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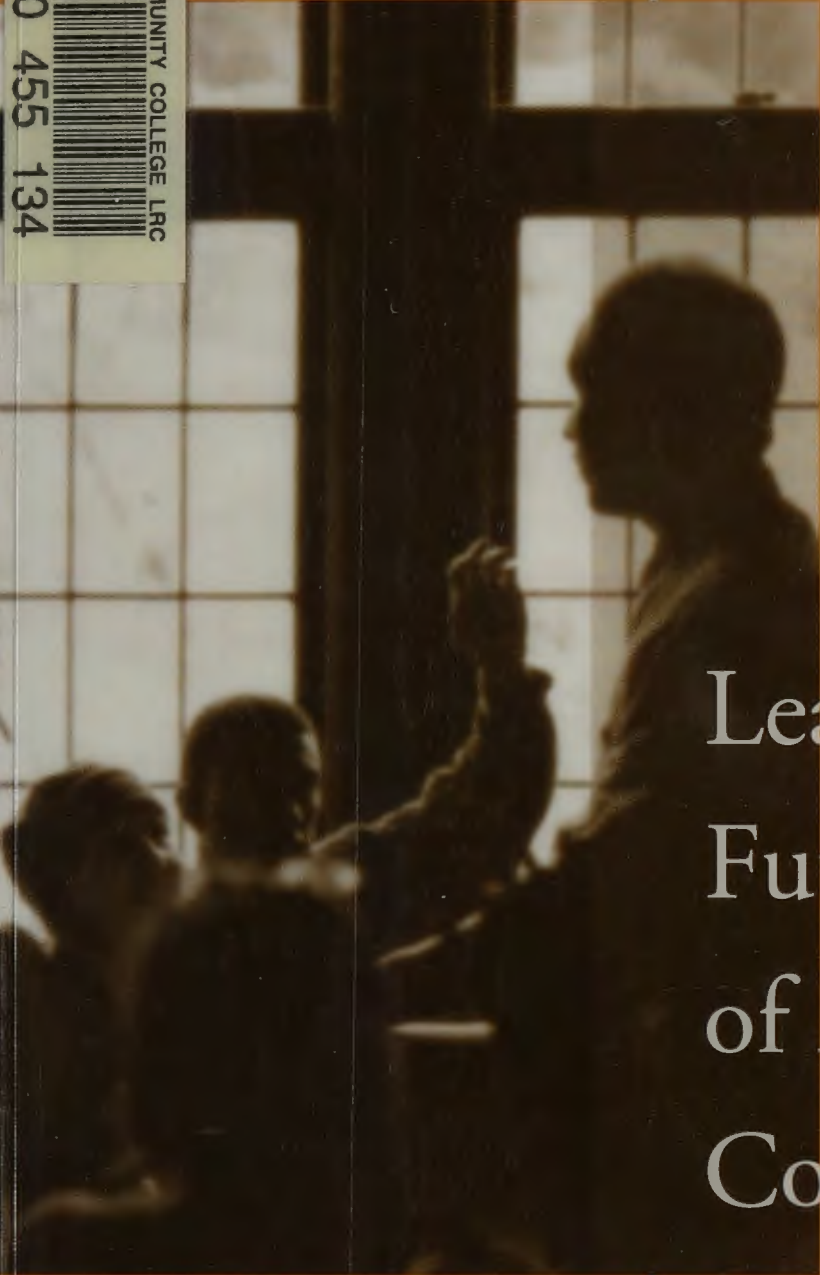
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New Directions for
Community Colleges

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PATRICK HENRY COMMUNITY COLLEGE LRC



Leading for the
Future: Alignment
of AACCC
Competencies
| with Practice

Pamela L. Eddy
EDITOR

Number 159 • Fall 2012

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**New Directions for
Community Colleges**

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Leading for
the Future:
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LEADING FOR THE FUTURE: ALIGNMENT OF AACC COMPETENCIES WITH PRACTICE

Pamela L. Eddy (ed.)

