

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Diversifying the community college CEO pipeline



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The authors examine the current community college presidential pipeline and offer possible explanations for poor CEO representation from diverse populations. They explore a relationship between CEO satisfaction and diversity by testing whether CEO satisfaction is correlated to campus and administrative diversity. While data from the study indicates no statistical relationship between satisfaction and diversity, further research to investigate the finding is recommended. Internal and external recruitment strategies for identifying minority community college CEO candidates conclude the paper.

Background

Researchers who specialize in community college administration speak of a *leadership crisis* or *leadership gap* facing the two-year system today because the senior administrative pipeline has failed to yield enough qualified candidates to fill available positions (Campbell, 2006; Gutierrez et al., 2002; June, 2007; Piland & Wolf, 2003; Vaughn & Wiseman, 2003; Yates & Roach, 2000). The crisis is made all the more ominous by recent waves of community college CEO¹ retirements—particularly in states such as California where in September 2007, 22 of the state's 109 community colleges had presidential vacancies, down slightly from 28 in 2006 (Piland & Kehoe, 2008). According to Weisman and Vaughan

¹ For the purposes of this study, "CEO" is used to describe both the presidency and the superintendency or chancellorship at either the two- or four-year college level.

(2001), more than 50% of community college CEOs plan to retire by 2010. The golden handshake of baby boomer retirements offers an unprecedented opportunity for new leaders who more closely resemble today's diverse student populations (Hope & Rendon, 1995).

While significant opportunities exist for minority leadership in community colleges around the country, the current percentage of two-year minority CEOs (presidents and superintendents) does not accurately reflect the racial and ethnic student demographic on most community college campuses (Phelps & Taber, 1996; Vaughan, 2004). According to a national study conducted in 2006, 88% of all two-year CEOs are white (Weisman & Vaughan, 2001). According to the same study, women represent only 29% of all community college CEOs.

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the importance of diversity in the CEO role, and offer solutions to the current shortage of two-year CEOs from underrepresented groups through realistic recruitment and retention strategies targeting candidates from both inside and outside academe.

Discussions of the community college leadership pipeline should include the role of the institution

and not focus so specifically, or univocally, on the progress of the individual through specific stages and requisite steps on the way to the role of CEO. Most previous research on community college CEOs and college presidencies in general focuses on the individual rather than examining the context in which the individual proceeds toward the presidency. Right now the context of higher education administration is averse to change; studies cite minimal increase in rates of doctoral degree completion, faculty tenure awards, or presidential hires among individuals of color. Rates of diversity among community college CEOs will only increase once institutions accept responsibility for creating a culture of inclusion and promotion for minority candidates who gather the appropriate credentials to warrant consideration for hire.

Review of literature

College CEOs bring to their role the sum total of their experiences, including their understanding of race and gender (Cortada, 1996). Being African American, for example, is inextricably linked to the way an individual operates as president or chancellor (Holub & Foote, 1996); the same can be said for being female, or Latino, or Asian. While all administrators in higher education play valuable roles in shaping the future of the

profession, the CEO arguably wields the greatest influence over his or her institution.

Bowen (1996) maintains that no pathway to the community college presidency is easy for individuals of color. He followed the traditional path of tenured professor to dean, dean to vice president, vice president to president, and president of one campus to president of a second. However, while serving as president of La Guardia Community College, Bowen charged his Chief Affirmative Action Officer with the authority to close a search that failed to draw a diverse pool of candidates for either a faculty or administrative position. According to Opp and Smith (1996), institutions that cancel searches failing to recruit minority candidates are more likely to attract a higher percentage of minority faculty. Such a strategy motivates some institutions to widely disseminate information about faculty job openings to prospective minority candidates, and serves as a concrete demonstration to prospective applicants that the institution is, in fact, committed to diversity *in deed*—not just *in word* (Opp & Smith). If the recruitment process begins from an understanding that institutional excellence requires both diversity and equity, changes can be made to gather widespread support from all members of the campus

community (Astin, 1985, as cited in Opp & Smith).

Diversifying the pipeline from within

One credential most researchers and practitioners recommend as the first step toward the post of CEO, vice president, vice chancellor, or dean is a tenure-track faculty appointment (Piland & Giles, 1998). A national study completed in 1988 found that half of all community college presidents came from the vice-president and dean ranks, which generally require experience as a tenured faculty member (Boggs, 2001, as cited in Piland & Giles). In both two- and four-year institutions, minority faculty are considerably under-represented at all stages of the tenure track (Milem & Astin, 1993). Recent findings (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001; Gutierrez, 2002; June, 2007) reveal that little progress has been made in moving individuals of color into the faculty pipeline, which begs the question of how aggressively academic institutions recruit qualified minority faculty. An even more basic problem is that few students of color are enrolled in graduate programs, from which the pool of tenure-line faculty is ultimately selected (ACE, 2005; Holmes, 2004).

