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In Their Own Words: Women Chief Academic Officers Discuss the Community College and Their Career Experiences

Brent D. Cejda

Previous research has shown that a variety of skills and experiences contribute to the career advancement of community college leaders. With the increased representation of women in senior-level positions, this paper answers the call to move beyond male-versus-female comparisons. Through in-depth interviews and follow-up conversations, six female chief academic officers (CAOs) discuss their community college employment, the issues and challenges experienced in obtaining a chief academic officer position, personal development of skills and abilities to be successful in their positions, the recommendations they would share with aspiring and new CAOs, and their future career plans.

Introduction

Community colleges employ a higher percentage of women administrators than four-year colleges and universities (Townsend & Twombly, 2007). The most recent comprehensive study of community college leaders found that 53% of the senior student affairs officers and 42% of the chief academic officers at community colleges were female (Amey, VanDerlinden, & Brown, 2002). In examining representation, Kanter (1977) identified 35% as a minimal level necessary to reach critical mass, the point at which a category of individuals moves from token representation to a collective group. Recognizing the increased numbers of females, Clark (1998) called for research on community college women faculty and administrators that moves beyond male-versus-female comparisons to in-depth investigations of their experiences and professional advancement.

The experiences of female chief academic officers (CAOs) are examined in this study. This position was selected for a specific reason. Historically, more community college presidents hold a chief academic officer position immediately prior to assuming a presidency than any other senior-level position (Vaughan, 1990; Amey et al., 2002). Yet even with the dramatic increase in the representation of females in the CAO position, a recent presentation by Vaughan (as cited in Townsend & Twombly, 2007) indicated that the percentage of women holding community college presiden-
cies has barely increased during the past five years. Therefore, in addition to examining the experiences that contributed to the career advancement of women CAOs, the study might also provide insight into why greater numbers of women are not moving into the community college presidency.

The chief academic officer (CAO) position clearly indicates the increased representation of women in community college leadership positions during the past 15 years. Moore, Twombly and Martorana (1985) sampled 2,049 administrators from 1,219 public and private institutions and reported that women made up 15.9% of the CAO population in community and junior colleges. Several years later, Vaughan (1990) reported that, within the same population, the representation of women in the community college CAO position had increased to 21%. Hawthorne (1994) surveyed the population of CAOs in 1,243 two-year colleges, obtaining a 57% response rate, and determined women held 27% of the CAO positions in community colleges. In 2000, a follow-up study of the community college leadership, with a 59% response rate, found women comprised 39% of the public community college CAOs (McKenney & Cejda, 2000). As noted earlier, the most recent data indicate that 42% of community college CAOs are women (Amey, et al., 2002).

Why is the percentage of women CAOs in community colleges higher than at other institutional types? Moore and Sagaria (1991) argued that women were more often employed in postsecondary institutions that were lower in status, thus the higher percentage in community colleges represented a marginalization of women. More than 20 years later, Townsend and Twombly (2007) concur with that assessment, finding that any equity in the community college employment of women administrators has occurred by default, not by proactive efforts.

The majority of career studies on women community college administrators have utilized a structural orientation, focusing on the sequence of positions of those who hold the office (Hawkins, 1999; McKenney, 2000; Power, 2005; Rodriguez, 2006). Twombly (1988) was the first to suggest that a variety of experiences, rather than just the position held, contribute to career advancement. A study of women CAOs in community colleges (McKenney & Cejda, 2001) supports this contention. A search of the extant literature revealed only three studies specifically focused on the career ex-
In their own words: Women chief academic officers.

Gorham (2000) interviewed 12 participants in the North Carolina Community College Leadership Program (NCCCLP), a one-year program designed for women and minorities to develop skills for higher-level administrative positions. Her findings indicated that participants perceived the NCCCLP to be beneficial to their career attainment as they increased their self-confidence, developed an awareness of leadership theory, and learned to work effectively with diverse groups. Other attributes of the program viewed as beneficial to career advancement included developing a statewide network of contacts and an understanding of the structure and operation of the North Carolina Community College system. In addition, participants reported that the NCCCLP served as a catalyst to greater involvement in the organization and administration of their respective institutions, which contributed to career advancement.

