

LEADING FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE EXCELLENCE: AN INVESTIGATION OF  
LEADERS' PROFICIENCIES AND AACC COMPETENCIES

by

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## ABSTRACT

One of the challenges facing community colleges is the vast number of successful CEOs and leaders who are leaving or have already left their positions. This challenge is compounded by one of the biggest problems facing community colleges, a lack of senior leaders who have the competencies and skills to be knowledgeable leaders to step into these vacated presidencies.

This sequential explanatory designed mixed-methods research study focused on the AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders focusing on the senior-level competencies. The study investigated senior leaders of a midwestern consortium of community colleges, and examined aspects of community college leadership development: to assess community college leaders' understanding of the AACC competencies, to assess how community college leaders self-assess their current level of proficiency with the AACC competencies, and to examine how community college leaders' experiences have affected their use of the AACC competencies for their own leadership development.

Phase 1 of the study was an online survey, using the exact wording of the AACC's 59 competencies and associated behaviors, to assess the proficiencies of senior leaders from Michigan community colleges in the AACC competencies. Phase 2 interviews with a subgroup of the survey respondents investigated the leaders' process in acquiring knowledge and proficiency in the AACC competencies, as well as to gain insight into how they plan to continue proficiencies through professional development activities.

The six key findings of the study include the extent to which the AACC competencies are utilized by senior leaders, the top ten people-focused competencies, the lowest ranked hard-skills

competencies, methods used by senior-leaders to develop their current knowledge of the AACC competencies, plans for continuing to acquire knowledge for leadership development, as well as the activities that were considered essential to acquiring the knowledge and skillset outlined by the AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders.

**KEY WORDS:** AACC Competencies, leadership, professional development

## DEDICATION

This dissertation, as well as my entire pursuit of a doctoral degree, is dedicated to my husband, Douglas Payne, who has been relentless in offering encouragement at every phase, and who has given me the support I needed to keep me on track and to realize my goals.

Forever and always!

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

### OVERVIEW TO THE STUDY

Over the past eighteen months, the U.S. has experienced challenges that have tested its social and behavioral fabric, from the life-altering effects of the pandemic to the political and social upheavals tied to long-standing cultural prejudices. These challenges caused many to question the foundations of effective leadership at all levels and in all sectors, private and public. Higher education was not exempt from the challenges, or from the need to examine and reassert the value of sound leadership. Even before the summer of 2020 and the height of the nation's difficulties, this research study was developed to examine leadership development within one sector that was in the midst of its own leadership void, the U.S. community college system. Using the Leadership Framework and the leadership competencies developed by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), this research study was developed to examine aspects of community college leadership development: first, to assess community college leaders' understanding of the AACC competencies; second, to assess how community college leaders self-assess their current level of proficiency with the AACC competencies; and finally, to examine how community college leaders' experiences have affected their use of the AACC competencies for their own leadership development.

### INTRODUCTION

Community Colleges are confronting unparalleled changes and challenges, one of which is the tremendous number of successful CEOs and leaders who are departing for various reasons,

including retirement, seeking a different career path (Ellis & Garcia, 2017; ), as well as terminations and death (Smith, 2016). One of the greatest problems facing community colleges is the lack of talented, competent, and knowledgeable senior leaders to step into these vacated presidencies to meet the challenges that community colleges face daily (Ellis & Garcia, 2017).

O’Banion indicated that not only are 75% of community college presidents and CEOs preparing to leave their positions in the next ten years but so are approximately 75% of their senior leaders (Smith, 2016). The AACC tracks the turnover rate of community college presidents as well as their successors. The results are staggering: Over 1,026 community college presidents left their position between 2011 and 2016 (see Table 1) (Smith, 2016).

Table 1: Number of Transitioning Presidents

YEAR	NUMBER OF TRANSITIONS
2011-12	134
2012-13	158
2013-14	262
2014-15	269
2015-March 2016	203

*Source: Smith, 2016, p. 4*

In 2017, AACC President and CEO, Dr. Bumphus, reported that over 900 presidential transitions had transpired at community colleges since 2013 (Ellis & Garcia, 2017). With the continuing rate of presidential and senior staff turnover, community colleges are experiencing substantial change, sometimes referred to as a disruption in leadership, due to this scale of transformations (AACC, 2012; Achieving the Dream & The Aspen Institute, 2013).

Senior leaders and faculty are also following a parallel pattern to that of the CEO by aging into retirement, causing concern for the imminent loss of historical background and institutional recall that could lead to future barriers for leaders who may repeat mistakes or make ill-informed decisions (Wallin, 2006; AACC, 2013; Ellis & Garcia, 2017). According to a 2016 survey in Executive Leadership Transitioning at Community Colleges (AACC & ACCT, 2018), 50% of community college presidents stated they will be retiring within the next five years; however, only 21.2% of the colleges surveyed are using succession planning to find a replacement. In 2017, the Aspen Institute reported that a very high number of community college presidents were expected to retire within the next ten years with a minimal number of their senior leaders ready or even interested in stepping in to fill the void. The volume of history, knowledge, and dedication to the community college mission that will be lost with the looming retirements of senior level administrators and the CEO is inconceivable (Duree & Ebbers, 2012). This leadership predicament is not just that of retiring CEOs, it also includes an absence of succession planning of the CEO's senior leaders. The reasons for this lack of planning include a shortage of qualified candidates or a lack of interest in ascending to the CEO position (The Aspen Institute, 2017). As early as 2008, Hassan examined the impact these expected departures were anticipated to have on community college leaders and the development of future leaders.

With this projected loss of leaders facing community colleges across the nation, it is imperative that competent leaders are identified and have the necessary training to step into the presidency and senior leader positions. Kouzes and Posner (2002) state that not everyone has the ability to perform at the levels needed to move the community college mission forward; the position takes competence and ability. They also stress that obtaining aptitude in any area requires being genuine and being a credible leader. Kouzes & Posner, 2002, stated:

Having a clear and authentic message is a necessary first step, yet the ability to consistently deliver the message and act on it requires a high level of skill. Before you can do the right things, you have to know how to do them. You cannot do what you don't know how to do, no matter how moral or noble the purpose...Leaders must be aware of the degree to which they actually have the capabilities to do what they say. And if they lack the competence, they must dedicate themselves to continuously learning and improving. (pp. 82-83)

