiring in significant numbers. There is great concern that the pipeline is not producing new leaders rapidly enough to fill all the resulting vacancies. In response, professional organizations are offering a wider array of professional development programs for aspiring leaders, and graduate schools are stepping up their efforts to prepare and credential students for leadership roles in the field (Boggs, 2003; Duvall, 2003; Shults, 2001).

The landscape of the community college is also rapidly changing, while pioneers who have navigated these complex institutions are retiring. Declining resources, technological advances, and demographic shifts are just some of the many challenges facing presidents today. In this sea of change, over 900 presidential vacancies are expected to occur within the next 3 to 5 years. Who will take their place? What qualities, experiences, and competencies are

necessary for the next generation of community college leaders at the executive level?

In his seminal work, The Power of the Presidency, Fisher (1984) posits "assignment to a leadership role does not confer any leadership abilities." This is true for virtually any leadership position; holding a title does not necessarily mean the person holding it is experienced, qualified, prepared or particularly good at the job. As we cultivate the new generation of community college leaders, it is critical to identify the demands of the position of president, as well as the skills necessary to do the job well. Indeed, the future of the community college depends, in large part, on prepared leaders to successfully navigate these ever-changing, and often-times choppy waters. Fisher (1984) concludes, "The ideal president blends charisma with expert and legitimized power, having a touch of reward, and, at all costs, avoid being coercive…all while maintaining distance."

In Chapter Three, literature relevant to this study was explored, In Chapter Four, the research method of the multiple case study research design used to gather and analyze the perceptions of the leadership demands and competencies of the community college presidency is presented.

Chapter 4

Methodology

Context of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore community college presidents'
perceptions of the demands and competencies of leadership at the community
college presidential level. The study focused on the experiences of four sitting
community college presidents to understand their perceptions of leadership at
the presidential level, and responded to the need to gain greater understanding
of what competencies are necessary for the next generation of community
college presidents to lead increasingly complex institutions and external
environments. The study can also help inform the curricular development of
community college leadership programs by identifying key competencies
necessary for effective presidential leadership.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study are:

1. What background in terms of personal and professional experience and
   education do community college presidents identify as necessary to act as
   a decision-maker in a community college environment?
2. How does the president experience decision-making? What qualities help
   or hinder?

Research Design

This study employed qualitative research to explore perceptions of the
demands and competencies of leadership at the community college presidential

level. Qualitative research presents an alternative to the traditional form of quantitative research (Creswell, 2005). Qualitative research tends to fall under rubrics such as naturalistic studies, ethnographic studies, and case studies (Creswell, 2005; Upcraft and Schuh, 1996). Case study is a method that allows for interactive research and an opportunity for the researcher to examine and report in rich descriptive language the contours of the participants' worlds and ideas. Marshall and Rossman (2006) refer to case study as a strategy for capturing "the deep meaning of experience in the participants' own words". Creswell (2007) writes,

> Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports) and reports a case description and case-based themes. (p. 73)

The case study approach "provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than by simply presenting them with abstract theories of principles" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2001). Marshall and Rossman (2006) note that, "because thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, and assumptive worlds are involved, the researcher needs to understand the deeper perspectives that can be captured through face-to-face interaction". Central to this form of inquiry is making meaning of what respondents have to say about the phenomenon under study, which differs from

identifying statistical relationships in quantitative research (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996).

Data Collection Strategies

Interviews were conducted at the participants' respective college campus, and lasted approximately 90 minutes. A demographic questionnaire was also provided to the participants prior to the interview, and collected on the day of the interview. The questionnaire included questions about the participant (race, gender, age, number of years employed as a community college president) and the institution itself (size, location, etc.) To ensure confidentiality, the participants were assigned a pseudonym. Additionally, the name and location of the participant's community college, other mentioned schools, and named references were assigned fictitious names. The interviews were digitally recorded and the results transcribed verbatim. The researcher was mindful of the potential impact presidents' words might have in print, and so member-checking took place. Member-checking is taking processed information back to participants so they can confirm the accuracy of the work. In case the researcher misinterprets an idea or concept, member checking might reveal that error. Indeed, it has been argued that member checking is "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transcripts were e-mailed to the participants to check for accuracy. Though no substantive changes were necessary in the final transcriptions, through member checking, each participant was able to satisfy any concerns about their words in print.

Once the interviews were completed and other supportive data collected, a thematic analysis of the responses was conducted to generate potential themes or patterns. Within-case and cross-case thematic results are reported in narrative form in the next chapter. The coding process consisted primarily of open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In the open coding phase, categories were developed. The analytic process involved identifying concepts, and then properties and their dimensions were discovered in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Axial coding involved looking for answers to the issues of why, where, when, how, and with what results. This allowed the researcher to discover potential relationships among categories. Finally, through selective coding, a central category was selected that represents the central phenomenon around which the other categories are integrated. This central phenomenon can be explored in future study.

Setting and Participants

Creswell (2007) recommends four to five subjects for in-depth interviews for a multiple case study. This qualitative multiple case study included four in-depth semi-structured interviews with sitting community college presidents. Participants were chosen using a purposeful sampling method based primarily on length of tenure. The average tenure of a community college president is five to seven years (Shults, 2001). As such, for the purpose of this study, the four presidents selected have been at their respective institutions for at least 7 years. The study was limited to New Jersey and New York community college

presidents for the purpose of ease of access as the researcher has worked in higher education in New Jersey for 18 years. Letters were sent to out to six community college presidents in New Jersey and New York who have been presidents at their respective institution for more than seven years. The letter included and introduction to the study, and an invitation to participate via an in-depth 90 minute interview on their respective campus. Four out of the six presidents agreed to participate in the study.

Interviews took place in each president's office. The rooms were empty except for the participant and the interviewer. Additionally, information about the interview space and college campus as a setting has been included.

President's Name, Degree	College	Student Population	Gender	Age	Ethnic Group	Total Years as president
Robert Patterson, Ph.D.	Urban City Community College	Approximately 9,000	Male	52	White	13
Michael Titan, Ph.D.	Hill Community College	Approximately 8,500	Male	66	White	23
Edmundo Rodriguez, Ph.D.	LaReina Community College	Approximately 10,000	Male	68	Hispanic	27
Grace Smith, Ph.D.	Continental Community College	Approximately 15,000	Female	56	White	13

Figure 2: Purposeful Selection Matrix (Adapted by author)

Chapter 5

Findings

Introduction

The four community college presidents interviewed for this study are sitting community college presidents. The tenure of these presidents ranged from 13 years to 27 years. Ages ranged from 52 to 68 years. In order to assure confidentiality, each participant and all persons named in the interview were assigned a pseudonym. In addition, the name of each community college and the names of all other places (place references, towns, states) named in the interviews have been assigned fictitious names.

This series of portraits begins with Dr. Robert Patterson, who has been a president for 13 years, and concludes with Dr. Edmundo Rodriguez, who has served as a community college president for 27 years.

It's the Right Place at the Right Time, and Again, *Understanding the Environment*

Dr. Robert Patterson

President of Urban City Community College

"Every year I give the Board a list of accomplishments for the year – a one page
bulleted thing. Ever since year one, I have put in bold at the top as my number
one accomplishment, 'maintained a positive work environment at the college.'
That is the only one I put in bold".

President Robert Patterson has been at Urban City Community College for 22 years. He has served as president for the last 13 years. His presidency at Urban City Community College is his first, and was promoted from within the institution. He has held several positions at the college, serving in the capacity of chief academic officer prior to becoming president at age 38. He holds a doctorate degree. Urban City Community College has a headcount of over 7,500 students, and the campus is located in a city which is highly diverse, and serves many low socio-economic status (SES) students.

Dr. Patterson greeted me in a very friendly and casual manner. Based on the easy rapport between Dr. Patterson and his support staff, it is evident that the atmosphere in this president's office is fairly informal. The greeting area was furnished with basic office furniture; nothing upscale to indicate that I was in the CEO's office. Dr. Patterson had arrived to the office at 6:30am, which, according to his staff, was a common occurrence on the days he was not at an off-campus meeting. When he is on campus, he always eats in the common cafeteria.

Sometimes he sits with students, sometimes he sits with staff. Even when he is not hungry, he still goes down to the cafeteria to sit and mingle with members of the college community.

Throughout the interview, Dr. Patterson reiterated the uniqueness of Urban City Community College, and the central role he plays. He shared, "I know every single employee here. Every single employee. I am on a first name basis with every employee in the college. I am Robert everywhere. Even the maintenance guys call me Robert."

The Nature of his Presidency

"The college has become sacred here [in the county]. You don't touch the college. You don't mess with the college."

President Robert Patterson did not want to be president when he was asked to fill the position. He was young, only 38 years old, and had only been Academic Vice President for two years. The college was in trouble, due primarily to poor leadership at the executive level, and was characterized by constant grievances, and what appeared to be inappropriate political influence. Patterson recalls:

The Board had to, because of the type of president it was, the Board had to fill a vacuum…The Board was intrusive only because of a weakness they saw in the president, so the Board was getting involved in things they typically should not get involved with but I don't think anyone could blame them…they were doing their fiduciary responsibility of making sure that

things were going okay in the college….which of course allows for at least

what appeared to be political so the freeholders got more involved.

President Patterson, who has been at Urban City Community College for

over 20 years, stressed the importance of the president "understanding the

environment" and "not making decisions in a vacuum." He talked about the

importance of relationships with the unions, shared governance, and being in

touch with the institutional culture. President Patterson is personally involved at

the bargaining table with union leaders, and pointed out that he has not had a

single grievance from the unions in his 13 years as president. When asked how

that was possible, Patterson responded:

> Because we pay a lot of attention to it. We deal with problems as they
>
> come up on a daily basis. We don't let things fester... Everyone knows if
>
> there is problem, we will work it out…not always necessarily the way
>
> everybody wants it worked out, but you know, we get it done.

Building Relationships, Trust and Good Will

Relationships and trust were recurring themes for President Patterson.

When discussing union negotiations, Patterson pointed out that collective

bargaining agreements (contracts) are often negotiated a full year in advance:

> I tell them what we can afford and they tell us what they need and usually
>
> we start off within a half point of where we're going to end up because we
>
> know we're not playing games because we trust each other…we go to the
>
> bargaining table once and that's basically for show…we've settled it going

out to lunch prior to that…we don't get up until we're done and we're just

doing the window dressing and we're dealing with small issues and it's to

keep some other people in the union happy…at least they went to the

table and got a chance to do it.

