



# THE ROGUE TRUSTEE

---

*The Elephant in the Room*

TERRY O'BANION

*League for Innovation in the Community College*

With support from **WebStudy**  
Learning Virtually Anywhere

The League for Innovation in the Community College is an international organization dedicated to catalyzing the community college movement. The League hosts conferences and institutes, develops web resources, conducts research, produces publications, provides services, and leads projects and initiatives with more than 900 member colleges, 160 corporate partners, and a host of other government and nonprofit agencies in a continuing effort to make a positive difference for students and communities. Information about the League and its activities is available at [www.league.org](http://www.league.org).

The opinions expressed in this book are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the League for Innovation in the Community College or WebStudy, Inc.

The League gratefully acknowledges the generous support of WebStudy, Inc., in the publication of *The Rogue Trustee: The Elephant in the Room*.

©2009 League for Innovation in the Community College

All rights reserved. No part of this project may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including, without limitation, photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission.

Requests for permission should be sent to  
Publications

League for Innovation in the Community College  
4505 E. Chandler Boulevard, Suite 250

Phoenix, AZ 85048

Email: [publications@league.org](mailto:publications@league.org)

Fax: (480) 705-8201

Printed in the United States of America  
ISBN 978-1-931300-56-8



This publication is available in digital form through the League's iStream,  
[www.league.org/istream](http://www.league.org/istream).

*Elephant Graphic, HMS Creative, Inc.*  
*Book Design, Ridgeline Design Studio*

## Contents

---

Acknowledgments | 4

Foreword | 5

*Bill J. Priest, Chancellor Emeritus, Dallas County Community College District*

Preface | 6

**CHAPTER ONE** | The Elephant in the Room | 9

**CHAPTER TWO** | The Behavior of Rogue Trustees | 17

**CHAPTER THREE** | What Motivates the Rogue Trustee? | 33

**CHAPTER FOUR** | Damage Caused by the Rogue Trustee | 51

**CHAPTER FIVE** | Strategies to Repair the Damage | 67

**CHAPTER SIX** | Concluding Impressions and Observations | 95

Epilogue | 100

References | 102

Appendix A | 103

Appendix B | 104

## Acknowledgments

---

**I AM DEEPLY INDEBTED** to the following friends and colleagues:

- To Don Berz, Executive Vice President (Retired), Chaffey College, California, and currently Executive Vice President of Academic Affairs, Long Beach City College, California, for his strong support in this effort, for the recommendations of potential presidents and chancellors, and for the many resources and contacts he provided.
- To Terry Kelly, Chancellor Emeritus, Alamo Community College District, Texas, and Charles Spence, Chancellor (Retired), Contra Costa Community College District, California, for their careful and insightful critique of the draft manuscript.
- To Cindra Smith, Director of Educational Services, Community College League of California (Retired), and Consultant on Board Development and Leadership, who served as my content anchor on all things related to community college boards.
- To Ruth Shaw, President and CEO (retired), Duke Power Company, and former president of Central Piedmont Community College, North Carolina, and El Centro College of the Dallas County Community College District, Texas, for her formidable skills with language and her wisdom regarding the challenges of serving on public boards.
- To Gisele Larose and WebStudy, Inc., for their generous support of this publication.
- And finally, to the 59 presidents and chancellors who are the real authors of this work.

## Foreword

---

**I AM DELIGHTED** to make some comments about this extraordinary work by my friend and colleague, Terry O'Banion. Dr. O'Banion is widely known as a leader and expert in the field of community college education. During his distinguished career, he has excelled as a teacher, writer, speaker, administrator, and consultant. In *The Rogue Trustee*, he has tackled the sensitive area of troublesome and often malicious board members whose actions can be destructive to colleges, faculties, administrators, students, and the communities they serve.

Through the personal experiences of fifty-nine college presidents and chancellors and extensive research into behaviors, motivations, and damage caused by rogue trustees, O'Banion has written a cohesive book which makes a significant contribution to an important but subterranean issue. The book is readable, insightful, and practical, suggesting a variety of tested means for dealing with rogues. I believe this book is destined to become a useful manual, a primer, so to speak, to help community college trustees and presidents who must deal with these destructive outliers on community college boards.

Congratulations on an engaging work!

— *Bill J. Priest, Chancellor Emeritus  
Dallas County Community College District*

## Preface

**THIS STUDY HAS BEEN THE MOST CHALLENGING** project I have undertaken in my 48 years of work in the community college—and one of the most satisfying. It has been an intriguing journey through the experiences of 59 community college chief executive officers (CEOs) who have shared personal accounts of their encounters with rogue trustees. (Throughout this book I have used the terms CEO, president, and chancellor interchangeably; all refer to the key administrator who reports directly to the board of trustees.) I believe that, until now, this has been fairly uncharted territory. Because these presidents and chancellors were willing to share their stories, we now have a clearer understanding of the enormous difficulties they have faced and the severe damage rogue trustees can do to our colleges, our communities, and our colleagues.

Fortunately, the overwhelming majority of community college trustees are exceptional community leaders, elected and appointed to champion the community college mission for the community and students they represent. These local trustees, serving as the guardians of their local community colleges, have helped create the most dynamic and innovative system of colleges in the world. Occasionally, a trustee pursues a path other than serving for the greater good, and sometimes that trustee becomes a challenge, a rogue, who runs roughshod over the norms and standards expected of community leaders. These trustees create enormous problems for the institution, for other trustees, for the college CEO, and for the community. This book is designed to assist those in the direct line of fire to respond to and resolve the issue of the rogue trustee.

The section on the **Behavior of Rogue Trustees** opens the door on issues long whispered about but never catalogued in quite this manner. Here the mean spiritedness of the rogue trustee who bullies, intimidates, and slanders all those in his or her path is revealed for all to examine in the words and descriptions of the presidents who were often the primary targets. Incidentally, these summaries and the quotes have had to be scrubbed and softened to ensure confidentiality; some readers would not believe these behaviors had occurred if they could read the excesses described in the original documents.

**What Motivates the Rogue Trustee?** considers possible reasons for the bizarre and inappropriate behaviors of rogue trustees. Although such analysis is better left to trained psychologists, these presidents did not hesitate to label and describe the motivations. They seemed quite sure of the forces that drive these rogue trustees to action, and since behavior is the

one visible means of determining motivation for the lay person, they linked behavior and motivation in their descriptions.

The section on **Damage Caused by the Rogue Trustee** examines the damage to the college; the president; the board chair; the other trustees; and the staff, faculty, and students—and the reports are alarming. In few cases can one person cause so much damage to so many and get away with it. Everyone suffers when a rogue trustee is in the mix; but individuals affected by the rogue trustee can leave the battlefield. The college cannot escape the war zone; it is defenseless against the barrage. In the final analysis, it is the students who suffer the collateral damage.

Although more than half a dozen of the presidents in this study lost their jobs as a direct result of a rogue trustee, most survived, and some even prevailed to the point that the rogue was sent packing. In the section on **Strategies to Repair the Damage** they share their plans and their actions for dealing with a rogue trustee. Presidents who have not yet had to deal with a rogue trustee should review these strategies and implement those that might help prevent the rise of a rogue on their board. Presidents who are currently dealing with a rogue trustee should review these strategies to determine which might apply in their situation. One strategy that might be useful to both groups of presidents is to distribute this document to every member of the board and then convene a retreat to examine and consider the relevancy of the ideas to the college and its board.

In the final section, **Concluding Impressions and Observations**, I have briefly summarized some general perceptions about the extent and nature of the issue of the rogue trustee. Rogue trustees appear to be on the increase. Hopefully, this work will help retard their advance.

— Terry O'Banion  
April 2009

## The Elephant in the Room

**ROGUE TRUSTEES RUN ROUGHSHOD** over the norms and standards of behavior expected of public officials appointed or elected to office. They tend to trample over the ideas and cautions of the CEO, the trustee chair, and member trustees. They place their own interests over the interests of the college. They violate written and unwritten codes of conduct. They often make inappropriate alliances with faculty, staff, and other trustees. They recommend and support policies that are not in the best interests of the institution. They consume an inordinate amount of staff and meeting time. They know how to get attention, to appeal to the base elements in others, and to manipulate individuals and situations to their advantage. Most rogue trustees are quite bright and articulate; some are mentally unbalanced. They are sometimes loners, exiled from the herd, but they also create alliances with others to carry out their agenda. They are high maintenance. They tend to poison the culture of the college instead of helping to create a sense of community, collaboration, innovation, and common values. They become the catalyst for increased defensiveness, paranoia, subterfuge, and fear. In short, they cause enormous damage. The rogue trustee is the elephant in the room, creating an ever-widening circle of frustration and destruction for anything in its path.

— Terry O'Banion

**THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE AND THE LAY BOARD** are both American social inventions that illustrate democracy in action. The community college is an expression of access and opportunity; the lay board is an expression of citizen responsibility for oversight and representation. They are symbiotic concepts in which the lay board is charged with assuring that the community college carries out its mission and goals. Each depends on the other for its success.

In the United States, community colleges are governed by boards of trustees either elected or appointed. According to data compiled by the Association of Community College Trustees and reported by Smith, Piland, and Boggs (2001), locally elected boards are the norm in 13 states; boards appointed by the governor, by local leaders, or by a mix of the two are the norm in 19 states. In 4 states boards are selected by a mix of appointees and elected officials (p. 3). In all other states the trustees are advisory or colleges are governed by a statewide entity. Mellow and Heelan (2008) noted that there are approximately 6,500 trustees serving over 600 community colleges that have either locally elected or appointed boards. (p.83)

Overwhelmingly, community college trustees are extraordinary civil servants working for the common good. In their seminal study on the political nature of community college trustees, Smith et al. (2001) point out:

Ideally, trustees are qualified lay people who fulfill their responsibility for governing the college unencumbered by single interests or agendas. They are able to build strong relationships with key constituents, civic leaders, elected officials, and other policy makers. They weigh various influences in the environment and make decisions that serve the public good. (p. 1)

In the final section of this important study about the political motivations and actions of community college trustees, Smith et al. (2001) conclude:

Overall, the results of the survey paint a healthy picture for trustee governance of America's community colleges. Trustees, whether appointed or elected, Republican or Democrat, are strongly motivated by the opportunity to provide service to their communities and the colleges and to improve programs for students. They have track records of prior community leadership. And they

feel most accountable to the citizens of the college region and to current students at the colleges. (p. 24)

In recent years, however, there is a rising tide of frustration with boards as they or certain of their members do not place the common good as their highest priority. Chait, Ryan, and Taylor (2005) point out that, “Frustration with boards is so chronic and widespread that *board* and *troubled board* have become almost interchangeable” (p. 11). There are numerous accounts of dysfunctional boards and a growing cottage industry of consultants called in to help address issues created by these boards. Accrediting commissions have been alerted to this growing problem and are struggling to design appropriate interventions to help colleges. *While there is undoubtedly a relation between rogue trustees and dysfunctional boards, this book is not about difficult or dysfunctional boards.*

There have always been individual trustees who have been a challenge to the college president and to other members of the board. There is the reformer trustee who has a legitimate agenda to make changes in the college but who works within the norms and boundaries to achieve objectives that are in the best interests of the college. There are single-agenda trustees who frustrate other stakeholders because they frame their entire perspective through the lens of the special agenda they champion. Some trustees represent special constituencies and try to move the board to favorable policies and actions that benefit these constituencies—often to the detriment of the common good. And there are maverick trustees who do not work well with the other trustees. In his acceptance speech in Minneapolis for the Republican nomination for the presidency on September 4, 2008, John McCain defined the maverick “as a person who marches to the sound of his own drum.” Maverick trustees may go their own way, but they do not destroy the college. *This book is not about reformer, maverick, or difficult trustees.*

There are also rogue community college presidents who create chaos and who damage their institutions. Surprisingly, some of these presidents are actually employed time and again as CEOs and have left a trail of destruction across a number of colleges in a number of states. These presidents are often incompetent or arrogant—or both. The few who demonstrate pathological tendencies are more easily spotted and do not last long. These kinds of presidents are likely to create tensions and problems that require strong reaction from trustees—reactions these presidents, as a defensive cover, might label roguish. There is no evidence, however, in the reports collected for this study, that roguish presidents are calling the kettle black by labeling their trustee adversaries as rogues. The presidents in this study have provided supporting documents from trustee chairs, other trustees, and staff

and faculty leaders to confirm their stories; newspaper stories, accreditation reports, and other presidents also confirm the validity of these reports. *This book is not about rogue presidents.*

## THE ROGUE TRUSTEE

*This book is about the rogue trustee.* The idea of the rogue as an animal, person, or state behaving in ways destructive to a special community can be applied in many contexts. It is particularly relevant to a number of trustees who serve on the governing boards of the nation’s community colleges. Among community college leaders, there are whispered tales of the bizarre actions of an occasional trustee who creates havoc for the institution, the CEO, and the other members of the board. This is a closeted issue in education that has not been thoroughly aired because of fears of retribution. The number and impact of rogue trustees in community colleges are unknown. The extent they are present in governing boards in other institutions of higher education and in K-12 systems is unknown. What college leaders can do to correct the situation has not been codified and shared. This book is an attempt to increase awareness regarding the issue of the rogue trustee and to begin a discussion of how the issue can be resolved—if it can be resolved.

---

Among community college leaders, there are whispered tales  
of the bizarre actions of an occasional trustee  
who creates havoc for the institution, the CEO,  
and the other members of the board.

---

The rogue as an animal—especially the idea of the rogue elephant—is a commonly understood concept. Siebert (2006) describes the rogue elephant as a “young male that has made an overly strong power play against the dominant male of his herd and been banished, sometimes permanently” (p. 1). He also describes behaviors of rogue elephants noting they attack villages with intelligent measures like blocking escape routes and pinning down humans before goring them to death; and display psychological traits previously observed only in people. There are also “rogue cops” who step outside the law, as featured in the 1954 movie *Rogue Cop* starring Robert Taylor, Janet Leigh, and George Raft. In recent years foreign policy experts have dubbed as “rogue states” those nations such as North Korea, Iran, and Libya that operate outside the bounds of international norms. The rogue elephant, the rogue cop, and the rogue state all operate outside the norms of standard behavior—and they all do enormous damage.

Loosely based on the concepts of the rogue elephant, the rogue cop, and the rogue state, the following description of the rogue trustee was created for this study:

*Rogue trustees run roughshod over the norms and standards of behavior expected of public officials appointed or elected to office. They tend to trample over the ideas and cautions of the CEO, the trustee chair, and member trustees. They place their own interests over the interests of the college. They violate written and unwritten codes of conduct. They often make inappropriate alliances with faculty, staff, and other trustees. They recommend and support policies that are not in the best interests of the institution. They consume an inordinate amount of staff and meeting time. They know how to get attention, to appeal to the base elements in others, and to manipulate individuals and situations to their advantage. Most rogue trustees are quite bright and articulate; some are mentally unbalanced. They are sometimes loners, exiled from the herd, but they also create alliances with others to carry out their agenda. They are high maintenance. They tend to poison the culture of the college instead of helping to create a sense of community, collaboration, innovation, and common values. They become the catalyst for increased defensiveness, paranoia, subterfuge, and fear. In short, they cause enormous damage. The rogue trustee is the elephant in the room, creating an ever-widening circle of frustration and destruction for anything in its path. Because of the fear of retribution and the forces of intimidation, other trustees and presidents have been reluctant to call attention to this destructive force.*

This description of the rogue trustee applies to a specific individual who is generally recognized by all other stakeholders as a key and major problem for the college. There are many dysfunctional boards, there are occasions when any one trustee can act out of bounds, and there are certainly degrees of behavior that make it tempting to label the worst offenders as rogues. In my communication with 59 presidents who were interviewed or who provided written responses for this study, there was no hesitation in identifying the rogue trustees who fit this description.

## STUDYING THE ROGUE TRUSTEE

This is not a study framed in traditional research design. It is an impressionistic study, perhaps closest to a traditional phenomenological study. Moustakas (1994) has noted that the goal of phenomenological research is “to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. From the individual descriptions general or universal meanings are derived, in other words the essences or structures of the experience.” (p.13) I am not a naïve observer of the community college. I have worked in

community colleges for 48 years, have written 12 books and over 150 articles on the community college, and have consulted in over 800 community colleges—in many cases with boards of trustees. My impressions are couched in my experience as I reviewed and analyzed the experiences of presidents who shared their encounters with rogue trustees.

For over three decades I have kept a folder labeled “The Rogue Trustee” in my to-do file. I started the file as the result of a story I heard Bill Priest, founding chancellor of the Dallas County Community College District, tell a small group of friends. He described in detail a trustee he had worked with in his early years in California who was a constant thorn in his side. The trustee was unreasonable, caused havoc in board sessions and throughout the college, and had as a goal the dismissal of the CEO. In part, the trustee succeeded because Bill indicated this trustee was one of the reasons he left his home in California to begin a new career in Texas—a great loss for California, a great plus for Texas. I was struck by this story because I thought that if a trustee could run Bill Priest off, there must be a dynamic at play here that would be worth examining. Bill Priest was the brightest, toughest, most effective community college CEO of his generation—perhaps of any generation—and I could not imagine a situation in which he did not come out the winner. Thus was born the idea of the rogue trustee, packed away in a folder on my to-do list.

In the spring of 2008, I had lunch with an old friend who stopped in Palm Springs, California, where I live. He was a retired president, and as we reminisced about our work in the community college, I mentioned the rogue trustee idea, and he began telling me a horror story of his experience with such a trustee. I asked him if he would be comfortable writing about this part of his career, and a few days later I received a ten-page paper detailing his story. For him, writing the paper was a cathartic experience; for me, it was the stimulus I needed to explore this topic more thoroughly. I knew at that point that I had tapped in to a very significant issue.

Over the next few weeks I emailed several presidents, asking if they had ever had a rogue trustee on their board. The response was immediate and intense. Not only did a number of them have experiences with rogue trustees, a number of them identified other presidents who had dealt with rogue trustees. I assured every contact that our communication, including their own stories and their recommendations of others, would be absolutely confidential.

That summer, I evolved a system of communication to gather information on the rogue trustee project. I created a description of the rogue trustee (see page 12) and asked for feedback from about a dozen presidents and consultants who work with trustees. I also created a series of questions

(Appendix A) regarding the president's experience with rogue trustees, including questions about rogue trustee behavior, motivation, damage, and actions taken to address these issues. I contacted dozens of presidents across the country and asked them to respond to the questions if they had worked with a trustee who fit the description. Most presidents sent written responses; a few preferred phone interviews. With every contact I stressed the confidentiality of our interactions and assured those providing information that I would send them a final draft of the work for their review and approval.

By the late fall I had interviewed by phone or had received written responses to my questions from 59 presidents representing 16 states. Responses were organized around the four key themes: behavior, motivation, damage, and actions taken. For example, I read all responses regarding behavior to create categories of behavior such as threatening or criticizing staff or influencing the awarding of contracts. In a second reading, rough tallies were made of the number of times these behaviors were mentioned by the presidents. The behaviors were then placed in priority order (Table 1, page 18); a little more than half the presidents mentioned those at the top of the list; only 5 mentioned those at the bottom. These behaviors were then described with quotes cited for the first eight to illustrate how presidents referenced them. This same approach in organizing responses was used in the other key themes of motivation, damage, and actions taken.

These reports, and the insights from a number of leading consultants who work with trustees, provided the information on which this book was written. The final draft was sent for review and critique to all 59 presidents to ensure I had met the standards of confidentiality and to enlist their assistance in presenting an accurate picture of a complex and potentially volatile issue. In addition, I asked 34 presidents for specific approval to use 46 long quotes, usually a paragraph, or a summary paragraph I created from their reports. Approval was granted in every case.

Obviously, this approach has limitations.

1. The study is clearly biased in favor of the president's point of view since only presidents were contacted to tell their side of the story. It would be helpful to gather information from the perspective of the rogue trustee, trustee chairs, other trustees, and college staff involved, but such an approach is beyond the scope of this effort and would make confidentiality impossible.
2. Absolute confidentiality of president names and college names is required for this project because of the fear of litigation and retribution. Such confidentiality makes it impossible to check the validity of the information and to check on the reliability of the author in recording interviews and interpreting the written reports.

