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Community College Chief Academic Officers' Perceptions of the Pipeline for the Presidency

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE

PIPELINE FOR THE PRESIDENCY

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Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Elizabeth Allan

An Abstract of the Dissertation Presented
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In response to research pointing to a growing executive leadership crisis in community colleges (CCs), with too few strong candidates entering the leadership pipeline for the presidency, I focused this study on individuals already in that pipeline. My goal was to develop an understanding of their perceptions of their own roles in the pipeline and the potential of faculty to enter the pipeline and ultimately achieve a presidency. Utilizing a qualitative research design, I explored the perceptions of eight individuals who occupy the pivotal position of chief academic officer (CAO) within the leadership pipeline at a CC, all recruited from a single state CC system. I carried out my research, in the form of interviews via Zoom and document collection, from March to June 2022. My goal was to gain a better understanding of how CC faculty are poised in executive job searches and how current CC administrators perceive their readiness to seek a position as president of a CC. Key among my findings drawn from the participant interviews and documents were the steps aspiring leaders among the faculty can take to prepare for leadership. First, faculty must be willing to carry out tasks, outside their regular teaching duties, that help them build experience. Second, they should become familiar with areas beyond their departments and the college environment, up through the state legislature. Third,

they should seek to earn a doctorate if they have a degree no higher than a master's degree. Finally, the data revealed that fundraising is an essential aspect of the president's job. Therefore, as a faculty member moves up through the leadership pipeline, they must become comfortable with this aspect of the position. Through these results, I assembled a list of recommendations for guiding CAOs who want to mentor faculty interested in entering the leadership pipeline, which has implications for practice.

DEDICATION

To my family, friends, students, and colleagues, each of whom has contributed to my growth and

life experiences in their own unique ways.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

xiii

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

As recently as 2021, reports in the literature point to an ongoing wave of retirements among community college presidents in the United States (Artis & Bartel, 2021; Martin, 2021). However, concerns about a looming increase in retirements and shortening tenure of presidents began to surface in the early 2000s (Eddy et al., 2017; Martin, 2021). By the mid-2010s, there were varying predictions regarding the increasing rate of retirements and where it would lead, with Wyner (2014) anticipating that it would soon reach nearly 50% and McNair (2015) expecting it to go much higher to almost 90%. According to a study from California, the tenure of community college presidents had reached an average of three and a half years at the time of the study, which it compared to that of four-year institutions at an average of seven years (Wheelhouse, 2016), contributing to the increasing rate.

The position of chief academic officer has historically served as a stepping-stone in the pipeline for full-time faculty candidates seeking the presidency (Anderson, 2014; Crosson et al., 2005; Eddy, 2018; Eddy & Garza Mitchell, 2017; Eddy et al., 2019; Twombly, 1988; Vaughan, 1990), with many community college presidents having begun their careers as full-time community college faculty members (Cohen et al., 2014; Eddy, 2018). Although, questions about the adequacy of the traditional pathway to the presidency, in which a faculty member advances through the leadership pipeline to become president, also began to appear in the literature in the early 2000s (Amey et al., 2002), coupled with emerging concerns about an increase in open president positions. Since then, first Campbell et al. (2010) and more recently Baker et al. (2019) have described this inadequacy as further weakening a leaky pipeline, in

which faculty often lose interest in leading beyond lower-level academic leadership positions, such as department chair.

According to Baker et al. (2019), Eddy (2018), and Perrakis et al. (2009), a community college faculty that is not diverse will lead to a weakened pipeline of candidates for executive positions. Additionally, community college faculty members are making alternate career choices that lead them away from the pipeline (Baker et al., 2019; Crosson et al., 2005), such as retiring from their faculty positions or leaving for other positions (Baker et al., 2019; Twombly & Townsend, 2008). There are also fewer qualified candidates in the pipeline than in years past (Campbell et al., 2010; Forthun & Freeman, 2017). Full-time community college faculty have not been studied widely; consequently, there is a lack of understanding about faculty decision-making regarding their current interest in executive leadership. For example, Twombly and Townsend (2008) stated that there has been very little scholarly research done on community college faculty when compared to research in other areas of these colleges. There remains a lack of sufficient research in all areas of the community college (Eddy & Garza Mitchell, 2016). Although, since 2019, gaps in the literature on community college faculty have begun to be addressed, in specific areas such as teaching and learning and professional development. For example, Harrington et al. (2021) studied the impact of teaching and learning on CC student success, while Eddy et al. (2021) examined professional development for CC faculty on teaching during a pandemic.

To provide a comprehensive understanding of what leadership is, Buller (2015), described it as "a process," "involving influence," "affect[ing] groups of people," and "entail[ing] pursuit of a common good" (pp. 115-116). As an expert in academic leadership, Buller (2015) was writing about leadership in the specific context of the academic dean, in which

2

leadership involves supervising quasi-independent experts (faculty). For example, a dean may have to demonstrate why a certain course of action is in the best interest of faculty members' own goals and why it will benefit them and their students.

Amey et al. (2002) and Boggs and McPhail (2016) explained that community colleges have grown in size and complexity since the mid-1980s. Likewise, Burke (2013) discussed the, at the time, "record enrollment growth" of community colleges (p. 839). More recently, Martin (2021) has described them as possessing a "dynamic environment" (p. 16). Therefore, that growth in size and complexity appears to still be evolving. Increasingly, more non-traditional candidates have been filling vacant leadership positions (Amey et al., 2002; Martin, 2021; Perrakis et al., 2009). A trend that appears to be following in the wake of this growing complexity.

Boggs and McPhail (2016) stated that "especially since 2000, community college leaders have been encouraged to aggressively pursue external funding sources" (p. 27). Therefore, a president must now devote much more time to fundraising than in the past (Cohen et al., 2014; Craft & Guy, 2019; Eddy & Garza Mitchell, 2017), a skill some full-time community college faculty members may never need to develop.

The traditional pathway to the community college presidency, in place until the 1980s, would have coincided with a view of leadership described by trait theory. According to Turner and Baker (2018) and Kezar et al. (2006), trait theory focuses on a leadership model in which a leader is entitled to their position based on personal traits. Therefore, community college presidents may have been chosen based more on the characteristics of the individual than on the requirements of the position, giving faculty members more opportunities to advance. Newer theories of leadership focus more on the position itself and its requirements. For example,

concepts of adaptive leadership focus on identifying challenges and analyzing them to produce

solutions (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004; Heifetz et al., 2009; Kezar et al., 2006; Khan, 2017;

Sunderman et al., 2020). According to Heifetz et al. (2009), "Adaptive leadership is the practice

of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive" (p. 14). Given that, as stated

previously, changes in community colleges since 2000 have prompted search committees to seek

non-traditional candidates for president, this theory can be a useful lens through which to explain

the change in the approach of president search committees.

   According to Cohen et al. (2014) and Martin (2021), the expectation that a community

college president have an academic background has become less of a priority for president search

committees in recent years, due to the changing role of the president. Yet among community

college staff and faculty there has been a conflicting perception that any president who has not

risen from the academic ranks does not have the necessary insider perspective to lead effectively

(Miller & Pope, 2003). According to a study by Thompson et al. (2012) staff expressed

confidence in an interim president's ability to build relationships within the community college's

environment because the president was an insider who had risen through the ranks. Osburn and

Gocial (2020) found that faculty are more likely to place trust in an administrator who has

demonstrated competency in their duties, a competency that could be derived from extended

community college experience. Also, Wyner (2014) pointed out that trustees often believe that a

community college president should have an academic background.

   As Anderson (2014) and Eddy et al. (2019) have asserted, many college administrators

have historically been drawn from the ranks of faculty. Also historically, the traditional pathway

or "pipeline" to the community college presidency has nearly always included the administrator

position of chief academic officer or CAO (Amey et al., 2002; Eddy et al., 2019; Twombly,

1988; Vaughan, 1990). Yet given the argument presented in the literature that the number of qualified candidates for the presidency has shrunk significantly, it was time to revisit the community college faculty as a renewed source for the pipeline to the presidency. Specifically, it was time to examine their preparation for college leadership and to pose questions that can help to illuminate why few CAOs (as former faculty) seek or are prepared to move into a presidency. Additionally, according to Bray (2010), Garza Mitchell and Eddy (2008), and Keim and Murray (2008) while community college presidents have been widely researched, community college academic deans (CAOs) are far less likely to be represented in the literature. A thorough search of the literature revealed that these CAOs continued to be under researched in comparison to presidents. Therefore, questions that provide insights into the role of the CAO are useful in narrowing the gap in the literature and producing a better understanding of this pivotal role in relation to career pathways to the presidency.

There are some key questions that if answered can help inform policy and practice toward strengthening the academic leadership pipeline at community colleges. Faculty have traditionally been positioned at the beginning of the pipeline. Therefore, it was important to understand if they are still a good source of leadership, and if so, what forms of professional development might they need. Additionally, including part-time faculty in leadership development can enhance their preparation as a potential candidate for the community college presidency, given that many trustees participating in presidential searches believe it is essential for a president to have at least minimal teaching experience, although others have not seen it as important (Plinske & Packard, 2010). Those trustees who do value teaching experience for candidates may see adjunct faculty, who can couple their teaching experience with leadership development, as strong candidates. Therefore, addressing questions about the position of chief academic officer was an important

5

step for developing an understanding of the level of preparedness faculty currently possess to advance into a leadership position.

Purpose of the Study

There is apparent conflict between the changing role of the community college president and current perceptions of who can fill that role. That conflict raises questions about the viability of traditional faculty candidates, as well as nontraditional candidates, such as those selected for their business skills rather than academic leadership skills. Given the extent to which there appears to be a crisis in the lack of strong candidates for the presidency, perhaps the traditional source of candidates, community college faculty, may need to prepare for newer aspects of the presidential role that didn't previously exist. Also, adjunct faculty members, who have usually been excluded from presidential searches, might also be considered, given that they could possess strengths more suited to the modern role of community college president. With this backdrop, I conducted a study designed to understand perceptions of community college chief academic officers about the community college leadership pathway.

Primary Research Question

Given that previous generations of community college (CC) faculty were more willing to enter the leadership pipeline for the community college presidency, the primary research question guiding this study was: What are the perceptions of former community college faculty members and non-faculty members who have advanced to the position of CC chief academic officer about the potential of faculty to enter and traverse the pipeline for the presidency?

Frameworks

Boggs and McPhail (2016), two former CC presidents, conceptualized the change in CC missions described in the literature as happening in periods of time called "generations."

Building on a study by Tillery and Deegan (1985), which identified four generations in the evolution of the CC, Boggs and McPhail (2016) named and elaborated on a fifth generation (alluded to in the study). The four generations identified by Tillery and Deegan (1985) were "Extension of High School" (p. 5), "The Junior College" (p. 8), "The Community College" (p. 12), and "The Comprehensive Community College" (p. 16). Tillery and Deegan (1985) did not name the fifth generation or describe its characteristics because they had placed the end of the fourth generation in the mid-1980s, which coincided with the publication of their study. Instead, they focused on describing challenges facing this upcoming generation.

Expanding upon Tillery and Deegan's (1985) generations approach, Boggs and McPhail (2016) elaborated on the study authors' fifth generation "generally referred to as the 'Contemporary Community College' (mid-1980s to 1990)" (p. 18). Furthermore, they added three more for a total of eight. For example, the authors described a sixth generation as focused on "student learning and institutional outcomes" and a seventh as based on "entrepreneurial thinking" (pp. 19-20). Lastly, they have described the eighth and current generation as focused on completion of courses and degrees. They further explained that this focus is driven by several external (national, state, and local) factors.

Given Boggs and McPhail's (2016) generations approach to describing the evolution of the CC, adaptive theory (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004; Heifetz et al., 2009; Kezar et al., 2006; Khan, 2017; Sunderman et al., 2020) is a useful theoretical framework for understanding not only the evolving role of the CC president, but also the chief academic officer, the pipeline position leading to the presidency. Adaptive theory explains how the behavior of leaders must be responsive to challenges in the organization and that leaders must thoroughly analyze those challenges to create effective solutions so the organization can function successfully (Heifetz &

Linsky, 2004; Heifetz et al., 2009; Kezar et al., 2006; Khan, 2017; Sunderman et al., 2020). It also involves leading people through "periods of disturbance" or "disequilibrium" with the goal of giving them opportunities to "experiment" with potential solutions to problems (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 28). Therefore, leaders must know how to lead others in ways that empower them to act on problems and develop solutions, which may be more challenging for certain potential candidates. For example, CC faculty members may only have experience responding to a specific set of problems related to the classroom, which they must handle themselves rather than empowering others to find solutions. Adaptive theory helps create an understanding of how certain aspects of a work role affect leadership style, especially when the leader is supervising others (Boehe, 2016). Thus, applying adaptive theory to faculty management of students in the classroom might reveal specific ways in which they can develop those skills as a department chair or CAO.

Methods

To answer my research question, I employed a basic interpretive qualitative design. The researcher, using these methods, conducts an in-depth investigation of a specific topic by examining a small group of individuals' understanding of their experiences in the social world (Glesne, 2016; Thirolf, 2012). Based on adaptive theory, I created interview questions for participants about their leadership roles. Adaptive theory explains how leaders must align their behavior with identifying, analyzing, and solving problems (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004; Kezar et al., 2006; Khan, 2017; Sunderman et al., 2020). It also focuses on leaders identifying their "orienting purpose" (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 221), which then allows them to make difficult decisions within the context of doing work that matters (Heifetz et al., 2009). Employing this

theoretical framework guided my design of interview questions that drew responses about how CAOs address the problems they face in their position.

Key Terms

In order to research and write about the chief academic officer and faculty at the CC, consistency with terminology was important. Job titles for the pipeline position of chief academic officer (CAO) at a CC can vary. For example, the following titles all refer to the same type of academic leadership position at a CC and may be used interchangeably to describe officers of equal rank: *academic dean, academic vice-president, dean of instruction,* or *vice-president of instruction* (Anderson et al., 2002; Gill & Jones, 2013; Keim & Murray, 2008; Osburn & Gocial, 2020). As a researcher investigating the position to better understand the CC leadership pipeline, I used the terms chief academic officer or CAO when describing this position. In direct quotations, I retained the original term used by the author, unless it caused confusion. When clarity was needed, I substituted chief academic officer or CAO.

Additionally, it was important to define the roles and responsibilities of faculty at CCs to differentiate them from faculty at research universities. According to Alexander et al. (2012), "teaching is the primary responsibility of community college faculty" (p. 851). Specifically, they "decide on course content and level, select textbooks, prepare and evaluate examinations, and generally structure learning conditions for students" (Cohen et al., 2014, p. 79). Full-time CC faculty are paid less than faculty at research universities and do not routinely submit articles for publication (Cohen et al., 2014). Unlike full-time faculty, part-time, or adjunct, faculty are paid at a lower rate and are hired on a contingency basis according to the needs of the college (Cohen et al., 2014). In recent years, part-time faculty have come to outnumber full-time faculty, accounting for as much as 69% of all CC faculty (Cohen et al., 2014; ASHE, 2010).

Lastly, I included the term "qualified" in my discussion of candidates for leadership positions, meaning candidates that search committees and hiring managers would view as being prepared to carry out the duties of the leadership position they are attempting to fill. I also included the terms "traditional" and "nontraditional" when discussing the CC leadership pipeline. When I have used the term traditional, I have focused on the academic pipeline that includes positions such as department chair, program director, associate dean, dean, chief academic officer, and finally president. When I have used the term "nontraditional," I am referring to work experience of CC leaders, including the president, from outside academic positions and even outside the CC.

Positionality Statement

My status as a doctoral student researcher with a background in higher education placed me in close proximity to the participants in my study, in terms of familiarity with each of their roles. I was a CC part-time faculty member, having taught as an adjunct at various colleges within my state's system for almost ten years. While teaching, I entered a doctoral program in higher education because of my interest in CC teaching and wanting to eventually provide leadership in that area. I became interested in the responsibilities of the CC academic dean while completing a doctoral internship in the academic affairs office of one of the colleges where I was teaching. My interest in understanding how the role functions in the pipeline to the presidency grew as I learned more about the complexities of the role. The literature on faculty who become academic deans was supported by what I saw in the role, making me curious to learn more by conducting research.

Additionally, as a White woman with a middle-class background, I needed to be aware of how my experiences within these aspects of my identity could affect my perceptions of

participants who have a different racial identity or socio-economic status. Furthermore, I was raised in a rural area and spent a significant amount of my time as a community-college instructor teaching at rural colleges. Therefore, I needed to understand that my affinity with rural communities could affect my interactions with participants who work at both urban and rural colleges. I had to be aware of being overly sympathetic to the challenges of those working at rural colleges; however, I also had the potential to judge those same challenges through the lens of how I saw colleagues addressing them.

Although I am now an administrator at a private university, I may eventually enter and advance along the CC leadership pipeline as part of my career path. Therefore, I had to continually reflect on how my biases and career development affected my interactions with participants and my ability to analyze the data I gathered. I kept a journal of my perceptions of the data gathering and analysis process and recorded my reactions to the data.

Summary

To reiterate, there is an ongoing wave of retirements among CC presidents (Artis & Bartel, 2021; Martin, 2021; McNair, 2015; Wyner, 2014), raising concerns about colleges having enough qualified candidates to fill open positions. Many CC presidents of the past had academic backgrounds stemming from their early careers as faculty members who then advanced to the position of chief academic officer before seeking a presidency (Anderson, 2014; Crosson et al., 2005; Eddy, 2018; Eddy & Garza Mitchell, 2017; Eddy et al., 2019; Twombly, 1988; Vaughan, 1990).

Modern presidents are less likely to have begun their careers among the faculty due to changing expectations of search committees (Cohen et al., 2014; Martin, 2021), which may have

11

contributed to a weakened pipeline in which fewer faculty choose to advance along it to obtain a

position as president (Boggs & McPhail, 2016; Baker et al., 2019; Cohen et al., 2014).

Additionally, many potential (CAO) candidates for the position of president began choosing to

remain in their positions until retirement, starting in the early 2000s (Campbell et al., 2010), also

contributing to a lack of qualified candidates for open presidential positions. Given these

concerns, I became curious about what it might take to revitalize what appears to be a weakening

pipeline for qualified candidates, as defined by search committees.

Therefore, I was interested in exploring how motivated CC faculty members can prepare

for the newer responsibilities of a modern president. Research into the leadership pipeline can

contribute knowledge that will help search committees find these candidates. Additionally, there

is a lack of research into CC faculty (Osburn & Gocial, 2020; Twombly & Townsend, 2008) and

chief academic officers (Bray, 2010; Garza Mitchell & Eddy, 2008; Keim & Murray, 2008).

Research regarding the key role of chief academic officer at the CC is timely given that this

position has historically contributed qualified candidates to the pipeline.

In this chapter, I provided an overview of my study. I presented the purpose of the study,

primary research question, framework, methods, key terms, and positionality statement. In the

next chapter I review the literature relevant to the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of the literature in this chapter provides an overview of CCs in the United States, a delineation of the literature about the key positions in the academic leadership pipeline at these colleges, and perceptions of those positions.

Community Colleges in the United States

According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) (2022), the U. S. currently has nearly 1000 CCs. Boggs and McPhail (2016) have offered the following definition for these colleges: "any not-for-profit institution regionally accredited to award the associate in arts or the associate in science as its highest degree" (p. 5). The authors applied this definition to both the "comprehensive two-year college" and "many technical institutes" (p. 5). There are some CCs that have begun to offer bachelor's degrees, but they are still few in number and are primarily focused on offering the associate's degree (Boggs & McPhail, 2016). Wright-Kim (2023) has more recently described it as an "emerging trend" (p. 3). Wyner (2014) has estimated that CCs serve "13 million students" or "4 percent of the entire U. S. population" annually (p. 1), although the AACC placed that number closer to 14 million as of 2020.

During the early to mid-twentieth century, CCs came to life as the junior or two-year college (Cohen et al., 2014; Thelin, 2011), where they were initially most concentrated in the Midwest to West (Thelin, 2011). CCs at the time were both public and private, with local taxes supporting public colleges and student tuition supporting private colleges (Thelin, 2011). Private colleges gradually gave way to public colleges as reform measures shifted the focus of these colleges from providing the first two years of post-secondary education to granting terminal two-year degrees, and thus linking them to state university systems (Thelin, 2011).

According Thelin (2011), "the typical junior college of the 1920s usually offered a liberal arts curriculum that represented the first two years of work toward the bachelor's degree" (p. 250). As high school graduation rates began to increase in the early twentieth century, many influential educators wanted these colleges to take on the task of providing general education to young students entering higher education, although proposals to that effect began to appear as early as the mid-nineteenth century (Cohen et al., 2014). The colleges' growth can also be attributed to national industrial expansion and its need for workers (Cohen et al, 2014).

From 1950 to 1960, enrollment in public two-year colleges nearly doubled from slightly less than 200,000 to almost 400,000, and then multiplied to just over 2 million by 1970 (Thelin, 2011). Additionally, an average of one "new public community college campus opened each week during [the 1960s]" (Thelin, 2011, p. 300). At the same time, colleges across the country began to adopt "community" as part of their name and to drop "junior," while throughout the 1970s significant amounts of state funding became available to support physical growth (Askin, 2007; Thelin, 2011). Additionally, most CCs today are public entities, with control often shared by the local community and the state (AACC, 2022; Bess & Dee, 2012). Lastly, during the 1980s, while most Americans continued to think of college as a full-time pursuit that involved living on campus until the student earned a bachelor's degree, part-time, two-year commuter colleges were on the rise (Thelin, 2011). After around 2000, significant changes began to appear affecting the mission of CCs (Boggs & McPhail, 2016).

According to Boggs and McPhail (2016), a series of issues confronting American CCs have begun to arise since the early 2000s: "student unrest, racial and ethnic tensions, campus emergencies, guns on campus, safety and security, cybersecurity threats, increased calls for accountability, college completion rates, developmental education outcomes, athletic injuries,

sexual assault, academic integrity, and many others" (p. 3). Baker et al., (2019) concurred that many of these issues have led to "student activism" (p. 823) on campus. This list demonstrates that modern CCs have become far more complex organizations since the days of their origins during a time of increasing demand for post-secondary education and worker training. With the expansion and increasing complexity of CCs in the United States, their missions also evolved (Boggs & McPhail, 2016). To highlight the modern complexity of CCs, Boggs and McPhail (2016) drew on the work of Tillery and Deegan (1985), who described the mission evolution in terms of generations.

Tillery and Deegan (1985) saw the changing CC mission as being divided into four "generations" (p. 4) unfolding from the early twentieth century through 1985. To summarize, generation one (1900-1930) was the period when CCs were still considered a bridge extending from high school to college. Generation two (1930-1950) was the junior college period, when these colleges were positioning themselves as institutions of higher education with no direct connection to secondary education. Generation three (1950-1970) marked the name change and increased growth, also described by Thelin (2011). Lastly, generation four (1970-1985) covers the period of the "comprehensive community college," in which the mission shifted to focusing on issues in the surrounding community. The term "comprehensive" has also been used by others, such as Amey et al. (2002), to describe the CC of the 1990s and beyond.

Additionally, Boggs and McPhail (2016) saw an outline of a fifth, unnamed, generation in Tillery and Deegan's (1985) work, "generally referred to as the 'Contemporary Community College (mid-1980s to 1990)" (p. 18). Within this fifth generation, "community colleges faced several key challenges: maintaining commitment to open-door practices, responding to diverse populations, and changing to respond to community needs and legislative mandates" (p. 18).

Building on the work of Tillery and Deegan (1985), Boggs and McPhail (2016) added a sixth mission generation that they labeled the "'Learning College' generation" (p. 19), based on the work of O'Banion (1997). They described this next mission generation (1990-2000) as focused on drawing attention to "student learning outcomes" (p. 19). There is agreement in the literature that student-learning outcomes has become a prominent issue for CCs since the 1990s (Altieri, 1990; Askin, 2007; Bragg, 2001).

Since 2000, however, Boggs and McPhail (2016) believe a new perspective has been adopted by CC leaders. They cited the example of the National Association for Community College Entrepreneurship (NACCE), which was founded in 2002, as proof that entrepreneurialism was becoming part of the CC mission starting in the early 2000s. They have labeled the generation of colleges since 2000 the "Entrepreneurial Community College" (p. 20), which casts a business-like perspective over college missions. For example, college leaders are encouraged to embrace practices that add to their colleges' revenue while decreasing the costs associated with providing an education to their students (Boggs & McPhail, 2016; Roueche & Jones, 2005). Boggs and McPhail (2016) concluded that continuing problems of declining state allotments, among other social and political issues, will drive leaders to embrace "entrepreneurism, flexibility, and adaptability" (p. 20) to keep their colleges viable.

Entrepreneurs in business are concerned with finding cost-cutting strategies that also increase revenue, and which include a certain level of risk-taking and willingness to create change within the organization (Roueche & Jones, 2005). Roueche and Jones (2005) have contended that CC leaders also need to seek out and employ these same strategies, while Raby et al. (2023) has advised that this approach must include CC leaders developing entrepreneurial skills. A search of the home page of the AACC (https://www.aacc.nche.edu) brings up several

references to entrepreneurialism at CCs, such as Gwinnett Technical College and Community College of Baltimore County, and as part of the Community College Innovation Challenge. The implication is that the concept of entrepreneurialism is becoming familiar to all members of the CC environment. According to Raby et al. (2023), identifying as entrepreneurial continues among certain CC leaders.

Furthermore, an entrepreneurial CC president has been described as "creat[ing] a workplace where employees engage in regular brainstorming activities, visit other colleges to learn about best practices, generate and attempt new initiatives, and receive various incentives for new ideas" (Summers & McGilvray, 2005, p. 119). What is missing from this description of an entrepreneurial president is any indication that having an academic background is important to achieving these objectives. This description also does not incorporate the push to generate revenue with a stance on student learning outcomes, a stance which, according to Boggs and McPhail (2016) has increased in importance due to increased calls for accountability.

The work of Boggs and McPhail (2016) provides a useful framework for examining mission changes since 2000 that have led CC president search committees to turn away from the traditional leadership pipeline that has its roots within the college.

The Community College Academic Dean: Challenges and Opportunities

Along the pipeline leading to the CC presidency is the position of academic dean or CAO. According to Wolverton & Gmelch (2002) "unlike deans at universities who are subordinate to chief academic officers and whose locus of control is somewhat discipline-specific, deans of instruction at community colleges fulfill functional roles across the disciplines" (p. viii). Wolverton and Gmelch (2002) went on to compare the role of the CC dean of instruction (or academic dean) to that of a university provost. Furthermore, according to

Williams June (2014), college deans at universities are often expected to combine expertise in oversight of academic programs with administrative and fund-raising skills, whereas in the past, job advertisements simply included a focus on having an academic background. According to Martin et al. (2015), the university provost's role can include "mentoring young faculty members, developing new programs, or increasing retention" (p.7). Martin et al. (2015) explained that candidates for the university provost's position have often served in other university administrative positions. For example, a provost may have previously served as an associate dean in an academic department (p. 21).

In 2014, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* issued a report titled "How to be a Dean," which described an adaptive leadership approach. According to Khan (2017), "Adaptive leaders do not just make changes, they carefully recognize potential changes in the external environment and consider the best path that will positively affect the organization" (p. 179). Summarized in the introduction of the report is a list of responsibilities of the dean.

> Academic deans are the middle managers of higher education: They juggle the agendas of top administrators and of professors and students. They craft visions for their schools and seek out the money to support those goals. They hire faculty members to fill classrooms and still, sometimes, carve out time for their own scholarship. They are the face of their school (How to be a Dean, 2014, p. 1).

This report is not specific to CCs. As previously stated, very little research has focused on CC academic deans (Bray, 2010; Garza Mitchell & Eddy, 2008; Keim & Murray, 2008). According to Channing (2021), there continues to be a gap in the literature on the development of all CC administrators. A search using the terms "chief academic officer" or "academic dean" and "community college" produced very little scholarship on the topic. Most existing scholarship

specific to the CC CAO was published during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Recent scholarship

has been sparse and has tended to focus on the development of university master's and doctoral

leadership programs, such as in the work of Gamez Vargas (2013), or on fostering diversity

among CC leaders, as in Eddy (2018). Robillard (2000) explained that one of the impediments to

conducting research on the CAO position is the lack of a concrete definition for the term "dean"

(2000, p. 3). After reviewing job advertisements in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*,

Robillard (2000) concluded that the requirements for the position vary as much as the institutions

seeking a CAO. In summary, the author explained that for most CAOs, duties range from the

administrative (budget and resource management) to the academic (curriculum development and

management of faculty issues).

Given this broad view of the CAO, some of the challenges CC CAOs face can be

extrapolated from existing scholarship on CAOs in general. Most CAOs face several challenges

in carrying out their responsibilities, beginning with their relationship with faculty (Bray, 2008).

According to Bray, this relationship is divided into three categories: supporting the work of the

faculty, regulating their behavior, and participating with them in shared governance. How a CAO

handles these three aspects of this relationship with faculty can determine the level of tension

that may arise (Bray, 2008). For example, if faculty members perceive that their former faculty

colleague, now CAO, has stopped thinking like a faculty member in favor of thinking more like

an administrator, tension between the CAO and the faculty can increase (Bray, 2008). Twombly

and Townsend (2008) concurred that faculty at CCs often view administrators as somewhat

authoritarian. Therefore, because CAOs are responsible for instruction at the college, managing

relationships with faculty members who do not always view them in a favorable light may be the

most challenging aspect of their jobs.