Not all unions share the same relationship with President Patterson.

Relationships with the support staff tend to be more formal, and more time is

spent at the bargaining table with this group. Patterson pointed out that:

We spend more time at the table with them because they are not as

sophisticated in terms of, you know…truthfully we want to keep them from

making mistakes. We don't take advantage of them and end up giving

them more than they ask for. [We ask] 'Don't you think you might want to

ask for this?'…Again, it's based on trust.

The issue of trust also came up when discussing employee discipline. Dr.

Patterson and his Vice President for Human Resources enjoy a very strong

relationship with the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) and they often

turn to them when potentially problematic issues arise. In one case involving the

mental deterioration of a long-term employee where separation from the college

was clearly needed, they contacted the NJEA to outline the situation and the

course of action they wanted to take:

Basically, when we say to the NJEA, 'look, we've gotta get rid of

somebody' they don't fight us because we kind of developed a good

enough relationship with them that they trust that we just don't go after

everybody…and every once in a while, they've gotta defend a

person…and you know, we make a show and make it look good. And that's okay…we give them their save face, and let them grandstand and do what they have to do and we'll do the same and we'll get it done….if there is trust, it works really well.

Dr. Patterson shared that trust is earned on both sides. "We're not on a power trip and we're not frivolous; we're inclusive in the decision-making process and we go through the process. And the process works for us, and because of that, we are not spending a lot of time on these kinds of problems [grievances]." According to Dr. Patterson, it is the president's job to generate good will. He pointed out that there are other presidents who have contentious relationships with unions on their respective campuses, thwarting good will. He commented:

There are presidents who hate their unions, and they just sit around trying to figure out "how am I going to get my unions?"…Nothing good is going to come of that. Not at least in terms of moving your institution forward. There's a good will that is needed to get stuff done, and you can't be a pushover…but you gotta understand that you as president or you as an administrator can't teach every class…the fundamental things we need to do at the institution, advising students and teaching them in the classroom…and for people to do this enthusiastically you need good will. And if you can't generate that good will and a positive work environment, then good things are not going to happen.

Fitting In

President Patterson stressed the importance of institutional fit at Urban

City Community College (UCCC). According to Patterson, UCCC is a very unique

place, with a strong sense or organizational culture. As president, he is at the

center of the culture, and the institution itself:

> Everybody's gotta feel that I am there to protect them. I'm there to protect
>
> their best interest…that somebody is there to protect their best interest
>
> and that ultimately I am going to make sure everyone is treated fairly…We
>
> deal with honesty and truth and if [people] are going to be deceptive…it
>
> doesn't matter how good you are…that's the kind of person who is not
>
> successful…I'll tolerate someone who may not be great at their job, but
>
> who is on board, who is working with us…If we have a fault here it's that
>
> we probably tolerate people a little too much sometimes who might not be
>
> at the top of their game. But I'll take that any day over someone who is
>
> subversive and nasty and a trouble maker.

Patterson went so far as to say that people perceived to be divisive are

"ostracized" by the community. "It happens with some very competent people

who might be fine someplace else…but not here" added Patterson.

The President Will Take Care of It

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of President Patterson's leadership

of his institution is the level of trust displayed by faculty and staff on issues

related to governance. Some might go so far as to call this level of trust to be an abdication of power, particularly by faculty. Patterson shared:

We are going through our periodic review right now. We've gone through the committee process for the past year and a half…the committee has done their report and now there is an expectation of the college…just listen to this…there is an expectation that Julie Kane [Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs] and I will rewrite this thing. And it is totally acceptable here…They expect, 'Robert and Julie will take care of that at the end'; that is basically the attitude here. 'Robert and Julie will fix it'…I have to accept this a little, you know, in terms of the tradeoff that I know it is going to go out okay…But I'll make major edits in this thing…I'll change recommendations….and if a team comes in, they [the committees] will be absolutely quiet.

President Patterson readily admitted that UCCC is not a typical environment. Patterson recently overturned a faculty recommendation related to the tenure process. The faculty committee made the recommendation not to renew a faculty member the year before this faculty member would be up for tenure review. Patterson thought the instructor's teaching ability trumped the other deficiencies pointed out by the committee, and decided to "save" her. Patterson said:

An outstanding faculty member who happens to be a minority; that to me is what affirmative action is about. And I've also gone a few steps further. The final decision on her is next December…I brought her in here and sat

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with her and I have a great relationship with her, but basically I had to sit her down and say 'you really dug a hole for yourself here' and she was crying…I made it clear to her that she needs to mend some fences around here…I said, 'I'm not guaranteeing that I am going to be able to save you next time.'

Interestingly, there were no explosions on the part of the faculty committee members who recommended non-renewal for this instructor. Patterson reported "zero explosions" resulting from his decision, primarily due to his ongoing communication with faculty. "I am under no obligation to explain myself but if I expect that committee to function well next year I better explain myself," said Patterson.

This extraordinary level of trust extends to the Board of Trustees as well. He shared that while there was a time when the Board of Trustees would entertain and consider grievances put forth by members of the college community, they no longer do so because they trust in the process put in place by the administration. Patterson points out:

While they would allow anybody to say whatever they want at the Board [meeting] they won't even entertain it at this point because they understand how the process works…when you have a faculty review committee that says no, and you have a VP of Academic Affairs that says no, you've got the President that says no, they are in no position to say yes. And they don't even consider it.

Political Acumen

President Patterson shared that he was courted for UCCC's presidency by both internal and external forces. As such, he had the luxury of setting some of his own terms of employment. Very active on local boards and chambers of commerce, Patterson was aware of the political tides that could affect his ability to lead effectively. Patterson recalls:

I said a precondition of my being hired [as president] is that you are going to mandate that I have no participation in partisan politics. And they said fine. I said you are going to ban me from going to anything political, of making any political contributions…I will be political with a "small P"…I think I am a confidante of most of the local politicians here….but I have never been to a fundraiser…it was a tone I had to set up front and that has served me very well over time. Just knowing the pitfalls of partisan politics is tough.

According to President Patterson, political acumen not only means knowing what to stay out of; it is also about knowing where to be seen. "You know, I spent a lot of time in the local community and still do. That's all part of the job…I've gotten to the point where I don't have to play games with my county at all" said Patterson. He continued,

I make sure I show up to events that I know are important to them [faculty], even if I have no interest in doing it…but they know, they see me there…you've got to show up and that's important to them…I go to a lot of funerals and wakes, a lot of this and that per year, even for people I don't

know particularly well…but it's important to them that I show up…and you get that kind of stuff back ten times over…and people will go out of their way to do things around here and volunteer their time because it's the right thing to do.

Leadership and Management

President Patterson has a very different relationship with each one of his vice presidents. Some he sees every day, some he rarely sees. Some e-mail him several times in the workday, while others have never e-mailed him. Some run everything past him, while others show him nothing. Patterson noted:

I made a conscious decision that on most things, I am not going to make them conform to my style because I am able to be flexible and why would I make them fit my mold if I don't have to? We all have to get the job done and as long as their styles are compatible, again they have to fit in to this environment, or else it is not going to work. But if their styles are different, I'm okay with it…there are some that I do micro-manage…it's situational. Some like to be micromanaged; it's the only way they are comfortable…operating by showing me everything they do, seek approval on almost everything, run everything by me before they do it. That can work as long as it's not everybody…the flexibility part is important.

Part of Patterson's leadership/management strategy is knowing a little bit about everything. "I can speak intelligently on anything going on around here and that's why I can edit the Middle States report because there is nobody who

knows…a little bit about everything at the college more than me. And everybody knows that."

Managing diversity is also something that President Patterson is very proud of. With over 300 Muslim students, the city where UCCC is located has the second largest Muslim population in the nation (second to Detroit, MI).

> You go down to the cafeteria at noon, and it is not just going to be African-Americans sitting with African-Americans…I am only happy when I go downstairs and see that the Muslims are sitting with the Hispanics, and this and that. This is the unique part. It is not the diversity, it is how it comes together. That's a value, and you work to make sure that you create situations where people work together.

To keep touch with the diverse needs of the student population, President Patterson makes it a point to teaching a class every once in a while. Even though it is difficult to commit to a regular teaching schedule due to his external commitments, Patterson stressed that teaching gives him a better understanding of the students the college serves, as well as great credibility and a sense of solidarity with the faculty. He added:

> Putting my grades in at the end of the semester, dealing with some of the policies, some of the stuff we make faculty do…some of it changed because I was teaching. Because I saw stuff and said 'Why are we doing this?' But it gives you credibility and that helps.

Challenges and the Road Ahead

The literature suggests that the challenges ahead for community college professionals are plentiful and complex. President Patterson agrees:

We are trying to run full service institutions and spending on average $7,000.00 per FTE to do it. No other type of education can deliver a high quality education at $7,000.00 per FTE. K-12 doesn't do it, four year baccalaureate institutions do not do it. In some cases, it is double or triple of what we spend per student. Managing that environment is very tough…managing in these kinds of times, when you are already lean and mean…when more is being asked of us…missions are expanding not contracting, and doing that at a time when resources are scare…that's a big challenge.

President Patterson also emphasized that the community college sector is not valued for what it does by the state or in Washington. This disconnect in values can be very difficult for institutions to reconcile, particularly faculty. He notes:

When the president of the United States goes up and talks about community colleges, he's not talking about us doing the first two years of the baccalaureate degree. It's all the other stuff we do, it's all the job training, it's all the work towards development…nobody's looking at us for our wonderful liberal arts courses that we're offering. We're more valued for the remedial work we do and for the ESL and for the workforce training and for the AAS programs that are putting people into direct career entry...and that is directly against the culture in many of our institutions

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where the most powerful departments are your history and liberal arts faculty…especially in the more [affluent counties]. They think they are a four-year college faculty and that is where the power base is…and they will be incredibly resistant and threatened by change. And that is a real challenge going forward.

Summary

"There is no playbook" said President Patterson about the job of community college president. "The minute you think you've got it figured out, you're wrong. That's why it's a great job. No two days are the same….If you are going to be good at this, you've got to know a little of everything."