3. The requirements of confidentiality also strongly influence and limit another aspect of this study. The most bizarre, outrageous, and damaging behaviors of rogue trustees could not be described because such descriptions could reveal players and location. Such behaviors often become the hallmarks of rogue trustees easily identified by other trustees and by college staff. Therefore, almost all quotes in this book are anonymous; all quotes not referenced are the actual words of presidents, edited for confidentiality, but kept anonymous for obvious reasons. All quotes from presidents are italicized.
4. Traditional approaches to sampling were not followed. The author invited presidents in about 20 states to recommend presidents who had experienced rogue trustees. The presidents who were recommended were invited to participate, and the great majority chose to do so. A number of the participating presidents also recommended other presidents who were contacted. The author did attempt to solicit participation from an equal number of states where trustees are appointed and elected; 9 states with elected boards were included, 7 states with appointed boards were included. In the group of 59 presidents, 36 worked with boards that were elected and 23 worked with boards that were appointed.



## The Behavior of Rogue Trustees

**IF THE BEHAVIORS AND ACTIONS OF ROGUE TRUSTEES** could be reported in detail, they would make a riveting novel illustrating the adage that truth is stranger than fiction. Bizarre would be almost a compliment as a descriptor for some of the behavior of some of the rogues described by presidents for this study. There are numerous tales of dishonesty, subterfuge, intimidation, and graft on the part of these trustees. Fear, anger, frustration, and disgust are commonly shared emotions for those involved with rogue trustees. College credibility has been damaged; funding has been reduced; sterling reputations have been tarnished. Jobs have been lost and careers have been destroyed by the actions of rogue trustees. In some cases, adversaries have come to blows; in other cases, actual death threats have been made.

No reader can fully appreciate the extent of and the damage caused by the inappropriate behavior of rogue trustees without reviewing the stories of these presidents in the original. That is not possible because of the need for confidentiality. Throughout this book I have walked a thin line, trying on the one hand to report accurately the stories these college CEOs have shared and trying on the other hand to make sure these stories cannot be traced by disguising the obvious identifiers of names, gender, location, and some specific actions. In several cases I have cited a full description provided by a president when it was typical; most descriptions are composites of behavior or only snippets of behavior. In all cases quotes in italics are the intended message of a real president but cited anonymously. In a few cases these stories are in the public domain and include appropriate citations.

The following summary of behavior is typical of most of the community college rogue trustees studied in this project:

*This Rogue Trustee was disruptive, demeaning, condescending, and disrespectful in open and closed board meetings. She questioned every decision or recommendation brought forward by the president. The questions were not legitimate questions to seek information but rather to imply that the president had not done his job correctly or had been trying to deceive the board. She openly called the president a liar. She interrupted constantly not only the president but other board members as well. She made frequent visits to the campus to conduct meetings with the staff of the college, trying to find out if the president was making inappropriate decisions in the operations of the college. She met with the president of the faculty union in an attempt to intimidate and influence the faculty negotiations process.*

**TREAT THE TRUSTEE WITH RESPECT**, even if he or she does not deserve it. Be professional. Leave discipline of the rogue trustee to the board chair, offering help and advice behind the scenes, if appropriate. It is not the job of the president to chastise a trustee openly, and doing so risks your seeming to feel superior to board members. I know one president who openly opposed a rather unpopular trustee, only to have almost the whole board turn on the president. Rogue trustees generally reform themselves or self-destruct. Be patient.

— Advice from a President

*She constantly called the vice presidents and requested insignificant data be provided to her because she was a trustee, without informing the president of the reason for her request. Usually a day before or the day of the board meeting, she would make a call requesting massive amounts of insignificant data be provided at the board meeting on a particular item that was not on the agenda. This trustee also posted information from a closed board session on her personal blog.*

Table 1 lists in order, with the most prevalent behavior listed first, the various behaviors of rogue trustees reported by presidents in this study. Keep in mind that even the least prevalent behaviors are violations of standards expected of public officials and cause considerable damage to the college.

*Table 1. Behaviors of Rogue Trustees, Ranked by Prevalence*

RANKING	BEHAVIOR
1	Undermining and attacking the president.
2	Making inappropriate contacts with faculty and staff.
3	Creating inappropriate alliances with unions and other groups.
4	Attacking other trustees in and out of meetings.
5	Influencing hiring and promotion.
6	Micromanaging college operations.
7	Making damaging statements to the press and to faculty and staff.
8	Threatening and criticizing faculty and staff.
9	Requesting vast amounts of information.
10	Supporting political patronage.
11	Acting in opposition/playing the contrarian.
12	Refusing to participate in orientation, retreats, work sessions, etc.
13	Influencing the awarding of contracts.
14	Engaging other trustees outside of established meetings.
15	Manipulating the gender, ethnic, and religious representation on the board.
16	Violating closed session confidentiality and personnel privacy.
17	Using college resources inappropriately.

No single one of these various behaviors stands as the only behavior exhibited by a rogue trustee. While in a few cases a single behavior was the distinctive hallmark of a particular trustee, in most cases rogue trustees exhibited six or seven of these behaviors as a pattern; in some cases almost all these behaviors were exhibited by a single trustee. The following list of rogue trustee behavior was provided by one president and illustrates the extent of violations of one trustee; six of the behaviors were deleted from the original list for confidentiality:

*Repeatedly attempts to circumvent the authority of the board chair and/or president (behind the scenes and at board meetings).*

*Is openly disrespectful and rude to college employees, other trustees, and visitors in public meetings.*

*Openly criticizes/tries to discredit board chair, other trustees, college president, and administrators at meetings and in public forums.*

*Repeatedly attempts to bring agenda items and issues to board meetings without first consulting board chair and/or president. Blindsides the administration and other board members.*

*Declared in open board meeting that union representatives can talk to him directly and bypass the administration.*

*Frequently tries to add irrelevant or unnecessary items/resolutions to the board agenda.*

*Attempts to openly discuss confidential personnel matters at board committee meetings and at regular board meetings.*

*Assumes authority (unauthorized) to speak on behalf of the college and board to state, county, and local officials as well as to community, union, and business groups.*

*Meets regularly with a small group of dissident faculty and staff from college (and has on several occasions shared confidential/privileged information).*

*Often times shows up at staff meetings, student government meetings, and other college events without an invitation.*

*Displays inappropriate behavior when representing college at community events.*

*Aligns with other rogue trustees when attending statewide meetings/events.*

*Uses limited knowledge of parliamentary procedure to attempt to run board meetings.*

*Makes derogatory comments about the institution in public forums.*

*Cites board policies that do not exist.*

In the following section each of the seventeen behaviors identified in this study is briefly addressed. The first eight behaviors are followed by examples of the behavior reported by presidents. Each of the italicized examples is a direct quote from a president sometimes edited for confidentiality. I have included these quotes because several of my early advisors thought the behavior of rogue trustees would not be particularly striking or damaging; the behavior of rogue trustees is even more bizarre and damaging than any of us first imagined, and these quotes only illustrate the tip of the iceberg in conveying the severity of the problem. The reader is spared examples of behavior for the last nine on the list since examples for the first eight make the point.

**Undermining and attacking the president.** Not surprisingly, this behavior was the most prevalent as reported by these presidents. That this behavior is so prevalent could be an artifact of the president's defensiveness, but it is more likely related to the central role the president plays in the affairs of the college and the clarity of the target the president presents as the key leader. The president is the primary representative of the college; the appointed leader; the defender of the college's mission, values, and operations. The efforts of any rogue trustee to create discord and chaos or to violate standards of behavior are going to come into immediate conflict with the president. Thus, when a rogue trustee is operating in an institution, the president must expect to be undermined and attacked—and few have been prepared for such an onslaught.

*Called me a liar in front of the board and the faculty.*

*Questioned every agenda item brought by the CEO as the self-appointed "watchdog" of the board.*

*Questioned my integrity and honesty in the local media.*

*The Rogue Trustee threatened to destroy the board chair, the college, and me. He would sink the ship to get the captain.*

*Acted in public as if he loved me and the college, but in closed sessions would vehemently attack me.*

*The trustee in question went through all my travel records on a regular basis to try and find something wrong she could use against me.*

*Harasses me through hundreds of emails accusing me of ineffective leadership and wrongdoing.*

*Always voted against my contract.*

*I was threatened with termination if I did not make personnel appointments the trustee demanded.*

*He questioned every action and recommendation I made in a rude and confrontational tone both in public and private settings.*

*The Rogue Trustee told faculty her goal was to get rid of the president.*

**Making inappropriate contacts with faculty and staff.** The second most prevalent behavior for rogue trustees also undermines the leadership of the president, and it is widespread in the colleges included in this study. Many trustees, motivated by wanting to serve and improve the college, will on occasion respond to a faculty member's concern about an issue. And there are social occasions where trustees interact with faculty and staff and may discuss aspects of the college. These are normal behaviors that do not create established patterns that could lead to damaging behaviors.

With rogue trustees, the inappropriate contacts with faculty and staff are considerably beyond the norm. Rogue trustees sometimes have relatives or friends among the faculty and staff and champion their causes in board meetings and with the president. Rogue trustees sometimes gain the confidence of disgruntled employees to support the trustee's effort to embarrass the president or to intervene in college operations. Some trustees feel they have a right and an obligation to interact directly with faculty and staff and tell faculty and staff what to do.

*The rogue trustee scheduled open meetings in the cafeteria with faculty and staff to hear their complaints.*

*The rogue trustee operated through a relative in the faculty to gather information with which he could play "gotcha" in board meetings.*

*The trustee comes to campus every day and wanders in and out of faculty and staff offices trying to uncover problems and issues he can address in board meetings.*

*An administrator was being groomed by the rogue trustee to replace the president. This trustee was in constant contact with individuals and key groups collaborating on strategies to hire selected individuals. In one instance, the trustee advised a staff member to sue the college.*

*It was discovered at one point that the rogue trustee had sent over 600 emails to college faculty and staff about college issues.*

*The trustee made constant requests to administrators for reports and data without going through the president or board chair as mandated by board guidelines.*

*The trustee advocated strongly for higher salaries for the employee category in which her relative was assigned.*

### **Creating inappropriate alliances with unions and other groups.**

A corollary of inappropriate contacts with faculty and staff is reflected in the much more potentially damaging behavior of inappropriate alliances with some unions. Rogue trustees are sometimes elected by faculty unions for the explicit purpose of representing union priorities, and some do so at considerable detriment to the overall good of the college. When a trustee is elected and supported by a union that does not have the best interests of the college as its agenda, the college is in deep trouble; the fox in the henhouse is obligated to deliver the eggs. There are many cases where responsible unions champion and support excellent trustees, but there are enough cases of alliances between a rogue trustee and a union that presidents in this study identified such alliances as evidence of the work of a rogue trustee.

---

When a trustee is elected and supported by a union that does not have the best interests of the college as its agenda, the college is in deep trouble; the fox in the henhouse is obligated to deliver the eggs.

---

The self-serving alliance between a trustee and a union is another educational issue similar to that of the rogue trustee, in terms of the damage that can result. The issue needs more attention, study, and creative solutions. And faculty members need to consider whether or not their primary goal of serving students is compromised when they support union leadership that supports rogue trustees.

*The faculty union paid a consultant to help elect trustees who would represent union interests. Once elected, the trustees appointed the consultant to a cushy contract as a consultant to the board.*

*In an open board meeting, the rogue trustee invited union representatives to meet with him directly to bypass the administration.*

*The trustee met with the faculty union during salary negotiations and coached the representatives on how to gain the most from the board, providing them with information from closed board meetings. In a closed session he threatened the board that the faculty would strike if their demands were not met. He ended up walking the picket line with the faculty.*

*The rogue trustee bleeds union blood.*

*Anyone who runs for a board seat without the backing of the faculty association is going to have a tough go. Just to stay even, such a candidate would have to double the local union's backing, since the California Teachers Association (CTA) automatically matches any contributions the faculty association doles out. (Coker, 1998)*

*Admonished by faculty for questionable practices in supporting the election of trustees favorable to the union, the faculty union president reminded faculty of the union's desire to have its candidates win elections at all costs.*

*The rogue trustee attended meetings of employee organizations and the local union chapter.*

**Attacking other trustees in and out of meetings.** One of the factors that confirm the rogue nature of trustees in this study is their propensity to attack their colleagues serving on the board—the fourth most often cited behavior of rogue trustees. Attacking the president and other college personnel is par for the course for a trustee who feels thwarted in his or her personal agenda; but why attack your peers on the board needed to support

---

The rogue trustee is a problem for all trustees,  
not just a problem for the president.

---

your agenda and allow you to maneuver the enterprise? Many rogue trustees work hard to create alliances with other trustees, and where these alliances are formed around projects and actions harmful to the college the results can be alarming. So it is a bit surprising to review so many reports of cases in which other trustees are attacked by a colleague. The situation begs for involvement of trustees and trustee associations in addressing this problem for the protection of individual trustees and of the entire governance process. The rogue trustee is a problem for all trustees, not just a problem for the president.

*The rogue trustee threatened to destroy the board chair politically in the local community if he scheduled a meeting of the board to review the rogue trustee's actions regarding a college project.*

*The trustee went to the local newspaper and made false and damaging statements about the other members of the board.*

*In board meetings the rogue was very negative and aggressive toward other board members, berating them for not supporting his positions and recommendations.*

*She submitted a series of requests for the expense records of the other trustees to intimidate them.*

*He was always attacking other board members in public for expressing viewpoints different from his.*

*He wanted to be in charge so much he harassed the board chair into resigning and then bulldozed his way into the board chair.*

*He physically threatened another trustee in an open meeting.*

**Influencing hiring and promotion of college employees.** Although this behavior is a bald-faced act on the part of trustees and is a clear violation of basic standards, it is fairly common in community colleges and is almost the norm in some districts and in some states. In one small college reported on in this study, trustees had appointed 10 relatives to jobs in the college. The degree of pressure placed on a CEO or on college staff accompanied by threats is what distinguishes the rogue trustee from other trustees on this dimension. CEOs are sometimes ordered by the rogue trustee to appoint or promote selected individuals whether or not they are qualified. When these violations are couched in the framework of political patronage or reflect nepotism, they can become particularly prickly. Some of these trustees are just trying to implement the practices they have followed in other locally elected offices they have held—practices not uncommon in an American political system in which to the victor belong the spoils.

*She demanded that certain candidates be hired so that she could deliver on the expectations of the political party that helped elect her.*

*When the president refused to appoint the trustee's crony to one of the management positions, the trustee persuaded the board to place a hold on both positions in management.*

*The county commissioners felt they were entitled to place people in college jobs because the county supports the college financially and appoints the college trustees.*

*The entire administrative team left the college and was replaced by faculty members who had supported the election of the gang of rogue trustees—by faculty who had no experience or credentials in administration.*

*He involved himself directly in a performance review of one of his relatives and advocated strongly for salary increases for the job category to which his relative was assigned.*

*She lobbied shamelessly for me to promote several cronies who had worked in her campaign.*

*He was a former member of the college's support staff who felt he and his friends had been passed over for promotion; his sole reason for election was to right this wrong.*

*The trustee told me: If I can't use my position as a trustee to benefit my family and friends, why would I want to give this much time to this college!*

*I later discovered that the rogue trustee had pressured the department head to appoint her daughter to the position.*

*The trustee threatened me with termination if I did not comply with his requests to hire the candidates he suggested.*

**Micromanaging the college.** Micromanagement is the bane of community college presidents and community college staff. It is the issue in governance most addressed in the literature. And along the way most boards eventually edge toward the line of some direct attempt to manage a decision, an action, a project. As Cindra Smith (2006a) points out, "The line between policy and micromanagement is not always clear. It can depend on board and institutional culture and protocols, communication style, intent, and how the intent is expressed" (p.1).

In the stories presidents shared for this project, micromanagement was almost always part of the behavioral pattern of rogue trustees. However, it was not always highlighted or stressed as a factor because, in the worst cases, it was trumped by the preceding five more dramatic, and perhaps more damaging, behaviors. In comparison to the preceding behaviors, micromanagement almost emerges as a preference, a more benign form of trustee intervention often motivated by the best of intentions. Trustees and college administrators should be on guard, however, in making sure there is a clear distinction between the role of governance and management. "Micromanagement sends a message of distrust, abrogates the authority of the CEO and ignores the organizational structure, decision-making systems, and procedures," says Smith (2006a, p. 3). In the hands of a rogue trustee, micromanagement becomes one more weapon of mass destruction.

*He demanded to see a list of all checks written by the college on a monthly basis.*

*She directed college employees to leave an event, prepare reports, and share privileged information.*

*The end result has been described as a culture of fear and anxiety brought on by a board member's micromanaging philosophy.*

*The trustee confused the policy-making role of the board with the management role of the administration and conveyed his opinion*

*to the local press and others that he needed to be involved in college procedures and processes.*

*As a former executive of a large company, this rogue trustee made it clear to the president and the other trustees that he knew more about managing the college than anyone else.*

*He wanted to be personally involved in every aspect of bids and procurement.*

*He presented me with a contract to purchase an agency owned by one of his friends.*

*She demanded I fire a faculty member for behavior she deemed inappropriate.*

*The trustee asked for a meeting with me and the director of facilities and at the meeting announced it was his intention to remodel the first floor of the library for a new student information system he was negotiating with a local vendor.*

*I made the mistake of involving the trustee in an interview with an excellent candidate for a vice president position; he later told the committee he had problems with the ethnicity of the candidate; it is a miracle we were not sued.*

*As chair of the board he assumed he was the CEO of the college; he called me twice a day to see how things were going.*

*He always demanded to review in great detail the financial records of the college but was never interested in the students or the overall mission of the college.*

*He treated the senior administrators as if they were his personal staff. He went to them directly without going through me, but they kept me informed, and we dealt with the situation as best we could.*

**Making damaging statements to the press and to faculty and staff.** Rogue trustees know how to play rough and how to intimidate their adversaries on the board or in the administration by manipulating the press and college employees. There are numerous examples in the stories gathered for this book of trustees making false and confidential statements to the local press to benefit their agenda. Some appear to do so out of vengeance. In several cases the rogue trustee had created a strong alliance with a reporter or editor to the continuing embarrassment of the college. In other cases the rogue trustee served as a conduit to faculty and staff groups stoking discord and distrust.

*The trustee told faculty that he ran for the board and was elected for only one purpose and that was to get rid of the president.*

*He called press conferences before every board meeting to make charges about me and the college, and he went to the various campuses of the district to meet with faculty groups to discuss college business. I was never informed about these meetings beforehand and was never invited to attend; the trustee refused to meet with me about policy issues.*

*An anonymous letter was sent to the faculty making outrageous and false charges against me and my top administrators; the rogue trustee was the primary suspect.*

*The rogue trustee constantly went to the local media with complaints about the college's noncompliance with regulations and would use the public comment sessions of board meetings to air complaints he said he had received about the college. He refused to provide the president or the board chair with any information that could be investigated.*

*He encouraged faculty and staff to complain about the morale of the college.*

*The rogue trustee leaked information discussed in executive sessions to the press and the faculty.*

*He summoned a horde of radio and television reporters to the board meeting and made wild and dishonest charges against the college.*

*He made personal attacks on the CEO in the local media questioning my integrity and honesty.*

*The trustee in question created an alliance with a local editor who made me the target of a series of investigations in the press regarding the illegal expenditure of college funds. I was finally cleared of all wrongdoing.*

*His behavior empowered the faculty dissidents to show disrespect to the board as a whole, including public name calling and threats of recall of some of the trustees.*

**Threatening and criticizing faculty and staff.** No person or group is safe from the rampages of the rogue trustee, but sometimes the most innocent stakeholders—the college faculty and staff—are the easy targets. In some cases college administrators have been ordered by a trustee to provide information. Rogue trustees have demanded that an administrator hire a particular candidate or fire a particular employee. College employees have been threatened that they would be fired if they did not do the trustee's bidding. Faculty and staff have been harshly criticized in public meetings

of the board when making reports or when they were asked to defend a position. College presidents try to create policies and procedures that avoid these kinds of confrontations and violations, and when faculty and staff are attacked, college presidents try to shield and protect them. Rogue trustees are seldom persuaded to abide by the rules in these cases, and they ignore the pleas of the president for restraint and civil behavior.