Additionally, a dean faces a challenge when involving faculty, especially department chairs, in shared governance. Bray (2010) warned that there is often ambiguity in striking the right balance between sharing power too much or too little with chairs, and that the challenge lies in navigating that ambiguity. More recently, Paape et al. (2021) contended that CC department chairs are often heavily involved in academic decision-making. CAOs at many public CCs are also limited in their decisions-making power over faculty due to collective bargaining. According to Bess and Dee (2012), faculty members at these colleges set the curriculum and conduct teaching evaluations based on terms in their negotiated contracts.

According to Buller (2015), "[a]though organizational charts depict administrators as occupying an institutional level above the faculty, the truth is that an excellent relationship with faculty members can be a key to success, a troubled or dysfunctional relationship an almost guaranteed path to failure" (p. 219). The CAO has an opportunity to establish that "excellent relationship" by seeking strategies to overcome conventional perceptions that create tension.

Another area that many CAOs are expected to manage well is the division or department budget. Faculty members' education in their academic fields usually does not include budget preparation (Robillard, 2000), and even if a faculty member served as a department chair before advancing to become CAO, it does not guarantee budgeting experience (Buller, 2012; Paape, 2021). "The responsibilities that department chairs may be assigned in the area of budgeting vary widely from one institution to the next" (Buller, 2012, p. 411). According to Buller (2012), chairs' budgeting duties can range from full responsibility to merely tracking expenses. Therefore, a new hire for the position of CAO may have almost no experience managing a budget, although it has become a primary responsibility of the position. Buller (2012) also pointed out that there are several accepted methods of managing a budget, and that it is important

for a leader to think in terms of both "planning and implementation" (p. 411). Without experience, a new CAO may assume that a budget is simply a spreadsheet the business office has created so managers can fill in the numbers. That CAO may not even know what questions to ask about the budget, such as which method is used at the college. The worst-case scenario would be if the new CAO inadvertently creates a budget shortfall by not understanding that budget lines are closed out at the end of a fiscal year instead of being carried over if that is the practice.

Fundraising is another area that is seen as a challenge for CC CAOs. Cejda and Leist (2006) argued that CCs have lagged behind larger institutions in development or fundraising, whereas Ebbers et al. (2010) argued that engaging in fundraising would help prepare leaders, such as CAOs, for future positions as president. While fundraising has been described as a recent addition to a modern CC president's responsibilities (Cohen et al., 2014; Eddy & Garza Mitchell, 2017; McNaughtan, 2017), others have begun to argue that mid-level CC leaders need to become more involved in fundraising (Craft & Guy, 2019; Ebbers et al., 2010). Fundraising may also be seen as an opportunity if it helps CAOs prepare for a position as president because it will help address the problem of a lack of viable candidates in the pipeline to the presidency. Buller (2015) suggested that CAOs, especially those with higher leadership aspirations, consider attending development workshops. Additionally, the author recommended that CAOs approach their own development offices about getting fundraising experience under the guidance of an experienced development officer, although Buller (2015) was writing about all CAOs in general, and not specifically about CC CAOs.

Along with the challenges individual CAOs face, the location of a CC can affect its ability to attract qualified candidates for the position. For example, Leist (2007) pointed out that rural colleges sometimes struggle to find qualified leadership candidates because many do not

21

want to give up "the bright-light attractions and conveniences of a major city" (p. 36). Leist (2007) also stated that many potential candidates just do not want to live in a small town. Eddy et al. (2019) concurred, stating that rural colleges have difficulty recruiting qualified candidates for leadership positions.

It is important to develop an understanding of the role of rural CC leaders and how to prepare future leaders for these colleges (Eddy, 2013; Eddy at al., 2019). According to Eddy et al. (2019) rural CCs face unique challenges tied to "declining populations" (p. 51) and their deep ties to their local economies. Furthermore, leadership at rural CCs has been under-studied in comparison to leadership at more urban colleges (Eddy et al., 2019). Therefore, including rural colleges in a study of leadership can lead to further qualitative studies that examine specific barriers identified in this study, thus further developing theoretical perspectives on faculty leadership development. especially at rural colleges.

The Community College President: Origins and Current State

Most CC faculty members prior to the 1980s would have held the master's degree as their highest degree. Therefore, earlier presidents would have been less likely to possess a doctoral degree because they had been former teachers. The percentage of CC instructors with doctorates rose from 4% in the 1920s to 20% in the 1980s (Cohen et al., 2014). Although a majority of CC faculty members today still hold a master's or specialized graduate degree rather than a doctorate (Cohen et al., 2014; Nagy, 2021), according to Amey et al. (2002), by 2000, 50% of college presidents held a doctorate in contrast to 1985 when only 39.5% did so. There is now an increased expectation that presidents will hold a doctorate as opposed to a master's degree (Artis & Bartel, 2021; McNair, 2015), with a majority of current CC presidents possessing the degree (Artis & Bartel, 2021).

Additionally, as early college leaders through the 1960s, CC presidents did not have to answer to local school boards and were freer to make unilateral decisions, giving them significant power (Cohen et al., 2014). According to Cohen et al. (2014) with almost no oversight of their power, these presidents often took a paternalistic view toward subordinates, such as teachers. It was not until the 1970s that governing boards became involved in decision making, while more recently presidents have had to begin sharing power with "funding agencies," "subordinates," "legislators," and "faculty organizations" (Cohen et al., 2014). Therefore, presidents are likely to be more educated but have less power than their earlier counterparts.

In particular, the change in the nature of the CC presidency began in the 1960s and 1970s with the rise of collective bargaining, which diminished the president's identity as an "authority figure and opened an era of political accommodation among contending forces" (Cohen et al., 2014, p. 145). Specifically, collective bargaining divided faculty and administrators, as many administrators either began to use contracts as a means of "controlling the faculty…or avoid[ing] responsibility for their [own] decisions" (Cohen et al., 2014, p. 147). By the early 2000s, a majority of public CCs had become unionized (Kater & Levin, 2004). Therefore, collective bargaining not only contributed to an erosion of presidential power, it also contributed to a distancing of the CC presidency from its academic roots in a background as former faculty members. Artis and Bartel (2021) caution that emerging leaders, including those intending to become president, must be prepared to work with unions because of their ongoing prevalence at CCs.

According to the literature, another aspect of the changing role of the presidency is the need to be focused on fundraising. Beginning in the early 2000s, CC presidents had become

more politically astute than in the past, by knowing how to assess and "become personally involved in the [state legislative] process" (Phelan, 2005). Because there is more financial oversight from the state, presidents need to be attuned to its decision-making process. As the public began to ask for more accountability beginning in the 1990s (Glass & Jackson, 1998) and the economy took a downturn in the mid-2000s, state legislatures began to decrease appropriations to public CCs (Boggs & McPhail, 2016; Cejda & Leist, 2006; Craft & Guy, 2019). Additionally, the increasing size and complexity of many CCs meant that budgets had increased significantly in recent decades, another reason why state legislatures became less inclined to fund college operations at past levels (Cohen et al., 2014). Development directors or fundraisers have begun to grow in importance in the organizational charts of public CCs, as opposed to earlier decades (Cohen, et al., 2014; Glass & Jackson, 1998). According to Cohen et al. (2014), placing a high priority on fundraising was primarily the objective of private college presidents, but public college presidents have begun to do the same. CC presidents now must be as directly involved in fundraising as other leaders, such as board members (Craft & Guy, 2019).

Today's CC president is most often likely to be involved on a regular basis with fundraising (Artis & Bartel, 2021; Esters et al., 2008) and is, therefore, less likely to be concerned with the academic management of the college, leaving it to the CAO. The typical modern university or college president has been described as looking outward, toward external stakeholders such as donors; while the typical CAO has been described as looking internally, toward faculty and staff and the education of the students (Buller, 2015). This division of duties sets up a conundrum along the pathway to leadership that begins within the CC, and it indicates a point where the pipeline may have become leaky.

Pathways to the Presidency

According to Anderson (2014), Crosson et al. (2005), Eddy (2018), Eddy et al. (2019), Twombly (1988), and Vaughan (1990), the role of CC CAO has held a pivotal position within the pipeline to the presidency. Historically, CC presidents have most often come from within the ranks of college faculty, by following the pipeline from department chair, to chief academic officer, to president (Cohen et al., 2014; Eddy et al., 2019; Osburn & Gocial, 2020). The following titles all refer to the position of CAO at a CC and are often used interchangeably to describe academic leaders of equal rank: provost, academic dean, academic vice-president, dean of instruction, and vice-president of instruction (Amey et al., 2002; Anderson, 2014). Chief academic officer is the term most often used in the literature.

Because CCs began as extensions of high schools, earlier presidents would have begun their careers as teachers who became college instructors and then administrators before moving into the presidency (Amey et al., 2002; Cohen et al., 2014; Eddy, 2009). That background began to fade through the late 1980s and 1990s, as, according to one study, the percentage of CC presidents possessing a primary or secondary education background dropped from 60% in 1985 to 17% in the early 2000s (Amey et al., 2002).

Regardless of title, the CAO is most often next in line to the president and has traditionally been the most recent position held by a first-time president (Amey et al., 2002; McNair, 2015; McNaughtan, 2018; Sanderson, 2014). Additionally, the president often works most closely with the CAO, in a relationship where the CAO may become an advisor and confidant of the president (Kuss, 2000). Artis and Bartel (2021) recommend that emerging leaders intending to become president learn to seek advice from their team of experts, which, considering Kuss' (2000) perspective, would include the CAO for a president, given their

expertise in and leadership of instruction. At the typical small to midsize CC, a chairperson leads each department and reports to the CAO, while the CAO reports to the president. At larger colleges, there may be an additional leadership level led by a vice president, to which division deans report (Cohen et al., 2014).

Search committees may be seeking candidates outside the CC environment simply because there are not enough internal candidates from which to select a president (Jones & Warnick, 2012). Due to rising retirements, among other concerns, Martin (2021) has recommended that search committees seek leaders from outside the traditional leadership pipeline and the CC itself. According to Jones and Warnick (2012), internal candidates with an academic background have often been seen as the most desirable candidates. Although, as previously stated, CC faculty members have gradually become less inclined to enter the leadership pipeline (Baker et al., 2019; Campbell et al., 2010; Crosson et al., 2005). Boggs and McPhail (2016) have also described the need for CCs to become more entrepreneurial and for leaders to foster an entrepreneurial and fundraising culture. Skills those with primarily an academic background may not possess. New pathways are being tested as search committees, operating under the belief that non-academic skills have a higher priority in an age of tight resources, have begun to look for candidates outside the traditional academic pipeline of the college (Cohen et al., 2014; Martin, 2021).

Faculty Perceptions of the Academic Leadership Pipeline

According to Miller and Pope (2003), Osburn and Gocial (2020), and Thompson et al. (2012), faculty and staff are more willing to trust the leadership of their college to a president who has risen through CC ranks to the executive level. If a president has insider knowledge of the CC they lead, the rest of the insiders will often be more accepting of them.

When compared to a four-year college or a university, an academic department at a CC is going to be smaller. In small departments, the chair will be perceived less as a boss and more as a colleague by department faculty (Buller, 2012). Therefore, according to Buller (2012), such a chair is likely to have a more informal, collaborative relationship with faculty members, which has implications for the department chair who advances along the pipeline to become CAO at the college. Yet, the position of department chair is often the first step in the leadership pipeline at a CC (Baker et al., 2019; Cohen et al., 2014; Eddy et al., 2019). It may be this sense of a leader being a colleague that resonates with staff and faculty when they also consider a president's ability to lead their college.

However, the nature of the CAO's position as an administrator can change a former faculty member's outlook once they become a CAO (Bray, 2008; Osburn & Gocial, 2020). According to Bray (2008), contrary to expectations that a former faculty member would have a continued strong relationship with former colleagues, tensions can arise. This can come about because that former faculty member may shift to thinking like an administrator who needs to get things done rather than continuing to think like someone who collaborates with peers (Bray, 2008; Osburn & Gocial, 2020). Bray (2008) also explained that when hard decisions need to be made, a sense of shared governance can bring faculty and the dean together. Although faculty are more likely to trust a dean when they perceive that a dean is willing to engage regularly with them and has faculty experience (Osburn & Gocial, 2020). Interestingly, this may say a lot about the pipeline and trust in the president. For example, faculty may develop a distaste for taking on the challenges of the office of CAO when they see others like them changing into the dreaded administrator. At the same time, when faculty set aside tensions with the CAO to work together

under a sense of shared governance, that is where they may also develop their willingness to place trust in an insider president.

Lastly, there is some indication in the literature that faculty may see the position of CAO as an end in itself (Eddy, 2018; Eddy et al., 2019; Keim & Murray, 2008). For example, according to Eddy et al. (2019) and Keim and Murray (2008), one reason why the pipeline to the presidency is weak is because many CAOs retire from that position, or they leave it altogether. Relatedly, in acknowledging this wave of retirements, Eddy (2018) has argued that increasing diversity in the CC leadership pipeline can help address this problem. Therefore, according to these authors, the weakness in the pipeline is also creating a shortage of qualified candidates for the position of CAO.

How Faculty See Themselves in Relation to the CAO Role and the Pipeline to the

Presidency

According to the literature, the shortage of qualified candidates for the position of CC president has been developing for four main reasons. First, many current presidents are in the same age group (over 60) and will be retiring around the same time, creating numerous simultaneous openings (Eddy et al., 2019; McNair, 2015). Second, the tenure of many CC presidents nationwide has decreased to between six and seven years (McNair, 2015; McNaughtan, 2018), meaning there is already frequent turnover. Third, there is a lack of qualified candidates among the current mid-level leaders in the pipeline to the presidency (Campbell et al., 2010; Eddy, 2018), as well as those who are also reaching retirement age (Artis & Bartle, 2021). Fourth, for various reasons many mid-level administrators have no desire to advance to executive leadership as they may have in the past (Artis & Bartel, 2021; Eddy, 2018; Eddy et al., 2019; Garza Mitchell & Eddy, 2008; Wolverton & Gonzalas, 2000). Faculty

28

perceptions of the pipeline will have a direct impact on the third and fourth reasons because a faculty member is often the person who moves up to become a CAO (Cooper & Pagotto, 2003; Eddy, 2018).

As potential leaders, faculty are already managers of the work they do (Barwick, 1990), a point of view supported by the fact that faculty lead in the classroom and make management-style decisions about the work students will do and how they will be graded. Yet, many CC faculty members have not seen themselves as having the skills needed to lead and manage, nor have they seen their teaching positions as requiring any of those skills (Cooper & Pagotto, 2003). Lack of preparation for career advancement among mid-level administrators (Baker et al., 2019; Ebbers et al., 2010) may be one of the primary reasons for faculty members' lack of interest in advancement. Additionally, according to DeZure et al. (2014), many faculty members resist the call to enter leadership positions because they believe the responsibilities will disrupt their "work-life balance" and interfere with "research and teaching" (p. 7).

Cooper and Pagotto (2003) also suggested that "[p]ast conceptions of leadership as residing in particular individuals or roles have slowed the emergence of leaders because faculty have often seen themselves as lacking innate abilities or not inhabiting formal administrative roles" (p. 28). According to trait theory, certain individuals have specific characteristics that contribute to their ability to lead successfully, and the presence of those traits can indicate who has leadership potential (Kezar et al., 2006). If CC faculty see themselves as lacking traits they presume make good leaders, it may indicate a reason why many of them are reluctant to seek leadership positions. This perspective may also explain why some faculty members who become interim CAOs return to teaching instead of seeking to become a permanent CAO. If they do not know how to draw on skills they have developed for the classroom, they may come to believe

they do not possess the necessary traits for leadership and step down as a result.

It is possible that faculty may also not recognize that the skills they develop to manage and teach their courses can be applied to a leadership position because, according to Barwick (1990), faculty members also do much of their work alone. Barwick (1990) was writing about faculty members' difficulty with working as part of a team, such as a committee, but it helps to highlight a reason why faculty may not recognize their own potential, which can be explored further to understand if Barwick's (1990) perspective is still current. According to Paape (2021), leadership and technical skills training, in areas such as managing a budget, is often recommended for department chairs because faculty entering those positions are often seen as lacking them. A perspective from others on faculty that may add to their own beliefs about their lack of preparedness. Therefore, with the proper professional development, they might come to see themselves as more prepared to enter the pipeline than they often think.

While many faculty members do not see themselves as having the skills to lead, that lack of preparation may also be manifested in a slightly different way. Although no one should be pushed into a leadership position if they have no interest in it, some faculty members have found themselves encouraged to accept a leadership position when they had no plans to seek it. "Often faculty do not make conscious choices to step into leadership, but instead find themselves drawn in because of their expertise or their influence on others" (Cooper & Pagotto, 2003, p.28). Additionally, because "deans generally come from an academic rather than a managerial background" (Robillard, 2000, p.7), the skill faculty members most likely will not have is financial management. Therefore, even if others recognize a faculty members' potential for leadership, it may be harder to know what is missing from their skills.

Faculty have also occasionally referred to entering an administrative position as going to the "dark side" (DeZure et al., 2014; McCarthy, 2003; Willis, 2010), which is a reference to the dark (evil) side of The Force in the *Star Wars* films. In other words, they are comparing becoming an administrator with the downfall of Anakin Skywalker, who became the dangerously authoritarian Darth Vader. The fact that the term appears in the title of Willis's (2010) work, and that each of these authors has used it without any additional explanation of where it came from suggests that its use may be ubiquitous among faculty. More generally, the use of this term aligns with what Baker et al. (2019) described as "negative perceptions about leadership roles that permeate the academy…" (p. 824).

It is also possible that faculty awareness of the "adversarial relationships that develop in a unionized college" and the pressure it puts on college leaders (Boggs & McPhail, 2016, p. 127) is what discourages many of them from seeking the office of CAO. As employees of the college, faculty in a unionized environment can benefit from collective bargaining when it protects their work life (Boggs & McPhail, 2016; Hammons & Orf, 2016). However, their perceptions of those protections and the contention it can create between faculty and the CAO may be a barrier to faculty interest in the position.

Research in this area can potentially reveal hidden barriers related to faculty perceptions that the position of CAO lacks new challenges that are inviting enough to draw them away from their current position, given that many of them no longer seek the position (Baker et al., 2019; Crosson et al., 2005). Additionally, faculty who have served as department chairs, deans, or interim deans and then returned to the faculty may have experienced frustration when attempting to lead their division. Again, research can show if this supposition is true.

The number of full-time faculty teaching in CCs has gradually decreased over the last few decades, in favor of hiring increasing numbers of part-time faculty (Christensen, 2008; Zitko & Schultz, 2020). According to the authors, this change is due to the need by administration to lower costs and to have a flexible pool of instructors that can be adjusted to fit enrollment numbers. This fact may point to a possible cause of a lack of full-time faculty interested in pursuing leadership: They may be reluctant to abandon an already shrinking department. This issue can support a call for part-time instructors to seek leadership positions, because they may not have the same concerns.

Interestingly, the two groups who constitute beginning and middle steps along the CC leadership pipeline (full-time faculty and CAOs) have been studied very little. When faculty have been studied, the focus has been on those at universities and four-year institutions (Hardy & Santos Laanan, 2006; Osburn & Gocial, 2020; Twombly & Townsend, 2008). A review of the literature shows the same is true of research on CAOs. The limited wave of literature that appeared in the early 2000s was likely a response to additional scholarship that described the changing role of the CC president and the appearance of calls to be concerned about the looming shortage of candidates to replace retiring presidents. If that scholarship on CC faculty and CAOs was, indeed, such a response, it was not sustained. Additionally, part-time (adjunct) faculty at both colleges and universities have been studied extensively, but not in terms of leadership.

Gaps in the Literature Regarding the Leadership Pipeline

There is agreement in the literature about the condition of the academic leadership pipeline that originates with the faculty at CCs: it has weakened in the decades since the 1980s (Artis & Bartel, 2021; Baker et al., 2019; Campbell et al., 2010; McArdle, 2013). There is also agreement in the literature about the reasons. First, CC faculty members are making career

choices that do not lead them into the pipeline (Baker et al., 2019; Crosson et al., 2005; Eddy et al., 2019), such as retiring from their faculty positions or leaving for other positions (Eddy et al., 2019; Twombly & Townsend, 2008). Second, there are fewer qualified candidates already in the pipeline than in years past (Artis & Bartel, 2021; Baker et al., 2019; Campbell et al., 2010).

According to the literature, full-time CC faculty have not been studied widely (Osburn & Gocial, 2020; Twombly & Townsend, 2008). For example, Twombly and Townsend (2008) stated that there has been very little scholarly research done on CC faculty when compared to research in other areas of these colleges, suggesting a gap in the literature. What the few studies available do show is that faculty follow three general career pathways. Some faculty stay in the teaching position they were hired into until they retire. Others choose to make a lateral move to a similar position at another college. Yet others have remained in their teaching position for a few years, following which they have left the CC to go into a non-academic position (McNair, 2015; Twombly & Townsend, 2008). Beyond that focus on what full-time faculty do during their careers, there have been no new studies since 2008 regarding their growing avoidance of the leadership pipeline. Additionally, although adjunct faculty teaching at CCs have been studied significantly more than full-time faculty, there is a gap in the literature regarding their leadership potential. A search of databases using the terms "part-time" or "adjunct faculty" and "leadership" most often produces articles about student outcomes or success.

Furthermore, there are multiple examples in the literature of studies and reviews showing there is a crisis in executive leadership resulting from a lack of strong presidential candidates currently in the leadership pipeline. The literature also shows that, at the same time, there is a crisis in the number of openings arising from a wave of presidents retiring. What the literature does not completely address is what is causing the crisis of a weak pipeline.

A search of the literature using a combination of terms such as "community college faculty" and "leadership" produced articles on leadership in the search to fill open faculty positions, leadership among faculty on curriculum issues, department chair leadership of faculty in their departments, relations between faculty and leaders, and leadership of faculty members involved in governance. A combination of the search terms "community college faculty" and "leadership pipeline" produced no articles. More articles appeared under a search using the terms "community college," "faculty," and "leadership." Many of those articles focused on leadership in relation to faculty, rather than developing them as leaders or their rise to leadership. Therefore, more research needs to be done that focuses on CC faculty and their potential or ability to move into the leadership pipeline, given the lack of studies since 2008.

The individuals who occupy the key positions along the academic leadership pipeline at CCs need to be understood in the context of their positions. Research into their perceptions of the pipeline and their relationships to each other will help increase understanding of how the pipeline can be revitalized.

Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed the literature to provide an overview of CCs in the United States. I also reviewed the literature regarding CC academic deans (chief academic officers), presidents, and faculty. Lastly, I identified gaps in the literature regarding the leadership pipeline at CCs. In Chapter 3, I describe my research design and methods.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This study was designed to address a gap in the literature by exploring perceptions of the career pipeline that has historically produced strong faculty candidates for the CC presidency but may no longer be doing so (Anderson, 2014; Artis & Bartel, 2021; Baker et al., 2019; Campbell et al., 2010; Crosson et al., 2005; McArdle, 2013). The goal of the study was to gain a better understanding of the perceptions of former faculty members and non-faculty members who currently serve as CAOs regarding the pipeline to the presidency for CC faculty.

Research Questions

Therefore, given that previous generations of faculty were more willing to enter the leadership pipeline for the CC presidency, the primary research question that guided my study was: What are the perceptions of former community college faculty members and non-faculty members who have advanced to the position of community college chief academic officer (CAO) about the potential of faculty to enter and traverse the pipeline for the presidency? Additional questions that supplemented the primary research question were:

- What are the perceptions of CAOs about the preparation it takes to assume that role, given that it is often a gateway position along the presidency pipeline?
- What are CAOs' perceptions of the responsibilities of their positions and how those responsibilities align with opportunities to advance along the pipeline?
- What are CAOs' perceptions of the skills and qualities needed for someone to be successful in their position?
- How do CAOs perceive CC faculty preparation for leadership roles?

This qualitative investigation was framed within the interpretive inquiry paradigm (Glesne, 2016). Bess and Dee (2012) noted that interpretivists view "reality as a set of subjective interpretations" (p. 44), in the case of this study, drawn from an in-depth investigation of a specific topic by examining a small group of individuals' understanding of the world (Glesne, 2016; Thirolf, 2012). For this study, that group included individuals occupying a pivotal role within the leadership pipeline.

Through participants' own words, and in the context of their daily work lives, this qualitative approach also allowed me to develop an understanding of potential influences that affect faculty members entering or remaining in the pipeline. By examining unique perspectives, I gained a richer body of material from which to draw conclusions about the condition of the pipeline. A large quantitative study that provides generalizations would not have captured the essence of what it means to be a CAO who occupies a position within the pipeline but who is unwilling to further advance along it. It also would not have revealed key details from the leadership careers of current CAOs that can highlight influences within the pipeline that may affect academics' career choices. However, this qualitative study has provided more depth and nuanced insights that can become the basis for a future quantitative study that may be more generalizable.

Site and Setting Selection

Given that I was seeking a minimum of eight CAOs to participate in this study, I sought a system that had a minimum of 20 colleges so I would be more likely to have an adequate response rate, even if the rate had been no more than 50%. A minimum of 20 colleges would also better ensure the confidentiality of the participants. The variety of sites within the system alleviated the potential that any one participant would have reasonably been able to guess who

any of the others were as I did not interview all individuals who occupied the role. Therefore, participants were encouraged to be more forthcoming because they were reasonably certain that their confidentiality would be protected.

Additionally, the organization and definition of CCs varies among states. Therefore, I created a set of site selection criteria that guided me in choosing the setting for conducting my research. A system in a U.S. state with both major cities and extensive rural areas ensured that both urban and rural colleges would be included, assuring that participants from both types contributed to the study to include a broad scope of perspectives that would contribute to findings beneficial to all colleges.

According to McMillian and Schumacher (2010), "a clear definition of criteria for site selection is essential" (pp. 326-327). Considering this recommendation, I defined a set of selection criteria to increase the likelihood of selecting a state where relevant "viewpoints or actions [would be] present" (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010, p. 327).

For several reasons, I sought a state with a central system office to which all the public CCs in the state report. First, there has been a trend in recent decades for states to organize their public CC s together as one system within the state (Cohen, et al., 2014). Having a central system office for the state's CCs excluded state systems that combine university campuses and CCs in the same system. For the same reason it excluded states where the CCs were branch colleges of the states' university campuses.

I applied Boggs and McPhail's (2016) definition of the CC to provide continuity in my search criteria. Therefore, in addition to having a central system office, the CCs in the system all had to be two-year institutions focused on the associate of arts or associate of science degrees. They included two-year technical institutions, per Boggs and McPhail's (2016) definition. I did

not exclude CCs from my criteria that had begun to offer bachelor's degrees, given that Boggs and McPhail (2016) include them in their definition of the CC. This development in a state system would have fit my criteria for having a recent policy change. All colleges in the system I selected only offered associate degrees, so offering bachelor's degrees did not become a topic for my participant interviews.

Additionally, according to Boggs and McPhail (2016), CCs across the country have faced a series of state-mandated reforms in recent years. Therefore, given that leaders are on the frontlines of responding to mandates, it was important for me to consider recent state legislative initiatives that prompted reforms to the system in the state I selected for data collection. I selected the year 1990 as the limit for the earliest point at which the reforms would have been implemented based on Boggs and McPhail (2016) who reported that the increase in CC reforms has happened within the last thirty years. Participants' responses would provide insight into their leadership approaches by revealing how they responded to new mandates. Their responses would also show how they have adapted to the mandate, because all the participants in the state I selected were hired into their position after the mandate became effective.

Lastly, to make the most efficient use of my time in selecting a site, I created two charts. In the first, I listed all fifty states and added columns for having a central office/associate degree focus and the minimum number of colleges in the system. I then moved the listings for states that met the minimum criteria from the first chart to the second chart. The second chart had additional columns labeled Required Reporting Structure, CAO Clearly Defined, and Major Policy Change or Mandate since 1990 (See Appendix A). In the column labeled Required Reporting Structure, I marked systems in which each college had its own president or chief executive officer. For the column labeled CAO Clearly Defined, I looked for chief academic

officers who were in a position at their college and who reported to the college president or chief executive officer.

The goal of establishing these criteria for site selection was to avoid randomly choosing a system which may not have provided the depth of data I was seeking. Clearly outlining a set of selection criteria also set a standard for additional research, by allowing myself and others to select colleges with a similar set of features for future studies.

Based on this site selection criteria, several state systems emerged that not only met all the criteria but also were the most likely sites to produce enough participants for the study. Of the systems that met the criteria, I selected one based on the following: all the state's two-year-only community or technical colleges reported to a single central office, and there was a clearly defined chief academic officer who reported to the college president at each of the colleges. The colleges' presidents all reported to the system chief executive officer (president). Furthermore, the CC system had begun implementing a major academic policy revision within the thirty-year timeframe, which affected the position of CAO. Therefore, I was able to select a robust CC system from among several that met my criteria as the site for my data collection. I specifically selected this state because I was unlikely to ever choose to live there, allowing me to be more objective and not influenced by any potential interest in working and living there.

<div align="center">**Sample**</div>

I employed purposeful sampling to provide for a deep examination of the pivotal pipeline position from which the participants were drawn (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The group I examined was represented by specific participants (Hatch, 2002), who occupied positions at colleges with differing geographic representation. Additionally, taking a "positioned informant

approach" (Kezar, 2002, p. 97) gave me access to an in-depth understanding of a specific role related to the leadership pipeline.

I identified participants within a single state CC system that included both rural and urban colleges. Seeking participants from a system that included both types of colleges ensured that perspectives from individuals working at rural colleges would contribute to the study, along with the urban colleges in the same system.