President Patterson is deeply entrenched in the culture that is Urban City Community College. Themes of trust, institutional fit, organizational culture, and personal involvement at every level emerged over and over in the interview. Patterson readily admitted that his environment is a unique one, and what works for Urban City Community College may not work at another institution. He seemed very proud of this uniqueness, proclaiming UCCC as a happy, "dysfunctional family." According to Patterson, sometimes "fit" is more important than performance, and he plays a very direct role in making sure that a certain level of harmony is achieved.

Highly accessible, President Patterson prides himself on working with an open door; even if it means that the chain of command is broken. Said Patterson,

My door is literally open all day. I mean, I don't just say I have an open

door; I have an open door that people literally use and especially…this

gets me in trouble…I will never turn an employee or a student away.

Doesn't matter what I am doing…again there is a balancing act on my part

because…I mean custodians come and see me all the time… they are my

buddies… they will come see me for advice…'I'm having trouble with my

supervisor, how should I handle my supervisor'? Now, I am okay with

that…I'm in an awkward position very often, but I'm okay with that

because it helps. Now, the supervisors don't particularly like the fact that

these people came to see me…and very often I have to not tell them…It's

a slippery slope sometimes and I'm well aware of it but it works.

Proud of his record of not having "a single grievance" from any of the

unions at the college, Dr. Patterson clearly dedicates a lot of time to

communication in all forms: He is visible, accessible, and highly informal most of

the time. He also seems to enjoy the same level of support, both internal and

external, that he did when he was first "courted" to the presidency 13 years ago.

Concludes Patterson, "I'm still on my honeymoon here…Seriously. We have fun

every day here. We really do."

Noses In, Fingers Out

Dr. Michael Titan

President of Hill Community College

"It's important that the board knows what its role is and respect the administration to do certain things…there are no secrets. Anything they want to know about, we're happy to tell. We're open, we're accountable…but if there are problems and issues they are not happy about, they need to give us a chance to fix it ourselves."

President Titan has been the president of Hill Community College for 23 years. His presidency at Hill Community College is his first, and like president Patterson, was promoted from within. Prior to becoming president, he served as the chief academic officer for eight years. President Titan holds a doctorate. Hill Community College serves a predominantly affluent county, and the look of the campus reflects this. HCC enrolls approximately 8,300 students. While not as diverse as Urban City Community College, its diversity is steadily growing. This is a value of President Titan, something he actively works to increase through his administrative team. Titan pointed out:

> Our student population was 90% white. We always got beat up in Trenton for not having more representation, and we worked hard to make sure we had more representation in our student body than was in the population of origin and we've been successful in doing that. That was part of my vision.

There was a formal air in President Titan's office suite. The staff was very polite, and polished. The office was furnished elegantly, and was located in a recently renovated building. President Titan provided a personal tour of the facilities, pointing out recent renovations, new construction, and state-of-the-art features. It was clear that President Titan is very proud of the facility, which was immaculately maintained.

The Nature of his Presidency

Prior to becoming president of Hill Community College, President Michael Titan was the only cabinet officer who was not a founding officer of the institution. With extensive experience in both academic and student affairs outside of the community college sector, he felt at times like an "outsider" which often posed challenges:

> I was the only person in senior management who wasn't a founder at the college. The founding president was still here, the founding chief business officer was still here, the chief student development officer was still here, and they were the team that put this college together. I was the outsider coming in and that was always a challenge…The founding president was a terrific person, very dedicated, had very high expectations in terms of academic excellence that has prevailed. But he was also very conservative, quite controlling and so forth and there was always a question about how much control he had versus the board. And he was not particularly forward looking in terms of technology…so there was a fair amount of frustration on my part and on the part of other people when he

retired…my vision was to more actively engage technology….but more importantly, the metaphor I use is like 'taking the lid off the bubbling pot' and allowing people to do what they wanted to do…within constraints…we have tremendous people here…and given some flexibility and guidance, we were just able to achieve excellence in a lot of different areas.

The first years were not easy. Early in his presidency, there was a "major fallout" between the college's board of trustees and the county freeholders. The county ended up cutting the college's budget by one million dollars, and as a result, President Titan had to restructure the college in a very significant way. He recalls:

It was quite a major undertaking. We brought in a consultant, we did an evaluation of all of our positions…we ended up eliminating several positions, consolidating some…I think there are about 30 positions that were involved in total that were either changed or eliminated and in the final analysis, I think only one or two people actually had to leave the college…But it was a very traumatic experience for the college. It took over a year to go through this process, and we were able to absorb the million dollar hit in a way that didn't damage the academic integrity of the college, which was the primary focus of what we wanted to protect.

Advisory Groups

Since the presidency at Hill Community College was his first, President Titan looked for guidance from top business professionals. He put together an

advisory group of three prominent leaders from business and industry. His

advisors were very sophisticated people in that in addition to serving as chief

executive officers of major corporations, they had also served on the boards on

major universities, one of them ivy league. Titan commented:

> I decided that it would be a good idea for me to have a, what I called a
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> presidential advisory committee because I was a new president…one was
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> a president of a bank and also the president of the [local] chamber of
>
> commerce, the other was the president and CEO of a corporation and
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> there are books written about him. And the other was the former president
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> and CEO of [a major pharmaceutical company]. I met with them
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> periodically, once or twice a year because I thought it was important for
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> me to have people I could talk to who had the executive level experience
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> and I could talk to them about things I wasn't ready to talk to the board
>
> about yet.

One of the major pieces of advice came early on from the pharmaceutical

CEO who told him, "Michael, when you do this [cut the budget] it's going to be

painful but you've got to cut deep enough so that you don't have to do this

again." Taking the CEO's advice, President Titan cut more aggressively than

perhaps was necessary. The advice has seemingly paid off. In the 10 years

following the cut, they have not had to do it again. "And I think we are as good, or

stronger than we were when we started the process" commented Titan.

Another advisory group to the president is the College Council, made up

of administrators, faculty, staff and students. It is the central governance

mechanism of the college, and advises the president on a variety of issues, student, academic, and otherwise. Interestingly, the faculty at Hill Community College has expressed dissatisfaction with this structure because of its inclusivity:

> From time to time, the faculty want a faculty senate, and I have taken the position that you have representation on the College Council, and the union. I think, and again, based on my experience at [other university] having a faculty senate and a union gets very confusing because sometimes the leadership of these two groups is not the same, so then the question becomes who really speaks for the faculty?…so you make a good faith effort to make sure we get input form across the faculty and others in the decision-making process, but not the final authority.

The Importance of Communication

President Titan spoke at length about the importance of communication. When he was forced to cut one million dollars from the college's budget, he held a college-wide meeting before the process officially began to explain what the process would be. He welcomed input from the college community and revised the process accordingly. Recalled Titan,

> The great majority of people on campus understood that this was not something I wanted to do, and I think they respected the process that we tried to use and we tried to engage them and listen to their concerns. We had to make sure that we were not suggesting something that…would be really difficult. But there are still people on campus who, the organization

who did the study was called the [Generic] group…and if you mention the word 'Generic' on campus, there are still people who get pretty upset…but the process was as open as it could be.

President Titan shared a story that illustrated the importance he places on open communication. As peers, President Titan (then Academic Dean) and the chief financial officer had their share of difficult moments together. When Titan became president, he approached the chief financial officer, and told him that he sincerely hoped that they would be able to work together, despite their past differences. The chief financial officer responded by telling President Titan that he would try to work with him, but that he would not share with him where all of the money was, as he feared the he [Titan] would spend it. "You have to understand," said the chief financial officer, "that I have a special relationship with the Board of Trustees and they depend on me for certain kinds of information." Titan responded by telling him that this was not going to work. They tried without success to make it work for a while. And so the chief financial officer was relieved of his duties, and offered a position on the faculty. He then hired a financial officer that had an entirely different attitude. Titan recalls:

> The [new chief financial officer] brought a whole new attitude…the basic difference was that he knew the money was not his…that it really was the college's, and he saw his job as to try to help people find ways to do things rather than tell them why they couldn't do something.

President Titan clearly values open communication and transparency. The new budget process has been in place for 27 years, and is widely embraced.

Significant Contributions

President Titan is very proud of two major contributions in his presidency; the first was to establish a foundation. The second contribution has to do with faculty, and their professional development. Hill Community College continues to have the highest ratio of full-time faculty to student ratio in the state. "The initial faculty that was hired was very strong in terms of its academic credentials…and I believe in Parkinson's Law, that strong people are going to hire strong people" commented Titan. When asked what was important to faculty, he spoke of academic excellence, and having higher standards. To that end, Titan established the Center for Teaching Excellence. In his inaugural address, President Titan emphasized that the quality of education essentially comes down to what takes place in the classroom on a daily basis between the faculty member and the student. The center is a "mechanism to enable faculty to further develop their skills in teaching or using new technology…that would enhance the classroom experience" commented Titan.

Challenges and the Road Ahead

Some of the challenges being faced by community colleges across the nation are not being felt by Hill Community College. With the growth of traditionally aged college students in the sector, many institutions are struggling to create a more traditional collegiate experience which students expect and demand. Hill Community College was founded approximately 40 years ago, and

the men and women who founded the college were committed at the time to ensuring students would have the "complete collegiate experience."

As such, they built a very robust student development program which included athletics, student government, student newspaper, and a student judicial board. These things that many institutions are more recently trying to develop have been in place at Hill Community College since "day one." "I'm proud of the fact that the student newspaper, probably the only student newspaper in community colleges, has been in existence continuously for 40 years and it's been an outstanding paper" said Titan. Other institutions who did not start with that philosophy are now feeling increased pressures to offer that full experience to students, including the addition of residence halls. Said Titan:

> There are community colleges that are doing this and you know there is a part of that in terms of the student development aspect of things…that may not be all that farfetched…Monroe Community College opened dorms and filled them immediately and they are opening a second set of dorms. Other colleges in New York State are doing the same. None of the colleges in New Jersey have taken that jump, but they might be thinking about it.

Consistent with the literature, President Titan also pointed out that the impact of technology will continue to challenge higher education in general. "The impact of technology is ever-changing and grows geometrically" said President Titan. He continued, "…when you think about the things we are doing now that we weren't doing ten years ago, then you think, 'okay, what are we going to be

doing ten years from now'." President Titan pointed out that students today are coming in with very high expectations, with strong computer skills.

