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A Decade in Review: A Systematic Literature Review of Presidential Engagement in Community College Fundraising

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ABSTRACT

Community college fundraising has grown into a visible area of institutional operations. The college president is perhaps the single most important person in directing and sustaining the use of fundraising activities on campus and, in many cases, the face of the institution. To what extent community college presidents have engaged in fundraising has been explored, but a comprehensive, especially over the past decade, is missing from higher education and community college research. Refereed articles were systematically reviewed to present an overarching lens into empirical research focused on community presidents and institutional fundraising. The study includes a review of more than 30 peer-reviewed articles published over the past ten years that focused on aspects of the role and responsibilities of the community college president with an emphasis on fundraising. Results from the literature review suggest that scholars continue to prioritize community college fundraising research but that researchers should increasingly focus on this area of study. Also, much of the literature argues that community college fundraising continues to grow as an alternative revenue stream due to public higher education's external environments. Current and aspiring community college presidents should engage in activities that will help prepare them to lead their institution's fundraising efforts.

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The role and responsibilities of the community college president have shifted (Carter & Duggan, 2011), and financial indicators are critical factors in assessing the quality and success of community college operations (Bers, et al., 2014). Community college finance literature has primarily examined local and state funding issues, student financial aid, budget challenges (Koh, Katsinas, & Bray, 2019), and to a lesser extent, fundraising (Ryan & Palmer, 2005). The emergence of community college fundraising, as a functional area, is tied to the need for alternative revenue sources that support the strategic priorities of the institution, the ebbs and flow of state and local funding, and the open-access mission that two-year institutions espouse (Boggs, 2006; Ryan & Palmer, 2005). Nearly 50 years ago, roughly half of all public community colleges had non-profit foundations attached to their campus (Luck, 1976). However, fundraising in higher education has developed into a leading source of discretionary revenue (Leslie & Ramey, 1998). Miller and Holt (2005) note that community colleges have been relatively slower than traditional four-year institutions to engage in institutional fundraising. College leaders have a unique opportunity to foster and develop a culture for philanthropic support for access institutions, therefore, playing a direct role in addressing societal needs, enabling more substantial levels of access to postsecondary education, and addressing community workforce

demands. For community college presidents, this means that their ability to lead their college in fundraising and philanthropic activities has become arguably more important than ever.

The American Association of Community Colleges (2018) lists fundraising and relationship cultivation as leading competencies for presidents to acquire. The expectation for fundraising is essential for aspiring community college presidents to anticipate and prepare for their current roles. As such, the study aims to synthesize established research for this line of inquiry conducted over the past decade. The study illuminates methodological techniques employed to address inquiries on community college fundraising and discusses how the collective work informs practice among community college presidents and guides institutional engagement in philanthropic operations and activities led by the president. A systematic literature review was employed to identify gaps in research that might be persistent in the study of community college presidents and fundraising and justify the need for additional research on this specific area of study in community college literature.

Literature Review on Community College Presidents and Fundraising

A systematic literature review was conducted and was guided by one research question for the study. Research Question 1 asked: What elements, expectations, and skills are associated with effective fundraising among community college presidents?

The literature examined focused on community college presidential leadership and the emergence of fundraising as a contemporary responsibility for these executives during the last decade. The study included a search of refereed journals from 2011-2020. This time frame was chosen because of the purpose of the study, which is to provide a relatively current presentation of research studies on community college presidents' roles in fundraising. The higher education research landscape needs a more consistent focus on the intersection of community college presidential leadership and fundraising and philanthropy operations. Many studies cover various aspects of fundraising and philanthropy, but far less succinctly in line with community college presidential leadership. As such, the study was distinguished as one that depicts a contemporary portrayal of community college fundraising research focused on college leadership as a baseline exploration that could expand periodically. Therefore, comprising peer-reviewed articles older than ten years was deemed out of scope for the study design.

