
Chief Academic Officers' Demographics and Educational Backgrounds

Marybelle C. Keim

Southern Illinois University, Carbondale

John P. Murray

California State University, Long Beach

The impending retirements of many community college leaders creates a need to better understand who the chief academic officers (CAOs) are and the paths they followed to become CAOs. Nonetheless, researchers have paid relatively little attention to this important leadership position. To address this gap in the literature, the authors undertook a national study of 300 randomly selected community college CAOs. The intent was to determine the educational backgrounds and demographic characteristics of public 2-year college academic deans or vice presidents and compare these findings to those of previous studies to determine trends.

Keywords: *administrator characteristics; community college leadership; chief academic officer; impending leadership shortage; job tenure; women administrators; administrator career paths*

The community college literature abounds with predictions of a shortage of qualified candidates needed to replace the large number of community college presidents who are expected to retire in the near future (Boggs, 2003; Campbell, 2002; Carroll, 2004). A few of these articles have acknowledged that the potential crisis extends to all levels of community college administration (Barwick, 2002; Leubsdorf, 2006; O'Banion, 2006-2007), and some even suggest that the number of chief academic officers (CAOs) retiring may pose a greater crisis than that created by the retirements of the presidents (Evelyn, 2001). Nonetheless, researchers have paid relatively little attention to who might replace the departing CAOs.

To address this gap in the literature, the authors undertook a national study of 300 randomly selected community college CAOs. The intent was to determine the educational backgrounds and demographic characteristics of public 2-year college academic deans or vice presidents and compare

these findings to those of previous research to determine trends. This article reports the methodology, findings, and implications of this descriptive analysis.

We begin by reviewing the literature that describes the growing concern over the imminent retirements of large numbers of community college presidents. We then point out that the situation is much the same for CAOs—those who occupy the position that is the traditional stepping stone to the presidency. Moreover, CAOs are not only retiring in large numbers but also leaving academic administration for a variety of other reasons, and many community colleges are finding it difficult to replace them. This suggests that not only is the pipeline to the presidency shrinking but also the pipeline to the CAO position itself. If community college leaders want to increase the pool of qualified candidates for the presidency, they need to begin by increasing the pool of candidates for the CAO position. A first step in this endeavor is to develop a picture of current CAOs to determine what prepared them for the position.

Imminent Retirements

Starting in 1998, with a report from the Accrediting Commission of Community and Junior Colleges in the Western Region, a number of agencies and scholars have sounded an alarm predicting a rapidly approaching crisis in community college leadership (Romero, 2004). The Commission's report spoke only to the needs of California, Hawaii, and the American territories of the Pacific. However, within a few years two national studies suggested that the crisis would affect all American community colleges. These studies predicted the retirements of between 45% and 80% of community college presidents (Shults, 2001; Weisman & Vaughan, 2002). Shults (2001) reported that 45% of 249 community college presidents responding to an American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) survey planned to retire by 2007. A year later, Weisman and Vaughan (2002) found that 79% of the 661 community college presidents responding to their survey planned to retire in 10 years or less. Replicating their study in 2006, Weisman and Vaughan (2007) found that 84% of 545 responding presidents planned to retire in 10 years or sooner and that 56% planned to retire in 6 years or sooner. The authors of both studies noted that community college leaders need to begin planning for the replacement of these presidents.

Although the majority of authors seem to be concerned about the presidency, nearly all the works cited above also mentioned that the surge in retirements will occur at all levels of administration and, to a lesser extent, at the faculty level as well. They expressed the fear that the “graying” of administrators is going to lead to a shortage of well-qualified candidates for future presidencies (Kelly, 2002; Shults, 2001). In addition, there is some evidence that “the traditional pipeline to the presidency . . . is dwindling to a trickle” (Barwick, 2002, p. 8).

Literature Review

Traditionally, the CAO position has been viewed as the stepping stone to the presidency (Vaughan, 1990). However, there is evidence that the pipeline to the CAO position is also shrinking (Leubsdorf, 2006; O’Banion, 2006-2007). If this is the case, where will community colleges find their future leaders? It is likely that departing CAOs will be replaced by individuals who have the same professional and personal characteristics. However, few studies have provided in-depth information about the professional and personal characteristics of CAOs.

