

Community colleges are vital part of higher education

The changing profile of Kansas trustees

By Paul Parker
and
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Most everyone agrees that one of the distinguishing features of public community college education is the great amount of local control. In general, control of the public community college has been delegated to local boards of trustees. Yet, prior to 1968 research concerned with investigating the characteristics of higher education's newest governing body, the community college board of trustees, was limited. However, within the past decade several significant national studies, such as Rodney T. Hartnett's "College and University Trustees: Their Background, Roles, and Educational Attitudes" (Educational Testing Service, Princeton, New Jersey, 1969), Gale Grafe's "The Trustee Profile of 1976" (Association of Community College Trustees, Washington, D.C., 1976), Sandra L. Drake's "A Study of Community and Junior College Boards of Trustees" (American Association of Community and Junior College, Washington, D.C. 1977), along with a few local studies, such as Paul W. Parker's "Profile of the Kansas Trustees" (Community and Junior College Journal, April 1970, Pages 58-70), have made available a

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great deal of information concerning who trustees are, what they do, and the impact of their actions on the mission of the college.

Community colleges are a vital and significant part of Kansas higher education. Beginning in 1965 with the passage of House Bill 893, an act known as the "Community Junior College Act," Kansas established a state system of community junior college districts and provided that these districts would be governed by a local board of six members composed of persons elected from the college district.

Recognizing the importance of this commitment to local control, and in view of the relationship existing between who trustees are and the impact of their actions on the development of the community college system, a study was conducted during the academic year of 1968-69. That study was undertaken to gather a body of comprehensive data concerning selected personal characteristics and background information of Kansas community college trustees.

The findings of the 1968-69 study indicated that the 'typical' Kansas community college trustee was a white male in his middle forties, married, with three children, two sisters and two brothers. He was well educated and financially successful (more than half had earned at least a baccalaureate degree and at least half had annual incomes exceeding \$16,500). He was engaged in one of four occupational classifications: professional (44 percent), managerial-executive-governmental (21 percent), small business-owner or partner (20 percent), and farmer (14 percent). He had limited experience as a trustee member. He was a native of Kansas.¹

Within the past decade, a period of intense interest in the characteristics, programs, and progress of community colleges, Kansas has developed an excellent system of community colleges. Also, during this period of growth and development characteristic changes of great significance have occurred in Kansas community colleges. These developments raise some interesting questions concerning the characteristics of the governing board—while the colleges have changed has there been a corresponding change in trustee membership? In other words, who are the people that compose our current board of trustees? Are current Kansas boards of trustees similar in their composition to the board members of 1969? Are there any significant differences between the 1969 and 1979 trustees?

For an answer to some of these questions, the authors conducted a study during the Spring of 1979. The population for the study consisted of the 114 trustees of the 19 Kansas public community college districts. In response to a questionnaire sent to these trustee members, 81 (71 percent) usable returns were received.

The study compared the responses of the 1979 trustees with those of the 1969 trustees by applying the chi-square technique. This article focuses on approximately one-third of the major items in the questionnaire. The majority of these items showed no significant difference between the 1969 and 1979 trustees.

However, some significant shifts have occurred since 1969 in the characteristics of persons who occupy the position of Kansas community college trustee. Significant differences at the .01 probability level were attained for age, educational background, income and years of expe-

rience as a trustee member. For instance, the typical trustee today is more likely to be over 51, to have more experience as a trustee member, have a higher medium income, and is more likely to have attained a higher level of educational achievement. And, although not typical or statistically significant, the probability of the trustee member being female has increased.

Age and Sex Distribution

The age distribution in 1979 indicated that the age range of trustee members had increased significantly. In 1979 there were fewer younger trustees and more older trustees than in 1969. The percentage of trustees under 40 years of age decreased from 22 percent to 12 percent, and the percentage of trustees over age 50 increased from 36 percent to over 51 percent. The median age of trustee members in 1969 was 46 years, in 1979 the median age was 52.

The number of women serving on Kansas boards of trustees is increasing (14 in 1979 as compared to 8 in 1969). Although there has been a 75 percent increase in trustee membership by women over the past 10 years, women still constitute a minority membership on governing boards as less than 15 percent of the respondents were women, and more than 85 percent were men.

Occupational Classification

No dramatic shifts have occurred over the past 10 years in the occupational classification of Kansas trustees. In 1979 four occupational classifications accounted for 83 percent of trustee members: professional with 28 percent (33 percent in 1969), managerial with 21 percent (21 percent in 1969), and sales, housewife, retired with 18 percent (9 percent in 1969). Agricultural related occupations ranked fourth with 16 percent in 1979, and third in 1969 with 14 percent.

Experiences as Trustees

Both studies investigated the extent of trustees experience in two categories: (a) years of service as a community college trustee member, and (b) total years of service as a board member-college trustee, and school boards. Two significant changes have occurred since 1969 in trustees experience. First, the percentage of trustee with three years or less of service as a trustee member in 1969 (71 percent) was approximately two times greater than the percentage of trustee with that limited number of

years service in 1979 (39 percent). Second, the number and percentage of trustees with four or more years of service in 1979 (49-61 percent) is nearly twice as great as the number and over twice as great as the percentage reported in 1969 (24-29 percent).

Educational Background and Income

College graduates at the baccalaureate degree level or higher, now hold 78 percent of the trustee positions in Kansas, as compared to 63 percent in 1969. The major change occurred since 1969 in those holding the baccalaureate degree, 45 percent in 1979, slightly less than 31 percent in 1969.

The median income of the respondents in 1979 was slightly over \$27,310, as compared to the median income range of slightly over \$16,500 in 1969. In general, it appears that in 1979 Kansas trustee's are significantly different in income than their 1969 counterpart. However, two factors need to be considered when analyzing the apparent gain: the increase in the cost of living index and the increase used in the various income ranges for the 1979 study.

In conclusion, Kansas citizens are still continuing to elect to membership on community college boards of trustees men and women who are relatively young, well educated, and financially successful. In 1979 the 'typical' Kansas community college trustee was a white male in his early fifties, married, with two children. He was well educated (78 percent had the baccalaureate degree or higher). He was financially successful (at least half had annual incomes exceeding \$27,310). He was engaged in one of four occupational classifications: Professional (28 percent), managerial (21 percent), agricultural (16 percent) and sales, housewife, retired (18 percent). He had increased experience as a trustee member. He was native of Kansas. He was significantly different than his counterpart of 1969 in four areas: age, educational background, income and years of experience as a trustee member.

FOOTNOTES

1. Paul W. Parker, "Profile of the Kansas Trustee," *Community and Junior College Journal*. (April, 1970) pp. 58-70.