The literature review was structured based on leadership issues and diverse resource allocation strategies and practices commonly found in the community college presidency and finance literature. The study places the association of presidential leadership, fundraising, and community colleges in perspective for those leaders who aspire or currently serve in those roles. The work also extends to campus and external constituents to better understand the existing scholarship and encourage and inform practice and participation in campus-wide fundraising.

Leading online databases, Google Scholar, Summon, and Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), were searched for their popularity and reputation for accessing relevant peer-reviewed journal articles. Empirical research that focuses on community college fundraising has a modest presence in higher education and community college research. The study's criteria created some limitations in identifying studies that discuss the role of community college

presidents in a fundraising leadership function. So, expanding the search for enough articles to conduct the study required many key terms. Initial key terms in the search included “community college presidents,” “community college fundraising,” “institutional advancement,” “community college philanthropy,” “community college donors,” “alumni relations at community colleges,” “planned giving at community colleges,” “community college finance,” and “private giving and gifts to community colleges.” Then, the title results of each search return were reviewed to determine their applicability to the study. Google Scholar was first searched with the exact keywords “community college fundraising.” Eight pages of literature were reviewed and excluded dissertations, books, reports, magazines, and briefs. Also, the study excluded literature that did not focus on the U.S. Community College sector or written in a language other than English. Then, based on the initial screening, the key terms were revised to only include “community college presidents” with secondary terms that included “community college fundraising,” “community college philanthropy,” “community college donors,” and “community college alumni.”

The search returned 647 publications on community college presidents and community college fundraising. A total of 363 peer-reviewed articles were identified through Google Scholar, 250 articles in Summons, and 34 articles from ERIC in the secondary screening of articles. A total of 80 articles (12.3%) were considered potentially relevant to the purpose of the study. There were 15 duplications of the 80 articles. After reviewing titles and abstracts and removing duplications, 65 articles were selected for final review. A total of 32 of the 65 identified studies (49.2%) were considered relevant and included in the study. There are limitations to the study as it did not use all available databases to conduct the study. Therefore, caution should be exercised in generalizing the results from the survey of the literature.

Multiple articles identified during the search examined the position of the community college president, specifically related to leadership styles, perceptions, preparation, and characteristics. Much of the community college fundraising literature generally mentions the president’s role in the development process or comprehensively covers college leaders’ involvement. Also, several studies on community college fundraising explored elements and practices often associated with the profession, such as planned giving, alumni associations, and to a lesser extent, capital campaign activity. After considering the literature content, the study was organized based on broad areas in community college fundraising and the role of the president in those areas.

Emerging Elements of Community College Presidents Engagement in Fundraising

Research on the community college presidency suggests that intentional planning is important for successful fundraising leadership which has developed into a pressing need (Boggs, 2011). Wagoney and Besikof (2011) found that only 2% of private giving to higher education goes towards community colleges. The decline in funding for public higher education has influenced community colleges to focus more on their alternative revenue capabilities, mainly fundraising (Skari, 2014). Boggs (2012) argued that trending issues for community colleges have shifted, and there is a need for outward-facing engagement. As a result, the community college sector has experienced a greater demand to emphasize the importance of fundraising operations on their campus, including attracting private gifts, sponsorships, and grants.

Drummer and Marshburn (2014) discussed the growth of community college fundraising programs and the increased strategic investment interest of popular philanthropic organizations like the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Lumina Foundation. Presidents are the most essential person in community college fundraising at the institutional level because they can support internal fundraising priorities that help build fundraising capacities and encourage an institutional commitment to philanthropic operations. Justice and Scott (2012) analyzed giving to public community college foundations and examined positive relationships between selected variables and fundraising. They found that operational budgets, enrollment, location, and endowment size influenced foundations' ability to increase private giving. They also found that senior fundraising officers had positive views of their community college president's engagement in fundraising for their foundations.