According to Judson (1999), it is easier to recruit minority faculty

where minority faculty are already employed. The presence of faculty of color on college campuses is the single most immediate source of recruitment for administrative ranks (Muller, 1996; Opp & Smith, 1996). Still, recruitment of minority faculty is just as difficult as recruitment of minority administrators because the culture of academic leadership is, for many potential candidates, intimidating (Wilson, 1996). The playing field is simply not seen as level (Bowen & Muller, 1996). Without a pipeline of racially and ethnically diverse faculty who view the ranks as ascendable, and the culture as supportive, community colleges will be left without a pool of candidates to consider when hiring senior administrators. Unless and until senior executive college leadership is reframed as a desirable goal for all faculty of color, search firms and campus search committees will fail to recruit minority faculty as future deans, vice presidents, or CEOs (Vaughan, 1996).

Community college presidents are decidedly different from their four-year counterparts for reasons researchers need to explore. According to a 2001 ACE report, minorities are almost three times more likely to be presidents of community colleges than doctoral-granting institutions. The same report indicates that 73% of community college presidents have doc-

toral degrees in education (Ed.D.), whereas 43% of presidents of four-year colleges and universities have doctor of philosophy (Ph.D.) degrees (ACE, 2001). Given that African American and Latino doctoral students are overrepresented in the field of education, it is no accident that more minorities assume two-year presidencies than presidencies of four-year institutions. The decision about where to become a president is effectively made *for* students of color when they enter doctoral programs in education because their path is potentially limited by virtue of their terminal degree (Vaughan, 2004). While this finding is promising for those who wish to promote minority leadership within the two-year system, it does not bode well for administrative equity across educational systems.

Diversifying the pipeline from without

Promising, if polemical, solutions have been proposed in cases where community college CEO searches fail to yield enough qualified minority applicants. One recommendation is for community colleges to seek presidential candidates from sources other than the academic pipeline (Vaughan, 1996). According to Vaughan, slightly more than half of current community college presidents already come from areas other than academic

officer posts. No studies show conclusive evidence of increased effectiveness among presidents from academic backgrounds. Minority candidates from outside academe with strong financial backgrounds, managerial experience, marketing expertise, and community connections seem the logical choice for institutions with limited minority pipelines. These individuals could bring a depth of knowledge concerning budgetary structures, management theories, and fundraising techniques. The notion of industry CEO as academic CEO seems a rational alternative when the academic pipeline fails to produce suitable candidates.

In fact, private sector training may be just what today's presidential candidates need most. The demands on the community college CEO are far different today than they were just 10-20 years ago, as today's Chief Executive Officer is often also assumed to be the Chief Advancement and Financial Officer (Boggs et al., 2001). Whereas once a president was expected to focus solely on his or her campus and the local community, now he or she must fundraise, court donors, build financially advantageous partnerships, lobby legislators, and develop a fiscal vision for the institution (Boggs et al.). Gone are the days of relying strictly on state funding to balance the institutional budget. Community

college presidents are now called upon to source external funding and solicit gifts in order to expand campus resources and develop new programs. A new reality is changing the presidential landscape. Aspiring CEOs who lack development and fundraising experience will need to hone these skills as they proceed through the pipeline unless they come to the presidency or chancellorship with these abilities already in place.

Vaughan (1996) suggests that hiring CEOs who have formerly served as financial deans may have two benefits: First, financial deans are more familiar with budgetary issues and can likely navigate the developmental aspect of the presidency in a more competent fashion than those trained solely as academic administrators. Second, the process of hiring outside the academic pipeline will increase the pool of potential candidates for the presidency. Whether or not the hiring of financial deans would improve diversity within the candidate pool is not known; however, those who mentor aspiring CEOs should be guiding them to learn as much as possible about fundraising and development in the years to come, and urge them to hone their fiscal skills as much as their *soft* or social and political skills (Corrigan, 2002).