Ballentine (2001) conducted in-depth interviews focusing on the career experiences of the first three females to hold community college presidencies in North Carolina. Experiences that the women perceived to be important to their career advancement included completing a doctoral degree, developing strong relationships with faculty in their graduate programs, having a mentor, and positioning themselves to gain a wide variety of leadership experiences. Each president followed a traditional career path to the presidency—faculty chair, dean, and CAO. In addition, each individual pointed to success in educational endeavors from elementary school through completion of the terminal degree as a key factor in developing the necessary self-confidence and self-esteem to serve as an effective educational leader.

Most recently, Cejda (2006) reported survey results on the perceived importance of professional development activities to the career advancement of female community college CAOs. The majority of respondents reported that 24 of 26 professional development activities had been important to their career advancement. The activities perceived as important by the greatest number of respondents included participating in state or regional leadership programs; serving as a board member for a state or regional professional organization; participating in institutional staff development programs; serving on institutional committees, task forces, or commissions; and accepting additional administrative responsibilities. In addition, the respondents indicated that networking in the community through active participation in local civic and fraternal organizations and K–12 schools was important to their career advancement.

Methodology

To gain an understanding of how the experiences of women CAOs contributed to their career advancement, a basic interpretive qualitative research design was employed. Drawing primarily from phenomenology and sym-
bolic interaction, Merriam (2002) stressed that the interests of a basic interpretive study include “(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 38). The desired outcome of this investigation was both descriptive and inductive, an attempt to reveal meaning from the perspective of the participating women CAOs (Bogdan & Bilken, 2003).

Data for this study were gathered between August 1, 2006 and July 31, 2007 from six female CAOs employed by public community colleges. Each of the CAOs participated in an in-depth interview at the beginning of the timeframe, and between three and six follow-up conversations with each participant during the remainder of the year was held. The participants are employed by three community colleges classified as rural, two community colleges classified as suburban, and one community college classified as urban. Two of the institutions are located in the Eastern time zone, three are in the Central time zone, and one is in the Mountain Time zone.

Combined, the women have 141 years of community college experience. Included in this experience is 48.5 years as CAOs, with a range from 3 to 21 years. Only one participant previously held a CAO position at a different community college. Among the six CAOs, 59 years of full-time community college faculty experience is represented. Two moved to their current position through promotion internally; the other four were hired as external candidates. Four of the six CAOs have worked in other educational environments; three have K–12 experience and three have university experience.

A semi-structured interview guide was used to conduct the interviews. The guide focused on the following five questions:

1. How did you come to work at the community college and why do you work there?
2. Did you actively pursue a CAO position and were there any issues or challenges you faced in moving to a CAO position?
3. Where or how did you develop the skills and experiences necessary to be successful in the CAO position?
4. What personal and professional recommendations would you make to those aspiring to or recently assuming a CAO position?
5. What are your future career plans?

Detailed field notes were taken during the initial interviews. After each interview, the notes were transcribed and sent to each interviewee for verification. Follow-up conversations were conducted for clarification and to gain additional insight into each individual’s experiences.

To analyze the data, coding families suggested by Bogdan and Bilken (2003) were used. As an initial step, each respective question was viewed as a situation and responses were organized under the appropriate situation code. The inductive process to group specific experiences and activities
into broader categories was followed. The perspectives of the participants in terms of the importance of the experience to their career advancement were considered. From this process, themes emerged that described the participants’ experiences and the relationship of the themes in their advancement to the CAO position and future career objectives. These themes were also informed by the previously referenced literature.

Findings

The findings were organized around the situation codes, the questions that frame the participants’ employment in the community college, advancement to the CAO position, and future career plans. When dialogue from participants was used to illustrate their experiences, they were referred to by number, CAO 1 through CAO 6, to protect their anonymity.

How Did You Come to Work at a Community College and Why Do You Work There?

The instructional mission of the community college emerged as the primary theme to explain how these women came to work at the community college. Reported in five of the six interviews, this theme developed through differing ways. CAO 1 had the most comprehensive experience with the community college.

I built my roots there as a student. The support I received from everyone . . . faculty, staff, and administration left a lasting impression on me. I wanted to return, to give back, to make sure that I would do the same.

As she was completing graduate school, CAO 2 realized that her interests were much more towards teaching then pursuing external funding and conducting research. The desire to focus on teaching led her to the community college. CAO 3 also wanted a faculty appointment and moved from an administrative position at a four-year institution to a full-time faculty position at a community college. CAOs 5 and 6 had both taught at the K–12 level. This prior experience combined with the instructional emphasis at the community college contributed to their initial employment. Three of the six CAOs served as adjunct faculty at a community college before moving into a full-time faculty position.