Moden, Miller, and Williford (1987) asked the CAOs at a stratified random sample of 451 four- and two-year colleges about their career aspirations “beyond the current position” (p. 17). Drawing on 331 (73%) usable responses, the researchers found that 37% of CAOs indicated a desire to move to a presidency or chancellorship, 20% indicated that they planned to retire, 15% indicated that they would seek another CAO position, and 14% indicated that they would return to teaching. Looking only at community colleges, Murray, Murray, and Summar (2000) surveyed the CAOs at 250 randomly sampled AACC member colleges and found that 73 (61%) of the 120 respondents stated that their first choice for their next career move was a community college presidency.

A number of researchers have confirmed that these aspirations are realistic. Although the percentages and job titles have changed over the years, studies going back to the early 1980s have found that prior to assuming their current positions, college and university presidents across all Carnegie institutional types were most likely to have held a CAO position or a presidency at another institution (Amey, VanDerLinden, & Brown, 2002; Lumsden, Plotts, Wells, & Newsom, 2000; Moore, 1983; Ross & Green, 1998; Ross, Green, & Henderson, 1993; Twombly, 1988; Vaughan, 1989). In 1985,

Moore, Twombly, and Martorana reported the results of a national survey of 1,219 administrators at public and private 2-year colleges. The survey revealed that 36 of the presidents in the sample had been provosts or CAOs immediately prior to assuming their current presidency and that 17% had been presidents at other colleges. In 2000, a partial replication of that study using a stratified random sample of 1,700 community college administrators and achieving a 54% return rate found that the percentage of presidents who had been CAOs was 37% and that the percentage presidents at other institutions had risen to 25% (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002). In 2006, a survey of the presidents of the public community colleges belonging to the AACC yielded a response rate of 61% ($n = 545$) and found that 46% of the respondents had been either a CAO or a vice president “with academic overview” prior to their first presidency (Weisman & Vaughan, 2007, p. 6). It is clear that the CAO position is the most common stepping stone to the community college presidency.

Although researchers have chiefly focused on the presidency, it has not gone entirely unnoticed that the most likely successors to the retiring presidents are also aging (Boggs, 2003; Evelyn, 2001; Shults, 2001). O’Banion (2006-2007) reported that a 2001 AACC survey of its membership found that “33 percent of presidents estimate that one-quarter or more of their chief administrators (the ranks from which community college presidents rise) will retire in the next five years” (p. 45). In 1985, Moore et al. reported that the average age of the community college CAO was 49. In 1998-1999, McKenney and Cejda (2000) surveyed the CAOs at public community colleges belonging to AACC, excluding those CAOs who reported to a centralized district CAO. Their findings, based on 369 responses (59.0% of all those surveyed), indicated that the average age of the CAOs had risen to 52 and—more important—that 72.5% were 50 years of age or older and 36.1% were 55 years of age or older. In 2002, Amey et al. reported an average age of 54.

Because of the concern over the graying of community college presidents, some have failed to notice that CAOs are also leaving the office in large numbers for reasons other than retirement or assuming a presidency. Mooney (1993) reported that when researchers reviewed 8 years of listings in the *Higher Education Directory*, they found that 19% of CAOs left their positions each year. This compared to 16% of chief student affairs officers and 14% each for chief financial officers and presidents. Mooney also cited data from the same source, indicating that the average tenure for presidents was 7 years. More than a decade later, Weisman and

Vaughan (2007) came to the same finding, indicating that presidents averaged 7 years in office.

