Community College Trustees: Mission, Values, and Decision-Making in Uncertain Times

Presentation of Preliminary Data
October 11, 2023

#ACCT2023

Pilot data
Given the rapid pace of technological and educational change, and sharp drops in governmental support for public community colleges, managing systemic change processes that ensure fiscal sustainability and adherence to institutional mission is likely to be “the defining task of the next decade” for community college leaders (Kisker, 2021, p. 3).

Trustees need to determine a direction for their colleges and communicate it effectively to the public, yet we know little about what you think about these issues or your plans for guiding colleges in the current environment of continuous change.

This is why this research is important.
Replicates and updates Iris Weisman’s dissertation research; surveys of trustees, board chairs, and college presidents - published in 1997 by ACCT as this book.

Largest empirical study of community college trustees in over 25 years

Addresses the problem of lack of current research

“By 1997, when Vaughan and Weisman conducted another survey of community college governing board trustees...not much had changed...This survey is still cited in more recent works on community college trustees” (Brekken et al., 2021, p. 3).
• Responses To-Date
Sampling of the Questions

• If you could immediately change 1-3 things about your college(s), what would they be?
• Imagine your college were awarded a one-time monetary infusion equal to roughly 10% of your annual expenditures. How would you advise your college/district to use it?
• What role should trustees play in driving systemic change?
• How often does the board give consideration to the opinions of [staff, faculty, local and state officials, business leaders, social agencies]?
• What is the purpose of community colleges?
• Rank the various functions [from a list] of community colleges in order of importance.
• From your perspective, who has the greatest influence on the board and its decisions?
• How would you describe the balance of power on the board?
• In your opinion, what are the greatest challenges that community colleges face today?
Preliminary Responses
(Not enough to generalize)

Pilot data
Demographics*

*1995/2023 survey and 2018 ACCT Citizen Trustee Survey

Pilot data

#ACCT2023
Reasons for Serving

1997

• Member of other boards and wanted community college experience
• Encouraged by a colleague who was a trustee
• Other

2023

• Other
  Former com. col. CEO, faculty, administrator, student; K-12 public educator
• Encouraged by a colleague who was a trustee
• Member of other boards and wanted community college experience
• Former student and wanted to give back (More than 1/2 attended a community college)

Rank order

Pilot data
Time Spent on Board Activities

1995

- Promoting the college
- Budget/financial management review and approval
- Policy development, review, and approval
- Assessing institutional performance
- Setting institutional goals
- Strategic planning
- Assessing the effectiveness of the CEO
- Community outreach

2023

- Promoting the college (tie #1)
- Budget/Financial management review/approval (tie #1)
- Assessing institutional performance
- Policy development, review, & performance
- Strategic planning
- Assessing the effectiveness of the CEO
- Setting institutional goals

Rank order

1995

1995

2023

Pilot data
Does the board have a student trustee?

Pilot data
Since you joined the board, have you been able to achieve what you had hoped?

- **Not at all**
- **To some extent**
- **Neutral**
- **To a moderate extent**
- **To a great extent**

Pilot data
How many hours/week (on average) do you spend on board matters?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>55.00</td>
<td>6.21</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
How measurable are the board’s goals for itself?

- Very measurable: 34
- Somewhat measurable: 68
- Neutral: 9
- Not very measurable: 14
- Not at all measurable: 2
- Not applicable: 1

Pilot data
Responsibilities of the Board

1995

• Promoting the college
• Budget/financial management review and approval
• Policy development, review, and approval
• Assessing institutional performance
• Setting institutional goals
• Strategic planning
• Assessing the effectiveness of the CEO
• Community outreach

2023

• Promoting the college (tie #1)
• Budget/financial management review and approval (tie #1)
• Assessing institutional performance
• Policy development, review, and approval
• Strategic planning
• Assessing the effectiveness of the CEO
• Setting institutional goals

Pilot data
How often does the board give consideration to faculty opinions?

Pilot data
How often does the board give consideration to student opinions?
From your perspective, who has the greatest influence on the board and its decisions?

- CEO and/or senior administrators: [High influence]
- Board chair: [Moderate influence]
- Other board member(s): [Moderate influence]
- External constituents: [Low influence]
- Faculty: [Low influence]
- Students: [Low influence]
- Other (please specify): [Other (please specify)]

Pilot data
Rank the various functions of community colleges

Not asked in 1995

2023

• Ensuring access to higher education
• Occupational training and workforce development (Ranked as #2, 3, and 4 in importance)
• TIE: Promoting diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice AND Contributing to local or regional economic development

Pilot data
Board’s appetite for systemic change

- Non-existent
- Not very strong
- Neutral
- Somewhat strong
- Very strong

Pilot data
What role should trustees play in driving systemic change?

- Review and approve change processes proposed by CEO
- Make the case for and drive systemic change
- Determine policy and overall direction of systemic change
- Identify policies, programs, or procedures ripe for systemic change
- Oversee implementation of systemic change processes

Pilot data
Do you feel that board members tend to put their own special interests or values above the needs of the institution?

Pilot data
What do you consider to be the purposes of community colleges?

