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Questions for retired community college presidents interviews:

1. When and how did you first hear about the “community college movement”?

In graduate school my major advisor had been the Dean of the School of Education and subsequently head of the State Higher Education Master Planning Commission and was instrumental in creating the “Community College System” out of the numerous existing Junior Colleges. Since he refused to take on more than three or four students, in various stages of their programs we all received his “indoctrination” into what he thought of as the most important new educational idea of the 20th century.

2. What were your first impressions?

It made a great deal of sense as I had attended a JUCO after being a reverse transfer from a state school, and was, in fact, teaching at the same school with its new community college name while I was learning about community colleges.

3. When did you first decide to get involved with community colleges and why?

I went to graduate school with the specific goal of getting the necessary training to become a College President. While I was there, the community colleges, and the “movement” became my obvious choice. On average, about one college per week was being opened during the era and the opportunities seemed boundless.

4. What was your first community college experience?

As an adjunct instructor finishing a deceased instructor’s assignments for a term and then for the academic year

5. What was your first position at a community college?

Adjunct Instructor

6. How did that lead to a presidency?

It probably didn’t have a lot to with me becoming a President as I was already in graduate school pursuing that goal. What it did was give me a firsthand view of a community college as I was thinking about what type of institution I wanted. Additionally, since I taught both day and evening classes I, was older than my students during the day, but younger than they at night. The lessons of that experience were very important for me later as we began to encourage education at community colleges as a lifelong process.

7. How well do you think you were prepared? What were the biggest challenges?

I had the luxury of being able to custom design my entire graduate program. In concert with my major advisor, the deans of both colleges involved signed off on what I wanted to do and lent their experience to the program design. Once the four of us agreed, my program was de facto approved since my advisor and the various Vice Chancellors of the university were the Dep't of Higher Ed. I knew every course I would be taking before my first graduate course registration. The biggest challenge of the program was that the other professors couldn't fit me into a conceptual box. For example, I was nearly ABD in organizational design from the School of Business when I had to take a required course in organizational theory from a brand new professor in the School of Education. After about three weeks he decided I should take an "A" in his course, not bother with the rest of his class, and take a grad assistantship with him the next fall. Two semesters later he was crushed to find out I not only already had an advisor, but was planning on writing my comps and my dissertation before finishing my coursework ... with full approval of the college.

For me, the biggest challenge of the presidency was to articulate and successfully convince staff to share my excitement about the community college movement. During the 1970's and 80's in Nebraska, I had spent my time trying to affirm to a senior faculty of a fifty year old junior college that it would be okay to be one of these strange new things called community colleges. By the time I went to Ohio community colleges were well established. However, Belmont wasn't a community college and the staff didn't want to become a community college. When the Board changed composition from one which wanted change to one which preferred something else, the challenges grew.

8. What were the biggest rewards?

Without a doubt, the biggest reward was the eyes of the graduates when you handed them their diplomas.

9. Describe the atmosphere on your first campus.

I guess my first campus was technically Nebraska Western College. In the summer 1976 I had accepted the chief academic officer position in Nebraska. Prior to reporting for duty, the President called and told me I ought to get there a month early as he had resigned and I would be named acting President the next week. The campus was in shock. It was founded in 1926 and under a variety of names and sponsorship had successfully functioned for fifty years. A few years prior the state had created six "Technical Community College Areas" (read districts) to try to join the 'movement'. In the Western Technical Community College Area that meant the forced amalgamation of a local Junior College, a local School of Practical Nursing, and a State Technical College (all 80 miles apart) under one Board. Unfortunately, the legislation was declared unconstitutional by the State Supreme Court. The legislature had just passed new legislation but the President in Scottsbluff was unsuccessful in the move to district leadership and had been at odds with all campus based administrations. The Board wiped the slate. Everyone left was concerned, anxious, and just plain frightened. The acting president (me) was twenty-eight years old and had more administrative experience than anyone on campus. The average age of the faculty was late forties but the median was about forty as a result of major hiring in 1970. The Dean of Students (age 42)

and I hired a new business manager (age 25) and the Board lured their new President (age 39) from another of the other old Nebraska schools. At this time and place we may have been exemplar of many colleges in "The Community College Movement." As a management team we were too young and green to know we couldn't change laws, invent a new kind of college, or transform old organizations into an integrated community college. So we just did.

10. Describe the different types of students you saw.

In each institution the students were slices of their environment and representative of where the institution was located. The only common thread was a weakness in basic skills. Over a period of twenty years using the same instruments in six different states a group of us were able to document 80+% of recent high school graduates needed remedial math and about 50% each reading and English. Based on what I've heard from friends still in the business it hasn't changed.

11. What was the attitude of four-year universities when you were president? How was that changed today?

In Kansas City they wanted our transfers.

In Nebraska, at first, they actively lobbied against the system. When they lost that issue, they ignored us, other than when we beat them on funding on the legislative floor. Interestingly, there was only one true state University. The rest were teachers' colleges and UNO which was a municipal college and medical school which was taken over by the state rather than being allowed to close.

In Ohio they tolerated us because the University Presidents and the two year College Presidents met with the Chancellor monthly.

In Oregon they ranged from ambivalent to quasi hostile contingent on the University President.

12. What was the relationship between the community college presidents and the State Board of Education when you were president? With the other presidents? With OCCA?

State Board - I thought surprisingly good. I had been in a unified state college and university system in Ohio, so Oregon was more like Nebraska and Kansas where the state presence was either non-existent or minor. The board seemed interested and pretty well informed. However, I thought the structure made it difficult for board members to shift gears from K-12 to Community Colleges.

