Competencies for Community College Leaders

The development and availability of well-prepared leaders is vital to the continued success of community colleges and their students. Throughout its history, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) has made proactive leadership development a central focus of its mission.

Now, that focus takes on even greater urgency as the level of turnover among community college leaders escalates dramatically. For this reason, AACC has worked to delineate a competency framework for today's and tomorrow's college leaders. The framework has wide utility for both individuals and institutions. It helps emerging leaders chart their personal leadership development progress. It provides program developers with curricular guidelines. Institutionally, it informs human resources departments with direction for staff recruitment, hiring, rewards, and professional development. This competency framework is intended as a "living document," evolving over time to meet changing human and institutional needs.

The Development Process, November 2003 – April 2005

In summer 2003 the W. K. Kellogg Foundation awarded AACC a grant called Leading Forward to address the national need for community college leaders. AACC began Leading Forward's work by hosting a series of four, day-long leadership summits with different constituent groups to build consensus around key knowledge, values, and skills needed by community college leaders and to determine how best to develop and sustain leaders. Experts in community college leadership from AACC affiliate councils, college and state "grow-your-own" programs, colleges in underserved areas, and university programs convened between November 2003 and March 2004. Information gathered at these summits can be found at http://www.ccleadership.org/leading_forward/summits.htm.

In July 2004, ACT, Inc. submitted an AACC-commissioned report, *A Qualitative Analysis of Community College Leadership from the Leading Forward Summits.* It provided AACC with a wealth of qualitative data, providing a broad picture of the competencies. These data were refined and contextualized to fit more closely with the community college environment, resulting in A *Competency Framework for Community College Leaders.* The report can be found at http://www.ccleadership.org/pdfs/ACT_report.pdf.

In fall 2004 AACC designed a survey to ensure that the critical areas of leadership competencies required by community college professionals had been addressed. The survey was distributed electronically in December 2004 to all participants in the leadership summits and to members of the Leading Forward National Advisory Panel. Out of 125 surveys, 95 were returned resulting in a response rate of 76 percent. This response was accompanied by extremely positive support for the six competencies for community college leaders. The competencies represent current best thinking as well as provide a forum for continual updating and for improvement in thinking about community college leadership.

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One hundred percent of the respondents noted that each of the six competencies was either "very" or "extremely" essential to the effective performance of a community college leader, thus affirming the validity of the Leading Forward competencies. Respondents also provided suggestions for minor modifications, which were reviewed by AACC staff and integrated into the competencies where appropriate.

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Respondents were also questioned about how well they, personally, were formally trained to apply each competency. Furthermore, those respondents who work for leadership development programs were asked how well their leadership program prepares participants to apply each competency. More respondents replied "minimal" or "moderate" to these two questions than when asked how essential the competencies are. In other words, these respondents, who make up a significant percentage of U.S. community college leaders and leadership development program personnel, indicate that each of the six competencies is essential to community college leadership but that the integration of these competencies is not as well established. These findings suggest a crucial need to establish this framework and to promote these competencies in the curricula of community college leadership programs.

On April 9, 2005, the AACC Board of Directors unanimously approved this document. The field of community college leadership development is encouraged to use Competencies for Community College Leaders. Please credit AACC and share your use of the competencies with Nan Ottenritter, Leading Forward Manager, at nottenritter@aacc.nche.edu.

Thoughts About Leadership

Community colleges, like many other American institutions, are experiencing a leadership gap as many current leaders retire. Moreover, the leadership skills now required have widened because of greater student diversity, advances in technology, accountability demands, and globalization. Based on its continuing support of the development of community college leaders, AACC has collaborated extensively with its many constituencies to identify and endorse a set of competencies for community college leaders.

In order to appreciate and use these competencies, the following principles apply:

- Leadership can be learned. While it can be enhanced immeasurably by natural aptitude and experience, supporting leaders with exposure to theory, concepts, cases, guided experiences, and other practical information and learning methodologies is essential.
- Many members of the community college community can lead. The competencies will shift in importance depending upon the level of the leader. For example, it is more critical that a president be able to communicate effectively with the board than for a staff assistant to do so. Both, however, can benefit from mastery of the communication competency.
- Effective leadership is a combination of effective management and vision. Ideally, acquisition of management skills would precede vision. In reality the two skill sets often develop in tandem and are presented together in this competency framework.
- Learning leadership is a lifelong process, the movement of which is influenced by personal and career maturity as well as other developmental processes.
- The leadership gap can be addressed through a variety of strategies such as college grow-your-own programs, AACC council and university programs, state system programs, residential institutes, coaching, mentoring, and on-line and blended approaches. Important considerations that apply to all forms of delivery include sustaining current leaders and developing new ones.

