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AUTHOR Collins, Charles C.
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ABSTRACT

The author feels that it is necessary to reconsider the makeup of "communities" that form community college districts and to reorganize the boards of trustees that govern the colleges. The boards should more truly represent the people whom the colleges serve, in fact including the students, faculty, and administrators of the colleges. Communities are seen as pluralistic rather than unitary, composed of highly diverse elements, and the boards of trustees should be based on proportional representation--proportional, that is, to the contribution and involvement of the groups actually making up the several communities of the community college. A proposal is made to set up 7-man boards, three of the seats being reserved for the taxpayer-citizens--to be chosen in open elections. A fourth seat would be held ex-officio by the superintendent-president; a fifth would be reserved for the elected representative of the faculty; a sixth would be for a full-time sophomore elected by the student body; and the seventh for a graduate alumnus or an adult evening student elected by either of these two groups. The rationale for including students, faculty and administrators on the board is given, as well as examples of recent trends in this direction. (BB)

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A REDEFINED BOARD FOR A REDEFINED COMMUNITY

Charles C. Collins
Junior College Leadership Program
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The progression of logic used to support most social institutions marches off with direction determined by first premise. First premise, when scrutinized, often turns out to be some stabilized perception or mind-set which may be more historic than it is accurate. If this initial and basic perception is altered, then the whole direction of the logic changes--or at least it would if man were logical. Here now is a case in point: an exploration of a pattern of governance that might follow if the conventional perception of community were rejected and a new, more complex and perhaps more accurate perception of the community were substituted.

Conventional Perception of Community

In the minds of those associated with junior colleges, the usual picture evoked by the term "community" is that piece of geography out there filled with taxpayers--or, more generously, with taxpaying citizens. A certain logical pattern follows from this perception: Those people out there created the college. They pay for it. Those who pay the piper should call the tune.

2

Purpose, policy, rules, and regulations should ultimately rest in their hands. Obviously, this final authority, this ultimate power cannot rest in all their hands at once; so it gets concentrated in those of elected representatives, the board of trustees.

This board hires the president, hires the administrative staff, and, indirectly, hires every instructor on the faculty. Its policy determines which students will be admitted and which will not. To a greater or lesser degree, then, all these people are beholden to the board. The students are the beneficiaries of their largesse. Many board members see the staff as their employees. They serve at the board's pleasure. By this perception, the staff's power is delegated to them by these representatives of the community. By this perception, the college president and all those who exercise power have as their constituency the elected representatives of the community.

Composition of Boards

The theoretical basis for elected college boards of trustees is very muddled. The legislation of elected representatives ordinarily applies to the people who elected the representatives. In the case of college boards, their legislation (policies, rules, budgets, etc.) applies to people who had minimal or no vote in their selection. This legislation does not affect their actual constituency except in the expenditure of money, in the spending of the electors taxes. The question is not whether representative government is good or bad but whether college boards of trustees are really representative. Who do they represent? They certainly do not represent the students. They may love them, feel responsible for them, do what is good for them, protect them, even indulge them, but they do not represent the students.

Neither do boards represent the faculty. They may turn to the faculty for advice and may even follow it. They may be obliged to negotiate deals

with faculty power blocs. But they are not accountable to the faculty and if they choose, they may tell the faculty to go to hell.

Boards do not represent administration. They may get educated by a wise president or get manipulated by a clever president. The administrative staff may have tremendous influence on the board but legally and in fact boards are not responsible nor accountable to their administrative officers.

Who, then, do community college boards represent? Conventional wisdom answers that they represent the people in the community, especially those who send their children to the college. They are the peers of the parents and since peers supposedly think alike on essential issues, they represent the parents. This is all fine and good except that the Educational Testing Service demonstrated in a 1969 study something that people familiar with boards already knew: board members, as a whole, are not the peers of the parents; in fact, they are quite unlike the parents. They are 85% male. Only 12% are under 40 years of age. They are 95% Caucasian. A mere 2% are junior college graduates, while 67% have a bachelor's degree or better. Only 13% earn less than \$10,000 a year, and 70% have yearly incomes in excess of \$15,000. They are 77% Protestant. Over 90% are classified as merchants, managers, professionals or farmer/rancher.

The usual public junior college trustee is then male, White, Protestant, over 50, earning \$25,000+ per year and most likely a business man who thinks he hears the voice of the people at his Rotary Club luncheon. As a matter of fact, the E.T.S. study showed that 63% of the trustees of the open-door college consider higher education a privilege and not a right. It also showed them to be more conservative and more repressive of students than any college trustees other than those of fundamentalist church colleges.

Qualifiers and Disclaimers

Thus described, it sounds as if community college boards were modeled after corporation boards; they are not obliged to represent their inarticulate consumers (students), or their employees (staff), or their management (administration), or even their small stockholders (taxpaying parents). By this devil theory they represent only the big stockholders (business and corporation taxpayers). This perception of board representation is not without considerable foundation but in practice it does not work out as neatly and simply as this. The dynamics are much more complex and those without de jure power certainly develop de facto power.