The story appears to be a somewhat different for CAOs. In 1991, Hawthorne (1994) surveyed 1,243 public and private community college CAOs and reported (on the basis of a 57% response rate) that the average tenure for CAOs was greater than 6 years. In 2000, Murray et al. reported that 55.6% of CAOs responding to their national survey had been in their present positions for less than 5 years. In 2002, Anderson, Murray, and Olivarez surveyed the CAOs at a national sample of 250 community colleges that had been proportionally stratified by accrediting region; the average tenure of the 184 responding CAOs (73.6% of those surveyed) was 5.4 years. However, in 2002, Amey and VanDerLinden reported that 74.0% of their national sample had been in their current positions for less than 5 years. Finally, using a national sample that was proportionally stratified by accrediting region and receiving returns from 94 (37.6%) of the 250 CAOs surveyed, Murray and Chambers (2006) reported that the average tenure of CAOs had dropped to 4.6 years in 2006. This may suggest that the tenure of a CAO is relatively short when compared to the tenure of a president.

Moreover, the pool of potential replacements for departing CAOs appears to be shrinking faster than of the pool of replacements for the presidency. There are reports that searches for top-level administrators are taking longer, costing more, and producing fewer and less qualified candidates, causing some pundits to predict that colleges may have to settle for less qualified individuals (Barwick, 2002; Evelyn, 2001; Kelly, 2002; Leubsdorf, 2006; Selingo, 2006). When one looks for the causes of the shrinking pool of potential CAOs, one finds that the problem is somewhat complex. Although some have contended that younger faculty members have been less willing to step up and assume leadership roles (Barwick, 2002), it is also true that there are fewer individuals to step forward. Part of the problem is simply demographics; the generations that followed the baby boomers were smaller, and there are fewer individuals in the work force between the ages 30 and 50 to assume leadership roles. Moreover, there has been a precipitous decline in the number of doctorates in community college leadership conferred in the past two decades. Citing a 2001 report published by the National Center for Education Statistics, O'Banion (2006-2007) noted that "the number of advanced degrees conferred in community college administration decreased 78 percent between 1983 and 1997." He went on to say that this "decline is

particularly alarming when the same report indicated that fewer than 100 degrees were conferred annually since 1990; and fewer than 25 were conferred in 1995–96 and 1996–97—the last years for which data are available” (p. 46). Although a doctorate in community college administration is not the only acceptable credential, it is often preferred by community college leaders.

In addition, the hiring freezes and retrenchments of the 1980s contributed to a graying of the faculty (Berry, Hammons, & Denny, 2001; Hardy & Laanan, 2003; Murray, 2005), further reducing the numbers of younger individuals who might now be available to assume leadership roles. Moreover, the financial woes of the 1980s also led to the reengineering or reorganizing of academic leadership positions, resulting in fewer midlevel academic administrators with broader responsibilities and further shrinking the leadership pipeline. Furthermore, higher education institutions rarely plan for orderly succession (Bornstein, 2005; Carroll, 2004; Leubsdorf, 2006), which reduces the pool of ready-to-serve candidates.

The worries over who will replace the departing presidents and CAOs are genuine. However, one significant difference may be that the office of the CAO cannot be as easily filled by individuals who are unfamiliar with the academic mission of the community college. This may be a greater crisis because although community colleges can turn to student affairs leaders, financial affairs officers, former business leaders, politicians, and retired military officers to fill vacant presidencies (Basinger, 2002), it is doubtful that these individuals can fill the highest academic leadership role if they have never been in a community college classroom. To be credible, the CAO needs “to demonstrate to a board and faculty that he or she understands the core process of the organization—teaching and learning” (Barwick, 2002, p. 10). If for no other reason than that, it is unlikely that a CAO vacancy can be filled from outside the academy. Moreover, given the unique and vitally important mission of the community college, it is nearly as unlikely that the role can be adequately performed by someone who is not committed to the open-door philosophy (Boggs, 2003).

Because CAOs provide an indispensable bridge between the faculty and the administration, they may have a greater effect on the academic affairs of an institution than even the president. “These individuals are at the center of what is ultimately of greatest importance to the community college, teaching and learning” (Vaughan, 1990, p. 19). In other words, the success of the educational mission of the community college, that is, the very reason for its existence, is undeniably dependent on the CAO.