He also wrestles with the concept of the community college being all things to all people, particularly in the area of workforce development, and how much emphasis should be placed in that area. He stated:

> We're part of the community, and we have responsibilities to the community. I think economic development is part of that responsibility, providing the training…for growing industries. In our case, we actually manage a small business incubator with about 12 companies in it, which is there for the purpose of creating jobs on a military base…we're working with corporations trying to customize training…and that's an area that I can see continuing to grow, but again it is so different form the traditional age students that maintaining that balance…could be a challenge for us, for going forward.

In an age of declining resources, President Titan emphasized the need for our institutions to become more entrepreneurial; to find new sources of revenue.

Summary

Throughout the interview, President Titan commented about having a highly credentialed faculty, and "tremendous" people at Hill Community College. Academic excellence and standards are very important to him, and to the HCC community, both internal and external. His support of faculty development and the ongoing commitment to providing students a complete collegiate experience

are his proudest achievements. "We have everything but the dorms," Titan commented. He loves his job. Said Titan:

> I think it's probably one of the best jobs in the world and I love it for a lot of
> different reasons…it's always different, the diversity…I love the
> diversity…I am naturally inclined to be interested in a lot of different
> things…my day is never the same, there's always something new. I mean,
> [my senior student affairs officer] and I laugh all the time. Just when you
> think you've seen everything, something else pops up, so there's never a
> loss for new approaches or creativity on the part of students or staff to do
> something. So there's always a challenge to be dealt with, and again, it's
> so fortunate to have terrific people to work with…One of my trustees
> called me last night…he said, 'You know you've got a great
> cabinet…We're just so happy with the way things are going.'

Again, talent and excellence are valued at Hill Community College, and President Titan sees his great challenge to be continuing that level of excellence. He concluded:

> We've had some changes because of retirements…and we've really
> added some tremendous new people…so one of the challenges right now,
> and a challenge for the institution is to go through the transition…it's not
> only presidents turning over in the next 10 years, it's professional staff and
> faculty…and I feel one of my primary challenges is to…work that process;
> to make sure that the people we hire going forward are gonna be here for

the next 10 years and will continue the commitment we have now to academic excellence and service to our students.

To that end, President Titan and his team consciously build leadership opportunities and career ladders for the HCC professional staff. Without having a specific succession plan, they are committed to having people in place who are ready to assume the next level positions when they become available.

If You're Gonna Be Good You Really Have to Like It

Dr. Grace Smith

President of Continental Community College

"You really have to deep understanding of the political nature of these positions;

that they will require you to navigate a political landscape; that there will be

pressures on you because of the politics, and that those pressures require

careful negotiations. I think presidents get into a lot of trouble because they didn't

understand that."

For President Smith, her appointment as president of Continental

Community College in 2000 represented a return to a college where she was

senior administrator for curriculum and pedagogy for a year before accepting a

presidency, her first, at another community college in 1997. She returned to

Continental Community College as president at the age of 47. A graduate of a

community college, President Smith is a nationally recognized expert on

community college education, and has authored countless articles and books on

the subject. Continental Community College has a headcount of over 15,000

students. The campus is located in an inner-city, and serves a large immigrant

population.

President Smith greeted me in a friendly, though rushed manner. It was

clear that, given her prominence in the community college movement, coupled

with the fact that she, by gender, belongs to an underrepresented group, is called

upon often to participate in research studies on the community college. The

presidential office suite was modestly appointed, neat, and organized. The support staff had a very easy rapport with Dr. Smith, suggesting an informal environment in the office.

The Nature of her Presidency

There's an extraordinary opportunity for community colleges to redefine our essence. The ways in which community colleges are fundamental to middle class in America, I think it's traumatically understated.

President Smith came to Continental Community College as its new president after a three year presidency, her first, at Rural Community College, a mid-sized community college in a rural setting in a nearby state. In that first presidency, she made many of her self-described "rookie mistakes" that she vowed never to make again in her career. One "rookie' mistake she talked about at length was failing to truly understanding the political landscape of the institution. Smith reflected:

> You do really have to learn this stuff. It's not innate. And you won't do it falling off a log, you really have to learn about it. And then I think the experience is in how you apply it and everybody makes a gazillion rookie mistakes and you think, 'Oh my God I will never do that again' and it's a powerful teacher.

Early in her tenure as president at Rural Community College, she had secured 12 million dollars to build a new building. Proud of "bringing home the bacon" as she called it, and understanding that this was a big opportunity for the

college and the community to build something special, she began the process of

bringing in the best architects, known for their work in higher education, to

present their ideas of what could be done with the resources available. Trustee

involvement was strong in the process, and they asked that in addition to the

nationally known architects, they also consider a local architect for the job.

President Smith recalls:

> We really wanted great planners who could really think through a master
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> plan, situate what they're building there, give a new vision for the
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> campus…We got some amazing architects, some nationally known
>
> architects to come in. We set up a committee, mostly board members,
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> with one or two representatives from the campus itself. So we went
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> through a process where we interviewed these planners…there were four
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> of them that I was thinking 'I don't know how I'm going to select them.
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> They're extraordinary.' The work they had already done in preparation and
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> the ideas for the campus were just really unbelievable. They were
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> extraordinary except for the one that had been put on by the board who
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> was a local person who came in extremely underprepared, who really had
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> not read any of the documents that we had prepared, had really done no
>
> conceptual thinking whatsoever and had a very weak staff in terms of
>
> space planning and utilization and understanding what an FTE
>
> was…really the basics they didn't understand…and the board, who was
>
> the majority of the group, picked the local guy. And it turned out, of course,
>
> that the local guy was very connected to the county executive; was a

major donor to the political party that was in play and not one of those board members had any compunction at all about giving this to this guy. I actually left the campus before the building was built…they asked me back to the inauguration of the new president, and I went through the building. It was made of shoddy materials, it's got a really poor design, and really it was my naïveté in not understanding that this was not about quality, it was not about doing something for the community. It was about political payback.

President Smith expressed that she failed Rural Community College and the community by mismanaging that situation. She reflected:

I'll never make that mistake again. Had I been aware, I would have structured it so that quality could rise to the top…understanding that the politics does play a part, that maybe you could have broken the whole project up into a couple of pieces, so you can give the local person who the county executive wants to have some small piece, that wouldn't damage the whole thing. It would probably not have been as good as you could have done, but you would have this overall impact on the college and the community.

This experience, though clearly painful, helped to shape the president she is today. President Smith shared that at Continental, she has successfully negotiated a lot of different deals for the benefit of the institution. She shared,

We have about 2 million square feet, and there is about a million more

square feet that I need to get renovated. I've brought in politicians, I'll

name anything for anybody, but I make sure I get to choose the architects

that come in. We do very public and open decision-making to get the

ideas, and then the final selection of personnel is really in my office. So

finding ways to both understand that it is a political process and a public

process, but making sure that it is not a crassly political process, which it

was at this place, that was really important for me to learn.

While the lessons she learned about the political nature of community

colleges impacted President Smith as a decision-maker, it was the vision she

had for Continental that guided her work. Continental, in its heyday, was a

nationally recognized institution, known for its innovative practices, outstanding

faculty, and programs. According to President Smith, the institution began to rest

on its laurels, and when she first arrived as president, was convinced that the

place really did not "live up to the hype." In meetings with her staff, the college

was described as an oppressive place by the people that made up her leadership

team. While internal leadership had something to do with the described

oppressive environment, the city's mayor, who was a very powerful public figure,

also, according to President Smith, played a role in creating that negative

environment. The mayor had declared war on community colleges. Reflected

Smith:

He hated community colleges. He went after them relentlessly.

He is a formidable and nasty man, and that's who he was, and who he

wanted to be and because he couldn't control the community colleges, he

was going to bash them. He wanted to bring them to their knees. So it [the

oppression] had been internal and external, and it dampened the spirit

here.

A change in the political landscape and leadership at Continental provided

the opportunity to change things. Smith called it "back to the future." She

reflected:

I wanted to create a place where people felt extraordinary about it. There

was a lot of hype about Continental then, and a lot of things I would look at

them and there was no substance to the reason for the good reputation,

but the good reputation remained. So I wanted to again, be a place of

innovation; be a national leader; be a place where people would want to

come to learn what we did…also to create one of the best faculties in the

country…and I think we've gotten there. I really feel very much that I have

the very best faculty I have ever seen. They are an extraordinary group of

human beings. We've taken national leadership on a lot of things…

So we've really gotten to position the college in the place I wanted to

position it. So it was about, in this weird way, sort of living up to an ethos

and to a conceptualization of ourselves that was more real and taking it

further. Part of it was overcoming that malaise, reinvigorating people,

letting their best selves shine again, reclaiming some of that historical

sense of who we were, but that wasn't real anymore, and then using that

as a platform to move forward.

Something that was not part of the original plan or ethos of Continental was the commitment to diversity that, in large part, defines the college today. This commitment to diversity was very important to President Smith, and an area she wanted to develop. According to Smith, two-thirds of Continental's students are foreign-born, and they come from over 150 countries. Shared Smith:

 To really capture that as a unique essence of Continental, that when

captured and delivered effectively; I think it's the new America…It's sort of

like, that's where the world is going. You can be in Kansas City and think,

there will only be people who look like me, white middle class women, and

you get there and it's like, no, there are a lot of people from Somalia, there

are a lot of people from Mexico, there are Croatians. The world looks quite

different, even in sort of the heartland of America. So Continental is at the

bleeding edge of that and faculty here and the staff have learned, in a tacit

kind of way, and sometimes an unarticulated way, how to capture that,

and we need to take that further.

Governance: Transparency and Unbending Standards

"Governance is good governance, only when it is focused on the central issues of

what it means to be a community college. And unfortunately, that is where I see

most governance fail"

Effective governance is a key, but somewhat elusive aspect in community college leadership according to President Smith. She reflected:

If all your college senate does, for example, is talk about whether or not the bathrooms are clean enough, and no one ever talks about the test rates in developmental skills, nobody ever talks about the retention rate, you don't have good governance. You have something else. So part of governance is that the focus is on the central issues of your community college campus. Do you argue about release time, or do you actually look at student learning? If you are only arguing about release time, you're looking at the wrong thing. So part of good governance is really making sure that the central issues that make you a college…Are you teaching the right things? Are your curriculum up to date? How do you know that? What evidence do you have? How do you share that evidence?