*He continued to attack the deans verbally in public meetings. One dean contacted a lawyer for her protection.*

*She sometime bullies and berates employees both to their face and to others.*

*The division chair left the meeting in tears after the trustee publicly attacked her.*

In the following summaries of the behaviors of rogue trustees, quotes from presidents to illustrate the behaviors have not been included, to spare the reader. Quotes used in the preceding summaries of behaviors are sufficient to make the case that these observations are supported by the presidents and are not just the creation of the author.

---

*His problem was that he held no principle  
that he could not rise above if the issue in any way  
touched his political self-interest.*

---

**Requesting vast amounts of information.** Many trustees, particularly new trustees, want reports and information so they can better fulfill their obligations and exercise informed judgments. The rogue trustee, however, requests vast amounts of information as a tactic to harass the president and other administrators. College staff spend an inordinate amount of time organizing and preparing this information, in most cases seldom used by the trustee requesting it. College guidelines usually require that such requests be channeled through the president or the board chair, but rogue trustees will often contact staff directly. “Many boards have a policy or protocol that requests that require a significant amount of staff time and resources to produce the information must come from the board as a whole” (Smith, 2006b, p. 4).

**Supporting political patronage.** Many trustees are elected or appointed on the basis of their political affiliations. In 1998, the newly elected governor of Florida replaced 203 of the 209 community college trustees (Smith, et al.

2001, p. 2). The great majority of politically affiliated trustees are exemplary and work for the common good of the college; sometimes their political affiliations accrue to the advantage of the college. But a rogue trustee can use political support and alliances to practice some of the darker arts of the political process. There are cases in the stories told by the presidents in this study where rogue trustees openly declared their political views and goals: to represent the interests of the political base and to practice old-time patronage. One trustee warned the president that he was a “political animal” and proved it time and again. Of this trustee the president said, *His problem was that he held no principle that he could not rise above if the issue in any way touched his political self-interest.* Trustees, elected or appointed by a political constituency, do have an obligation to reflect the perspectives of their constituencies, but they also have a higher calling to champion and represent the overall mission of the college. Most trustees know how to walk this line; rogue trustees ignore the line and violate it willingly.

**Acting in opposition/playing the contrarian.** Although this behavior could be incorporated as part of many of the other behaviors listed here, it was described precisely in these terms by a number of presidents to the extent it became a separate category. Rogue trustees are clearly not team players, except when it is part of their overall strategy to diminish and destroy. Some apparently relish the role of the contrarian. They will recommend a new policy or practice, then vote against it. They will oppose every item the president brings to the agenda. They appear to enjoy casting the lone vote on the board. Sometimes acting in opposition does not even seem part of a strategy to accomplish larger goals; it is an end in itself and as such is a peculiar behavior that can create considerable consternation for the president and among other trustees.

**Refusing to participate in orientation, retreats, work sessions, etc.** The business of governing a college is complex to say the least. Presidents and trustee leaders usually advocate orientation for new trustees and retreats and work sessions for all trustees, the president, and selected staff to create better working relationships and to address difficult and long-range issues. Some rogue trustees refuse to participate in any of these processes and events. Sometimes they just fail to show up—on purpose.

**Influencing the awarding of contracts.** It is not uncommon at all levels of the political process for officials to influence the awarding of contracts, and there are elaborate schemes and hordes of lobbyists who specialize in this activity, especially at state and national levels. Such practices exist at the local level as well, where they are often quite transparent. Trustees who

serve on community college boards are expected to operate in an open environment—an environment that reflects educational values and culture that differ from other more politically oriented institutions. Even where laws and guidelines are clear about the awarding of contracts, rogue trustees will attempt to work around the law or openly violate the law. Many of the stories reported by presidents are about attempts of trustees to play a role in the awarding of contracts; in most cases such attempts are thwarted by the president, other trustees, legal action, or community pressure. Even so, the attempt is a behavior that creates great agitation and concern for the college and its stakeholders.

**Engaging other trustees outside of established meetings.** It is an underlying value of nonprofit boards that the members act as one body. They are all privy to the same information, and they work together as a team to fulfill their governing function. In most states and college districts there are sunshine laws that prevent board members from meeting in small groups with each other and with the president except under specified conditions. The rogue trustee violates this standard by contacting other trustees outside of regular board sessions to push his or her agenda and to solicit support and involvement. When other members of the board meet with the rogue trustee under these circumstances, they are supporting and participating in inappropriate behavior. When they meet with the rogue trustee willingly and for purposes detrimental to the overall mission of the college, they have entered the territory of the rogue trustee themselves. There are a number of cases reported by presidents in this study of pairs and small groups of rogue trustees who meet regularly outside of established meetings—an ominous sign of difficult times ahead.

**Manipulating the gender, ethnic, and religious representation on the board.** Community college boards have become much more diverse in the last several decades, reflecting the changes in American society that are also reflected in the student and faculty populations of the college. Since the achievement of a full and mature democracy is still unfinished business in the U. S., there are many tensions around the issues of representation, equality, and justice. These tensions are easily manipulated by demagogues as we see on television almost daily, particularly in times of national, state, and local elections. The community college board is a perfect venue for rogue trustees who want to exacerbate the challenges related to gender, ethnic, and religious dimensions for their own ends. In these reports by presidents, there are examples of rogue trustees who have created divisions among board members that reflect these dimensions. Particularly ugly are the cases where a trustee has rallied one ethnic group to protect its interests against the interests of another ethnic group.

### **Violating closed session confidentiality and personnel privacy.**

There are a number of issues addressed by trustees that require absolute confidentiality for effective solution. Terminating contracts of individuals, contract negotiations with unions, purchase of land for new campuses, and ethics issues are examples. Reasonable members of the board understand why confidentiality is required and strictly observe the rules and the consensus of the board. A rogue trustee sometimes violates the agreement to keep discussions and actions confidential and leaks information to the press or to the faculty. Some actually do this openly; most do it surreptitiously.

**Using college resources inappropriately.** This was the least prevalent behavior of rogue trustees noted by presidents in this study. Most were violations of college travel policies involving over charges or unsupported claims. In several cases trustees used college office equipment to copy large amounts of personal documents not related to college business. The use of the college's legal counsel for detailed information on issues championed by the trustee was cited in several instances. By themselves, these specific behaviors probably reflect dishonesty and opportunity more than they identify the violating trustee as a rogue, but they are behaviors used by rogues and cited by presidents as part of the arsenal of rogue trustees.

These 17 behaviors are reported by community college presidents as the most prevalent behaviors of rogue trustees. There are other behaviors that are exhibited by rogue trustees, but these are sufficient to make the case that the rogue trustee is a major challenge for the community college. And in most cases rogue trustees exhibit a number of these behaviors as a pattern. The motivation behind these behaviors is reviewed in the next chapter.



## What Motivates the Rogue Trustee?

**THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES** and I learned many valuable lessons dealing with our rogue trustee. My advice would be:

1. *Make sure that either board policy or the board bylaws specify the kind of behaviors that the board will not tolerate and provide the minimum due process for removal from office.*
2. *The board chair and the president should be extremely direct and firm during the new trustee orientation about the role of the board and that of the college president, and firmly confront any response from a new trustee that suggests unwillingness to respect those role delineations.*
3. *The president should spend sufficient time with each new trustee to learn what his or her expectations and aspirations are. My experience over the last 26 years has taught me that new trustees are usually flattered to have the undivided attention of the president and will reveal a lot about their aspirations, goals, motivations, and expectations over a series of relaxing lunches. The discussion can focus on examples of effective and inappropriate board behavior.*
4. *In colleges with a rotating chair policy, the president should enlist the support of former chairs to change the policy so that the most competent leader is elected and continues in that role as long as he or she is effective. A strong and effective board chair and president can work as a team to control and remove a rogue trustee.*
5. *Some of the regional accrediting bodies have finally recognized the danger to the institution of an uncontrolled rogue trustee and have adopted standards that empower the president and board chair to arrange for a focused visit.*
6. *Finally, I suggest that a president faced with the horrors of dealing with a rogue trustee exercise great patience and restraint and quietly document the improper actions and behaviors of the rogue trustee.*

— Advice from a President

**SUCH A SIMPLE QUESTION;** such a complex answer. Motivation is a tricky concept, hard to pin down, impossible to verify. It is often quite difficult for us to understand our own motivations, much less the motivations of others. Observed behavior is one clue most often used; we bundle the behavior we see into a pattern and infer cause or motivation. Behavior is the visible application of motivation. But we can never be 100 percent certain that we have identified and described motivation accurately, and neither can trained psychologists and sociologists because it is all so individual and so messy. Motivation cannot be seen in the same way a tumor can be seen with an MRI, although recent breakthroughs regarding increased responses in the brain to stimuli that result in measurable indicators is promising. And there is the problem of projecting our own values (and motivations) onto the behaviors observed in others; projection could have been a key factor for these presidents because of their sometimes symbiotic connections with the rogue trustees. So when we categorize, examine, and label the motivations of others, we do so with caution and with a need to be reminded that we are slogging through a swamp full of dark holes and unseen traps.

The presidents who participated in this study were asked to address four key questions and several minor ones (see Appendix A). The first question had to do with actions and behaviors of the rogue trustee. The second question asked about motivation for this behavior: In your view what was the primary motivation for these actions and behaviors? Reading through the documents the presidents provided, it appears there was little hesitation in answering the question about motivation. In these murky waters, they seemed sure of their diagnosis. They often elaborated on the key themes and often provided supporting observations from their own interactions with the trustees. In a number of cases, they provided supporting observations from other trustees, faculty, and staff, including letters and articles from the press. Although I have purposefully raised cautions about diagnosing motivations, I believe these presidents collectively present a fairly accurate picture of the current situation and the personal reasons behind the actions and behaviors of rogue trustees.

Rogue trustees are motivated by many factors. They are seldom one-dimensional even when they champion what appears to be a single cause. Here is a brief description from a retired president who captures some of the core dimensions of motivation:

*The basic issue with these folks is a lack of understanding or acceptance of the role of a trustee as part of a policy-making team. They need to understand that they do not act independently and they do not deal with college operations and management. Rogues usually have an agenda independent of the college mission and want the college to pursue that agenda. They often have a goal of personal advancement in the community through their visibility as a leader at the college. There are always unhappy staff members who immediately attach themselves to the rogues and feed them information that serves the staff member goals. They also frequently want to use their power to get friends jobs or contracts.*

The motivations of rogue trustees identified by the presidents in this study clustered around six key dimensions listed in priority in Table 2. The total of colleges is greater than the number of participating colleges because in several cases the president made a strong case for more than one motivating factor, and in several cases a president cited more than one rogue trustee in the analysis. The priority is more relevant as an indicator here than the number of colleges cited.

Table 2. Motivations of Rogue Trustees

MOTIVATION	NUMBER OF COLLEGES
Exercising power and control.	19
Representing political alliances and priorities.	16
Expressing pathological behaviors.	11
Representing special faculty/staff or unions.	10
Championing personal agendas.	8
Working against the president.	8

**Exercising power and control.** Chief among the motivations identified by the presidents is the rogue trustee’s need for power and control. These needs also show up as part of the other motivation categories, but for this group the need for power and control so dominates their actions it deserves a special category. The locus of the need for power and control is sometimes external and sometimes internal. Externally, the trustee tries to use power to grant favors, influence hiring, influence contract awards, and demonstrate personal clout. Internally, the need for power and control appears to be related to something deep and personal; power and control are not used to accomplish anything except to satisfy some inner urge.

“Ego trip” is a common term presidents applied to many of these trustees. They love being on television and in the press—sometimes even

when the coverage is negative. For some trustees, the opportunity to be in the limelight triggers behaviors long dormant in other contexts. Election or appointment to public office provides the trustee with fifteen minutes of fame promised by Andy Warhol. One such trustee, among many other bizarre behaviors, often made grand statements in support of certain policies and then inexplicably would cast the lone vote against them—apparently just for the recognition.

Rogues will sometimes play the contrarian for the power and attention that comes with being identified as the dissident. Some demand to be recognized and introduced at every public function of the college. Several have advocated for office space on the campus so they can be more involved in running the college.

---

Education is a gentle enterprise—ripe territory for marauders and renegades who are adept at seizing and manipulating power.

---

Some of the rogue trustees in this study came with reputations as officials who exercised power and control in other roles and elected offices prior to becoming a community college trustee. Presidents report being warned by community leaders regarding the motivations of some of their new board members. One trustee had garnered a lot of attention for his maverick behavior in an earlier office and saw the board position at the college as an opportunity to regain his lost celebrity. The community college provides an accommodating stage for a trustee who wants to exercise power and control. The culture is collaborative and supportive. There are few regulations or policies that prohibit inappropriate behavior. There is little public interest in the operations of the college and the election of trustees. Compared with other public offices, the stakes and the spoils are minimal. Education is a gentle enterprise—ripe territory for marauders and renegades who are adept at seizing and manipulating power. On the community college board, the rogue trustee can be a big fish in a little pond.

A subset of the need for power and control shows up in the obsessive demand on the part of the rogue trustee for an inordinate amount of attention from the college president. In one case, the trustee was a highly regarded professional who received a great deal of public attention. She brought that need to her role as a trustee but focused primarily on the president, whom she demanded cater to her every whim and need. In another case, the trustee made it clear from the moment he was appointed

to the board that his primary interest in serving on the board was to have unfettered and unlimited access to the president. He constantly called the college president, and if the president was not there he left a message that the president return his call in an hour; if the president did not return the call in an hour, he would call the president's secretary and chew her out. Often, he would drive to the college in his attempts to locate the president. In still a third case, the rogue trustee called the president twice a day, every day. These trustees were exercising their need for power and control by directly controlling the president as best they could.

One way for rogue trustees to exercise power and control is to gain access to information not readily available to other trustees or even the president. A number of the trustees in this study created alliances with individuals and groups on campus to gather information about the president's behavior, faculty morale, negotiations, expenditures, travel, and other issues. This information would be used to intimidate the president and other trustees into compliance with the rogue trustee's demands. In several cases, the rogue trustee divulged such information to the faculty and to the press.

Here are several brief summaries of cases in which rogue trustees exercised power and control over the college and the president:

*From the very start she attempted to control the board and to influence both administrators and faculty. Her initial attempts were both naïve and blatant. She would often pop in to offices on campus, surprising and embarrassing staff. On these visits, she often raised questions that could not be immediately answered and that frustrated and angered her.... She was reelected for a second term, which intensified her pressure on the board and staff to bend to her will. She succeeded in fragmenting the board and angering the administration. She also began to socialize with influential faculty members, some of whom were officers and negotiators for the union. Eventually, she would meet with union leaders and take their positions directly to the board. Now she could exercise her power and control over the board by threatening union action and strikes. Administrators became demoralized because they thought the board was incompetent to handle this aberrant trustee.... The college brought in a consultant who worked with the board for one year; at the end of the sessions, the consultant told the president, "I have never met anyone like this trustee. She is either quite stupid or extremely Machiavellian in her efforts to control others." Two presidents have left, in part, because of this trustee, and the third is having a tough time.*

*Although he was appointed by the local power base of a political party, he had no interest in representing the interests of the party. He was*

*interested only in extending his power and control over the college for his own internal needs. Since most of the other trustees were new, he immediately began a series of personal attacks on the board chair, who could not take it and resigned; he then bulldozed his way into the chair's position. He likes to bait the other trustees, speaks on every issue on the agenda—and always speaks first, and he has made it clear to the other trustees that his opinion is the only correct opinion. He has physically threatened another trustee on the board. No other trustee has the courage to take him on.*

*The rogue trustee is a very powerful and vindictive person in a position of great influence in our community. When he was appointed, he quickly let the chair and the rest of the board know that he outranked them and that he would not deal with anyone except the college president. He saw his election as a local official and his appointment as a college trustee as a mandate for him to manage the college. When he was confronted with board policies regarding an action he wanted to take, he made it clear he had no regard for the bylaws and considered himself more important to the college than the rest of the board put together. He had an insatiable need to control whatever environment he found himself in.*

**Representing political alliances and priorities.** Although the need for power and control was the primary motivating factor for rogue trustees in this study, the presidents gave almost equal weight to political alliances and priorities. Obviously, these two key motivating forces are closely linked and intertwined; power and control are often the major tools of the partisan politician. The reason this factor is distinguished here as a separate motivating force is the emphasis given by presidents in their reports. Mellow and Heelan (2008), reporting on community college trustees, observed, "The intrusion of local political ideologies and perspectives appear to be ascendant nationally." (p. 89)

Many of the reports provided by presidents for this study include references to the trustee's political motivation for seeking a seat on the college's board of trustees:

*The trustee said to me, Look, I am going to be out of here before you know it. I want to go to the state house then to Washington, D. C., and this is just a stop along the way.*

*His motivation seemed to be to get his picture and opinions in the press. Many speculate that he has political aspirations since he has run for office in the past.*

*Her goal was to support county-based priorities over those of the college.*

*She ran so she could grant political favors. She actually told me that her only reason for running for the board was to be in a position to grant favors to her cronies.*

*He viewed his appointment as part of the spoils system of the political process and as a stepping stone to higher office in the county. He wanted to be mayor next.*

Most of the cases reported by these presidents were about trustees on their way up the political ladder. Some presidents with political savvy of their own supported and worked with trustees to help them achieve their goals within the boundaries of legal and ethical practice. One president said, *Unfortunately and sadly, we are so happy to get rid of them that we sometimes actually help them get to the next level just to get them out of our hair. It becomes a vicious cycle that breeds trouble for everyone.*

But all politicians are not on the way up. Those who have been thwarted in their ambitions and who have lost elections in the state or county sometimes cycle back through the college's board of trustees for one last hurrah. These failed politicians are often more cynical and contentious than their counterparts on the way up, becoming classic cases of the rogue trustee running roughshod over everyone, with seasoned skills for creating chaos and damage.

Rogue trustees who are partisan politicians exhibit two particularly destructive behaviors. They pressure the president and the other trustees to hire their cronies, fire their enemies, and award contracts to their friends or party affiliates. They need to demonstrate to their political party and to those who appointed them that they are fulfilling their promises as party loyalists. Secondly, they tend to champion causes that will endear them to the voters and to their appointers. They love playing the role of watchdog regarding financial matters at the college, often declaring they are the only ones protecting citizens from tax increases and wasteful spending—a role relished and exploited by politicians from the local to the national level.

The following brief summaries provide additional perspective on the rogue trustees who place their own politics and their political affiliations above the interests of the college:

*She was extremely ambitious politically and actually ran for Congress while on the board of the college. She shamelessly promoted two or three of her cronies who had worked on her campaign and tried to pressure me into hiring them. She made it very uncomfortable for me to go against her lobbying for these individuals, one of whom was a complete loser. She actively campaigned against any of my plans and recommendations that intruded on her political ambitions.*

*The trustee was a locally elected official in addition to being an appointed trustee of the college. Local politics reflected old-style machine politics so he sought to use his position for political patronage as a way of securing loyalty and votes for his political career. There was also a significant amount of self-aggrandizement reflected in his actions because he wanted everyone in the community to know he was a political power broker and a political force to be reckoned with. He also wanted to use the college to make sure his family and friends had good paying jobs.*

---

*In one case, the trustee threatened to use his power to terminate the appointments of other politically appointed trustees if they did not support his efforts to award a large contract to a political friend.*

---

*I had two rogue trustees who shared a sharp and singular focus—to advance the county's local political patronage system. In each case trustees interfered in the hiring process to place politically connected individuals in positions on the campus, ranging from lower level to more senior levels. In each case, the president was implicitly threatened with termination if these appointments were not made. In one case, the trustee threatened to use his power to terminate the appointments of other politically appointed trustees if they did not support his efforts to award a large contract to a political friend.*

**Expressing pathological behaviors.** The presidents cited pathological behaviors as the third most important motivating factor in this study. Although these behaviors were sometimes expressed as part of the other motivating forces, presidents in eleven cases viewed them as the primary motivating factor, thus establishing a separate category.