A president could not operate very long without developing the faculty as part of his constituency and occasionally using this power against the power of the board. However, the board is the president's primary constituency, his legal source of power. And it takes a nimble footed or desperate politician to try to manipulate counter forces to legitimate authority.

Once appointed, the faculty can and does band together into a power bloc which can move in a direction quite different, even opposite from that of the board. Organized and with tenure, the faculty represents a different constituency, which the president and his administrative staff may, or may not, lead. If they begin pulling and hauling in a different direction from the board, the president really has a split constituency and may, as Clark Kerr³ analyzed it, be more mediator than leader.

No Black President can ignore his Black student constituency nor his Black adult constituency in the ghetto. Militant White students also make administrators more than a little nervous. Potentially, the students could become a bigger, more fractious power bloc even than the faculty--and on many campuses they have already become so, polarizing things so that the president

and his administrative staff are not even mediators but simply buffers, sufficiently well-paid stand-ins to take all the blows really directed at the board and, beyond them, at the city, state, and national politicians who often determine board thinking and board action. Many presidents and other administrators threaten to or actually do resign because they have no real student or faculty constituency, and the narrow, perhaps reactionary, policies of their boards force them into the role of whipping boy.

A Different Perception of Community

All of these qualifiers and disclaimers describe a perception of community, different from that of "convention wisdom" and suggest that different power dynamics would flow from recognition that there is not one community but plural groups with different degrees of involvement. The college is not created by equal efforts of all the people in a geographical area. Various groups of people are involved in varying degrees in a social agency such as a college. Tax dollars alone do not build the college or sustain it. The in-put is a lot more than money. The in-put includes the molding and binding cement of administrative leadership. The in-put includes the collective and massive and on-going creativity of the faculty. The in-put includes the expended energy and the manifold contributions of the students, present and past, day and evening, young and old.

The community is plural, not unitary. There are several primary groups within the town-gown community. There are the people in the geographic district who contribute not only tax dollars but also psychological support. There are the alumni and the adult evening students whose understanding of the college mission qualifies them for a special and louder voice in the governance of the college. There are the students for whom the college ostensibly exists, young adults who are eating the pudding but who are given no public voice for saying

whether or not it is any good. There are the faculty members whose entire professional lives revolve around the college. And, finally, there are the administrators who have the most wide-angle view of the whole enterprise and who are, or should be, lifelong students of leadership in complex organizations. Once the community is perceived in this pluralistic way, then it is necessary to develop some structure of governance congruent with the perception: a structure that will give different weights, different strength of voice, to groups making different degrees of contribution--of in-put.

A Model to Fit This Perception

What is needed is a board of trustees based on proportional representation--proportional, that is, to the contribution and involvement of the groups actually making up the several communities of the community college. If error is to be made, let it be on the side of a broader base; the model will be constructed as a seven-man board.

Three of the seven seats will be reserved for the taxpayer-citizens to be chosen in a wide-open election (although good argument could be made for a nominating system that would assure a voice for women, a voice for the ethnic minorities and a voice for employers in local business and industry). The fourth seat in this model would be held ex-officio by the superintendent-president, who would use the authority of his knowledge and his vote to support the multi-faceted view of administration. The fifth seat on this model board would be reserved for the elected representative of the faculty. The sixth board position would be held by a full-time sophomore elected by the student body from a panel of students interested enough in district governance to have been dedicated board-watchers during their freshman year. The last seat would be filled by a graduate alumnus or an adult evening division student chosen in an election restricted to resident alumni and adult evening students. So--in this

model, power would emanate from clusters or groups within the community who have intimate knowledge, who have deep involvement and who make or have made significant contributions to the achievement of the purposes of the college.

Terms of office would vary, a factor which might give greater continuity to board deliberations, decision-making, and action. The superintendent or president would hold his seat on the board as long as he was chief administrative officer. He probably should be the chairman of the board and should continue to exercise primary responsibility for preparation and control of the agenda. The three citizen-taxpayers would be elected every four years in the general November elections. The tenured faculty representative might well be the immediate past president of the faculty senate, who would act as observer during the year of his presidency and as regular board member during the year following his tenure as senate president. The representative of alumni and adult evening students would be elected by this combined group for a two-year term. As noted earlier, the student representative would be elected for a one-year term and from a panel of sophomores who had religiously attended board meetings during their freshman year.

Consequent Shift in Dynamics

To return to the opening idea: if initial perception changes then the whole subsequent pattern changes. If community were seen as consisting of multiple clusters of deeply-involved groups rather than an undifferentiated mass of taxpayer-citizens, then the composition of the governing board would have to change to give representation to these clusters; and, without doubt, this would shift the dynamics closer to political reality. Perhaps the most important of these new dynamics should be described in capsule paragraphs.