As part of the leadership structure, I sought a system that had one system president or chancellor. Each college in that system had a college president who reported to the system president, as opposed to having a CAO who reported to a system president or chancellor. This was important, because I wanted to get a sense of how the local leadership structure informed the CAOs' approach to carrying out the duties of their positions. If any of my participants were reporting directly to a supervisor outside the college, even if in the same system, the homogenized aspect of their leadership would have masked unique aspects of their roles at their colleges.

The sample included representatives from a key CC role that intersected the leadership pipeline originating within the CC: current CAOs who had come from the ranks of full-time faculty and those who rose from other staff positions. The perceptions of CAOs can reveal why full-time faculty members who do seek to become CAOs do not often aspire to become CC presidents as more of them once did. I had set a goal of interviewing a minimum of eight participants in this role. Fewer than eight participants would have shaped my research as a case study and not allowed me to extract meaningful themes from the data. In response to my first invitation to all CAOs in the system, I initially received five acceptances for an interview, and I kept recruiting until I had eight participants. I asked the first interviewees, who were White

women, to recruit other participants from among their peers to increase demographic diversity in terms of race and gender.

Participant Recruitment

In choosing a state with a single system of community colleges, I found participants who had similar job descriptions and relationships with both their supervisors and the faculty and staff who report to them. Because I sought a state with a central system office and that did not combine any of its CCs with university campuses, it was more likely that each of the individual colleges in the system would have their own CAO, which is what I found when I recruited my participants.

Using sites located in multiple towns and cities within a single state provided a rich depth of findings from each participant, by revealing deep knowledge about a specific position from multiple perspectives shaped by demographic variation. These participants were positioned within multiple pipelines, and the pipelines were at colleges within the same CC system. Therefore, the aggregate data from these participants provided a depth of findings that contributed to an understanding of how the pivotal role along a typical pipeline functions within a system.

Lastly, to reach potential participants, I obtained a list of all the colleges in the system. Most of the colleges had a directory of staff and faculty on their websites. By searching the directories, I was able to locate the name and email address of potential participants. I contacted each potential participant through their email. I offered a gift card as an incentive and thank you for their participation. I received five acceptances by the following day and scheduled a 90-minute Zoom call with each of them. I asked the first participant interviewees if they would be

willing to forward my request to other CAOs, and they said they would. That request led to three

additional acceptances.

Data Collection

My research included two types of data sources: one-on-one interviews with participants

and documents. These are each explained in more detail next.

Interviews

The individual interviews allowed the CAOs to explore the meaning they made of

leadership at the CC, both from the perspective of having adequate preparation to lead in a

changing environment and the challenges perceived to exist once a leadership position had been

attained. I was able to interview a total of eight CAOs working at colleges within the state

system I had selected, meeting the minimum number of participants I had proposed for my study.

My approach to conducting the interviews was informed by Seidman (2013) who stated

that "interviewing is especially labor intensive" for the researcher (p. 11). By implication, it can

be equally labor intensive for the participants. Given that CAOs presumably already have busy

work lives, I anticipated I would be more likely to receive positive responses to my requests for

participation if respondents knew they would only have to sit for one interview.

I took notes to record observations and key points raised in the interviews (Glesne, 2016)

and recorded the interviews. A small, minimally intrusive device is most comfortable and least

intrusive for interviewees (Seidman, 2013). Therefore, I used an iPhone, which fits that

description. I anticipated that the interviews would last 60 to 90 minutes. I worked with each

participant to find dates and times that were convenient for them and allowed for confidentiality,

and I met with them by video conference on Zoom. The shortest interview lasted 47 minutes and

the longest 107 minutes. The length of time should not be an indication of the quality of the data

I collected. Some participants spoke rapidly with fewer pauses to include phrases and words, such as "you know" or "uhm." Others took more time to think about what they were going to say before they spoke.

All information transmitted by participants to an interviewer has the potential to constitute acceptable data for the study, regardless of the mode, including verbal and non-verbal transmission (Maxwell, 2013). Therefore, during the interviews, I was also attuned to any non-verbal signals and behaviors that could shape my analysis of participants' verbal responses to the questions. For example, I watched for gestures or expressions that appeared to confirm or contradict any statements made by the participants, which underscored the importance of taking notes during the interviews.

Throughout each interview, I focused on the context of each participant's experience as it related to the topic of leadership. The emphasis for CAOs was on revealing how the participant prepared to first become a college faculty member, through questions about education and goal setting. I also sought information about how they each prepared for leadership and at what point the desire to become a college leader became a salient pursuit. It was important, for the goals of this study, to encourage participants to make meaning of this career preparation. My additional objective for the interviews was identifying how their past experiences were shaped rather than why (Seidman, 2013). I focused on participants' current lived experiences relative to leadership. For example, I asked questions intended to reveal how confident participants as former faculty members were about seeking their current leadership positions and how confident they were about their ability to do their jobs based on their past preparation. I also explored how participants made meaning of their current experiences. Finally, I asked participants to reflect on the meaning of their leadership experiences. These reflections produced data about positive and

43

negative perceptions among former faculty members, now CAOs, that shape a faculty member's willingness to seek leadership positions.

Interview Protocol

Interview questions were developed based on a review of qualitative research and theory-based literature (See Appendix B). The data collected from participants was derived from semi-structured interviews, with prompting questions. A three-interview format was outlined by Seidman (2013). Due to time constraints, I was limited to one interview per participant. Therefore, I divided my questions into three parts to focus on the goals Seidman (2013) outlined for each of the three separate interviews (see Appendix C). According to Seidman (2013), the first interview should focus on a participant's life history; therefore, my questions for the first part of the interview prompted responses that revealed how participants had prepared for their positions through past experience. For the second part of the interview, I followed Seidman's (2013) recommendation to focus on gathering concrete details of the present, to better understand how participants carried out their work responsibilities. During the third part of the interview, using Seidman's (2013) outline, I focused on gathering responses that showed how participants made meaning of their experiences.

Additionally, an adaptive framework has contributed insight into how the participants constructed meaning about leadership roles in the academic pipeline and faculty preparation for those roles. According to Kezar et al. (2006), leadership from an adaptive perspective is "generative, multidimensional, multilevel, chaotic, and anxiety provoking" (p. 40); all elements of the adaptive leadership approach, as outlined by the adaptive framework (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004; Heifetz et al., 2009; Khan, 2017; Sunderman et al., 2020). Therefore, I created interview questions based on an adaptive framework in the specific areas cited above from Kezar et al.

44

(2006). For example, I included questions in part one of the interview regarding CAOs'

perceptions of how others, such as supports and role models, have contributed to their own

understanding of leadership, which drew out responses about how those others have analyzed

problems and sought solutions in chaotic conditions (Kezar et al., 2006). These questions also

drew responses about how those others have identified challenges, analyzed them, created

solutions (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004; Kezar et al., 2006; Khan, 2017; Sunderman et al., 2020), and

modeled them in their support of those participants. Additionally, questions in part two of the

interview elicited responses about how the participants have adapted their behavior to face the

challenges of their positions. The position of CAO can be a challenging role. Understanding not

only what those challenges are, but also the opportunities they provide, can shed light on how

faculty perceive it as a gateway to leadership.

Finally, the focus of my questions produced participant responses that identified

perceptions about qualifications for the presidency and how they perceive the term "qualified,"

which in turn provided insights about potential barriers or opportunities for advancement along

the pipeline. For example, I asked what they saw as the most difficult aspect of the CAO's job

before accepting the position. I transcribed each interview and listened to the recordings a second

time to check the transcriptions for accuracy.

Documents

A second data source strengthened the quality of the entire data collected, given the small

number of participants interviewed (Hatch, 2002). A review of job descriptions for CAOs

supplemented the interviews by showing what search committees were seeking for candidate

qualifications in these positions. For example, comparing the job responsibilities of CAOs with

their perceptions of a president's responsibilities helped reveal ways in which individuals in the

pipeline can better prepare to advance in their career. Therefore, my analysis of the documents supplemented the interview data regarding the nature of the CAO and president positions.

Document collection contributed useful data to supplement the interviews. I retrieved advertisements for CAO and president positions from *HigherEdJobs.com*, where such postings were most likely to be found. I tailored the search agent to seek three active advertisements in each of the two job categories. Once I had determined which CC system I would use as a site for participants, I sought three ads for positions that were open during the time I conducted the interviews and that had been posted by geographically and demographically similar colleges, to align them with the positions my participants occupied. These documents revealed how search committees expected a final candidate to carry out their duties and how they determined what makes a candidate qualified. I also asked each of the participants for a copy of their job descriptions, which they all provided. My expectation had been that these documents would be readily available, due to the public nature of the colleges where the participants were employed, which was the case. The ways in which the interview questions revealed differences between search committee expectations and the participant's actual duties helped reveal how the pipeline has become leaky. Through the use of interviews and document review, I collected a breadth of complementary data.

Data Analysis Methods

Based on the nature of qualitative research, I used established methods of qualitative data analysis, guided by my research questions, to develop an understanding of the meaning of the topic for the participants (Maxwell, 2013), which included deductive and inductive analysis, the latter informed by a dramaturgical approach. I applied the same analytic approach to a review of the documents as I did to my interview transcripts.

Deductive Analysis

I began with a deductive approach, given that I "start[ed] with a preliminary causal network" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 238). Deductive methods focus on "orienting constructs and propositions to test or observe in the field" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 238). Implicit in perceptions of the CC leadership pipeline is an understanding that faculty members do not now enter the pipeline as regularly as they once did (Baker et al., 2019; Boggs & McPhail, 2016; Cohen et al., 2014; Crosson et al., 2005), which is a perception that established a causal network between these faculty and the leadership pipeline. Interviews through a deductive analysis approach can reveal influences within a causal network (Miles et al., 2014), in this case influences that underlaid faculty members' relationship to the pipeline being researched in this study.

Specifically, I was looking for perceptions about CAOs' leadership styles and faculty preparation for leadership, informed by an adaptive framework (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004; Heifetz et al., 2009; Khan, 2017; Sunderman et al., 2020). For example, I looked for how the participants perceived the challenges they have faced in carrying out their duties (Kezar et al., 2006). I also looked for how they analyzed those challenges and responded to them based on their analysis (Kezar et al., 2006). Therefore, a deductive approach based on adaptive theory revealed the nature of the causal network between faculty in the pipeline through analysis of participants' perceptions of their own role in the pipeline.

Inductive Analysis

Following my application of a deductive approach, I applied an inductive approach. Through this second analysis method, I coded for recurring themes in the data (Miles et al., 2014), which allowed me to refine and elaborate the patterns I initially drew from the data using a deductive approach. According to Miles et al. (2014), these two approaches are "dialectical" (p.

238), meaning they could both be used in a complementary way at different stages of analysis to draw conclusions that build on one on another.

Furthermore, I used dramaturgical coding for analysis of my interview data because it is useful for exploring the complexities (Cairns & Beech, 2003) of the chaotic environment that is inherent in adaptive work (Kezar et al., 2006), which was accomplished by focusing less on the "monologue" of the interview data and more on the "contradictory" aspects of the "social situations" the participants described (Carins & Beech, 2003, p. 179). It allows the researcher to accomplish this goal by "transforming data into drama" (Cannon, 2012). It is a method of analysis that explores participants' behavior within their roles (Miles et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2021). According to Miles et al. (2014) and Saldaña (2021), the dramaturgical method is useful for making meaning of participants' experiences by examining their behavior as if it were a dramatic performance in a play.

Using this method, I organized the perceptions of my CAO participants as scenes in a dramatic production (Cannon, 2012; Saldaña, 2021), through which I coded for themes regarding the nature of the casual network that links CC faculty to the leadership pipeline. Because CAOs do not work alone, a scene can be drawn from a description in an interview of how a participant approaches a problem that involves others, such as faculty, students, or staff. "This method applies the terms and conventions of character, playscript, and production analysis onto qualitative data" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 76). For example, I coded for participants' behavior under the term *character* by identifying their "objectives (OBJ), conflicts (CON), tactics (TAC), attitudes (ATT), emotions (EMO), and subtexts (SUB)" (Miles et al., 2014). Saldaña (2021) provided a definition for each of these six codes, while I added a seventh code, OPP, and defined it (See Figure 3.1) in the style of Saldaña (2021).

48

Figure 3.1 Chart of dramaturgical codes and definitions.

	Element of Character	Description
1	**OBJ:**	Participant-actor *objectives,* motives in the form of action verbs
2	**CON:**	*Conflicts* or *obstacles* confronted by the participant-actor which prevent him or her from achieving his or her objectives
3	**OPP:**	*Opportunities* sought by or offered to the participant-actor that helps them advance or progress to the next level
4	**TAC:**	Participant-actor *tactics* or *strategies* to deal with conflicts or obstacles and to achieve his or her objectives
5	**ATT:**	Participant-actor *attitudes* toward the setting, others, and the conflict
6	**EMO:**	*Emotions* experiences by the participant-actor
7	**SUB:**	*Subtexts*, the participant-actor's unspoken thoughts or impression management, usually in the form of gerunds

Adapted from Saldaña (2021, p. 186)

Because leaders organizing their behavior toward analyzing complex problems is a defining aspect of an adaptive leadership framework (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004; Khan, 2017; Sunderman et al., 2020), this coding approach revealed much about how the participants behaved within the leadership pipeline regarding empowering and motivating others to seek solutions.

Ultimately, this analytic approach helped elicit perceptions that revealed how CAO participants have adapted to the modern challenges they face in their pivotal role within the pipeline, which then contributed to an understanding of how an adaptive framework (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004; Kezar et al., 2006; Khan, 2017; Sunderman et al., 2020) can be applied to develop a better understanding of a leaky leadership pipeline. Additionally, this analysis revealed hidden influences that shape faculty behavior toward the pipeline.

I first transcribed the interviews and carefully read the transcriptions. Dramaturgical coding is useful for deductive analysis because, as previously stated, the researcher can cast the CAO participants as "characters" (Miles et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2021) who, as former faculty, had a specific relationship within the causal network, just as they would as characters engaging with the plot in a play. For example, a CAO participant was treated as a character who as a former faculty member had entered the leadership pipeline, unlike many peer faculty members. Also, CAO participants were treated during coding as characters who are likely to make other career choices besides advancing along the leadership pipeline to a presidency.

Likewise, dramaturgical coding is useful for inductive analysis. That same CAO was then treated as a character whose perceptions of the pipeline needed to be better understood. Playwrights pose a "dramatic question" when they write a play, which is then answered by the dialogue between the characters and their actions towards each other (Starkey, 2013). Therefore, any play works like a research study into the perceptions and motivations of the characters, which makes dramaturgical coding ideal for studying the perceptions of a small group of participants, through both deductive and inductive analysis.

Using dramaturgical terms and conventions, I focused on coding (See Figure 3.2) to produce general statements about the perceptions of CAOs regarding the potential of faculty members to become leaders.

Figure 3.2 Examples of dramaturgical coding.

Data	Field Notes	Analytic Notes	Coding
And so, one of the things I've tried to do is provide people who have told me they want leadership opportunities… and so, I've tried to provide them with leadership opportunities.	Tone serious/ emphatic	Important obligation to him.	OBJ: "providing opportunities"

Figure 3.2 Continued.

And, uhm, and then whenever I've tried to provide opportunities, they say, but I don't want to do that. But that's not	Including every detail of a typical conversation.	Evidence of their resistance and his efforts.	CON: "resistance"
what you told me. You said you want a leadership opportunity. But that's not what I meant. So, you know, I'm trying to give you an opportunity to lead.			OBJ: "trying"
And so, sometimes they pass up opportunities… I've seen them pass up opportunities to gain experience. Because they don't necessarily see that the experience is, what the development is, or if they don't necessarily think that it leads to that, or they're just not interested in it or whatever. Because I've seen them pass up opportunities whenever it falls in their lap, and that hurts them.			CON: "avoidance" ATT: "disappointment"

Based on deductive strategy, these statements revealed perceptions about the nature of the causal network between faculty and the leadership pipeline. Then, I coded further to identify perceptions about how the causal network operated to exclude faculty from the pipeline or disinterest them in entering it. Based on inductive strategy, these additionally coded statements revealed how the pipeline has become leaky.

Once I transcribed and coded my interviews, I reviewed the job advertisements and job descriptions of CAOs and presidents and coded for language describing qualifications for leadership positions, as defined by the authors of the documents. The goal was to understand how written language supports or discourages CC faculty from seeking to become leaders or CAOs from seeking to become presidents (Glesne, 2016; Perakyla & Ruusuvuori, 2011; Thirolf, 2012). Therefore, as with the interviews, I first applied a deductive approach to elicit an

understanding of the causal network that exists between faculty and the leadership pipeline, through the pivotal CAO role. Using this method, I coded for statements that revealed causal links between faculty and the network. I also coded for causal links between current CAOs and the pipeline that revealed an understanding about how former faculty became leaders. I then applied inductive analysis to further elicit perceptions that elaborated on the nature of the causal network. Specifically, I coded for how search committees expected candidates for positions to behave in identifying problems, analyzing them, and creating solutions (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004; Heifetz et al., 2009; Kezar et al., 2006; Khan, 2017; Sunderman et al., 2020) or to what degree job descriptions focused on an adaptive approach. For example, just as with participant interviews, I coded for expectations of the desired candidate's behavior under the term *character* by, in a similar way, identifying "objectives (OBJ), conflicts (CON), tactics (TAC), attitudes (ATT) (Miles et al., 2014, p. 76), and opportunities (OPP) that appeared in the documents.

After separately coding first the interviews and then the documents, I compared and contrasted the themes identified in each. Because these were documents as opposed to interviews, I also used dramaturgical coding to focus on playscript elements. For example, I coded for situational irony (SIT), "in which the results of a situation are distinctly different from what one might reasonably expect" (Starkey, 2013, p. 49). This example of coding revealed differences between the perceptions of participants occupying those positions and the expectations of search committees relying on the accompanying job descriptions to fill the positions.

My goal in comparing the coded documents to the coded interviews was to understand how participants' perceptions about leadership or faculty potential for leadership aligned with the expectations for the CAO positions stated in the documents. Similarly, I looked for contrasts

between participants' perceptions and expectations for their positions.

Through these methods, the goal of my analysis was to understand the participants' perceptions (Glesne, 2016; Perakyla & Ruusuvuori, 2011; Thirolf, 2012), by uncovering themes within and among the interviews (Seidman, 2013). Additionally, by employing adaptive leadership as a framework for analysis of both the interview data and the documents, it strengthened the reliability of the findings by applying the same lens to both what the individual said about their job and what the job description said about it. Hatch (2002) recommended using a second source when the participant sample size is small. Therefore, the application of the same analytic approach and theoretical framework to both a participant and their job description met that requirement.

Validity, Credibility, and Reliability

To establish validity, I employed triangulation as a means of cross-validation (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Maxwell (2013) referred to validity as the "correctness" of, among other aspects, the interpretation of data. The findings needed to be credible to participants and readers of the research (Miles et al., 2014), therefore, by applying methods of analysis that proved validity there was also a stronger likelihood that the findings would be credible. By triangulating my document analysis with analysis of participant interviews, I looked for ways in which any barriers that were identified through the interviews were embedded in the documents. Any threats to the validity of the study were mitigated by comparing data obtained from these real-world documents with the data obtained from the interviews. Also, using a three-part interview process further strengthened validity by adding context to participants' comments (Seidman, 2013).

Additionally, building on the work of Miles et al. (2014), I addressed the issue of the reliability of my study by writing clear research questions, explicitly describing my role as the researcher, connecting my research to theory, using appropriate data collection, and including data quality checks in the form of member checks. If participants are allowed to review transcripts of their interviews, they can confirm the accuracy of the transcripts once they have been typed (Miles et al., 2014).

Hatch (2002) also emphasized the importance of outlining the researcher-participant relationship such that the researcher thinks through and carefully describes the role of each. As a researcher, I interviewed participants who, like me, have taught at a CC. Therefore, I needed to define how my researcher role is separate from my role as a former CC instructor. When I interviewed the participants, I was aware that they might take note of the fact that I was a part-time rather than a full-time instructor, and they might want to know if it would influence how I interpret comments about faculty. However, none of them expressed concern that my former part-time status could influence my perceptions of their comments. In fact, some of them commented on how I might better understand their pursuit of a doctorate as a leader given that I am a department leader also pursuing a doctorate.

Trustworthiness

Several strategies were employed to strengthen the trustworthiness of this investigation. First, I implemented a member-check process that invited participants to review transcripts of their interviews for accuracy and clarity. This process is also an important way to promote candid responses from participants. It can also strengthen their trust because they can provide feedback on details that can breach confidentiality and reveal their identity to others. According to Miles et al. (2014), participants may "spot information that would identify them and thus

threaten their interests" (p. 63). Therefore, the trust of high-profile participants such as CAOs can be built by allowing them to check transcripts for identifying details. If they see that a researcher is willing to be diligent about ensuring confidentiality, it will make them more willing to trust the interview process. However, none of them expressed interest in reviewing the transcripts, although several asked me to let them know if I had any follow-up questions.

Lastly, I was aware of the potential for researcher bias. For example, I was a researcher with a background in CC teaching studying CC faculty members' preparedness to enter the leadership pipeline, by focusing on former faculty members in the CAO role. Therefore, the potential existed that I would selectively focus on certain points in the data that would support any assumptions I might have (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

To decrease the likelihood of bias arising from the setting, I selected a college system site where I had not taught to avoid ethical or political dilemmas related to interviewing friends and colleagues (Glesne, 2016). Choosing colleges in a system outside the states where I have lived decreased the possibility of encountering anyone I knew.

Significance and Potential Impact

The goal of my research was to better understand how potential influences can affect CC faculty members' willing to enter the leadership pipeline. Fewer faculty candidates are entering the pipeline (Boggs & McPhail, 2016; Baker et al., 2019; Campbell, et al., 2010; Cohen et al., 2014) at a time when a wave of president retirements (Artis & Bartel, 2021; Eddy, et al., 2017; Martin, 2021; Wyner, 2014) over the next few years could open a high percentage of positions, with McNair (2015) anticipating it to reach almost 90%. Additionally, there are many faculty and staff members at CCs who do not fully trust the leadership of those they perceive as outsiders, those who do not have an academic background and who lack the insider knowledge

needed to understand the organizations they lead (Miller & Pope, 2003; Osburn & Gocial, 2020). A better understanding of the factors or changing career goals of faculty that have led to the decrease in faculty candidates for the key pipeline position of chief academic officer will help ease the crisis forming in presidential leadership. It can also lead to an increase in potential candidates who will have the additional advantage of insider experience.

Summary

In this chapter I described my research design and methods. I provided an overview of my primary and secondary research questions; setting, population, sample, and sampling strategy; site and participant selection criteria; data collection; data analysis methods; validity, credibility, and reliability; trustworthiness; and significance and potential impact.

Next, in chapter 4, I describe the themes that emerged from my data analysis. To answer the research question, I gathered data on the journey faculty typically take to become a CAO, including the backgrounds faculty bring to the CC and that have shaped their professional identities. I also gathered data about how they perceived the CAO position as the precursor to achieving a presidency. The analysis of the data showed what the participants perceive as both opportunities and challenges for faculty in traversing the pipeline, developing as leaders, and eventually becoming a qualified candidate for a presidency.

CHAPTER 4

CAO PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE POTENTIAL FOR FACULTY TO BECOME

ACADEMIC LEADERS AND ADVANCE TO A PRESIDENCY

To answer the research question, it was important to understand how the participants themselves each entered and traversed the leadership pipelines at their respective colleges. In sharing their own experiences, they provided a wealth of data on how a faculty member can follow the same path. The participants' perceptions on how the pipeline can produce viable candidates for the presidency contributed toward answering the research question regarding faculty potential to achieve a presidency. Document analysis supplemented the interview data regarding themes related to the nature of the CAO and president positions.

In this chapter, I first provide an overview of the participants and their colleges. My intent is to review my analysis of the interview data from the individual perspectives of the participants, revealing how each participant's experience contributed to producing each theme and subtheme. I then describe nine themes that emerged from the data, including entering the leadership pipeline; the value of faculty experience; the importance of the doctorate; developing leadership potential; challenges to leading; achieving senior leadership positions; understanding the pivotal position; becoming a qualified presidential candidate; and the president and CAO: a vital bond. Each theme is divided into subthemes, which illuminate specific aspects of each theme.

The Chief Academic Officers

For this study, I interviewed a total of eight CC administrators who were each the chief academic officer of their respective colleges. Among the participants, there were four White women, one Black woman, and three White men. Only one of the participants overtly identified

her race by calling herself a Black woman. The others indirectly identified themselves as White at various points during their interviews. They shared their gender in a similar way. When discussing an individual participant, I identified them as "CAO" with a number from 1 to 8 to protect their identities. For example, I referred to the first chief academic officer I discussed as "CAO 1."

To further protect identities, I broadly defined the size of each college by range of student population as small (under 3000), medium (3000-5000), or large (greater than 5000). These are arbitrary choices I made and are not based on any officially defined criteria for rating the size of a CC. I chose not to use the Carnegie Classification definitions of college size because it may be possible to identify a specific college based on these definitions.

The areas in which the colleges were located were a mix of rural and urban, including small towns and small and large cities. Each of the participants took varying paths to their current positions, which included high school teaching, professional positions in industry, and part- and full-time CC teaching.

Additionally, two of the participants had received their PhDs in their respective fields following attainment of their master's degrees early in their careers. Four of the participants each pursued and earned their EdDs while working full-time at their CC in various lower-level leadership positions, and two are currently in EdD programs pursuing the degree while working as CAO. In this section, I highlighted key aspects of the journey each participant took to their current position. Following the overview of each participant's journey, I included a summary of their duties from each of their individual job descriptions.

Lastly, at a specific point in their interview, each participant made an observation that reflected their point of view on a topic important to them. Therefore, I have cited that

observation at the beginning of each CAO section. While not quite a motto for each of them, the emphasis with which they each said it suggested that it could be interpreted as either a personal motto or perspective or a guiding principle, depending on how they applied it.

The first participant I described, CAO 1, took time out of a weekend day to interview with me. She explained that she not only has a long-term goal to become a CC president, but she also enjoys teaching others how to lead at a CC. Our interview lasted almost 2 hours, exceeding the ninety-minute limit I had promised her. I pointed out when we had reached the scheduled endpoint of the interview because I wanted to show that I respected her time. However, she indicated that she was happy to continue while she had more to share.

CAO 1: White Woman / Small Rural College / Small Town

"What do I have to do to stay here?"

Upon earning a bachelor's degree, CAO 1 began her career as a high school teacher in another state. Following a move to the site state, she was unable to find a high school teaching job, so she applied to the local CC on a whim and was hired as an adjunct instructor.

> At that moment I was just looking at my teaching journey and how can I move into this
> world. Because I had never taught at a community college; I'd never been introduced to a
> community college. I had no idea what it had to offer.

Once there, CAO 1 said she, "fell in love with the community college setting." Her enthusiasm for CC work led her to seek advice from an administrator on how to build a CC career. "And he said, 'You have to get your master's degree.' I was brand new, brand new, knew nothing. I came from [home state]; and so, I said, 'Where do I go for that?' and he goes 'It's [Local] University.'"

59

The advice to get a master's degree was based on her stated goals that went beyond teaching. "I wanted to be able to maneuver within that [CC] setting and teach and to lead. I already had that in my mind." CAO 1 was only one of two out of the eight CAOs who knew early in her career that she wanted to lead at a CC as president.

CAO 1 finished her master's degree while still an adjunct, and she then sought advice on next steps from a member of the faculty in her master's program, Dr. S., whom she called her "academic mom." Dr. S. firmly advised her to get a PhD because "credentialism is coming," meaning that the state CC system was moving toward requiring all incoming presidents to have doctorates. Although several of the participants expressed their interest in obtaining a doctorate to enhance their work, CAO 1 was eager to be finished with her education, upon earning her master's degree, so she could begin working full-time. She only reluctantly agreed to go for her PhD in the same humanities field as her master's degree was in. "And so, I kind of went, OK (drawn out with a descending tone and followed by a hearty laugh). I was not one of those people who wanted to do all that." Her reluctant acquiesce showed that she was willing to accept any requirements necessary to become a president.

CAO 1 moved rapidly through her PhD program. "[I]…began my PhD in 2006, and then I actually finished my coursework up in two years, and so by…May of 2008, I had finished all of my coursework for my PhD."

Before she moved into her first full-time position, the administrator who gave her the advice on earning a master's degree provided her with a leadership opportunity. "He was also recognizing in me my leadership capabilities, so I had a unique experience as an adjunct, in that I was not only an adjunct teaching [in my field], but I was also mentoring new adjuncts."

Although her adjunct teaching had supported her through graduate school up to finishing her doctoral coursework, a life change prompted a career move.

[I] was all set [to begin my dissertation], and then I got pregnant. And so, that kind of put a little bit of a, so I've already done all this [doctoral course] work. All I have left is [the dissertation]. I need a full-time job because I need to support my child….

Her first full-time leadership position was as a student-services program coordinator, although it did put a hold on completing her dissertation.

I found my first full-time employment in the community college system at [another system college]. I began as [a program] coordinator, and I had no idea what that meant…. [But] I had put my heart and soul into it and became an integral part of what I was doing at that time, for [the program] and for our students.

Based on new advice, CAO 1 eventually learned that building a career in student services does not often lead to the presidency, which in this state travels more often through the academic division. "I needed to teach because I started investigating and recognizing the path in a community college in [this state] to the presidency." Therefore, CAO 1 next accepted a full-time faculty position, but with additional leadership responsibilities. "I came out from [program coordination] and became a full-time [humanities] instructor, and we actually did a thing, it was a study abroad, [humanities] instructor slash study abroad—you had to go to [a country on another continent]." Although, "I actually began in [a Central American country], a study abroad program. I took students [there]. I then taught other instructors how to lead study-abroad programs."

