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CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICERS AND THE FUTURE LEADERSHIP OF AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

Chief academic officers (CAOs), often referred to as provosts, are responsible for the teaching, research and service functions at colleges and universities. CAOs are second-in-command on most campuses reporting directly to the president or chancellor. With funding provided by the TIAA-CREF Institute, the American Council on Education (ACE) surveyed CAOs in 2008 to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of this position and the individuals holding these positions. More specifically, the study examined demographics of CAOs, the professional paths followed to the CAO position, chief responsibilities and challenges of the CAO, and future career plans, including whether CAOs will pursue a president's position. This report complements the key findings and insights presented in the ACE report *The CAO Census: A National Profile of Chief Academic Officers* (Eckel, et al., 2009) with the reflections and observations from four current CAOs—Herman A. Berliner, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, Hofstra University; Joan F. Lorden, Provost and Vice Chancellor, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte; Risa Palm, Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, The State University of New York; and Michael A. Smyer, Provost, Bucknell University—based on their perspectives and experiences.



Several overriding demographic findings emerged from the study:

- Eighty-five percent of CAOs are white and 40% are female, though these figures vary somewhat across institutional types.
- A slight majority (52%) of CAOs were hired into their position from within the same institution, with 42% rising through the administrative ranks at a single institution.
- The most commonly held immediate prior positions were dean of an academic college (27%), an executive position in academic affairs (23%) and a CAO position at another institution (13%); again this varied with institutional type.
- Recent CAO hires are more likely than longer-tenured CAOs to have come from another institution and to have been a dean or other academic affairs officer.

Joan Lorden comments below that a relative lack of females and minorities in CAO positions, especially at doctoral-granting institutions, is a direct product of their relative absence from the ranks of tenured professors. Lorden maintains that addressing the diversity challenge for professors is a prerequisite for solving it for CAOs. Herman Berliner observes that movement into a CAO position is often not an intentional career progression, but rather the result of events that occur around the person. And Lorden further notes that “many people in positions of responsibility are accidental administrators” due to a lack of succession planning on campuses and a lack of leadership training.

CAOs tend to be satisfied with their position (63% report being very satisfied and an additional 33% are somewhat satisfied), but the survey does not delve into the source of that satisfaction. Lorden shares that her satisfaction in the position emerges from the opportunity to shape academic programs, to influence interactions across disciplines, and to promote successful student and faculty careers. Along with their job satisfaction, CAOs report a conflict between what they perceive to be the priorities for their position and the expectations of their president and the expectations faculty for what those priorities should be. The only consensus top priority among the three groups is the promotion of academic quality. The priorities of the CAO and those of the president appear better aligned than those the CAO and faculty. In addition, CAOs often feel challenged by other campus vice presidents and frustrated by a lack of both human and financial resources.

The results make clear that the nature of the position differs across institutional types, a point emphasized by Risa Palm in her comments. For example, CAOs at doctorate-granting institutions tend to spend their time on activities that are more administratively oriented (e.g., managing personnel, strategic planning, and budgeting and financial planning), while those at other types of institutions tend to focus on more academically oriented activities (e.g., curriculum, accountability and assessment). Furthermore, as noted by Berliner, the fraction of time spent on such activities can and will vary dramatically from year to year.

Less than half of CAOs remain in campus administration upon leaving the post.¹ The most common career moves from the CAO position are retirement (21%), a presidency (20%) and a return to the faculty (18%.) Michael Smyer comments below on the need for colleges and universities to address the “lost knowledge” challenge posed by these career moves. Furthermore, the most common career path to an academic presidency is through the CAO position (American Council on Education, 2007), but only 30% of current CAOs intend to pursue such a position (an additional 25% are undecided.) A lack of interest in a presidential position is typically driven by the unappealing aspects inherent in the job as perceived by many CAOs, though personal considerations such as balancing family life and wanting to

1 Current CAOs were asked about the subsequent career move of their immediate predecessor.

return to a faculty position influence such career plans as well. One-quarter (25%) of female CAOs intend to pursue a presidency compared with 33% of men (28% and 23%, respectively, are undecided.) Almost one-half (48%) of African American CAOs intend to pursue a presidency compared with 35% of Asian-Americans, 34% of Hispanics and 28% of whites (27%, 33%, 30% and 24% are undecided, respectively.)