Presidents were quite clear about this motivating force in the labels they used to describe rogue trustees they placed in this category: *off balance or ill; due to the make-up of her personality and use of alcohol; petulant self-pity; needed couch time with a shrink; mood swings; just plain crazy; an absolute Bozo; and doesn't live in reality.* At first, the word pathological seemed too strong a word to use for these trustees. But with the labels the presidents provided and with the definition for pathological as, “any deviation from a healthy or normal condition,” it seems quite appropriate. As one president said of a rogue trustee, *He seemed to be almost pathologically indifferent and insensitive to the problems he created and what his actions meant for the college.*

Community college presidents are not usually psychologists, but they are keen observers of human behavior. Most do not become successful without making sound judgments about the behavior, including the motivations, of others. And a number of them do have an extensive background in counseling psychology and in student services. All of those in this study have an earned doctorate. Therefore, I believe these presidents have the experience and the educational background to make fairly valid observations about the motivations of these trustees.

The rogue trustees with fragile personalities can prosper in the community college environment. They bring their neuroses and their passions to the public arena, which serves as a petri dish for the growth of their unmet and unchecked needs. Educational culture is usually welcoming, democratic, supportive, forgiving, open, pleasant, and collaborative—an ideal venue for the rogue trustee to take hold and come to full fruition. The following case is an example of this process in action, even when the college players were warned about the propensity of this trustee:

*Despite the reputation of this trustee, the board and staff welcomed him and treated him with respect. Everything was relatively smooth for two years and then slowly he became adversarial as a trustee and started pushing a personal agenda. The board, as a whole, has been very patient but because of his behavior it seems we are now facing a confrontation. College staff and each of the other trustees have consistently been civil and used logic and reasoning, while the subject trustee's level of dishonesty, disrespect, and hostile behavior has escalated.*

This category of motivations was difficult to pin down because of the variety of pathological behaviors that were included. Several presidents identified lack of intelligence as a factor although that condition is not usually categorized as pathological. Meanness of spirit was listed by a few presidents as the motivating force. Three presidents cited alcohol abuse as a factor. Two subcategories were the most common associated with the expression of pathological behavior.

The first subcategory is related to failure in life, early childhood trauma, and low self-esteem. The trustees in this subcategory appeared to take their frustrations out on the president, other trustees, and the college—perhaps bringing a pattern of behavior to the educational arena they had been expressing in many other contexts. The following examples are illustrations of this subcategory:

*The primary motivation for her actions seemed to stem from an unhappy childhood and an unfilled adult life. She saw herself as the*

*underdog. She also saw herself in the role as making someone higher up pay for the injustices she had suffered. She did everything she could to get attention, even when it came with a great deal of criticism.*

*Individuals who abuse the powers and privileges of their positions are driven to do so by deep-seated insecurities and character flaws. Eventually, those insecurities and/or personality quirks will cause them to step way over the line of acceptable behavioral norms.*

*This trustee had a personal disposition that was totally negative toward everything in his life, which led to an innate distrust of people and processes.*

*The worst rogue trustee in my career, and I have had several, was bright, unattractive, and overweight. He never achieved much in his life and was jealous and vengeful with those who had. He resented the faculty for the terms, compensation, and working conditions they enjoyed and had little regard for the other members of the board. Life had not been fair for this trustee, and he was out for revenge for the injustices in his life. He was not a conservative or liberal and had no real platform; he was strictly an opportunist playing out his anger.*

The second subcategory includes rogue trustees who may have had some pre-existing propensity for unbalanced minds—certainly a propensity for rash and irrational behavior. Although presidents identified only a few such trustees with these conditions, they present special challenges because rational efforts to address their issues and problems do not work. The following cases illustrate this motivation:

*This trustee was simply mentally unbalanced. Verbatim minutes of the board meetings revealed that most of his diatribes had no logic and made no cognitive sense. He hated any administrative authority. He had a meanness of spirit and took great pleasure in intimidating others, embarrassing staff and other trustees in public, and creating lies and rumors to hurt people and the college.*

*He was sometimes a good and supportive trustee, but his behavior was erratic. He would have mood swings and would get very angry and yell at me. His mood swings frightened me and my staff, and we were always on our guard.*

**Representing special faculty, staff, or unions.** The motivations of some rogue trustees align perfectly with the aspirations of a few disgruntled employees, pressure from relatives on the staff, or the agendas of some unions. One president reported that her rogue trustee wanted special favors for his girlfriend who worked at the college, but most of the cases involving trustee alliances with special faculty and staff reflected incidents of nepotism or disgruntled individuals.

Many colleges have policies that address appropriate behavior of trustees when they have spouses, children, or other relatives working at the college; these policies do not always prevent a determined rogue trustee from violating the spirit if not the letter of these policies. Two examples illustrate cases of nepotism:

*Her relative was a long-term employee at the college, and state law allowed her to serve as a trustee because she was elected to the board long after the relative had been hired. Her basic motivation was to protect the employment of her relative. She got involved in personnel issues regarding the performance of the relative and advocated for higher compensation increases for the employee category in which her relative was employed. She was a conduit to the board and to me on issues fed to her by her relative.*

*He did enormous damage to the college and to me because of a perceived injustice to his wife who worked at the college. Although he ran for the board to “keep property taxes down, improve communication between the trustees and the faculty, and improve salaries of the faculty,” his primary motivation was to secure a salary increase for his wife. Once elected, he confronted me with an ultimatum to adjust his wife’s salary or suffer the consequences. I could not in good conscience support the adjustment; the nightmare for me, the other trustees, and the college played itself out for many years.*

---

There are a number of cases of former employees who run for the board and who become rogue trustees in their efforts to settle old issues with the president, or who want to right wrongs they perceive have been done to themselves and/or their colleagues.

---

There are a number of cases of former employees who run for the board and who become rogue trustees in their efforts to settle old issues with the president, or who want to right wrongs they perceive have been done to themselves and/or their colleagues. These trustees can be particularly challenging because they are often encouraged by special friends or faculty groups who champion their agenda and who provide inside information on college policies and practices. The following example involves a division chair:

*After retirement he ran for the board and was elected. He had been angry for many years because he had been passed over for promotion to higher administrative positions. As a trustee he advocated for all division chairs whom he thought deserved promotions, and he soon had a following of a small but active group of former colleagues. He was in constant touch with this group and took informal proposals and complaints about alleged college abuses to the board, bypassing the board-approved grievance procedures.*

The most challenging issues, by far, in this category, however, are when rogue trustees align their agendas with those of faculty and other employee unions that do not champion the overall interests of the college as union priority. These are often fragile and unholy alliances: rogue trustees use the unions to get elected; unions use the rogue trustees to represent and negotiate their positions. At one level—given the values and mission of the educational enterprise—it is unimaginable that such alliances could be operating in the environment of education. At another level these alliances reflect the reality of politics-as-usual as common practice in American society and as common practice in academia. It was Wallace Sayre who first said, “Academic politics is the most vicious and bitter form of politics, because the stakes are so low” (quoted in the *Wall Street Journal*, December 20, 1973).

Some rogue trustees come to office with union backgrounds and represent union perspectives with great skill and insight, sometimes causing great damage to the overall mission of the college.

*Our rogue trustee had been a long-time union leader in other contexts and reflected a union mentality in which it was always them vs. us. He worked to create an environment of mistrust and suspicion so he could accomplish his goal, which was to serve college union interests to the exclusivity of all other concerns. He met with union leaders before and after board meetings and would actually confer with these leaders in the audience. He was very uncanny in how he knew exactly how far he could go without prompting a reprimand for violating the board’s code of ethics.*

*With his union background, the trustee assumed it was his duty to ensure that all facility and related projects were awarded to union contractors. He went directly to staff in the business office to try and influence their decisions regarding contracts.*

*One of the negotiators for the faculty union told the chief negotiator for the board that the “real” negotiations took place between the rogue trustee and the faculty leaders.*

It is not uncommon in states where unions are the norm for an occasional trustee to be motivated primarily as a champion of union interests. In many of these cases there can be positive outcomes. But rogue trustees often violate all standards of behavior expected of elected or appointed officials when they meet with union leaders and advocate for their positions inside the board. When they threaten the president or their board colleagues with strikes and other agitating behavior from faculty, they have crossed the line into the territory of the rogue trustee.

**Championing personal agendas.** Again, as with all these loosely identified categories for motivation, championing personal agendas was quite often a factor in the other categories. It is a special category in this study because of the emphasis that at least eight of the presidents gave to the category. In one sense, almost all rogue trustees champion personal agendas, whether to exercise power, represent disgruntled personnel, serve political groups, or go after the president. In this category, trustees championed a special agenda almost exclusive of all other interests—an agenda that was highly visible to all the college stakeholders and that became the hallmark of the trustee. Two presidents described the situation:

*Many of the rogue trustees I've experienced have a personal agenda before they arrive on the board, which, in many instances, is the sole purpose for their being there. They never really accept the fact that an individual board member governs through the full board and not as an individual.*

*This trustee pushed his agenda at any cost and without regard for the institution as a whole. He ran for the board position and was elected on the issue. He had no respect for board process or protocol and always challenged and tried to discredit the way the president and other board members tried to function. Over the years, he gained control of the board and drove the president to resign.*

Presidents and other members of the board have a particularly challenging situation when the personal agenda championed reflects values and prejudices that are anathema to educational culture. While educators usually support the examination of all sides of an issue, it is embarrassing for the college as a whole when one of its own trustees publicly champions a perspective that few educators can support. One of the most challenging cases cited by a number of presidents in this study is that at the South Orange County Community College District (SOCCCD) in California—a case that has been very public in the local press and on faculty-sponsored websites, so it can be referenced here.

In 1998, Matt Coker, a reporter for the *OC Weekly*, described in detail the efforts of a college trustee at SOCCCD to persuade the college to sponsor a seminar on the John F. Kennedy assassination. As the board president, he got his fellow trustees to approve spending \$5,000 in district funds to pay four speakers. The speakers included talk-show host Dave Emory, who contends Nazis who fled defeated Germany played a leading role in slaying JFK; John Judge, who says a cabal of gays and the military-industrial complex was behind the killing; Sherman Skolnick, a contributor to *Spotlight*, which the Anti-Defamation League calls the most antisemitic publication in America; and Michael Collins Piper, who wrote a book claiming that Kennedy's assassination was a hit orchestrated by top-level CIA officials in collaboration with organized crime and Israel's intelligence service, the Mossad. The national media covered this case, and there were protests from hundreds of local citizens, including college faculty and students, as well as a number of local and national organizations. In response, the board of trustees decided to move the seminar off campus; it was finally cancelled. There are many, many details and problems surrounding this personal agenda by a trustee in a very complex situation that has become a legend in California community colleges.

There are other cases where presidents report that trustees have championed similar controversial issues. The following two cases reflect the personal agenda of trustees in two different colleges:

*He was ultraconservative, and his issues related to things like right to life, gun control, etc. He took advantage of every opportunity to grandstand on his issue du jour at the televised board meetings, irrespective of whether his comments related to board agenda items or anything whatsoever to do with the college.*

*The trustee was motivated by her own personal fundamentalist beliefs played out in the college in her efforts to make sure that students did not have to study homosexuality as part of a course on different cultures.*

This category on personal agendas overlaps considerably with the category on representing political alliances and priorities. Almost all the cases in that category could be cited here as examples of championing personal agendas. Some presidents reported that using the college as a stepping stone in a political career was the only motivating force behind a trustee. In several cases, presidents reported that placing minorities in positions at the college, including the presidency, was the single agenda championed. Supporting athletics was the driving force behind the interests and actions of several other trustees. And in some cases, as reported earlier,

the personal agenda was to right a wrong or perceived injustice to a friend or family member.

**Working against the president.** Although working against the president as a specific target is often part of the other key motivating forces discussed here, in at least eight cases it became the paramount motivating force, overshadowing all the others. Since these cases are reported by presidents who view the rogue trustees as their major adversaries, those not familiar with the details of these cases could raise the issue of paranoia on the part of the presidents. In my view, paranoia was not an underlying element in these situations; when these presidents looked behind them, they were in reality being pursued. The following illustration reflects the reality some of these presidents faced:

*I had crossed swords with a local power broker many years earlier, and at the right time he sponsored two trustees for positions on the college board, arranging an obscene amount of money to support their campaigns. Once elected, they began their campaign to get rid of me. Unsuccessful in their early attempts, they sent a press release to the local media and to the District Attorney's office accusing me of "money laundering." A grand jury was convened which found them guilty of lying and fabricating a story that ruined my career. The grand jury completely exonerated me and clearly placed the blame on the rogue trustees. A movement began through local leaders to recall these trustees, but, as of this writing, they are still on the board. I resigned from the college.*

---

At least seven presidents in this study report they are no longer in their positions as a direct result of a rogue trustee; they were either dismissed or resigned in frustration.

---

In another case in another state, a rogue trustee wanted to get rid of the president and, similar to the case above, accused the president of "wrongful spending." Again a grand jury was convened and decided the charges were irrelevant; the case was dismissed. Paranoia fades as a rationale in light of the reality of grand juries.

In a number of these cases, rogue trustees ran on platforms to get rid of the president or became the champion of dismissal following election. In many cases rogue trustees have been successful, and there is a growing list of presidents who have been dismissed or who have resigned. At least seven presidents in this study report they are no longer in their positions as

a direct result of a rogue trustee; they were either dismissed or resigned in frustration. The motivations to get rid of the president are sometimes stated bluntly:

*She said of the president, "The fish rots from the head."*

*He ran on a platform to fire me.*

*Her sole purpose on the board was to get rid of the president.*

*So far he has run off two presidents.*

*He made it known in the college community that he was going to get rid of me because I was a woman.*

The goal is not always to get rid of the president, but some rogue trustees work hard to embarrass and discredit the president, which can lead to resignations out of frustration.

*He tried to embarrass me publicly at board meetings, as well as belittle me and other administrators.*

*His main agenda was how he could upstage the administration and the president in particular.*

*She would challenge any and all of my decisions and actions in an adversarial manner.*

A common tactic of these trustees is to focus on the financial affairs of the college. Those who are attorneys, CPAs, or business executives bring a well-honed skill to the table. They often position themselves as the watchdogs to protect citizens against increased taxes and wasteful spending.

*He always focused on the financial aspects of the college and never once inquired about or was interested in the students or the mission of the institution.*

*She played to every audience as if she were the only person protecting them from tax increases.*

*He never asked about issues related to the mission of serving students but preferred to concentrate on legal compliance issues and the president's compensation package.*

Oddly enough, five of the presidents specifically report that the rogue trustee wanted to get rid of the president so he or she could be the president. In one case another trustee told the president, *You know what this is all about, don't you? He wants your job.* Some just want to run the college from their trustee position, but others apparently believe they are qualified to serve as president. Seldom is this the route to the community college presidency.



This is an alarming list of negative motivations rogue trustees bring to the college. Lest the reader be overwhelmed by this litany, we must keep in mind that the great majority of community college trustees are motivated by very positive reasons to serve. In a survey conducted for the Association of Community College Trustees (Smith et al., 2001), the authors summarized, “The most important reasons that motivated both appointed and elected trustees to seek appointment or election were to: 1) serve the community, 2) serve the college, and 3) improve programs for students” (p. 6). “Very Important” was the value placed on serving the community by 89 percent of appointed trustees and 86 percent of elected trustees. Serving the college was rated “Very Important” by 83 percent of the appointed trustees and 80 percent of the elected trustees. Improve programs for students was rated “Very Important” by 72 percent of the appointed trustees and 73 percent of the elected trustees.

## Damage Caused by the Rogue Trustee

- *Private confrontation between the chair and the rogue trying to educate worked several times; in other cases, it did not.*
- *Use of ACCT or AGB consultants can relieve the chair of addressing the problem directly; unfortunately, some rogues could care less what external folks say.*
- *Use the accrediting body to identify poor leadership and inappropriate behavior; this is a high risk for the president.*
- *Talk to the appointing authority if possible; often its members have no idea they appointed a jackass.*
- *Good committee structures can enable a bad voice to be localized or drowned out by wiser minds.*
- *Kill them with courtesy and information to outflank the parochialism; too often this is just a major waste of energy, but it can work.*
- *Encourage broad board participation to lessen the influence of a few; it is important to encourage the thoughtful board members who are often too polite to challenge the rogue.*
- *Retreats where board assessment can take place and candor can be exchanged are a good way to bring out discomfort with the rogue without brutal confrontation.*
- *Continuous board self-assessment can be benchmarked against good practices and outcomes.*
- *Actively support the work of ACCT and AGB to uplift board awareness of the significance of their roles.*
- *Provide thorough board member orientation.*
- *Obtain permission from the appointing authority to have some vetting role, at least by the chair.*
- *Embarrass the idiots when called for—as a last resort.*

— Advice from a President

**THE ROGUE TRUSTEE MAY BE THE SINGLE MOST DESTRUCTIVE FORCE** ever to plague an educational institution. There have been rogue presidents and rogue faculty members who cause considerable damage, but the rogue trustee operates from the nexus of power that provides a base for massive destruction. Presidents and faculty do not have much of a power base, and there are policies in place that can lead to their dismissal. There are few, if any, policies in place to deal with the rogue trustee, and those that are in place amount to little more than a slap on the wrist.

As a trustee, the rogue has a legal role in the governance of all aspects of the college. The rogue has a public platform in board meetings usually held monthly and sometimes twice or more a month. The rogue trustee has access to the community and to the local media, often through prior associations. The rogue trustee is the employer of the president and plays a key role in hiring, setting salary and benefits, extending contracts, and evaluating the president—psychological and economic leverage some rogue trustees wield with a heavy hand. The rogue trustee is a peer of the other trustees and can bully them into acting on his or her agenda; the rogue can and has worked against the re-election or reappointment of other trustees and will support their opponents. Educational culture pretty much requires obeisance to the trustee from faculty and staff, and the rogue uses the authority to berate and intimidate these employees. Again, the rogue trustee is the elephant in the room—a rogue elephant not easily contained.

Three presidents describe in brief paragraphs the range of damages that have occurred at the hands of a rogue trustee:

*The most damaging is the trustee's sowing the seeds of mistrust in the board and the administration throughout the college and the community. Clearly the trustee's public displays of disrespect and derogatory comments have had a negative impact on how the college president and board are perceived by all employees and the community at large. More so, the amount of time and energy that is expended simply dealing with the trustee has cost the college both in terms of manpower and dollars—time and money that could have been better spent on more productive endeavors.*

*The board process has been bogged down; routine issues become more complex. The ability to conduct business with the entire board in an open and candid manner is lost, as the rogue trustee cannot be*

*trusted with either sensitive or confidential information. Inclusiveness, once embraced by the entire board, is a thing of the past.*

*Damage included diminished public confidence in the board as a whole, difficulties for the college foundation to raise funds, accreditation problems for the board and the college, undermining the CEO's authority, personal attacks in the media including questioning integrity and honesty, bothering students and causing students to question how a board member could get by with such actions, and setting a climate in the board meetings of negativity and selfishness that sometimes rubbed off on other members of the board.*

It is unimaginable that one person can cause so much damage to so many. When the rogue trustee operates over long periods of time—in several cases for decades—the result is the creation of an institution in crisis. When there are two or more rogue trustees or when the board chair is the rogue trustee, the crisis becomes a calamity. Such damage is pervasive and affects the entire college, president, faculty, staff, and other trustees. The damage to the college and to these three groups is reported in the following section.

---

The college, on the other hand, cannot leave the community and does not have the capacity to recover as easily as individuals; it is the college that suffers most at the hands of a rogue trustee.

---

**Damage to the college.** The damage a rogue trustee can do to individuals is enormous. Presidents are the most visible and vulnerable targets, but administrators and faculty can suffer, too. Other trustees on the board are not immune, and chairs resign and excellent members of the board decline reappointment or refuse to run again. However, individuals do have a choice, even though the damage can be severe personally and professionally. They can move on and recover. The college, on the other hand, cannot leave the community and does not have the capacity to recover as easily as individuals; it is the college that suffers most at the hands of a rogue trustee. Once the college's reputation is damaged, it can take years to regain community trust and support.