The study-abroad program, on another continent, involved spending as much as several weeks abroad for each term, working with non-English-speaking students in one of the countries.

"They sent us to [that country] to teach the classes. And so, I did that. I became an ambassador; it became a very good stint for me. I became an ambassador for the school."

CAO 1 had to overcome what could have been a barrier to advancing her leadership journey to the chief academic officer position she now holds. Although she saw leading the study-abroad program as an opportunity, it presented a challenge to her personal life.

It was hard, when my son was two and a half, the first time I went [abroad]. I had to be there six weeks at a time, and I remember saying in order to move ahead, I have to do this, and it's gonna suck, but I have to do it.

Therefore, the only way she could overcome that potential barrier to her career growth was to accept the separation from her son, as difficult as it was. During the interview, I mentioned how comedian and actor Amy Poehler's motto is to always say "yes please" to any opportunities offered. Following that discussion, CAO 1 mentioned the phrase "say yes" several times to show that she also does not like to turn down opportunities. She demonstrated that belief through her statement above.

Eventually, leading the study-abroad program brought her to the attention of upper-level administrators, including vice presidents and the college president. "I ended up kind of in that space that's hard to get into with the inner circle of administration. So, I finally got to be in the eyesight of the people that I wanted to become."

Becoming visible to upper-level administration led to her being offered an academic director-level position. "After working in [study abroad], I…got the call…to become director of [a faculty development program], and so this was a big step. I was moving out from faculty back to staff, and I…had no idea what it meant." CAO 1 was willing to take jobs she did not fully understand to move ahead.

Another potential barrier surfaced later after CAO 1 had become a director.

At this college, this [was as] high as I go. And it was because there were some changes happening at the college, and because of those changes I. Could. Not. Move. Forward. (Said with emphasis.) And in fact, no one could.

CAO 1 had hit a ceiling in her career because none of the people above her would be retiring for many years. She knew they would not because she asked them. Therefore, she again sought advice, from a supervisor CAO 1 had asked about her retirement plans, which prompted CAO 1 to move to another college to seek a deanship, the position she held prior to her current CAO role at her present college.

It was a risk-taking move that helped bring even more attention to her career goals. According to her, anyone trying to advance their career must "put [their] name out there because I remember, one time, I put myself up for vice president." This was while she was still a coordinator and "I knew I wasn't going to get it." Later, as she got to know people in upper administration through her study-abroad work, a vice president mentioned that application to her. She was open with him about her reason for applying, telling him that she had done it to let senior administrators know it was a goal and to bring herself to their attention.

CAO 1's approach was to earn the degrees she would need to qualify for leadership positions relatively early in her career. She also used her obviously strong people skills to get to know others at the college and seek advice from them. Furthermore, she actively pursued leadership positions she knew would advance her career. Finally, she was willing to take whatever leadership tasks were available to advance her career.

CAO 1 is unique from the other seven participants because she knew and had stated from the beginning of her CC career that she wanted to be a president. Although CAO 2 also learned early that she wanted to be a leader, her journey was somewhat different from CAO 1's.

CAO 2: Black Woman / Medium Urban College / Large City

"I decided at that point that [lack of a terminal degree] would not be the reason I would not get another leadership opportunity."

Like CAO 1, CAO 2 began her career as a high school teacher. Unlike CAO 1, who sought a job at a CC due to a relocation, CAO 2 knew early on that she did not want to remain a high school teacher. Therefore, she researched the education she would need, not to lead at a CC but to teach there, leading to her earning a master's degree in teaching in her field.

> I started out my career as a high school [STEM field] teacher almost thirty years ago, so I recognized that that was not a career choice that I wanted to stay in very long. But it prompted me to go back to school to get a master's degree so I would be eligible to teach at a community college….

During her high school teaching period, CAO 2 was more aware of the CC and its place in higher education than was CAO 1. Also, unlike CAO 1, without prompting from others, CAO 2 chose to pursue additional education beyond her bachelor's degree, knowing that she would need it to grow her career and begin CC teaching. Therefore, "I went to [Local] University, a historically black college and university; and [I] worked at a CC in a very rural, remote area as a full-time [STEM field] instructor." She had researched the qualifications needed for CC teaching and knew exactly how many credit hours she would have to earn at the master's level to teach in her field.

She eventually left that position to lead a university pre-college program. It was her enjoyment of leading in this position that convinced her to begin a doctoral program. "I enjoyed the supervisory roles and so started a graduate program [but] didn't finish it."

As with CAO 1, she did not finish it because life circumstances intervened. Although unlike CAO 1, she did not return to the same program. She had gotten married and moved, so she accepted a full-time CC teaching position at the college where she eventually became CAO. For several of the participants, a move affected their career path. In CAO 2's case, it brought her back to full-time CC teaching, which many of the participants noted was an essential part of their journey to CAO.

> I think that because I started out as a full-time faculty member it brings me a lot of street cred. And a lot of respect. Faculty feel like that I have their back, and that I understand the challenges and the rewards that go along with being a faculty member.

As a faculty member, CAO 1 took advantage of a statewide leadership training program. "I then became the coordinator of the [STEM] discipline, eventually became the chair of the [STEM] discipline, and then became the assistant dean for the university transfer in science and math."

Although CAO 2 had begun to advance through the academic leadership pathway, she still had not decided what her "trajectory" would look like. Therefore, when the dean's position opened, she was uncertain about whether she should apply, first choosing not to apply and then finally deciding she would apply. Although she did not get the position "and the reason I was told that I didn't get the position was because I didn't have a terminal degree, and the person who did get it did have a terminal degree."

Although CAO 2 had enrolled in a doctoral program earlier in her career, she had not completed the work to earn a degree. Therefore, she now began a new program "because I committed that [lack of a terminal degree] would never be the answer as to why I didn't get a future position…. That was the impetus for me to go back to school." She selected a leadership program that fit with her goals. "I enrolled in a cohort program at [Local] State in 2017 and graduated in 2020 with my doctorate in community college leadership."

She was eventually selected to become chief academic officer while in this doctoral program.

> There was this position opening up, chief academic officer, and I was asked to step in in the interim. It just seemed so out of the blue to me, but when I look back on it, I think that I had been preparing for the position all of this time. And so, as I mentioned…May 1st [2021] is when I stepped into that role on an interim basis.

The interim position gave her time to experience the role and find out that being CAO was what she wanted. "I liked being able to make decisions that are going to affect the lives of our students and their livelihood." Eventually, "after being in this role for that period of time, and going through the interview process, [I was recently] selected as the permanent chief academic officer…." It was obtaining this CAO position that has now made CAO 2 begin to consider eventually seeking a presidency.

Furthermore, CAO 2 finally earned an EdD, and she believes that learning from "professors of practice" in the field strengthened her ability to lead at her college.

> I feel like the graduate program I went through was a really hands-on practical graduate program that had professors of practice from community colleges and two-year

institutions come into the classroom and teach and share their experiences. I got to

participate in a lot of professional development….

In addition to initially lacking a terminal degree, CAO 2 discussed another challenge she

faced. As a Black woman in a leadership position, she has felt the effects of microaggressions.

Recognizing the inequities that existed, not only being a woman but a Black woman, that

I think I experienced, you hear the term 'microaggressions.' These daily kind of grinding

things that are so part of your normal day that you don't even recognize that it's grinding

away at you.

However, as CAO, she has supported the new president in improving equity on campus

and addressing racial discrimination.

When our new president… he came on board July of 2020, and it was right after the

George Floyd murder, and we declared that our college was going to be an anti-racist

college. So, we have been very intentional about our policies reflecting equitable

practices; we're trying to remove barriers….

Ultimately, "I feel like all of my experiences have prepared me for this one position, the

good and the bad, and even being told I wasn't qualified because I didn't have a terminal

degree." Like several of the other participants, CAO 2 acknowledged that bad experiences along

with the good can help a leader learn and grow.

CAOs 1 and 2 share some similarities in first earning bachelor's degrees so they could

teach in their respective fields at high schools. CAO 3's career start differs from each of theirs

because she set out from the beginning to become a CC instructor.

CAO 3: White Woman / Large Urban College / Major City

"Honestly, when I began, as most faculty do, I thought always I wanted to teach, and never really thought about doing more than that."

CAO 3's journey through her CC career was unique among all the participants. She did not work at multiple colleges in the system before arriving at her CAO position. As a faculty member, she taught in a STEM field department and had no interest in taking a leadership role. That perspective changed "slowly, as more responsibilities [were] shared and opportunities [became] available. I found that I did like the administrative piece." Taking on those responsibilities was what turned her toward seeking clearly defined leadership positions.

CAO 3 followed a predictable academic leadership path out of her faculty role. "I became a department chair, a division chair, an associate dean, a dean, an associate vice president, and eventually, vice president. So, it was all at the same institution, internal promotions." As she advanced, her teaching role gradually dropped away. She explained that "in academics, typically leadership is a dual role: It's part faculty, part leadership. So, like your department chairs, program chairs, are typically faculty who also do some administrative work."

As she began to move up through the leadership pipeline, she received some advice about earning a doctorate.

> There was a president, along my journey, that pulled me aside…I think at the time I was
> probably in a mid-level leadership…maybe an associate dean, and he shared with me that
> if I wanted to elevate my role, if I wanted to eventually be a vice president, then I would
> need the advanced degree.

The president had confidence in her abilities, enough to promote her without a doctorate when a position became available. However, he was nearing retirement and told her that "the new

president coming in would not have our history" and would evaluate her more on the level of education she had.

Therefore, CAO 3 elected to enter an online program and earn an EdD in teaching and learning at a Christian-affiliated university. Although she has mixed feelings about the online experience. "I am a little envious of some of my peers who, since then, have gone through seated programs. Because I think there are benefits to each." She believes that the online doctorate program can be challenging for older students.

Eventually, CAO 3 reached a level where she had completely transitioned to administration. For her, the slow rise meant that there were both "some benefits to gradual change and some shortfalls." Ultimately, "At the dean level is when the change happened, where it was all administrative and I was no longer teaching. Unlike changing positions radically where you learn a whole new role, it was really more of a gradual process," which for her was a benefit.

CAO 3 saw a shortfall in what she described as it being "difficult to be a prophet in your own land, so to speak, so that people who know you typically associate the role that you're first hired in." Therefore, she believed that it was difficult for others at the college to see her as anything but an instructor.

Also, she had friends among her peers, and when she began to rise into leadership positions, it was difficult to become their supervisor, both for her and for them.

It's going to change the way you are viewed by your friends, your colleagues and peers, fair or not. You become 'one of them' when you step into senior leadership, the administration, the leadership, the college. It is an intentional step across the line.

To become a chief academic officer, CAO 3 had to leave the college she had worked at during her entire career. "My [leadership] journey was at one college for twenty-six years, and I recently joined [current college], which is where I am now, and this is my third year here."

She is also one of two participants who spoke at length about their experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic. Although all of the participants, to varying degrees, saw the pandemic as creating challenges to their leadership, CAOs 3 and 5 were each promoted to their CAO positions at the start of the pandemic.

CAO 3 was faced with navigating the academic affairs division through two back-to-back challenges: "We had to take what was predominately seated instruction…and move that to online instruction. We survived that for almost a year, and then as we were beginning to make some progress, we had this cyberattack, the security event." It caused them to lose all course material they had on their course management system. They had one week to find backup material and set it up on a new system.

She described the pandemic and the cyberattack as challenges to leading. They also appear to have created barriers for her in easily adapting to her new college and CAO role. "I did not have the history with the faculty here I had at my previous institution. So, it's taken me a while to build that trust," mainly because she had to set that trust-building work aside to handle the problems created by the pandemic and the cyberattack. This is a concern for her because, "My role as chief academic officer is to take care of my faculty—to help them, make sure they have what they need to deliver quality instruction, and so I really see myself as a champion for the faculty."

The above three participants each talked about how they arrived at their CAO position and the point at which they knew they were going to move into leadership. By contrast, CAO 4

started the interview by focusing on how unexpected it was for him to become a CAO. Additionally, the first three each described earning their bachelor's degree and master's degree at universities. By contrast, CAO 4 was the first of two of the eight participants to talk about being a CC student.

CAO 4: White Man / Medium Rural College / Small Town

"I kind of wound up in this position by dumb luck, I think. I don't necessarily know that it was a well-planned journey, at least in my case."

CAO 4 is one of three participants to identify as a first-generation student. "We [were] not well blessed with financial means. We were probably in the lower middle-class bracket. Community college was probably my only outlet, but I did go to a community college." He then went on to earn a bachelor's degree at a university.

Furthermore, CAO 4 described how he developed relationships with several individuals who became mentors, even before he completed his CC education.

> I had some good mentors at the community college that…took me under their wings. [I] found out [that] community college was where I wanted to be, and so they…guided me through getting that master's degree in [a STEM field] and…led me in that direction.

He had connected to the CC early as a student to the point where he wanted to return as an instructor serving other students.

CAO 4's first job was at a CC as an adjunct instructor while he worked on his master's degree. Although once he had earned the degree, he took a position teaching at a high school until a full-time instructor position opened at the local CC, which it eventually did. Then leadership opportunities began to come his way.

In contrast to the above three participants, CAO 4 was more likely to move into a new position as part of a reorganization that left him with certain responsibilities. His first leadership position was as a department chair, and then a reorganization provided his next opportunity. "The school had to make some cuts for financial reasons, and so, when they restructured, reorganized, they did away with the department chair level. They created these levels of assistant dean, associate dean, dean." For him it meant becoming an associate dean. Also, when a position opened, he did not so much seek it as he was asked to take on. "Then the dean they had hired moved on, and they moved me into the dean role, and I was in that role for a few years."

Although his parents had not gone to college and had worked in the manufacturing industry, they did not want him to follow the same path. "The kind of advanced manufacturing that you see now is not the kind of manufacturing my parents, my sisters and their families went through. It was tough; they were tough. I'm cut from some tough piece of cloth."

CAO 4's parents understood that getting a college education was the way out of this labor-intensive work. CAO 4 also believes that possessing a family background in manufacturing and attending a CC gives him a closer connection to the students his college serves.

> We see that in education, in community colleges every day. If they don't have that
> [family] support, those lower socioeconomic students wind up in a much similar situation
> as their parents, if they don't have some kind of support system outside of education. And
> I was lucky enough to have that.

He emphasized that having mentors at the CC and a supportive family made the difference for him, and knowing how vital family support is makes him understand students who do not have it.

Once CAO 4 became a CC instructor, he had an experience that showed him how fortunate he was to have the support he had received from his family. "It didn't dawn on me until

I…was teaching part time in a prison. I was teaching in a maximum, close-custody prison, and I

had a student that it just…hit me one day, he was a very good student….” That prisoner was

eager to learn from the courses he was taking thorough the program. CAO 4 did not ask him

what he had done, but “you had to know they had to have done some harm to somebody or killed

somebody, or they’d done something pretty, pretty bad to be there.”

> Eventually, CAO 4 learned the background of this prisoner from an employee at the

prison.

> I remember the guard telling me…that his was…an unfortunate situation. He came up
>
> from a broken home, where his father beat his mother and him. And it got to the point to
>
> where he was old enough, to where he walked in one day, and he was thirteen, and he
>
> walked in one day and his father was beating his mother. He picked up a baseball bat and
>
> beat his father to death and they tried him as an adult.

> Meeting this prisoner, who was young and eager to earn a college degree, was a turning

point in CAO 4’s life. “I thought to myself, it just takes that one split instant and a decision can

change a life. And I was just fortunate that I had not had any kind of situation like that.” Not only

did it cause him to reflect on his own opportunities, but it shaped his leadership philosophy.

> It was an eye-opening experience…. Cause you really don’t know what people are
>
> carrying with them. You don’t know what students are bringing to the table. You don’t
>
> know what instructors and staff are bringing to the table, either. So, you have to think
>
> about all of those things…when you’re in a leadership position….

> Furthermore, although CAO 4 is now the leader of academics at the college, one of his

positions along the leadership pipeline to CAO was, “I think most people would say…was a little

unorthodox, but I was able to make a move into student services." Although to him, it was valuable in preparing to work with students as CAO.

> I always try to be student focused and be a student advocate…. And the job I
> landed…vice president of Student Services, it was a combination position. It was a
> combination of vice president of student services and academics. We had both of them
> under one house….

Throughout the interview, CAO 4's prevailing perspective was focused on service to students. That is why he added, "That [position] was a really nice fit for me and my interests." He has drawn on his own background as a CC student and as a CC instructor teaching courses in a prison. Coupling that with his knowledge of the difficulties CC students face in their personal lives, he is deeply engaged in promoting student success at his college.

He is one of two participants who are currently working on their doctorate degrees while working full-time. He said that currently, "I'm trying to finish my doctorate up, my dissertation steps. I missed a meeting this morning with my dissertation chair. She sent me an email saying, 'You must be busy, so I won't bother you.'" He put the comment from his advisor into the context of trying to earn a doctorate while working full-time as a CAO. "A lot of times I work until seven o'clock at night, and the day that I don't…it would be for the class. And after that, I don't feel like doing anything. So, I've dedicated everything to Saturday and Sunday." He added, "I have done pretty much all of [my coursework] on the weekends. I have dedicated…all of Saturday and Sunday, that's…what I have done. So, I do 16, 20 hours on the weekends."

CAO 4 has his pursuit of a doctoral degree in common with CAO 5, who is also working on the degree while he works full-time as a chief academic officer.

CAO 5: White Man / Small Urban College / Small City

"Be willing to become comfortable with discomfort."

CAO 5 used very similar language to that of CAO 4 to describe the unexpectedness of finding himself in his CAO position. "I kind of jokingly say that I am as surprised as anybody that I ended up here." He had planned to work in industry. "[I] got the Bachelor of [in a STEM field], which I feel like it really helped me from the viewpoint of critical thinking and problem solving and logical thinking…. And then I got a master's degree in [that field]."

Like several of the participants, a life change and a move brought him to the CC seeking a job.

> A couple of years after starting work [at a major manufacturer] and getting married, actually six weeks after my wife and I got married, [I] got caught up in the third round of layoffs. This was in the early two-thousands after nine-eleven and the downturn that followed that. [We] moved back to [this county] where [my] community college is. And moved back here looking for a job and had played with the idea of wanting to work at a community college part-time, teach a little bit.

He took a job teaching developmental courses in his field, thinking that "honest to God, I…would do it for a semester or two, and that was at the tail end of 2002. And so, that was an awfully long time ago." Therefore, like several of the participants who had never planned on a CC career, he developed a passion for the work, saying, "This is a fantastic college to work at." It motivated him to stay. From there, each promotion seemed like a next logical step based on his education and industry experience.

> There were some opportunities that came up in our advanced manufacturing area, and because I had the [STEM] background, I had a couple of folks mention those to me. So, I

applied, served as interim program head for a few months for an industrial systems program, and then applied for and moved into the associate vice-president role for advanced manufacturing industry and trades.

He also had an experience similar to most of the other participants: when a higher-level position would open up, someone at the college would suggest that he apply for it. His philosophy about his career growth was that he would pursue opportunities as they became available, but he never planned out a long-term path to follow. He also found that it is not always easy to adapt to the next new job, leading to his outlook that you must accept that it can take up to a couple of years to feel completely comfortable in your new position.

> No matter how good you think you do, it's not going to be what you thought. Becoming comfortable with that, becoming comfortable with being uncomfortable is probably a life skill that is way more important than I ever thought it was.

He also was willing to take jobs that he did not want to do because he saw value in doing those jobs.

> If I was going to try to figure out how I got here, one is the willingness to take on things that you may not want to, even when there was no additional pay or anything associated with it. I'd take all I could learn a lot from.

Furthermore, he earned a second master's degree after beginning his leadership career at the CC.

> [I] went back to school and worked on a Master of Arts in Christian Studies at a seminary that's a couple of hours from here. So, it gave a kind of…interesting contrast between this applied that is mathematical and rigid and this one that's much more humanities,

social science, theological, literature-based, and those two things together, so that was

interesting.

Although he did it for personal interest, he added that "I think it's helped me." It wasn't

easy to do, having already entered the leadership pipeline at the CC. "Spending four years

working on the master's degree at the seminary, that was something I did just for me. That

wasn't job related here. But still, it, it was stressful." For him, it was a foreshadowing of his

commitment to earning an EdD.

The doctorate degree is overwhelming. I am personally at the place right now where I am

looking at, looking at the next two weeks and thinking that if I can make it through the

next two weeks, I might survive the next month and start over again with another

semester.

Finally, like CAO 3, CAO 5 believes that gradually advancing through career growth is

much better than a rapid rise. Although he did experience a rapid journey because he went

quickly from a director-level position to that of a vice president.

I mentioned the stress that I personally felt for those first couple of years. Jumping levels

is very stressful because there was so much to learn, and you feel responsible for your

folks, you feel responsible for your students, and don't want to mess up. So, yeah,

skipping levels is doable but painful.

Each of the participants I have discussed to this point showed me that there is no

predictable path to becoming a CAO, other than that teaching is often an early step. CAO 6 also

fit this pattern. Like several of the participants, she began teaching once she had earned a

master's degree.

77

CAO 6: White Woman / Medium Urban College / Small City

"Keep the north star the north star."

CAO 6 answered my first question about her journey to leadership by saying that she had taken a traditional path, beginning as a full-time faculty member and holding that position for "five or six years before I had my first official, quote-unquote, leadership role."

Like CAO 4, CAO 6 considers herself a first-generation student. "Neither one of [my parents] went to college, and so I was a first-generation college student. My older brother, I was the first in my family to go, but…what they did model for me growing up was work ethic." She believes it was that work ethic that carried her through the rigorous effort to obtain an education.

Furthermore, CAO 6, like CAO 5, pursued an education so she could work in her chosen field.

> I did my bachelor's degree in [a STEM field]. I followed that with a master's degree in [a related STEM field]. I thought, yeah, I'm going to be one of those people who works in a lab, does some research, and works with a skilled researcher or whatever. That's kind of what I wanted to do.

However, she took on teaching for financial reasons. "In order to fund my education, I accepted an assistantship and a teaching assistantship, teaching in [science] labs at a university, and I found that I enjoyed that immensely." From there she moved into CC teaching.

CAO 6 had something in common with several other participants in that she moved to the site state from another state due to personal reasons and sought a job at the local CC. She had taught at a much larger CC before moving. "That was a bigger school, and so I didn't work as closely with others there." Therefore, she believes she did not begin to grow as a faculty member until she moved to this state and a much smaller college. It was that early mentoring from peer

faculty at the smaller college that helped her develop skills for leadership. "They were early role models, where I kind of adjusted how I interacted with students, and I built my confidence as far as interacting with students." She believes that is a skill that has carried over to each position she has held.

Her first leadership position, referenced above, was department chair. Like many of the other participants, this was an opportunity that arose from a retirement that prompted a reorganization. An associate vice president was given more responsibility. "And then, in order to support them as a leader, we created department chair roles, which this college had not had prior to that." Like several of the other participants, she was reluctant to leave her full-time teaching position.

I was not terribly interested in [being a department chair] to start with. I did not feel I had been teaching long enough, and I was very happy in the classroom, but I had some colleagues who kind of talked me into giving it a try.

She still was not convinced. Therefore, the next step she took was echoed by several of the other participants: She sought the advice of a supervisor.

I had a conversation with [the dean of instruction]. And I just said, 'I'm willing to try this and give it a shot, but…if it's not a fit for me or I'm not doing well with it, or…it's not for me, I want to make sure I can go back to my faculty role. So that was the deal we struck.

CAO 6 laughed when she made that comment. She saw how unnecessary creating that safety net was because she then said, "But after a year, I found that I enjoyed it. I had learned a lot, so I stayed in the role." CAO 4 said that no one can understand the CAO role until they've done it, and therefore, people either choose to not understand the level of commitment it takes or

79

they avoid it, fearing what it might involve. That perspective is evident here because it was not until CAO 6 moved into the role of department chair and understood it that she found she enjoyed doing the work. Her experience is similar to CAO 2's in that regard.

Interestingly, and unlike other participants who had people fully supporting them to take a role, CAO 6 said, "I was a department chair, and when I took on my leadership role, I don't think [the president] was confident that I was right for the role." CAO 6 had to demonstrate her ability to do the job. Once she had done that, "[the president] trusted me with a lot. She trusted me. In some instances, she trusted me with some things she didn't trust her vice president with."

CAO 3 also talked about earning trust, but for her it came from being an unknown as a leader because she had advanced through the leadership ranks at a different college. She had suddenly become the supervisor of faculty who did not know her. CAO 6 saw that issue of trust surface with her first leadership job. Although once she had proven herself,

> [The president] gave me every opportunity under the sun. She put me in situations where she knew I could grow and learn. She put me to be responsible for a lot of things. So, she had a lot of confidence in me, and I think that was also important.

This statement was accompanied by a laugh, as if to acknowledge how far that trust had come.

Once she reached the associate dean level, she decided to return to graduate school for a doctoral degree.

> I decided…to go back and get the doctorate. Interestingly, those people that it seems like I know now… when they get their doctorate, they have a certain goal in mind. Like they want to be a president, or they want to be a provost or whatever. I really did not have that in mind. It was a good time in my life at that point to start the doctorate, if I was going to. It's kind of like one of those, now would be a good time because my life is pretty settled.

80

When she started the program, she was at a lower level of leadership than CAO 5. She also did not appear to feel the same kind of pressure that he did in doing doctoral work while holding a full-time leadership position.

Furthermore, to CAO 6 the "traditional" aspect of her leadership journey meant holding a leadership position for a few years and then advancing to the next level. In another way, her journey along the leadership path was somewhat atypical. Although many of the participants spoke about reorganization and the opportunities it created for them, almost all of CAO 6's leadership positions were newly created positions that had not existed before.

> Every role I have had, there's been no former whatever to call up and say, 'Well, how'd you do this? Well, how'd you handle this? What's the history here?' Nothing to where people around you are saying, 'You know, I've got this. I know what to do with this.' But [in reality] there's no one who'd been in the role before.

Other participants might have a newly created position, but they involved redistributed areas and responsibilities, for which there was usually someone around who knew how to supervise the area. For CAO 6, with each new position, she would not only take on a new job, but she would take on newly created areas to supervise. For example, the new vice president "created the School of Foundational Studies and Academic Support," and CAO 6 was selected to lead it.

She also spoke at length about how a leader must make the right decisions without trying to make someone happy or worrying about hurting someone's feelings, leading her to share her motto about decision making cited above. "You have to become okay with making some people unhappy, and that is, I think, that is one of the hardest things to do."

CAO 1 also commented on the difficulty of making hard decisions that not everyone will support. She put it in the context of being at a small college where any staff or faculty member feels comfortable letting the CAO know what they think about a decision. "And you get a phone call. Why did you just decide that, when did that happen? This is how it's affecting this, this, and this kind of thing." Although CAO 6 works at a larger college than CAO 1, she also described how faculty and staff will reach out to the CAO or any decision-maker when they feel slighted by a decision.

CAO 6, like CAOs 1, 3, and 4 also talked about coaching their "direct reports," associate vice presidents (AVPs) or deans and directors whom they directly supervise. CAO 6 described working with new deans who struggled with making a decision that would negatively affect someone and therefore make that person unhappy. She admitted that even she struggles with it. "You have to get to a certain point where you are okay with people disagreeing with you because some people are not going to like some of the decisions you have to make. That's a challenge." And that is why she shared her motto about the North Star, the star traditionally known as a stable point used for celestial navigation to keep ships on course.

Whereas CAO 6 made a point of emphasizing the typical gradual progress of her leadership career path, CAO 7 did the opposite, by describing his journey toward leadership as atypical. Although it did in some aspects mirror CAO 4's journey.

CAO 7: White Man / Large Urban College / Large City

"Lead where you are."

CAO 7 sees himself as not having followed the typical path to an education.

I am not a traditional student, per se. I got my undergraduate degree at twenty-nine, and

even when I started community college, I started off in developmental. So, I can relate to

our students. That's where some of my passion comes from.

CAO 7 had a start to his education that was similar to CAO 4's in getting an associate

degree first at a CC. Unlike CAOs 4 and 6, who each had parents encouraging them to earn a

college degree, CAO 7 was not encouraged to attend college. "It was early 90s, but coming to

college wasn't for people like me, so to speak. Right? I wasn't meant for, I was supposed to go to

work, and that's what I did." Although, he eventually found the incentive on his own to seek a

bachelor's degree.

It was later on that I found somebody that was a recent college grad, and in arrogance, I

thought to myself, wow, if he can get a four-year degree, I can. So that's what motivated

me. And so, when I see that [in others], I want everybody to know that, hey, college is for

you, right?

Like CAO 4, CAO 7 feels a deep connection to the students who attend his college. Also, like

CAO 4, he bases that attitude on his early experience trying to find his way in life and earn his

first post-secondary degree at a CC.

Before he arrived at a CC as an adjunct instructor, he applied to a university for a staff

job after earning his bachelors' degree. He explained that he "had no clue I was going to work in

higher education. I just applied for a position, and it happened to be in higher education. I'm very

thankful for that." Therefore, like many of the other participants, he did not have any sense of

what a career at a CC might look like. As a benefit of his university employment, CAO 7 was

able to earn a master's degree in his field.

CAO 7 also believes that earning a doctorate is the other piece of preparation that has helped him be successful in his position.