The CAO of a community college is both the leader and the manager of the academic mission of the institution and ultimately the guardian of academic excellence (Esmond, 1989; Robillard, 2002; Vaughan, 1989, 1990). The CAO has responsibility for recommending the hiring and firing of faculty members and the major responsibility for supervising and evaluating faculty members. CAOs have the core responsibility of managing academic programs, which includes curriculum management, curriculum development, and program assessment. They are responsible for seeing to it that faculty members and curricula adhere to high academic standards and accreditation requirements. “Ultimately, the effective dean of instruction serves as an ‘internal auditor’ responsible for maintaining the college’s academic integrity” (Vaughan, 1989, p. 111).

However, being an excellent academician, although a necessary condition for leading the faculty, is no longer sufficient. The arena in which the CAO must now play includes a large set of players, all with demands of their own. The CAOs’ constituencies include the faculty, students, trustees, the president, other senior administrators, midlevel administrators, parents, various community groups, taxpayers, and oftentimes local and state legislators. As one astute observer put it, “If you’re a CAO, everyone wants a piece of you” (Marchese, 1989, p. 6).

CAOs now need to be knowledgeable about a myriad of things unrelated to the curricula and faculty-related responsibilities that once consumed their work days (Bragg, 2000; Land, 2003). “Now more than in the past, CAOs must consider and confront legislative and legal mandates, greater student demands for a consumer friendly education, complex and uncertain funding issues, and enrollment management concerns” (Murray et al., 2000, p. 24). Today’s CAO needs to be familiar with legal mandates dealing with such issues as discrimination, harassment, workplace safety, and student rights. They need to understand workforce education, job retraining, economic development, enrollment management, management of instructional technology, conflict resolution, budgeting, grants acquisition and management, resource management, and planning—just to name a few tasks not found in typical academic doctoral programs. “Indeed, the dean of instruction’s position probably requires more time, energy, and attention to a myriad of details than any other administrative position on campus, including that of president” (Vaughan, 1989, pp. 110-111). Consequently, “there is a growing consensus that the position of chief academic officer can no longer be defined by a succession of skilled amateurs rotating out of their faculties for short periods of time” (Martin & Samels, 1997, p. 15).

Despite the obvious importance of the CAO position and the likely high rate of turnover, scholars have seemed singularly uninterested in studying the CAO. A search of *Dissertation Abstracts International* using the keywords *community college* and *president* returned 514 hits with 52 hits having the word *president* in the title. A similar search using the keywords *community college* and *chief academic officer* returned 52 hits, with 3 hits having the term *chief academic officer* in the title. A closer examination of the 52 hits revealed that only 10 actually addressed the CAO position and that only 3 of these were national studies. An Education Resources Information Center search using the keywords *community college* and *president* returned 1,267 hits. A similar search using the keywords *community college* and *chief academic officer* returned 65 hits, with only 15 published since 2000.

Study Procedures

Once a sample of 300 colleges had been randomly selected from the *AACC Membership Directory*, the researchers consulted each selected college's Web site to learn the name of the current CAO. When this information was not available from the college's web site, inquiries were made by telephone or e-mail. Using the name obtained from the college's Web site, through e-mail, or by phoning the college, the Web site of *Dissertation Abstracts International* was searched to determine the type of doctoral degree the CAO had earned (if any), the year of graduation, the alma mater, and the dissertation topic. When the information was not available from *Dissertation Abstracts International*, the participant was contacted by e-mail or phone to obtain the data.

Trends and Conclusions

Table 1 shows that 133 (44%) of the sample were female and 167 (56%) were male. This suggests that although females are still underrepresented, they are making some progress in obtaining the top academic administrative position in community colleges. In a 1990 national study of "individuals identified by the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges as the chief academic officer of public community, junior, and technical colleges" (p. x), Vaughan (1990) found that only 21% of CAOs were female, and in 2002 Anderson et al. found that females