*The community began to raise questions about the board's behavior and about the college's capacity to provide a quality education. A culture began to emerge that made it harder for the college to pass*

*bonds, plan for mergers and expansion, develop new programs, and establish partnerships with local business and industry.*

*In essence, the college became dysfunctional with the responsibilities of the board, the president, and the administration confused, uncertain, and strained.*

*The community at large had no trust in the board, no faith in its integrity, and no respect for the college. Community leaders were always looking for the ulterior motive of the trustees.*

*Eventually, if the rogue trustee stays on the board, the college and community will be negatively affected in some way. Local citizens will wonder what all the fuss is about at the college, which was always a place they could be proud of.*

---

Once the college's reputation is damaged, it can take years to regain community trust and support.

---

When a college begins to become an unhealthy place, local stakeholders begin to have doubts and the college loses support:

- In a community college, the support of community leaders is absolutely required if the college is to function efficiently and effectively. Colleges need local leaders to champion their mission and their programs and to establish credibility. Local leaders participate in many networks through service clubs, the Chamber of Commerce, churches, social clubs, and similar organizations, and they are immediately attuned to any problems at the college.
- Local and state legislators can withhold funds and raise inquiries. They become reluctant to sponsor special bills that would benefit the college. They help spread the word in high places about the challenges at the college.
- Foundations, individuals, and businesses that have contributed to the college in the past will hold back their support. Once these sources have cut off the flow of funds, it is difficult to regain credibility and trust.
- Tax levies and local bonds can fail for lack of community support. One college had not had an increase in the local tax levy for fourteen years because the community had lost faith in the college. In another case, the rogue trustee actively campaigned against the local bond that would have significantly helped the college.

- Rogue trustees sometimes create havoc with the process for awarding contracts. Since contractors often represent local businesses and industries that partner with the college to create special workforce opportunities for students, the process must be transparent and legitimate. In some cases, the rogue trustee has influenced the awarding of contracts; in one case reported in this study, a very large construction contract went to the least qualified vendor, a friend of the trustee. In this very competitive arena, the college's integrity and reputation were severely damaged.
- Once the local media become involved in covering the news from the college, the chaos and dissension created by the rogue trustee can become headline news. In one case, a local editor worked closely with the rogue trustee over a period of years to report on the worst scenarios at the college, which were not always true. In a half dozen cases, rogue trustees held press conferences and summoned television stations to advance their agendas, to make false accusations against the college and its leadership, or to bask in the attention. It is particularly difficult for a college to recover from continuing negative reports in the local media.

Once local stakeholders and community leaders lose faith in the college, the college's reputation is damaged almost beyond repair. The rogue trustee can complete his or her tenure and leave the site of destruction, but the damage can continue for years. As Shakespeare's Marc Antony observed, "The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones."

In addition to the loss of support and trust from community stakeholders, there is collateral damage to the college. Presidents worry that all the attention required to deal with a rogue trustee takes away from the business of operating the college:

*The primary damage done by a rogue trustee is that it distracts college leaders from mission and purpose and people. Time and money are wasted dealing with the issues and anticipated issues or trouble which the rogue causes. Decisions are postponed, real issues are ignored or set aside, and the institution stagnates.*

*Everything slowed down in the college; the business of the college became the business of dealing with the rogue trustee.*

One rogue trustee, unchecked and over time, can turn a healthy college into a very unhealthy college. An early sign is the beginning decline in faculty and staff morale. The sense that the college was a special place in which to work no longer rallies loyalty. The bonds of community, collaboration,

and connectivity are loosened and sometimes lost. Faculty and staff drift away and hunker down in the comfort of their personal priorities. The spirit of risk taking, innovation, and experimentation is replaced by increasing caution and paranoia. The climate created by the rogue trustee accentuates the conservative elements in the college, and there is a reluctance to launch new programs or to engage in change. Motivation to lead is inhibited; the college atrophies; the work of the rogue trustee is done.

In some cases reported here, faculty and staff begin to mimic negative behaviors modeled by the rogue trustee, and they take advantage of processes long considered inappropriate for professional educators. They participate in creating a new culture of division and cynicism. Some retire early and others leave out of frustration. The college's reputation becomes known in the region and the state, and there are fewer and fewer applications from quality faculty and quality leaders. The pool of applicants for top positions, including the presidency, lacks luster.

---

One rogue trustee, unchecked and over time, can turn  
a healthy college into a very unhealthy college.

---

Unless there is a student trustee or an active and involved student government, students may not be aware of the damage done to the college. Over time they may begin to realize, especially if there is an active student press or they engage the local media, that there is something wrong about the college. One president reported a significant decline in enrollment because of the problems created by the rogue trustee. He also noted that *millions of growth dollars were lost because of the rogue's behavior*. Students, too, suffer the impact of rogue trustees.

**Damage to the president.** New community college presidents soon develop tough skins, given they play such visible roles and are so closely connected to their faculty, staff, and communities. Community college presidents are highly accessible to faculty and staff, with whom they interact daily; to community leaders and media representatives who live next door or gather, along with the president, for lunch at the monthly Rotary or Kiwanis meeting; and to the local trustees who sit with the president at monthly or semimonthly board meetings. Such accessibility makes the community college president highly vulnerable and a clear target for rogue trustees on the attack. Maybe in some cases familiarity really does breed contempt.

Although a few presidents report that their rogue trustee does not personally attack them, most report personal attacks that would shock

those not exposed to such shenanigans. Rogue trustees have called their presidents incompetent, dishonest, stupid, and liars—in public places including board meetings, in community venues, and in meetings with groups of faculty and staff. One president reports that she spent most of her time trying to keep faculty and staff morale positive while trying to put out the fires a rogue trustee kept starting to disparage her reputation. At one point, the leadership of the faculty union came to her aid in an open board meeting with a vote of confidence as a counterweight to the attacks of the rogue trustee. In many of these cases of personal attack, the assault is carried over into evaluations, contract extensions, and salary negotiations.

Personal attacks lead to considerable stress for presidents, other trustees, faculty, and staff, and the majority of presidents in this study did not reference the stress they—or their families—feel. The stress and tension reflected in the following statements is only the tip of the iceberg:

---

The president loses the opportunity to lead the institution when the board is in chaos or when a trustee operates, without penalty, outside the norms of expected behavior.

---

*The damage done to me was the tension it created between me, the trustee, and the college staff and community leaders involved in the case.*

*I thought I was masterful at controlling my emotions and attitude with the rogue trustee until I realized how many toxins and negative energy began to fade away when the issue was resolved.*

*The other trustees and I went through considerable stress and anxiety in anticipation of the threat created by the rogue trustee.*

*In the beginning, before I had proved myself to other board members, he caused me personal anguish and concern.*

*The trustee got involved in a very unethical situation, and I had to confront him about it while in fear of his temper and for my job. With the help of another trustee, we resolved the situation but not without a lot of stress and anxiety on my part.*

*If the president spends too much time anticipating what the rogue is going to do, the president will end up in the doctor's office.*

Rogue trustees, through personal attacks and other means, create a climate that can undermine the authority and credibility of the president. In one state there have been several cases reported of anonymous letters sent to the faculty and to the local press charging the president with unlawful

and immoral behavior. A rogue trustee has been charged with this practice by one president. The president loses the opportunity to lead the institution when the board is in chaos or when a trustee operates, without penalty, outside the norms of expected behavior. When the trustee uses the local media or instigates an investigation by a grand jury, as reported in two cases noted earlier, the credibility of the president will suffer regardless of the speciousness of the charges and attacks. One president noted that in extreme cases the president becomes a “figurehead” when groups and individuals know they can bypass the president and go directly to the board or to the rogue trustee. Another president said that in these cases the president starts looking, acting, and quacking like a lame duck.

In one interesting situation, the credibility of the president was actually enhanced when attacked by the rogue trustee:

*I'm sure it was inadvertent, but the thing she did to me was give me instant credibility within the college and the community. Having her tell people that I was incompetent and should be fired for not doing the things she wanted me to do reinforced perceptions of my integrity and of my willingness to oppose her for the good of the college.*

There are probably a number of similar situations where presidents have gained credibility with faculty, staff, and other trustees for standing up to a rogue trustee, but there were few such incidents reported in this study.

A common tactic or need of some rogue trustees is to demand an inordinate amount of personal attention and time from the president, which can cause considerable damage for the president. Some rogue trustees call the president daily, demand to know where the president is at all times, and bombard the president with hundreds of emails. These contacts are sometimes designed as calculated harassment and sometimes reflections of obsessive needs on the part of the trustee. In either case, if the president makes time for the trustee, as most do in the beginning, he or she has less time for leading and managing the college. All rogue trustees cause situations that require a great deal of time and energy from the president, but here we are addressing the special case of trustees reflected in this observation by a president: *He monopolized my time and energy so effectively that the other trustees began to resent the fact that I had no time at all to spend with them.* And we can assume that faculty, staff, and family members share the same resentments.

The ultimate damage that a rogue trustee can cause the president is loss of the job. Dealing with a rogue trustee may be part of the reason the tenure of community college presidents has “dropped from its earlier high of 10 years to a norm of 5 years” (Dunderstadt, 2000, p. 576). In some

cases, presidents are dismissed when the rogue can rally the other trustees to support such action. In some cases the climate and the reputation of the college have become so damaged by the rogue trustee that other trustees and even the president agree that the situation is irreversible and the president needs to be replaced. In most cases reported here, the president simply resigns in frustration. Several of these cases were highlighted in, “Working against the president” (see page 46). It might be difficult for presidents who work with supportive boards and who have never experienced a rogue trustee to believe that, as one president said, *No president would be prepared for this kind of trustee*. The following presidents have the scars to validate that observation:

*I had five great years until the new trustee came on board, and then I could not take it anymore and resigned.*

*The damage done to me personally made it impossible for me to work productively with the board so I left the institution.*

---

Although presidents make every attempt to protect faculty and staff from personal attacks by rogue trustees, they are not always successful.

---

*My career was seriously damaged, and the buyout seriously damaged the finances of the college.*

*He ran me off and later ran off the second president. The third is beginning to realize the gravity of the situation.*

*I finally left under great duress.*

*The situation caused by the rogue trustees was so bad that the district chancellor, district vice chancellors, both college presidents, and both college vice presidents of instruction resigned.*

*I chose to leave the college before the trustee completely destroyed my credibility and integrity.*

*Luckily, my retirement age came at just the right time! Oh, Happy Day!!!*

Sadly, losing one's job is not always the end of the drama. In one case, the rogue trustee continued the attack by trying to influence stakeholders at a new college where the president was appointed CEO. The trustee urged faculty at his college to contact faculty at the new college and sent newspaper reports to the board at the new college. Although such actions sometimes follow a really incompetent and destructive president, in this

case it appeared to be a case of vengeance on the part of a rogue trustee. The president eventually hired a personal attorney to help him address the situation.

**Damage to faculty and staff.** When the college to which they have dedicated their lives is under threat and in chaos, faculty and staff also feel the damage created by a rogue trustee. A climate of fear and mistrust begins to pervade the entire institution. A rational approach to conducting the business of the college is derailed. The college's reputation in the community and in the state—linked to the reputations of the faculty and staff—is in jeopardy. The maelstrom caused by the rogue trustee can stir the darker angels hovering in the shadows of the institution.

Beyond this more generic damage to faculty and staff is collateral damage that affects some individuals directly and personally. Although presidents make every attempt to protect faculty and staff from personal attacks by rogue trustees, they are not always successful. In some cases, a specific staff member such as the vice president for business or the director of personnel is a continuing target because of the position's special role in the arena in which the rogue wishes to dominate. More common is the trustee who attacks any college employee who stands in the way. Several presidents report on these cases:

*He used fear, and staff were afraid of his constant intimidation.*

*When told by staff members that his request is against college policy, he sometimes bullies and berates employees to their face and to others.*

*One vice president was so intimidated by the trustee she consulted with a lawyer.*

*In open board meetings she would reprimand administrators for not having the answers to her questions.*

A tactic used by rogue trustees to agitate the president almost always falls on the shoulders of administrative staff—the preparation of detailed and endless reports on college functions and operations. The preparation of reports for board meetings is an expected and much practiced activity in community colleges, but here we are describing behavior in which such requests are used as intimidation. In a number of the cases reported in this study, the rogue trustee relishes the power and control he or she can exercise by requesting reports. Administrators and their staffs spend a great many hours preparing such reports—time taken away from the business of managing the college. Where this behavior is clearly an act of intimidation on the part of the rogue trustee, the reports are sometimes dismissed or

totally ignored. In several cases, a rogue trustee pushes the envelope by asking for follow-up reports or raising an additional series of questions to which staff must respond, usually by the next meeting of the board.

Where these personal attacks and intimidating actions occur, college faculty and staff become demoralized and cynical. They begin going through the motions. They lose heart, and the quality of their performance can deteriorate. Their relationship with the president suffers because they lose confidence in the ability of the president to manage the situation: If the president cannot protect herself, how can she protect me?

---

Their relationship with the president suffers  
because they lose confidence in the ability of the president  
to manage the situation: If the president cannot  
protect herself, how can she protect me?

---

One of the outcomes of these deteriorating situations is that they encourage a few others in the organization to behave unprofessionally. In a number of cases faculty and staff started going directly to the rogue trustee for support, bypassing the president and the other trustees. Rewarded with success, faculty and staff return to these routes again and again, creating detrimental patterns of behavior. The climate of the college begins to change and openness, collaboration, and community are lost values. Some faculty pine for the good old days. The rogue trustee, running roughshod over the norms of expected behavior, has wrought considerable damage on all the stakeholders.

Just as with presidents, the ultimate damage occurs when faculty and staff lose their jobs because of the rogue trustee. Some take early retirement or resign to take jobs in other institutions to disengage from chaos and a deteriorating college environment. One key state leader reported to me that more vice presidents than presidents lose their jobs because of rogue trustees. He suggested that vice presidents and other top administrators often became the sacrificial lambs to the rogue's need for power and vengeance. These administrators are forced out of positions when they cross a rogue trustee, and sometimes other trustees and the president are impotent to prevent it.

A former administrator describes just how difficult it can be for faculty and staff when rogue trustees reign:

*My difficult decision to depart after almost two decades of exemplary service ranging from professor to vice president was forced by the board majority who repeatedly threatened to terminate my administrative appointment this year at the end of my current contract.... The real issue is ideology and control, and the board majority exercises that control through administrator dismissal, staff intimidation, and faculty reassignment; then personally fills "vacated" positions with supporters woefully unqualified except in their political persuasion.... If the board majority supports the fine work of its administrators, faculty, and staff, as they claim, then why have all key administrators left to accept administrative appointments in other college districts?*

**Damage to other trustees.** As indicated throughout this book, the great majority of trustees are exceptional and dedicated public servants who collaborate with and support the efforts of administrators and faculty to create a quality college to serve the community. Mellow and Heelan (2008) in *Minding the Dream* describe these kinds of trustees:

The composition of governing bodies ... will ideally be a selection or election of the best and the brightest people. Participants in governing bodies should come to their tasks with a single purpose: to maintain and enhance the community college. Thus, the ideal governance has processes which seek out and select individuals on the basis of intellect, wisdom, expertise, and the purity of their intentions.... In the best governance, no aspect of an individual's service is aimed at personal gain. (p. 78)

---

Much has been written about dysfunctional boards in community colleges, but it is not known how many of these problem boards had their genesis under the influence of a rogue trustee. Further research may reveal that the problem is not so much the dysfunctional board as the dysfunctional trustee.

---

This ideal composition exists in many community colleges across the country, but when a rogue trustee is added to the mix, the climate for public service can be severely damaged along with the dedicated trustees who want to serve their communities and their colleges. Much has been written about dysfunctional boards in community colleges, but it is not known how

many of these problem boards had their genesis under the influence of a rogue trustee. Further research may reveal that the problem is not so much the dysfunctional board as the dysfunctional trustee. If that proves to be the case, consultants and stakeholders who are invested in solving these problems may need to revisit how they approach the solutions.

---

Through manipulation and intimidation the rogue begins to create a climate of mistrust and deception. Unless the president and the other trustees are able to block these efforts, the board process will soon descend into chaos and confusion where meetings are full of dissension, frustration, and anger.

---

Whereas the best and brightest on the board work as a team to govern the college, the rogue trustee is a discordant element forcing other trustees to deal with his or her behavior and agenda. Instead of focusing board time on basic policies and strategic plans, the focus shifts to whatever issues the rogue trustee wants to address. Through manipulation and intimidation, the rogue begins to create a climate of mistrust and deception. Unless the president and the other trustees are able to block these efforts, the board process will soon descend into chaos and confusion where meetings are full of dissension, frustration, and anger. Here are several examples of how rogues carried out their schemes to take over the board:

*He learned the norms of higher education, the vocabulary, and the processes, and then he struck. The other board members were available to be manipulated—that was their key role in his view. He would wait for the right moment and then make a move to take control of the situation. Sometimes he had a three-step process or a sequence to set up conditions most favorable to him. His best condition was being in the middle of chaos that he created.... He would not hesitate to distort anything that would help his efforts; truth, intent, or consequences were not relevant. If he could destabilize the board and the president, then he could try to fill the void, gain control, manipulate. He was out to destroy everyone, including the other trustees on the board.*

*From the very start, the rogue trustee attempted to control the board and to influence both administrators and faculty.... Other board members talked among themselves about the brazenness and*

*callousness of the rogue and wondered about his motivations.... He was reelected and then intensified his efforts to fragment the board.... He further polarized relations between himself and the board.... Over a period of several years, his behavior resulted in significant distrust among board members and between board members and the administration.*

The two cases above are extreme situations, and while there were a number of similar cases reported by presidents in this study, most of the effects on other trustees and the board process were a little less dramatic:

*The other board members grew tired of the constant harassment and the long drawn out board meetings filled with arguments.*

*The community at large had no trust in the board, no faith in its integrity, and no respect for the college.*

*The board process was compromised by his violating closed session rules, being unduly obstructionist, and causing additional work by other board members who tried to interpret and deal with his agenda.*

*Exacerbates the capacity to have a candid discussion for fear any opposition to the rogue's perspective is going to lead to a diatribe.*

*It weakened the team effort of the board and made the members ineffective.*

*The rogue's behavior caused severe conflict within the board, reduced the level of trust among members, and hindered efforts at team building within the board.*

Boards of trustees that have to deal with these kinds of conflicts lose their credibility with the administration, with the faculty and staff, and with the community. The rogue turns on other board members and accuses them of being “in the pocket” or acting as a “rubber stamp” for the president when they try to work with the CEO in an appropriate way. Serving on the local board is no longer an honor; indeed, such service can become a badge of dishonor. Disenchanted board members can become placid. They are often reluctant and even impotent to confront and remove the bad apple in the barrel:

*The rest of the board simply withered away and faded into the background, leaving the president to deal with the rogue.*

*This particular rogue was so proficient, persistent, and aggressive in manipulating and disrupting to achieve her own agenda that the board became dysfunctional and was unwilling to take any action to stem her behavior.*



*The other five trustees were reluctant to go against the rogue because he was a bully and would challenge and embarrass them verbally at meetings. They retreated from confronting him, and the board chair was absolutely no help.*

Feeling ineffective and impotent are not what trustees signed on for in the beginning. Even worse outcomes occur when good trustees begin to mimic the behavior of the rogue trustee. If the rogue trustee can get away with securing appointments for his family, obtaining contracts for his friends, and gaining all this attention, others might be inclined to follow. As one president said, *Rogue trustees are contagious*. Another president said, *Rogues lead to rogues; the more they are tolerated, the more they are imitated by other trustees. Soon chaos ensues*. Good trustees can be damaged by bad trustees.

---

Good trustees can be damaged by bad trustees.