> That prepared me (pause to consider) and in my opinion, in higher education that actually prepared me to understand more about the budget, how we're funded, how (pause) the different success initiatives, and what different roles at a community college actually play in different areas. And I think that's also contributed to me going to a chief academic officer.

Therefore, while other participants focused on how a series of progressively more responsible leadership positions prepared them to be a CAO, CAO 7 paired one key position with his education as the preparation that mattered to him.

CAO 7 did not follow the "traditional" pathway to leadership that CAO 6 claimed about herself or the "traditional" education pathway described by CAO 8 in the next section. He emphasized the uniqueness of his journey several times, which led from a professional staff job at a university in his STEM field, to CC adjunct teaching, to working in institutional research, to CAO. Several of the participants commented on the importance of staying in each position long enough to learn the role and to prepare for future roles, but CAO 7 took relatively few steps to arrive at his current position, when compared to the other participants. He believes that growing a leadership career comes from seeking leadership tasks and opportunities in whatever position you hold, which explains his statement above.

He began to teach as an adjunct at the university where he earned his master's degree. Like several of the participants, he was living out of state, and it wasn't until he moved to the site state, which was moving back home for him, that he discovered he could have a career at a CC.

Because he already had some experience with adjunct teaching, at the university, he decided to continue along that path and applied for an adjunct position at the local CC. From there he took a position in institutional research. "I moved into a role in institutional research (IR) and decision support. That's really helped me [as VP of Instruction]. CAO 7 believes that his experience in IR was why he was able to move so quickly into his academic leadership role without first becoming an associate dean or dean of academics. "It was because I was looking at course success rates. I was looking at how are we transforming? How are we using data to at least inform us of our achievement gaps and what we need to do?"

He is also aware that he may have missed some of the experience he could have gotten from advancing more slowly." A lot of individuals come right up the academic branch, right? They go program coordinator, and then they're a dean, and then they're a CAO. I did not take that track. And mine is completely different." He admitted that he has to ask more questions to fill in the gaps in his knowledge of the job. "I'm not prepared in that sense. So, some of the questions I have to ask, and maybe that's a good thing because I do have to ask, 'Why are we doing it this way?'" He made it clear that his unique background is valued by others, but it is he himself who feels the lack of direct experience for the position.

CAO 7 was another participant who addressed the pandemic. "COVID has been terrible. It really has. And we've also learned a lot during COVID. What we've been challenged… and we've figured out new ways of offering instruction." Each of the participants who directly addressed the pandemic pointed out that the lessons learned from adapting to it will last far beyond its end, becoming an improvement to the ways in which they offer instruction.

Although CAO 7 described his education as atypical, by contrast, the final participant, CAO 8, described her educational journey as very typical.

CAO 8: White Woman / Medium Rural College / Small Town

"The selection process is a gift."

CAO 8 was the only one of the participants to have earned a doctorate before seeking a career working at a CC, and it was due to her love for the field she had chosen. Each of the others sought their doctorate after learning that they would need it at some point in their leadership career and that without it, they would not be able to advance beyond a certain point.

CAO 8 described her educational journey as "be[ing] unusual in some respects" because she completed her education relatively early, compared to most CC leaders. "I went straight from high school to undergrad and then did my master's and PhD at the same place." For her it was her love of the field she had chosen to specialize in: "It was more because of the science." Therefore, her goal was to work in her chosen STEM field. "I never really saw community college instruction, much less community college leadership, as an end goal." A couple of life decisions steered her toward the CC.

CAO 8 arrived at the CC because she decided that she did not want to pursue a career that required her to divide her time between research and teaching. "I didn't want to split between both because I was at a large research university and saw how challenging that was for some of my mentors." She knew she could do one or the other but not together in any kind of complementary way.

Additionally, CAO 8, like several of the other participants, moved from her home state to the site state. Having chosen teaching over research and needing a job following her move, "I landed at a community college with an adjunct faculty position." She planned to work as an adjunct while considering her next steps. Then, like several of the other participants, she took an opportunity to move into a full-time teaching position when it became available.

CAO 8 spent "the next five years as faculty." Like CAOs 3 and 6, she was content to be a faculty member and did not seek out leadership opportunities. This is unlike CAO 1, who became focused on her long-term goal of becoming a president while teaching as an adjunct faculty member. Once CAO 8 had decided to become a department chair, it was not simply a matter of accepting the role. "At our institution department chairs are an elected position, elected by the faculty in the department. So very much of a four-year university model." Therefore, CAO 8 had to adapt to going through a selection process. It was not something that she appreciated at the beginning of her career.

When CAO 8 applied for her first full-time position, to be a faculty member, she learned what the selection process was like. "When I was first hired, and so I had been teaching adjunct, I had been teaching a significant number of hours as an adjunct, and I was a tad resentful of going through the interview process." She felt that she had already proven herself as an adjunct instructor, and she was tired from being pregnant and just did not want to deal with interviewing. "The department had sent a letter to the dean, and the dean's like, 'Nope, we don't know who's out there. We might, there might be someone else out there that might be even better than [her first name].'"

She was ultimately selected for the full-time position. Furthermore, she now sees the process as a "gift." "I appreciate that every time there's been a committee and I've done an interview, I've gone up against others and I've earned…earned my position." This perspective has carried over into how she conducts hiring as a CAO.

As CAO 8 adapted to the hiring process, she next applied for the dean of instruction position when the person in that position left. From the interviews, it became clear to me that in a state with a well-organized system, people looking to advance in their careers will often move

among the colleges. Some leave and then come back to the college they started at, depending on what positions are available. Most of the participants commented on how that jumping around among colleges is necessary because CCs are often relatively small, which limits the availability of opportunities to advance.

CAO 8 was able to advance at her college due to another reorganization. "There's some organizational changes…so essentially, there's myself, and then, well, so it was me as VP of Academic Affairs, chief academic officer; and then a dean of instruction." She had moved from being a dean of instruction to chief academic officer through this reorganization. Since then, both have moved up one level: she is now a senior VP and the dean has become a VP.

CAO 1 spoke about the challenge of a higher-level leader, in her case the president, pressuring others to accept their choice for a position. Her perspective on the problems it can create was echoed by CAO 8: "I am really, really careful and cautious about anything that smacks of that plucking people and plopping them into positions because not only is it potentially damaging to the institution, but it can be damaging to that person."

In CAO 1's case, it was a friend of the president who received an interview at his request, although she was able to reject hiring that friend. CAO 8 described watching this hiring of the wrong person happen at her college and learning that it does not go well.

Interestingly, in answer to a question about how she delegates work to her direct report (the dean who is now VP), she spoke about how she could have done things differently. "So, if I knew then what I know now, say eight years ago… would have worked to maybe have an associate dean or two in place to take care of the day-to-day stuff that has to get done." This perspective reflects comments made by CAO 3, who discussed being unwilling to delegate as much as she should have.

Because in CAO 8's view, she did not spread the day-to-day workload around adequately early on, she is now stuck with lower-level managerial work. "Because the woman who was dean is now VP. She's doing a lot of, almost more initiatives, advising initiative, outreach to another county, our secondary county; and that's why I, I'm now doing some of those [day-to-day] things." How this summary of her duties appears to me, listening to this description, is that she, as CAO, is stuck doing work that should be done by someone reporting to her lower-level VP. She has also implied that it is more difficult to rectify the problem now that these roles are established as they are with their assigned duties. Ultimately, as both CAOs 3 and 8 each explained, the CAO should be doing more of the planning and decision-making work, while leaving the managerial detailed work to lower-level professionals, such as associate deans and deans.

Next, I included a summary of duties cited from the job descriptions provided by each of the participants. Through each of the participant interviews, themes began to emerge. As I completed more of the interviews, I began to hear similar comments about topics common to all the participants. As I coded the transcribed interviews, the presence of the themes was strengthened and clarified. In the next section, I describe the data that emerged from the analysis of both the interviews and the job descriptions.

Table 4.1 The participants, their colleges, and their position description summaries

CAO	Participant	College	Position description summary
1	White Woman	Small rural college in a small town	Under limited supervision the [chief academic officer] plans, directs and reviews the activities and operations of the college academic functions including instructional programs and curriculum development and compliance; provides information to the Board of Trustees; coordinates assigned activities with other departments and outside agencies; provides leadership for the division. Exercises supervision over supervisory,

Table 4.1 Continued.

			professional, technical and clerical staff. ([Site 1 Job Description], 2022, p. 1)
2	Black Woman	Medium college in a large city	The successful candidate will serve as an executive leader of the College and will provide oversight and support for Academics and Guided Career Pathways. The [CAO] will join a committed, student-focused College community and will be expected to foster and maintain collaborative partnerships to promote student success and completion. The [CAO] will value and advocate for the dignity and engagement of people from all backgrounds and will develop and mentor faculty and staff to ensure a mutually beneficial experience. [The College] provides pathways to academic excellence by defining, aligning, and assessing clear student learning outcomes that prepare students for work-based learning opportunities, university transfer, and seamless job placement. The College seeks an experienced and dynamic academic professional with a record of successful leadership and innovation. The [CAO] will bring a thorough understanding and commitment to the philosophy, mission, and purpose of the [site state] community college system and will possess the ability to build relationships and work collaboratively within the college and the broader community. ([Site 2 Job Description], 2022, p. 1)
3	White Woman	Large urban city in a major city	The [CAO] will have broad responsibility, either directly or indirectly, for the following positions/areas and/or functions: College and Career Readiness; Nursing/Allied Health/Human Services; STEM; Student Success; Course Entry and Faculty Contracts; Resource Support; Culinary/Hospitality/Arts and Communication; Professional Careers Division; E-Learning; Public Safety and Transportation Technologies; Libraries; Learning Innovation and Instructional Design; Faculty Learning and Engagement; Business/Global Business/General Studies; Applied Technologies/Construction; Corporate and Economic Development; and Business and Industry Learning Services. The VP serves as the Chief Academic Officer in a learning-centered college for assigned divisions, and supervises the development, implementation, communication, and evaluation of the curriculum. The VP provides highly complex and responsible assistance to the president and works collaboratively with business and industry to ensure that the college has innovative workforce training programs that respond to community labor market demands. Provides executive

Table 4.1 Continued.

			leadership in creating a unified and focused vision for student success. ([Site 3 Job Description], 2022, p. 1)
4	White Man	Medium rural college in a small town	Serves as Chief Academic Officer, under the authority and supervision of the President; plans, develops and administers all aspects of the College's academic programs, activities, personnel and budget in instructional areas; provides leadership in maintaining academic standards; represents the College with appropriate external agencies and organizations; supervises and evaluates Deans and support staff and monitors their professional performance and development. Works actively with other areas of the college to ensure a spirit of college wide collaboration, collegiality, civility and teamwork. ([Site 4 Job Description], 2022, p. 1)
5	White Man	Small urban college in a small city	The [CAO] is directly responsible for the leadership and administration, the planning, development, maintenance, and operation of College curriculum and non-credit programs; provides administrative and leadership direction for all areas of Academic Affairs. This position will provide collaborative leadership with the Executive Leadership Team ensuring the College runs effectively and efficiently in documenting, developing, monitoring and achieving institutional/administrative units/program goals. Under the general direction of the President, this position has specific responsibility and authority to develop all academic activities for the college. ([Site 5 Job Description], 2022, p. 1)
6	White Woman	Medium urban college in a small city	The [CAO] provides leadership and oversight for all curriculum program offerings and program services, ensuring academic accountability, assessment of student learning, and advancement of student success. In collaboration with [their supervisor] the [CAO] supports academic personnel decisions, budget development, and program and curriculum development. ([Site 6 Job Description], 2022, p. 1)
7	White Man	Large urban college in a large city	Provides executive leadership for the academics division of the College. The [CAO] is responsible for leading measurable expansion and improvement of teaching and learning at the College, including: • Advancing the College's student-centered culture through the design and delivery of high-quality, innovative, and transformative teaching and learning. • Leading the design, implementation, and assessment of scholarly, diverse, and learning-centered curriculum.

Table 4.1 Continued.

			• Promoting the development of student-centered, equitable and inclusive systems that enhance student learning, persistence, and completion, and equity of opportunity and success for all students. • Developing strong relationships and partnerships within the local, regional, state, and national educational ecosystem, including collaborations with K-12 and university partners. • Demonstrating a commitment to collaborative practices and shared leadership. • Overseeing the academic integrity of the College and ensuring compliance with various regional and program-specific accreditation and licensing agencies. ([Site 7 Job Description], 2022, p. 1)
8	White Woman	Medium rural college in a small town	As the Chief Academic Officer, the [CAO] is responsible for the planning, development, implementation and evaluation of Curriculum operations, all in collaboration with the Vice President of Instruction. Additional areas of oversight include, but are not limited to, Planning and Research, Academic Support, the college library and bookstore relations. In cooperation with other college administration the [CAO] facilitates the integration of academic resources and student services to achieve a focused enrollment initiative that supports the college's mission and goals. ([Site 8 Job Description], 2022, p. 1)

Each of the participants sent me a copy of their job description by email that lists their documented responsibilities. I have omitted their specific job titles to protect their identities because there was enough variation among their titles that it could be relatively easy to identify the participants based on title alone, especially by other participants who would be familiar with those titles. Some of the participants knew who else had agreed to be interviewed because they had helped recruit others. However, none of them know in what order I interviewed the participants. Therefore, without the job titles they would not easily identify which sets of response data belong to a given participant.

Furthermore, each participant is at the level of a vice president and has the phrase "vice president in their title. According to CAO 2, in the site state, "a chief academic officer is someone who is in charge of all the academic programs of the college." Each of the participants confirmed that they have this responsibility as the primary aspect of their position. I reviewed the essential duties of each participant in the order in which I described the participants above, starting with Chief Academic Officer 1. Next, I describe the themes and subthemes that emerged from the data.

Entering the Leadership Pipeline

The first theme to emerge, entering the leadership pipeline, illustrates how becoming a CAO was surprising to the participants. Many of them had not set out to work at a CC, but along with those who had sought to work there, most of them had not planned on becoming a CC leader. To begin answering the research question, it is important to understand how faculty are drawn to work at a CC and how those who have become CAOs find their way into the leadership pipeline. The perceptions of the participants about how they arrived at the CC and became faculty members and later CAOs helped develop this understanding.

"Found Out I could Teach There"

Many of the participants spoke about how they had earned a bachelor's or master's degree for what they thought at the time would be their life-long careers, in either secondary education or a STEM field in industry. Most of the participants had either moved to the site state from their home state or returned to the site state, where they had grown up. After arriving, they had each discovered that they could not find a job in their field, whether in secondary teaching or industry, which prompted them to seek an adjunct teaching position at a CC.

Conveying the unanticipated nature of landing at a CC, one participant noted, "[I stopped] by the community college and found out I could teach there. I could teach developmental [courses] there with my bachelor's degree" (CAO 1). Other participants echoed this sentiment. For example, they also described moving to [the site state] and not being able to find a job as either a secondary teacher or an industry professional. They also knew very little about the CC, even as they applied there to become an adjunct instructor.

Unlike the participants who had no choice but to seek a career change, several other participants knew about the CC and wanted to work there. For example, another participant chose to leave the secondary environment without prompting. "So, I recognized that [being a high school teacher] was not a career choice that I wanted to stay in very long" (CAO2). She was fully aware of what the CC was; and representing comments made by several of the participants, she added, "[I got] a master's degree so I would be eligible to teach at a CC."

Ultimately, the common aspect of a career change to the CC for most of the participants, those who did not set out to become CC faculty, was having a life change that unexpectedly brought them to this environment. Although they had varied backgrounds, each of the participants gave a single reason for staying at the CC once they had arrived. According to one participant she, "fell in love with the CC setting" (CAO 1). This comment was echoed through similar language by each participant about why they have stayed. Therefore, regardless of whether the participants arrived at the CC as a second career choice or by intention, the common ground uniting them was their love of teaching at the college, and that is what has anchored them there.

The fields of the participants in this study included allied healthcare, biology, engineering, the humanities, information technology, mathematics, physics, and zoology. In

94

addition, there were several overlaps between these fields among the participants because some had credentials in more than one field. This range among the participants emphasizes the broad scope of field-specific experience and education possessed by all CC faculty. According to one participant,

> When you're dealing with faculty, all different areas of college, all the way from university transfer to psychology and history, to IT and computer programmers, to early childhood education, to engineering technology majors and welders, those faculty members come from a lot of different backgrounds. And with few exceptions, most of them didn't intend to teach, originally (CAO 5).

His comments convey the attitude of each of the participants about how leaders themselves can come from a variety of fields. It also shows how they as CAOs understand that leaders must be cognizant of the breadth of experience among the faculty.

All but one of the participants eventually became a full-time faculty member, with only the remaining participant moving directly from an adjunct position to a leadership position. Once these participants each became a faculty member and eventually found themselves entering the leadership pipeline, they then became part of a more homogenous contingent—the academic leader.

"I Did Like the Administrative Piece"

Each of the participants had a similar experience entering the leadership pipeline, which eventually brought them to the CAO position. For example, one participant described a typical experience:

I began as [a program] coordinator, and I had no idea what that meant…. [But] I had put

my heart and soul into it and became an integral part of what I was doing at that time, for

[the program] and for our students (CAO 1).

Likewise, many of the participants described entering their first position at the level of

coordinator, department chair, or director. They also described working to understand the role

and to become adept at it.

Although another participant, teaching in a STEM-field department, eventually entered

the pipeline, she initially had no interest in taking a leadership role. That perspective changed

over time. "Slowly, as more responsibilities [were] shared and opportunities [became] available,

I found that I did like the administrative piece" (CAO 3). Taking on those responsibilities, at the

urging of others, was what turned her toward seeking clearly defined leadership positions. Her

gradually developing interest in leadership was an experience common to most of the

participants.

Advancing up through the pipeline was often unplanned, as one participant explained:

"The school had to make some cuts for financial reasons, and so, when they restructured,

reorganized, they did away with the department chair level. They created these levels of assistant

dean, associate dean, dean" (CAO 4). For him it meant moving from the department chair role to

that of associate dean. Also, when a position opened, he did not so much seek it as he was asked

to take on. "Then the dean they had hired moved on, and they moved me into the dean role, and I

was in that role for a few years" (CAO 4). All the participants took very similar routes to move

out of their first leadership positions, with change in the various leadership roles at their colleges

propelling them.

"A Really Strong Mentor for Me"

Regardless of the other influences that brought them into the leadership pipeline, it was a mentor, often a president, who gave each of them guidance at a critical point in their journey to the CAO position. A leader who takes an adaptive approach to developing future leaders can, "give their employees a clear sense of their own potential…" (Heifetz et al., 2009, p 170). Many of the participants saw in their own leadership journey how this approach can work, as they developed a sense of their own potential. For example, one participant talked about how a president had played an important role in guiding her leadership journey: "I had a community college female president who was a really strong mentor for me, who provided a lot of insight. I think that's important for folks as they venture down this [leadership] path" (CAO 2). She also defined what it was like to observe both good and bad leadership. "So, the things I liked I tried to replicate, and the things I thought—if I was ever in this position, I would not do A, B, C, D—is how I would lead" (CAO 2). Her comments reflected the perspective of each of the participants, especially in how mentors can provide both good advice and modeling of how not to lead. Several of the participants also advised that any faculty member thinking of aiming for a presidency should find a good mentor.

The frequency with which presidents were mentioned as providing advice and direct mentoring was indicative of their regular involvement in shaping a CAO's career and in preparing them for a future presidency. Therefore, it became clear that a CAO's president is often the colleague who contributes to the socialization of leaders to who want to eventually seek a presidency.

One participant described the process of locating a good mentor for leadership and what that relationship should look like, which was representative of what each of the participants had to say about the nature of the mentor-mentee relationship:

Find a mentor, someone who will go beyond just saying that they're your mentor. Be willing to give that mentor permission to tell you things you don't want to hear. Be willing to let your feelings be hurt and know that it is done with a helpful attitude. It is okay to…ask someone to hurt your feelings and tell you what you need to do differently (CAO 5).

This perception relates directly to answering the research question because the participants each believe that a faculty member cannot become a leader without the help of others, especially a good mentor and that they must often be proactive in seeking a mentor.

The Value of Faculty Experience

Relatedly, faculty experience arose as a theme from the participants' agreement on how critical possessing a faculty background is for an academic leader, especially one who intends to become a CAO.

Faculty Experience as Leadership Credibility

One participant had moved through several leadership promotions with increasing responsibilities at a single college. However, to become a CAO she had to seek a position at another college. For her that meant becoming an academic leader working with faculty who knew nothing about her capabilities. Her answer to the problem was to seek them out.

I decided to go on a listening tour with the faculty. So, I had [multiple] faculty meetings…to really meet faculty, ask them questions, tell them some policy work, things I was looking at in terms of hours on campus [and] faculty teaching load (CAO 3).

She wanted to show the faculty that she was interested in their perspectives and could talk to them as a faculty insider who had direct experience with, for example, teaching loads. Therefore, she drew on her full-time teaching background to have knowledgeable conversations with them. Her comments echoed that of the other participants about having the background to understand what faculty do.

CAO 2 used a term to fully illustrate the value of that faculty experience when she said, "I think that because I started out as a full-time faculty member it brings me a lot of street cred." The term *street cred* was used by several of the participants regarding their faculty experience and how it cultivated respect among the faculty. These comments reflect the perspective of each of the participants on the value of their faculty experience and how it helps them lead other faculty members. Therefore, according to the participants, to be successful in the pivotal position of CAO that then can lead to the presidency, faculty moving into the position can bring a built-in credibility with them.

In contrast to the participants' perceptions that faculty experience gives a CAO credibility, an analysis of their job descriptions revealed that not all were required to have teaching experience as applicants for their positions. Four of the participants were expected to have demonstrated success as instructors, while for a fifth it was only a preferred qualification. The three remaining participants were not required to possess any teaching experience, which is an interesting contrast to the participants' nearly complete agreement that a CAO should ideally have been a full-time faculty member. Similarly, CAO job postings for area colleges in neighboring states had varying expectations for teaching experience. The first requires seven years of full-time teaching; the second includes "significant teaching experience" in a list of preferred qualifications; and the third describes it as a "plus."

Leadership Experience as Leader Credibility

Teaching experience is an advantage that, for the participants, does not necessarily offset other ways that faculty may lack preparedness for leadership. For example, a faculty member may be well educated in their field and have the expertise to teach, but if they do not have experience in leading others "they then have to heavily rely on people under them to get things done that they, they don't know how to lead them because they don't have experience" (CAO 1). Another participant said, "But [my] having the experience in the past about making some of those rule changes or policies, it made it a little bit easier and a little less scary [as a CAO]" (CAO 3). Many of the participants agreed by describing the value of entering lower-level leadership positions in preparing them to occupy more senior positions.

Also, from a student-success perspective, one participant described how he learned to think about what students bring to their learning environments when he taught courses at a prison. "It was an eye-opening experience. That particular… that was kind of a moment for me, cause it kind of really shaped things about [the student experience]. Cause you really don't know what people are carrying with them" (CAO 4). He also believes that these kinds of experiences prepare aspiring leaders to better understand those they lead or who may be affected by a leader's decision making. Collectively, the perspectives of these three participants represented the views of each of the participants on how important it is for a future leader to begin getting additional experience that contributes to leadership preparation, beginning while still a faculty member. This theme helped address the research question by illuminating ways in which teaching experience contributes to a faculty member's leadership potential and the gaps in experience that can affect their entry into the leadership pipeline.

<center>**The Importance of the Doctorate**</center>

Many faculty members arrive at the CC with a master's degree in their field or they enroll in graduate school to earn the degree.

A Master's Degree for Teaching

When a participant asked her supervisor what she had to do to build a career at her school, he replied, "You have to get your master's degree" (CAO 1). Through their various statements, the participants concurred that advisors had informed them that faculty need a master's degree to build a full-time teaching career at a CC. They also agreed that no one had mentioned earning a doctorate as necessary to becoming a faculty member. Therefore, completing their education at the master's level creates an obstacle in faculty not having the right credentials to advance into the senior leadership positions of vice president and president. The participants' perceptions about this obstacle helped to further address the research question.

Senior Leadership and the Doctorate

Of the eight participants, four of them have an EdD, two are currently enrolled in an EdD program, and two have a PhD. Those with EdDs were all advised to get that degree so they could advance as leaders. Exemplifying the experience of receiving this advice, one participant said,

> There was a president, along my [leadership] journey, that pulled me aside… I think at the time I was probably in a mid-level leadership… maybe an associate dean, and he shared with me that if I wanted to elevate my role… if I wanted to eventually be a vice president, then I would need the advanced degree (CAO 3).

Each of the participants who had entered an EdD program shared stories of receiving very similar advice from a higher-level leader, most often a president. Of the two who had earned PhDs, one had also received the same advice to earn a doctorate. She elected to continue right

<center>101</center>

into the PhD program at the same school where she was finishing her master's degree. The other also opted for a PhD because she originally intended to become a researcher.

An analysis of the job descriptions provided by participants showed that the minimum degree required for their positions is a master's degree, with only three listing the doctorate and a fourth a terminal degree as the preferred degree. Although some of them entered their CAO positions without the doctorate, soon each of the eight participants will possess the degree, which they agree is vital for carrying out their duties. The three CAO job postings for area positions in neighboring states showed a similar pattern of favoring the doctorate.

Also, an analysis of the documents pertaining to open positions for president showed that there was some variation among the education and experience requirements for president. It ranged from the doctorate being the preferred degree to being the expected degree. When it was preferred, a candidate could be selected for the position if they possessed a combination of a master's degree and significant experience. The minimum experience listed in the documents varied from five to ten years. Regardless of the degree to which the documents and the participants agreed with the necessity of a presidential candidate having a doctorate, both showed that a doctorate was the degree desired most often by search committees.

A significant challenge for faculty in earning a doctorate is the lack of time to complete the degree as working professionals. There was agreement among the participants that it is especially difficult to earn a doctorate while holding a senior leadership position. It can become a challenge for faculty because they are able to begin their leadership careers by entering lower-level leadership positions, such coordinator or program director, without having a doctoral degree. Indicating the difficulty of attending graduate school as a CAO one participant shared,

I have dedicated pretty much all of Saturday and Sunday…. So, I do 16, 20 hours on the

weekends. A lot of times I work until seven o'clock at night. And, you know, the day that

I don't…I have class, it would be for the class. And after that, I don't feel like doing

anything. And so, I've dedicated everything to Saturday and Sunday. That's what I've

done (CAO 4).

Each of the six participants who have been through EdD programs spoke about struggling to

carve out time for classes and to complete coursework while carrying out their leadership duties.

According to the participants, there are specific ways in which the doctorate enhances a

CAO's ability to do their job. One participant outlined the preparation her doctoral program gave

her to be a successful CAO:

I feel like the graduate program I went through was a really hands-on practical graduate

program that had professors of practice from community colleges and two-year

institutions come into the classroom and teach and share their experiences. I got to

participate in a lot of professional development… (CAO 2).

Her comments were representative of the perspective of all participants who each shared how

their program had prepared them professionally. Therefore, each of the participants who had

entered a doctoral program as a leader said they would advise any faculty member thinking about

entering the leadership pipeline to get their doctorate and to get it as early as they could, advice

that contributes to answering the research question.

Developing Leadership Potential

To further answer the research question, the participants shared their perceptions on how

faculty members can begin to develop their leadership potential, in addition to having the right

credentials. Each of the participants shared that there are ample opportunities for faculty

103

members to begin developing leadership skills and that it is essential that those who want to lead take advantage of those opportunities.

Embracing Opportunities

Many of the participants explained that faculty members often refuse to do work that they are not interested in or that they see as outside their job description. Using humor to make his point, one participant said, "Never, never, never (laughs) tell your supervisor you don't want to do something because it's outside your job description. Never do that (chuckles)" (CAO 5). He then provided an example of the kinds of tasks he has been asked to do while performing his own job:

> I don't think you can be president or vice president without doing a whole host of things that are outside your job description. In the same month, I could sit in boards of trustees meetings; I could be in meetings with county commissioners; I could present to a grant funder; and I could be carrying bricks around the parking lot to hold down the curtains for a drive-through graduation and trying not to get dirt on my pants while I'm doing it. And it could be all of that in the same week. So, the willingness to do things outside of what you think your job is is critically important (CAO 5).

Many of the participants expressed frustration with faculty reluctance to accept opportunities and shared similar descriptions of the variety of tasks they each have had to perform.

Another participant described how difficult it is for faculty to understand what a CAO does.

> I don't think anybody understands the role [of CAO] until you get into the role, unless you have the ability to work side-by-side with that particular person, and you get to see the day in and day out and what's involved. For some faculty who say I want to be chief

104

academic officer, take advantage of opportunities when they arise, even if it may not

necessarily lead directly to that role. Because sometimes you may not understand how

they are linked (CAO 4).

Comments made by other participants showed the high degree to which they agreed with the

sentiment expressed by CAO 4.

To the participants, any faculty member who eventually wants to become a president may

set up their own barriers by not following advice on what it takes to become a CAO, the gateway

position to a presidency. In helping to answer the research question, this perspective shows that

faculty must be ready to carry out tasks that seem unrelated to the CAO position because the

CAO who assigns them fully understands the value of those tasks. However, this state does not

have collective bargaining agreements with CC faculty, so these CAOs are unencumbered by the

constraints such agreements could place on their attempts to provide faculty with leadership

experience.

Several of the participants also described tasks they had taken on to grow and

demonstrate their ability to lead. For example, one participant explained how accepting jobs he

did not want to do was important for developing skills to enhance his career.

[I] took on a couple of projects, tasks that I didn't really want to, along the way. [I] didn't

want to become director of [a STEM area]. For…several years, I served as coordinator of

our federal Perkins Grant, which brought funding to [a college program]. Didn't really

want to do that, but I took 'em (CAO 5).