Craft and Guy (2019) characterized fundraising as an opportunity for community colleges to build capacity to accomplish their mission. They contended that it is urgent and that two-year institutions must not ignore philanthropy's significance in their success. Institutions finding success in their fundraising goals have cultivated a culture that includes sustained strategy, management, and solicitation of giving. Smith, Miller, and Gearhart (2017) examined the usage of fundraising feasibility studies to plan for capital campaigns. They noted that more community colleges were hosting campaigns and that the planning process was underexplored in the community college literature. Their findings revealed that community college leaders believe that feasibility studies were instrumental in the successful facilitation of campaign planning. The feasibility study provided leaders with a better understanding of their capacity for aggressive fundraising, a curation of a case for philanthropic giving, and the human resources needed to conduct the campaign.

Community college alumni less often become donors (Carter, 2011). Skari (2014) argued that alumni giving is one of the leading underdeveloped pools for attracting private gifts and illustrated that community college fundraising is quite different from fundraising at four-year colleges and universities. The author examined alumni giving at community colleges by employing a predictive model to a multistate sample of 7,330 college alumni. The author concluded that community college alumni who hold an associate's degree were twice as likely to give compared to alumni who did not give. Also, alumni who gave to their four-year institution were four times more likely to give to the community college they attended.

Smith, Gearhart, and Miller (2019) attributed problems in alumni giving to the lack of prospect research infrastructure, the transient nature of the community college students, and the lack of solicitation and stewardship programs with graduates and former attendees of the institution. However, community colleges have experienced a substantial increase in receiving million-dollar gifts to their institutions in the past decade. Smith et al. (2019) surveyed a panel of 10 community college presidents to identify how they and their institution were utilizing their alumni relations officers and affinity groups. The findings suggested that presidents viewed alumni relations programs as an essential asset to their institution and that their sustainable presence would be a priority. To develop effective fundraising strategies, 2-year colleges must understand what affects alumni giving. There are multiple benefits to the community college sector for identifying and sustaining a pattern of giving from firms, estates, and individuals. The

effort can aid community college presidents in developing strategies to support their institutional mission and address issues unique to their campus and surrounding area (Smith et al., 2017).

Carter (2011) reintroduced a donor-based model for community colleges to utilize to improve their fundraising. Inspired by the design of logic models, the model's objective was to provide community college presidents with a tool to conceptualize, plan, and carry out their fundraising efforts while recognizing that no one action or decision led to accomplishing the institutions' fundraising goals. In a subsequent study, Carter and Duggan (2011) used the Seven Principles of Giving as a theoretical framework to design their study on philanthropic motivation. After surveying 2,865 donors and using an ANOVA to analyze the data, the study showed various types of communication from the community college. McAllister's (2013) study on community college fundraising in the context of public relations revealed that institutions in New Jersey were not optimizing their dialogic capacity by utilizing the internet for successful fundraising. The author examined how dialogic theory served as a guide for relationship-building. Bucci and Waters (2014) employed content analysis techniques to examine fundraising websites at North Carolina colleges and universities. Compared to their four-year counterparts, the study found that community colleges did not present their fundraising in a dialogic format to engage with donors and prospective donors. Telephone calls, letters, and visits from the president statistically influenced donors, albeit differently. Gearhart, Smith, and Miller (2019) found that crowdsourcing, as a fundraising strategy, was typically used to address immediate financial needs and engage donors who might be willing to invest in the college long-term. Also, crowdsource funding was used to appeal to a broader range of individuals interested in supporting the institution. Studies have suggested that though community college fundraising has experienced an upward trend in performance, planning, strategy, and focus of solicitation and stewardship of various gifts and gift types are not as clear-cut (Smith, 2018). Fundraising as an administrative task within community colleges can be challenging because of the lack of sustainable approaches to establishing a sophisticated fundraising unit on campus (Smith, 2018).