Smyer explains that work and career views are influenced by both generational attitudes and life-stage attitudes with natural implications for future career plans of CAOs. Lorden comments that developing the skills, confidence and even desire to pursue a presidency can depend heavily on a CAOs relationship with his or her president. And Risa Palm comments that the chief responsibilities of a CAO typically have little overlap with the chief responsibilities that engage a president and that this may drive a lack of interest; it certainly raises the issue of a need for training and mentoring for those aspiring to be a president.

PERSPECTIVES OF A LONG SERVING CAO (HERMAN BERLINER)

I very much appreciate the good work of the American Council of Education in developing The CAO Census, and especially in recognizing the essential role played by the Chief Academic Officer on virtually every campus. The report is fascinating reading for anyone in higher education who works as a CAO, or works with a CAO, or aspires to become a CAO. The report makes clear multiple times that the average CAO has served in the position for 4.7 years and the average CAO is in his or her mid-fifties. But since I have had the pleasure of meeting and knowing many CAOs over many years, I am convinced that there really are no “average” CAOs. My background, at this point in time, as it was when I stated serving as a CAO is very different from any average. I am completing my 20th year as Provost having served continuously as Hofstra’s Provost since September 1, 1989. At the time I became Provost I was about thirteen years younger than average which makes me at this time, about seven years older than the average. Consistent with the study, I find the position more satisfying and more enjoyable than ever, and more importantly, I feel that I am still making an important contribution and still have the full confidence of the Hofstra community. I have also now served as Provost for two Presidents and am very pleased that, when Hofstra selected a new President in 2001, he asked me to stay as Provost.

At the time I became Provost, I was serving as Hofstra’s business school dean but my ambition was not to become a Provost. Career paths can be an intentional journey as implied in the Census, or they can be the result of unexpected changes in direction. At the end of summer 1989, Hofstra’s then Provost was set to go on medical leave and scheduled to return for the Spring 1990 semester. Consequently, the President and the Provost asked me to fill in as Interim Provost for the semester and I agreed. The Provost never returned and an internal search for the “permanent” provost was announced early in the Spring 1990 semester. A number of candidates emerged and in addition a number of potential candidates were waiting to come forward. A key part of enjoying an administrative position is the person you report to, and as a dean I would be reporting to the person selected to be the next provost. None of the declared or undeclared candidates was in my opinion right for Hofstra or right for me (as my supervisor). I, therefore, became a candidate and have never regretted my decision. For me and for many CAOs, these positions are not the result of an intentional journey; in academic positions as in life, serendipity is a factor that should not be underestimated.

In reviewing the nature of the position, the Census noted the importance of “curriculum and academic programs,” followed by “supervising and managing personnel,” and “accountability, accreditation, and assessment.” What also needs to be made clear is the dynamic nature of the position. Dramatic changes from year to year in the top one or three activities help create a sustained passion for the CAO position. For example, looking at my past three years, it started with successful but very time consuming negotiations with the faculty union on a new five year contract. Next, between last year and this year, we have been visited or have visits scheduled by fourteen of our twenty accrediting agencies. And beginning this year and without question including next year, my job and the job of virtually every other

CAO will be to help minimize the educational impact of a serious recession. Add to this my involvement with two major initiatives by Hofstra's president—hosting a national presidential debate on our campus (which took place on October 15, 2008) accompanied by a comprehensive year long program of events that examined all aspects of the U.S. Presidency plus the development of a new medical school scheduled to open in 2011—and you have sense of the both the dynamism and the changing agenda that colors the fabric of a CAO position.

