

Crisis and Calamity in the Community College: Preparing Faculty and Administrators for the 21st Century (Accepted for Publication in the *Community College Journal*)

Terry O'Banion

Terry O'Banion is Director of the Community College Leadership Program at Walden University and President Emeritus and Senior League Fellow at the League for Innovation in the Community College

Introduction

Throughout its 100 plus year history, the community college has proved to be resilient and creative when faced with social and economic challenges, surviving the struggle to gain a respected position in the panoply of higher education. Spurts of rapid growth, occasional declines in student numbers, the lack of resources, or the quixotic whims of legislators have dented, but not derailed, the continuing development of the community college. It has, in fact, become stronger as it has responded to societal requirements to offer the most comprehensive programs in higher education today. It has not shirked its responsibility to take on the preparation of the underserved and the disenfranchised—"the toughest tasks in higher education" as Frank Newman said long ago. The community college, this unique American social invention, is a survivor, and it has prevailed as one of the most successful experiments in the nation's democracy.

As the community college gears up for its second century, it will face unprecedented challenges reflecting the changing nature of American and global society. If the community college is to survive, it must address a looming crisis that is moving toward a calamity: The retirement of legions of faculty and administrators who created and managed the modern community college, and the lack of programs to prepare their next generation of replacements.

The Need for Administrators

In 2002, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) convened a national summit of community college leaders to address problems and issues related to leadership needs in community colleges. The summit report did not mince words: "*Community colleges are facing an impending crisis in leadership.*" This alarm was sounded on the basis of a leadership survey conducted by AACC in 2001 that warned:

- *Nearly half of responding community college presidents indicate they will be retiring in the next six years; and*
- *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.*

For example, if in the next five years, one-half of the approximately 1,200 community college presidents retire (600) and one-quarter of the 3,600 chief administrators (the three vice president positions common in most community colleges), retire (900), then that is 1,500 new leaders at the top two levels that will need to be replaced.(O'Banion & Kaplan, 2003)

A new study, released in 2005, suggests that the challenge is even greater than estimated because the number of colleges from which the data were extrapolated was grossly under-reported. In a paper commissioned by the National Council of Instructional Administrators, *Strengthening the Capacity to Lead in the Community College: The Role of University-Based Leadership Programs*, authors Stephen Katsinas and Ken Kempner report the number of public, private, non-profit, and proprietary two-year colleges at nearly 2,400—twice the number of 1,200 commonly cited by the U. S. Department of Education. By using the Katsinas and Kempner estimates, the number of new leaders at the top two levels needed in the next few years becomes 3,000 rather than 1,500.

In California, the problem has already reached crisis proportions. Since July 2005 over one third (36%) of the community college CEO positions have been filled with new CEOs or interim CEOs because of retirements or resignations. Candidate pools are so thin that many searches have had to be extended several times. Colleges often have to rely on interim personnel who are retired. (D. Woodruff, Community College League of California, August 4, 2006).

Furthermore, when factoring in the number of deans, division chairs, and program officers (positions that increasingly require the doctorate) who comprise the pipeline for leadership roles, there is clearly a significant demand for advanced, specialized degrees. Another example from California provides a window into the challenge. “As of early November (2005) I am aware of the following administrative vacancies in California community colleges: nineteen Vice Presidents, four Associate Vice Presidents, nineteen Deans, and five Associate Deans—and I am sure there are others. I recently conducted a state-wide professional development workshop in San Diego for Chief Instructional Officers and learned that a third of all these positions in the state are brand new.” (D. Berz, personal communication, November 12, 2005).

Considering the vast numbers represented by these positions, *leadership crisis* may be an understatement.

The Need for Faculty

If the need for community college administrators is a *leadership crisis*, the need for community college faculty is a *calamity*. The National Study of Postsecondary Faculty conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (2004) sounded the alarm. In the academic year 2003-04 there were approximately 112,000 full-time community college faculty and 221,400 part-time faculty. These faculty were asked to indicate the number of years until they expected to retire:

	<u>Full-Time</u>	<u>Part-Time</u>
1-5 years	16.4%	13.8%
6-10 years	19.8%	16.5%
<u>11-15 years</u>	<u>19.7%</u>	<u>16.9%</u>
Total (1-15 years)	55.9%	47.2%

Using these retirement figures as a model, community colleges will need 18,375 new full-time faculty and 30,553 new part-time faculty in five years. *In the next fifteen years community colleges will need 62,608 new full-time faculty and 104,500 part-time faculty.*

In a September 1, 2006 article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* titled “Boomers’ Retirement May Create Talent Squeeze” the author highlighted the looming vacancies created in higher education because of the large numbers of retiring baby boomers. “An estimated 6,000 jobs in postsecondary education administration will have to be filled annually between 2004 and 2014.”(pA51) Citing Montgomery Community College in Maryland as an example, the author noted that 65% of the full-time faculty at Montgomery are over the age of 55—prime prospects for retirement in the next few years.