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Arthur M. Cohen, Editor-in-Chief

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EDITOR'S NOTES

Sounding a clarion over a decade ago (Shults, 2001), calls of a leadership crisis in community colleges prompted attention to developing future leaders for two-year colleges. To aid in preparing potential leaders, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) initiated their Leading Forward program to help identify what skills and knowledge future leaders required. A series of summits occurred over a two-year period in which experts in community college leadership gathered to discuss and create a set of best practices from the field; ultimately, this information resulted in a report titled *A Competency Framework for Community College Leaders* (AACC, 2004). A year later, the AACC published *Competencies for Community College Leaders* (2005), which included a set of six competencies deemed critical for community college leaders: organizational strategies, resource management skills, communication skills, a willingness to collaborate, advocacy skills, and professionalism. The intention was that the competencies would guide leadership development, both for individuals and through formal training venues. What remains unknown, however, is how the competencies operate in practice.

Though a number of dissertations have begun to use the competencies as a framework for evaluation or guidance for future leaders (Duree, 2007; Haney, 2008; Hassan, 2008; Schmitz, 2008), scant publications are available on the topic for practitioners (Eddy, 2010; Hasson, Dellow, and Jackson, 2010; McNair, 2010; McNair, Duree, and Ebbers, 2011; Sinady, Floyd, and Mulder, 2010). Furthermore, although the *Competencies* report was well received by community college leaders and scholars, a recent survey showed that leadership development and training programs were not yet addressing these skill areas (AACC, 2008).

If the AACC competencies indeed provide a framework to guide development of future leaders, how are they being used by individuals to prepare for the demanding roles of community college presidents and other institutional leaders? As a framework, the competencies by their very nature are broad based and all encompassing. Thus, the application of the skills may differ for those in rural areas relative to urban locales, for those leading institutions with localized challenges that may range from financial exigency to burgeoning enrollments of new immigrants, and for women leaders relative to men. Likewise, placement along the career pathway may make a difference in how the competencies are applied. New leaders may find immediate need for skills in resource management or organizational strategy, whereas seasoned leaders may have more call for expertise in collaboration and advocacy. What remains clear is the need to help support

and encourage talented individuals to seek top-level positions in community colleges.

An underlying premise for the AACC competencies is that learning about leadership is a lifelong endeavor. As adult learners, community college leaders tie in their new learning with past experiences, ultimately expanding their understanding of leadership. It therefore becomes critical to think about the types of leadership development that occur along the leadership pipeline and how aspiring leaders acquire the requisite competencies to lead in these challenging times. Recently, Wallin (2010) edited a volume of *New Directions for Community Colleges* that reviewed leadership in an era of change. Wallin's volume focused on a range of issues dealing with leadership development, but did not address the role of the AACC competencies and the implication of the competencies in practice. The broad foundation of leadership development provides a showcase for how the competencies are interpreted, thus allowing us to learn what is really working in practice.

Recent advances in leadership theory underscore the need for collaborative leadership (Hickman, 2010). Shifts away from hierarchical leadership models (Kezar, Carducci, and Contreras-McGavin, 2006) to more inclusive leadership (Hickman, 2010) require different skills and approaches to leading. Even though the competencies include collaboration as a skill set, current conceptions of this skill apply predominantly to outside collaborations versus working collaboratively within the institution to share leadership. The question then becomes how the existing competencies might be reinterpreted to accommodate for shifts in practice and the need for contextual competencies among leaders (Eddy, 2010).

Today's leaders need to be innovative as they work to meet the challenges facing their institutions, leveraging resources and personnel to realize greater outcomes (Alfred, Shults, Jaquette, and Strickland, 2009). Strategic leadership becomes the mode of operation. Yet the needs and context of challenges vary among colleges. This volume seeks to document the ways in which the AACC competencies have been applied in practice, to investigate the utility and range of the competencies, and to suggest next steps for revisions of the competencies to help improve leadership development.

The inclusion of empirical data in the chapters showcased for others a variety of ways to apply the competencies in their own settings. Those involved in leadership development, aspiring leaders, and institutional leaders can use the chapters to guide training and development opportunities within community colleges. Researchers and policymakers will find utility in the information presented to advance leadership theory and policy implementation to meet the needs of changing demographics and conceptions of community college leadership.