As is highlighted in the report, the CAO position is “internally focused on campus and academic matters.” Nevertheless, two statistics in the census surprised me—the fact that seventy-five percent of the CAOs “spend little or no time on alumni relations” and that “seventy-two percent said they do little or no fund raising.” Considering that many CAOs rose to the position from a deanship (or other faculty or administrative position) at the same institution, the statistic is even more surprising. Prior to moving into administration, I taught economics to many undergraduate and graduate students. As dean, I taught MBA students virtually every semester. In addition, I meet and work with new student leaders every year. I am pleased to say that I have stayed in touch with many of these former students who are now our graduates. I also periodically talk with the leaders of our alumni organization. As a person who is about to complete his fourth decade on campus, I regularly serve as a resource person for graduates returning to campus. Even if the person graduated as far back as a half century ago, I likely knew first hand many of the faculty that impressed the graduate and can join with the graduate in reminiscing about these faculty and about life on the Hofstra campus. I assume that many CAOs have similar experiences and even if they are not very time consuming, they should be viewed as an important ingredient in successful alumni relations.

The statistic on fund raising is also at odds with my experience, but it may not reflect the full spectrum of fund raising activities. Even if the CAO is not the person making the actual ask in regard to fund raising, the CAO (especially in a private institution) is most likely involved in generating ideas and proposals for new centers, faculty chairs, facilities, academic programs, and other initiatives that help define and enhance the institution. The quality of the proposal can make an enormous difference and CAOs have an ideal vantage point for helping to shape a proposal that leads to a successful ask. Add to this the fundraising element involved in promoting and supporting an active culture of applying for grants, and the role of the CAO in fundraising is even clearer.

As a long term CAO, I feel an obligation to conclude my commentary by addressing the issue of job “frustrations.” And I admit I am an economist rather than a psychologist so this will not be a clinical analysis. CAOs according to the census are consistent in reporting “not having enough money, the difficulty of cultivating leadership in others, and the belief that they are infinitely accessible” are the top three sources of frustration. All of us can always point to not having enough money and our job by definition is to do the best we can with the resources we have. But for me the real source of frustration is when a CAO believes that academic and academic support needs are not receiving a fair share of the available resources. Early in my tenure as Provost, I felt that non-academic areas were receiving extra resources when there were still pressing needs in the academic area. Thankfully, I have not had that feeling for many years. Cultivating a new generation of senior academic leadership is a tremendous unmet need. To help resolve this issue, will require the orientation, mentoring, sabbatical time, flexibility and other support we have now built into faculty appointments (Berliner, 2007.) And when it comes to the expectation of almost open door accessibility, while I understand the feelings of many CAOs, my advice is to deal with it. Especially in this email, text messaging age, the expectation of a rapid response will not diminish, and the success of a CAO, in my opinion, is correlated to the availability to all constituencies of the person holding this position.

CREATING THE PIPELINE FOR ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP (JOAN LORDEN)

As a Chief Academic Officer, the two questions I have been asked most often by those outside my institution are: “What do you actually do?” and “Do you want to be a president?” Asking these questions on a national scale in *The CAO Census* has revealed some interesting issues about leadership in U.S. higher education. Two topics explored in

some detail are the relatively modest interest expressed by CAOs in moving to a presidency and the limited diversity seen in the CAO position, particularly in doctoral universities. Because the CAO position is viewed as a stepping-stone to a presidency, these observations prompt questions about the nature of the CAO position; the progress of women and minorities in the professoriate; and talent development in the academy.

Despite the frustration of chronic shortages in resources and feelings of being always on call, the CAO Census reports that CAOs are overwhelmingly satisfied with their jobs. The survey data offer little insight about the source of this satisfaction, focusing more on the descriptions of how CAOs report spending their time rather than the rewards of the job. It is hard to extrapolate from what CAOs seem to agree are their most time-consuming activities (curriculum and academic programs; supervising and managing personnel; and accountability, accreditation, and assessment) to what is rewarding.