One precursor to effective governance according to Smith is transparency in the decision-making process. That transparency, according to Smith, usually has to do with money or personnel. She shared:

It's really all about either money or people. That's it. Curriculum, you know, we can argue about where the comma goes, but basically, it's going to be about money and people. And even the curriculum are normally about money and people. 'I don't like this degree requirement!' Why? 'Because my course isn't in it!'

Having "unbending" standards, said Smith, is also a key component to effective governance. One place that "unbending" standards is critical is in the tenure and promotion process. Reflected Smith:

When I first came here, the structure here at Continental is that, for tenure or promotion, there is a departmental level committee that says up or down. If it's up, they go to a college-wide committee, which I think is essential and it really looks to create a standard across all of the different departments on campus...And then they recommend to me and I make my final and independent decision...When I first came here, there was no department that said no to anybody. The college-wide committee never said no to anybody, and the president never said no to anybody. When I looked at the articulated standards, which at Continental are quite high…almost nobody was making those standards. And so that first year, I said no to a lot, like 30% of the promotion and tenure cases, and that was unprecedented. Of course, the union was like, 'this is terrible, you are not listening to us' and I was like, 'no, you are not listening to yourself! You set standards, and you didn't apply them, so you guys have to get better!' We're now at a place where, I haven't denied somebody…in forever, and it's because there are really high standards, and they're really articulated, but there's also accountability…I started holding the standard, the college-wide started holding the standard, then the departments holds the standard. Now we almost never see someone at the college-wide

[committee] who is below standard. And I can't remember a time when the

whole college committee said this is a good person and I said no.

"A 'yes' is always easier than the 'difficult no'" shared Dr. Smith (paraphrasing

from another community college president). She insisted, however, that a

president has to have the "difficult no" if he or she is going to have any integrity.

Transparency also has to do with knowing that there are clear standards

and they are "not arbitrary" or "about personality" according to Smith. She

offered:

People can disagree about how a standard is applied. There are nuances

in that. It's not always so clear…there are arguments…'I see that as

scholarship, you don't.' But you are looking at the right things. I think

governance allows for clear standards and accountability, and builds

strength.

Self Awareness

Self awareness, and all of its implications, is very important in successful

leadership according to Smith. In her experience, the old adage of "do what you

say, say what you do" is imperative to being an authentic leader. She shared:

Don't try to say you do matrix management if really you're a command and

control kind of person. But if you are that, understand the limits of that.

And again, open yourself up. You've gotta be reading about what is

leadership? How is it defined in an organization? What does technology

do to leadership? To understand all of that takes an active mind and you

have to apply yourself.

In addition to self-awareness, Dr. Smith shared that the institution is also highly aware of the president. It is a highly scrutinized position according to Smith. She cautioned:

Everyone will be watching you. When I walk into this campus…if I had like a terrible morning…you can just feel people like 'Ooh something's bad.' You have people look at you…you lose a pound, you gain a pound, everybody knows. It's sort of a very public position and you have to be prepared for the level of scrutiny that you'll have.

Transforming Lives

When asked about what was important to faculty, Dr. Smith quickly pointed out that for the best faculty, what is really important is making a difference in student learning. For Smith, it is important that faculty are deeply knowledgeable as scholar practitioners of how to teach, and more specifically, how to teach at a community college. She shared that at Continental, the faculty genuinely love the students they teach, and there is never an indication from faculty that they should have higher performing students. Describing Continental faculty attitudes about students, she said:

There's no like 'all of these students shouldn't be here' or 'you should have gotten us a better group.' There's none of that. It's 'we are in exactly the right place, because what we want to do is transform lives.' We want to take kids who had bad preparation, or because of poverty, or mental illness in their family, or whatever, have not had a square shake at getting

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where they need to go, or who have three kids at home, husband who's out of work, you know - the regular community college student. You have to love those students, and the Continental faculty really do. And they care deeply about whether or not they can learn…

Regarding the faculty's professional desires, President Smith quickly responded, "They want the satisfaction of knowing that they are great scholar practitioners in the classroom, and they are great scholars in their discipline." To that end, President Smith shared that she is deeply committed to creating a culture of very high standards within where faculty have the freedom to create. Shared Smith:

I think they care about being a good college citizen – a citizen of your college. To be engaged with each other as co-travelers on this process of making a college, which is really what the faculty do – They make the college, they do it in conversation with each other, they do it by challenging each other, and they do it by figuring out what it the next thing we should be doing. In doing that I think that faculty find their head – they find their lead. Faculty are very much self-initiators.

Challenges and the Road Ahead

According to President Smith, it is time for a paradigm shift in the community college. Both the policy paradigm, and the funding paradigm must be changed in order for community colleges to survive. Reflected Smith, "I think if those two things line up, everthing else is sort of the normal problems. Did the boiler break? What should your tuition be? Those kinds of problems." The policy paradigm, according to Smith, has to do with reframing what higher education

actually means. That reframing will have implications of how we measure what we do, how we hire, the technology we use, how we assess students, and how we assess institutions. In reference to the funding paradigm, Smith offered:

> I think that there is extraordinary funding inequity and that the community colleges can no longer be funded on an FTE basis less than an elementary school. The system will break. If you think about it as…If community colleges are a pivot point, the sheer weight of the need of this country to educate, and educate people who are not making it out of high school, or have GED's, or that are already in the workforce. How are you going to get them up to a space where they are really going to be productive? It's going to be at the community colleges. But if we don't change how we're funded, and if we're always seen as the place the county cuts, the state cuts, the place where the federal government doesn't step in, it's gonna break, and I think that that will destabilize the pyramid of higher education in the United States.

President Smith also shared that for-profit institutions are outpacing community colleges, and that if the community college continues to operate with the same framework, it risks becoming extinct. Stated Smith:

> The New York Times has recently, in the last few months, has connected with several for-profit and not-for-profit institutions to offer associates degrees. Johnson, the for-profit university is really gaining ground. The AFLCIO (Union) has bought a for-profit college so that they can do an on-

line associates degree. If we try and continue our same framework, our same paradigm, our same funding, our same policies, we'll be extinct. And it won't be very long. It'll be 20, 30, 40 years, and then there won't be anything called a community college.

Faculty, who, according to President Smith, are the "lifeblood" of a campus, must be involved in the facing these challenges. "We are going to have to change some things pretty fundamentally. And I think…faculty really have to read about that. They have to understand how different the world is."

Conclusion

President Smith has very high standards, and a wealth of knowledge of the American community college. Recently, she traveled to South America to help a country, who was very interested in the work Continental was doing, create their first community college. She is deeply passionate about the field of higher education, and the place the community college holds within it. She holds her faculty in high regard, respect, and esteem, and considers them to be most central to the life and culture of the institution.

She believes that scholarship, in addition to experience, is critical to successful leadership. Shared Smith:

I think there's a lot to be learned. A lot of it is self-taught, but you better be reading the Wall Street Journal and the Harvard Business Review to better understand what the political situation is in your community. You've gotta be reading the community college literature and understanding that. So, there's a lot to master out there but it's definitely available to learn and

I think you do have to learn it. I think experience comes in how you apply

it.

She considers most governance mechanisms at community colleges to be

ineffective, mainly because they focus on the wrong issues, and fail to ask the

right questions:

We're arguing about the wrong things. We're arguing about how many

square feet do we get for our classroom, or do you like the temperature,

or, should the calendar start on August 31st or September 3rd. And there

are huge fights, and people are yelling and all of that, and no one is ever

saying, "well once we get those students in here, how many students get

through developmental English. How many of the Black kids from Newark

are coming to our campus. How many GED students ever make it to a

credit course. If those aren't the issues of governance, then you don't

have good governance…Are all the white kids getting through

developmental math, and none of the Hispanic kids getting through

developmental math? If you don't know that, as a college governance

system, you are not doing the right thing. And then, whose responsibility is

that? Again, if college governance doesn't say, 'It's OUR responsibility.

We're going to take this on. We're going to figure this out.'

President Smith is also very concerned about the future of the community

colleges in terms of their viability. She warned that they could become extinct in

the not so distant future if fundamental change does not occur. From Smith's

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perspective, this is the greatest challenge for current and future community college leadership. All challenges considered, however, President Smith also sees this as an extraordinary opportunity to really look at things in a different way and make positive change. Concluded Smith:

> There's real power in these positions to make a difference in the community and in the lives of students, and I think on the national scene…I think it will be challenging, but I think all of higher education will be challenging. And I think the challenges are going to come from places we don't expect. I think the international stuff is really going to be challenging. I think the workplace stuff is really going to be challenging. I think this connection of media and higher ed to offer degrees…I mean, people who talk about for-profit, well that's way beyond for-profit. Suddenly you're reading the NY Times online, and you're also getting your degree. I mean the ways in which all of the fundamental structures that we have…to be a college president you have to have a faculty, you have to have a building. Who knows? Maybe you don't need any of those, maybe you just need a newspaper! I think it will be interesting and challenging, but as I said, a real opportunity as well to make a difference and to be a part of this change, to direct it in a way that feels that it has integrity.

You Know, We Really Are Hired Hands.

Dr. Edmundo Rodriguez

President of LaReina Community College

"I think the most successful presidents have been the ones who understand that

their work is really to facilitate the work of the faculty."

The most experienced of the four presidents interviewed for this study has

served as president at three community colleges spanning over 27 years.

President Edmundo Rodriguez is currently in his ninth year as president of

LaReina Community College, which is located in a suburban, upper middle class

neighborhood with many wealthy residents. LaReina is part of a larger university

system where the president reports to a chancellor. The campus was well-

maintained, and the president's office suite was well appointed with upscale

furniture. Currently 67 years of age, President Rodriguez first became a

community college president at the age of 42. The institution where he obtained

his first presidency had tremendous challenges at the time he took office, and

was at risk of losing its accreditation. Recalled Rodriguez:

> It was the type of presidency that only a 42 year old kid gets. By the time I
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> left, they had bought the land, they had tenure, and they had full
>
> accreditation from the [accrediting agency] and that was good.