---

The Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) has created numerous workshops and retreats to help colleges improve their board processes. ACCT's annual conference is an excellent venue for trustees to learn about the basics of effective board practice and to network with other trustees and presidents. Orientation for new board members and continuing staff development opportunities for all board members is now common practice to ensure that boards are more efficient and more effective. And these practices are often viewed as the palliative that will prevent the advent of the rogue trustee or corral the behavior of the rogue trustee. Where rogue trustees have established a beachhead, however, orientation and staff development are often thwarted and abandoned:

*During his first year as a trustee, he so dominated and disrupted the annual board retreat that no retreats were held again until after he resigned.*

*We encouraged without success the trustee to attend regional and national meetings for board members.*

*The board workshops were scheduled periodically as a way of addressing the problems the rogue had created, and after about the third one, the consultant found that the rogue trustee was torpedoing the process by asking the same questions at every meeting.*

*She totally disengaged from our attempts to create a board team effort and refused to attend retreats.*

*He did not believe in board development. He made sure that the other board members did what he wanted through persuasion and fear. The other trustees feared him and would not oppose him.*

As with presidents, faculty, and administrators, the ultimate damage done to other trustees by the rogue trustee is when excellent and committed trustees resign or choose not to run for reelection. In a number of cases, the target of the rogue trustee is the board chair, whose position the rogue often desires.

*The rogue trustee threatened to destroy the board chair, who later resigned.*

*He made board meetings so unnecessarily long and confrontational that after a year, two popular and productive board members resigned.*

*Because of the personal attacks on the board chair, made in public by the rogue trustee, the chair resigned.*

*My excellent board chair left in frustration.*

*No matter how much I pleaded with her, she said at the end of her term she would not run again because she had had it with the rogue trustee.*

In several cases in this study, a rogue trustee publicly campaigned against a colleague on the board and actively recruited associates in the community who supported the rogue's agenda to run for the board. Although such political maneuvering is not uncommon on many boards, the rogue trustee is often more blatant and heavy handed in such machinations.

## Strategies to Repair the Damage

**THE GOOD NEWS IS** that in about half the cases reported in this study, actions were taken that changed the behavior of the rogue trustee or resulted in the trustee resigning from the board. The bad news is that in about half the cases reported in this study the actions taken to change the behavior of the rogue trustee or to get the trustee to resign from the board failed. We are used to ending articles and studies on a positive note summarizing the steps or strategies that the intended audience should consider and implement to address the challenge under consideration. To end this review in that way is to play the role of Pollyanna; the rogue trustee is too tough a customer to be dealt with in the usual approach. Some presidents in this study indicate there are no strategies or solutions for dealing with a rogue trustee:

*Boards are weak and powerless in dealing with a rogue trustee. They don't know what to do and live in constant fear of their own public embarrassment. They attempt to fix the problem behind closed doors, and it never works. They send the rogue to "charm school," and that works for one or two board meetings. I don't really see any significant action that can turn the ship around. One of my cynical reactions is there is no cure for rogues. The chromosomes and genes of rogues won't allow resolution to occur.*

*Neither policies, good practices, laws, or the enticements of collegial teamwork have dissuaded this person from pursuing his own personal agendas. Unfortunately, the board has not been willing to do more than mildly sanction his actions. I attempted to engage this trustee by accommodating his personality and personally orienting him to the protocols of the trustee's roles and responsibilities. When that failed I tried to get the board chair and the other trustees to help manage him; but that failed, too. I finally employed an attorney to review the illegal actions he championed. But when the board was not willing to confront him, and the public was unwilling to unseat him, he was emboldened to continue doing what he had always done. He is still at the college creating havoc for everyone.*

*My experience tells me, after trying everything there was to try, that the damage can be repaired only after the person is gone. I have seen other colleges repair quickly in that case. While the rogue trustee is still on the board, I don't think it can happen. Other trustees, the chair, and I worked together to bring about change in the rogue—to no avail. We tried all the usual stuff: workshops, frank talks, confrontation,*

**PRESERVE YOUR INTEGRITY;** *be willing to say no, even if it means you may lose your job; do the right things for the right reasons, and do them the right way. Keep everyone equally informed and consistently demonstrate your support for the college. Don't make deals hoping to placate the rogue trustee.*

*Find colleagues you can talk with, both to strategize and as a means of stress relief. Don't try and force other trustees to take sides, but continue to address the undesirable behaviors with the board chair, assuming the board chair is not the rogue trustee, and encourage him or her to address the unacceptable behaviors.*

*Seek to engage board members in professional development activity so they will have an opportunity to learn about best practices. This can be done by having trustees attend ACCT conferences and/or conducting board retreats on topics shaped by the board. Hopefully, the board will select topics or can be encouraged to select topics that address the behavior of the rogue trustee.*

—Advice from a President

*“How can we help you?” talks, trying to get an opposition candidate to run against him. Nothing worked, and nine years later the trustee is still on the board.*

In these three cases, the president solved the personal dilemma by resigning or retiring. And in all three cases, the rogue trustee continues to damage these colleges and their constituencies as an active member of the board.

But there is also good news in examples of strategies implemented by presidents, board chairs, and other trustees that have worked to limit or change the behavior of rogue trustees. There are no easy solutions for, as defined in this study, the rogue trustee is an extreme example of an individual who uses his or her position to create havoc, violate the rules, and cause severe damage. Many of them are immune to the usual expectations and pressures social organizations exert on individuals to create a civil society. The strategies summarized in the following section are all taken from the real experiences of the presidents who participated in this study.

---

There are no easy solutions for, as defined in this study,  
the rogue trustee is an extreme example of  
an individual who uses his or her position to create  
havoc, violate the rules, and cause severe damage.

---

Both successes and failures are reported to provide a realistic picture. Every case of a rogue trustee is idiosyncratic to the culture, the players, and the opportunities in a specific college. Presidents and trustees will have to examine these strategies carefully to determine which ones will apply to their situation.

**Policies, codes of ethics, handbooks, guidelines.** Most community colleges, usually under the leadership of the president, have created written policies or guidelines regarding trustee effectiveness. There are excellent examples of codes of ethics and handbooks, some developed by national trustee organizations such as the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) and the Association of Governing Boards (AGB). Some colleges have developed special statements of values, principles, and practices for trustees. Accrediting standards also address the appropriate roles of governing boards.

One president felt that a statement of values and principles *was effective in isolating the behavior of the rogue trustee and was helpful in*

*empowering other trustees to intervene.* A number of presidents felt that policies and guidelines helped identify areas of concern and provided a framework in which issues and violations could be discussed. Some of the written documents available are too general to be effective in addressing the behavior of rogue trustees. Many recommended that these written documents were more helpful when they addressed specific issues of board behavior, such as the following:

- Place time limits on speaking during board meetings.
- Establish attendance requirements for board meetings.
- Require that reports be prepared only when two or more board members make a request.
- Agree not to respond to anonymous letters and emails.
- Prohibit trustees from making direct requests or demands to staff; all requests go through the president or the board chair.
- Establish processes for a consent agenda.
- Establish criteria and a process for removing a board member from office.

All colleges should, at a minimum, create policies, codes, and guidelines that identify the appropriate roles and responsibilities of trustees in governing the college. It is much easier for an effective board to create these documents before a rogue trustee appears. Such documents help effective boards become even more effective; they can be very useful in contending with a rogue trustee.

While there are many good examples of documents available that focus on roles and responsibilities of trustees, one is cited here that is exceptional and could be easily duplicated. The New Jersey Council of County Colleges is the legally created state organization for community colleges in New Jersey. In 2005, the Council created a one-page document, *Eight Key Principles for Community College Trustees* (see Appendix B), that addresses the primary roles of trustees. It is left to local presidents and trustees to promote these principles as they wish. A number of the colleges ask their trustees to sign this document each year, providing an opportunity for trustees to review and even evaluate their roles as an annual event.

An annual evaluation of the trustees and of the president's role in relationship to the trustees can be a very effective strategy for surfacing rogue behavior. Effective trustee boards tend to participate in such evaluations as a matter of good practice. Some colleges include participation by vice presidents, other key administrators, and faculty leaders. Evaluation protocols are available throughout the literature with special forms available from ACCT and AGB.

Unfortunately, solid guidelines, annual evaluations, and stringent codes of ethics do not always influence the behavior of trustees; some rogue trustees are not constrained at all by these established standards, as reported by presidents in the following examples:

*Largely out of the actions of a rogue trustee, the board adopted an ethics policy that included provision for enforcement. These provisions were not effective in changing behavior because board members were reluctant to police one another.*

*The rogue stated that the policies, regulations, and procedures do not apply to board members unless specifically stated. He also indicated that anything is permissible if there is no specific language prohibiting action.*

*He made it clear he had no regard for the bylaws.*

*Board members were totally opposed to any policy regarding their role. Since the trustees are elected, they felt it was up to the electorate and not the board to deal with inappropriate behavior.*

Policies, guidelines, codes, and handbooks can provide benchmarks and a framework for review and evaluation; but for the rogue trustee who does not abide by the norms accepted by others, different strategies must be considered.

**Trustee development: orientation, work sessions, retreats, and conferences.** The written documents noted above often provide the content for trustee development programs. Most colleges attempt some kind of orientation for new trustees in which these documents are quite useful. Orientation might include special sessions with the president and the board chair, mentoring by another board member, and sessions with selected staff. Trustee conferences, both at the state and national level, provide orientation sessions for new trustees.

When colleges want to address key issues and opportunities in the college, work sessions are a popular venue. Retreats provide an extended and often informal environment for examining more complex problems. Consultants are often invited to lead retreats to improve board relationships; some are scheduled specifically to deal with the issue of a rogue trustee but often disguised under the banner of “improving communications” for all.

A number of presidents report success with trustee development programs as a method of preventing the emergence of a rogue trustee. One president used the New Jersey *Eight Key Principles for Community College Trustees* as a launching point. The board adopted the principles and focused its efforts on implementing a number of the principles over a period of time.

## STRATEGIES THAT WORK

Presidents and trustees have used the following strategies, sometimes alone and sometimes in combination, to lessen the influence of or remove a rogue trustee:

1. Create a code of ethics with teeth that includes a procedure for removing a trustee.
2. Establish policies and guidelines for trustee behavior that include such items as board attendance, time limits on speaking, and requests for staff reports.
3. Require a thorough orientation for all new board members.
4. Establish a trustee development program that includes work sessions, retreats, and conferences.
5. Bring in external consultants and accreditation teams when necessary.
6. Use the college's legal counsel to provide an annual update on laws concerning open meetings, bid and contract procedures, conflicts of interest, and other relevant issues.
7. Create criteria for the board chair position and establish a board policy that allows for the re-election of the board chair.
8. Create an annual evaluation process for board chair performance, trustee member performance, and CEO performance related to the board; and examine the results in an annual retreat or special work session.
9. Establish policies and procedures for a consent agenda for much of the board's work.
10. Work with the board chair as the most appropriate officer to address the problems of the rogue trustee.
11. Work with the board chair to enlist the support of the other members of the board in addressing the problems of the rogue trustee.
12. Consider channeling the energies and time of the rogue trustee into special projects or committees that reflect his or her interest.
13. Treat all board members equally and keep all members of the board informed about transactions and meetings with any individual board member.
14. Make sure all transactions with the rogue trustee are kept in the public eye.
15. Document all violations of the rogue trustee.
16. Encourage the board chair and other trustees to apply political pressure to corral the behavior of the rogue trustee.
17. Cautiously support opposition candidates when the rogue is running for reappointment or re-election.
18. Encourage the local media to attend board meetings and to examine the actions of the rogue trustee.
19. Cautiously support efforts at public censure by the other trustees, the faculty, and the community.
20. Keep the board focused on the larger picture: college mission, community service, and student learning.

External consultants facilitated a retreat that helped board members focus their energy on applying the principles to the achievement of college goals, rather than focusing on the personal agenda of any particular trustee. The use of a comprehensive trustee development program seems to hold promise as a tool for avoiding the rogue trustee situation.

Another president had been coping with a rogue trustee for some years and the problem eventually resulted in an official accrediting agency warning about the board's behavior. The president used the warning as a trigger to create a strategic plan to address the problem of the rogue trustee. Working with the board officers to help them understand the long-term damage to the college because of the official warning, and their responsibility to ensure the board acts as a single entity, an agreement was reached to have an external facilitator conduct orientation and training for all trustees, with a particular emphasis on policy governance principles. A review of all board policies followed and included strengthening the policy regarding trustee ethics and expectations. In addition, an annual plan was developed to maintain a board focus on strategic planning and on effectiveness and accountability measures. Additional trustee retreats, development opportunities, and resources were created as part of an ongoing focus on having trustees work with the president to advance the mission of the institution. The president reported that the rogue trustee has changed her behavior and now operates as an effective member of the board.

Even so, there are some cases where trustee development did not prove to be effective. One president reported that her rogue trustee refused to attend board retreats. Another president with experience in four different colleges said, *A rogue trustee does not learn to be a better trustee from trustee meetings and workshops; they learn how to use and exploit the culture, the terminology, and the protocols. The more trustee workshops they attend, the better they are at being a rogue trustee.*

**External consultants.** There are a number of consultants with expertise in working with trustees in the community college environment. They can troubleshoot on specific issues, review and evaluate policies and practices, and facilitate retreats and workshops. The Association of Community College Trustees provides a consulting service that is widely used, and there are individual consultants who are nationally known for their expertise, including Cindra Smith, Wayne Newton, George Potter, and Gary Davis.

One president had tried to work with a rogue trustee for several years and had very little support from the various board chairs. Finally, a chair was selected who would confront the issue of the rogue trustee, and in concert with the president a board retreat was planned with assistance from ACCT. As a result of the retreat, the president reported that the trustee

became more aware of how his behavior reflected on the college and how his behavior was viewed by other trustees and the community. He began to operate as an effective board member and several years later was elected to chair the board, where he served the college well.

In another case, the president brought in a consultant for a board retreat which began as a disaster when the rogue trustee immediately attacked the consultant and questioned his authority and ideas. The session exploded into hostile attacks on the president by the trustee, who left the room with another trustee who sometimes supported him. The consultant worked with the trustees left in the room and helped them understand they needed to “circle the wagons” to protect the college and themselves from the hostility created by the rogue trustee. While the session was dramatic and intense, the outcome was quite positive. The board members in the room called the president after the retreat and pledged their support; from that point, the board operated more efficiently and effectively, and the rogue trustee was isolated.

With some rogue trustees external consultants are impotent to assist. Over a period of several years, a rogue trustee in one college had created a great deal of mistrust and discord between the administration and the board of trustees. She then became the champion of addressing this “communication problem” and suggested a series of board and administrator retreats. A consultant was engaged who recommended a process in which trustees and senior administrators would identify problems to be addressed in a series of Saturday workshops. The first couple of workshops went smoothly until the rogue trustee began to deliberately stall the process by repeatedly asking the same questions of the consultant. The process deteriorated rapidly until the consultant conceded that the workshops were not helping, and they were abandoned.

Consultants, however, can be very effective in confronting a rogue trustee directly when others are too intimidated to do so. Most consultants have dealt with rogue trustees and dysfunctional boards, and they can bring this experience to bear on the problems at hand. When the consultant is part of a strategic plan that involves the creation or revision of documents on trustee effectiveness and a sustained program of trustee development, the opportunities for successful outcomes are increased.

**Accreditation.** Full and laudatory accreditation is the gold standard for all institutions of higher education. If the accreditation process places the college on probation, there is a plan for recovery, but if accreditation is lost, the college is out of business. In some cases accrediting agencies are brought in by college leaders to address significant issues in the financial or governance arena. In this study presidents cited monitoring reports,

warnings, and probation from the accrediting commissions regarding dysfunctional boards and the rogue trustees that operate on those boards. Full accreditation is the one external source that helps guarantee the college's integrity and reputation within the state, regional, and national education community, and it provides significant leverage for managing the behavior of rogue trustees.

Colleges dread the kind of national attention that can come with warnings from the regional accrediting associations regarding their accreditation status. *Community College Week* (Halcom, 2008) reported on an ongoing problem at Oakland Community College in Michigan with the headline, "Trustee Turmoil at Michigan College Putting Accreditation at Risk." The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools cited the board as a recurring trouble spot and admonished the board to "learn how to argue, debate, and disagree intellectually." The opening sentence of the article sounded the alarm, "The Board of Trustees at Michigan's largest community college is on notice to bury the hatchet on long-running political discord or risk the college's accreditation status."

---

Full accreditation is the one external source  
that helps guarantee the college's integrity and reputation  
within the state, regional, and national education community,  
and it provides significant leverage for  
managing the behavior of rogue trustees.

---

By the time accrediting commissions are involved in addressing issues related to rogue trustees, these issues have been around for some time, and the damage is probably severe and systemic. While rogue trustees may dismiss accreditation as an issue, usually the board as a whole will respond and try to address the problem. There are a number of cases cited by presidents in this study of colleges placed on probation with monitoring reports and revisits to track progress. However, because presidents and colleges are so sensitive to the role of the accrediting agency and the negative press that follows an intervention, there was no interest in sharing specific stories and allowing them to be cited.

In recent years, in recognition of the increasing problems related to board governance, and indirectly of problems created by rogue trustees, accrediting commissions have expanded their standards regarding

governance and college management. One president reports that the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools now has a revised standard (3.2.6) that opens the door for external support in dealing with a rogue trustee. A monitoring report from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education regarding an issue related to micromanagement and political interference by the board in a community college cites a series of relevant standards from *Characteristics for Excellence in Higher Education: Eligibility Requirements and Standards for Accreditation* (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2006):

...the governing body is ultimately accountable....however, it should not manage, micromanage, or interfere in the day-to-day operation of the institution.... Always the advocate, and when necessary the defender of the institution, the governing body is responsible for the institution's integrity and quality. (pp. 12-13)

Governing body members, regardless of how appointed, have primary responsibility to the accredited institution and should not allow political or other influences to interfere with governing body duties. (p. 13)

Members of the governing body act with authority only as a collective entity. (p. 13)

...the governing body should assist the executive officers by helping them resist pressures from individuals or groups outside the established governance structure of the institution that threaten to impede the fulfillment of institutional mission and goals. (p.14)

Other accrediting commissions have focused on the importance of a code of ethics for trustees. The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges has created an excellent set of standards regarding board and administrative organization that includes a specific standard related to appropriate board behavior: "The governing board has a code of ethics that includes a clearly defined policy for dealing with behavior that violates its code" (2002, Standard IV.B.I.h.). A number of California community colleges have been targeted by the commission for not addressing the trustees who violate the code of ethics.

There is a major risk involved for presidents who engage the accrediting commissions in examining governance issues in their institutions. Not only will their colleges be exposed locally and nationally for the problems, there could be retributions from the rogue trustee and his or her allies. In one case reported here, a college was placed on probation by the accrediting commission for political interference by board members and the county

sponsors. The president who made this happen was warned by the visiting team, *You might win the battle but ultimately lose the war*—meaning that the local politicians involved might blame him for the intervention. In any case, accrediting commissions can play a powerful and effective role in corralling the behavior of a rogue trustee when all other strategies have failed. Accreditation standards on governance and leadership should be incorporated in the college documents on board policies, codes of ethics, statements of principle, and handbooks to help set the stage for effective board practice and, hopefully, to prevent the need for more direct intervention by the accrediting commissions.

The staff members who serve accrediting commissions are a great resource for presidents who have to deal with a rogue trustee. Key staff at the accrediting commission are aware of the colleges in their region that have rogue trustees and dysfunctional boards, and they can be helpful in referring a president to colleagues in the field for support and advice.

Accrediting commissions do not usually target an individual in an institution as the source of problems and are not ever likely to identify a specific rogue trustee as the issue. The approach of the commissions is to address more generic issues such as a “dysfunctional board” or a “breakdown in communications between the board and the administration.” Under these banners, the team review can unearth the problems and make recommendations for action. While most stakeholders in the institution will understand that the real problem is the rogue trustee, it is possible that the rogue trustee will be oblivious to this process or will choose to ignore the outcomes. It is quite possible that most reports from accrediting commissions that focus on trustee problems are really reports on problems caused by a rogue trustee or two.

**Legal controls.** Although this study did not involve a review of legal controls available to presidents and boards, some presidents commented on the issue. There are apparently major differences among the states. A Florida president indicated that state and local policies were more than adequate in dealing with a rogue trustee. A California president said, *There is no recourse in California that I was ever able to find to stem the actions of a board member who is up to no good—unless, of course, they are engaging in illegal activity.* A Michigan president noted that *state law severely limits the actions that can be taken against an elected official.*

Except where a trustee is engaged in clearly illegal actions, there are very few policies in place for curtailing the behavior of or removing a rogue trustee. They are as protected as state and nationally elected officials: impeachment, after all, is the only recourse for removing a U. S. president from office.