When I think about what I find attractive about my own job, it is that a CAO has the opportunity to develop and execute an academic plan, encourage faculty interaction at the interface of disciplines, and help create the context for successful faculty and student careers. Like other university-wide academic appointments, the CAO is positioned to have a broad overview of the most exciting intellectual output of the institution. Are satisfied CAOs all alike? It is hard to say, but almost by definition, universities harbor more good ideas and exciting opportunities than there are resources to support. Perhaps understanding the rewards of the job would add insight into the apparently limited interest of today's CAOs in ascending to presidencies. The survey data focus mainly on the perceived negative features of the presidency (e.g., life in a fishbowl) and neglect the possibility that the CAO position has its own attractions. Exploration of what engages people in the position would be helpful in understanding how to attract and develop a diverse pool of candidates for this complex position.

The survey's gender data are striking both for the similarities revealed between men and women CAOs and for the similarities between women in CAO positions and those in faculty positions. We learn that on average, male and female CAOs are similar in age, background, career paths, frustrations, and activities. Like their faculty counterparts, female CAOs are less frequently married, more often divorced, less likely to have children, and more likely to have altered their careers to care for others or to accommodate the careers of others. Given that CAOs reach their positions primarily after rising through the faculty ranks, it is hardly surprising that female CAOs are fewer in number, especially at the doctoral-granting institutions, where the numbers of women at the rank of professor remains small in most fields. The limited numbers of African American and Hispanic CAOs may also reflect this narrowing of the field as one moves up the tenure ladder in research universities.

Recent studies by disciplinary associations and other organizations confirm the loss of women faculty from the tenure track ranks, even in those disciplines where the numbers of degrees awarded to women are robust. Although women in the social sciences, a broad field from which CAOs tend to be drawn, may start their careers in academia at the same rate as their male counterparts, after 6-10 years, more men are tenured and more women are in non-tenure earning positions (Rudd, et al., 2008.) Women in the social sciences are still almost twice as likely as men to move or alter their careers because of a partner's job change or family needs and responsibilities. The persistence of these patterns emphasizes the need for spousal or partner hiring programs, a commitment to family friendly policies, and other institutional changes to increase the numbers of potential women candidates for senior administrative ranks at research universities.

One of the suggestions emerging from the study is that mid-level women and minority administrators may benefit from strong mentoring programs to help prepare them for CAO positions. The CAOs surveyed also cite the difficulty in developing talent. Universities have come late to the realization that many skill sets are needed to manage a large enterprise, whether it is a research program or a university, and few of these skills are taught in graduate school.

Succession planning has not been a high priority at most institutions. As a consequence, many people in positions of responsibility are accidental administrators. They did not start their careers with administrative positions in mind, but have been successful academics. They are sufficiently committed to the success of their institutions to take on an administrative task when asked or when an opportunity arises, learning their roles through trial and error rather than through a deliberate process of development.

Signs of change have started to appear at multiple levels. Graduate schools have become more engaged in providing doctoral students with a broader range of skills ranging from communications to management, negotiation, and conflict resolution. Many institutions, including my own, have established mentoring programs for new faculty and are now extending them beyond the period of initial appointment. Mid-career faculty with interests in administrative positions can be prime targets for development as future leaders but need opportunities to investigate new career trajectories. Either through their own initiative or through programs like the NSF ADVANCE Institutional Transformation awards, universities are beginning to create ongoing opportunities for groups of emerging leaders to develop institutional knowledge and leadership skills. This can help to establish an institutional pipeline for leadership without taking people out of research and instructional programs prematurely.

For academics that make a career decision to enter administration, a variety of programs exist to provide leadership training for new or prospective administrators. For busy CAOs, however, developing the skills, confidence, and perhaps the desire to move to a presidency may depend more on the relationship with a successful president than a training program. A CAO who chooses to move on to a presidency can benefit tremendously from a president who provides mentoring in the areas such as fund raising, external relations, and board governance that are not typically part of the CAO role. The survey suggests a good alignment of expectations between presidents and CAOs but does not explore the relationship in much detail. It would be interesting to know more about if or how presidents provide mentoring for their CAOs and how they build their leadership teams. The friction that some CAOs report with other senior administrators may be indicative of the leadership style and tone set by the president.