Most of the participants agreed by talking about doing jobs or tasks they weren't particularly

interested in but that were beneficial to their leadership development.

Breaching Silos

Relatedly, most of the participants shared that faculty members seeking opportunities outside their own departments is also vital for those interested in leadership opportunities. In summarizing the problem of not seeking opportunities outside their own departments, a participant said,

> When you stay in your silo, you think everybody thinks the way you think. And that whole breaking the silos across campus, that's huge because you get to learn that not everybody thinks the way you think about the leadership, about the benefits, about the students, about all of it. Everybody doesn't think the same way. And it's easy to forget that when you're spending twenty years in the same department with the same people, complaining about the same stuff (CAO 1).

Another participant said, "I've never been…a direct supervisor for…Welding, for example. I have been the supervisor of the supervisor for Welding" (CAO 6), making the point that it is also important to learn how other departments operate before becoming the leader of those supervisors. Also, "Faculty may not know…the difference between capital budgets and county funding and state funding and grant funding and institutional funding" (CAO 5). These perspectives are reflective of the participants' views on the detrimental effect of an aspiring leader remaining ensconced within their department and never learning how other departments manage their staff and resources.

Broadening Perspective

For most of the participants a key to faculty stepping outside of their silos is committee membership. As one participant put it, "You get to see what chairing a committee [is like], looking after an initiative or doing something. That's valuable leadership experience, especially

if you're doing plenty of that" (CAO 4). The importance of committee membership was echoed by many of the participants.

Another way the participants agreed that faculty could breach the silo of their departments is to learn how to network. For example, one participant said,

> This is what I've always been missing, is having those connections that are often, often people know they're supposed to search out…. I didn't know what it meant to find those connections and how important it was to find that networking piece in order to move forward (CAO 1).

This statement reflects the combined perception of the participants about faculty and how valuable it is for them to develop this skill, which contributes to answering the research question.

To take a further step in the process of breaking the silo of their departments, a participant said that he would advise any aspiring leaders among faculty to become familiar with the CC leadership process up through the state system level. "Curriculum improvement projects occasionally happen within the state on a system level. Those are a pain. If it happens to be your area and you can get involved in that then do so" (CAO 5). The participants agreed that these types of projects are important to understand for aspiring leaders.

Relatedly, one of the participants focused on the importance of getting involved with the legislative process:

> Anything that has to do with legislation, bond referendums, saying yes to those things. Because if you are trying to get in the line of sight of upper administration to having them seeing you as someone who is invested in a journey to leadership, that is huge, knowing how to talk to the legislature, knowing how to talk with potential donors, knowing how to not be too aggressive (CAO 1).

It conveyed what many of the participants shared about the value of knowing how to work with the state legislature.

The theme of developing leadership potential is supported by the analysis of the documents. The length of time to establish that an applicant has acquired sufficient experience to be a CAO in the site system varies, but only slightly. For example, the average length of time in terms of previous leadership experience required is five to six years. Although instead of length of time, one participant's job description includes a long list of bullet points describing specific areas of knowledge that would most likely come from having served several years in lower-level leadership positions. Therefore, CAOs in this state and neighboring states have usually spent at least five years in other leadership positions gaining experience to become a CAO. The documents also support the sub-theme of breaching silos because a breadth of leadership experience required to become a CAO would have exposed the successful candidate to areas outside their departments. The analysis of these documents further addressed the research question, because it indicated that faculty should be advised to build a background of experience that spans several years, covers a variety of tasks, and exposes them to areas beyond their departments.

Each of these subthemes under the theme of developing leadership potential is related to learning about the activities of the college beyond the classroom and the faculty member's department. From an adaptive leadership perspective, Heifetz et al. (2009) recommended that leaders "get on the balcony" (p. 49), meaning that they must develop an understanding of how the organization function as a whole. Therefore, these approaches to developing leadership potential come from the participants taking an adaptive perspective.

<center>**Challenges to Leading**</center>

The next theme that arose from the data was about challenges to leading as a CAO. Analyzing these challenges through the lens of adaptive theory helped answer the research question because it showed how faculty who want to eventually become a president must learn to assess their environment to carry out this leadership role.

Frequent Meetings

First, each of the participants said that a typical day is filled with back-to-back meetings. One described why he ends up attending so many meetings throughout the week:

> I personally, I have eight direct reports. I meet with two of them biweekly, four of them weekly, two as needed because they're right—they're in the offices beside me, and all eight of them once a week. So that's a lot of meetings, and that's just my direct reports. That doesn't count the other meetings that you're involved in with the rest of the executive leadership team (CAO 5).

Listing the many meetings and their purposes, usually tied to the number of direct reports they have, was common among the participants. Another participant linked the endless meetings to the length of the workday. "I'm invited to meetings, but if there are any action items that need to take place, I don't always have time to do the action items that take place, until—that's why the workday lasts so long" (CAO 3). These comments represented each participant's view of what makes a workday so long for CAOs. From an adaptive perspective, the sheer number of meetings CAOs must commit to can leave little time for the analysis of problems that leads to solution finding, as evidenced by CAO 3's comment about the lack of time to complete action items.

"Putting Out Fires"

A related aspect of the workload challenge for a CAO is how many mundane details crop up during a typical workday. One participant shared, "I will tell you one thing that I'm trying to combat and trying to work with the deans [on], as well. It's the whirlwind" (CAO 7). He elaborated by saying that it involves dealing with short-term department operational problems, which he also described as "putting out fires," that surface each day and distract from the bigger issues he wants to work on. Most of the participants agreed by sharing similar stories about distractions that pull them away from the important issues they need to address. This adaptive approach, of attempting to turn operational problems back to the individuals who raise them, is an ongoing process that many of the participants are struggling to improve. From an adaptive perspective, they understand that it is not their job to provide the quick technical fixes that others want from them.

Making Decisions

They each shared that making decisions is an important part of their jobs and spoke about the challenges inherent in being the decision makers. For example, the participants talked about how staff and faculty can react to their decisions. According to one participant, although she is willing to make difficult decisions, it is not any easier for her just because she is the CAO. "And the majority of faculty are right there with you. But you have to become okay with making some people unhappy" (CAO 6). According to Heifetz et al. (2009), to think adaptively, leaders must accept that making tough decisions is an ongoing process, which these participants have done. CAO 6 also described coaching her direct reports to think the same way. Many of the participants agreed, describing having to become comfortable with knowing they cannot please

everyone. One participant provided an example of a typical way in which a former peer might react to a decision:

> And so, you just can't make that decision and that be it, cause at a small college that often happens. One person makes the decision and that's just it. And then all of a sudden backlash occurs, you know? It's funny because even at the larger institution that would happen, but the effects of it weren't felt as quickly. At a smaller institution, it's felt more quickly (CAO 1).

Her comments were indicative of all the participants' perceptions that faculty who have become academic leaders must learn to stand by their decisions when backlash occurs. Overshadowed by the lack of time each of the participants has experienced is the implication that they may not have enough time to thoroughly analyze problems and prepare others for those decisions. Heifetz et al. (2009) stated that "understanding the political relationships in your organization is key to seeing how your organization works as a system" (p. 89).

Change Making

By contrast, another participant talked about making transformation happen by involving the right people who support the change, which, adaptively, Heifetz et al. (2009) described as "people shar[ing] responsibility for the larger organization's future…" (p. 103).

> It takes having a good number of what we call 'greenlight people,' the people who are the yes-please people. The people who understand the importance of movement and growth and transformation in order to survive within the current climate of higher education (CAO 1).

We had been discussing actor and comedian Amy Poehler's position that you take advantage of opportunities by saying "yes please" whenever possible, so CAO 1 repeated that phrase to make

111

her point. Another participant described an example of encouraging transformation work: under his guidance, the "directors and supervisors and coordinators will have conversations about working with the faculty's data on how to find opportunities to improve student success" (CAO 4). Again, many of the participants were in agreement that others need to see the value of the changes they, as CAOs, want to make if they wish to receive support for those decisions. According to Heifetz et al. (2009), it is important to gage the "ripeness of an issue" (p. 127) or individuals' readiness to seek solutions to a problem, an adaptive approach these participants are taking when they encourage conversations about issues.

However, none of the participants expressed any reluctance toward decision making. In fact, CAO 7 said regarding curriculum development, "we really have to have collaborative conversations, transparent conversations, and get the best solution as our group; and then if there's a tie, and somebody has to break that tie, I'll be that guy," which further revealed how each participant indicated that they were willing to be decision makers. In answering the research question, this perspective demonstrated that faculty must develop the resolve to be decisive in light of any opposition they may face.

Additionally, there was agreement among the participants about what constitutes the most common problems CAOs face regarding student success. For example, CAO 5 mentioned his concerns about students having adequate "childcare and transportation" and the challenges they face in dealing with "changing work schedules." Another participant extended the problem of ensuring student success to the challenge of creating a viable transfer pathway to the state's public universities: "I told [the university representative], we have trouble transferring credit to that pathway with the senior institution. They just don't want to take it at the CC level, even though we have an articulation agreement" (CAO 4).

These student-success problems were frequently mentioned during the interviews with participants and how there are no easy solutions to them. Although, CAO 2, with the support of the new president, has taken an "equity-minded" approach to begin addressing these issues. "We're trying to remove barriers from policies that affect students, so for example our attendance policy, negatively. It's punitive for some students and we're trying to be equity-minded and meet students where they are." The participants were in agreement that these issues form barriers to achievement for their students and that CAOs must be part of the conversation about seeking solutions.

Leading Peers

Once a faculty member has entered the leadership pipeline and been given a formal leadership role, there can be additional challenges for them in exercising their new level of authority. For example, one participant explained the difficulty of leading peers as a department chair and as the youngest member of the department faculty.

> One of the things that I ran into early on in that first department chair role, when I started that role, I was about thirty-three or thirty-four. And so, every person who was going to be reporting to me as department chair was older than me…. And for a number of people, I was the youngest person by a number of years. And so, you counter that with there were a couple of folks in that mix who were older males. So having a younger female (laughs) as their boss, those things were challenging (CAO 6).

Although, she pointed out that "fortunately, I had been there for a few years and had built good working relationships, good collegial relationships with them, and they knew that they could trust me and that I had the integrity." Many of the participants agreed that having strong relationships with peer faculty can carry over into becoming an effective leader.

However, one participant pointed out that becoming a leader of former peers can affect friendships that the new leader may have had with other faculty, especially as they advance into a senior leadership role, such as vice president.

> I think it's a little more difficult to separate yourself from people you've been friends with for a long time…. It's going to change the way you are viewed by your friends, your colleagues and peers, fair or not. You become 'one of them' when you step into senior leadership, the administration, the leadership, the college. It is an intentional step across the line (CAO 3).

She also described not being able to talk freely with her colleagues about college affairs as she used to:

> You're exposed to a lot of information, and you see things at a college level much more clearly, and so some of that…the emotional toll that takes on you, not that you're keeping secrets, but that's what it feels like. Not being able to share things, and that was difficult on me personally, on an emotional level (CAO 3).

Likewise, many of the participants shared perceptions that aligned with the views of CAO 3, that faculty who become leaders must be prepared for the changes in their relationships with other faculty they have worked with as peers.

In identifying these issues, the participants helped to answer the research question by showing that faculty who want to lead will need to accept that they will face such challenges if they want to succeed as leader, especially if preparing to eventually become a president. In accepting the mantle of leadership and the identity changes that came with it, the participants created a disequilibrium in the environment, which Heifetz et al. (2009) stated can motivate

114

others to produce change. This is another way in which adaptive leadership theory provides a

lens for understanding the challenges to leadership the participants faced.

<h2 style="text-align:center">Achieving Senior Leadership Positions</h2>

Aspiring leaders must also prepare for an extended journey through the pipeline if their

goal is to reach senior positions such as the CAO and the presidency.

Leadership Journeys: "It's Not a Sprint"

A participant emphasized the time commitment it takes for the average faculty member to

go from teaching to a presidency:

> If that's your goal, [to become a president] it's a marathon; it's not a sprint. You are not
>
> going to go from [being an instructor] to a president in a year. So, that is, probably, I'm
>
> guessing, I would guess at best, a ten-year marathon. Maybe not, but for most people,
>
> that's gotta be, I would imagine, that's gotta be a ten-year journey (CAO 5).

He sees the pursuit of a presidency through the strategies outlined above as a long process that

cannot be completely rapidly, a process already faced by several of the participants in growing

their own careers.

"Only Hiring from Outside"

One barrier to a steady rise through the leadership pipeline was shared by a participant

from her own experiences:

> The hardest part for me was that I was working at a very good institution, so no one
>
> wanted to leave, and people stayed even past their retirement. They were eligible for
>
> retirement, but they stayed. And so, my next jump would have been to department chair
>
> and then to dean…. [For another position] they were only hiring from outside above
>
> where I was. And so, because they weren't looking internal, they weren't hiring internal,

and it looked like for at least the next five years nothing was going to change, I had to

figure out, what's my next step? (CAO 1).

Her comments represented a common sentiment among the participants: that a faculty member

must be prepared to move to another college to grow their career due to the lack of opportunities

at their current college, with many of them outlining their own moves during the interviews.

Therefore, according to the participants, faculty must be prepared to leave a college where they

may have invested a major portion of their teaching careers to seek opportunities elsewhere up

through the CAO position.

<div align="center">

Understanding the Pivotal Position

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Once the rising leader has reached the pivotal position of CAO, whether at their own

college or another college, they must understand what the position entails.

Oversight of the Curriculum

For example, management and oversight of the curriculum was often the first duty

mentioned in the participants' job descriptions. Each summary included various words to

essentially describe the same obligation, with "academic" or "curriculum" appearing most often.

For example, CAO 1 "plans, directs and reviews the activities and operations of the college

academic functions." Each of the other CAO's job descriptions included a very similar

statement.

There is also a chief academic officer for the state CC system, who works out of its

central office. Therefore, the person in this role is responsible for setting the expectations for all

the CAOs working in the system, evidenced by the similarity of the participants' job

descriptions.

The job postings for open CAO positions in surrounding states were in agreement that curriculum oversight was the top priority for CAOs at those colleges. For example, the duty to provide curriculum oversight for one position reads "The VPAA [CAO] preserves the integrity and viability of the College's curriculum, ensuring its quality, relevance and strategic alignment with the mission, vision and values of the College…." There is complete consistency across each of the CAO job descriptions, both those provided by the participants and those I found posted for open positions, that curriculum oversight is a primary duty of a CAO.

Leading the Division and Standing in for the President

One or more of the words *leads*, *leading*, or *leadership* also appeared in each job description. For example, CAO 1 "provides leadership for the division." She supervises all staff in the division, although this combined aspect of leadership may be due to her college, and therefore division, being small. Supervision of faculty is not directly mentioned in her job description, although managing the curriculum would likely involve guiding faculty. By contrast, CAO 3 works at a large college, and her job description specifically lists seventeen academic and learning support areas she is responsible for. Based on their college size, each of the participants had wording in their job descriptions similar to one or the other of these representative descriptions. The area job postings agree with the participants' job descriptions that leadership in the academic areas of the college is an additional primary duty for CAOs along with oversight of the curriculum.

Another participant shared that, as a CAO at a large college in a major city, she occasionally assists the president in carrying out her duties.

But now that the president knows me and trusts me a little more, she has me standing in

for her, at meetings and in communications with the community and business industry.

117

So, I need to free some time up to do some of that work, to take some things off of her

(CAO 3).

Therefore, a CAO may occasionally be expected to share responsibility for leadership of the college with the president, depending on the needs of the college. Through an adaptive perspective, Heifetz et al. (2009) advised leaders to "see yourself as a system" (p. 181). It allows leaders to "identify the resources and constraints on [their] ability to make things happen" (Heifetz et al., 2009). The authors explained that when leaders see themselves a system, they can then understand that there are external forces acting upon them, such as the way in which their president shares power with them. Each of the participants who worked at a large college spoke about assisting the president with certain external duties. This point addressed the research question on participants' perceptions of how a faculty member can prepare to become a president. If a faculty member who has become a CAO works at a large college, they may be asked to assist the president. None of the participants set a size limit on when that expectation was more likely to happen, with the presidents at those larger colleges choosing when to assign some of their duties to the CAOs.

Collaborating with Others

Finally, each of the CAOs is expected to "collaborate" or "coordinate" with others, although who those others are varies with the college. For example, CAO 1 "provides information to the Board of Trustees; coordinates assigned activities with other departments and outside agencies." Although CAO 1 is expected to work with both internal and external groups, this may again be based on the smaller size of her college. By contrast, as the CAO of a larger college, CAO 5 "will provide collaborative leadership with the Executive Leadership Team." He explained that,

We make a lot of team decisions; we make a lot of… we do a lot of collaborative

discussions. If they can't work well together, ah, you're handicapped. You, you are, you

are severely held back in what you can accomplish (CAO 5).

His job description goes on to say that his collaboration is focused on internal groups through his

work with the team. This collaboration differs from assisting the president in carrying out their

duties because collaboration was described by the participants as an ongoing part of their duties.

For example, one participant shared that "my leadership style, but though it's collaborative, I

think it's more authentic when it can be" (CAO 3). She also related having to work

collaboratively with multiple stakeholders at her first college due to its size:

I did come from a smaller-midsized institution, because I did wear all of those hats… I

had managed a budget, I had gone through an IT crisis, I'd had the experience at the adult

high school level, the continuing education, the curriculum. I mean, I had really done it

all (CAO 3).

These perceptions of when a CAO focuses internally versus externally addressed the

research question by revealing that a faculty member must be conscious of college size as they

move through the leadership pipeline and begin preparing to seek a presidency. The perspectives

of CAOs 1 and 3 about working at small versus large colleges represented what each of the

participants had to say about how college size shapes their job duties. At a smaller college the

CAO must be more of a generalist, as CAO 3 demonstrated through her comments above, while

a CAO at a larger college is less of a generalist whose role can become an extension of the

president's role with a more outward focus. As CAO 3 explained, there are more associate vice

presidents to delegate specific areas to at a larger college.

As in the first two areas of curriculum management and leadership, the job descriptions of the three open positions I examined also described collaboration as an important duty of the CAO. For example, the person who is hired for one CAO position will be "collaborating with institutional leaders on the development and implementation of college-wide strategy," which is very similar to CAO 5's duties and that represented the requirements of each of the open position postings.

What this analysis of the job descriptions for both the CAO participants and other open positions in nearby states showed is that colleges have three specific areas that they want their CAOs to focus on. The descriptions of open positions were in agreement with the job descriptions for the participants on these key areas. By comparing statements from the interviews and the participants' job descriptions, clear links between the participants' expectations of their duties and their colleges' expectations emerged from the data (See Table 4.1).

Table 4.2 Examples of links between participant and college expectations of CAO duties

Major Categories of CAO Duties Identified in the Job Descriptions	Participants' Expectations	Colleges' Expectations
Curriculum Oversight:	"I have a really broad scope between adult education, continuing education, workforce development, curriculum programs, a really broad scope [of oversight]" (CAO 4). "The provost position had included oversight, not only of curriculum and instruction but of student services and continuing education. And at that point [curriculum oversight] was split out, and so I was over instruction [as the new CAO]" (CAO 8). (Representative of how the participants each described providing curriculum oversight.)	"Serve as the Chief Academic Officer (curriculum and continuing education) and maintain responsibility for the overall leadership of the College's instructional units" (CAO 5 Job Description). (Representative of the description of curriculum oversight in each of the eight job descriptions.)
Leading:	"I decided to go on a listening tour with the faculty. So, I had [multiple] faculty meetings…to really meet faculty, ask them questions, tell them some policy work, things I was looking at in terms of hours on campus [and] faculty teaching load" (CAO 3). (Representative of how the participants each perceived their role as leaders.)	"Provides visionary leadership for the academic divisions of the College through the development and administration of policies and procedures aimed at providing and supporting quality instruction" (CAO 4 Job Description). (Representative of the description of leading in

Table 4.2 Continued.

Leading (cont.):		each of the eight job descriptions.)
Collaboration:	"My leadership style, but though it's collaborative, I think it's more authentic when it can be" (CAO 3). "We make a lot of team decisions; we make a lot of… we do a lot of collaborative discussions. If they can't work well together, you're handicapped. You are severely held back in what you can accomplish" (CAO 5). "We really have to have collaborative conversations, transparent conversations, and get the best solution as our group; and then if there's a tie, and somebody has to break that tie, I'll be that guy" (CAO 7). (Representative of how each participant saw collaboration as an integral aspect of their duties.)	"The VP…works collaboratively with business and industry to ensure that the college has innovative workforce training programs that respond to community labor market demands" (CAO 3 Job Description). "[The CAO] will provide collaborative leadership with the Executive Leadership Team" (CAO 5 Job Description). (Representative of the description of collaboration in each of the eight job descriptions.)

The participants' statements showed that they face a wide variety of tasks as part of their daily workload. Therefore, functioning generally within the scope of those key areas allows CAOs to take on many tasks at their discretion. In addressing the research question, it revealed that

aspiring leaders among faculty must be adaptable to a position that only broadly defines the scope of the job.

Becoming a Qualified Presidential Candidate

The last step in a faculty member's journey through the leadership pipeline to the position of president, as revealed by in the data, is to recognize when they are prepared to apply for a presidency.

The Doctorate as "Gatekeeper"

To help complete an answer to the research question, I analyzed three president job postings in neighboring states to supplement the perceptions of the participants. In one, the candidates were expected to have specific credentials. For example, the first included the statement: "Candidates must have a doctorate or other terminal degree and at least 10 years of administrative and teaching experience at a community college or other degree-granting institution. An equivalent combination of education and experience may be considered."

Although this search committee expects the candidate to have a doctorate, they did leave room for an applicant without it, provided that they have the right combination of education and experience to supplement its lack. The second mirrored the first on education and experience but did not allow for experience to offset lack of a doctorate. They also included having budget expertise. The third required a minimum of a master's degree but added that a doctoral degree is preferred.

Ultimately, there was some variation among the colleges, and even in the expectations of the participants, regarding the necessity of a president having a doctorate. As one participant discovered, the requirement also varies over time: "For about five years in [site state], you could not be a president without a PhD. And then all of a sudden, it changed. The tide changed back,

123

and it became more about experience than about credentials" (CAO 1). This was an observation many of the participants concurred with.

Yet, as discussed above, each of the participants stated that either the president or another mentor had told them that they could only go so far up the leadership pipeline before they would be required to have a doctorate. There was strong agreement among the participants that this is a key requirement for a presidential candidate to meet, given what search committees will likely expect. Even if the job description does not require a doctorate, there was the perception among the participants that not having it can first become a barrier at the level just below the presidency. For example, CAO 2's job description allows a candidate to substitute for the required terminal degree with "a master's degree in a discipline appropriate to higher education leadership and additional graduate work in higher education, CC leadership, education, or a related education field." Although she had credentials that could be substituted, she was told that she did not get the first dean position she applied for because she lacked that terminal degree, and the successful candidate did have it. Therefore, the participants agreed that a prudent choice is to earn a doctorate before reaching a senior academic leadership position, such as dean, because the candidate may be competing with others who do possess it.

One participant stated, "It's still like the gatekeeper [to achieving a presidency….] You kind of have to know some people to get the president position without having the doctorate. And you really have to have some outstanding experience…" (CAO 4). So, while it is possible to rise to the presidency without a doctorate, it is also not typical, a point that almost all the participants agreed with. This participant added that, "if [a faculty member is] really thinking about upper-level kind of things, I would encourage them to go ahead and do it [get the doctorate] earlier…" (CAO 4). His comments were representative of the perception of all the

124

participants. Implied in his comments is how much the expertise of a doctorate brings to a candidate's preparedness, and that even a significant amount of experience is unlikely to offset its lack.

From Senior Leader to President

There was also general agreement among the participants that having the right experience is important. Most presidents who rise from a CC leadership pipeline often come from either the CAO or chief financial officer (CFO) positions, although more often the CAO position, based on comments from various participants. For example, CAO 1 talked about how she had mapped out the typical leadership steps a presidential candidate would likely have taken. "And at that time, traditionally, you went from CAO to president." She said this was around 2005 when she was beginning to look at the path she would have to follow to become a president. Several of the participants mentioned knowing an academic VP or CAO who had gone on to become a CC president as evidence of who is most likely to become a president. For example, CAO 8 stated that "I have colleagues that I worked with in our chief academic officers' group who have gone on to presidencies."

CAO 3 expanded that path to include the chief financial officer (CFO), "If you think about linear progression, most presidents do come up though either instruction or through finance because those are probably the two most difficult pieces of leading a college, in my opinion." She was making the point that search committees are interested in candidates who know something about the running of the college, whether academically or financially. Her observation represented the views of a majority of the participants that they are beginning to see presidents who have a non-academic background but who still come from within the CC environment.

This participant also pointed out that a business focus may not be desirable from an academics perspective. "We talk about, oh, we have to run it as a business center. Students are our customers, and I don't think that's right. I don't think those are your most successful presidents" (CAO 3). Many of the participants conveyed the necessity of presidents having an understanding of CC academics, in alignment with this participant's perspective.

Community College Insider

Almost all the participants were in agreement on that important background element, that a qualified candidate for president should have experience working in the CC system. According to one participant,

> Community colleges are open-door enrollment. You really do serve a different
>
> population. It is a different environment. It really is about the community, so the
>
> 'community' in the community college name is important. You do have an obligation to
>
> serve your community. So, you serve your entire student, not just the academic portion of
>
> the student needs. So, it's important that leaders know that and understand that (CAO 3).

For her, no other type of education leadership experience is translatable to the CC because she sees no similarities between the CC and other education systems. In her view, the CC has its own niche. Her comments were representative of comments made by a majority of the participants, several of whom agreed that, for example, K-12 experience would not translate well to the CC. Another participant reinforced this perspective by describing how a recently successful candidate for a presidency in the state system had achieved her goal:

> She [knew the college at] every level, yeah, every level. I thought that was phenomenal. I
>
> was cheering her on. (Laughs.) Yeah, [another system college] did the same thing. The

gentleman who is currently the president at [that CC], he began as an adjunct math

instructor there, and worked his way up (CAO 1).

To add depth to the value of having CC experience, CAO 8 elaborated on why it is

essential for presidential candidates to be so knowledgeable about the CC at multiple levels:

Experience with accreditation, and…I'm not saying they should have written the report.

But there needs to be an understanding because if you don't understand all those

components and the importance, the significance of those components, it's super easy to

make a misstep. You need…to know if the people who you're working with, whose

responsibility…those things are, know what they are talking about. Right?

For these two participants, knowing the CC thoroughly at every level, and even into

accreditation, makes an applicant a strong presidential candidate, reflecting the perspective of

each of the participants. What they have described for presidential candidates matches the

adaptive approach of "get[ting] on the balcony…[to] gain a clearer view of [the organization's]

structures, culture, and defaults (it's habitual ways of responding to problems)" (Heifetz et al.,

2009, p. 49). To the participants, individuals who have this "balcony" perspective of the college

make better candidates.

Characteristics of a Leader

The participants also described personal characteristics they thought were important for a

candidate to possess. A key focus among the participants was the importance of a president being

a risk-taker and a visionary. For example, one participant said:

I think leaders take risks. I think leaders are not going to do what's expected. I mean

there's the day-to-day running of things, but in order to really make an impact, you need

to take risks and to go out on a limb (CAO 2).

Another participant said: "But I do see much of the day-to-day leadership coming from a level below, so from your vice presidents, managing people. So, the president's role is really visionary…" (CAO 3). Many of the participants commented on the necessity of a president being a risk-taker and a visionary and the comments of both these participants reflected those views. From an adaptive perspective, Hiefetz et al. (2009) advised leaders to increase their tolerance for risk in order to promote change.

Furthermore, the words "trust" and "integrity" surfaced multiple times throughout the interviews. Interestingly, many of the participants used these words to describe how important it was for they themselves to be seen as possessing those qualities by others at the college. They also talked about expecting deans and associate vice presidents who report to them to have those qualities; although they spoke somewhat less about expecting the president to have them.

For example, one participant said,

I think the trust and integrity part is critical. Because if you're going to be making a high-level decision like [presidents make] then if I'm going to follow someone that way, then I need to have confidence in that trust and integrity piece of it. You have the best interests on the part of my people and will make decisions with the right mindset (CAO 6).

It is worth noting that, in addition to the qualifications described above, the importance of a president having people and political skills and fundraising expertise were commented on much more by the participants than possessing trustworthiness and integrity. Therefore, CAO 6's comments above were somewhat unique but worth noting. This does not necessarily imply that qualities such as trustworthiness and integrity in a president are not important to most of the participants; it just demonstrated that the participants collectively emphasized other aspects more fully.

128

The Internal-External Boundary

Many of the participants defined the president's political role as "external" in contrast to their own, which they saw as "internal." Most of the participants expressed discomfort with the idea of engaging in external politics, although several of them spoke about their high degree of comfort with navigating the internal politics of their respective colleges. For example, one said, "Not that I don't have the know-how to navigate the internal politics. It's a little bit… it seems a lot easier to me than externally" (CAO 6). This statement represented the view of each of the participants, who made very similar statements.

The participants often paired the terms "external politics" and "fundraising," so to the participants, there is overlap between these two activities. The participants described how they expected a president to be skilled at handling external politics and fundraising. For example, one summarized the views of all participants on how important those skills are:

> Because a president, once you hit the size of like [smaller site system CC], once you hit that size, you're more politic; you're shaking the hands; you're out in the work force development; you're meeting all the CEOs of these companies; you're doing the donor walk and trying to get donations. And you're really, you're politicking. You're at the legislature. You're trying to be a voice for those smaller colleges, and it's an important role (CAO 1).

