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ABSTRACT

This paper predicts that there will be 129 presidential vacancies each year in the nation's community colleges, and that individuals moving from one presidency to another will likely fill only 30% of these vacancies. The author offers suggestions for preparing community college leaders for the future, including: (1) the American Association for Community Colleges (AACC) should use its prestige and contacts to obtain funding from one or more major foundations, part of which will be allocated to individuals selected as potential presidents; (2) each community college president in the nation should mentor one individual on his or her campus whom he or she has chosen as a potential future community college leader; (3) graduate programs in higher education should enroll every individual selected by the president as a future leader; and (4) states should cooperate in offering graduate education. If these and other recommendations are implemented, special considerations must be emphasized: (1) professors must be willing to cooperate with AACC, the presidents, foundations, and others in assuring that graduate programs are relevant and flexible; and (2) presidents must take their roles in selecting future leaders very seriously and examine the total pool of applicants on campus, not limiting their choices to those individuals who have chosen to pursue the presidency as a career choice. (EMH)

Developing Community College Leaders for the Future: Crisis or Opportunity

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DEVELOPING COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERS FOR THE FUTURE: CRISIS OR OPPORTUNITY

George B. Vaughan

Is there an impending crisis in community college leadership at the presidential level? Certainly many community college leaders think so, as evidenced by this meeting. There is indeed evidence to suggest that there is reason to be concerned, that there is a potential leadership crisis facing the community college. For example, in 1996 over two-thirds of the presidents then in office stated that they would retire within the next 10 years. Added to these retirements will be forced resignations, deaths, and any number of other occurrences that will thin the presidential ranks. There is and will be room at the top. Room at the top does not need to translate into a leadership vacuum at the top and certainly does not need to constitute a crisis.

What, if anything, can be done to prevent a crisis in community college leadership? Indeed, are there opportunities inherent in the impending crisis whereby community college leaders can capitalize on the situation, avoiding a crisis and insuring even stronger leadership for the nation's community colleges in the future? And can current presidential leadership be strengthened in the process? I think the answer to both questions is yes: a leadership crisis can be averted and community college leadership can be stronger in the future than it has been in the past.

With the above in mind, and recognizing the importance of this meeting, I believe there are two important questions we must consider here today in response to George Boggs's multifaceted charge. (1) Can a cadre of presidential leaders be prepared for the future who have experience working in the community college, are well educated, are well informed, and who understand and are committed to the community

college philosophy and mission? (2) How can these leaders be identified, educated, mentored, sponsored, and otherwise prepared to assume the reins of leadership in the nation's community colleges?

The following are my suggestions for preparing community college leaders for the future. My focus is on preparing individuals to assume the community college presidency, the most important leadership position on campus. But the road to the presidency is winding and often requires many guides along the way.

DEMAND

As suggested above, a large percentage of today's presidents plan to retire within the next 10 years. The tendency is to panic when one thinks of the number of presidents who will retire in any given period, especially if one looks a decade ahead. Yet when one realizes that the average age of presidents (1996 data) is 54 years of age, it does not take a mathematician to figure out that a number of presidential vacancies will occur. At one point, I determined that there are 129 presidential vacancies each year in the nation's public community colleges. Individuals moving from one presidency to another will likely fill approximately 30 percent of these vacancies. Nevertheless, the need for new presidents is real, *as has been the case since at least the early 1960s*.

SUPPLY

Over 90 percent of today's community college presidents have the doctorate. Of the 90 percent, over 60 percent have the doctorate in higher education. Clearly, then, the major source for today's community college presidents is graduate schools of education. There is nothing wrong with and much right with presidents having degrees in higher education. But to continue to recruit presidents from the same source with

similar educational experiences is to construct the pathway to the presidency too narrowly and ultimately is to overlook many committed individuals who would bring diversity to the presidency. Why is the present system of educating and training presidents in need of examination and perhaps change?