The attention to mentoring and leadership development occurring in universities today represents a healthy trend, but whether it will compensate for structural factors that reduce diversity in the CAO ranks is an open question. At least at research universities, it is difficult for me to envision much change in the prevailing pattern of hiring CAOs from the ranks of the tenured faculty. A CAO needs to understand the work of the faculty, their values, and the incentives that drive their performance. This is most easily achieved through experience. Lack of diversity at the professorial level is a function of both personal and institutional factors, but solving the diversity problem for CAOs will require solving it for professors. This is a challenge beyond the scope of the CAO Census.

UNDERSTANDING A LACK OF CAO INTEREST IN THE PRESIDENCY (RISA PALM)

This is a very interesting presentation of data about chief academic officers from 1,715 varied universities and colleges. A 50-item questionnaire asked about satisfaction in the position, primary duties and institutional responsibilities, issues that are particularly frustrating or challenging, career history, educational background, career aspirations, and demographic information. The data are thoroughly cross-tabulated and summarized in the ACE report. In addition, the study compares responses from the CAOs with those of college and university presidents, based on a separate survey conducted by the ACE in 2006. CAOs and presidents were compared on the basis of age, gender, professional background and experience, length of time in position, and how they spend their time in their current positions.

Three of the survey findings are of particular interest. First, the survey showed that although the position of chief academic officer is pivotal in training individuals to be college or university presidents, the activities of the chief academic officer are often unrelated to the kind of tasks that engage a president. Chief academic officers reported

spending most of their time promoting academic quality, setting the academic vision of the institution, leading change, and ensuring student success. Few chief academic officers reported working on fund-raising, alumni relations, and economic development. In some ways, the academic dean, particularly of large colleges such as arts and sciences, business or medicine, has a role more like that of president than does the provost. This suggests that while the position of chief academic officer gives a broad-based campus experience, it does not impart the skills in external relations that are needed to succeed in the presidency. This disconnect may work well when the president and the provost take complementary roles in the institution, and the CAO has no intention of becoming a president. However, the lack of role overlap suggests a need for formal presidential training for those CAOs who do want to pursue a presidency.

Second, many of the chief academic officers have no intention of becoming college or university presidents. First-time presidents have frequently been chief academic officers immediately before taking on the presidency: yet the majority of chief academic officers either have no intention of becoming presidents (45%) or are undecided (25%). The primary reason that CAOs do not want to become presidents is the nature of the work (66% gave this response). The chief academic officer has a very close-up view of what life is like for a college or university president, and the reluctance of so many to pursue that next step is an indicator of the difficulty and pressures associated with the job of university or college president. Another cause for this reluctance is the fact that the presidency is almost a kind of career change, from a position where responsibilities are internal and more faculty oriented—academic quality, curriculum, student success and faculty development—to one where responsibilities are more corporate—such as interacting and working with trustees, alumni and legislative bodies and fund-raising, as well as budget and financial management.

The third finding of particular interest is the fact that although all of the respondents were “chief academic officers,” their professional backgrounds and even the nature of their jobs vary widely by institutional type. For example, overall most CAOs have earned their highest degrees in education or higher education. However, this is the top field of study only for CAOs at associate degree-granting institutions (e.g., community colleges). For doctoral granting institutions, most CAOs are from the social sciences, then the physical/natural sciences and then the humanities/fine arts. Similarly, while 50% of the chief academic officers in associate degree-granting institutions are women, the proportion is only 32% in doctoral-granting institutions. Almost half of the CAOs in doctoral-granting institution were formerly deans of academic colleges (48%), while in baccalaureate-granting institutions, only 18% of the CAOs held such positions.

Perhaps more important were the differences among institutions in the way CAOs spent their time. In doctoral granting institutions 62% spent moderate-to-significant time in fund-raising, while in associate institutions only 16% were engaged in this type of external activity. At both masters and doctoral-granting institutions, the most time-consuming activity for the CAO was supervising and managing personnel including deans. At baccalaureate, associate and special focus institutions, curriculum and academic programs was the activity that was most time-consuming. Strategic planning and budget/financial management also consumed much of the CAO’s time in doctoral-granting institutions, while accountability, accreditation and assessment were more time-consuming in all four of the other sectors. Thus, the chief academic officer’s role is far more like that of president in a doctoral-grant institution than in other sectors, and, perhaps not surprisingly, it is the CAOs from this sector that are more likely to move directly to presidencies (31% from doctoral-granting as opposed to 16% from baccalaureate and 8% from special focus institutions).