From their initial employment, only one of the six CAOs has left the community college environment. That individual took a position at a university and, feeling unsatisfied with the move, returned to community college employment after three years. The 141 total years of employment is evidence that the CAOs work at the community college because of a genuine commitment to the mission and purpose of these educational organizations.

“I believe the community college is the truest democracy in terms of higher education institutions.” —CAO 1
“I had no clue about community colleges when I started, now I have an absolute passion for them.”—CAO 4

“I think we make a difference—that is why I work here.”—CAO 6

It is also apparent that these individuals are satisfied with the decision to remain at the community college.

“There hasn’t been a day that I regret moving to the community college.”—CAO 3

“I wouldn’t change my community college experiences for the world.”—CAO 5

**Did You Actively Pursue a CAO Position and Were There Any Issues or Challenges You Faced in Moving to a CAO Position?**

None of the women began their community college employment with an administrative position as a career goal. Two of the CAOs indicated that they pursued a doctorate to be better at what they did, not as a prerequisite for a senior-level administrative position. Each of the six CAOs spoke of either peers or superiors encouraging them to seek additional levels of administrative responsibility. After gaining administrative experience, two of the interviewees aspired to the CAO position. A third aspired to a dean’s level position, assuming that without a doctorate she would not be considered for a CAO position. Four of the six have applied for only one CAO position, the one that they currently hold. Two of the individuals indicated that they applied “to test the water,” still unsure as to whether or not they wanted to move to a CAO position.

When asked specifically about challenges and issues as women in community college administration, none of the CAOs expressed belief that they faced any gender barriers. Two CAOs commented that although they had heard of barriers in other types of educational organizations, they felt that the community college environment supported or facilitated the movement of women in the administrative hierarchy.

Only two challenges or issues in moving to a CAO position were reported. One of the two CAOs who did not hold a doctorate indicated that the lack of a terminal degree presented a challenge. She moved to the CAO position from within the institution, but only after an initial search failed. In the initial search, the educational requirement was a terminal degree. When the search failed, the position was re-advertised with a master’s as the minimum degree. Another CAO indicated that she felt that being single was sometimes an issue in her career, but she was unsure if this was an issue in her moving to a CAO position.

**Where or How Did You Develop Skills and Experiences Necessary to be Successful in a CAO Position?**

Three broad themes emerged from the responses provided by the six CAOs
regarding this question. The most common theme focused on a variety of employment experiences. Faculty experience specific to the community college was viewed as essential to developing skills necessary for the CAO position, supporting the findings of Gorham (2000). Displaying individual teaching expertise was only a part of this experience as understanding the challenges faculty face in the classroom and the complexity of the faculty role was viewed as equally important to success as a CAO. A comment from CAO 4 illustrated the broadness of faculty experience as she emphasized that any CAO should have, “Develop a love and appreciation for teachers and teaching. After all, it’s all about trying to lead faculty. The wrong reason to become a CAO is because you dislike teaching.”

Supporting previous research (Cejda, 2006; Gorham, 2000), the participants believed that professional experiences that developed an understanding of the larger institutional picture were important to career advancement. One means to develop such an understanding was through service on committees. According to CAO 2,

> Serving on the curriculum committee and the faculty senate enabled me to see the bigger picture of the whole institution. Not every committee assignment will provide this perspective. Choose a committee assignment that might be difficult, like the general education committee, and stay on the committee for a number of years.

Other experiences mentioned to gain an understanding of the larger picture included obtaining program approval at the institutional or state level, familiarity with both securing and expending funding, and representing the institution to external constituencies such as external advisory groups or business and industry. Each of these experiences fit into the broad category of leadership referenced in Ballentine’s (2001) study. Only two participants mentioned that prior administrative experiences prepared them for success in the CAO position. One CAO indicated that previous work experience outside higher education helped her gain “people skills,” important to her success as a CAO.

The second theme regarding the development of skills and experiences for CAO success centered on professional development activities. This theme incorporated formal and informal professional development programs. Formal professional development programs included earning degrees and attending conferences, seminars, and workshops. The degrees referenced were not, however, always graduate degrees focusing on community colleges or higher education. Other professional development activities did not always focus on leadership.