Chapter One, by Nan Ottenritter, provides a context for the establishment of the competencies. She outlines the historic backdrop that included

an extensive data-gathering process, which resulted in the creation of the six competencies. Lessons learned fall into two domains: (1) designing and implementing a national project inclusive of a wide range of voices, and (2) current approaches and thinking about leadership in community colleges.

Chapter Two, by Desna Wallin, describes how the AACC leadership development programs utilize the competency framework. Preparing community college leaders for an uncertain future is a daunting task. In the plethora of available leadership programs, serendipity seems to be the dominant theoretical underpinning. Ideally, a meaningful leadership development program should be based on foundational principles that have proven to be both valid and reliable over time. In the development and subsequent revisions of the structure and curriculum of the AACC Future Leaders Institute and the Future Leaders Institute/Advanced, the AACC competencies are interwoven throughout each presentation, activity, and reflection to provide a foundation for training. The result is a comprehensive and coherent leadership development opportunity for rising leaders in America's community colleges.

Chapter Three, by Pamela Eddy, argues for the use of clusters in thinking about the competencies. Four clusters are presented: inclusivity, framing meaning, attention to the bottom line, and systems thinking. Overarching these clusters is the need for contextual competency in which leaders align their approaches based on their college's context.

Chapter Four, by Chris Duree and Larry Ebbers, provides data from a national survey of community college presidents regarding their views of the competencies. In particular, the research points out what competencies are viewed as most critical, what competencies require more professional development, and what competencies receive less prominence in practice. The chapter concludes with advice for sitting and aspiring presidents on targeted critical areas for development.

Chapter Five, by Brent Cejda, reviews the types of challenges facing rural community college leaders in particular. Repeated references in the leadership literature regarding how mission, location, culture, and constituencies influence an institution also suggest that there are differences between rural community colleges and their urban and suburban counterparts. This chapter focuses on the impact of location on the interpretation and development of the leadership competencies.

Chapter Six, by Regina Garza Mitchell, explores how community college presidents make tough decisions that meet the demands of internal and external constituents while maintaining the delicate balance between personal and professional ethics, mission, and vision. Ethical decision making is woven into assumptions of many of the current AACC competencies.

Chapter Seven, by Kristin Bailey Wilson and Elizabeth Cox-Brand, provides a review of the competencies using the lenses of gender and race for analysis. The chapter reviews the AACC competencies using discourse analysis to determine if underlying assumptions are made regarding who

can lead in community colleges and what is the most appropriate manner of leading.

Chapter Eight, by Delores McNair and Dan Phelan, builds on interviews with six current presidents in which the presidents were asked to reflect on their pathway to the corner office and to review which of the competencies they have found to be most valuable in their practice. In addition, the participants were asked to address how they are building leadership development opportunities for their own staff and what competencies are highlighted in this training.

Chapter Nine, by George Boggs, presents suggestions for the competencies into the future. During his presidency at AACC, it was Dr. Boggs who initiated the study about the impending turnover in leadership in community colleges and was the steward of the process resulting in the competencies. In this chapter, Boggs argues that the competencies are not static. He discusses emerging challenges for colleges and reviews what leadership competencies will be needed to address these challenges.

Chapter Ten, by Richard Alfred, explores the countervailing forces inside and outside of colleges that demand skills and competencies unlike those required of earlier leader generations. This chapter describes the competencies leaders need to develop and deploy in colleges striving for abundance—a state achieved by institutions when their resources are leveraged to a level beyond reasonable expectation.

In summary, this volume provides information that will allow the reader a better understanding of the formation of the AACC competencies, their use in leadership development programs and in practice, and possible changes to the listing in the future. In particular, readers will understand better the thinking behind the construction of the competencies and how their use in practice emphasizes those most critical to leaders and those that leaders need more support to master. In addition, the changing environment of higher education places new demands on leaders, and as a result, the AACC competencies must expand and adjust to reflect this new climate. Each chapter includes campus-based examples, offers best practices, or covers implications for practice and policy in using the competencies in the field. New and seasoned leaders can transfer the information and best practices presented within this volume to their institutions. Likewise, leadership development programs can implement the concepts as they strive to train the leaders of the future.

Pamela L. Eddy
Editor

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