Therefore, to her, a smaller college with fewer financial resources is very dependent on the president's skill at raising money for the college. She also pointed out that at a smaller college there are fewer people to support the president by doing additional fundraising work, which can often be an office of one staff member as opposed to a team at a larger college. Her perspective represented the broader perspective of all the participants who emphasized that college size

affects the degree to which the president directly engages in fundraising and the size of the team that supports them.

One participant commented, "See [fundraising] for me would be my least favorite (laughs) thing to do. But I recognize its importance, and I've done some things to increase my experience with that" (CAO 8). Again, her comments were representative of the other participants on an aspect of the presidency faculty must develop skills for if they want to eventually reach that position.

Another participant emphasized how important it is for a president to have well-developed political skills.

> Navigating the political waters, so my president does an excellent job of that, and I leave
> it to him and take cues from him. But if I want to be a president someday, I need to know
> how to navigate that. I'm learning, I'm watching (CAO 2).

These comments about learning fundraising and political skills were echoed by the other participants, which addressed the research question on how faculty can advance to a presidency. It underscored how they must overcome their, often inherent, dislike of carrying out these two duties.

Relatedly, many of the participants spoke about the ability to build relationships as a requirement for presidents to possess, separate from having political skills. One participant pointed out how important those relationship skills can be to a president:

> Being a president is relational. You've gotta think about relationships, right? That's what
> a community college is about. If you don't have somebody who can build relationships,
> you're not going to be able to do it. So, there's relationships… there's a charisma, there is

a charisma piece to that. Got to be able to shake hands, know people, kiss babies (CAO

4).

Each of the participants commented in a similar way on how important it is for presidents to

have that relationship-building skill, emphasizing that faculty must develop it if they intend to

eventually seek a presidency, which further addressed the research question.

By contrast, one participant cautioned that relying heavily on charisma can go badly for

the college, affecting how staff members do their jobs.

Unfortunately, when you meet a few people who are that way [charismatic and outgoing],

we had a person who was hired as the VP at my previous institution. Who showed up for

the interview was not who showed up for…the work. And he created such chaos, people

were leaving in droves, people were getting physically ill from the anxiety he was

causing. Because he wouldn't sit and listen, and he didn't know how to lead that area. He

had never led an area like that (CAO 1).

She was making the point that he had been charismatic enough to get the job while hiding his

lack of ability, indicating the limits of relying on charisma to connect with others. This point

relates to what I outlined about regarding the participants' expectations that leaders be

trustworthy and possess integrity.

CAO 5 touched upon the topic of relationship building by offering advice on how to go

about it. "Find ways to work with people you don't like. Show that you can work across

disciplines. Those are all things that I think a president absolutely has to be able to do." Later he

reiterated, "Have people skills. If you don't have people skills, find 'em (chuckles) somewhere."

This perspective is reflective of how each of the participants commented on the importance of

learning relationship-building skills through experience.

131

One participant described an example of how she believes her president has demonstrated strong people skills.

I think a good leader listens to people and is focused on that person when they are talking. My president is excellent at this. When he is talking to me, I don't care what is happening in the room, he is focused in on me; and I feel I'm the most important thing going on right then. And I just find that amazing… (CAO 2).

By contrast, CAO 6 explained that she has witnessed what happens when a president does not communicate well.

I've seen examples of presidents who, they don't have that intangible…gift of communication. So, everything they say comes off as really like in your face (said with a laugh). They say something and you're sitting there going, what did they just say? I could put my head down….

Collectively, these comments by CAOs 2 and 6 demonstrated various facets of the overall perspective of all the participants. They believe that if a faculty member wants to become a president, they need to develop relationship-building skills. These skills are important to the college because it can build support for the college from outside stakeholders as well as a strong department team internally. When a president does not handle it well, either by overly relying on personal charisma or by making statements that show an insensitivity to the audience, it can drive stakeholders away. Therefore, their perceptions on relationship building is another way in which their comments addressed the research question.

Culture Influencer

For many of the participants, the size of a college also determines how involved the president is in directly shaping the college's culture. According to one participant,

When you are [a president] at a smaller college…you have more voice in the day-to-day

operations. You have a better chance of changing the culture and not depending on others

to. You're working hand-in-hand with your VPs to change the culture, to drive the ship,

to, to move it forward (CAO 1).

As she had in other aspects of leadership, CAO 3 took ownership of that work at her college due

to its larger size. "Some of the culture work that I had begun when I first got here, trying to build

some trust and relational aspects, that it just…some of those things just did not happen [due to

the pandemic]." CAO 3 works at a large urban college. Therefore, her comments align with those

of CAO 1 regarding the way the size of the college affects how directly involved the president is

in managing its culture. At her large college, the responsibility falls directly to her, while the

president is more removed from the process.

The perspectives of these two participants who lead academics at colleges on the opposite

ends of the size range exemplify the perspectives of all the participants on how college size can

influence how involved a president will be in determining campus culture. However, before they

can begin to shape the culture of their campus, adaptive leaders must learn how to gage the

culture and to recognize how any negative aspects have become entrenched (Heifetz et al.,

2009).

In addressing the research question, these perspectives demonstrated that faculty intent on

becoming a president must learn how a president engages with campus culture and to what

degree based on campus or college size. Indirectly, these contrasting perspectives show that

faculty must also consider what size college they would prefer to lead before becoming a

candidate for a presidency.

There Must be a Good Fit

One participant described having a friend who she thought had the qualifications to be an effective president.

I know someone who wanted to be a president, who decided not to be a president, based on the president she had, like the new president that had come in. And the president she had turned her off on wanting to be president (CAO 1).

She believes there is more to her friend not wanting to be a president than the role model she had because this participant added,

So she says. I know sometimes people say those things, and there's really other things. But when I look at that person, had that person branched out to a smaller college and had any type of experience or contact with that, they actually would have seen what they don't want is to be president at that size of an institution (CAO 1).

Therefore, this participant believes that her friend watching her president perhaps struggle with leading a college of that size may have been the real reason for this friend not wanting to have her own presidency. This insight aligns with the views of other participants who observed that there must be a good fit between a president and the college they are hired to lead.

"We Want to Stay in Instruction"

Another participant shared a fact that may seem counterintuitive when examining a desire to seek the next position in the pipeline, the presidency:

In [our state], there are [a large number of] community colleges, and it is more difficult to be hired as a chief academic officer than as a president. There are more applications for chief academic officer positions than there are for presidents of institutions, and that surprised me (CAO 3).

134

When I asked her if she knew why this discrepancy might be true, she had this to say: "My assumption is because there are a large number of faculty, so maybe [CAO] is a more desired role for faculty members because we want to stay in instruction" (CAO 3). Her comments echo those of the other participants. In various ways, they each expressed a passion for the work they do as a CAO. With the exception of two participants who are sure they want to eventually become a president, the rest expressed varying degrees of uncertainty about pursuing a presidency. They did not rule it out but gave a dislike of external politics and fundraising as primary obstacles to seeking the position. Several added that in lieu of a presidency, they might seek another CAO position at a different college if it allowed them to grow as an academic leader.

At various points all the participants were in agreement that the higher a leader goes in the pipeline, the more important it is to find the right college to be a leader at, and not just in terms of being a qualified candidate for any president position. Also, they agreed that a passion for academic leadership paired with a dislike for politics and fundraising can act as a deterrent to a CAO pursuing a presidency.

The President and CAO: A Vital Bond

Finally, through their descriptions of conversations these participants have had with their current and former presidents, they showed that the relationship between CAO and president is a vital bond that strengthens the leadership pipeline. The participants also showed that an interdependence can develop between a college's CAO and its president. Generally, there is no one else in the leadership pipeline above the CAO except the president. The participants agreed that the president often seeks out the CAO to be an advisor and confidante because in the leadership structure of their colleges, they each report directly to the president. Therefore, it is

135

vital for a faculty member who wants to become a president to understand that relationship. In addressing the research question, the participants' responses demonstrated presidents can become role models for future presidents, especially those at the CAO level.

For example, one participant talked about how the CAO can work in tandem with the president to carry out that president's vision. "Our new president…. It was right after the George Floyd murder, and we declared that [our college] was going to be an anti-racist college. And with, so we have been very intentional about our policies reflecting equitable practices…" (CAO 2). Her comments represented how each of the participants spoke about their relationship with the president. In those relationships, the presidents were delegating some of their authority to the CAOs but also supporting those CAOs in making major changes, an adaptive approach in which the presidents use their authority to protect and motivate individuals to make changes (Heifetz et al., 2009). In both areas, a faculty member who intends to become a president must understand how the flow of power works, further addressing the research question.

Another participant described the interconnectedness of his role with the president's, and the effect it can have on the college:

> Myself and another VP and the president were talking yesterday morning…. We are a couple of years out from going through our next [review] with our regional accrediting board…. Those happen every ten years, and we realized that all three of us would likely retire either immediately before or in the middle of the next ten-year [review]. And so…that could be disastrous for a college, to have three key leaders vanish within a year or two of [an accreditation review] (CAO 5).

This was the beginning of a discussion among the three of them about how they would commence planning to prepare the next generation of leaders at the college. This perspective was

136

representative of how each of the participants felt about the responsibility of leadership. Therefore, in addressing the research question, participants stressed that a future president must think about how they will establish their legacy and about succession planning once they have become a president. Therefore, faculty must also recognize that once they become a CAO, they may become part of the president's succession plan based on the strength of their working relationship.

Summary

In this chapter, I described themes that emerged from an analysis of the participants' perceptions of how they think a faculty member can prepare to transition into a leadership role and advance to first a CAO position and later a presidency. I supplemented that analysis with analysis of related documents: both the participants' job descriptions and other job postings in nearby states for open CC CAO and president positions. I compared the perceptions of CAOs to their job descriptions. Once analysis was applied, this comparison established links between the leadership perceptions of current CAOs and the expectations of their departments and human resource departments. An understanding of these links also led to an understanding of the pipeline and the degree to which it is leaky. Next, in Chapter 5, I provide a discussion of my findings, including how the literature review in Chapter 2 and the conceptual framework selected for this study relate to my findings.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Summary of Findings

The themes that emerged in this study have implications for further research and practice. In Chapter 4, I described nine themes, divided into subthemes, related to CC CAO perceptions about how aspiring leaders among the faculty can enter and transverse the pipeline to the presidency. I organized my analysis of the themes in the following order: Entering the Leadership Pipeline; The Value of Faculty Experience; The Importance of the Doctorate; Developing Leadership Potential; Challenges to Leading; Achieving Senior Leadership Positions; Understanding the Pivotal Position; Becoming a Qualified Presidential Candidate; and The President and CAO: A Vital Bond. When the themes related to the nature of the CAO or president positions, I included analysis from the documents.

In this chapter I provide a summary of my findings, examined through the lens of both the extant literature and the conceptual framework I selected for this study. I organize my discussion under the headings of Discovering the Community College, Entering the Pipeline, Becoming a CAO, and From CAO to President. I finish by including an explanation of the study's limitations, recommendations for further study, and implications for practice including a proposed framework for preparing faculty to enter the leadership pipeline.

Discovering the Community College

Most of the participants came to the CC from various backgrounds in secondary teaching or industry. The rest attended graduate school with the intention of becoming CC faculty. According to Amey et al. (2002), Cohen et al. (2014), and Eddy (2009), prior to the 1980s, many earlier CC presidents began their careers as high school teachers. Although, by the early 2000s,

only 17% of presidents had such a background (Amey et al., 2002). In contrast to these percentages, of the eight participants in this study, three of them (or nearly 40%) began their careers as high school teachers. Of those former teachers, two (or 25% of the participants) stated that they intend to pursue a presidency. These former teachers did not arrive at the CC through any connections to their high schools, as earlier presidents had done. Although the sample size for this study was too small to make a direct comparison of these percentages regarding high school teachers with the percentages provided by Amey et al. (2002), it is interesting to consider that former high school teachers still enter the pipeline.

Entering the Pipeline

There was unanimous agreement among the participants that becoming a CAO was an unexpected outcome for them. The participants were also in agreement that when they each first began working at their respective CCs, they had no intention of seeking any leadership position, which supports the literature regarding faculty members' frequent lack of leadership plans (Baker et al., 2019; Campbell et al., 2010; Cooper & Pagotto, 2003; Crosson et al., 2005). According to Baker et al. (2019), when administrators in their study were questioned about becoming leaders, they "indicated that they were initially ambivalent" (p. 7). Therefore, these participants' perspectives on becoming leaders supports the literature.

The only divergence among the participants as they entered the pipeline arose from the point in their careers at which they each began to realize they wanted to lead. For some it was earlier than others. Several of the participants did not seek their first leadership position until encouraged to do so by their colleagues at the college. Cooper & Pagotto (2003) stated that faculty members may be encouraged to take on a leadership role if colleagues perceive that they have the ability to "influence others" (p. 28). According to Eddy et al. (2019) networking with

colleagues, especially senior leaders, can lead individuals, such as faculty, to learn that they have leadership potential.

Other participants applied for open positions because they had discovered that they were interested in leading. Still others were gradually given administrative duties along with their teaching duties that became a precursor to moving into a full-time leadership position. According to Cooper & Pagotto (2003), faculty members may be asked to take on leadership tasks because they have the expertise to carry out those tasks. Eddy et al. (2019) stated that potential leaders can also learn to lead by "encountering new tasks" (p. 56). Therefore, participants' statements about accepting opportunities for advancement supports the literature.

Regardless of when they began to lead, each of the participants followed a path that generally led from full-time CC teaching to chair or coordinator to dean to vice president (and CAO). According to Cohen et al. (2014), Eddy et al. (2019), and Osburn and Gocial (2020), a typical pathway for a faculty member starts with a department position, such as department chair, and then leads up through academic leadership to the positions of CAO and then president. Osburn and Gocial (2020) also used a "tier model" (p. 903) to group these positions into three levels; with chairs in the first level, deans in the second, and vice presidents (including the chief academic officer) in the third.

For these participants, opportunities for full-time leadership positions often developed from retirements and department or division reorganizations. According to Forthun and Freeman (2017), there is a "leadership crisis" (p. 69) at U.S. CCs due to the retirement rate of administrators. The frequency with which CAOs are retiring from their positions instead of seeking a presidency contributes to a weakened pipeline to the presidency (Eddy et at., 2019; Keim & Murray, 2008). Therefore, while retirements are often creating new opportunities for

140

rising leaders, they also contribute to a lack of qualified candidates entering the pipeline that leads to the presidency (Campbell et al., 2010; Forthun & Freeman, 2017), given that the CAO position most often produces those candidates (Eddy, 2018).

Becoming a CAO

There was almost unanimous agreement that having been a full-time faculty member is helpful because it gives CAOs an understanding of challenges to teaching that faculty face and that it also gives CAOs credibility with full-time faculty. According to Osburn and Gocial (2020), having a competent academic administrator is important to CC faculty. The authors also stated that "the further the administrator was removed from the faculty, the less trust in him or her was reported" (p. 910). Therefore, the participants' assertion regarding full-time faculty experience supports the literature on faculty trust in CAOs. However, the documents revealed that not all CAO search committees required a faculty background for the position, contrasting with the participants' belief that it is essential.

The participants also each spoke to the challenges they have faced as CAOs. They emphasized that faculty who want to lead must understand how to address these challenges, which are not often as evident to faculty in the classroom. The participants talked about the struggle to separate higher-level projects from more routine operational tasks. One of the participants equated this mixing of leadership duties and tasks to "putting out fires" while later calling it "the whirlwind." They have found that it can be a challenge to keep lower-level operational problems from intruding into the projects and duties they are expected to handle.

Several of the participants discussed trying to encourage lower-level leaders to better handle these issues before they get out of hand. They said they would prefer that the problems requiring simple fixes to be addressed by the deans and associate deans and that those leaders

141

only bring them updates, not requests for solutions. In taking this approach, these participants are espousing an adaptive leadership style (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004; Heifetz et al., 2009; Kezar et al., 2006; Khan, 2017; Sunderman et al., 2020), in which leaders seek solutions to complex problems arising in the environment while avoiding producing quick technical fixes to satisfy others.

However, this mixing of higher- and lower-level duties supports the description of CAOs as "middle managers" that was included in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* report "How to be a Dean" (2014, p.1) and as "midlevel leaders" (Eddy et al., 2019, p. 56). As middle managers or midlevel leaders, these participants must carry out major projects that the presidents, their supervisors, expect them to be responsible for. They in turn supervise lower-level leaders. As several participants shared, a CAO must provide coaching and guidance to those leaders so the operations of the academic division run smoothly. The challenge these participants see in this combination of duties is that they are forced to go beyond guidance and coaching of others in handling the technical (operational) problems. They become drawn into creating the fixes to those problems themselves, which Heifetz and Linsky (2004) and Heifetz et al. (2009) advise against doing within an adaptive leadership framework.

Interestingly, several of the participants outlined another adaptive approach they take in bringing people together to gain consensus for an initiative or change that needs to happen. One of the participants described needing to have a certain number of "greenlight people" to move change forward. Another talked about assembling people as a team to work through a problem. He only steps in to make a decision if they cannot form a consensus. Leaders who take an adaptive leadership approach turn the problem back to those who are most closely connected to the problem, compelling those individuals to find solutions and tactics for creating change. It also gives them ownership of the problem, and therefore, gives them an investment in seeing

142

their solution succeed (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004; Heifetz et al., 2009; Kezar et al., 2006; Khan, 2017).

When describing their assigned CAO duties, the participants agreed that they are expected to function broadly in three areas: as leaders of the academic division, which includes decision making; as managers of the curriculum; and as collaborators. For example, one participant described sharing her plans for the division with faculty, which exemplified what most of the participants said about their leadership as CAOs. Another explained her role managing the curriculum, while another shared details of how he is expected to collaborate with others. Again, these perspectives reflected what the other participants said. The documents all supported the participants' outlining of these three areas of responsibility. This finding that a CC CAO has a clearly defined set of responsibilities disagreed with the literature that the role has no universally defined duties (Robillard, 2000).

When a faculty member reaches the position of CAO, the president, as their direct supervisor, will influence how the CAO does their job. The size of the college also plays a role in the shaping of a CAO's duties. The participants were in agreement that at a larger college the president may expect the CAO to assist with carrying out some of the president's external duties, suggesting an adaptive approach by allowing the CAO to be involved in problem solving for their areas (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004; Heifetz et al., 2009; Kezar et al., 2006; Khan, 2017).

According to Williams June (2014) and Eddy et al. (2019), an expectation that academic leaders, such as a CAO, engage in fund-raising has begun to appear in job descriptions, whereas it was absent in earlier versions, which focused more exclusively on academic oversight. Although the participants acknowledged that fundraising is an essential duty of a president and

potentially a CAO, that expectation conflicts with their perceptions of it as an unpleasant duty. In contrast to the literature, none of the documents listed fundraising as a CAO duty.

Lastly, the participants agreed that their love of teaching and academics is what propelled them into the roles of CC faculty member and academic leader. They also agreed that it is the reason they may choose to remain a CAO until they retire. As one participant had shared, she would be more interested in seeking another CAO position with more responsibilities, so she could remain in academics, than in striving for a presidency. Yet another participant explained that because there are more applicants for CAO positions than for president positions in this state, it is evidence to her that faculty may only seek leadership positions that pertain directly to instruction because of their love of teaching. Therefore, this perspective elucidates why a CAO may choose to remain in that position until retirement, which the literature does not fully address. For example, Campbell et al. (2010) stated that some CAOs choose not to seek a presidency for complex reasons and identified what they were doing instead, such as retiring or moving to similar positions, without elaborating on the why. However, the participants' perspective on remaining a CAO until retirement conflicts with their collective belief that the CAO position most often produces candidates for the presidency. Although this latter view fully agrees with the literature about which position is most likely to produce candidates for the presidency. This is an interesting but contrasting perspective on a role seen as essential in producing future presidents.

From CAO to President

There was also complete agreement that although a CC instructor needs no higher than a master's degree to teach, senior-level leaders, including the CAO and president, should have a doctorate. The participants were also in complete agreement that search committees currently

144

expect candidates for the presidency to have this degree, although they also agreed that search committees have wavered over time between placing higher emphasis on either the doctorate or experience. According to Artis and Bartel (2021) and McNair (2015), the doctorate has grown in importance as an essential credential for presidents. Therefore, the participants' collective view of search committees' current expectations supports the literature. The documents partially supported the participants because not all of the postings for president required a doctorate, instead listing it as "preferred."

When asked to share advice they would give to faculty interested in becoming leaders, all the participants pointed to the differences between being prepared to teach and being prepared to lead. For example, they each talked about how a faculty member knows their own field thoroughly and that they focus on being an expert in their field so they can work or teach in that field. Also, the participants each observed that preparation for CC teaching rarely involves earning a doctorate. However, they agreed that senior leaders must know more than their own field and that they must possess a doctorate. Artis and Bartel (2021) described earning a doctorate as an important part of development for CC leaders.

According to Cohen et al. (2014) and Nagy (2021), CC faculty are more likely to hold a master's degree than a doctorate. In contrast, by 2000 at least 50% of CC presidents held a doctorate (Amey at al., 2002). The participants also focused on the importance of having a doctorate for leadership positions below the presidency because an aspiring leader has a better chance of being selected for a vice presidency or presidency if they have a doctorate or are enrolled in a doctoral program. The challenge for faculty, as the participants explained, is that it is not easy to earn a doctorate once they have begun their careers because it is difficult to find the time to do both well concurrently. Therefore, they were in agreement that any faculty member

145

intending to strive for a senior leadership position, such as CAO, should get their doctorate as early as possible, before taking on significant leadership responsibilities.

Beyond having a doctorate, the participants agreed that president candidates having the right experience is also important, which the participants primarily identified as CC experience. This is experience that they believe can best be obtained by serving as a CAO. Several of the participants talked about how CAOs often go on to become presidents, a position supported by the literature (Amey et al., 2002; Anderson, 2014; Crosson et al., 2005; Eddy et al., 2019; McNair, 2015; Sanderson, 2014; Twombly, 1988; Vaughan, 1990). Additionally, one of the participants said that a chief financial officer is the other type of position that search committees will draw from when selecting a president. Although she pointed out that possessing experience in managing a college's finances can be useful, she also cautioned that presidents are not the most successful when they take a business approach by treating students as "customers." This perspective conflicts with the view in the literature that CC leaders are becoming more entrepreneurial and that presidents are increasingly expected take a business-like cost-benefit approach to managing the college (Boggs & McPhail, 2016; Raby et al., 2023).

In addition to rising through the leadership pipeline of a college, the participants agreed that it is important to have knowledge of the CC environment. Several of them pointed out that having experience in other systems, such as K-12, is no substitute for knowing and understanding the, to them, unique environment of the CC. According to the literature, staff and faculty agree with this viewpoint of the participants because many staff and faculty believe a president needs to have knowledge of the CC environment and its academics to be an effective leader (Miller & Pope, 2003; Thompson et al., 2012). Eddy (2018) stated that gaining experience in mid-level CC leadership positions can act as a "testing stage" (p. 6) for a presidency.

146

There was consistent agreement about the role of the president among the participants. The duties they identified fall into three areas: external political navigation and fundraising, building relationships, and shaping campus culture. Several of the participants indicated that the size of a college can also affect the degree to which the president carries out these duties. For example, one participant pointed out that a small or mid-sized college could be heavily reliant on a president's skills in those areas. According to McNair (2015), Boggs and McPhail (2016), and McNaughtan (2017), in recent years, the expectation has developed that presidents must be more proactive in seeking funding from outside sources.

Additionally, the doctorate was always mentioned in the context of ideal qualifications in in the job postings for open president positions, regardless of prevailing expectations from the participants or the colleges. This focus on the doctorate as an important qualification suggests that search committees are seeking leaders who can take an adaptive approach. They may recognize that a doctorate can give presidents skills that allow them to analyze a problem and produce a solution (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004; Heifetz et al., 2009; Kezar et al., 2006; Khan, 2017; Sunderman et al., 2020).

The participants also agreed that anyone who is otherwise qualified to become a president should consider the size of a college when applying for an open position. One participant had shared the example of a friend who decided not to seek a presidency because of the struggles her president had experienced in leading. This participant represents the view of all the participants that any qualified candidate should know what kind of college they want to lead because the wrong choice could affect their ability to be successful. According to McNaughtan (2018), to ensure that a president has a long tenure at a college, the hiring committee should consider "the importance of the interaction between presidential characteristics, goals, skills, demands, values,

and those of their organization" (p. 529). Therefore, the participants' observations about choosing the right college to lead support the literature.

Participants were also in agreement that there can be a strong bond between the president and CAO, which can then lead to a strengthening of the leadership pipeline. Presidents may rely on the CAO to support them by assisting them in carrying out their duties, especially at a larger college. A president may also work with the CAO to plan for future leadership gaps to ensure a smooth transition as senior leaders, especially if both the president and CAO are facing retirement within a few years. Presidents often mentor CAOs if they see in them a potential to eventually seek a presidency. According to McArdle (2013), presidents value creating a leadership team that can prepare students to be productive in their careers and finding the right people to fill leadership roles. Additionally, the position of CAO is often a gatekeeper position for the presidency (Eddy, 2018), which the participants agreed means that it can help prepare individuals to become a president. Therefore, a CAO's close proximity to a president can give them an understanding of the president's role in preparing to seek the position themselves.

Conceptual Framework

Adaptive leadership theory was used for the conceptual framework in this study. This framework allows for an examination of the positions of chief academic officer and president and how individuals occupying those positions manage the requirements that accompany their duties. Specifically, an adaptive leadership framework provides an understanding of how chief academic officers and presidents face challenges that arise from carrying out their duties (Kezar et al., 2006; Kuk & Banning, 2016). An adaptive leadership approach calls for leaders to identify a given challenge and to assess it for solutions (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004; Heifetz et al., 2009; Kezar et al., 2006; Khan, 2017; Sunderman et al., 2020). Many of the participants described

148

expectations from faculty and staff that they provide quick or immediate fixes to department operational problems. The participants also described how they usually turn such problems back to those faculty or staff who first raised them. For these participants, this strategy places solution finding with those individuals, which is the key step in an adaptive leadership approach (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004; Heifetz et al., 2009; Kezar et al., 2006; Khan, 2017; Sunderman et al., 2020).

Throughout the interviews, the participants explained how their position involves addressing challenges from a range of sources. For example, they agreed that there are ongoing challenges to student success, which arise from the students experiencing a lack of resources related to childcare, transportation, changing work schedules, and internet access at home. They also agreed that these are not easy challenges to address. From an adaptive perspective (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004; Heifetz et al., 2009; Kezar et al., 2006; Khan, 2017; Kuk & Banning, 2016; Sunderman et al., 2020), several of the participants discussed how they have had to analyze a problem based on specific elements of that problem. For example, when discussing transfer agreements with representatives of the state's public universities, the participants have had to assess the variables that arise from the concerns the universities bring to the table. As they negotiate with these representatives, they must seek new solutions to meet the challenges presented by the representatives.

Specifically, CAO 4 talked about his work on transfer agreements, which can be viewed through the lens of adaptive leadership theory. To varying degrees, several of the participants each spoke about how negotiating those agreements is not an easy process. CAO 4 shared that there should be a relatively straight forward approach to negotiating the pathway for education majors. "The teacher credit pathway…but I told [the university representative], we have trouble transferring credit to that pathway with the senior institution. They just don't want to take it at

the CC level, even though we have an articulation agreement." During the negotiations, the team from the CC, led by CAO 4, worked on assembling a series of first- and second-year courses that should seamlessly transfer to the university. The goal is for students intending to be teachers to avoid repeating any courses once they reach the university.

An example of a challenge arises from the university side in the form of federal requirements for education majors who intend to teach in middle and high school. CAO 4 explained that it can be frustrating to address one variable, such as the federal requirements for education programs, only to have new ones raised after adjusting their program to meet the last one. However, he described negotiating these agreements as a solution-seeking process. "It's all kind of a challenge, even with the agreements." Once the agreements are in place, he must be prepared for the next problem that affects those agreements. "It's always going to be a work in progress because most of those agreements have shelf lives. We always, after two years, three years, have to come back and renew it" (CAO 4).

According to Bess and Dee (2012) "subtle and sometimes hidden conditions" (p. 52) can affect outcomes. For CAO 4, they are what continually arise during the negotiation of transfer agreements, and they become the challenges he and others on the team must always be prepared to address during each new set of negotiations to renew the agreements.

From an adaptive leadership perspective, as several participants stated, it is important to bring faculty into problem-solving aspects of student-success challenges. To the participants, these types of challenges do not have a quick technical fix, but rather they require an adaptive approach that can bring those who want solutions to improve learning outcomes, such as faculty, into the problem-solving aspect of meeting the challenge (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004; Heifetz et al., 2009).

For example, one participant stated,

I really think if we're really going to accomplish what we really need to do, we all have

to work together as a team. Somebody has to be there, but we really have to have

collaborative conversations, transparent conversations, and get the best solution as our

group… (CAO 7).

Another participant has also newly adopted a similar approach. "This is the first year in which

now directors and supervisors and coordinators will have conversations about working with the

faculty's data on how to find opportunities to improve student success" (CAO 4). Like CAO 7,

he is not going to step in with ideas on how to fix the problem. Instead, he is bringing the staff

and faculty together who are directly confronted by seeing students failing to succeed.