## **LEADERSHIP COMPETENCY THEORIES**

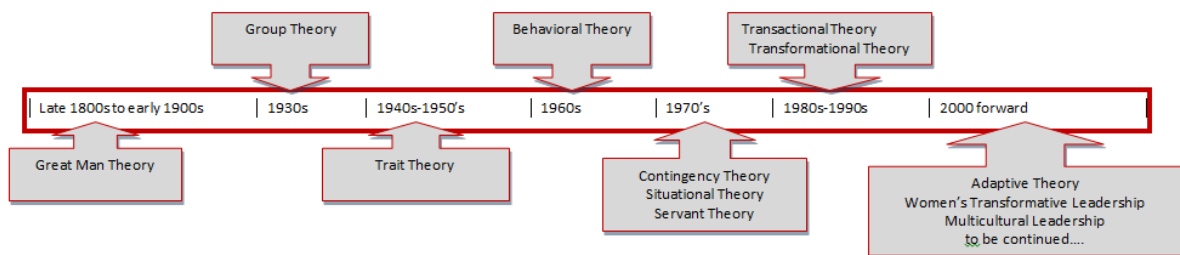
Theories about effective leadership have been debated and developed for centuries and are discussed by small corporations, new-economy start-ups, and huge conglomerates alike, as well as across sectors from business, government, public administration, and education. The theories are varied depending on the sector and the focus, but the consensus is that people need leaders to help them reach their potential, to articulate the mission and vision of their companies/institutions, and to inspire others to achieve the stated goals and objectives of the company/institution (Goffee & Jones, 2000).

Leadership theories and frameworks have developed and changed significantly since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, moving from a belief in innate leadership characterized by the Great Man Theory, to more current beliefs in learned leadership skills and a recognition of individual leadership approaches, as reflected in Adaptive Leadership and Transformational Leadership theories (see Figure 1). Research on leadership started to develop around the early twentieth century when people were skeptical about the influence of logic and motivation and man's ability to continuously progress (Goffee & Jones, 2000). Current research refuted one of the earliest posited beliefs, the Great Man Theory, which states that leaders are born and that leadership qualities are innate (Persley, 2013). This theory was a precursor to the Trait theory developed in the 1940s and 50s which outlined common qualities and attributes of an effective leader (Persley, 2013). Two leadership theories that are widely practiced today, especially in higher education,



are transformational and transactional leadership theories. Transformational leadership is valued because it can be “inspiring, giving a direction or vision, intellectually stimulating people, empowering them and challenging their views” (Mellor, 2015, p. 1), while transactional leadership is “more about monitoring performance and giving feedback” (Mellor, 2015, p. 1). Mellor’s analysis of leadership approaches asserts that both transformational and transactional leadership styles are essential; one leads to a higher level of employee involvement (Transformational) and the other leads to a higher rate of employee compliance (Transactional) (Mellor, 2015).

*Figure 1: Leadership Theories Timeline with Assumptions*



- Assumptions**
- **Great Man Theory:** Leaders are born, not made
  - **Group Theory:** People are more committed to actions when they are involved in the decision-making
  - **Trait Theory:** Certain personality traits constitutes ability to lead
  - **Behavioral Theory:** Leaders can be made, success dependent upon learnable behavior
  - **Contingency Theory:** The leader’s ability to lead is contingent upon various situational factors, including the leader’s preferred style, the capabilities of followers and other situational factors
  - **Situational Theory:** The best action of the leader depends upon a range of situational factors
  - **Servant Theory:** The leader has a responsibility to followers
  - **Transactional Theory:** Theory of exchange; people are motivated by rewards (or punishment)
  - **Transformational Theory:** Leader encourages participation through concern for a broader goal
  - **Adaptive Theory:** Leadership is a process of mobilizing people to tackle tough problems; leadership can be learned; leadership can come from anywhere in an organization or a community
  - **Women’s Transformative Theory:** Relational versus transactional; Believes in making institutions more transparent, responsive, accountable, and ethical
  - **Multicultural Theory:** Engages in understanding and interrupting the cycle of oppression on multiple levels; Acknowledges and brings forth strength and power in self and others; Fosters the ability to imagine, envision and create new realities

*Source: Persley, 2013*

Research on leadership by Goffee and Jones (2000) delved into the qualities of inspirational leaders, and identified four important, but unexpected, qualities:

1. **They selectively show their weaknesses.** By exposing some vulnerability, they reveal their approachability and humanity.
2. **They rely heavily on intuition to gauge the appropriate timing and course of their actions.** Their ability to collect and interpret soft data helps them know just when and how to act.
3. **They manage employees with something called tough empathy.** Inspirational leaders empathize passionately- and realistically- with people, and they care intensely about the work employees do.
4. **They reveal their differences.** They capitalize on what's unique about themselves.  
(p. 1)

Effective leadership continues to be studied and examined in efforts to understand and predict when leadership will succeed and when it will fail (LeaderNation, 2009). One such leadership framework is that of authentic leadership which became prominent in 2003 when Bill George published the book, *Authentic Leadership*. George outlined the four main behaviors of authentic leaders who remain genuine to themselves and others (Kruse, 2013):

- First, authentic leaders focus on being self-aware and genuine: leaders are aware of their strengths, weaknesses, and emotions, and act the same personally and professionally, in public and private.
- Second, authentic leaders focus on being mission-driven and concentrate on results: leaders put the mission/goals of the institution ahead of personal interest.
- Third, authentic leaders lead with the heart: they show their emotions wisely and communicate often with staff.
- Finally, authentic leaders focus on the big picture for the long-term: they don't let the small stuff interfere with the mission and vision of the organization.

Another often discussed leadership theory is known as “Distributive Leadership,” which stresses that decision-making authority must be present and exercised throughout the institution. According to Ellis and Garcia (2017), in an education setting, this means that the CEO wants to

ensure that decisions affecting students are made quickly in order to assist students promptly, and also to enable faculty and staff to function effectively on the students' behalf. A drawback to this theory is that a great deal of training, time, investment, and tolerance of mistakes are necessary in order for this leadership model to be effective (Ellis & Garcia, 2017). Ellis & Garcia give an example of how this model of leadership is applied using the "Student Walkthrough" program at Clark State in Ohio. Clark State's program has various team members walking through a student experience (i.e., registration and/or advising) from a student's perspective; this ultimately leads to improved services offered to students (Ellis & Garcia, 2017).

## **DEFINING COMPETENCY**

How leadership competencies have been described, labelled, and/or identified has been riddled with ambiguity, confusion, and inconsistency since it became a popular topic of discussion in the 1960s and 1970s (Seemiller, 2016). The word "competency" has customarily been used to explain certain knowledge, abilities, and characteristics essential to be a successful leader (Lucia & Lepsinger, 1999; Cumberland, Herd, Alagaraja & Kerrick, 2016). The elements of any set of competencies have included and been linked to terms such as behaviors, beliefs, values, aptitudes, skills, traits, attitudes, and characteristics (Cumberland et al, 2016). However, two elements have been widely agreed upon even though the definition of competency is still debated: First, "competencies should be identified for each task or role in an effort to lay out criteria that will provide direction for an individual to improve their capacity," and second, "competencies should be measurable" (Seemiller, 2016, p. 93).