It was a sense of civic responsibility that initially drove President

Rodriguez to pursue a presidency. Recalled Rodriguez, "I felt as a teacher I

could influence 150 students at a time, where as an administrator, I could create

policies that would help thousands." Translating that desire into action, however, was a bit more difficult. According to President Rodriguez, there was no real training to prepare him for the job of president. "We all learned the job by the seat of our pants!" he commented. "I mean, we may have taken a course here, and a course there, but we really didn't, you know, create a written rule as to how to do this."

The Nature of His Presidency

President Rodriguez readily admitted that he was not the search committee's first choice candidate for the presidency of LaReina. "The first choice was another individual," noted Rodriguez, a fact that, from his perspective, freed him from having any "allegiance" to them. He was 59 years old when he became president, and felt that while there were a couple of things he genuinely wished to accomplish, he had nothing he needed to prove professionally. As a matter of fact, when he initially accepted the post of president, he did so with the intention of retiring only three years later, at the age of 62. Reflected Rodriguez:

> I came in with the understanding that first of all, their committee did not
> select me, and second of all, I came in with the idea that I was going to do
> something about ensuring the success of the student rather than just
> providing the opportunities to students, and I didn't have a board of
> trustees because it was a university [system]…so that freed me to do what
> I would call the curriculum development…and then I didn't care. If the
> bosses didn't like it, well thank you very much.

Very early in his tenure as president, just months after starting, President Rodriguez laid out a four-point plan to the college community, something he suggested every new president should do, particularly in situations where there is dissent about the choice of president. The plan included straightforward, easy to measure initiatives which included cleaning up the campus, faculty development, developing a strategic plan, and fundraising. Recalled Rodriguez:

The agenda was very clear, so six months after I started I was able to go back to the faculty of this college and say 'look, this was the agenda. How is the campus now? Do we have a strategic plan? Do we have a faculty development program? Fundraising?' There was no excuse as to whether I was on the right track or not. That worked, and my advice to somebody who was getting into the presidency…as quickly as you can…put out an agenda like that and then measure yourself against it.

The President and the Faculty

A self-described overly involved and "intrusive" president, President Rodriguez has had four chief academic officers in his nine years as president at LaReina, a fact he admits he is not proud of. Very candid about his self-perceived shortcomings, he shared:

I am too emotional about the job at times and that's not good. In this job you have to be a little bit more circumspect. I always feel that if I express what I am trying to say, the other person is going to get it. I have never learned that they only hear whatever they want to hear. So that has gotten me into moments that are difficult.

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A dominant theme that emerged with President Rodriguez was that of the critical role of the faculty. President Rodriguez expressed that presidents should ideally come from the faculty ranks, and that there is danger in hiring a "specialist" to be a president. The best college presidents, shared Rodriguez, are members of the faculty who have decided that they "needed to work for that title." He added, "It doesn't hurt to take a person like that and develop them into a president." President Rodriguez himself came from the faculty, and served as a chief academic officer before he became a president. Stated Rodriguez:

When the college is looking for a new president, it is generally a committee that is comprised of the faculty, with some additions like trustees, students, you know, community leaders. But the main bulk of the presidential search committees is the faculty. The faculty is the one that begins to develop who they want as a college president. What is also telling is that when you have an inauguration of the college president, it generally takes place a year after the appointment. If you research the literature, you will find that the tradition for that is that the faculty will give the "director" a year of probation, and if they were happy with the person, then they had a celebration inaugural...I think the most successful presidents have been the ones who understand that their work is really to facilitate the work of the faculty.

Faculty development was also central to the original four-point plan that President Rodriguez laid out early in his presidency. He saw professional

development for faculty as critical to getting them "on board." Shared Rodriguez,
"They needed to have the ability to express themselves as professionals…to see
themselves as professionals rather than people on the job." He described his
relationship with the faculty at LaReina as positive, and has gone to great lengths
to protect their role at the college. Recently, the chancellor of the university
expressed a desire to eliminate the practice of electing department chairpersons,
and to have administration appoint chairpersons instead. Shared Rodriguez:

> Sixteen of the 17 presidents [in the university system] are with the
> chancellor…I want to elect these chairs because I think I have the
> intestinal fortitude not to ratify an election if somebody is elected that I
> think is the wrong person. And I have that authority and I have removed
> two sitting chairs because I felt that they were not doing what they were
> supposed to be doing. So, if I have the intestinal fortitude to exercise may
> authority I think that having elected chairs is good, because what we are
> saying to the faculty is, 'We have enough trust in you to know that you are
> going to elect somebody you have confidence in.' They don't have to be
> *my* administrators, but at the same time, I do have some control and I
> exercise it.

Central to the role of president according to Dr. Rodriguez is guiding
creativity, or setting parameters so that creativity can emerge in a focused way.
He was quick to point out that he truly meant "guide" and not "control." "You don't
give the keys to a Mercedes to a 14 year old kid and then tell them 'don't have an

accident'" cautioned Rodriguez. One example he gave of guiding creativity was the creation of freshman academies at LaReina. He really wanted to create a private school environment in a public setting, meaning that he wanted students to feel that they were attending a "real" college, that they be pampered and monitored, and that they received intensive academic guidance, ensuring they got the right courses at the right time. "But how you do it, that's a different story" said President Rodriguez. He continued:

> I think that if we just create the environment or the canvas…and then you say, 'you do whatever you want'…some people are going to go in one direction, some go in another direction, and eventually you have a Jackson Pollock painting that could be very beautiful, or you can have a Pollock-type painting that is a piece of [expletive]. So you have to really, as an administrator, you have to really guide that.

What has resulted from this guided creativity is a program he is very satisfied with. While the success rates were not yet available at the time of the interview, President Rodriguez shared that early indicators showed promising results. "I took an idea that had germinated for years…and was able to then implement it at the college…the college then took it, modified it, and made it their own," Rodriguez proudly stated.

Also important in reference to faculty is that they understand their role as educators, and in the shared governance process. President Rodriguez feels that faculty must understand that if they make a decision to become a faculty member at a community college, they must understand that they are going to teach. "And

then we need to make that teaching worthy of research" added Rodriguez.

Having a clear definition of what shared governance is also critical to an

institution. Shared Rodriguez:

> Policy recommendations [from faculty] are extremely important, but they
>
> are in fact recommendations…I have said to faculty, if there is any
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> recommendation, I will certainly pass it on to the trustees. But I will also, if
>
> I disagree with it, I will tell you that I disagree with it, and I will have a
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> minority report that will accompany that recommendation to the
>
> trustees…So again, the definition of parameters is very important.

Quality versus Access

Dr. Rodriguez, while passionate about the work of the community college

in this country, was also highly critical of it. He had strong words to describe how

we continue to "fail" our students. Stated Rodriguez:

> We always talk about open admissions…but you know, with open
>
> admissions, we are always providing opportunities for students to fail and
>
> it really drives me crazy that we raise expectations…We tell someone
>
> 'You are in college' when they are really not. They are *trying* to get into
>
> college.

Further, Dr. Rodriguez strongly criticized the educational system in general. He

continued:

> I really, truly and honestly believe that public education has gotten to a
>
> point where it's almost fraudulent. That we are using public dollars to raise

expectations of people and then not care about them. It's a way to diminish guilt…just throw money at them…think about a woman who makes $45,000 working her [expletive] off, raising two kids, and then because she wants to do something for those kids, she has to pay $1000.00 tuition…to get a better education. She is paying taxes on her salary…I would say if you have to send your child to a private school, then don't pay taxes, because that local [public] school has failed you…we do it with our colleges too.

Challenges and the Road Ahead

When discussing the challenges community colleges face in the future, President Rodriguez was quite outspoken on his positions. On the subject of leadership and the road ahead, he asserted:

I think that we need a new breed of presidents. I think the old guard should go away and I'm one of the old guards. While I have great fears that the next generation will not be able to sustain the pressures that we did, but having said that, we need to wake up the community college movement and understand that we need to pay much more attention to quality rather than access…we already have the access…we need to self-regulate our ability to retain students…that we are responsible for students' success rather than their failure…that we place resources behind that.

He also described an imminent environment of uncertainty in community colleges, given the fact that they are suddenly "hot." He pointed out that the

recent influx of resources is "crumbs" in relative terms. "It [12 billion dollars] will be fought after by close to or over 100 [institutions] and we are going to be eating our young" stated Rodriguez.

Summary

With 27 years of experience, President Rodriguez has seen and experienced a great deal. These experiences have helped to shape the president he is today. Early in his career, he had to let go of 100 faculty members during a fiscal crisis, and he shared that it was one of the hardest things he has ever had to do professionally. That experienced in 1975 shaped him to be fiscally conservative to ensure that he would never have to go through the pain of retrenchments. "I have always been very careful to set aside reserves," shared Rodriguez.

The importance of "professionalizing" the faculty was a recurring theme for Dr. Rodriguez. "As a whole, the faculty at community colleges need some work." At the same time, he stressed the importance of protecting the faculty's central and historic roles in higher education. "We administrators cannot do that and frankly should not do that" he stated in reference to administrative involvement in the tenure process. "They [the faculty] have to look at each other and say 'Is this all there is?' They have to look at each other and say, 'Okay, we are better than this.'"

President Rodriguez believes that there is an art, and a science to administration. "The art comes from the heart" reflected Rodriguez. "You have to believe in the organization to the point where it is not just a job, but it is

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something you are doing because it is the right thing to do." He expressed that with age does not come wisdom, but comes the experience of having seen the same scenarios over and over. Political intelligence and cultural understanding are also key elements for leading an institution. According to Rodriguez, "The ability to understand the essence of the institution and to be able to translate that is extremely important…That is what communication means to me."

Another fundamental quality in good presidents according to President Rodriguez is a sense of social and civic responsibility. Shared Rodriguez:

I wish I could get a bunch of top ten community college presidents together in a room and say, 'what is it that we want out of this system'…and then go out and promote that. I think we need to have that social responsibility to promulgate what should be.

Ultimately, according to Dr. Rodriguez, the community college needs to define itself, its values, and focus on the issue of quality instead of only access. "We don't know what we are. That's the system of community colleges, and in the meantime, 12 million people are coming to it." While there are certainly challenges in the road ahead which could test us in ways not yet anticipated, Dr. Rodriguez remains optimistic about the future of community colleges. He shared:

It could be a time where we become something better than what we are…We need to be optimistic that…after the growing pains, we are going to emerge on the other side as a strong system of higher education.