Three of the six CAOs pointed to their undergraduate disciplines as a means of developing important skills. Specifically referenced were written and oral communication skills in a communications major, problem solving in mathematics, and understanding and analyzing data in chemistry. Although there was agreement that a doctoral degree is the “ticket” to
compete for a CAO position, only two of the CAOs pointed to practical skills gained in graduate study in the area of community colleges or higher education. In terms of non-credit professional development, one CAO attended conferences of professional associations in unfamiliar instructional areas. She improved her leadership abilities by learning more about these areas. Another CAO mentioned accreditation meetings and conferences where she gained knowledge important to success as a CAO. Two of the CAOs identified a national leadership program for women they attended in the 1980s, both finding that the program was beneficial to their career advancement some 20 years later. One CAO reported that her community college president sponsored a professional development program for the executive team. Similar to earlier findings (Cejda, 2006), examples of formal professional development included local, state, and regional activities as well as national initiatives. A corollary to participation in formal professional development programs is establishing a peer network, an aspect discussed fully in the third theme for this question.

Informal professional development activities were also perceived to facilitate career advancement. Foremost among the activities was reading professional literature. Again, the importance of learning the community college literature in areas unfamiliar to the CAO was stressed as important to future success. One CAO visited each of the respective community college campuses in her state as well as the system office in the state capital, learning about the various successes of each institution and the inner workings of the system office. Another CAO made it a point to observe effective leaders, to gain an understanding of how they handled certain tasks or situations.

The third theme regarding skills and experiences is based on mentors and networking. As indicated in previous studies (Cejda, 2006; Gorham, 2000), formal professional development activities served as a vehicle to develop a network. CAO 6 viewed this as the greatest benefit of graduate education, “I found a cohort of working professionals attending graduate school and some community college administrators serving as adjunct faculty. These became valuable contacts in helping me understand community colleges, administration, and leadership.” Other CAOs pointed to the importance of getting, keeping, and using contact lists from conferences, seminars, and workshops. Also cited was the benefit of developing peer networks within the state and the region by participating on statewide committees.

Five of the six CAOs mentioned that a mentor or role model helped them develop the skills necessary to be a successful CAO. The term “mentioned” in the previous sentence is purposeful, as none of the CAOs responded that a mentor was the primary means by which they developed knowledge or skills. In two of the interviews, a mentor was mentioned only after I directly questioned whether they had a mentor. Individuals who served in this capacity ranged from parents who had held leadership positions to professors and included both peer mentors and superiors. Each of the five CAOs who
spoke of a mentor indicated that they did not seek out the mentor. The mentoring experiences were, however, influential enough that each of the CAOs is currently serving as a mentor to others, mirroring a finding of Ballentine (2001).

**What Personal and Professional Recommendations Would You Make to Those Aspiring to or Recently Assuming a CAO Position?**

Participants took time to reflect on their experiences prior to responding to this question. Although the CAOs share a deep commitment to the instructional mission of the community college, it is obvious that the nature of the position and accompanying stress, at times, can take its personal and professional toil. More than one CAO viewed their position as “the top” of the academic world of the community college. As the old saying goes, “Life is often lonely at the top.”

There was also consensus among the CAOs that many of their recommendations would be applicable to men as well as women. As mentioned earlier, these CAOs shared the perception that they did not face obstacles or barriers to career advancement because they were women. They also conceded that the best CAOs draw on a variety of qualities, some stereotyped as male or female, and suggested that aspirants to leadership positions focus on learning from whom they admire, regardless of the individual’s gender.

Each CAO spoke on this question longer than on any of the other questions. The majority of their comments form a theme of effective leadership that stems from specific traits, knowledge, or skills. Foremost among these is knowledge of organizational culture, an understanding of the culture of the employing institution, and the ability to work within the organizational culture. Traits important for a CAO include having a sense of humor, especially regarding oneself, and a thick skin to partially deflect criticisms. It is also best to be known for personal honesty, so the faculty can hear what is said without being offended. Effective communication, people, and decision-making skills were viewed as essential to success in the CAO position. Equally important were skills related to building consensus and trust with the faculty. In order to do so, the CAO must have a knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of the faculty role in the contemporary community college. Trust was also important between the CAO and deans or chairpersons. CAOs needed to learn to trust other instructional administrators and allow them to do their jobs. The nature of the CAO position increasingly called for knowledge and skills in finance and budgeting. Even with the importance placed on knowledge and skills, the CAOs also believed it was important to continue to trust personal intuition.