The survey instrument was designed by a working group of chief academic officers, pre-tested, and then administered to a wide range of academic officers. The report does not indicate that earlier research (e.g., Anderson, Murray and Olivarez, 2002; Lucido, 2000; Ferren and Stanton, 2004; Martin and Samuels, 1997; Mech, 1997) was explicitly consulted in developing hypotheses around which a survey instrument could be designed. A review of this literature and hypotheses tested therein would be a useful basis of comparison with the current empirical data, and is suggested as a future project.

AGE, GENERATIONAL AND GENDER CONSIDERATIONS (MICHAEL SMYER)

I am a new provost in my first year. I came to this position after a career that combined administrative roles and research in the psychology of adult development and aging, most recently as co-director of the Sloan Center on Aging & Work at Boston College. Both elements—my status as a novice provost and my experience in the field of gerontology—shape this commentary.

The United States is an aging country in an aging world (United Nations, 2007.) This basic demographic fact affects everything from broad scale social programs like Medicare and Social Security to individual ethical decisions at the frontiers of biotechnology and genetic interventions. These demographic trends also affect the structure and process of work in contemporary society, including academic administration (Pitt-Catsouphes & Hudson, 2007.)

The results of this important survey illustrate several larger themes about aging and work in the United States and aging in academe.

- First, the difference between age-related and generational concerns. Are some of the themes of these chief academic officers related to normal developmental processes in middle and late adulthood? Are some of the key elements related to the specific generation of our respondents? Does it matter?
- Second, the serious challenge of “lost knowledge.” When CAOs retire, they often take with them important “tacit knowledge” of how things are done in their setting. Given the demographics of Presidents and CAOs, what can higher education institutions do to be ready for this challenge?
- Third, gender differences in CAO experiences and trajectories. Men and women CAOs are significantly different in their current family structures and care-giving responsibilities. This raises important questions about integrating work and family issues across a career in academic administration.

We are used to discussing generational issues in higher education—student generations. However, this sample of CAOs encompasses members of at least three generations and individuals at different points in their own life courses—19% are between the ages of 31-50, neatly combining members of Gen X and late Baby Boomers; 47% are between the ages of 51-60, all members of the Baby Boomer generation; and 33% are 61 or older, placing them in the Traditionalists generation (see Dobbs et al., for more information on these categories). These generation and life-stage differences may affect CAO views of work and retirement. For example, the Families and Work Institute (2004) reported that 22% of Boomers are work-centric, compared with 12-13% of other generations. (Some may argue, however, that any CAO, regardless of generation, is work-centric!) These generational differences may also affect CAOs subsequent career plans.

The age distribution also reminds us that the meanings of work shift across the life-span from a goal orientation to focusing on time-left-at work (Smyer, Besen, & Pitt-Catsouphes, 2008; Smyer & Pitt-Catsouphes, 2007). This is part of a larger developmental process of shifting from how much time has passed to how much time is left (Carstensen, 2006). In addition, mid-career and late-career leaders' views may reflect a self-assessment of their own changing physical, cognitive, social and emotional abilities (Sterns & Huyck, 2001.)

Thus, from a generational perspective or an individual perspective, each institution must attend to the various meanings of work for its CAO. This attention leads logically to a concern about succession planning.

This CAO survey focused on career plans of CAOs, particularly the likelihood of seeking a presidency. The rationale for this concern is clear: “Given that 49 percent of current presidents are aged 61 or older, higher education likely faces a sizeable leadership transition and many of the most likely candidates to fill those positions are either uninterested or uncertain about their future plans” (Eckel, et al., 2009.)