Chapter Summary

       Chapter Five presented the findings of this study gathered from interviews, observations, and documents. Four sitting community college presidents shared their experiences, and perspectives on the leadership demands and competencies of being a community college president. The analysis of their perceptions contributed to qualitative case study research, and it provides an understanding of leadership in the context of community colleges. Chapter Six will examine the results of cross-case analysis of these interviews.

Chapter 6

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendation

This study began in the Spring of 2009, and its purpose was to examine the perceptions of the leadership demands and competencies of the community college presidency as perceived by sitting community college presidents. The research was conducted with four participants in a multiple case study design. The study addressed two research questions:

1. What background in terms of personal and professional experience and education do community college presidents identify as necessary to act as a decision-maker in a community college environment?

2. How does the president experience decision-making? What qualities help or hinder?

Chapter One provided the background of the study. Chapter Two explored the researcher as a leader. Chapter Three provided a comprehensive review of literature associated with this study. Chapter Four explained the purpose of the study, introduced the research questions, and provided a rationale for the qualitative multiple case study research design. Chapter Four also discussed setting, participant selection, data collection, validity, methods of data analysis, the role of the researcher, and the potential impact of the study. Chapter Five presented the findings on the case studies, the perceptions of four sitting community college presidents of the job demands and leadership competencies. This information was gathered through in-depth interviews, observations, and document review. The findings were drawn from the participants' stories, and the

results were thematically presented. Chapter Six discusses the cross-comparison of themes, and the researcher's conclusions drawn from the study.

Summary

Urban City Community College, Hill Community College, LaReina Community College, and Continental Community College are all very different institutions. Urban City Community College and Continental Community College are urban institutions located in highly diverse cities, and serve primarily low socioeconomic status (SES) students. Hill Community College and LaReina Community College serve a higher SES population and are located in more affluent areas.

Based on high levels of Board, faculty, staff and community support, along with their length of tenure at their respective institutions, Presidents Patterson, Hill, Rodriguez, and Smith have enjoyed successful careers as community college presidents. However, they each employ very different and distinct philosophies and leadership styles. While President Patterson is very involved in the decision-making process at every level, and actively engages in the culture of the organization, President Titan maintains a relative distance, choosing to work through his cabinet and advisory boards with a more traditional, hierarchical approach. "I can speak intelligently on anything going on around here …there is nobody who knows more, a little bit about everything at the college more than me, and everybody knows that" said President Patterson. President Titan, on the other hand, looks to his leadership team for the answers related to their areas of

expertise, and is "interested enough" to learn what he needs to in the more critical areas, such as institutional finances. President Rodriguez is a self-described intrusive manager, and has had four chief academic officers resign or be terminated in a nine year period. Rodriguez is close to retirement, a fact that makes him bolder as he feels he does not have anything to prove or lose. President Smith is highly engaged in process, and likes to have as much as possible articulated. He likes ground rules, and she wants everyone to know what those rules are so that they can freely create within parameters. Clearly, Presidents Patterson and Rodriguez operate in Birnbaum's (1998) collegiate (influencing, persuading) and political (mediating conflict) models, while Presidents Titan and Smith operate primarily in the bureaucratic model, establishing goals, using his chain of command, and engaging in planning.

While President Patterson stressed institutional "fit" as most critical at Urban City Community College (UCCC), President Titan stressed commitment to academic excellence as central to Hill Community College's (HCC) focus. President Patterson suggested that at UCCC they tolerate people who are not "at the top of their game" provided they "fit" in to the institutional culture, while President Titan talked about the importance of retaining the most talented and credentialed staff to maintain their academic and service standards. Presidents Rodriguez (LaReina Community College) and Smith (Continental Community College) also spoke at length about academic excellence and standards as critical to our mission.

When hiring new faculty and staff at their respective colleges, the presidents take a different approach to the process. President Hill and his staff are focused on not only hiring highly credentialed people who shared a commitment to excellence, but also on retaining them. President Patterson's approach is slightly different. His focus is on making sure that the person who is hired is a person who will fit in with the existing culture. "I charged the [search] committee this week and said, 'look, you guys know the tone of this place and it's gotta be someone else who can continue the same tone that we have'" shared Patterson. President Rodriguez stressed the importance of faculty involvement at every level, particularly when hiring the president.

Shared Themes

While the presidents interviewed for this pilot were as different as the institutions they serve, there were some common themes that emerged in the interviews.

Open communication. Open communication emerged as critical in good leadership from all participants. While one president was clearly more informal in his style of communication than the others, all four presidents stressed that communication was a vital component for "buy-in" from the campus community. "The ability to understand the essence of the institution and be able to translate that is extremely important and that's really what communication means to me" stated President Rodriguez. This theme is consistent with the literature, and identified by the American Association of Community Colleges as one of the

critical competencies necessary for the next generation of community college leadership.

Faculty. President Smith had a more has a very high regard for her faculty at Continental, and truly believes that they are among the best faculty she has ever seen. Student learning is of paramount importance to her faculty, as is being a "concerned college citizen." She reflected:

> To be engaged with each other as co-travelers on this process of making a college, which is really what the faculty do…They make the college. They do it in conversation with each other, they do it by challenging each other, and they do it by figuring out what is the next thing we should be doing. In doing that I think that faculty find their head – they find their lead.

President Titan shared that students and academic excellence are most important to faculty, while President Patterson responded that they want a good work environment where they are free to "get things done." Similarly, President Rodriguez stressed that faculty want to be free to be creative, and it is the job of the administration to create an environment where they can do so.

Challenges ahead. Being all things to all people" and funding for these initiatives were challenges discussed by all presidents. Said President Patterson, "Missions are expanding, not contracting…something's going to have to give at our institutions, and [identifying] what that is and managing that in a collegial way is a real challenge". Presidents Titan and Rodriguez concurred with that position. In addition, Titan stressed the need to find new ways to fund existing and new programs. "Community colleges are famous for being more responsive and more

nimble than other institutions…but you can't take it for granted…[we need] to be more entrepreneurial, to find new sources of revenue" offered President Titan.

Shared President Smith, "There's an extraordinary opportunity for community colleges to redefine our essence. The ways in which community colleges are fundamental to middle class in America; I think it's traumatically understated." President Rodriguez also expressed concerns about institutional identity, and that it we fail to truly define what community colleges are, they will become exclusively "workforce development training school programs." Concerns about future funding were dominant in all of the discussions, and all presidents concurred that community colleges can no longer operate on the current funding formulas.

Training the board of trustees. Two of the presidents interviewed work directly with a board of trustees, and two work under a chancellor, though they also have experience working with a board of trustees at prior institutions where they served as president. The two presidents who currently work with a board of trustees shared that they had work to do with their respective boards in terms of what role was appropriate for them to play. Their message was clear; it is critical that the president set a tone with their board, and that the president must lead the board. Both presidents expect that their board will give the presidents and their leadership teams the opportunity to solve problems without interference, and both presidents indicated that their respective boards play an appropriate role in institutional governance. President Rodriguez was very clear about his feeling on the president's relationship to the board. He stated:

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The relationship with the trustees is very political from the get-go…College

presidents, I believe, work for the faculty, the institution; they work for the

students. They do not work for the trustees. Yet the reality of the situation

is that you have this structure that has been developed over the years in

that the trusteeship has become the driving force.

President Smith also talked about the importance of leading the trustees, and

that by having failed to do so in her previous presidency, she ultimately failed the

college and the community.

Fiscal responsibility. President Smith identified "a deep understanding of

the budget" as a critical competency for a president. The competency she

described went well beyond knowing what it costs to run the college, and how

much money is in each of the accounts. She discussed the budget in a broader

sense:

You need to understand how to run your own college. You need to have a

ration-ready sense of where the dollars are coming from, where the dollars

are going to, where you want them to be going to. What the limits are on

how you can use money, those kinds of things. But I also think that college

presidents need to understand the economic context of the college within

their locality and within their state and I think within the country. So to

understand the relationship of education to the economic viability of your

community and to be able to express that, to understand how the state

and cities give and don't give money, to make sure you have positioned

your campus appropriately and how to really determine the elements

within your campus that by refocusing or reformatting what you do on campus you can really provide greater resources to your campus.

After having had to "redline" 100 faculty members early in his career as president, President Rodriguez, describes himself as a fiscal conservative, who pays special attention to finances so that he never again has to go through an experience like that. President Patterson deals with financial matters in a very frank way, both internally and externally. He knows how much money he needs to operate the college, and does not ask stakeholders for a penny more than that figure. This "straight-talk" has helped him to establish trust with the county, and shared that they almost always follow through with honoring their budget requests. President Titan also talked about the importance of hiring the right chief financial officer (CFO). He shared, "Presidents rarely get fired for not having the best curriculum, but plenty get fired for not managing the finances." Having an excellent CFO is critical to that end.

Political intelligence. All four presidents talked at length about the importance of understanding the institutional environment, both internal and external. All shared experiences where politics played an important role in the success or failure of a project or initiative. Each president had a story to share about how failing to understand the politics surrounding a situation negatively affected their effectiveness as a leader. And each president acknowledged that since politics are prevalent in any organization, it is critical for presidents to have political acumen. President Smith offered:

You really have to have a deep understanding that [the position of president] will require you to navigate a political landscape, that there will be pressures on you because of the politics and that those pressures require careful negotiations that I think presidents get into a lot of trouble because they didn't understand that and the politicians will try and use the community college… it's a jewel in a community.

The perspective on political intelligence that was shared by all four presidents is consistent with the literature. Bolman and Deal (2007) talk about the importance of "developing political intelligence to set a direction, build a base of support, and manage relations with opponents and allies" in successful leadership.

It's a great job. All presidents shared their love of the job of community college president. The diversity, in terms of staff, students, responsibilities, day to day experiences, and challenges are attractive to all four presidents. They all expressed that no two days are the same, and that, as President Patterson stated, "The minute you think you've got it figured out, you're wrong." President Titan echoed, "Just when you think you've seen everything, something else pops up." In addition, Presidents Rodriguez and Smith talked about civic and social responsibility as central to their love of the job. "You have to be able to believe in the organization to the point that it is not a job, but it is something that you are doing because it is the right thing to do" stated Rodriguez.