According to Heifetz et al. (2009), employees may look to the leader to fix a problem,

which is what the authors describe as taking a technical approach. This is akin to creating a quick

fix. Instead, Heifetz et al. (2009) recommended bringing the individuals who are experiencing

the problem into conversations leading to finding a solution. This is the approach CAOs 7 and 4

described as cited above, which represents how many of the participants approach problem

solving.

CAO 6 also explained that she coaches her deans not to make a decision for the purpose

of making someone happy by fixing whatever problem they bring to the dean. Heifetz et al.

(2009) placed this kind of decision making in the realm of a technical fix, as well. They

described this approach to leadership as, essentially, solving problems for others. When a leader

responds reactively with a quick technical fix, they can make themselves a target when the fix

does not solve the problem to everyone's satisfaction. According to Heifetz et al. (2009), when

leaders bring people together who need solutions, as CAOs 7 and 4 described, that approach can

lead to people crafting a workable solution that they take responsibility for as a group. Therefore, CAOs 7 and 4 outlined how they take an adaptive approach to leading, which a majority of the participants also described doing.

Additionally, many of the participants spoke about the importance of giving faculty members who want to lead tasks to develop their leadership skills. According to Heifetz et al. (2009), "People learn to lead on the job" (p. 170). The authors went on to discuss how leaders can use these opportunities to give aspiring leaders a "sense of their own potential" (p. 170) and help them grow into leadership. Therefore, these participants have taken an adaptive approach to developing faculty members into future leaders.

Furthermore, CAO 3 explained how important it was for her to take "listening tours" with faculty once she had become a CAO, especially given that they did not know her because she was new to the college. That is also an adaptive approach. Heifetz et al. (2009) described how important it is to listen to people who are going to be affected by change. CAO 3 had been asked to reorganize her academic affairs division, which would significantly affect faculty. She said there were,

> things I was looking at in terms of hours on campus, faculty teaching load. When I
> stepped into the role, I found that we had one policy. We said all faculty do thirty-six
> hours a year, period. But that was not the reality. Faculty were all over the place.

Heifetz et al. (2009) explained that it is important to listen to all stakeholders facing a change a leader wants to make, even those who might be opposed to it or who might erect roadblocks. The authors also described this approach as "get[ting] on the balcony" (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 49) to understand how the system reacts to a problem. Many of the participants described wanting to be kept informed of how problems are unfolding, even if the staff who report to them are acting on

152

them. During one of her listening tours, CAO 3 was confronted by a faculty member who challenged her on the proposed change to faculty hours. CAO 3 said that having a conversation with this faculty member helped bring them onboard with the change. This is further evidence of how these participants incorporate adaptive leadership into their duties.

When the participants shared their perceptions of presidents and presidential leadership, they often described a president who would give them, the CAOs, the authority to carry out certain responsibilities on the president's behalf. Although the CAOs at the larger colleges portrayed this as necessary because a president cannot do it all, they also showed that these presidents were taking an adaptive approach. For example, when CAO 3 said that once she had gained the president's trust, she was given responsibility for some of the president's external duties, it revealed an adaptive approach. Essentially, the president was asking her to work on outcomes, or find solutions, in those areas. That work gave her responsibility for creating solutions that would eventually affect internal areas where she would face some of those problems. For example,

> You want to know everything; just so that you get sorta that high-level overview. But now that the president knows me and trusts me a little more, you know, she has me standing in for her, at meetings and in communications with the community and business industry… (CAO 3).

When CAO 3 attends those meetings, she is directly involved in discussions that can affect the students attending her college. Therefore, she is contributing to conversations about the type of education the community and business industry are seeking for students who will eventually contribute to the community and become employed by local industry. By giving CAO 3 this responsibility, the president was taking an adaptive approach in putting the person at the

153

center of the issue in charge of the outcomes (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004; Heifetz et al., 2009).

Many of the participants discussed how their presidents included them in certain responsibilities of the president. According to Eddy (2016), there is indication that some presidents themselves see the adaptive aspect of their role by demonstrating that they see a difference between providing technical solutions to certain problems and developing relationships with others that can produce deeper benefits through collaboration.

Limitations

Due to the relatively small number of participants required for the study, I faced a limitation in having one demographic population (White women) overly represented. I created pseudonyms for each of the participants. They were each aware that although their identity would be kept confidential, other CAOs working in the same CC system were also participating. Therefore, some of the participants might have been constrained to speak less openly than they might otherwise have done. Selecting a CC system that contained a high number of colleges helped to mitigate the effect of many of the participants each knowing the others and lessened the chance that a participant could identify another participant. Additionally, each participant belongs to a regional CAO peer group. The participants do not all belong to the same regional group, so the likelihood of them all knowing each other was less than it would have been for a smaller CC system.

Recommendations for Further Study

The scholarship is sparce on both CC faculty (Osburn & Gocial, 2020; Twombly & Townsend, 2008) and chief academic officers (Bray, 2010; Garza Mitchell & Eddy, 2008; Keim & Murray, 2008). Therefore, additional qualitative studies that build on the findings from this study can produce further understanding of the themes that emerged. Studies that seek to explore

issues for which there was no agreement or consensus due to the limitations of the represented populations could shed further light on these issues.

First, a study that focuses on the impact of microaggressions on Black women who are academic leaders at CCs can explore ways in which to address its impact. According to Parikh and Leschied (2022), "originally coined in 1970 by Dr. Chester Pierce, the term 'microaggression' encompasses any subtle insult or informal degradation of a member of any socially marginalized group" (p. 1719). Although race and gender were not the focus of this study, I would recommend that attention to identity differences be made the focus of future investigations. Second, the participants emphasized the importance of presidential candidates having a doctorate yet somewhat disagreed on how consistent search committees are in requiring it, a perspective supported by the documents. That disagreement does not align with the extant literature, which shows that search committees have been increasingly requiring presidents to have a doctorate. Therefore, further study can explore these areas of disagreement. Third, the participants' understanding of their job duties appears to align with their written job descriptions. Although their job descriptions show consistency in several core duties, research has found that CAO job descriptions vary widely among CCs (Robillard, 2000). Further studies can provide clarity on this discrepancy.

Finally, only one of the participants moved from an adjunct instructor position into the leadership pipeline without having become a full-time instructor between the two positions. Therefore, this was a rarity among these CC leaders. Given that most of the participants stressed the importance of full-time teaching for CAOs to gain credibility with full-time faculty, it is an area for further study.

155

Implications for Practice and Policy

This study has produced findings on the barriers and opportunities for faculty in entering

the leadership pipeline that leads to the CC presidency. It also produced findings on the nature of

the positions of chief academic officer and president. The themes that emerged from the study

led to my creating a list of ways in which CC faculty can prepare and be mentored to enter the

leadership pipeline and reach the positions of chief academic officer and president. In this list

(See Table 5.1) I describe how CC leaders in the pipeline can prepare and support faculty who

aspire to become leaders. This list is divided into two stages. Faculty members who wish to

eventually become a president must first seek to become a CAO. There are several

considerations that emerged related to become a CAO: developing leadership potential, the

world outside the department, and essential credential. Second, a CAO who wants to seek a

presidency must take certain steps to become a qualified candidate for an open position. The

considerations that emerged within this theme are broadened experience, politics and

fundraising, and visionary leadership.

Table 5.1 Academic leader preparation considerations for CC faculty

Leadership Preparation, Stage 1: Becoming a CAO	Once a faculty member enters the leadership pipeline with the intention of eventually becoming a CAO, themes revealed in the data indicated ways in which they can prepared to reach that goal.
a) Developing Leadership Potential	There was unanimous agreement among the participants that faculty members must reach out and actively seek opportunities to lead before moving into their first formal leadership position. The participants made it clear that taking on tasks assigned to them by the CAO is good preparation for leadership. As CAO 5 put it, "If you only do your job well, and that's all you do, you will not understand how it connects to the rest of the college." This comment reflects the perspective of all participants that faculty members must be prepared to pursue any available opportunity to learn about leadership.
	The participants made a collective point that those opportunities are easy to find and that there are plenty of them. They agreed that aspiring leaders must be proactive in seeking out those opportunities and asking their supervisors, usually CAOs, to provide them whenever

Table 5.1 Continued.

	possible. The participants also agreed that being known as someone who is interested in being given leadership tasks to perform is key to gaining opportunities.
a) Developing Leadership Potential (Continued)	However, the participants expressed frustration with how often faculty members rejected opportunities to develop their skills. "For some faculty who say I want to be chief academic officer, take advantage of opportunities when they arise, even if it may not necessarily lead directly to that role. Because sometimes you may not understand how they are linked" (CAO 4). Comments made by other participants showed the high degree to which they agreed with the sentiment expressed by CAO 4. Therefore, CAOs who want to mentor aspiring leaders should consider first educating those faculty members on how certain leadership tasks relate to being a CAO. For example, one participant described a task he took on to expand his experience. "For…several years, I served as coordinator of our federal Perkins Grant, which brought funding to [a college program]" (CAO 5). Linking their own experiences to their current jobs could demonstrate to faculty why these opportunities are important. Therefore, if a CAO who has, for example, managed grants can show how that experience relates to their current work, it can encourage aspiring leaders to accept offers to do similar tasks.
b) The World Outside the Department	There was also full agreement among the participants that when faculty members know little to nothing about areas outside their own departments, it can place limits on aspiring leaders. Each participant spoke about how they had gone to school to either work in industry or to teach. Therefore, their educational goals ranged from earning a bachelor's degree so they could teach in high school or a master's degree so they could work in industry or teach at a CC. Additionally, the high school teachers among them went on to earn master's degrees so they could move into CC teaching. None of them had considered needing to know more than the subject matter for their fields. Therefore, collectively they had advice for faculty interested in becoming leaders, especially regarding learning about areas outside their department by breaching the "silo." For example, a participant stated that it is important for a leader to know at least something of how other departments and areas operate because good decision making depends on it. She stressed that it is not possible to know everything about each area a leader supervises, but the leader needs to step outside the world they are used to and learn what they can. I've never been a supervisor, a direct supervisor for, like, I don't know, like Welding, for example. I have been the supervisor of the supervisor for Welding. And so, sometimes when you have those levels and they're like that and people bring things to you for a decision, you don't, often times, you don't necessarily know enough of the detail, I feel like anyway, to make the right decision, in order to make the right decision (CAO 6).

Table 5.1 Continued.

b) The World Outside the Department (Continued)	A faculty member merely getting to know areas outside their department is only the beginning of expanding that experience. The participants also agreed that future leaders need to understand how leadership functions at levels above the college. This includes at the CC system, county government, and state legislature levels. For example, Faculty may not know…the difference between capital budgets and county funding and state funding and grant funding and institutional funding. You may not be aware of the dozens and dozens of policies that the college has, and which of those we have because we want them and which of those we have because the federal government or SACS say that we have to have them (CAO 5). These comments are reflective of the overall perspective of the participants that leaders need to understand how other departments function at the college and that they must understand the wider state systems that interact with the college. For those mentoring faculty, this represents advice for them to encourage those aspiring leaders to broaden their experience beyond their own departments.
c) Essential Credential	Additionally, there was unanimous agreement among the participants that there is important key step a faculty member can take to move into and up through the academic leadership pipeline, which is to earn a doctorate, either a PhD or an EdD. For example, CAO 2 was told that she was not selected for a leadership position because she did not possess a "terminal degree." Through earning a doctorate, she believes learning from professors who have expertise in CCs prepared her well for leadership. Two participants are currently working on earning an EdD because they each realized that they not only needed the degree for their current jobs but also might find it challenging to advance to a presidency without it. According to one, "I think I would tell [faculty aspiring to be presidents], as soon as you can get a doctorate, do it. I don't think there are any presidencies in [the site state] that are going to be available without a doctorate" (CAO 5). Therefore, an early step aspiring leaders can take is to earn their doctorate, given the clear agreement among the participants that this is an essential goal for future CAOs and presidents to set. Furthermore, current leaders who are mentoring faculty can provide support or incentives to those who wish to earn a doctorate for the purpose of becoming leaders.
Leadership Preparation, Stage 2: Becoming a President	The next position in the leadership pipeline beyond CAO is that of president. Themes arising from the data showed that the pathway to the presidency is not automatically established because a rising leader has been a CAO, although CAOs are often seen as potential candidates for the position. The data show that barriers surfacing in that pathway can be

Table 5.1 Continued.

Leadership Preparation, Stage 2: Becoming a President (cont.)	related to specific expectations of the president's duties, which may only be partially developed in an individual occupying the position of CAO.
a) Broadened Experience	As discussed previously, the experience a faculty member needs to become a CAO can be derived from tasks and later leadership positions they hold within the academic realm. As CAO 3 pointed out and most of the participants experienced, the typical pathway for a faculty member is department chair, program coordinator, program director, dean, and finally vice president/chief academic officer. When the participants shared advice for faculty to seek external experience, they focused on conference attendance, learning about other departments, and committee membership—all within academics. However, the participants revealed that a president must have additional experience from outside academics. For example, I think a good presidential candidate is someone who is passionate about what they are doing for the community, and that passion comes across in everything that they do—in their day-to-day work, in the speeches that they give, in the welcomes that they give to different groups. It's the focused interactions they have with people. It's knowing the history of the community college and knowing the challenges that we face and what are the innovative risk-taking we can do to change those things (CAO 2). For this participant, the president must be able to navigate the external world of the community surrounding the college and have a deep knowledge of the college itself. An individual who is grounded in the academics of a college may not need to know much about the college's surrounding community or its history—a perspective supported by all the participants. Therefore, CAOs aspiring to become presidents are likely not to have been required to gain external experience beyond academics and perhaps department budget experience. Yet the participants were in agreement that it is necessary for a president to possess that broader experience. However, as CAO 3 discovered, CAOs may occasionally stand in for their president for certain duties. When presidents are willing to share some of their responsibilities with their CAOs, it is an opportunity for faculty who have moved into the position to use that experience in preparing for a presidency. Therefore, intentional mentoring by presidents of CAOs can be beneficial to those who want to achieve a presidency.
b) Politics and Fundraising	Another area in which a CAO may not have adequate preparation for becoming a president is politics and fundraising. For example, when CAO 5 described how faculty should seek experience with the state legislature or county government, he explained that future CAOs needed to understand how funding was appropriated to the college. He did not place it in the context of gaining experience in politics or fundraising.

Table 5.1 Continued.

b) Politics and Fundraising (Continued)	Additionally, several of the participants admitted that they were not comfortable with either aspect of this area, and they described knowing they lack that expertise and yet would need it if they ever decided to pursue a presidency. For example, CAO 2 said, "I'm learning, I'm watching, I'm having conversations with people. I'm discovering that when I'm meeting with county commissioners or council people that they're just people, and they're looking for information and are inquiring about what we can offer them." She placed this comment in the context of needing to acquire additional expertise she had not needed to become a CAO. She knows her experience as a CAO is not necessarily enough to prepare her to be a president, a perspective representative of that of all the participants. Therefore, CAOs who want to prepare themselves or faculty they are mentoring to enter a pipeline leading to the presidency should seek ways to broaden their experience in areas external to the college. Again, intentional mentoring by presidents of CAOs and CAOs of faculty can be beneficial to those who want to achieve a presidency.
c) Visionary Leadership	The last duty of a president that is not explicitly described as being part of a CAO's duties is providing visionary leadership for the college. Only one of the participants mentioned expecting to be a visionary within the scope of his job: I really do believe leadership is a lot about casting a vision for folks who fall under your area, and even those who don't, that fits with the mission of the college. Getting people excited about what we are doing (CAO 5). He limited it to the areas he is responsible for, all in academics. He also showed by his comments that he sees that vision as part of a larger vision, ensconced in the mission of the college. That perspective may prepare CAOs to assume the often-expected visionary role of a college leader if they recognize it as part of their duties. However, none of the other participants mentioned this role as being part of their duties or expectations. Also, none of the documents included being a visionary leader in a CAO's list of duties. In contrast, two of the three job postings for president that I found did describe expecting the successful candidate to be a visionary leader for the college. The words "vision" or "visionary" were not used for the third, but that posting was for a campus president who will also be the CAO, supporting the concept of a CAO as not needing be a visionary.

Ultimately, a faculty member who wants to become a CAO and then eventually a

president may need mentoring to develop each of these additional skills. The participants cited

above learned that they must develop specific skills not inherent in their current duties as CAO.

Therefore, when CAOs can recognize the need for additional skills development for aspiring

presidents, they can also take a proactive approach to developing those skills for themselves and preparing faculty to do so, as well. However, these participants were not constrained by collective bargaining agreements. Other CAOs acting in a mentoring role with faculty may be limited in how they can offer faculty opportunities to gain experience outside their teaching duties.

Lastly, leaders interested in developing a better process for guiding aspiring leaders to obtain the right credentials and experience can consider changes to policy. First, leaders can examine how to design organizational systems and structures to facilitate the development of faculty to become qualified candidates to enter the pipeline for senior leadership positions. Next, leaders should consider how to move the responsibility for initiating the acquisition of experience from the individual faculty member to the CC system, in which the system would provide incentives and opportunities for interested faculty to acquire experience. Lastly, professional organizations such as the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) may want to consider how they can provide support for these types of policy and practice initiatives.

Conclusion

In this study, I sought to develop an understanding of the role of the community college chief academic officer, its position in the leadership pipeline, and how faculty members can prepare to enter the pipeline. My goal was to develop an understanding of how a faculty member can enter the pipeline, traverse it to the position of chief academic officer, and ultimately go further to become a president if they so wish.

Through a review of the literature, I explored scholarship about the CC, faculty perceptions of leadership, the presidency, and the position of chief academic officer. This review

revealed gaps regarding the opportunities and barriers currently faced by faculty who might seek to enter the leadership pipeline to become a chief academic officer and later a president. The review also exposed gaps in the literature on the role of the CC chief academic officer.

Employing a qualitative study design, I conducted interviews with CAOs who each lead the academic affairs division of their individual colleges within a single state CC system. I selected this system because it had a single central system office and enough colleges to provide the minimum number of participants I was seeking. Furthermore, each participant reports to the college president, which allowed to me to gain insights into the relationship between the CAO and the president. Each interview was scheduled for ninety minutes, although one lasted almost two hours with the encouragement of the participant being interviewed. Through these interviews, I was able to gather a rich depth of data regarding the position of CAO, the presidency, faculty who aspire to becoming leaders, and the nature of the academic leadership pipeline in this state's CC system.

The themes that emerged from this study help to fill gaps identified in the literature review. I then combined the emergent themes into a series of recommendations for identifying ways in which faculty are unprepared to become leaders and how they can develop leadership skills that will allow them to rise through the pipeline to a presidency. These recommendations are organized into two sections: becoming a CAO and becoming a president. The first section includes an approach for preparing rising leaders to seek leadership development, to develop an understanding of the world outside the department, and to acquire the appropriate credentials. The second section examines the additional preparation needed to become a president, in the areas of broadened experience, politics and fundraising, and visionary leadership.

As each participant reflected on their journey to leadership and they shared their

162

experiences as CAO, consistency among their responses began to emerge. This consistency produced clear themes about becoming a CAO, navigating the leadership pipeline, and the nature of the presidency. For example, the participants universally agreed that a faculty member intending to enter and advance through the leadership pipeline must be prepared to take on tasks offered by the CAO to learn leadership skills and to eventually earn a doctorate, preferably before reaching the vice-president level.

Therefore, this study produced findings that contribute to the sparse research on CC faculty and CAOs. Specifically, it fills gaps on the nature of the CAO position, the opportunities and barriers that exist for faculty who want to seek a presidency, and why faculty who become CAOs may choose not to seek presidencies. Lastly, it has produced implications for practice through recommendations for an approach to preparing faculty to enter the leadership pipeline.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Site Selection Criteria

Outline of State and Participant Selection Criteria

1. Central or System Office / Associate Degree Focus

    a. Do the public community colleges in the state all report to a central or system office?

    b. Do the colleges in the system each have a 2-year associate degree focus?

2. Is there a minimum of 20 colleges in the system?

    a. If not, are there enough colleges to make an attempt to recruit participants worthwhile, given that the other state selection criteria have been met?

3. Reporting Structure

    a. Is there a system president or chancellor?

    b. Does each college have a president or chief executive officer who reports to the system president or chancellor?

4. Chief academic officer defined

    a. Is the chief academic officer position separate from the college president or chief executive officer position?

    b. Does the chief academic officer report to the president or chief executive officer?

    c. What is the chief academic officer's title?

        i. Vice president

        ii. Academic Dean

        iii. Dean of Instruction

        iv. Other

5. State Legislative Reform

    a. Has the state instituted a major policy change or mandate (since 1990) toward its

        community colleges?

    b. Is it a change that affects the position of chief academic officer?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

The data collected from participants was derived from semi-structured interviews, with prompting questions listed below. A three-interview format was outlined by Seidman (2013). Due to time constraints, I was limited to one interview per participant. Therefore, I divided my questions into three parts to focus on the goals Seidman (2013) outlined for each of the three separate interviews. According to Seidman, the first interview should focus on a participant's life history; therefore, my questions for the first part of the interview attempted to prompt responses that reveal how participants have prepared for their positions. For the second part of the interview, I followed Seidman's recommendation to focus on gathering concrete details of the present, to better understand how participants carry out their work responsibilities. During the third part of the interview, using Seidman's outline, I focused on gathering responses that showed how participants made meaning of their experiences. Additionally, my questions were guided by an adaptive leadership framework (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004; Heifetz at al., 2009; Kezar et al., 2006; Khan, 2017), intended to draw responses about how CAOs and their role models have approached addressing complex challenges they have faced. Lastly, the focus of my questions was intended to produce participant responses that identified perceptions about qualifications for the presidency and how they perceive the term "qualified," which in turn provided insights about potential barriers and opportunities for advancement along the pipeline.

Appendix C: Questions for Chief Academic Officers

My name is Jane Ellingwood. I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Maine. I am also the director of Disability Support Services at a private university and am a former community college adjunct instructor. My advisor is Elizabeth Allen. She is a professor in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Maine.

My goal for this study is to understand the perceptions of chief academic officers (CAOs) about the community college leadership pathway leading to the presidency. I am seeking to gain a better understanding of how faculty interested in leadership might prepare for newer aspects of the presidential role, the nature of the CAO role, the end point of the leadership pipeline, and the nature of any barriers or opportunities that might exist along the pipeline. I am recording this interview with your permission, and you may skip any questions you do not wish to answer.

I will create a paper identity key to match your name to a pseudonym and keep it in a locked cabinet. I will keep the audio recording of the interview on a password protected computer and external hard drive in a locked cabinet. Recordings and the key will be destroyed in 2022. The hard copy of my notes will be kept in a locked cabinet indefinitely. The interview transcripts and scanned copy of my notes will be kept on a password protected computer and external hard drive indefinitely.

Interview Part 1: The journey to leadership
1. Describe important aspects of the journey you took to arrive at your current leadership position; such as education, past positions, and family support.
2. Who has been instrumental in providing you with encouragement and support during your journey?
3. Describe challenges you have encountered and how you met those challenges to continue your leadership journey.
4. How have role models among your family of origin and in the workplace provided you with guidance?
5. Describe the point at which you decided to become a leader and how you arrived at that decision.
6. Does your leadership journey include seeking a presidency?

Interview Part 2: Current leadership experience
1. Describe a typical workday.
2. Describe ways in which you identify challenges to teaching and learning at your college.
3. Describe how you develop an understanding those challenges.
4. Describe how you approach meeting those challenges.
5. How do you draw on your past work experience and education to carry out your current responsibilities?
6. How might you have better prepared for this position?
7. How do you define leadership?
8. How would you define a CC presidential candidate as qualified?

Interview Part 3: Making meaning
1. Based on your own experience, reflect on how your journey to leadership has shaped your approach to leadership in your current position.
2. Given what you know now about the demands of your current position, what might you have done differently to prepare to lead?
3. What recommendations might you make to others who are considering entering the leadership pipeline?

Appendix D: Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by Jane Ellingwood, a candidate for a PhD in the Higher Education Doctoral Program within the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Maine. The faculty sponsor is Elizabeth Allen, professor of higher education in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Maine.

Purpose of the Study: My goal for this study is to understand the perceptions of chief academic officers (CAOs) about the community college leadership pathway leading to the presidency. I am seeking to gain a better understanding of how faculty interested in leadership might prepare for newer aspects of the presidential role, the nature of the CAO role, the end point of the leadership pipeline, and the nature of any barriers or opportunities that might exist along the pipeline. My research will contribute to an increased understanding of ways to develop qualified candidates for the community college presidency.

What you will be asked to do: You were selected to participate in this study due to your role as a community college chief academic officer. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in an interview by Zoom and describe your experiences in your current role, and past roles if any, in relation to the community college leadership pipeline. Two sample questions are as follows:

- Describe important aspects of the journey you took to arrive at your current leadership position; such as education, past positions, and family support.

- How do you draw on your past work experience and education to carry out your current responsibilities?

The interview will be recorded with your permission and will take place sometime between the end of February and the end of the semester in May 2022. Your time commitment will be approximately 60 to 90 minutes to participate in the interview. Because the interviews will be conducted over Zoom, you should find a private place to participate where our conversation will not be overheard. I and my advisor will be the only ones with access to the interview data.

Risks: There are no foreseeable risks beyond any inconvenience and expending time for the interviews. You may end your participation at any time during an interview. You may also choose not to answer a question if you wish.

Benefits: There will be no direct benefits to you, but you will have an opportunity to reflect on the rewards and challenges of your community college career. You will also have the opportunity to contribute to research that has the potential to lead to new approaches in community college leadership preparation and a better understanding of the chief academic officer role. The overall benefit will be a potential increase in the number of well-prepared candidates for the community college presidency.

Compensation: Following the of the interview, a $50 VISA gift card will be mailed to you as a thank you for your participation.

Confidentiality: The interviews will be confidential. I will assign pseudonyms to identify participants and sites and will keep your identity confidential throughout the process. I will create a paper identity key to match your name to a pseudonym and keep it in a locked cabinet. The key will be destroyed by December 2022. I will keep the audio recording of the interview on a password protected computer and external hard drive in a locked cabinet. It will be destroyed following creation of the transcripts by approximately June 2022. The hard copy of my notes will be kept in a locked cabinet indefinitely. The interview transcripts and scanned copy of my notes will be kept on a password protected computer and external hard drive indefinitely.

Voluntary: You may end your participation at any time during an interview. You may also choose not to answer a question if you wish.

Contact Information: If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at 207-974-8668 (or jane.ellingwood@maine.edu. You may also contact my faculty advisor Elizabeth Allen at 207-581-3166 (or email elizabeth.allen@maine.edu).

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Compliance, University of Maine, 207-581-2657 (or email umric@maine.edu).

Participating in the interview indicates consent.

Appendix E: Email Letter to Participants

Subject Line: Invitation to Participate in a Study

Dear_____:

My name is Jane Ellingwood, and I am working on a dissertation toward a PhD in higher education leadership at the University of Maine. My telephone number is 207-974-8668 and my email is Jane.Ellingwood@maine.edu. I acquired your contact information through your college's online directory. I am conducting a research study about community college leadership. My goal for this study is to understand the perceptions of chief academic officers (CAOs) about the community college leadership pathway leading to the presidency. I am seeking to gain a better understanding of how faculty interested in leadership might prepare for newer aspects of the presidential role, the nature of the CAO role, the end point of the leadership pipeline, and the nature of any barriers or opportunities that might exist along the pipeline. My research will contribute to an increased understanding of ways to develop qualified candidates for the community college presidency.

I am contacting you to ask if you would be willing to participate. Your time commitment will be approximately 60 to 90 minutes to participate in an interview conducted over Zoom sometime between the end of February and the end of the semester in May 2022. You will be asked to describe your experiences in your current role, and past roles if any, in relation to the community college leadership pipeline. The consent form is attached for more information on the study.

If you would be interested in participating or have any questions, please reply to this email or you may call me. My telephone number is 207-974-8668 and my email is jane.ellingwood@maine.edu

Thank you for your time.

Follow-up Email Letter to Participants

Subject Line: Second request – Invitation to Participate in a Study

Dear_____:

My name is Jane Ellingwood, and I am working on a dissertation toward a PhD in higher education leadership at the University of Maine. My telephone number is 207-974-8668 and my email is Jane.Ellingwood@maine.edu. I acquired your contact information through your college's online directory. I am conducting a research study about community college leadership. My goal for this study is to understand the perceptions of chief academic officers (CAOs) about the community college leadership pathway leading to the presidency. I am seeking to gain a better understanding of how faculty interested in leadership might prepare for newer aspects of the presidential role, the nature of the CAO role, the end point of the leadership pipeline, and the

nature of any barriers or opportunities that might exist along the pipeline. My research will contribute to an increased understanding of ways to develop qualified candidates for the community college presidency.

This is a follow up to an email I recently sent. I am contacting you to ask if you would be willing to participate. Your time commitment will be approximately 60 to 90 minutes to participate in an interview conducted over Zoom sometime between the end of February and the end of the semester in May 2022. You will be asked to describe your experiences in your current role, and past roles if any, in relation to the community college leadership pipeline. The consent form is attached for more information on the study.

If you would be interested in participating or have any questions, please reply to this email or you may call me. My telephone number is 207-974-8668 and my email is jane.ellingwood@maine.edu

Thank you for your time.

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Jane Ellingwood was raised just outside of Bangor, Maine. She is a graduate of the University of Maine with a Bachelor of Arts in English (2003) and a Master of Arts in English (2008). She also earned a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from the University of Southern Maine in 2013. She taught college English courses and creative writing for ten years before moving into CC professional staff positions as an academic advisor and then an ADA Coordinator. She is currently the director of Disability Support Services at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. She also holds a private pilot's license. Jane is a candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Education from the University of Maine in May 2023.