Today, many of the students who enter graduate school with the presidency in mind as a career goal have little understanding of the position and even less preparation for the presidency. Others are ill prepared for graduate school, often lacking the writing and analytical skills required to succeed in most graduate programs. (They do, however, ultimately manage to complete the doctorate in higher education, thanks to extra effort on the part of professors and on the student's ability to stay the course.) In many cases, then, those individuals who enter graduate school with the presidency in mind engage in a process of "self selection." That is, in many cases our leaders are self-anointed up to a point. Self-selection is, in my opinion, not always the best way to choose presidents for the community college (or for a country, for that matter.).

The pathway to the presidency is restricted even further when one considers a fact that has received very little notice in the debates surrounding community college leadership. The fact is that over 90 percent of the current presidents came from within the community college ranks (1996 data). I believe this to be appropriate, for a commitment to and understanding of the community college is, in my opinion, mandatory for successful leadership at the presidential level. So what is the problem, assuming there is one? *The problem is that of self-selection as noted above limits the pool of potential presidents, thus excluding many individuals who, with some guidance and encouragement, would follow the pathway to the presidency.* Stated another way, under

the present system most of us *are* not looking at the total pool of community college professionals and identifying and encouraging a large number of individuals to move into leadership position. To move into administrative positions in many community colleges today, one must be lucky, determined, highly motivated, and be willing to assume any administrative position that comes along. Ironically, the one factor that does more than any other to move one into the presidential pipeline is to occupy a minor administrative position prior to beginning doctoral study (self-selection in operation). In essence, we have a situation whereby individuals volunteer to enroll in a graduate program, a first step for many on their pathway to the presidency. The final result is a pool of presidential candidates who have held low-level administrative positions, enrolled in graduate school, received the doctorate, moved up a step or so in the administrative ranks, and entered the presidential candidate pool. Yes, many of these individuals make outstanding presidents. But that is not the discussion today. The important question is can steps be taken to increase the diversity and size of the pool for future community college presidents? I think so.

THE LEADERSHIP PIPELINE

As suggested above, the pathway to the presidency for over 90 percent of community college presidents leads through graduate school. Graduate school is important and is a major steppingstone on the pathway to the presidency. It is not enough, however. As George Boggs notes in his charge to this group, there are some excellent leadership programs, some effective mentoring programs, and some excellent leadership development activities. George also notes that *these current activities and programs are not sufficient to meet future leadership needs*. What is needed is to use

current graduate programs, leadership activities, and practices *as the basis* for developing leaders for the future and for enhancing the leadership abilities and practices of those individuals currently serving as community college presidents. Who, then, should take the lead in developing leaders for the future? Once the players in leadership development are identified, what can be done to assure that competent leaders who understand and are committed to the community college mission and philosophy lead the community college of the future?

THE PLAYERS

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC): Important undertakings need coordination, support, a history, prestige, an advocate, and leadership. Community colleges in American are fortunate to have the AACC, an organization that can and does provide all of these. Important in what I am proposing is the Presidents Academy, an affiliate council of the AACC.

Community College Presidents: Community college presidents must play an important role in identifying, cultivating, mentoring, sponsoring, and teaching future presidents. Indeed, current presidents play the key role in selecting future community college presidents. Presidents decide who moves into the important pathways to the presidency, sponsor future presidents, and otherwise virtually control the supply of future presidents.

Professors and Programs of Higher Education: As suggested above, doctoral programs in higher education are extremely important to the recruitment (within the limits of self-selection), training, and education of future presidents. Professors also mentor future presidents.

Foundations: If the demand for community college leaders is to be met, foundations must become involved, providing funding, "moral support," and the publicity that comes from major grants. The W. K. Kellogg Foundation played an important role in educating the community college presidents of the 1960s and 1970s. A new "Kellogg-type initiative" is needed. Foundations must be one of the players as the nation seeks new leaders for the new century.

THE PLAN

I offer the following suggestions for assuring that well-prepared individuals lead the nation's community colleges at the presidential level.