Gyllin, Miller, Morris, and Grover (2015) conducted a case study on donor giving patterns and confirmed that maintaining a data-driven infrastructure for donor and gift information management is a considerable task consistent with previous literature. They also suggested that community college presidents would benefit from preparation for fundraising as they progress in their careers and consider components of fundraising practices such as infrastructure development and relationship building. After distributing a survey to 150 community college leaders, including campus presidents, Smith, Gearhart, and Miller (2018) determined that planned giving is a solicitation and stewardship process that community colleges participate in but often lack a strategy connected to larger institutional fundraising goals.

Fundraising as a Skillset and Expectation for Community College Presidents

Price, Schneider, and Quick (2016) concluded that college presidents recognized that financial management is a high-pressure responsibility and a daunting undertaking in their day-to-day role. Financial strategies and entrepreneurship are required to achieve fundraising goals (Duree & Ebbers, 2012). Mullin (2014) suggested that community college leaders take lessons from the Great Recession and seek opportunities to generate alternative funding, including fundraising and workforce training contracts.

In their discussion on competencies among community college presidents, Duree and Ebbers (2012) mentioned that some presidents view fundraising as their institution's most substantial challenge. Also, they discovered that fundraising was considered a more prominent concern than other key areas such as enrollment and retention and more political factors like legislative advocacy. For community college leaders, including the president, relationship building is necessary for fostering a successful fundraising unit, and this work applies to alumni, philanthropists, elected officials, and foundations alike (Clevenger, 2018). Gearhart and Miller (2018) surveyed community college presidents to learn how and to what extent they prioritize institutional fundraising. The study revealed that presidents spent nearly 50 hours a week on fundraising duties, approximately 30% of their monthly work time. Event-based fundraising and stewardship represented the two leading fundraising activities that community college presidents invested in monthly.

Ottenritter (2012) suggested that the shifting role of community college presidents, such as the increasing need for fundraising, is attributed to less job satisfaction and shorter tenures as president. Community college presidents decide to assume the role for several reasons, many of which tend to be external, such as a person encouraging them to consider the role or perhaps some specific professional or personal event that motivates them to pursue the leadership role (McNair, 2014). However, community college stakeholders such as trustees and faculty expect community college presidents to perform exceptionally despite having less funding and resources (Trent & Pollard, 2019). Boggs (2011) suggested that community college presidents take steps to eliminate less relevant activities to the institution's mission like reducing program duplication and instead investing in fundraising efforts. He argued that students would tell the story of their worthwhile experiences with the campus, eventually attracting future students.

McNair, Duree, and Ebbers (2011) interviewed community college presidents to gain perspective on the skills that presidents believe they needed as they ascended to the role and perhaps would have benefited from before they assumed their leadership position. Fundraising, among other key responsibilities such as financial management, was identified as an invaluable competency. Vargas (2013) explored the process for curriculum development for a community college leadership preparation and identified that politics represented the most concerning aspect of community college leadership. Despite politics being an overarching theme in the preparation programs for community college presidents, financial management and fundraising, including alternative resource allocations, such as grants and sponsorships were considered leading topics to include in doctoral curricula. White (2011) asserts that several internal and external demands, some of which compete with one another, pushed community college presidents to look for new ways to generate revenue through fundraising activities. Presidents need to work well with their governing boards, for example, to accomplish funding objectives and overall fundraising goals. White suggested that strategies such as developing creative infrastructures that support teaching and learning can foster a fundraising culture that leads to positive student success outcomes.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to survey the literature on community college presidents and their role in fundraising. The systematic literature review method helped demonstrate that community

college fundraising and college presidents' orientation towards fundraising activities have received attention over the past decade. Though there is a possibility that the study neglected relevant works, the review summarizes a body of work that includes significant contributions to the topic. Many of the studies examined center on leadership, preparation, and explanations for the increased need for institutional advancement. Community college presidents have increasingly engaged in fundraising activities that support several initiatives, but it remains a relatively more minor part of community college revenue. Individual donor commitment fluctuates across two-year institutions, but industry engagement is a primary strategy for private support. Private industry support is structured around a workforce development framework where community colleges create training and hiring pathways with industries based on the company's specialization. Businesses often invested in community colleges with grant contracts and private gifts in scholarships to support students enrolled in programs that would lead to employment in the same specialized industry.