A number of states have enacted sunshine laws to ensure that elected and appointed officials make their decisions in the open. The Brown Act was enacted in California in 1953 to ensure that the public could obtain access to and participate in local government meetings and deliberations. Although they vary from state to state, conflict-of-interest laws are among the most effective laws that govern the behavior of publicly elected officials.

The challenge of using these acts and any local or state policies to address the issue of the rogue trustee has to do with enforcement. Most are not specific enough to apply to the problems created by the rogue trustee, and if they were, there would still be the problem of how to enforce the law. While some of the problems created by rogue trustees are in the realm of illegal acts, most of the problems have to do with personality dysfunction and a meanness of spirit that fall outside the legal arena.

A recall campaign is one legal step colleges can take to address specifically the issue of a rogue trustee. But as one president reported, *While the attorneys agreed there were grounds for his recall, the process could be more contentious than coping with the trustee, and it could be quite damaging to the college.* Several presidents indicated that recall campaigns had been attempted or were in process in their colleges, but there was no way to determine in this study whether or not they were effective in removing the trustee. Unseating an appointed trustee may be easier than unseating an elected trustee; it all depends on how well connected the college president, board chair, and other trustees are to the appointing authority.

One president reported that his college had established a process by which an external investigator is hired to investigate selected problem issues that need objective analysis. An investigator was hired to review numerous grievances from staff and administrators regarding the treatment they had received from a rogue trustee. The president thought the report of the case with recommendations helped the trustee better understand her role and the impact of her behavior on the staff and the college.

The legal counsel employed by the college is a resource on legal issues that should be used extensively. The counsel plays a major role in the creation of policies, statements, and guidelines related to trustee effectiveness. The counsel should be used in orientation sessions, retreats, workshops, and work sessions to review and interpret existing local and state policies. One president reported that, *The general counsel was engaged to provide update sessions on laws concerning open meetings, bid and contract procedures, conflicts of interest, etc., for the entire board, aimed primarily at warning the rogue trustee of the boundaries and equipping the rest of the board to enforce them.*

**Role of the board chair.** In ideal situations, with a strong and competent leader serving as the chair of the board of trustees, the board chair plays the pivotal role in managing the behavior of the rogue trustee. When a highly competent and respected board chair is joined by competent and supportive members of the board, the rogue trustee may never hatch or, if he or she does, cannot thrive. One president was absolutely clear about responsibility for dealing with a rogue trustee: *A board problem is a board problem, not a CEO problem.*

A number of presidents reported that they worked closely with excellent board chairs to deal with a rogue trustee. In one case a new president was aware of the problems on the board with a rogue trustee when he took the job, and he raised the issue with the board chair. The chair committed to serving as the board chair for two years to give the president time to establish support and agreed to keep the rogue trustee off his back during that time so the president could do his job. The chair kept his commitments.

---

One president was absolutely clear about responsibility for dealing with a rogue trustee:

*A board problem is a board problem, not a CEO problem.*

---

In another case, the president and the chair built a close alliance to deal with the rogue trustee. They kept each other informed of her actions, and they planned ahead on issues she would support or not support in the formal meetings of the board. As the president said, *An unwavering team effort of a strong and highly respected board chair and a strong and effective president can control, or remove, a rogue trustee.*

Unfortunately, a number of presidents reported that their board chairs were neither highly competent nor well respected, and were totally ineffective in working with the president to address issues related to the rogue trustee:

*The board chair was weak, inarticulate, and not very smart; he was impotent in managing the rogue trustee.*

*The first chair was completely intimidated by the rogue trustee; the next chair was willing to take the rogue on but lacked the respect of the entire board to be of much help.*

*I worked with two board chairs and neither was strong enough to rein her in. One tried to be her buddy for a while, and she just devoured him.*

*The board chair was absolutely no help. It took me two or three meetings with him to realize that he would immediately share with others our private conversations. Initially, he would support my position and then change completely to support the rogue's position.*

These examples of poor board chairs beg for a change in how colleges select their chairs. An incompetent board chair is not only useless in addressing the problems of the rogue trustee, but the college also loses the support and leadership of a significant person who needs to be involved in helping guide the college to achieve its mission and goals in the community and the nation. It has often been said that the most important job of the board is to select a highly competent president; the second most important job of the board is to select a highly competent chair. And there is a strategy that has proven very effective in a number of colleges: abandon the traditional policy of rotating the chair annually, create criteria for a quality chair, select the most competent person on the board to be the chair, and re-elect that chair as long as he or she performs effectively. As an alternative, some colleges may want to place term limits of 3 to 6 years on the service of a board chair.

---

It has often been said that the most important job of the board is to select a highly competent president; the second most important job of the board is to select a highly competent chair.

---

Kirkwood Community College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, has had only three board chairs in 42 years. Bud Jensen, the founding chair, served 19 years as chair; Wayne Newton served as vice chair for 12 years and then as chair for 18 years; the current chair, Lois Bartelme, has served since 2003 following Wayne Newton's retirement. Under this arrangement, Kirkwood has become one of the most outstanding community colleges in the U. S., with numerous state and national awards to verify its flagship status. Bud Jensen and Wayne Newton were both honored with the Dale Ensign Award for being the outstanding trustee nationally, and both served as chair of the board for the Association of Community College Trustees. In 2001, Norman Nielsen, president of Kirkwood during Wayne Newton's tenure as chair, was named the outstanding CEO in the nation with the Marie Martin Award.

Nielsen, now retired as president of Kirkwood, offered the following advice about the continuity of chairs:



The secret of a healthy working relationship between the board chair and CEO is for the board to select a chair who is a very capable leader and allow that person to continue to serve in that capacity indefinitely if the system is operating smoothly and the working relationship of the chair, board, and president remains positive and is serving the best interests of the institution. There are many, many capable trustees throughout the U. S., but not all of them are capable of serving in the position of board chair. When you select one who is, stay with it for the good of the institution. (N. Nielsen, personal communication, October 13, 2008)

---

Board members can violate the spirit of any policy by reverting to politics as usual, but if they support and adhere to the values and goals of the new policy, boards may operate more effectively, trustees will enjoy their tenure, rogue trustees may be kept at bay, and the college will prosper.

---

Kirkwood's policy regarding the continuity of board chairs is straightforward: "Since the Board does not practice any rotational system of the board chair or vice chair, any member may nominate, and any member may serve." A special culture has evolved over the four decades this policy has been in effect that reduces competition for the chair position; every board member at Kirkwood feels deeply connected to and involved in the college, and the board takes great pride in working as a team to advocate for Kirkwood. Wayne Newton has pointed out, "If I could point to one thing that makes the KCC system work, it is that the chair is evaluated along with the board each year" (W. Newton, personal communication, October 12, 2008). The evaluations provide an opportunity for all board members to review the work of the chair and their own work, and for over four decades they have all been satisfied with the arrangement.

One president in this study is a strong advocate for a continuing chair. He said:

*The board chair should always be the acknowledged strongest leader of the board. And he or she should continue to be re-elected until he or she leaves the board or is replaced by another trustee with even stronger leadership capabilities.*

He suggested that once the president earns the respect and full support of the board, the president should carefully enlist the support of several former board chairs to change the policy from rotation to continuity. Problems may surface with the continuity policy as well if trustees do not agree on criteria for the board chair position and if they fail to elect the most competent leader. Board members can violate the spirit of any policy by reverting to politics as usual, but if they support and adhere to the values and goals of the new policy, boards may operate more effectively, trustees will enjoy their tenure, rogue trustees may be kept at bay, and the college will prosper.

**Role of other trustees.** Other trustees are like the board chair; some are good and some are not so good. Some will take on the rogue trustee; some will avoid such confrontations at all costs. The trustees on the board, however, have a major stake in this issue because the rogue trustee can, and often does, make their service on the board a miserable experience. Unless they are aligned with the rogue for their own personal or political benefit, they are a formidable resource for the board chair and the president if they can be rallied to the cause.

In some cases, the rogue trustee wears out his or her welcome, and the trustees naturally gravitate to a strategy that isolates the rogue. Several presidents report that they have actually orchestrated this process as the only defense. In one college, the trustees have agreed to allow the rogue to make his point in a board meeting, and then he is totally ignored as the board moves on to its business. The board helped make this approach work better by placing limits on the time a board member could speak in meetings.

*The board still listens to his requests but gives them no credence. He has lost his credibility with not only the board, but also the staff. Everyone tolerates him, but no one responds to his wild requests or critical comments. He has been rendered impotent.*

*Increasingly, the board members ignored and isolated the rogue trustee. When he spoke at board meetings, typically no one responded. I noticed that board members seldom talked with him informally before or after meetings.*

*The other board members tired of his behavior and didn't pay attention to him; they, in effect, ostracized him. He stopped coming to board meetings and did not run again when his term ended.*

Peer pressure is a powerful force, and when it is exerted by powerful people in public forums, it can be one of the most effective strategies available for dealing with rogue trustees. Presidents in this study reported a

number of instances where peer pressure was used in board meetings and behind the scenes.

*Feedback I received privately from some board members indicated that conversations between board members and the rogue trustee helped persuade her to buy into the new plan. Since the vast majority of the members adopted the plan, the peer pressure on the trustee mounted.*

*I confronted the rogue trustee about the situation he had created, and with the help of another trustee it was resolved—but not without a great deal of stress and anxiety on my part.*

*Several other board members began taking the hint and periodically intervened to distract or diffuse the rogue trustee. This was most often done with humor, but at times was very direct—though never confrontational.*

In several of the cases reported by presidents, trustees played active roles in unseating a rogue trustee. In one case, the trustees worked behind the scenes to persuade the appointing agency not to reappoint the trustee. In another case, the majority of the board actively and publically campaigned

---

Trustees want to make a difference; they want to give their best; they want to be proud of their work.

---

against the trustee for re-election and endorsed his opponent.

Members of the board, however, cannot always be counted on for support. Trustees come to the board with very diverse agendas and with varying amounts of experience. The great majority are motivated by values of public service and understand their role as advocates of the college. A few are motivated, as indicated in the chapter on motivation (page 33), by political ambition and self interest; these board members may not be useful in bringing peer pressure to bear on the rogue trustee, and some of them are allies with the rogue trustee. Several presidents reported on these open and hidden alliances:

*The board refused to sanction the rogue trustee because they perceived it would cast a negative light on all trustees, most of whom were either running for or preparing to run for the city council or the state legislature.*

*I admit that maybe other board members also had unspoken agendas and allowed him to take over so that theirs could also be acted on.*

Volunteers who serve on nonprofit boards do not usually anticipate that the experience will be unpleasant. They want to make a difference; they want to give their best; they want to be proud of their work. Participating in the governance of a college to help students learn is a perfect arena in which they can exercise their altruistic values. They are often unprepared for the abuse that is sometimes part of the arsenal of the rogue trustee.

*He lashed out at the other trustees when they did not support him, calling them wimps and incompetents.*

---

The other trustees were reluctant to go against the rogue because he was a bully and would challenge and embarrass them verbally at meetings.

---

*The other trustees did not want to take on the rogue. They found it easier just to let him have his way and run the board. They deferred to him.*

*The policy was clear, but the will of the board to take action was not there. Threats, intimidation, and the support the rogue trustee had from the faculty stymied the board. Some of it had to do with ongoing litigation and a potential strike; the board was just too frightened to do anything.*

*The other trustees were reluctant to go against the rogue because he was a bully and would challenge and embarrass them verbally at meetings.*

In cases in which it is clear that a rogue trustee is continuing to cause mistrust and discord and is rendering the board and the college ineffective, the president and the board chair should carefully consider how they can enlist the other members of the board to participate in addressing the problem. They will need to plan with great caution to ensure that the selected members will understand and support the effort; those tired of the abuse and intimidation are good candidates. Sunshine laws regarding meetings between board members must be observed. The board chair, rather than the president, should make the initial contacts with other trustee members on an individual basis. Specific actions related to isolation and peer pressure should be identified and implemented by all participating trustees.

Sometimes these approaches unfold as a natural outcome in response to a problem; in other cases the approach can be encouraged. Presidents who engage in such efforts walk a thin line and must be very careful to guard

their credibility. In extreme cases the strategy may be worth the risk; one frustrated president in this study went so far as to campaign publicly against the re-election of a member of his board, so some presidents are willing to take significant risks in trying to address the problems of the rogue trustee.

**Role of the president.** Regardless of the strategies used to address the issue of a rogue trustee, the president will be a central player and many times *the* central player. If the board chair is sufficiently competent and is perceived as effective by the other trustees, the president's first strategy is to build a strong alliance with the board chair based on mutual trust and respect. An effective board chair and an effective president present a formidable front to the attacks of a rogue trustee. When the board chair rotates every year, it makes it difficult for the president to create a sustaining alliance with the chair and opens up opportunities for the rogue when the style and culture of the board changes on an annual basis.

---

One trustee who had never voted in favor of new construction and new buildings was made chair of the building committee and began to champion and vote for new buildings.

---

In this study, a number of presidents described the alliances they made with the board chair to prevent the rogue trustee from creating problems:

*I enlisted the assistance of the board chair, and he told the rogue trustee that if he persisted in his behavior he would be publicly censured; that seemed to work.*

*The board chair and I worked to isolate the disruptive behavior. We always reviewed the monthly agenda ahead of time to anticipate how the chair could prepare for the rogue's actions.*

*With the support of the board chair, I kept him busy dealing with legislative matters so he would not have time to micromanage the college.*

There was an interesting division in this study regarding the strategy to accommodate or not accommodate the needs and agendas of the rogue trustee. A number of presidents felt it was important to try to work with the rogue trustee even when they knew this would be a challenge. Other presidents, often in retrospect, felt that accommodation had been a mistake and just delayed the inevitable confrontation.

In several cases cited in this study, presidents tried to channel the time and energies of a rogue trustee by making the trustee chair of a committee

reflecting his or her interests. One trustee who had never voted in favor of new construction and new buildings was made chair of the building committee and began to champion and vote for new buildings. Another trustee who created havoc on the board with her endless questions regarding the budget and college finances was made chair of the finance committee. The president and staff then spent a great deal of time reviewing the budget and financial reports with the trustee in private before board meetings to address her concerns; from that point on she did not raise any questions about college finances in public. Such strategies may require that the president and staff spend more time preparing and working with the trustee on specific college issues, but it may be time well spent and may result in a change of general behavior on the part of the rogue trustee.

In another case, community leaders warned the president that an incoming board member had been a problem on previous community boards, and the president vowed to work closely with the new board member to make him feel welcome. The president spent a great deal of time with the new board member and asked staff to accommodate his needs. Staff bent over backwards to provide information and access, granting special requests and providing special services. After several years of accommodation the president reported that the trustee continued to violate all standards of appropriate behavior and had become even more aggressive and demanding. In this case, accommodation had just made the behavior worse.

Several presidents made strong cases for not accommodating a rogue trustee and recommended that rogues be confronted directly and quickly:

*In retrospect, the biggest mistake the chair and I made was in not confronting him directly and forcefully from the very beginning. I am now convinced that, since we did not confront him forcefully and let him know how things would operate, he assumed that we did not have the strength or resolve or courage to do so. It was a terrible mistake and one that I believe convinced him that he could dominate the board and become my "boss."*

*Perhaps the best lesson is that accommodating such individuals and not managing to control them is the worst mistake. Presidents or chancellors have a terrible time with these people because board members too often refuse to assert their authority, which by law is very limited, to bring these persons under control. They leave it to the CEO to handle, which is nearly impossible.... The CEO tries to be supportive of the rogue and gain a supporter in return, to maintain progress and to retain one's position. The CEO's tenure, however, can be shortened by accommodation. It's best, I have learned, to make every effort to*

*control this individual quickly and decisively, for not doing so will result in a short tenure anyway.*

Most of the presidents in this study advocated “shining a light” on the behavior of the rogue trustee as one of the most effective strategies. Presidents kept all transactions with the rogue trustee in the “public eye,” as they did all their transactions with board members. Every request of the rogue trustee was shared with all board members. Copies of responses to emails, letters, and phone calls from the rogue trustee were sent to all board members. In some cases, any meeting with an individual trustee was reported in writing to all members of the board. One president documented everything, including the costs of staff time to accommodate the many requests of the rogue, and shared copies with all board members. Orchestrating these responses takes staff and president time, but establishing transparency in all interactions with board members as a basic operating principle sends a message to board members who do not play by the rules—and it creates clarity and trust in the faculty, staff, and community. Presidents testify to the effectiveness of these strategies:

---

Most of the presidents in this study advocated  
“shining a light” on the behavior of the rogue trustee  
as one of the most effective strategies.

---

*Everything a rogue does needs to find sunshine. Sunshine is the most effective strategy to contain a rogue. Deal with the trouble up front and hold the trouble up for the whole world to see. Everyone knows a rogue when they see one, so let them see one up close.*

*We threatened to “out” his behavior in an open board meeting.*

*The most effective strategy was to keep the behavior, requests, and actions in the public eye. Make sure that the other board members see what is going on. Make sure that opinion leaders in the community understand what is going on. Make sure that the faculty and staff are aware of the actions of the rogue trustee.*

Several presidents felt that keeping the focus on the “big picture” of the college’s mission helped thwart rogue trustees who wanted to focus on specific areas of finance or the physical plant—areas in which they feel more comfortable. One president featured items related to student success and student learning on the board agenda, noting that trustees do not usually profess to be knowledgeable in instruction, curriculum, and assessment of

learning outcomes, so all trustees are on the same page. The president said, *It provided a deeper context for decisions that related to the physical and fiscal issues of the college and helped all of us to focus on student learning as our major business.*

With a consent agenda for managing the business side of the college, it is possible to use board meeting time to engage trustees in the deeper business of the college—improving and expanding student learning. Faculty and staff can be involved in reporting on innovations and experiments in student success, and students can participate as well. Most trustees sign on for service because they have a profound commitment to serving students; when they can discuss, review, and share their values regarding education in a public forum, they can rally around larger issues and take pride in their contributions. Rogue trustees do not thrive in this environment.

---

Most trustees sign on for service because they have a profound commitment to serving students; when they can discuss, review, and share their values regarding education in a public forum, they can rally around larger issues and take pride in their contributions. Rogue trustees do not thrive in this environment.

---

Sometimes, usually as a last resort, presidents report they have no other option but to directly and personally confront the rogue trustee. One president said, *I found that open confrontation with her seemed to be the only thing that worked. She would back down only when she was challenged openly, directly, and firmly.* Another president indicated that the rogue trustee seemed to expect that he would be confronted on some of his most bizarre actions and seemed to welcome such confrontations as an external control on behavior that perhaps he felt he could not manage.

In one case, an experienced board chair urged the president to confront the rogue trustee privately in the same manner the rogue trustee always confronted the president. With the board chair’s support, the president asked the rogue trustee to meet him in his office, and the president assailed him with all the venom, anger, and profanity he had been storing up; the trustee was startled, but from that point on he did not use profanity when dealing with the president, and the president reported that he became an effective and supportive member of the board.

In another case, the president delivered what he called a “two-by-four between the eyes” to a rogue trustee. He said to the trustee, *If you continue*

*in this line of action, I will be compelled to put the question to the board immediately. You can make your case and I will make mine. I think I know where they will come down, but rest assured I am willing to go all the way on this issue.*

These personal confrontations take immense courage on the part of the president. The president's job is at stake if the confrontation fails to achieve its purpose. But some presidents who have tried all the other strategies are willing to take this risk rather than continue to work in an impossible situation created by a rogue trustee.

---

Political pressure is an effective strategy  
for addressing problems created by a rogue trustee,  
a strategy presidents can encourage and support when  
appropriate—and perhaps as a strategy of last resort.

---

**Political pressure.** Applying political pressure to achieve goals is a well-honed strategy deeply ingrained in the human psyche and universally practiced. It thrives in the educational environment as it does in all institutions. Presidents are constantly under political pressure from the faculty, from their trustees, from community leaders, from local and state office holders, and sometimes from student groups; as a result presidents are not naïve about the power and effects of political pressure. They have learned to apply political pressure themselves but usually in rare circumstances. And they are aware of the inherent dangers in playing in this arena.

