

Competencies for Community College Leaders

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### **Competencies for Community College Leaders**

As I read through the competencies I found various aspects of all roles appealing. However, the ones that attracted me the most were the roles of mid- and senior-level leaders as well as aspiring CEO. I was most attracted to these because above all else I feel that they would place me in a position in which I not only help realize the institution's mission, but these roles would also enable me to directly contribute to refining the mission. Furthermore, these executive and leadership roles would place me in a position in which I could directly advocate for community outreach, activism, and social justice.

#### **Mid-Level Leaders**

The role of mid-level leader enables one to effectively drive change from the middle (AACC, 2018). Through the process of interacting with student and faculty subordinates, as well as senior-level leadership and administration, a mid-level leader is able to provide a unique perspective to all stakeholders. When a policy is enacted by administration, a mid-level leader is able to see firsthand how it is impacting the campus; providing key insight into day-to-day effectiveness, and providing information for potential improvement and refinement up-the chain. When discussing leadership of any level, it's important to remember that all leaders, up and down the chain of command, must believe in the mission and be on the same page. Thus, a mid-level leader is a vital link in developing and facilitating strategies to achieve the mission.

Another critical competency is advocating and mobilizing. According to AACC (2018, p. 29):

An effective community college leader understands and embraces the importance of championing community college ideals, understands how to mobilize stakeholders to take

action on behalf of the college, and understands how to use all of the communications resources available to connect with the college community.

However, AACC (2018) goes on to explain “When opportunities present themselves, be an advocate and speak passionately about the mission of the community college.” To improve this I would simply remove the qualifier of “When opportunities present themselves.” I believe that a leader should always strive, and be expected to, advocate for the mission. Eddy & Boggs (2010) echo this sentiment by saying, “Leaders advocate by attending community events and participating in state and national policy forums.” I understand this to mean that we as leaders must often put ourselves in a position to advocate, as opposed to waiting for an opportunity.

Another aspect that drew me to this role was the personal traits and abilities, specifically that of being authentic, explained as “[Approaching] your interactions with students, peers, and college leaders by promoting trust, good behavior, fairness, and/or kindness” (AACC, 2018, p. 33). This type of leadership is something that really resonates with me.

### **Senior-Level Leaders**

Much of what makes a mid-level leader successful can also be applied to senior-level leaders, with the added responsibility of “[ensuring] department and unit priorities are always aligned with the priorities and goals of the college” (AACC, 2018, p. 37). One such way this competency is demonstrated is through the leaders role as an influencer, the AACC (2018) stresses that a senior-level leader should “only champion those initiatives that will really make a difference in the lives of students” (p. 40). This is something that I find extremely worthy. As leaders, we must understand which initiatives are meaningful and which are developed in ivory towers and have no concrete relation to the needs of the institution or the community.

Further emphasis is placed on the importance of the behavioral theory approach to leadership, described by Nevarez & Wood (2010) as “[focusing] on the importance of building, sustaining, and enhancing interpersonal relationships that lead to enhanced efforts in reaching a common goal.” This really resonates with me as it is directly related to my experience as an ungraduated student. The importance of faculty – both administrators and lecturers – developing interpersonal relationships with the student body, and the community as a whole, should not be understated. These relationships serve as a vital window into the community and allows leadership to develop meaningful policies.

The senior-level leaders role allows one to begin experiencing more of what would be required if they want to pursue a future presidency. According to McNair, Duree, & Ebbers (2011), “...because of the dynamic nature of community college leadership, the complex skills required of community college presidents... there is no one set of experiences that lead to the acquisition of skills required” (p. 4). This diverse range of experience needed to be an effective leader can be learned most efficiently on the job, and this role positions one to do as such.

### **Aspiring CEO**

The AACC (2018) stresses that an aspiring CEO should be aware of, and prepared for, “[the] ability to influence others, particularly in the external community” (p. 54). Furthermore, AACC (2018) states that an aspiring CEO must “understand how to prioritize human, financial, and capital resources to advance the priorities of the institution” (p. 55). The former is what draws me to this role above all else, the latter is what intimidated me. Speaking on the latter, I find that prioritizing human, financial, and capital resources is an impossible task. The quest to balance humanity with capital is, in my opinion, why we find our current structures so unjust and exploitative. As such, this is a position that would be difficult for me for me on an intrinsic level.

On the other hand, I believe that having people who can identify these contradictions is an important first step in addressing the issues. I don't claim to be the right person, as this requires a complex and robust set of skills and experience. On acquiring the skills to navigate this complex role, McNair, Duree, & Ebbers (2011) state that, "skills are acquired incrementally through an organic, individualized path that includes professional experiences, professional development, mentoring, and doctoral studies in community college leadership" (p. 8).

Overall, I believe that while intimidating, the role of president also enables one to have the most impact on the greater community. Eddy & Boggs (2010) explain the importance of this relationship with community, "The college typically views itself as being apart from the region, and I'm trying to build the image within the minds of our faculty and staff that we are the region. And without us, it will not change."

## References

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