Table 1
Gender, Highest Degree Held, and Type of Doctoral Degree Held
by Chief Academic Officers in the Study Sample

| | Gender | | Highest Degree | | | | Type of Doctorate | |
|--------|----------|----|----------------|------------------|----------|-----|-------------------|----|
| | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % |
| Female | 133 | 44 | Doctorate | 210 ^a | 70 | EdD | 83 | 39 |
| Male | 167 | 56 | JD | 2 | 1 | PhD | 123 | 59 |
| | | | EdS | 6 | 2 | DA | 4 | 2 |
| | | | Master's | 82 | 27 | | | |

Note: *N* = 300. For the "Gender" and "Highest Degree" columns. *N* = 210 for the "Type of Doctorate" column (i.e., 210 of the 300 study subjects had doctoral degrees).

a. Includes doctor of philosophy (PhD), doctor of education (EdD), and doctor of arts (DA).

Table 2
Highest Degrees Held, by Gender, by
the Chief Academic Officers in the Study Sample

| | EdD | | PhD | | DA | | JD | | EdS | | Master's | |
|--------|----------|----|----------|----|----------|-----|----------|-----|----------|-----|----------|----|
| | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % |
| Male | 41 | 25 | 68 | 41 | 3 | 2 | 1 | >.5 | 5 | 3 | 49 | 29 |
| Female | 42 | 32 | 55 | 41 | 1 | >.5 | 1 | >.5 | 1 | >.5 | 33 | 25 |
| Total | 83 | 28 | 123 | 41 | 4 | 1 | 2 | >.5 | 6 | 2 | 82 | 27 |

Note: *N* = 300. Percentages should be read across rows. For example, 41 men holding the EdD represent 25% of all men in the study sample.

accounted for 41%. Table 2 provides data regarding the gender of the CAOs by degree held. It is interesting to note that there are more males than females among those CAOs not possessing a doctorate or JD.

Table 1 shows that 210 CAOs (70% of the sample) hold an earned doctorate. This represents a decline from 85% in 1985 (Moore et al., 1985) and 76% in 2000 (McKenney & Cejda, 2000). This may suggest that boards are finding it more difficult to find CAOs with doctorates. Reports of failed searches and complaints of shallow candidate pools for community college administrative positions are increasingly common (Barwick, 2002; Leubsdorf, 2006; Selingo, 2006). Moreover, the number of doctoral degrees conferred has declined in recent years (Smallwood, 2003). Even more dramatic, between 1982 and 1997 there was a 78% decline in the number of individuals earning a doctorate in community college leadership (Kelly, 2002; O'Banion, 2006-2007). Assuming that it takes 5 to 10 years to move from midlevel to upper-level administration, this

Table 3
Topics of the Dissertations Written by the Chief Academic Officers (CAOs)

| | Number of CAOs Writing on the Topic | % of CAOs With Earned Doctorates |
|-----------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| Education-related topics | | |
| Related to 2-year colleges | 74 | 35 |
| Other education topics | 64 | 31 |
| Total education | 138 | 66 |
| Topics outside of education | 72 | 34 |

paucity of degrees granted could be a contributing factor to the shallow recruitment pools that community colleges are now experiencing.

Of the 210 participants with an earned a doctorate, 138 (66%) held doctorates in the field of education and 72 held doctorates in other disciplines (Table 3). The most popular disciplines outside of education were literature (13), chemistry (8), psychology (6), sociology (6), and history (4). Of those holding earned doctorates, 123 (59%) held a PhD, 83 (39%) held an EdD, and 4 (2%) held a DA (Table 2). Although the schism between advocates for the EdD and advocates for the PhD has grown more vocal in recent years (Jacobson, 2005), it appears that the percentage of CAOs holding an EdD rather than a PhD has held fairly steady over the years at between 33% and 36% (Hawthorne, 1994; McKenney & Cejda, 2000; Vaughan, 1990).

That 138 or 66% of the dissertations written by the CAOs in our sample were in the field of education may be a harbinger of change. Previous researchers have suggested that practitioners and, more important, search committees have viewed the doctorate in education as less preferable than one in a traditional discipline (Martin, Samels, & Associates, 1997; Townsend & Wiese, 1990). However, it may be that search committees and others have recognized that community college leadership roles have become more complex, demanding legal, fiscal, and human resource management skill sets that are not included in traditional academic programs.