The AACC

The AACC must be the national organization that coordinates and promotes the effort to recruit, select, educate, and train future community college presidents. The Presidents Academy can play an important role in this effort. The AACC can assist the process by doing the following:

1. The AACC should use its prestige and contacts to obtain funding from one or more major foundations. The Association should control a portion (beyond administrative overhead) of the funding for fulfilling its role in the educating and training of future leaders in order that the Association can be an active partner, not just the fiscal agent. A portion of the funds should be allocated to those individuals selected as potential presidents. (See the role of community college presidents below for a description of these individuals.)
2. The Presidents Academy should include those selected for leadership roles in the summer DC experience. The potential future presidents can learn much

about the presidency by associating with current presidents. Moreover, the summer experience program is set, is staffed, and from what I understand, is successful. Why not bring others into the process? In addition to the current activities included in the summer experience for presidents, additional activities should be expanded for those individuals selected for future leadership positions to include an in-depth look at a number of the national higher education organizations in the DC area and visits to selected foundations in the DC area.

In addition to the Academy's role, professors from universities with programs in higher education should help plan the summer experience. The summer experienced should be under the rubric of an academic internship, offering graduate credit from participating universities. An individual from a university program who would insure that academic standards are maintained and that the experience is an academic one as well as a practical one should coordinate the summer experience for future leaders, cooperating with the AACC in every phase of the program. The summer internship should be structured much as any good internship would be structured in a graduate program.

The President

1. Each community college president in the nation should identify one individual on his or her campus as a potential future community college leader, with the goal being for that individual to prepare for the community college presidency. *The president should examine the total pool of faculty and staff*

members on campus and select carefully. Two points are especially important to the selection process. One, presidents should take the initiative in selecting individuals to mentor, looking at the total pool of faculty and staff and not limit the selection process to those individuals who hold minor administrative positions and who have begun a doctorate on their own. Stated another way, presidents should not limit their selections to those individuals who are engaged in the self-selection process. Of course, these individuals should not be excluded either. The point is that some individuals should be recruited who have a minimum of a master's degree in a discipline or a professional field such as business. Importantly, individuals who already hold the doctorate should not be excluded. That is, the avenue to leadership must be opened to Ph. D.s in English, mathematics, music, or whatever. To select the majority of the presidents from among individuals with degrees in education (a number of presidents have the master's degree as well as the doctorate in education) is to define the presidential pool too narrowly. Second, special attention should be paid to selecting members of minority groups as potential presidents. In 1996, Caucasians made up almost 86 percent of the community college presidents. Blacks (5.2 percent, 1996 data), Hispanics (4.9 percent, 1996), Native American (1.9 percent, 1996), and Asians (1.5 percent, 1996) are especially in short supply in the presidential pipeline. Obviously, minorities are not engaging in the self-selection process to the degree that is required if the presidency is going to be diversified based on race and ethnic heritage. While more and more women are entering the presidential ranks

(almost 18% in 1996), women too deserve special attention by presidents as they identify future leaders until that time that women are represented equally with men in the presidential ranks.

2. Once the president selects someone to mentor, he or she should work with the individual until that individual completes the program designed to groom future presidents. *That is, the president should mentor only one individual at a time.* Mentoring is a serious, time-consuming business and consists of more than meeting with an individual occasionally. The president should do all that can be done to prepare the person being mentored for the presidency.
3. The president should make resources, including financial support, available to the individual selected as a future leader. Financial support should include funds and release time for obtaining the doctorate, if needed; it should also include support for summer workshops, internships, seminars; and support for attending professional meetings such as the annual meeting of the AACC and Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT).
4. Some presidents should establish a mentoring program whereby those selected for future presidential leadership can participate in a year-long program on his or her own campus. The program could be patterned after the successful American Council on Education Fellows' Program. Those colleges that adopt such a program should offer its interns (fellows) release time for the academic year. The fellow would be assigned to the president.

Graduate Programs

Graduate programs must play a major role in the education and training of future leaders. Graduate programs should play the following role.