Solution 1: In-House Programs for Faculty and Administrators

The community college’s primary response to the crisis and calamity of replacing thousands of faculty and administrators has been to create in-house programs of staff development. Community colleges have been national leaders in creating staff development programs for their employees. While these programs vary greatly from college to college, their primary goal is to prepare all members of the institution to better understand the culture of the community college and to perform their roles more effectively in that culture.

The staff development programs for the faculty usually focus on exploring innovative teaching practices designed to increase student success. How to create learning communities and service learning programs or how to implement collaborative learning techniques and problem-based learning designs are examples of some of the more popular topics. Many colleges are currently focused on helping faculty to understand and apply learning objectives and how to assess them. When these faculty staff development programs are embedded in the college culture with sound designs and effective management they can improve teaching and learning practices, and they can help create a sense of community in the college, but they are seldom designed to address the shortage of and need for new faculty.

The staff development programs for administrators usually focus on leadership skills and management techniques, including the establishment of leadership institutes designed to enhance the skills of current leaders and to identify and prepare future leaders. The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) has recently completed a major project, *Leading Forward*, funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation that included

recommendations for grow-your-own (GYO) leadership programs based on programs at 16 community colleges, two community college districts, and five state programs. Where these programs are well-established and effectively-managed, they are proving to be successful in identifying new leaders and preparing them to advance to mid-level or high-level positions.

A few of the faculty development and leadership institute programs have negotiated credit with area universities for participants who aspire to advanced degrees including doctorates. However, the great majority of these in-house programs are not linked to university programs to ensure smooth transitions, and most do not encourage participants to continue their higher education in a university. *For many aspiring to advance in faculty ranks and mid-level management—and for all aspiring to presidential and vice-presidential positions—the doctorate is a requirement.*

Solution 2: University Programs for Faculty and Administrators

While in-house programs of staff development can sharpen the skills of faculty and administrators once they are on the job, university programs that prepare faculty and administrators for leadership positions must be a key part of the equation if the need is to be successfully addressed.

Does the community college sector have enough doctoral programs to keep up with the need? Not likely. The National Center for Education Statistics (2001) reported that the number of advanced degrees conferred in community college administration decreased 78 percent between 1983 and 1997. That 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. And sadly, only a few universities have created master's degree programs to address the need for community college faculty; fewer still have created doctoral degrees for community college faculty.

Almost all of the existing university programs are designed to prepare administrators rather than faculty, and they tend to fall into three groups.

The first group includes the traditional community college leadership programs that have been around for decades. The University of Texas at Austin, the oldest of these programs, is also recognized as one of the best. Other established programs include the University of Florida, Michigan State, University of Illinois, North Carolina State University at Raleigh, among others. These programs are campus and class-based and, with few exceptions, staffed with only one recognized expert with experience in the community college. No data are currently available, but these established programs probably produce fewer than 50 graduates a year.

The second group of university programs is larger, but are not specifically designed for community college leaders. These programs are couched in higher education, adult education, or general policy departments; and students are usually offered only one basic

course in the history and philosophy of the community college. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln is an example of a program in this group. The program is both online and campus-based and offered through the department of Educational Leadership and Higher Education. In these broad-based programs students can focus on a dissertation about the community college, or complete an internship in a community college, but these programs in no way provide a comprehensive curriculum on community college culture and issues. Also, these programs are hardly ever staffed with a professor who is an expert or has any experience in the community college, and it is not uncommon for the only course on the community college to be taught by an adjunct professor who is president in an adjacent institution. Again, no data are available, but these programs probably produce no more than 25 graduates per year who specialize in the community college.