There are many reasons why competencies and competency frameworks are used in organizations. According to Seemiller (2016), there are numerous uses for competencies:

1. Assessments can be given to predict the performance effectiveness of job candidates

2. Provide necessary training for employees to be effective in their positions
3. Evaluate employees using a set of defined competencies and performance criteria
4. Create a system of promotion and growth based on learned competencies
5. Provide compensation packages based on employee competency levels and performance.

Many tools or models have been developed to measure and evaluate the leadership competency of individuals aspiring to leadership roles. The Leadership Effectiveness Framework (or LEF) (Yoon, Song, Donahue & Woodley, 2010), Kouzes & Posner Leadership Practices Inventory (or LPI), and the Thomas-Kilmann Indicator (or TKI) (Rosch & Priest, 2017) are examples of assessment tools. This research study concentrates on the Leadership Framework developed by the AACC, Competencies for Community College Leaders, which was developed for use in a community college setting (AACC, 2018).

However, as useful as these tools and models may be for defining leadership characteristics, there is some evidence that these leadership competency models could limit leadership development (Patching, 2011). The leader idea is founded on the premise that leaders follow their own path or create new paths; they also create the environment in which their decisions work. By inspiring others, those who follow make sure those decisions work (Patching, 2011). Zenger (2012) states that leadership development programs may fail because of irrelevant or old content; the content is so abstract and theoretical that it is hard to implement; or the delivery approach is just plain boring. For an individual to develop their leadership competencies, on their own or using a model similar to what is listed above, they must develop their own self-awareness as a leader, and must build upon the foundation of who the person truly is or wants to be (Patching, 2011; Zenger, 2012).

## **HISTORY OF THE AACC COMPETENCIES FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERS**

Historically speaking, the AACC competencies for community college leaders were developed for various reasons, including to support emerging leaders as they plan their professional development activities, to provide a resource for Human Resources Departments and Boards of Trustees when they begin the recruitment process of seeking a new president, to provide guidance for institutions who develop grow-your-own programs, and to provide a framework for developing curricula for leadership development and doctoral programs (AACC, 2005; Hassan, 2008; McNair, 2009; McNair, Duree & Ebbers, 2011).

Early in the twenty-first century, realizing that there would be a leadership deficiency going forward, AACC began the “Leading Forward” initiative, with financial support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (Hassan, 2008; Hebert-Swartz & McNair, 2010; Ottenritter, 2012) to examine what leadership competencies community college presidents would need to be successful in the new millennium (McNair, Duree, & Ebbers, 2011). Beginning in 2003 and continuing through early 2005, AACC sponsored numerous summits with diverse constituent segments to focus community college leaders and researchers to develop a leadership framework for the community college leader of the future (AACC, 2005). Using this newly established but heavily studied framework, Boards, CEOs, and Human Resources Executives have an outline on which to focus professional development and succession planning activities, and colleges and universities have a standard on which to base doctoral degrees and leadership programs (McNair, 2009; and McNair, Duree & Ebbers, 2011).

### **FIRST AND SECOND EDITION**

The initial framework, as well as the second edition published in 2013, was centered around six competency topics referred to as “domains”: organizational strategy, resource

management, communication, collaboration, community college advocacy and professionalism (AACC, 2005, 2013). Each competency included a detailed description of the domain and itemized specific philosophical statements and behavioral attributes that should be developed (McNair, 2009; Hebert-Swartz & McNair, 2010). There were several differences between the first and second edition to the competency framework as noted below:

1. The Resource Development title was changed to be more inclusive of various resources; the updated title was “Institutional Finance, Research, Fundraising, and Resource Management” (AACC, 2013)
2. Professionalism was removed as a separate competency as these attributes were incorporated throughout the other competencies (AACC, 2013)
3. The second edition of the competencies were stratified into three separate categories and presented as a progression with new skills learned at each level:
  - a. Emerging Leader
  - b. New CEO - first three years on the job
  - c. CEO – More than three years on the job (AACC, 2013)

Minimal changes were made to the initial principles that were established in 2005 because these competencies were still applicable to the leadership dilemma in 2012-13. AACC maintained the philosophy that leadership characteristics and skillset can be learned, leadership skills develop and grow from all levels with the institution, learning to be a leader is a continuous process, and that the leadership disparity can be tackled through multiple strategies (AACC, 2013). In the second edition, the rudimentary competencies required at the first level, Emerging Leader, were established. The competencies progress and expands for the next level, New CEO – First 3 Years on the Job. For the third level, CEO – 3+ Years on the Job, the competencies increase and strengthen where the leader has matured into a fully functioning and competent community college leader (AACC, 2013). Fundamentally, the second edition of the

competencies for community college leaders was based on the belief that leadership progression is on a continuum with proficiency developing as the leader gains experience.

*Figure 2: AACC Leadership Continuum*



*Source: AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders, Second Edition, 2013*

### THIRD EDITION

AACC believes that, as the environment of community colleges change, so must the competencies and creativity of its senior leaders, and as leadership competencies develop on a continuum, leadership competencies should transform as the requirements of the community college, its students, and community members change (AACC, 2013). Some of the noted changes AACC identified are the changing focus of the community college mission, scarcer resources, and the fluctuating demographics of community colleges students (AACC, 2018). Because of these acknowledged changes, the AACC president assembled the Commission on Leadership and Professional Development to concentrate on crafting suggestions to revise the AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders (AACC, 2018). The Commission concentrated on creating a comprehensive document to direct the improvement of rising leaders and to support institutions with the selection of staff dedicated to the mission, vision, and values of the community college (AACC, 2018). The Commission remained centered around student

access and success, institutional transformation as the landscape of community colleges evolves, and providing a standard for career progression of staff at all levels (AACC, 2018).

The updated third edition of the AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders released November 2018 was distinctively different than the preceding versions (AACC, 2018). The third edition is separated into 11 focus areas under specific employee clusters with competencies and behaviors listed under each level and focus area.