Donor behavior and attitudes toward community colleges have seemingly shifted over the past several years. Donor interest for two-year institutions might be tied to the overall perception and appreciation for higher education in society. Moving toward high donor engagement to improve private giving is a growing strategy for establishing and maintaining a successful fundraising office. The literature suggests that two-year colleges rarely have the type of donor base found in traditional four-year colleges. As mentioned, private financial resources from community businesses and industries that support academic programs ultimately produce trained graduates who might eventually work for those businesses and industries. Though this type of partnership and support can benefit the community college, it lacks diversity in private resource creation.

Fundraising requires a strong commitment from leading donors, individuals who offer cornerstone types of gifts to the institution. Especially relevant in capital campaigns, high net worth individuals with the capacity to give large gifts to support the college are perhaps the more crucial and aspirational elements to the success of intense fundraising initiatives such as a capital campaign. As an aggressive fundraising effort, the capital campaign remains a critical initiative for fundraising practice for more community colleges to engage. Donor engagement is one of the primary considerations when planning for the capital campaign. Lead donors often serve on a committee of volunteers to help oversee and advise on the capital campaign. The capital campaign chair is often viewed as the leading volunteer of the capital campaign, who works closely with the community college president and senior institutional advancement officer. Community college presidents should be prepared to work with these volunteers to provide guidance throughout the process, motivate and inspire them, and communicate whether the college's priorities and are indeed aligned with the campaign activities.

Using feasibility studies, as an example, can identify the priorities and needs of the community college. Furthermore, through a thorough investigation, the bulk of the information compiled, presented, and accepted by community college leadership could differ from the expectations of the donors and volunteers. The president and senior fundraising officer should fill the gaps and clarify distinguishing differences that distract from productive college fundraising efforts. Community colleges are equipped with a distinctive message to appeal to their alumni and donor base: their support is gradually needed every year due to the stagnation or decline in public

funding. Understanding what donors expect from activities like capital campaigns can provide an additional level of insight on how to improve donor engagement. Empirical research on the community college capital campaigns was relatively scarce during the literature search. Community college presidents have multiple managerial and leadership styles. How they engage with private giving efforts might vary based on their comfort level with the type of work and skills typically recognized by experts as ideal for fundraising success. The literature review found that much of the empirical work on community college presidents and fundraising activities center on the need for preparation or marketing and public relations factors. Future leaders need more research that outlines approaches for successful community college fundraising from an administrative perspective. In a report sponsored by the TIAA Institute and the American Council for Education, Olisi (2019) identified almost half of all gifts from the US's leading 50 donors supported the higher education sector. Though this is a positive trend for higher education, unanswered questions remain regarding the status of community college fundraising, mainly inquiries about the giving patterns among community college donors.

The study sought to examine the empirical literature that has been established for fundraising and philanthropy in the community college sector to bring forth a better understanding of college presidents' place in the practice and illuminate how their roles are situated in this emerging and expected practice. The study also further extends the argument made by scholars who are participating in and conducting this line of research. First, up to this point, private giving in the community college sector is progressively critical to the success of two-year institutions. Second, research for improving institutional orientation toward engaging in fundraising is needed.

Aspiring community college presidents should take the opportunity to engage in external relations opportunities when available. The president's role continues to shift and remains incredibly influenced by their ability to lead the institution in this functional area. Community college finance models vary across states and institutions; however, economic and public policy-driven demands, like competition for public financial resources, contribute considerably to sustaining fundraising as an expected revenue stream for community colleges. Community college presidents should invest in building skills that reflect their ability to be strong leaders who can develop and convey a vision for successful fundraising. Moreover, they need to communicate institutional needs while speaking to community needs and expectations. The study calls for more empirical research on community college fundraising strategies to provide new directions for two-year college presidents and fundraising professionals.

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