The third group of university programs includes the online/distance learning programs. All of the programs listed here as examples are accredited by their regional accrediting associations, and they have expanded considerably access and variety for community college professionals seeking the doctoral degree. Nova Southeastern University (www.nova.edu), as Nova University in the 1970s, created a special community college leadership program in which professors from traditional universities (including the author) met with clusters of students over long weekends in seminars focused on community college culture and issues. The current program is embedded in the Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership and does not include any specific courses on the community college. Fielding Graduate University (www.fielding.edu) offers an Ed. D. in Educational Leadership and Change with a concentration in Community College Leadership. At Fielding students create an individualized program keyed to leadership competencies specific to the community college environment; faculty with experience in the community college mentor students through the program. Capella University (www.capellauniversity.edu) features a Ph. D. in Education Leadership for Higher Education with no specific courses on the community college listed; the program is a traditional, online program that is competency based.

The Community College Leadership Program (CCL) at Walden University (www.waldenu.edu) is an exemplary online/distance learning program offering the Ph. D. for both faculty and administrators. Named by *U. S. News & World Report* in 2001 as one of the nation's "best online graduate schools," Walden University is accredited by the North Central Association and enrolls approximately 26,000 graduate students in master's and doctoral programs. In 2003, leaders at Walden committed to creating a learning-centered model Ph.D. for community college administrators and faculty that would address the crisis and calamity in the community college. It is early to judge the success of this new program, but 130 students are currently working on a Ph. D., and new students are enrolling monthly.

Because the program of study at Walden is so unique, students first enroll in an online orientation course to teach them how to be successful in navigating the online learning environment. Each student is then assigned a Faculty Mentor who guides and coaches them through the program. The 25 mentors available to students are selected from

among the most distinguished leaders in the community college sector, and most students work with six to eight of these leaders in their studies.

The Learning-Centered program at Walden includes a Personal/Professional Development Plan, Learning Agreements, and a Learning Framework. As part of the admissions process students create a Personal/Professional Development Plan mapping out their current skills, goals, and plans to achieve the goals. Walden's distinctive Learning Framework consists of five Knowledge Area Modules (KAMs) that address the key concepts and skills deemed necessary for success as a community college faculty member or administrator. Each KAM is couched in a process that engages the student in explorations of Breadth, Depth, and Application tying together the connection between theory and practice. The Learning Agreement is a contract with the Faculty Mentor prepared for each of the five KAMs that is a summary statement of what the student plans to accomplish for each of the KAM components (Breadth, Depth, and Application).

Community college leaders need to heed the warnings in the 2006 *Chronicle* article: "Many institutions are largely unprepared for what lies ahead." "We don't do a very good job of planning for leadership succession." "The talent war that most institutions are fighting is going to get more intense." Students in the Community College Leadership program at Walden University and in the other online doctoral programs are preparing to become the new faculty and administrative leaders for the 21st century community college. These new online programs, because of their accessibility to working professionals and their strong emphasis on community college culture and issues will play an increasingly important role in addressing the crisis and calamity now facing the community college. Community colleges can increase their opportunities for recruiting outstanding talent to replace their baby boomers; a good place to begin is to identify aspiring leaders already on their staffs and encourage and support their efforts to complete the doctorate in community college leadership.

References

Berz, D. (November 12, 2005) Personal Communication.

Council of Graduate Schools and American Association of Community Colleges. (Undated) Preparing future faculty for community colleges: A concept paper.

Jeandron, C. (2006). *Growing your own leaders: Community colleges step up: A leading forward report*. Washington, D. C: Community College Press.

Katsinas, S. and Kempner, K. (March 1, 2005). *Strengthening the capacity to lead in the community college: The role of university-based leadership programs—An NCIA white paper*. Washington, D.C.: National Council of Instructional Administrators.

Leubsdorf, B. (September 1, 2006) Boomer's retirement may create talent squeeze. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

Dec. 2006/Jan. 2007, *Community College Journal* V77, N 3

National Center for Education Statistics. (2001) *Integrated postsecondary education data systems (IPEDS) Completions survey*. Washington, D. C.: U. S. Department of Education.

O'Banion, T. and Kaplan, J. (September 2003). A learning-centered Ph. D. for community college leaders. *Leadership Abstracts: World Wide Web Edition*, 16 (9), Phoenix: League for Innovation in the Community College.

Woodruff, D. (August 4, 2006) Sacramento, California: Community College League of California.