Higher education faces the challenge of “lost knowledge”: “the decreased capacity for effective action or decision making in a specific function, team or role” (DeLong, 2004.) Almost 40% of CAOs indicated that their predecessors either retired or returned to the faculty, taking with them explicit and tacit knowledge about how to move organizations ahead. At the same time, current CAOs raise serious concerns about possible barriers to assuming a presidency—concerns about the nature of the work itself and concerns that the nature of the search processes.

A recurrent finding is that employees of all ages, but especially older workers prefer flexible work arrangements that allow them to use their skills in novel ways without the full scope of responsibility or burden in earlier roles (Pitt-Catsouphes & Smyer, 2006; Pitt-Catsouphes et al., 2009)—arrangements that vary the time, place or responsibilities of work. It may be that the 13% of former CAOs who moved into administrative positions other than CAO or president found roles that allowed the institution to leverage their experience and expertise, while allowing greater flexibility in schedule and responsibilities. These arrangements will be increasingly important in an aging workforce.

Other CAOs raised concerns about the search process itself. Approximately a third of CAOs age 61 or older expressed these concerns. It may be that these CAOs are implicitly concerned about ageism in search committees—differential perspectives on the value and potential of older candidates. Recent findings suggest that employers and co-workers have a complex set of opinions about older employees. On one hand, they value their experience, loyalty, and social and professional networks. On the other hand, they may perceive them as less attuned to technological change and less personally flexible (James et. al., 2007.) With 80% of the CAO census ages 50 and above, it may be important for presidential search committees to assess their starting assumptions about age, aging, and experience as they review potential candidates.

The survey data suggest significant differences in balancing the challenges of families, caregiving and career advancement. For example, women CAOs have lower rates of marriage, higher rates of divorce, and higher rates of caring for others than do their male counterparts.

In part, the experience of these CAOs—both men and women—reflect larger patterns of caregiving in our aging society. It is estimated that there are 44 million caregivers in the United States providing care for adults 18 and over; this is approximately 21% of the adult population serving as caregivers (Pandya, 2005.) More than half of these caregivers are currently working or have worked while providing care. Approximately 50% of workers aged 50 and above have children in their household (Sweet & Joggerst, 2008.) Thus, these CAOs at mid-life and beyond are not experiencing the “empty nest”; instead, they are facing the “cluttered nest” (Putney et al., 2007) with implications for both family functioning and work.

Forty percent of CAOs are women, while 23% of presidents are women. If we are to tap this substantial talent pool, our approaches to careers must take into account different patterns of blending work and family demands across life. This may require shifting from a career path to a career lattice approach (Benko & Weisberg, 2007), building in expectations of flexible work arrangements for both women and men caregivers at different stages of family responsibility.

A final observation—the CAO survey data were gathered in March, 2008, before the current economic challenges were being so directly felt on campuses. The time of measurement often affects the validity of survey findings. At the very least, we might ask how CAO views might be different a year later. For example, this sample of CAOs then listed budgeting/financial management sixth on their top uses of time. Would they give it the same ranking now? How would the current economic climate affect their satisfaction with their roles, their family care-giving patterns, their retirement plans and their career projections? At the very least, the survey data provide a valuable benchmark of perceptions and plans before the current economic challenges affected each campus and its leadership.

CONCLUSION

The CAO Census: A National Profile of Chief Academic Officers addresses a number of issues important to those concerned about higher education and its future leadership. It documents relatively low representation of women and minorities in CAO positions, particularly at doctoral degree-granting institutions. It highlights the key challenges encountered by CAOs and the conflicting priorities they face from their constituencies. And it discusses the career paths of CAOs, both into the CAO position and from the CAO position. The latter is particularly important as the population of college and university presidents continues to age. CAO is the most common previous position among presidents, but most current CAOs are not interested in pursuing the presidency. This may be due to a lack of desire given the demands CAOs perceive as inherent in a president's job. Personal considerations are also a factor for many. However, given that the responsibilities of CAOs and presidents often do not overlap, many CAOs may feel ill-prepared for a presidential position. The continued health and vitality of the American higher education system depend on how such issues are addressed.

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