Table 2: AACC Competencies Stratification Categories

FOCUS AREAS	EMPLOYEE CLUSTERS
1. Organizational Culture	1. Faculty
2. Governance, Institutional Policy, and Legislation	2. Mid-Level Leaders
3. Student Success	3. Senior-Level Leaders
4. Institutional Leadership	4. Aspiring CEOs
5. Institutional Infrastructure	5. New CEOs, First Two Years on the Job
6. Information and Analytics	6. CEOs, Three Years on the Job and Beyond
7. Advocacy and Mobilizing/Motivating Others	
8. Fundraising and Relationship Cultivation	
9. Communications	
10. Collaboration	
11. Personal Traits and Abilities	

*Source: AACC, 2018*

Community colleges are given examples on how to use the revised competencies to plan for leadership development. For example, under the focus area of Organizational Culture, one competency listed is “Mission, vision, and values of the community college” (AACC, 2018, p. 23). For Mid-Level Leaders, the behavior listed is “Learn about the college’s mission, vision, and values, how your role supports them, and whether a career in the sector is a fit for you”



(AACC, 2018, p. 23), but for Aspiring CEOs, the same behavior is listed as “Demonstrate tangible outcomes from your past and current performance that show you embrace the community college mission, vision, and values” (AACC, 2018, p. 51). If an employee is at the mid-level and wants to progress, the professional development focus would be to acquire the behaviors at their level and then concentrate on the competencies and behaviors at the next level.

The third edition reflects changes that offer those who wish to develop and progress valuable information on the capacity needed to expand within one’s current position and to evolve and apply the competencies as one is promoted into roles with more extensive responsibilities (AACC, 2018). According to AACC (2018),

Everyone in the community college can lead from their respective positions. The purpose of this revision is to provide useful information on the proficiency required to improve within one’s current position, as well as to show a progression of how the competency is applied as one ascends into roles with more and broader responsibilities. (p. 4)

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The acknowledged leadership dilemma that has been occurring in community colleges — as experienced leaders retire and new successors step in without the knowledge and skill set to sufficiently assume leadership roles (Wallin, 2006; AACC, 2013) — has put added pressure on institutions to better define the needs and abilities of its leaders. Various articles and reports suggest community college CEOs have largely failed to offer senior leaders programs intended to cultivate competencies vital for success in filling the vacuum left by retiring community college leaders (Amey, 2004; The Aspen Institute, 2017; AACC & ACCT, 2018). The challenge facing employees willing and eager to step into a more multifaceted and demanding position is identifying the knowledge and abilities needed to ensure the functions and responsibilities of these higher-level positions are competently performed.

This study is significant for two reasons. First, it concentrates on senior leaders and how they view and utilize the AACC competencies in everyday practice. Second, this study will add to the literature on the leadership competencies denoting how they are utilized when practiced and how the senior leaders learn or develop the identified skills outlined in the competencies. Phase 1 of this study focuses on the competencies from the AACC third edition and asks the senior leaders to determine their level of proficiency for each of the competencies and the related behaviors. During phase 2 of the study, research participants focused on the AACC third edition competencies and discussed how well they have been reviewed and utilized by the participants. This study is expected to provide significant insights into how the competencies are learned and implemented by senior leaders, as well as to identify how they plan to gain knowledge of those competencies that need further development.

## **PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This study seeks to understand how the AACC competencies are utilized by community college senior leaders, and how the AACC competencies impacts the professional development of community college senior leaders, specifically (1) to assess community college senior leaders' understanding of the AACC competencies, (2) to assess how community college senior leaders self-assess their current level of proficiency with the AACC competencies, and (3) to demonstrate how the AACC competencies are utilized in community colleges for leadership development. The research questions directly related to the stated purpose above are:

1. How do senior leaders in Midwestern community colleges self-assess their level of proficiency in the AACC competencies for community college leaders (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 2018)?
2. How do senior leaders in Midwestern community colleges prefer to acquire the competencies defined in the AACC competencies for community college leaders (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 2018)?

## **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

Throughout this dissertation, the following terms are used. To avoid misunderstanding, these definitions are included:

- **Advancement Opportunities:** defined as performing better in current position, seeking a promotion, seeking a presidency, etc. (AACC, 2018)
- **CEO:** defined as the person ultimately responsible to answer to the Board of Trustees, whether the title is Chancellor, President, CEO or similar.
- **Community Colleges:** defined as "...any not-for-profit institutions regionally accredited to award the associate of arts or the associate in science as its highest degree" (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014, p. 5).
- **Senior Leader:** defined as staff that reports directly to the CEO regardless of title, except for clerical staff.
- **Leadership Competencies:** defined as skills, knowledge, values, abilities, behaviors and characteristics that are directly related to effectiveness at all organizational levels (LeaderNation, 2009; Seemiller, 2016).
- **Succession Planning:** "...an essential strategy for harnessing the substantial talents in your organization. It is the process by which successors in your organization are identified for key posts and career development" (Flanagan, 2009, p. 1).

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This mixed-methods, sequential explanatory designed research study was limited to a regional consortium of community colleges in the Midwest (a total of seven geographically located community colleges), and is a non-probability sample, which removes the generalizability of this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The survey questionnaire and the follow-up interviews focused on the AACC competencies for community college leaders at the senior leader role, regardless of the position currently held by the survey and interview participants; the AACC competencies defined for the five other levels, or roles, within a community college (identified as faculty, mid-managers, aspiring CEOs, new CEOs, and

seasoned CEOs) were not part of this study. Therefore, the results are specific to the senior leader role of leadership.

The survey was emailed to 98 potential respondents using SurveyMonkey. A total of 19 completed surveys were received, a 19% response rate. The average response rates vary depending on the type of survey used (Trochim, Donnelly & Arora, 2016; Lindemann, 2019). Lindemann, 2019, states that the average survey response rate is 33% overall; however, when considering different types of surveys used, a typical response rate for electronic surveys is 20%.

Phase 1 of this research was completed by mid-February 2020, with Phase 2 estimated to begin April 1, 2020. However, by mid-March the coronavirus, known as Covid-19, had become a world-wide pandemic with a majority of the United States being closed down by late March. The impact to this research study was immediate and made it impossible to collect Phase 2 data in the original format, in a focus group session with one participant from each of the identified colleges. The focus group session became one-on-one online interviews beginning seven months after the initial start date for Phase 2.

The delimitations identified for this research study include responses from senior leaders and not leaders at all levels of a college. Study participants consist of senior leaders from community colleges regionally located in the Midwest (non-probability) and, thus, is not generalizable to community colleges nationally; however, representation does extend across urban, suburban, and rural community colleges.

## **SUMMARY**

This research project focuses on three areas: to assess community college senior leaders understanding of the AACC competencies, to assess how community college senior leaders self-assess their current level of proficiency with the AACC competencies, and to demonstrate how

the AACC competencies are utilized in community colleges for leadership development. In the next chapter, literature will be discussed that outlines the emerging issues in locating and cultivating leaders that have the needed skillset and competencies necessary to assume the top CEO position. The third chapter outlines the specific methodology followed for this study. The fourth chapter presents the findings and analyzes the results. The fifth chapter will discuss the implications of the research findings, future research opportunities that could follow this study, and provide guidelines for community colleges to follow as they develop programs and/or implement strategies for professional development opportunities.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### INTRODUCTION

Chapter One introduced the leadership challenges that most community colleges have or will be facing in the near future: a shortage of qualified candidates that can assume the position of the presidency or the Chief Executive Officer, a changing executive leadership staff that report to CEO, and an aging faculty (Fulton-Calkins and Milling, 2005, Wallin, 2006; McNair, 2009; McNair, Duree, & Ebbers, 2011; Duree & Ebbers, 2012; and AACC & ACCT, 2018). Chapter Two reviews pertinent literature about the community college presidency, challenges facing community colleges, effective leadership, desired competencies, and professional development to achieve these competencies.

### THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENT

Researchers have examined the role and challenges of the position of the community college president in great detail. Duree and Ebbers (2012), for example, studied presidential perceptions of the AACC competencies and discovered which competencies were perceived as critical, which need greater expansion, and which are viewed as slightly less vital when applied. Most of the literature reviewed focused on the evidence that the college presidency was at risk. AACC (2005, 2013), AACC & ACCT (2018), and Eddy & Khwaja (2019), in fact, described the increases in retirement-aged existing presidents, the shorter presidential terms, and the rising challenges faced by presidents as some of the key factors in the emerging problem of turnover in community college presidents. The literature discussing the turnover concerns of the community


college presidency has reinforced the issues stated above, and has identified additional challenges linked to the shortage of leaders willing to step into the CEO position, including a lack of candidates with the required skill set (AACC, 2005; Fulton-Calkins and Milling, 2005), a call for rethinking the competencies required of future presidents (Ottenritter, 2012), as well as a lack of interest in the top position, and less tenure as president (Bradfield, Cheng, Clark & Selingo, 2017; Paterson, 2018; Eddy & Khwaja, 2019).

In 2017, Bradfield, et al., reported that the pathway to the college presidency is not the same as it has been since the early 1800s when presidents were not only running the college but teaching as well. A continuously evolving position, the pathway to the college presidency has become more complex as the traditional academic leadership route (dean to provost to president) has been joined by leaders from across the institution (including student services and finance) and has expanded to include a non-academic pathway with colleges seeking candidates from the business sector (Bradfield, et al., 2017).

Another aspect of the evolving nature of the position is the broadening of the foundational skills college leaders are expected to have. Beyond the expected academic and intellectual leadership skills, Bradfield, et al., (2017) also identified organizational strategy, communication, fundraising, collaborating, financial, and operational acumen as essential for college leadership. Ellis and Garcia (2017) and the Aspen Institute (2017) also hypothesized that future community college leaders would require a diverse new set of leadership abilities to meet the rapid changes facing the community college. Ellis and Garcia (2017) worked with current senior leaders to create a list of skills essential for GenXers to be successful in the presidency, including having the desire to make a difference in the lives of students, having strong mentors, keeping abreast of state legislature for strategic planning purposes, promoting empowerment for

faculty and staff, and seeking a suitable work life balance. The Aspen Institute (2017) developed a list of competencies and capacities leaders would need to react and adapt swiftly to survive unforeseen changes and used these to develop a model for an environment open and responds to change (see Figure 3).

*Figure 3: Aspen Institute’s Evolving Job Description of the College Presidency*

<b>DEFINING THE CHALLENGE: THE EVOLVING JOB DESCRIPTION OF THE COLLEGE PRESIDENCY</b>	
ENDURING COMPETENCIES	CAPACITIES TO RESPOND TO NEW & EMERGING CHALLENGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop a vision and long-term strategic direction</li> <li>▪ lead and navigate complex shared governance systems</li> <li>▪ Communicate vision and build consensus across multiple constituencies</li> <li>▪ Deliver equitable access</li> <li>▪ Secure strong budgets, enrollments, and resources</li> <li>▪ Ensure quality teaching and knowledge development through research</li> <li>▪ Understand how to manage the complexities of auxiliary enterprises</li> <li>▪ Articulate the value of their institutions</li> <li>▪ Manage crises</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Foster thoughtful discourse amid increasingly polarized cultural and political climate</li> <li>▪ Respond to swift contextual changes, accelerate decision-making in a shared governance context</li> <li>▪ Lead development of new teaching, program, and advising models to respond to evolving technology and student demographics</li> <li>▪ Ensure equitable outcomes</li> <li>▪ Identify and develop nontraditional partnerships and resource streams</li> <li>▪ Re-envision models of research, knowledge development, and engagement to respond to regional and global challenges</li> <li>▪ Integrate technology and big data to achieve efficiencies while maintaining quality education</li> <li>▪ Articulate the value of the institution as part of an ecosystem advancing individual and societal goals</li> <li>▪ Manage public relations in the era of social media</li> </ul>
	
<p><b>The Presidency of Tomorrow and Beyond: A Model for Building a Leadership Ecosystem Adaptive to Rapid Change</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Expand and improve transition planning, professional development, and peer learning opportunities for new and veteran presidents.</li> <li>2. Provide board greater and more integrated assistance to hire, support, and work with presidents who will act not just as institutional stewards but also as forward-thinking education leaders in a changing environment.</li> <li>3. Advance new and expanded ways to identify and develop a diverse presidential talent pool.</li> </ol>	

*Source: The Aspen Institute, 2017*



AACC (2012) and Smith (2018) stated that vice presidents and other candidates for the college presidency believe more consideration of varied professional development topics for new leaders needs to happen based on the changing needs and evolving mission of community colleges, and believe existing senior leaders have an obligation to formulate and inspire capable employees to move upward into senior leadership positions at community colleges. Moreover, Smith (2018), as well as Jaschik and Lederman (2018), reported that just 28% of existing CEOs are impressed with the current pool of employees that are available for future leadership roles, and 47% believe there is no clear path to prepare for the presidency; however, Smith (2018) stated that to be optimistic is key as the next generation of leaders that step into the pipeline is a more diverse group that brings a new set of abilities and talents into the field.

In 2011, McNair, Duree, and Ebbers focused on how community college presidents perceived their preparedness for the presidency and discovered several themes that presidents felt they could have prepared better for. Of the 282 respondents, 103 reported that resource management, collaboration, and community college advocacy were the three main areas that needed further development. McNair, Duree, and Ebbers (2011) also discovered that the main ways to prepare for a presidency was through professional development activities, on-the-job experiential training, as well as mentoring, job shadowing, and internships.

## **CHALLENGES FOR THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENT**

In 2016, Toner found that numerous challenges that are obscuring effective leadership include, but are not limited to, the advent of offering bachelor's degrees, intense funding and public policy fluctuations, amplified scrutiny and emphasis placed on improving completion, meeting local needs, changing national agendas, along with leaders lacking a clear roadmap for effective leadership. Later, Morris (2017) substantiated those identified above while outlining

numerous challenges facing community college leadership that require CEOs to react quickly, think innovatively, and manage change rapidly and creatively; they include

- Financial shortfalls as local, state, and federal funding is reduced, sometimes drastically.
- Technology advances, wireless innovations, and online educational improvements that happen constantly.
- Enrollment and retention levels declining in the current economic environment, and the need to invest in strategic enrollment management tactics.