Conclusions

Based on their responses and the literature, (Vaughan, 1989; Pierce & Pederson, 1997; Hockaday & Puyear, 2000; Weisman & Vaughan, 2006) there is

a great deal of versatility that is required of the community college president. However, according to Presidents Titan, Patterson, Rodriguez and Smith, along with Fisher (1984), leadership positions do not confer any leadership abilities. The presidents interviewed for this study all talked about "rookie mistakes" and "learning the job by the seat of one's pants." While there was consensus on many of the demands and competencies necessary for effective leadership, such as the importance of fiscal understanding and responsibility, communication skills, political acumen, managing the board of trustees, and social responsibility, there was no consensus as to *how to attain* these necessary skills. This is also consistent with the literature (AACC, 2005; O'Banion, 2008). There is no set roadmap to success as evidenced by the very different presidents interviewed, who, as different as they are, all enjoy considerable levels of success as president at their respective institution.

Recommendations

Further study is recommended, particularly in the area of organizational culture/institutional fit. An area of great consensus among the participants was that a president who is very talented and successful at one institution, may not be successful at another institution, based on cultural compatibility and fit. Each agreed that even the most successful president, if transplanted to an institution where the institutional culture was not compatible with their leadership style and values, would fail.

Also recommended is that graduate and leadership training programs adopt, as part of their curriculum, some field experience that would require the

student to spend time shadowing a president to be exposed to the actual day to day demands of the position. These demands, as described by the presidents interviewed in this study, require multiple leadership skills to be practiced at any given time. In addition, given the importance of institutional finances, graduate and leadership training programs should also consider requiring a finance course to the curriculum.

Finally, based on the large number of executive leaders retiring in the next five years, institutions should consider engaging in succession planning. According to the literature, the pipeline to fill these vacancies is not adequately filled with people ready to assume executive leadership positions. If the pool is not there, then a pool needs to be cultivated. Community colleges would be well-served by developing programs that identify talent, and develops that talent to be ready when opportunities arise, at every level.

Leadership Revisited

As previously stated, there is no common rulebook or playbook to a successful community college presidency. Based on interviews with four successful presidents with a combined 85 years of experience as presidents, it is clear that what works for one may not work for the other. When considering my leadership; where I am today, where I hope to be tomorrow, it is clear that my transformational and transactional leadership style will serve me well should I become a community college president. As expressed by all four participants in slightly different ways, good presidents set the course and provide a vision for their institution. This is where I am strongest in my leadership, bolstered by an

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attention to the critical transactional pieces of the job. It is encouraging to know that these innate qualities, which have been refined through nearly 20 years of experience as an administrator in higher education will position me well to assume the next level of responsibility: a presidency.

There are two areas where I clearly need to grow are developing political intelligence, and teaching experience. While I consider myself to possess political intelligence to a degree, the levels of political involvement expressed by most of the presidents are quite daunting to me. President Smith relayed a painful story about political payback that impacted her ability to do well by her college, and the surrounding community. Reflecting on her experience, I have enough self-knowledge to recognize that I am not yet prepared to navigate that kind of environment. The outcome of that situation, as described by President Smith, would be debilitating to me. And yet, effectively navigating institutional politics is central to the role of president.

It is also clear that I need to get back into the classroom and teach. While attaining more experience in the classroom will certainly strengthen my portfolio as a candidate for a presidency in the future, my desire to teach goes well beyond that reason. My teaching experience is minimal, and so the bulk of my classroom experience is from the perspective of a student. While I may not agree with President Rodriguez's position that presidents should only come from the faculty ranks, I do believe that faculty make up the lifeblood of an institution. Presidents Rodriguez, Smith, and Titan expressed teaching excellence as being of paramount importance to an institution. I wholeheartedly agree with their

assertion. And a good president needs to appreciate, and understand firsthand the challenges of being a teacher in today's classroom.

To be perfectly candid, this study has transformed me. I originally embarked on this course of study out of genuine curiosity. The idea of one day becoming a community college president was tenuous at best, and stemmed from a conversation with my boss where he communicated that he thought I had the talent to make a good president in the future. I pursued my doctorate for two reasons: First, it had always been a personal goal in my life, and second, earning the doctorate would provide me with the opportunity of doing my job (vice president for student affairs) anywhere. I would not be limited to institutions that only required a master's degree. Through this research project, I find myself genuinely excited about the future of community colleges and my role in that future. I find myself excited about the expanded role I will be able to play in the future of the community college because of my degree. I have always loved what we do in our corner of the higher education world; but having spent time with presidents discussing their journey, the challenges they face, and their thoughts on the future, made me more hungry than ever to join their ranks and helping to shape the future of these indispensable institutions.

I interviewed four community college presidents. Each one had his or her own distinct view of the position, the leadership demands and competencies to be successful in the role, and the challenges for the future. Despite the countless challenges and perceived burdens of the position of president, one thing was

perfectly clear: Each one of the presidents interviewed in this study *loves* the job, and is wholly committed to the community college mission.

Summary

This chapter presented the implications from this study on policy and practice, and provided recommendations for future research. For those seeking a community college presidency, the findings of this study suggest that aspirants should pay careful attention to the culture of the institution, both internal and external. The importance of really understanding the institutional culture was stressed by each candidate as paramount to a successful presidential tenure. Also clear was that, for these presidents, there was no training that fully prepared them for the job. Learning the job "by the seat of one's pants" was a sentiment shared by each of the presidents interviewed for this study.

As a person who aspires to a community college presidency (in ten years or so) I learned that I already possess some of the critical skills for the position. Burnham's leadership paradigm (2001) talks about the fundamental leadership elements (first level) necessary for effective leadership; a strong sense of personal security, communication skills, political acumen; and a commitment to innovation and risk-taking. All four presidents interviewed clearly possessed these inherent qualities, and to a great extent, I believe I do too. The second and third level elements described in Burnham's paradigm are areas where I am growing through both study and experience. The participants in this study made it clear that much of what is described in both the AACC's *A Competency Framework for Community College Leaders*, and Burnham's leadership paradigm

is learned "on the job." It is good to know that it seems I am on the right path. I

am confident that the other pieces, specifically board management, resource

development, and promoting a complex mission, will fall into place with

experience and exposure to different areas within my college, and in the sector at

large.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions:

1. Please tell me about your most significant experiences as a college president.

2. As the leader of the campus, what was the overall environment that you intended to create? What was it like for faculty, staff and students?

3. What does effective governance look like?

4. How do you experience decision-making, specifically with the faculty?

5. What issues are important to faculty?

6. What are the most important changes or trends that you see emerging for the community college and its leadership?

7. The AACC put out a document specifying the six competencies necessary for effective community college leadership. Community College presidents who responded to the document agreed on how essential the competencies were, but that the integration of the competencies was not well established. What are your thoughts on the critical skills or competencies needed for the job of president?

8. Can you tell me about a situation where you made a decision in a way that violated the way you believe decisions should be made?

9. What are some other comments you would like to make regarding your role as a community college president?

Appendix B

Demographic Questionnaire

Pseudo Name: _____

Date: _____

_____

Please Answer the Following:

1. **Gender** _____

2. **Ethnicity** _____

3. **Age** _____

4. **Highest Degree Earned:**
_____

5. **Is this your first community college presidency?**

    _____ **Yes**   _____ **No**

6. **If YES, how long have you been president at your current institution?**

_____

7. **If NO, how long (total number of years) have you been a community**

college president? _____

8. **Institution Size:**
    Approximate FTE _____

    Approximate Headcount _____

Appendix C

Letter to Prospective Participants

April 2, 2009

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXx
President
XXXXXXX Community College

Dear Dr. XXXXX:

I hope this e-mail finds you well and in good spirits!

As you know, I am enrolled in the Rowan University doctoral program, community college cohort. I also serve as the Vice President for Student Affairs at Hudson County Community College. I am embarking on a pilot study that will explore community college presidents' perceptions of the demands and competencies of leadership at the community college presidential level. This exploration will lay the groundwork for future study of the community college presidency. As you are an experienced president, I am very interested in interviewing you about your experiences, and would greatly appreciate having you participate in this pilot study.

Should you agree to participate, your involvement would include a 90 minute interview scheduled at your convenience in a suitable location (preferably on your campus). The interview will remain confidential. Research standards and ethical codes will be followed to protect your privacy. In describing your experiences in this study all descriptors will be excluded. You will be assigned a pseudo name, and the only information on participants will be generic demographic descriptions.

I greatly appreciate your consideration of this request. If you agree to be a part of this pilot study, please reply to this e-mail. I will then place a follow-up-up phone call to your office to answer any questions and to schedule a time for our visit.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours truly,

Paula P. Adelhoch

Appendix D

Informed Consent Form

I agree to participate in a study entitled " Community College Presidents: Perceptions of Leadership Demands and Competencies " which is being conducted by Paula Pando Adelhoch, a student in the Rowan University doctoral program in Educational Leadership.

The purpose of this study is to explore community college presidents' perceptions of the demands and competencies of leadership at the community college presidential level.

The data collected in this study will be combined with data from previous studies and will form the basis of a dissertation on presidential leadership in the community college.

I understand that I will be interviewed about my experienced as a community college president, and that I will fill out a demographic questionnaire. My participation in the study should not exceed ninety (90) minutes.

I understand that I will be assigned a pseudo name and that all the data gathered will be confidential.

I agree that any information obtained from this study may be used in any way thought best for publication or education provided that I am in no way identified and my name is not used.

I understand that there are no physical or psychological risks involved in this study, and that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time without penalty.

I understand that my participation does not imply employment with the state of New Jersey, Rowan University, the principal investigator, or any other project facilitator.

If I have any questions or problems concerning my participation in this study, I may contact Paula Pando Adelhoch at (551) 697- 3805.

Faculty Advisor: Dr. James Coaxum III
Address: Rowan University, Education Hall, 201 Mullica Hill Road, Glassboro, NJ 08028
Phone: 856-256-4779
E-Mail: coaxum@rowan.edu

_____ _____
(Signature of Participant)   (Date)

_____ _____
(Signature of Investigator)   (Date)