There would be franker recognition that the whole educational scene is part of the broad political one. The worn out myth that the board is simply

a body of public spirited, selfless, objective, apolitical citizens would be discarded. The position and the action of the existing power blocs would be there for the public eye to see.

There would be reasonable if not complete assurance that the board would have some champions of the gown as well as champions for the town and economy. At least four of the seven board members would not feel that their campaign expenses were paid by those more affluent taxpayers who expect them to serve as watchdogs protecting the tax rate.

In political persuasion, local boards would no longer be carbon copies of statewide boards and the politicians who appoint them. There would, therefore, be much more local board resistance to pressures from above, from city hall, from the state capitol, and from Washington.

In a board composed of administration, faculty, students and general citizens, the we-they dichotomy would tend to be reduced, if not eliminated. The political process would be substituted for eye-ball to eye-ball confrontations. There would be shifting alliances according to the issues, and, no doubt, there would be the political horse-trading that this suggests.

Faculty senates would no longer have the weaknesses of employee councils, for their representation on the board would erase, or at least blur, the distinction between the board employer and the faculty employees.

Election of students to the board would take student politics out of the sandbox. It would no longer be a "kid's game on which the adults can blow the whistle at any point and change the rules when the will of the faculty, the administration or the taxpayers is in any way challenged."

Student representation on the board would, of course, give short shrift to present faculty or administrative resistance to student participation on the policy committees of the college. Thus, a portion of the cause of student unrest

should be removed. And, since most representatives on the board would really know something about the relevancy of the curriculum and of instruction, perhaps there would be more action and less talk about making education relevant.

Faculty, students and administration could no longer have the complaint, nor the cop-out, that they could only advise or recommend on policy but never set it. Their voting record on policy issues would be there for all to see.

The paternalism of "giving" faculty and students a minor role in directing that which is central to their lives, the college, would be ended. With the end of paternalism, there should develop more of a colleague relationship, more equal status all around.

Finally, with such a board, the president would not find himself so frequently in the role of mercenary constantly fighting off faculty and student attacks on board actions, actions with which he himself may not agree. Faculty and students would be less inclined to see him as a sell-out to the board. When upset by board action, their political animosity would be more accurately directed toward their own representatives on the board.

Pipedream or Prognostication?

Model-making is quite in vogue, but when models are big enough to be important, they are usually too big to be experimentally tested. The only way for this board model to be really tested would be for some community college district to try it. And maybe one will. There are signs that the time is ripe.* University of California President Charles Hitch, like many of his presidential colleagues, is a voting member of the U.C. Board of Regents. Students now sit as voting members of the board of trustees at Princeton, Vassar, University of

*If the voting age is reduced to eighteen, many conservatives who would have immediate and visceral objection to this proposal may wish it were still an option. With effective organization, students could develop such a voting bloc that they could capture more than one seat on the board of trustees. The alumni and the evening division students could muster the votes right now if they had the political organization to effect such a mustering.

Maine, Cornell, Colgate, as well as the Board of Higher Education for New York's SUNY-CUNY. In California, there is a non-voting student member who speaks for students on the West Valley Junior College District Board. Foothill District, also in California, has a student representative who serves with the presidents of the two campuses as a panel of consultants at District Board meetings. The statewide president of the associated student bodies of California community colleges sits as a non-voting member of the Board of Governors of California Community Colleges. The professional association for all public and private junior colleges in California, The California Junior College Association, has two students, again non-voting, who are members of the C.J.C.A. board of directors. The Executive Secretary, Lloyd Messersmith, reports that the students are fast becoming a fully recognized fourth constituency (boards, administration, faculty, students) of this Association.

Among 1966-1969 Stanford alumni, 58% agreed "There should be a student as a fully active member of the Stanford Board of Trustees." And 5/3 of Stanford alumni of all ages and all political persuasions agreed that 'Stanford' faculty members should be able to vote--directly or through representatives--for members of the Board of Trustees." ⁶ Certainly, the exclusive appointment of upper class WASP's to the boards of regents of state universities is being challenged. Jess Unruh, in his campaign to unseat Governor Ronald Reagan, was asked if he favored a shift away from businessmen as University Regents to people who knew something about education. His answer: "There's no reason that 16 millionaires and eight politicians can do a better job than a couple of carpenters and some students. Just because people have been successful in this acquisitive society of ours doesn't mean they're fit to run our social institutions." ⁵ Perhaps the system of election that stacks the community college boards of trustees with middle class WASP's may also be challenged.

What sounds far-out may have better promise and better logic than what seems to be the ordained order. The tribulations of boards and their administrative officers during the last decade stand as omens either of change or of worse trouble in the decade ahead. Participatory democracy is more than just a passing slogan. Students and faculty want and are going to get a piece of the political action. Administrators will not long continue to be stand-up targets in such a withering crossfire. There are going to be more voices in the decision-making. There is something to be said for giving voices seats from which to speak, in the inside tones of reason and constructive mutuality rather than leaving them outside of the chambers of decision, with standing and shouting room only.

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