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Organizational Strategy

An effective community college leader strategically improves the quality of the institution, protects the long-term health of the organization, promotes the success of all students, and sustains the community college mission, based on knowledge of the organization, its environment, and future trends.

Illustrations:

- Assess, develop, implement, and evaluate strategies regularly to monitor and improve the quality of education and the long-term health of the organization.

- Use data-driven evidence and proven practices from internal and external stakeholders to solve problems, make decisions, and plan strategically.

- Use a systems perspective to assess and respond to the culture of the organization, to changing demographics, and to the economic, political, and public health needs of students and the community.

- Develop a positive environment that supports innovation, teamwork, and successful outcomes.

- Maintain and grow college personnel and fiscal resources and assets.

- Align organizational mission, structures, and resources with the college master plan.

Resource Management

An effective community college leader equitably and ethically sustains people, processes, and information as well as physical and financial assets to fulfill the mission, vision, and goals of the community college.

Illustrations:

- Ensure accountability in reporting.

- Support operational decisions by managing information resources and ensuring the integrity and integration of reporting systems and databases.

- Develop and manage resource assessment, planning, budgeting, acquisition, and allocation processes consistent with the college master plan and local, state, and national policies.

- Take an entrepreneurial stance in seeking ethical alternative funding sources.

- Implement financial strategies to support programs, services, staff, and facilities.

- Implement a human resources system that includes recruitment, hiring, reward, and performance management systems and that fosters the professional development and advancement of all staff.

- Employ organizational, time management, planning, and delegation skills.

- Manage conflict and change in ways that contribute to the long-term viability of the organization.

Communication

An effective community college leader uses clear listening, speaking, and writing skills to engage in honest, open dialogue at all levels of the college and its surrounding community, to promote the success of all students, and to sustain the community college mission.

Illustrations:

- Articulate and champion shared mission, vision, and values to internal and external audiences, appropriately matching message to audience.

- Disseminate and support policies and strategies.

- Create and maintain open communications regarding resources, priorities, and expectations.

- Convey ideas and information succinctly, frequently, and inclusively through media and verbal and nonverbal means to the board and other constituencies and stakeholders.

- Listen actively to understand, comprehend, analyze, engage, and act.

- Project confidence and respond responsibly and tactfully.

Collaboration

An effective community college leader develops and maintains responsive, cooperative, mutually beneficial, and ethical internal and external relationships that nurture diversity, promote the success of all students, and sustain the community college mission.

Illustrations:

- Embrace and employ the diversity of individuals, cultures, values, ideas, and communication styles.

- Demonstrate cultural competence relative to a global society.

- Catalyze involvement and commitment of students, faculty, staff, and community members to work for the common good.

- Build and leverage networks and partnerships to advance the mission, vision, and goals of the community college.

- Work effectively and diplomatically with unique constituent groups such as legislators, board members, business leaders, accreditation organizations, and others.

- Manage conflict and change by building and maintaining productive relationships.

- Develop, enhance, and sustain teamwork and cooperation.

- Facilitate shared problem solving and decision making.

Community College Advocacy

An effective community college leader understands, commits to, and advocates for the mission, vision, and goals of the community college.

Illustrations:

- Value and promote diversity, inclusion, equity, and academic excellence.

- Demonstrate a passion for and commitment to the mission of community colleges and student success through the scholarship of teaching and learning.

- Promote equity, open access, teaching, learning, and innovation as primary goals for the college, seeking to understand how these change over time and facilitating discussion with all stakeholders.

- Advocate the community college mission to all constituents and empower them to do the same.

- Advance lifelong learning and support a learner-centered and learning-centered environment.

- Represent the community college in the local community, in the broader educational community, at various levels of government, and as a model of higher education that can be replicated in international settings.

Professionalism

An effective community college leader works ethically to set high standards for self and others, continuously improve self and surroundings, demonstrate accountability to and for the institution, and ensure the long-term viability of the college and community.

Illustrations:

- Demonstrate transformational leadership through authenticity, creativity, and vision.

- Understand and endorse the history, philosophy, and culture of the community college.

- Self-assess performance regularly using feedback, reflection, goal setting, and evaluation.

- Support lifelong learning for self and others.

- Manage stress through self-care, balance, adaptability, flexibility, and humor.

- Demonstrate the courage to take risks, make difficult decisions, and accept responsibility.

- Understand the impact of perceptions, world views, and emotions on self and others.

- Promote and maintain high standards for personal and organizational integrity, honesty, and respect for people.

- Use influence and power wisely in facilitating the teaching–learning process and the exchange of knowledge.

- Weigh short-term and long-term goals in decision making.

- Contribute to the profession through professional development programs, professional organizational leadership, and research/publication.

Development of the Competencies for Community College Leaders by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) was a broadly collaborative effort. AACC would like to express its appreciation to the following individuals for their insights and participation:

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