- Strive to help eradicate poverty through education and training.
- Create an atmosphere for academic success - To make students "real world ready."
- Provide educational leadership for lifelong learning and to remain relevant in our community as an impact player.
- Be the catalyst for changing our students and communities by creating a safe, accessible, affordable, environment based in academic excellence.
- To educate students, help industry, respond to community needs.
- To provide an education to meet the needs of the student, wherever they are in their journey. It may mean anything from a workshop, a class, a certificate program, or a two-year degree. It might be the beginnings of transferring to another institution and earning a bachelor’s, master’s, or doctoral degree.
- Educate to uplift community members, expand their outlook, provide useful skill sets.
- To provide quality, low-cost educational opportunities to improve the quality of life for students, their families, and communities.
- And many, many other responses

Pilot data
What professional development topics are you interested in?

1995
- Not in the original survey

2023
- Board member responsibilities (126 votes)
- External partnerships (108)
- Goal setting (for the board and/or institution) (108)
- Legislative advocacy (100)
- Strategic planning (99)
- Budget/financial management (94)

Pilot data
How likely are you to run for political office after your term on the board has expired?

Pilot data
Most important criteria in evaluating the CEO

- Annual goals set by the board
- CEO’s leadership qualities
- Annual goals set by the CEO
- Institutional effectiveness and performance data
- Lowest were: (lowest first)
  - Student satisfaction
  - Faculty satisfaction
  - CEOs relationship with elected officials
  - CEOs relationship with community leaders
  - CEOs commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice
Have the following received less emphasis, no change, or a greater emphasis in the new strategic plan.
What are the greatest challenges community colleges face today?

- Funding
- College costs (for students)
- Access and affordability for students
- Student progress and completion
- Enrollment

Pilot data
What are the greatest opportunities?

- Implementing entrepreneurial or innovative programs and practices
- Student progress and completion
- Establishing and maintaining external partnerships
- Occupational training and workforce development
- Coordination and collaboration with other institutions of higher education

Pilot data

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If you could immediately change 1-3 things about your college(s), what would they be?

- Increase enrollment
- Hire new and innovative faculty
- Enhance strategic community connections
- Establish wrap-around basic needs services
- Increase number and percentage of residential faculty
- Greater emphasis on shared governance, including students
- Establish an annual “futures thinking” forum with board members, admin., students, faculty, and community leaders
- Make enrollment processes easy for students
- Engage all employees in professional development around supporting student success and completion
- Provide on-campus housing
- Do something innovative that would be entrepreneurial
- Lower tuition

Pilot data
If you could immediately change 1-3 things about your college(s), what would they be?

• “Reduce waste at the system level. Reduce brick and mortar footprint. Pay faculty and staff reasonably.”
• “I’d like to see a tuition freeze, more free programs, lower costs for textbooks, and courses that stay ahead of the ever-changing job market.”
• “Continue to establish the wraparound services that we have; housing, grab-and-go food stores, clothing stores, mental health services, etc.”
• “Expand online learning. Better communication between the college, county, community. Faculty engagement.”
• “Significantly promote each of the college’s signature programs in more in-depth and creative ways to reach new types of students. Create and enhance strategic community connections (business or non-profit) for each academic department and administrative unit.”

Pilot data
If your college received a one-time monetary infusion of about 10% of your annual expenditures, what would you do with it?

Sampling of responses:

- Save students money
  - Tuition freeze/free
  - Make dual enrollment free
  - OER

- Pay employees

- Enhance/improve facilities

- Add to fund balance

- “Better connect faculty to students in order to drive student success”

- “Hyperflex teaching, virtual and augmented reality, mobile teaching/learning resources”

- “Invest in innovative programs that will create sustained programming and diversified revenue streams.”

Pilot data

#ACCT2023
If your college received a one-time monetary infusion of about 10% of your annual expenditures, what would you do with it?

Sampling of responses:

• “Use the funds to acquire a strategic selection of teaching and promotional technologies - hyflex teaching, virtual, and augmented reality, mobile teaching/learning resources, etc. - as well as online support communities by interests, career connections, etc.”

• “First I would want to hear from college leadership where they see the greatest need.”

• “Our students need assistance with transportation, childcare, and supplemental income assistance. Removing the barriers is essential to student success.”

• “Find a way to spend it on students, including free dual credit and other ways to offset the cost of tuition. We would also want to spend it on creating more ‘earn and learn’ apprenticeships.”

• “More full-time faculty empowered to participate in wrap-around services for students that reduce achievement gaps and dramatically increase completion rates.”
Who has the greatest influence on the board and its decisions?

- CEO and/or senior administrators
- Board chair
- Other board member(s)
- External constituents
- Faculty
- Students
- Other (please specify):

Pilot data
How would you rate the level of trust between the CEO and the board?

- Not at all strong
- Not very strong
- Neutral
- Somewhat strong
- Very strong

Pilot data
Follow-up Individual Interviews

• What motivates you to do this work?
• How do you describe your trustee work to others?
• What are the greatest challenges that community colleges face today?
• What are the greatest opportunities community colleges have today?
• We are also interested in your ideas about public values since community colleges are public institutions. How do they play out in your strategic plans?
• What does your college need to be doing now to prepare for the future?