Burden and exploitation

The final piece of the puzzle is finding a way to make senior administrative positions less taxing on the individuals of color who currently serve as CEOs, chancellors, or vice presidents of their institutions. One African American CEO or Latino/a vice president cannot be expected to fill a token role or speak for all members of his or her race. As Ronald Temple, former chancellor of city colleges in Chicago, explains, "I felt like I was in a goldfish bowl. It made me feel as if I had certain responsibilities because I was breaking barriers for someone else. I was frequently at meetings where I was the only black person there" (Evelyn, 1998, p. 9). Research has shown that increased percentages of minorities in positions of power tend to support the recruitment of additional minority candidates for administrative roles (Opp & Smith, 1996). But until a critical mass is accrued on campus, institutions run the risk of burdening individual faculty members and administrators of color with the role of speaking for everyone of color, or representing all members of their particular race or ethnicity when decisions are made—a burden no individual person or small group of individuals can reasonably bear.

Similarly, administrators of color should not be automatically

expected to lead diversity initiatives or spearhead campaigns to recruit minorities into administrative or faculty positions. Practitioner scholars (Fong, 2000; Gutierrez, 2002; Wiley, 2001) discuss the harrowing nature of being one of few administrators of color, and reflect on the poor retention of minority administrators who often decide to leave a position at a predominantly white institution within months of their arrival. Whether or not minority administrators leave, Wiley explains, is contingent on the institution's willingness to share responsibility for discussion of issues of critical concern, as evidenced by campus-wide participation in diversity initiatives. If one or two administrators of color become *de facto* chairs of affirmative action committees, for example, or if African American administrators are automatically selected to lead focus groups on racial tolerance, the campus can be seen as taxing those individuals rather than collectively shouldering the task of diversifying the campus community.

Methods

The present study employed a quantitative approach to research by using data collected from a 56-item pilot survey of college and university presidents distributed to campus and system CEOs across four states—California, New York,

Hawaii, and Florida—in Spring 2006. The survey instrument was designed to assess self-reported levels of satisfaction with the presidency or superintendency. Survey items were validated through pilot testing on a sample of current and recently retired community college CEOs. A total of one hundred and fourteen CEOs completed the final survey, 33 of whom lead community college campuses or districts. Twenty-one percent of all respondents were female, 78.4% were male, and the majority—82.2%—identified as white/Caucasian. Hispanics/Latinos accounted for 9.9% of the sample, while 3% identified as black/African American, and 4% identified as Asian. Most respondents held doctoral degrees—in total, 81%—but the majority of four-year CEOs held Ph.D. degrees compared to the community college CEOs, who held primarily Ed.D. degrees (84%). The majority of respondents were first-time CEOs (52%), and 78.7% indicated that their current CEO position would also be their last. Of all respondents, 3% indicated that their current position was interim. Overall, the demographic profile of the study participants mirrors that of the national averages for race, gender, and age among college and university presidents.

Two hypotheses for the study were established: first, that there

would be no correlation between CEO's satisfaction with their role and *campus* diversity, and second that there would be no correlation between CEO's satisfaction with their role and *administrative* diversity. These hypotheses were designed to reveal the extent to which leading a diverse campus is a factor in overall job satisfaction among community college CEOs. Bivariate correlation analyses were performed for three relevant survey items: satisfaction with the presidency/superintendency, perceived level of campus diversity on campus, and perceived level of administrative diversity on campus. A one-way ANOVA tested mean differences between groups.

Analysis

A first set of correlation analyses run on variables satisfaction and campus diversity yielded no correlation for either population, showing a Pearson Product Moment Correlation (r) value of .048. A second set of analyses run on variables satisfaction and administrative diversity also yielded no correlation, with a Pearson Product Moment Correlation (r) value of .044. With regard to correlations among the variables, no significant linear relationship is identified. Thus in both cases the null hypotheses were accepted. To test for mean differences, a one-way ANOVA was performed on the

Table 1. Correlations between items

Items		Satisfaction with the CEO role	Campus diversity	Admin. diversity
Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	1	-.048	.044
			.651	.677
	N	95	93	92
Campus diversity	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	-.048	1	.537
			.651	.000
	N	93	94	93
Admin. diversity	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.044	.537	1
			.677	.000
	N	92	93	93

data. The approach to data analysis examined variation in satisfaction by types of diversity (campus or administrative).

Post-hoc comparisons between types of ethnicity did not show any significance, suggesting that CEOs of campuses with different levels of perceived campus or administrative diversity did not statistically differ in their levels of satisfaction.