In 2017, Bradfield, et al, outlined four crucial challenges that exist between higher education trustee boards and their senior leaders, these include: (1) short-term thinking, such as programming for the niche job market or specific technology that does not resolve identified problems, (2) a lack of alignment between the qualifications that boards are looking for and those potential job applicants possess, (3) boards' and leaders' ability to become transformational leaders and shift from short-term to long-term strategies, and (4) a flawed search process with search committees and boards with different priorities. This final challenge was later reinforced by the AACC and ACCT (2018), who added the difficulties that boards and search committees have finding the right fit and making a smooth transition between the departing and arriving presidents.

Soha, Osman, Manaf, and Abdullah (2016), and Hassan, Gallear, and Sivarajah (2018) found the challenges that impact leadership, from slightly to considerably, often relate to the followers' impressions of the leader and involve follower commitment and satisfaction, how followers relate to the organizational leadership culture, and leadership effectiveness, which the authors directly relate to leadership style and practice.

AACC (2005, 2013, 2018), AACC (2012), *Achieving the Dream* and the Aspen Institute (2013), ACCT (2014), AACC and the ACCT (2018), and countless other similar research focused on the challenges that are directly related to the issues facing community colleges, with Tarker (2019) confirming that these challenges include the number of retiring presidents transitioning to emerging and senior leaders with less experience; the constantly shifting and ambiguous higher education and community college environment; decreasing enrollment; low completion rates; changing government funding models; growing accountability and accreditation issues; as well as pressures from local, state, and federal agencies and accreditation bodies for major curriculum reforms.

Based on many of these challenges and the changing landscape, the AACC (2018) refined their competency model for community college leaders to close the knowledge gaps for all those wishing to move into senior level positions or improve in their current positions. Also, in the latest competency definitions, the AACC identified three overarching themes: (1) the belief that leadership can be learned over time, (2) a perception that community college leaders practice a participatory leadership approach instead of a hierarchical one, and (3) a leadership framework that needs to encompass all of the abilities, knowledge of functional areas, and personal qualities and characteristics necessary for community college leaders to progress in their careers (Tarker, 2019).

## **EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP**

Research into effective leadership by Wolverson and Gmelch (2002), and Padilla (2005), and later supported by Smith and Wolverson (2010), found that effective leadership is characterized by the selflessness of its leaders, leading to successful transformational organizational outcomes. Smith and Wolverson (2010) also reported the top five competencies or

skill areas as defined by their participants (in order of importance) as directly impacting the effectiveness of the organization: (1) analytical, (2) communication, (3) student affairs, (4) behavioral, and (5) external relations; all of which were also identified by the AACC and are incorporated into the third edition of the AACC (2018) competencies for community college leaders.

Research on effective leadership and the AACC competencies by Duree and Ebbers in 2012 found that leadership is obtained through cognitive development levels that happen over time, through a variety of experiences, and by learning through various pathways. Washington (2018) stated that community college presidents cannot be successful by operating in a vacuum but must recognize that institutions are interconnected and rely on a network of relationships, and that ongoing professional development activities are essential for the continued success of the president and the institution.

Recent concepts of community college leadership recognize the intricacy of modern-day higher education institutions and the need to manage chaos and cope with continual change (Eddy, Sydow, Alfred & Garza Mitchell, 2015). Rishi (2016), and Eddy and Khwaja (2019) posit that the community college structure impacts how leadership is presented and structured because of the “different missions foci, different student demographics, the role as a bridging institution with ties to business training, high school dual enrollment, and university transfer” (p. 56). Eddy and Khwaja (2019) hypothesize that institutional perceptions of leadership must concentrate on managing change, executive level advancement, adaptive work, and collaboration to build inclusivity.

In 2007, Spendlove’s research found that leadership is conducted through a social lens, which is the reason why transformational leadership works so well in higher education.

Spendlove's (2007) research specified the greatest reported characteristics such as sincerity, integrity, the ability to listen and confer with others, discuss and influence, think broadly and purposefully, and engage with people; all of which define effective leadership as being a social action that requires having credibility with others, leading by example, and communicating and collaborating (or soft skills). Lazarus (2013) and Rishi (2016) further defined the soft skills most critical for effective leaders as including leadership ability, open communication, collegiality, professionalism, promoting feedback, appearance, and etiquette. Hassan, Gallear, and Sivarajah (2018) revealed a social connection between effective leadership and followers' perceptions of how well leaders performed and communicated, including giving consideration to the interests and needs of the followers. Later, Bumphus (2018) exhibited a social mindset by successfully outlining and communicating the link between mission, vision, and strategic planning, as well as stating that, for leaders to be effective, they need to recognize extraordinary effort, commend excellence, and applaud failure.

Shahmandi, Silong, and Ismail (2012) stated that the individual's proficiency level in various competencies substantially impacts their effectiveness as a leader. Achieving the Dream and The Aspen Institute (2013) identified five core qualities for CEOs to be effective leaders: (1) a deep commitment to student access and success, (2) a willingness to take significant risks to advance student success, (3) the ability to create lasting change within the college, (4) having a strong, broad, strategic vision for the college and its students, reflected in external partnerships, and (5) the ability to raise and allocate resources in ways aligned to student success. They further identified leadership competencies that will reflect and build on these qualities: fiscal management, fundraising, external relationship-building, communication, and ethical and risk-averse behavior (Achieving the Dream, Inc. & The Aspen Institute, 2013). Again, all of these

identified competencies directly align with the AACC (2018) competencies for community college leaders. In addition to the above, and also directly related to the AACC competencies, Zafar, Hmedat, Chaubey, and Rehman (2019) stressed that an excellent academic leader must have the following qualities to ensure effectiveness in leadership:

He must be of high vision and a good team person. He has to set a standard by example and have ability and courage of conviction. He must be of loving nature with positive attitude; he should be a good listener and have ability to share the truth with compassion and zeal. He must have proactive personality with high degree of commitment and desire to expect and respect conflict. He must be ready to take risk and accountable to the higher authority and must follow policies and procedures in effective way. He must be honest and work with integrity and have ability to inspire people with confidence. He must have ability to trust and empower others. Being a leader, he must be communicative, collaborative, and connected to all academic participants. He must have willingness to learn, unlearn, and relearn and work with positive energy. He should be creative, innovative, and entrepreneurial, and have ability and desire to redesign the organization in order to set the directions and develop People. (p. 42)