1. Graduate programs in higher education should enroll every individual selected by the president as a future leader. If a graduate program is not available in an area, the future leaders should be enrolled in a program that offers the majority of its work through the use of technology. Interactive classes could be offered on Saturday mornings, for example. If the selected future leader already has the doctorate, he or she would be required to enroll in the DC summer experience and meet the same requirements as those individuals who are enrolled in doctoral programs. The individual with the degree would also receive graduate credit for the experience, even if the credit did not count towards a degree. (Funds must be generated if the program is to succeed. See number 3 below.) In addition, those individuals with the doctorate but lacking courses in higher education should be required to complete a core of courses, including a course in the history, philosophy, and mission of the community college, courses in management and leadership, and perhaps a course in the history of higher education. This segment of the program should consist of from 12 to 15 graduate credits.
2. Graduate professors should help plan the summer experience, basing it in part on the Presidents Academy's existing program.
3. Graduate programs should agree to give college credit for the summer internship. At least one professor should agree to oversee the summer experience, including grading whatever written material is required and

evaluating whether the program has been successful, thus resulting in the awarding of graduate credit.

4. Graduate programs, working with AACC and a foundation, should recruit a cadre of fulltime students while at the same time enrolling some students part time.
5. States should cooperate in offering graduate education. If a state does not have a doctoral program, it may join a state with such a program to assure that no state is denied the opportunity to produce outstanding community college presidents.

The Foundations

One or more foundations should provide funding for the above. Foundation leaders should help shape the program and lend its name to those future leaders enrolled in the program similar to the Kellogg Fellows of the 1960s.

Some Special Considerations

If the above approach is to be successful, some things must be emphasized. They are as follows:

1. The program must be flexible, and cooperation among the various entities must be mandatory. Flexibility means giving future leaders choices in internships (with the exception of the summer internship), course delivery, times classes are offered, and so on. Cooperation means working together in ways that permit all entities to participate in carrying out the above.
2. Those individuals with the doctorate in disciplines or a professional field must understand that higher education administration is a professional field and those

who enter it are no longer historians, mathematicians, scientists, and whatever. That is, they must understand what they are getting into. They must realize that they are professionals in a highly specialized field and take the necessary steps to become proficient in that field.

3. Presidents must take their roles in selecting future leaders very seriously and examine the total pool of applicants on campus, not limiting their choices to those individuals who have, often on their own, chosen to pursue the presidency as a career choice.
4. The AACC must view the training of future leaders as a top priority--indeed as a mandate. George Boggs must be visible in the process and never miss a chance to address these future leaders. The AACC must be the major force in seeking funding.
5. Professors must be willing to cooperate with the AACC, the presidents, foundations, and others in assuring that graduate programs are relevant and flexible. Professors must also be willing to plan programs and activities for those individuals who already have the doctorate. Most graduate programs should flourish under the above plan.
6. Foundations must be sold on the value and feasibility of the above. Once sold, they must lend their names as well as their resources to the above.

CONCLUSION

The above proposal can succeed in assuring that the community college of the future has a supply of intelligent, well-informed, well-educated, well-trained leaders. The above offers current presidents the opportunity to work with future leaders in ways

that most presidents are not doing today, thus providing an avenue for presidential renewal for current presidents. The proposal places the AACC and its Presidents Academy clearly in the center of the leadership circle, thus filling the vacuum that currently exists in all community college leadership programs. The proposal offers graduate professors the opportunity to enroll outstanding students committed to community college leadership. Foundations can lend their names and resources to an important national undertaking. Importantly, the above proposal provides the opportunity for a leadership undertaking to profit from leadership at the national level through the AACC and foundations, at the local level from the president's office, and at the regional and national levels from graduate professors.

The impending crisis in community college leadership can be alleviated and leadership in the universities, the foundations, the AACC, and graduate programs enhanced, while at the same time developing a core of leaders for the nation's community colleges in the immediate and distant future. Rather than a crisis, the projected shortage of leaders for the nation's community colleges presents a wonderful opportunity to develop leaders for the nation's community colleges.

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