Interpretations

The findings of the study raise important questions about the role diversity plays in the life of a community college CEO. If diversity does not influence satisfaction, it

is important to consider possible explanations for this disconnect. Perhaps other factors, such as the ability to raise funds or maintain strong CEO-board relations, more strongly influence a CEO's experience of his or her role. If a president, superintendent, or chancellor has difficulty with campus politics or external relations, the level of diversity among his or her peers and constituents may be less significant to him or her than other factors and may not outweigh the effects of other issues at play. The findings, then, raise more questions than they answer. What factors influence CEO satisfaction? To what extent does a president or chancellor's own racial and ethnic identity shape his

Table 2. One way ANOVA analysis

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	2.673	2	1.337	2.736	.070
Within groups	43.972	90	.489		
Total	46.645	92			

or her view of the importance of diversity? The findings lead one to question whether diversity is as important to CEOs in practice as it is in theory. If diversity is not a prerequisite for satisfaction among sitting CEOs, how then can initiatives to increase the number of diverse potential CEO candidates succeed?

Recommendations

More research is needed to understand the experiences of minority CEOs at both the two- and four-year levels. Scholars of color have been critical of current research on diversity in administration, noting that most studies investigate practitioners in student affairs, or focus on the role of minority administrators in promoting the diversity of their own institutions (Holmes, 2004). Holmes also calls for disaggregated research to probe significant differences in experience, preparation, and progress of individual ethnic groups. While the college presidency is viewed by many as the pinnacle of academic administration and thus as a benchmark of status for African Americans as

well as other people of color in the academy, each group faces unique challenges and barriers on the way to the top (Wilson, 1999, as cited in Holmes). One danger inherent in a discussion of minority administration is the tendency to conflate the experiences of all CEOs of color and minimize the impact of cultural differences on the progress of each ethnic group toward the presidency or chancellorship.

Across higher education, weak and indifferent recruitment practices combined with a lack of explicit institutional recruitment procedures or express interest in recruiting individuals of color for top-tier positions, send the message that individuals of color need not apply (Phelps & Taber, 1996). The reluctance to welcome minorities into administrative ranks is the legacy of a prejudiced society (Aronson, 2003). Now, in the midst of fiscal restraints and budget crises when more and better CEOs are needed but many searches turn up dry, it is important for institutions to see administrative diversity at the very least as a requisite aspect of academic leadership (Muller, 1996).

Recommendations for practitioners engaged in CEO searches who seek to diversify their candidate pools include the following:

1. When posting a job description, state explicitly that candidates from underrepresented groups are encouraged to apply.
2. Be sure to post descriptions where they will be read by a broad audience whenever possible, including community college newsletters and publications that target a wide range of regions and populations.
3. If a CEO search fails to yield an appropriate pool of candidates of color, consider either closing and reopening the search to allow for more candidates to apply, or consider expanding the search to include potential candidates from outside higher education in the private sector who have relevant experience.
4. Solicit current faculty and administrators on campus to offer nominations and references for potential CEO candidates. Often, current employees know of ideal candidates in their fields but will not refer them unless asked.
5. If using a search firm to identify and recruit CEO applicants, those on the campus search committee should work closely with individuals from the firm to help them understand the critical nature of diversity among candidates, and to define diversity for the purposes of the search; for example, a search committee might desire not only racial or

ethnic diversity in a presidential candidate, but experiential, educational, and/or regional diversity as well.

6. Demonstrate a commitment to diversity on campus by hiring talented individuals from diverse backgrounds in all positions, including classified staff and faculty.

Conclusion

While community colleges employ more CEOs of color than four-year colleges and universities, two-year institutions have far to go before they can claim equality within their senior administrative ranks. There is no silver bullet to the problem of poor minority representation at the highest levels of academic administration. But by thinking about the dilemma of poor representation among people of color in new and innovative ways, leaders can foreground the importance of justice, equity, and transformation. Today's college CEO demographics are disheartening. To students of color, the demographics suggest that the presidency is an unrealistic goal. To change that perception requires two levels of commitment: first, to strategic hiring processes that can widen the pipeline for individuals of color *today*; and second, to social justice and equality in systems of higher education that will unblock the CEO pipeline for decades and centuries to come.

Vaughan (2004) notes the irony that community colleges open their doors widely for students of color, while the door to the president's office is barely cracked open to candidates of color. Those who apply for presidencies and rise through the administrative ranks in higher education—regardless of system or institutional type—tend to be white and male (Vaughan). Attention must be paid to the bal-

ance of racial and ethnic power within community college administration. Presidential search committees need to ensure that candidate pools are representative of their campus student populations. A CEO of color sends a message to the community as well as future applicants for other administrative positions that diverse candidates are welcomed at the leadership table (Muller, 1996).

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