Table 3 shows the dissertation topics for those holding earned doctorates. Of the 138 that dealt with education, 74 specifically focused on community college issues. These are detailed in Table 4. Four topics accounted for the majority of these 74 dissertations: student issues (15 dissertations), administration or leadership (12 dissertations), curriculum or teaching (12 dissertations), and faculty development (11 dissertations). Three dissertations each dealt with assessment, transfer, trustees, and

Table 4
Two-Year College Dissertation Topics of the
Chief Academic Officers (CAOs) in the Study Sample
Who Wrote Dissertations on Community College Issues

| Topic | Number of CAOs Writing on the Topic |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Students | 15 |
| Administration or leadership | 12 |
| Curriculum or teaching | 12 |
| Faculty or faculty development | 11 |
| Assessment | 3 |
| Transfer | 3 |
| Trustees | 3 |
| Technical education | 3 |
| Accreditation | 2 |
| Counseling | 2 |
| Effectiveness | 2 |
| Mission | 2 |
| Economic development | 1 |
| Learning resources | 1 |
| Performing arts | 1 |
| Strategic planning | 1 |

technical education. Two dissertations each were on accreditation, counseling, effectiveness, and mission. One dissertation each focused on economic development, learning resources, performing arts, and strategic planning.

Table 5 reveals that that much of the dissertation research was limited in scope and therefore of limited generalizability. The greatest number of dissertations dealt with a single college (37) or a single state (24), with six comparing two colleges and six others that were based on regional studies. Only one had a national scope. Although studies with limited scopes can advance the knowledge base, it is disappointing that only 1 of 74 dissertations specifically dealing with community college issues advanced knowledge of the broader national picture. Although the U.S. community college governance model is a decentralized, state-controlled system of higher education, many issues and problems are shared across state and regional borders. Few, if any, of the dissertation topics mentioned in the paragraph above are unique to a single state or region. Nearly all, if not all, community colleges face questions regarding faculty development, assessment, transfer, trustees, technical education, accreditation, and effectiveness.

Table 5
Scope of Dissertation Research Undertaken by
the Chief Academic Officers (CAOs) in the Study Sample

| Scope | Number of CAOs |
|--------------|----------------|
| One college | 37 |
| Two colleges | 6 |
| One state | 24 |
| Regional | 6 |
| National | 1 |

Table 6
Decades in Which Chief Academic Officers (CAOs)
in the Study Sample Earned Their Doctoral Degrees

| Decade | Number of CAOs in the Study Sample Who Earned Doctorates in That Decade | % of CAOs in the Study Sample With Earned Doctorates |
|--------|--|---|
| 1960s | 1 | 0.5 |
| 1970s | 51 | 24.3 |
| 1980s | 44 | 21.0 |
| 1990s | 82 | 39.0 |
| 2000s | 32 | 15.2 |

Table 6 notes when the CAOs earned their doctorates, indicating that about 45% had earned their doctorates prior to 1990 and nearly 25% had earned their doctorates before 1980. Around 39% had earned the doctorate in the 1990s, and only about 15% finished their doctorates in the present decade. The high percentage of CAOs earning their doctorate before 1990 suggests that these individuals may be approaching retirement. This is a further indication that turnover rates may be much greater in the coming years than in the previous decades.

Table 7 shows which universities produced the most doctorate holders who became CAOs at a community college. Six universities graduated five or more of the CAOs, representing 17.6% of the individuals in our study. The University of Texas at Austin and NOVA Southeastern University educated the greatest number (seven each) of CAOs. It is interesting to note that the University of Texas at Austin, which houses the highly regarded Community College Leadership Program, also leads all other universities in educating community college presidents (Keim,