A second theme from the recommendations focuses on “what to do” in the professional life, rather than on traits, knowledge, or skills, referred to as career recommendations. Two initial career recommendations were pro-
vided for those who aspire to the CAO position. The first one was to pursue a shadowing experience or an internship, according to CAO 1, “It is difficult to understand the CAO position or to explain it to another person, if they haven’t or don’t see the person in the role.”

The second focuses on a specific recommendation for female CAO aspirants—a willingness to move. One of the participants pointed out that most of the female CAOs she knew had moved to obtain the position. How far someone is willing to move—within the state, from state to state, or from one region to another—may determine whether an aspirant actually obtains a CAO position.

For those who have recently assumed a CAO position, an initial recommendation referred to the aforementioned importance of understanding organizational and institutional culture. There are differences between community colleges and among the individuals who occupy the CAO position. CAO 3 stated, “You need to spend time trying to figure out what the job is at the particular community college and then define how you fit into the CAO role as it exists at that community college.”

Several of the CAOs suggested that those new to the position constantly remind themselves of the key values and principles of the community college—providing educational opportunity, student learning, and teaching-centered faculty. A number of comments pointed to the need to become and remain involved in the community, based on the community college mission. One specific recommendation for community awareness is to pay attention to taxpayers and contribute to fiscal responsibility.

New CAOs were reminded to not always “reinvent the wheel.” Finding out how other institutions operated or addressed a challenge or issue may facilitate initial successes in the position. An understanding of the institution and the culture was again emphasized—as finding out why previous initiatives failed was important to successfully implementing change. New women CAOs were also cautioned against overly multi-tasking. As CAO 1 commented, “This is one of the most difficulty challenges for women... We over commit and multi-tasking become a challenge to our efficiency rather than a means to accomplish more.”

The third theme in this area focused on professional development activities. As identified in previous research (Ballentine, 2001), aspirants need to recognize that a terminal degree is now required for the CAO position. Other leadership training opportunities should also be pursued as the terminal degree opens the door, but does not guarantee success in securing a position. More than one CAO stressed the importance of developing a financial plan—as few institutions provide tuition support to pursue a terminal degree. Individuals should attend seminars, conferences, and workshops even if they have to pay their own way. Developing a network of contacts while participating in these activities emerged again as a common recommendation.

Making the most of current and future positions on the path to becoming a CAO was also viewed as important. Participants recommended that aspir-
ing CAOs maximize teaching experiences to include as many areas of the instructional mission as possible (e.g., developmental, transfer, contract training) and through different delivery methods (i.e., face-to-face, online, interactive video) as instruction is what the CAO position is all about. Take advantage of opportunities to chair committees and to lean different areas of the college. Seek opportunities to gain administrative experiences relevant to the CAO position during upward movement in the administrative ranks.

Final career recommendations applied to both aspiring and new CAOs. Regardless of the years of community college experience, ask for and accept advice and constructive criticism from superiors or peers. Both were viewed important to obtaining a CAO position and success in the position. Continued participation in professional development activities after earning a terminal degree and after obtaining a CAO position was also viewed as important to career advancement and success.

The fourth theme centered on personal, not professional aspects. The key recommendation in this theme was to try to maintain a balance between a personal and professional life. The key word in this recommendation was “try” as each participant stressed that balance was very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. Essential to even attempting balance is the necessity to learn how to say no, at least occasionally. The participants agreed that work and life balance was generally more difficult for women than men, especially if they had children. Societal expectations of men continued to be predominately focused on the role of wage earners and the time sacrifice as to family rather than work. Women are still expected to sacrifice work over family. If they do sacrifice family time, they often feel guilty.

Contemporary technology appeared to be at least part of the challenge of developing and maintaining a personal life. Smart phones, laptop computers, and wireless networks made it simple to always be at work. A common suggestion was to actually leave the office, not to take the office home. The tendency to check email or to check voice messages while on vacations was mentioned more than once as an example of “never leaving the job.” One CAO stressed that she now purposely refused to work from home or while on vacation. If she needed to work after hours or on weekends, she stayed at or returned to the office. At the same time, it was important to receive understanding and support from a spouse or family regarding the complexity of the position and the fact that responsibilities may require evening and weekend work.