With other Presidents – Presidents are, by nature, difficult. In Oregon I found them to be more so than the norm. And, given the comparative youth of the Oregon "system" and its insular nature, it tended to be a closed group. I believe it was unique to the time. Financing was problematic and most of the guys (there were no women) had been together for years with long term relationships both good and not so good. It was very difficult for the group to actually work together and celebrate institution's individual successes. Additionally, small and more recently created institutions were viewed as junior members of the club. I believe that was due to the "Service District" concept which was used to get community college services into un-served areas without the state committing to a complete "system" of community

colleges. Thus, in three districts, under the community college statutes, local boards taxed and then contracted for services with other existing accredited community colleges.

{A bit of historical digression is necessary here. By the middle 1980's Oregon had state colleges, universities, community colleges, or community college service districts in virtually every population center. In, from an outsider's view, a bizarre sequence, a community college movement in Klamath Falls was stopped in Salem by an agreement to allow Oregon Technical Institute to offer baccalaureate degrees. The newly renamed Oregon Institute of Technology then, amazingly, began the process of eliminating its locally popular two year programs. Within a few years what had been a functional two year college, dating from 1947 with great local support, turned into a four year college facing a community initiative to start a community college in the same community. An election 1996 to create a new community college and levy the taxes was successful with an 80% approval.}

The creation of Klamath became problematic after the service district had been in operation for a year and the Klamath Board sought the creation of a Community College as opposed to operating as an extension campus of one of the existing community colleges. The question of whether a Community College Service District could actually operate a community college was the issue. Fortunately for Klamath, the community college statutes were pretty clear. Unfortunately, no other Service District had pursued that end. During the 1997-98 year Klamath secured a state charter as a community college, received authorization for its Board to award degrees, had all of its programs approved as a single package, and began the accreditation process. This sequence resulted in a third type of community college configuration in Oregon ... a chartered college offering its own courses and degrees, pursuing accreditation, but operated by a service district. This was not a particularly popular positioning. In 2001 legislative action converted all service districts to community college districts and legally changed the remaining three service district operations to community colleges.

I believe that, in large measure, resistance to these changes was a natural reaction of people who had been together for an extended time feeling their culture threatened by new personalities. Additionally, the people involved seemed culturally incapable of accepting the concept of a system of unique Community Colleges and reacted negatively to the word system as representing a centralized State Community College System. Hopefully, new folks have changed the culture.

OCCA – By and large I felt OCCA was the least effective of the CC organizations in the three states where I was involved. Again the comparative youth of the system has something to do with it ... As does the political culture. Oregon was the only state in which I worked in which the state organization was not a function of the local Boards rather than the Presidents. Interestingly, the year I went to Ohio, the State's Attorney General started an investigation of the Ohio two year schools organization under RICO statutes. Cooler heads prevailed and the organization re-incorporated as a "Council of Local Governments" reporting to a Board composed of local college's board members. This fundamentally altered its functioning. When I left Oregon the presidents seemed to believe OCCA remained a creature of the Council of Presidents.

Notwithstanding my comments above, OCCA was by and large helpful to Klamath as it pursued its development. That is a compliment to the OCCA leadership. In any similar organization where dues are determined member institution size, it can be very difficult not to sacrifice the smallest for the largest contributors. I always believed dues should have been equal among districts as seen elsewhere.

13. How has the movement changed since you first became involved?

I don't think "The Movement" continues to exist. I think the explosion of community colleges in the mid 60's to mid 70's propelled the movement through the 1980's and into the mid 90's. As the people who drove the creation or building process for 25-30 years have left the scene so has the missionary zeal. Very few active community college leaders today have personal experience actually working for passage of enabling legislation or starting a new college district. Their memories are of implementation and development rather than creation.

I think the weight of operating the massive "system" of community colleges, and leading their continued operation seems to preclude the visionary activities of "The Movement". To regain that zeal would, of necessity, demand a completely new and revolutionary vision of what education ought to be in the 21st. century. Maybe it's adequate to celebrate what we have built to date and be about the business of improving it to meet new challenges.

14. What advice would you give to community college leaders today?

I believe you can trace a direct line from the GI Bill, to the Truman commission report, to the WWII veterans who created the explosion of the community colleges and orchestrated creation of "The Movement." In the next generation, we demanded a natural extension to include women and minorities and to make the vision universal. In 1997, in Oregon, I referred to "The Community College Movement" in a forum of community college employees ... to resoundingly blank stares of incomprehension. Hopefully, what it meant was that the Community Colleges had become a fact of life rather than a mission. Perhaps the revolution was successful and those present had moved onto evolution. What I would say to today's leadership cadre is "Have the courage to go back and learn our/your history then write future history." The fundamental questions are still the same. What business are you in and for whom? What do they need? Answer those questions. Then, create high quality cost-effective programming consistent with the answers. And, don't get sidetracked with superfluous notions.

Biographical Form

Oregon Community College Oral History Project

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EDUCATION:

Year	Institution	Degree
1965-66	University of Missouri at Kansas City	
1966-67	Kansas City Kansas Junior College	
1967-69	University of Kansas School of Business	BS Business
1971-72	University of Kansas School of Business	MS Organization and Administration
1972-74	University of Kansas	PhD Higher Education

COMMUNITY COLLEGE EXPERIENCE:

Year	Institution	Position Held
1971-72	Kansas City Kansas Community Junior College Kansas City, KS	Adjunct Instructor
1973-74	Kansas City Kansas Community Junior College Kansas City, KS	Adjunct Instructor
1974-75	Park College School for Community Education Crown Center - Kansas City, MO	Assitant Provost
1975-76	Park College School for Community Education Crown Center - Kansas City, MO	Associate Dean
1976-90	Nebraska Western College/ Western Nebraska Community College	Vice President
1990-97	Belmont Technical College St. Clairsville, OH	President
1997-2004	Klamath Community College Klamath Falls, OR	President