Table 7
Institutions at Which the Chief Academic Officers (CAOs)
Earned Their Doctoral Degrees

| Institution | Number of CAOs |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|
| University of Texas at Austin | 7 |
| Nova Southeastern University | 7 |
| Florida State University | 6 |
| North Carolina State University | 6 |
| University of Minnesota | 6 |
| Columbia University, Teachers College | 5 |
| 5 institutions | 4 each |
| 13 institutions | 3 each |
| 22 institutions | 2 each |
| 70 institutions | 1 each |

2005). Of further note is that NOVA Southeastern University, also graduating seven, offers a nontraditional doctoral program, suggesting that such programs have gained a perception of legitimacy in the eyes of higher education leaders. Although six higher education institutions produced five or more CAOs, more than 80% of the CAOs earned their doctorates at a total of 110 different universities, with 70 producing only one CAO. The data suggest that, for the most part, holding an earned doctorate is more important than where it was earned.

Comparisons to Presidents

When compared to the literature reporting the profiles of presidents, there appear to be differences. In this sample, 44% of the CAOs were female. Keim (2005) found that only 32% of community college presidents were female. A year later, Vaughan and Phillippe (2006) reported that the percentage had declined to 28%. If that is the bad news, the good news is that there are a greater number of females in the CAO position—the traditional stepping stone to the presidency.

Only 70% of this sample held an earned doctorate. Conversely, Vaughan and Phillippe (2006) found that 88% of the presidents held a doctorate. In this sample, 39% of those holding a doctorate held an EdD. Alternatively, Keim's (2005) earlier study found that 46.9% of community college presidents with doctorates held an EdD. Keim also found that about 71% of the presidents holding doctorates had earned their doctorates

in the field of education. However, in this sample 66% of the CAOs with doctorates had written dissertations on topics related to education.

Around 45% of the CAOs with doctorates had earned their doctorate before 1990; however, Keim (2005) reported that slightly more than 72% of the presidents with doctorates had earned a doctorate before 1990. This may be an indication that a greater number of presidents are older and therefore closer to retirement.

Implications and Conclusions

It is apparent that a great deal more progress is needed to achieve gender equity. Although the number of women CAOs has increased over the years, the number is still not representative of the proportion of women working in or attending community colleges. Women represent just more than 51% of the full-time community college faculty (“Profile of Faculty,” 2006), and in this study 44% of the CAO positions were held by women. Although this represents admirable progress toward equity from 21% in 1990 (Vaughan, 1990), it is still short of equality. When we note that only 32% of community college presidents are female and that the CAO position is the traditional stepping stone to the presidency, the enormity of the inequity becomes apparent. Community college leaders and doctoral program faculty members need to step up efforts to recruit and identify women with leadership potential and encourage and mentor them to assume presidencies.

At a time when there is an unprecedented turnover of CAOs and the job of the CAO is becoming more complex, it is worrisome that we are also experiencing a decline in the number of doctorates being granted in community college leadership. Furthermore, if the doctorate in community college leadership is the preferred degree (Barwick, 2002; O’Banion, 2006-2007), graduate schools need to heed the warning that this study provides and initiate or expand programs designed to prepare future community college leaders. Recently, California legislators recognized the seriousness of the situation and, in an extraordinary move, drastically modified their master plan to allow California State Universities to offer a doctorate in educational leadership with two emphases—one in PK-12 leadership and the other in community college leadership. Prior to this change, the California State University system was not allowed to offer a doctorate except in conjunction with a University of California institution.

Faculty members involved with graduate preparation programs need to take a hard look at their curricula. Although it goes beyond the scope of this study, the literature clearly demonstrates that the task of leading the academic side of a community college has become much more complicated over time and requires managerial and leadership skill sets not taught in traditional academic programs (Martin & Samels, 1997; Murray et al., 2000). Graduate school programs in community college leadership should do more to encourage students to pursue research that will affect the nation. It is disappointing to see that only 1 of the 74 dissertations on community college topics was a national study.

Ultimately, community college leaders need to do more to convince younger scholars to pursue a career in community college leadership. Unless they make greater efforts, the legacy built by the baby boomers is in danger.

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Marybelle C. Keim is a professor at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois.

John P. Murray is a professor at California State University, Long Beach.

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