Taking care of personal health by eating right and regularly exercising was considered important to anyone in any administrative position. In addition to this recognition, the CAOs pointed to the importance of developing personal interests or hobbies and in pursuing those activities on a regular basis. The term hobby may not be correct as more than one CAO used the term “personal escape experiences,” vital to dealing with the stress that often came with the position. Family was important, but there was also the need for personal care.
What are Your Future Career Plans?
The primary question about future career plans was whether the CAOs wished to assume a presidency. Only one of the CAOs currently aspires to a presidency. A second indicated that she was assessing whether to make this move by participating in activities for aspiring presidents, but that she was not sure. A third CAO would not rule out the possibility, indicating she had not yet seriously considered a move. The remaining three CAOs indicated that they did not wish to become a president; two of the three were very emphatic about their position on the matter. It was important to recognize that the question was worded “do you aspire to” not “do you have the abilities or skills”. Each of the CAOs believed they could be a community college president.

The most obvious follow-up question was why five of the six were unsure or against a move to the presidency. The simple answer was that the responsibilities of the presidency would remove them from the instructional mission of the community college and, as mentioned earlier, each expressed a genuine commitment to that mission. CAO 5 reflected, “I’m committed to academic administration. I don’t want to work with boards, go to rotary and chamber meetings, or raise money. I love the academic piece and am really happy in my current role.” At the same time, each of the CAOs recognized the importance of the president to their current and future job satisfaction and realized that a change in the president could result in a change in career plans.

A second follow-up question was whether these women saw themselves moving laterally to another CAO position or to a position other than the presidency. Only one indicated the possibility of moving laterally to another CAO position; others indicated a preference to remain at the same institution. In keeping with their instructional commitment, four of the six mentioned a return to faculty positions at some point, possibly as adjuncts, after they stopped working full-time. No other administrative positions were referenced.

A final follow-up question was whether the CAOs saw themselves working at another type of educational institution. While working full-time, none of the CAOs saw themselves leaving the community college. One of the CAOs mentioned the possibility of teaching as an adjunct at a four-year institution after she retires from the community college. As mentioned earlier, there was a deep commitment among these women to the community college, its mission, and the students served.

Summary
As only one of the CAOs had a goal of working at a community college, this study supported the contention that the representation of women in administrative positions at community colleges is more by accident than by plan (Townsend & Twombly, 2007). Although the remaining CAOs followed
different paths, the instructional mission served as a focal point from their initial employment through the present day. It is safe to say that, for these women, the community college is more than a job; they believe in the institution and the mission it serves. The commitment to the community college and its mission speaks against the marginalization argument of Moore and Sagaria (1991). For the participants in this study, the community college is the institution of choice. Two of the participants had university experience prior to their initial community college employment. A third left the community college environment for a position at a research university and, dissatisfied, returned to the community college. Moreover, none of the participants indicated the likelihood that they would pursue employment at other types of postsecondary institutions.

This study also supports the argument that a variety of experiences, not just the previous positions held, facilitates career advancement (McKenney & Cejda, 2001; Twombly, 1988). Professional experiences, professional development, and networking and mentors were the three themes that emerged from questions about developing the skills and experiences necessary to obtain and be successful in the CAO position. Gathering experiences relevant to the CAO position and understanding the institutional big picture are viewed as key to success as a CAO. Multiple professional development activities were identified, and the content of these activities was not solely focused on community colleges, higher education, or leadership.

It is important to note that the CAO position was not an initial career goal for any of the study’s participants. The women did not perceive gender as a barrier in securing a CAO position and expressed the belief that the current community college environment has removed such obstacles. They also emphasized that their professional and personal recommendations for aspiring and newly appointed CAOs were not focused specifically on women. There were, however, three suggestions targeted to females. First, women should understand the likelihood of having to move to assume a CAO position and should be prepared to do so. Second, they should be careful not to overly multitask. Third, they should strive to maintain a balance between work and home, including taking necessary personal and family time.

Although the percentage of women in the CAO position at community colleges has doubled since 1990, similar gains have not been realized in the presidency. For the women in the study, this is a choice—not because of a “glass ceiling.” Comfortable in their positions and committed to the instructional mission of the community college, they serve the ideal of making a difference in the lives of individuals through educational opportunities. Additional research on the status of women in the community college presidency is warranted. The reluctance to consider a presidency among the CAOs in this study, however, suggests that the community college can no longer simply assume that the number of women presidents will continue to increase.
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