Where political pressure was used in this study as a strategy to cope with a rogue trustee, the pressure came primarily from other board members who were savvy in the use of this power. Many trustees are well connected to and aligned with a political party, and they can use those connections to get action. Presidents cited half a dozen cases in which their trustees worked behind the scenes with their political counterparts in the appointing agency to make sure that a rogue trustee was not reappointed to the board. In some of these cases, the party leaders did not want to be embarrassed by their appointments; in others, they were returning favors to their allies. In any case, political pressure is an effective strategy for addressing problems created by a rogue trustee, a strategy presidents can encourage and support when appropriate—and perhaps a strategy of last resort.

One president believes that local political organizations will discipline their own if they are aware of the problems:

*I have tried to make a trustee's inappropriate behavior obvious to other trustees and to the local appointing authority. It has been a slow but effective process. The appointing authority knows that I will not embarrass them if they appoint a jackass, and they know I will give them an opportunity to fix the situation.*

Another president was not quite so positive about working with the local appointing authority. He said, *The system is broken; it all starts with politics, and there is no process in place to remove a trustee.* At his institution, he and the board had to ask for assistance from the accrediting association because of the political interference from the local appointing authority. He recommended that presidents work through their state community college association to establish statewide policies regarding the appointment of trustees that would include criteria for board membership, term limits, and a removal process. A state association of community college presidents working with a state association of community college trustees might accomplish such a goal.

One president in this study was quite sure that rogue trustees could not operate in states with appointed boards. He assumed that the political process used to appoint trustees would also be applied to control and dismiss trustees who tended to become roguish. Another president in another state where trustees are appointed also hinted that this might be the case in her state. This became an intriguing issue, and I reached out to presidents in states with appointed boards to determine if they had dealt with rogue trustees. Of the 59 presidents who provided reports for this study, 36 were from 9 states with elected boards and 23 were from 7 states with appointed boards. In my view, rogue trustees prosper equally whether they are elected or appointed. A more extensive review couched in a traditional research design might prove me wrong, but it is quite clear that rogue trustees exist in states where they are appointed.

**Role of the press.** Some rogue trustees become adept at using the media to support their antics. In one case cited by a president in this study, the rogue trustee held his own press conference following every board meeting to complain about and make false charges against the college. In two cases, rogue trustees threatened press conferences with local TV stations and the local press if they could not get their way. And in one special case, a rogue trustee had established a personal alliance with a local editor who reported negatively about college business based on claims from the trustee.

Presidents also know how to use the local media to make their case, and most colleges work hard to establish open and positive lines of communication. Most colleges employ a public relations officer whose duties include serving as a liaison with local radio, TV, and newspaper agencies.

Presidents who have established good relationships with the local media can turn to these sources when a rogue trustee begins to create problems. Presidents make sure the local press is represented at board meetings so reporters can see for themselves the actions of the rogue trustee. The established role of the press is to cast light on unseemly behavior, and presidents can play a role in orchestrating opportunities for such events. One president, with support from his board chair, arranged for all board meetings to be televised on the local cable channel, and in this way the rogue trustee was exposed to a much wider community.

In one community college, a local reporter became intrigued with the behavior of a rogue trustee and began to follow her actions over a period of time. After a series of stories appeared in the local newspaper, the trustee began to modify her behavior. The student newspaper is also a resource that should be encouraged to investigate rogue trustees. In several cases in this study, stories on rogue trustees have appeared in national educational newspapers such as *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Community College Week*.

---

Presidents who have established good relationships  
with the local media can turn to these sources  
when a rogue trustee begins to create problems.

---

**Public censure.** To be admonished and censured by a higher authority or by one's peers in public would appear to be one of the most extreme and embarrassing acts that could occur in the life of a human being. It is the modern version of being stoned. Oddly, one president reported that after the board had publicly sanctioned one of its members, she was even more emboldened to continue her behavior. In another case, a president reported that public censure was worn as a badge of merit by the offending trustee. These responses reflect the complex nature of rogue trustees.

Public censure, however, can be an effective strategy in corralling the behavior of rogue trustees. Several presidents referred to public sanctions by an accrediting commission and by the board of trustees as effective but were reluctant to provide details. Public censure places the college's problems in the spotlight, and while such acts might work to alleviate the problems with the rogue trustee, they can create negative perceptions in the community, the faculty, and the student body that presidents would like to avoid.

If an accrediting commission is involved, the college can be warned or placed on probation; these actions are clearly public censure in the educational community. It is unlikely that a specific rogue trustee would

be named in such action, but a specific rogue trustee might be the primary cause of a warning or probation. Accrediting commissions, as pointed out before, usually couch their warnings in terms of problems related to poor communication or to ineffective governance when it comes to trustees. Nevertheless, these interventions by an accrediting association can be used as leverage by the president and the board to make necessary changes.

The sitting board is a powerful force when its members choose to apply pressure on another member. Censure in an executive session can be effective with threats that a public censure will follow if the behavior is not changed. Board members can also work with community leaders to encourage censure by a group of concerned citizens; a recall campaign by concerned citizens is a clear form of public censure. Academic senates and faculty unions can also create a vote of no confidence in a rogue trustee—a strategy used fairly often against some presidents.

---

Presidents are caught in a very special bind: they want to protect the reputation of the college, they want to ensure the continuing support of the community, they want to know they have the continuing support and respect of the board, and they want to protect the faculty and staff and maintain a sense of shared values as educators—but public censure of any kind visibly shines a light on the elephant in the room.

---

Public censure is a tricky issue for all involved. Trustees feel uncomfortable about policing their own ranks and worry about being tainted by the rotten apple in the barrel. Community leaders don't like to see their elected or appointed officials charged with the responsibility for governing their much prized community college involved in public scandals. Faculty and students can become demoralized and cynical when the problem requires such extreme measures for solution. Presidents are caught in a very special bind: they want to protect the reputation of the college, they want to ensure the continuing support of the community, they want to know they have the continuing support and respect of the board, and they want to protect the faculty and staff and maintain a sense of shared values as educators—but public censure of any kind visibly shines a light on the elephant in the room. And in some cases it may be the only effective strategy in dealing with a rogue trustee who has become a rogue elephant running

roughshod over the standards expected of public officials—especially those charged with governing such an important and precious commodity as the educational enterprise. In the final analysis, public censure is a brave and powerful act of a group of stakeholders who want to protect the college.

## Concluding Impressions and Observations

SINCE THIS HAS NOT BEEN A TRADITIONAL STUDY, there are no traditional conclusions on which to end—that is, conclusions based on hypotheses and hard data. The significant findings are really the strategies for dealing with a rogue trustee outlined in the previous section. But I have gleaned some general impressions from this study that might be useful to those who want to continue this discussion and those who want to study these issues more thoroughly.

1. The rogue trustee is much more prevalent than I and the colleagues I consulted originally thought. When I first started discussing this issue with colleagues, several advised me that such a study might not be worth the time because, in their view, there were not many incidents of the rogue trustee. We know of at least 59 rogue trustees—those described by the respondents in this study—who have harassed or who are harassing presidents and other trustees and damaging the colleges on whose boards they sit. In addition, another 17 presidents agreed to participate but did not follow through; 19 others were recommended by their colleagues as presidents who were dealing with a rogue trustee but who did not respond; and 4 wanted to participate but were advised by their attorneys not to do so because they were in the middle of negotiating severance packages with their boards. This limited study, therefore, has identified 99 presidents who have dealt with at least one rogue trustee; based on these data, there are several hundred rogue trustees operating in community colleges today. One president suggested that at least half the presidents in his state had dealt with a rogue trustee.
2. Throughout this study, I have referred to the rogue trustee as a singular entity, giving the impression that there is only one at a time in a college. In reality some presidents have dealt with numerous rogue trustees in their careers and more than one at a time. One president provided written reports on 5 rogue trustees she had experienced; many reported dealing with 2 or 3 in their careers. Some reported dealing with 2 on the same board at the same time; one president reported that in his former college there are still 4 rogue trustees in charge.

### **WE KNOW PRESIDENTS HAVE LOST THEIR JOBS;**

*other trustees have resigned, refused to run again, or refused reappointment; and faculty and staff have been intimidated, compromised, and discharged. This is damage enough to call for a major study and investigation of the issue. But the most severe damage may be to the college and to its students, long term damage that operates beneath the surface and slowly crumbles the foundation of our community colleges.*



3. The damage done by rogue trustees is enormous and has not been calculated on the national level; this study is a first step in that effort. We know presidents have lost their jobs; other trustees have resigned, refused to run again, or refused reappointment; and faculty and staff have been intimidated, compromised, and discharged. This is damage enough to call for a major study and investigation of the issue. But the most severe damage may be to the college and to its students, long-term damage that operates beneath the surface and slowly crumbles the foundation of our community colleges. As one president said, *The behavior of a rogue can be every bit as damaging to a college as a significant budget cut, the destruction of a building on campus, or a shooting.* Their actions tend not to be as explosive as these examples, but they eat away at the vitality of an institution over time.

---

*The behavior of a rogue can be every bit as damaging to a college as a significant budget cut, the destruction of a building on campus, or a shooting.* Their actions tend not to be as explosive as these examples, but they eat away at the vitality of an institution over time.

---

4. While this study has focused only on the community college trustee, I have learned in my reading and in my interaction with the presidents that there are plenty of rogue trustees on all public boards. Presidents often indicated that their worst case scenarios were eclipsed by the behavior of rogue trustees on their local K-12 boards. And numerous cases of rogue trustees were cited for city and county councils and commissions. Rogue trustees are a universal problem for all public boards.
5. There is not much difference, if any, in the number of rogue trustees who prosper on elected boards and those who prosper on appointed boards. Two of my first contacts in this study suggested that I would not find rogue trustees on appointed boards. I believe they thought that governors and local county authorities were more rational and more effective in appointing boards than citizens were in electing boards. Although further study might identify some differences between rogue trustees on elected versus appointed boards, they thrive in both environments.

6. Someone needs to study the relationship between the rogue trustee and the dysfunctional board. Most of the literature and most consultants and accrediting associations focus on the dysfunctional board when problems are addressed in this arena. And I am sure there are many dysfunctional boards, but some dysfunctional boards are probably caused by or are the expressions of the work of a rogue trustee. And if that is the case, the strategies and the approach used to correct the problems might differ; if the one rotten apple in the barrel can be removed or isolated, the entire barrel does not have to be treated.
7. There is also rich material for a study of the relationships between rogue trustees and faculty and staff unions or groups. Some of these alliances are very destructive, and while there may be short-term gains for unions, there may be long-term damage to the core values faculty and staff bring to the educational enterprise. Faculty and staff need to examine the darker angels of their nature that create a pact with a rogue trustee, and weigh the outcomes of such alliances against their commitment to their profession, their community, and their students.
8. A study also needs to be conducted on the policies and regulations that can be used to remove a rogue trustee from office. Most of the presidents in this study felt that there were no or few such policies or guidelines in place in their states. It would be very difficult to implement new policies in this arena because of the political flexibility that public officials have built into the system for their own protections. But such a study might identify some workable solutions that could be applied by a local board. Local boards do have the flexibility to police their own ranks.
9. Unfortunately, as noted by many presidents in this study, board chairs and other trustees are often impotent to police their own ranks. They are either too intimidated to act, or they want to protect their own interests. A study of these conditions with suggestions of how a board can play a more effective role in dealing with rogue trustees in their midst would be useful. In the meantime, presidents, where chairs and other trustees are ineffective to assist, are left on their own to cope. If the rogue trustee knows the board chair and the other trustees will not intervene, the president is severely limited in his or her chances of being successful in confronting the rogue trustee.

10. In spite of the challenges of dealing with rogue trustees, presidents have discovered some effective strategies that work in some situations. These strategies are outlined in the previous section and constitute the most valuable contribution of this study. Presidents, chairs, and trustees who reference these strategies should examine closely the idiosyncrasies of their own culture, the peculiarities of their own case, the commitment of the major players, and the resources available before they adopt these strategies.
11. Even in the worst of circumstances created by rogue trustees, the great majority of faculty continue to meet their classes and the great majority of administrators and staff continue to make sure the college is operating efficiently—because they are dedicated professionals committed to students. Although something is lost, they do their best

---

The overwhelming majority of community college trustees are excellent and effective citizen leaders who are committed to governing the college to ensure that students and the local community are well served by a fully functioning institution.

---

and sometimes hunker down into cynical stupors unable to disengage from the effects of the chaos and anger that permeate the college. The work of the rogue trustee can tamp down the innovative spirit of the faculty who go unappreciated and unsupported in their efforts to improve and expand student learning while the administration and the board focus all their attention on a rogue trustee. Faculty leaders who recognize the problem could be very effective in bringing the weight of their credibility to bear on such situations.

12. In the final analysis, the best strategy for preventing a rogue trustee in establishing a foothold or in addressing the problems created by a rogue trustee who has gained a foothold is highly competent leadership and sound policies for effective board governance. When a college has created policies and guidelines that support an effective model of governance and when those policies and guidelines are implemented by highly competent presidents and trustee chairs, the rogue trustee confronts an environment in which his or her agenda cannot thrive. One of the most succinct statements of effective board

policy can be found in John Carver's listing of 10 principles in *Basic Principles of Policy Governance* (1996).

13. Finally, it must be stated again: The overwhelming majority of community college trustees are excellent and effective citizen leaders who are committed to governing the college to ensure that students and the local community are well served by a fully functioning institution. As George Potter has said, "It would be rare indeed to find a more important or more difficult role, carried out by more dedicated, selfless public servants, than that of a governing board member of a community college" (Cited in Mellow and Heelan, 2008, p. 84).

## Epilogue

As I indicated in the opening section of this book, I have had an interest in the topic of the rogue trustee for over 30 years, stimulated by damage done to several good friends by rogue trustees. As I pursued the subject, I found increasing numbers of individuals who had encountered rogue trustees, and I heard accounts of damage to individuals and institutions. While the college president is the most visible and easiest target for the mischief of the rogue trustee, it is the college itself that is most vulnerable to lasting damage.

Individuals can move on. Harassed presidents can resign and move to another institution—as can administrators, faculty, and support staff leaders. Stressed board chairs and other trustees can resign or decide not to run for re-election or for reappointment. Students swirl in and out of institutions, often oblivious to the inner politics that operate in their colleges.

The college, however, cannot leave town. It is rooted in its community as the founders wished it and designed it—vulnerable to the best and the worst its community has to offer. In the great majority of cases, the college is a tremendous asset to the community, and community leaders and students point to it with considerable pride. In more cases than I first imagined, however, there are a number of colleges that have lost their spirit and their footing and have become targets of ridicule and embarrassment because of the actions of rogue trustees run amok. In these colleges, rogue trustees have intimidated their fellow trustees as well as college administrators and faculty, leaving the college to face a loss of confidence and reputation that can linger for many years.

The damage is often insidious, and generates responses that are very different from other crises. In the face of a natural disaster, a random evil act, or a major financial catastrophe at the college, the human spirit would have been evident on many fronts. Energy and compassion would have poured out in great abundance. Rallies would have been held; funds would have been collected; plans and projects would have been implemented. The governor might even have stepped in to help. And this spirit of response is reflected in some of the colleges in this study savaged by a rogue trustee. Strong leadership, team work, political savvy, sunshine laws, and peer pressure have all been used to isolate and rout the rogue trustee, keeping him or her from causing further damage.

But that response is not universal. Too many community colleges have been severely damaged by a rogue trustee, or two or more rogue trustees

acting as a team. Too many community colleges are currently trying to operate with a rogue trustee as the elephant in the room. These colleges and the leaders who still persist need help in dealing with the machinations of the rogue trustee.

I hope that this book will cast some light on how difficult these challenges are and will initiate conversations in state and national associations that serve presidents and trustees. I also hope that some of the recommendations in this book regarding how to deal with a rogue trustee will be helpful to presidents, trustees, faculty, staff, and community leaders as they try to protect their colleges from the devastating effects of the rogue trustee.

## References

- Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges. (2002). *Accrediting Standards*. IV.B.1.h.
- Association of Community College Trustees. (2006). *Standards of Good Practice for Trustee Boards*. [www.acct.org/CenterEffectiveGovernance.asp?bid=89](http://www.acct.org/CenterEffectiveGovernance.asp?bid=89).
- Carver, J. and Carver, M. (1996). *Basic Principles of Policy Governance*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Coker, M. (1998). The Evil of Froguenstein: The Real Monsters Behind Community College Trustee Steven J. Frogue. *OC Weekly*, 3(31), 15-20.
- Chait, R., Ryan, W., and Taylor, B. (2005). *Governance as Leadership: Reframing the Work of Nonprofit Boards*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.
- Dunderstadt, J. (2000). *A University for the 21st Century*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Halcom, C. (September 1, 2008). Trustee Turmoil at Michigan College Putting Accreditation at Risk. *Community College Week*, 21(1), 1-3.
- Mellow, G., and Heelan, C. (2008). *Minding the Dream: The Process and Practice of the American Community College*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Middle States Commission on Higher Education. (2006). *Characteristics for Excellence in Higher Education: Eligibility Requirements and Standards for Accreditation*.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Sayre, W. (1973). Quoted in the *Wall Street Journal*, December 20, 1973.
- Siebert, C. (October 8, 2006). An Elephant Crackup? *New York Times Magazine*.
- Smith, C. (2006a). Defining Micromanagement. *Board Focus*, 9(1), 1-3.
- Smith, C. (2006b). High Performing Boards Make and Monitor Policy. *Board Focus*, 9(1), 3-4.
- Smith, C., Piland, B., and Boggs, G. (2001). *The Political Nature of Community College Trusteeship*. Washington, D. C.: Association of Community College Trustees.

## Appendix A

### THE ROGUE TRUSTEE: THE PRESIDENT'S EXPERIENCE

As briefly as possible (2–4 pages) address the following items/questions regarding your experience with a rogue trustee. Make sure that you do not include any information that could be used to identify you, the Rogue Trustee, the college, or anyone involved. I will send the final article for your review to ensure that I have not included any information that would be detrimental to you. Try to address all of the following in your summary:

1. Describe the primary actions and behaviors that marked this person a Rogue Trustee. Note specific standards of behavior that were violated.
2. In your view what was the primary motivation for these actions and behaviors?
3. Assess the damage this trustee did to you, the board process, the college, etc.
4. Review the key actions that you, the board chair, and others took to try and change or moderate the behavior of the Rogue Trustee.
5. Did your college have in place or did the actions of the Rogue Trustee stimulate the college to create special policies on board member behavior related to the actions of the Rogue Trustee? If so, were these policies effective?
6. What were the most effective actions if there were any?
7. How was the situation finally resolved or mediated?
8. What advice would you give to a CEO who is struggling with a Rogue Trustee?
9. If you have copies of any stories on your situation that appeared in local or the college newspapers—and you feel comfortable sharing these with me—please fax copies to me at 760-328-1112 or send to the address below.

Send your summary to Terry O'Banion as an email or Word attachment to [obanion@league.org](mailto:obanion@league.org) or send a hard copy to Terry O'Banion.

Thanks for your support in this effort to help our colleagues who must deal with rogue trustees.

# Appendix B

---

## **EIGHT KEY PRINCIPLES FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRUSTEES**

1. The most important job of the community college trustee is the selection and support of the college president.
2. It is essential that community college trustees advocate for the college and its budget.
3. Community college boards of trustees must manage themselves and ensure that members are fulfilling their roles and participating in an appropriate manner.
4. The community college board of trustees governs the college through broad policies, while the president and his/her staff are responsible for operations.
5. Community college trustees should consult the Middle States Commission on Higher Education ([www.msche.org](http://www.msche.org)) accrediting standards on the importance of good trusteeship.
6. The community college board of trustees is an independent body governing the community college and, by law, the trustees' responsibility is to protect the best interests of the college.
7. Key community college trustee responsibilities, by law, include defining the mission of the college, hiring the president, setting tuition, and approving budgets, new programs, and facilities plans.
8. Community college trustees should abide by the "Institutional Code of Ethics" approved by the NJ Commission on Higher Education ([www.state.nj.us/highereducation](http://www.state.nj.us/highereducation)) as well as their own institution's code of ethics.

**Endorsed by the New Jersey Council of County Colleges—April 18, 2005**

*Used with permission.*