In 2003, the AACC set out to provide leaders with the tools and knowledge necessary to address the problem of having skilled leaders available to assume the vacant leadership roles from the CEOs and their senior leadership staff who are retiring. Later research into leadership competencies needed for senior leaders and the presidency led by the ACCT (2014) focused on the vital knowledge needed for the CEO position and stated learning these competencies requires a more profound, in-depth, and hands-on experience. A few years later, The Aspen Institute (2017), as well as Ellis and Garcia (2017) also examined the competencies needed for senior leaders and the CEO; these competencies include the ability to

- Communicate effectively, both written and oral
- Make data-driven decisions
- Evaluate and implement the latest technology
- Understand the changing demographics of the student body

- Effectively address political, fiscal, and racial instability while maintaining faculty, staff, and student engagement
- Be dedicated to student access and success
- Do not be afraid to take considerable risks
- Initiate long-lasting internal changes
- Develop excellent collaborations externally with business partners and the community
- Secure additional funds and allocate resources where they are needed
- Be authentic and personable to connect with others at all levels
- Understand how students feel and the challenges they confront

All of these identified competencies are directly linked to and have been included the AACC competencies for community college leaders (2018).

In 2010, Yoon, Song, Donahue, and Woodley developed the Leadership Competency Inventory (or LDI) that has 32 leadership competencies they believed would be applicable for any type of organization and industry. The research was conducted with managers from the health care industry; however, review of the LDI competencies reveals complete overlap with the AACC competencies for community college leaders, including decisiveness, customer focus, strategic planning and thinking, and technology management. Further research in 2010, by Plinkse and Packard, outlined leadership competencies for community college CEOs that identified 47 competencies that were identified over a 15-year ability timeframe. Plinske and Packard's research identified, however, not only 15 personal characteristics that community college CEOs should have — including being a champion for community colleges, being involved in the community, being self-motivated and tactful with others, and being well balanced — they found that the most frequently occurring recommendations for community college CEOs

were to possess strong communication skills including written communication, public speaking skills, listening abilities, having media savvy, understanding the importance of the political environment, networking, being people oriented, and being able to understand a diverse student population (2010). Once again, all of the competencies identified by Plinske and Packard are likewise included in the AACC competencies for community college leaders.

## **DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES**

Research that focuses on ways to develop or enhance leadership competencies discuss a wide range of opportunities, from professional development to mentorship and job shadowing. Wallin (2006), and Taylor and Bodurka (2017) reported that short-term (two days to one year non-academic) focused leadership development is crucial for leaders in all professions. Wallin (2006) described three concepts that promote professional development, including that people who engage in leadership development do so (1) based on their experiences while associating these proficiencies to prior knowledge, (2) place emphasis on skills and knowledge that can be incorporated into everyday activities, and (3) devote time and energy to professional development contingent on the anticipated rewards of these actions. Fulton-Calkins and Milling (2005), Wallin (2006), and Haynes (2009) also identified areas that need training for leadership development including necessary management skills (i.e., conducting meetings and knowledge of budget and finance), the ability to communicate mission, vision, value, and form connections based on building relationships, and finally, leaders need to know how to self-assess, to know their strengths, vulnerabilities, and how to management stress, balance family commitments and maintain a confident attitude.

Several researchers, including McNair (2009), Hebert-Swartzter and McNair (2010); McNair, Duree, and Ebbers (2011); and Taylor and Bodurka (2017), found that doctoral



programs, mentoring, on-the-job training (experiential learning), and other professional development activities (conferences, leadership academies, etc.) were the methods that community college leaders used most often to acquire additional leadership skills, including the AACC competencies. McNair, Duree, and Ebbers (2011), Duree and Ebbers (2012), and Taylor and Bodurka (2017) emphasized that there is no exact one path to acquire the knowledge and skill set needed to advance to the community college presidency; however, utilizing a leadership framework (such as the AACC competencies) will ensure that leaders obtain the capabilities essential for effective leadership no matter the path they choose for their development. Hebert-Swartz and McNair (2010) state that accountability and leadership must be used for performance reporting leaving little room for ambiguity, exercise creative leadership when trying to meet the needs of the college, use collaborative strategic planning to link the mission and objectives to long-range goals of the institution, and to build alliance within the institution and outside with different governing and community bodies.

#### ADVANCED EDUCATION TO DEVELOP COMPETENCIES

McNair's (2015) and Ullman's (2015) research found that once a decision was made to seek a presidency, those interested began to assess their knowledge and skill levels, then utilized their self-awareness to begin to develop competencies and knowledge for their desired career using several methods: seeking a doctorate degree, obtaining new professional experiences, securing a formal mentor, and engaging in professional development activities (attending workshops and conferences, etc.); however, seeking the doctoral degree was identified as the most important credential to acquire for the presidency. Later, Bradford, et al (2017) stated that institutions advance leadership development considerably by (1) applying a leadership approach that supports the mission and vision of the institution, (2) utilizing a data-driven, evidence-based

method to recognize leadership potential, and (3) providing concentrated leadership coaching and experiences at all levels of the organization.

In 2017, Pierce stated that a president must always be cultivating their skills and developing as a professional and as a person. Pierce recommended several pathways to make this happen: to network with others in similar positions at other institutions to allow the individual to gain insights from others when unfortunate situations happen; to get a formal mentor or coach to help develop skill sets; to teach a course to emerging leaders to enhance your own skill set; to collaborate outside education by sitting on boards in order to keep abreast of practices across the country; finally, to be disciplined in pursuit of professional development because no one has all of the skills necessary to pursue any leadership role (2017). The key, Pierce emphasized, is to keep moving forward.

Research by McNair, Duree, and Ebbers (2011) found earning a doctoral degree important to becoming a college president; in fact, of 97 respondents, 20 stated they regretted not finishing their doctoral education before being hired as a president. To close the disparities between doctoral program outcomes and the expectations of presidencies, the researchers suggested that doctoral programs for community college presidents should intentionally align with the AACC competencies for community college leaders and map their doctoral classes to correspond with the AACC competencies.

#### MENTORING AND PRESIDENTIAL COMPETENCIES

McNally (2010) found that mentoring is an important path to gain leadership knowledge as it provides access to others in leadership positions through networking and open communication, provides greater opportunities for heightened self-awareness, and increases a personal support system. McNally (2010) further stated that mentoring is influential in

advancement opportunities, in obtaining leadership positions, and in providing important information on the political atmosphere of the institution. Duree and Ebbers (2012) found that nearly 50% of current presidents had a mentor relationship prior to being a president, and their research reported that, not only does having a mentor have a substantial effect on the individual learning experience, mentorship also enhances the intricacies of intellectual leadership improvement over time.

#### EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING (PROGRESSIVE ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE)

The research of Plinske and Packard (2010) outlined 17 experiences that Board of Trustees look for during the hiring process: This includes experience in senior management (both inside and outside of the community college setting), having a mentor, serving on an external boards, fundraising experience, and work on accountability initiatives; however, these additional two experiences were identified as crucial: Professional commitment and experience at organizations with a good public reputation.

Duree and Ebbers (2012) found that although approximately 90% of current CEOs have a doctorate degree, another key development factor for leadership skills is experiential learning that occurs over time, at multiple levels of responsibility and leadership. The researchers also identified formal leadership programs — independent of graduate programs — as important for preparing for leadership roles, especially those utilizing the AACC competencies as a guiding framework. Eddy (2012), and Cejda and Jolley (2013) found that individuals learned how to be a leader more effectively on the job, over time instead of through formal education, citing progressive administrative responsibilities and challenging job assignments as key to their learned knowledge base. Cejda and Jolley (2013) stated that accepting additional responsibility and serving the institution through a wide range of involvement (such as serving on institutional

committees, etc.) as the individual moves upward, builds experiential knowledge over time and leads to an increasingly effective leader.

#### SUCCESSION PLANNING AS LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Duree and Ebbers (2012), Ullman (2015), and Graham (2018) stated that succession planning is one way to train identified employees with the skill set they need to be effective in the future, and to ensure their current and potential institutional knowledge and experience survives to benefit future generations. Boerner (2015), and AACC and ACCT (2018) reported that creating a leadership pipeline ensures employee satisfaction while the absence of a clear succession planning strategy is avoidable, challenging for numerous reasons, and places the college's mission and future in peril, especially when unforeseen incidents or emergencies occur in which leadership stability is disturbed. Also in 2018, AACC predicted that just over 21% of retiring CEOs stated they have or expect to initiate a succession planning program to fill the vacancies of the retiring senior leadership staff. Research into the opinions of succession planning by Flanagan in 2009 found that an institution's succession planning efforts and professional development are key factors for prospective employees when choosing an organization and outlined nine key principles to be successful.

#### COLLABORATION AND TEAM LEADERSHIP AS DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Research by Wallin (2012) found that collaboration is one of the foundations of effective leadership, as no one leads without the willing efforts of others working toward an identified goal. Later research on team leadership led by Ellis and Garcia (2017) found that collaboration is key to providing an atmosphere that is conducive to student success. The following year, Whissemore (2018), Boggs (2019), and Mandrell (2019) indicated that one of the most important responsibilities every leader has is to develop, prepare, and nurture teams as they are

implemented and become cohesive, placing emphasis on building team chemistry and trust as they are fundamental to the teams' productivity. Zhuo's research (2019) focused specifically on the role of teams and team leaders and found that, because teams are fluid with people coming and going regularly, the team leader must be able to change and adapt quickly and constantly, especially because teams should be about the people who comprise them, and not about the leader. Zhuo (2019) also discussed issues that team leaders need to be aware of to be effective, especially when teams increase in size and become more complex mechanisms including finding the balance between doing the work yourself or delegating it to the team, realizing that the team leader's formal authority can cause team members to treat them differently, being able to manage multiple situations as the team grows, prioritizing projects and schedule workload, and knowing your team and their abilities.

## **SUMMARY**

This chapter has presented a review of the existing literature on the community college president and the challenges they face, the AACCC competencies for community college leaders, effective leadership skills and the associated competencies, as well as different aspects of professional development and how leadership competencies are learned or developed. Finally, the discussion included the different ways to acquire leadership skills, such as experiential learning, succession planning, and team leadership experiences. Chapter Three includes an examination of the research methods and design of the study, as well as the population and sampling, data collection, limitations and delimitations that affected this research study.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter will illustrate the research methodology used to conduct and validate this mixed-methods research study using a sequential explanatory design. This design provides a method to capture both quantitative and qualitative data from study participants in order to support the subsequent themes and recommendations derived from the collected data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This mixed-methods, sequential explanatory designed research study includes a regional consortium of community colleges in the Midwest (a total of seven community colleges). This chapter presents the purpose of the study, the research problem, and the research questions that are the focus of the research as well as provides descriptions of the study design, the participants and sampling methods, the data collection instrumentation and data analysis process, as well as discuss the limitations of this research study.

### STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PURPOSE

The American Association of Community Colleges originally developed the AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders in 2005, the second edition, published in 2013, was very similar to the first edition with six competencies. The third edition of the AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders was published in November 2018; this edition is completely different from the first two editions with 11 focus areas that lists 59 competencies with the accompanying behavior spread over six levels of leadership. The study concentrated on

all 11 focus areas and 59 competencies and behaviors but centered on senior leaders at community colleges, defined by the AACC identified as “senior-level.”

The researcher was seeking to assess community college senior leaders understanding of the AACC competencies, to assess how community college senior leaders self-assess their current level of proficiency with the AACC competencies, and to demonstrate how the AACC competencies are utilized in community colleges for leadership development.

## **RESEARCH PROBLEM**

With the retirement of experienced leaders, successors are being hired, often lacking the span of knowledge and skills to sufficiently assume the roles their predecessors developed over decades of service (Wallin, 2006; AACC, 2013). This lack of knowledge and skills has added to the burden put on the college’s Board of Trustees to better describe the requirements and capabilities of its senior leaders. As outlined in several articles and reports, community college CEOs have been unsuccessful and ineffective in offering training programs intended to develop leadership competencies that would be crucial for success in filling the vacuum left by these aforementioned retiring community college leaders (Amey, 2004; The Aspen Institute, 2017; AACC & ACCT, 2018).

Identifying the competencies and skills essential to guarantee the functions and responsibilities of senior leaders are competently performed is a challenge faced by current and future employees who are ready and excited to ascend to the senior level at their institution. Concentrating on the senior leaders of a consortium of community colleges in the Midwest, this research outlined the leadership framework used for professional development while focusing on the AACC competencies for community college leaders, assessing their level of proficiency in

and ability of these competencies, and identified the methods used and or experiences that have led to the development of these competencies and associated behaviors.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following are the research questions that supported the stated purpose:

1. How do senior leaders in Midwestern community colleges self-assess their level of proficiency in the AACC competencies for community college leaders (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 2018)?
2. How do senior leaders in Midwestern community colleges prefer to acquire the competencies defined in the AACC competencies for community college leaders (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed., 2018)?

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study utilized a mixed-methods research approach combining components of both a quantitative and a qualitative research project. The quantitative approach used a descriptive non-experimental survey research design to address the purpose of the study. A descriptive research design documents what is happening or what exists. Descriptive research involves obtaining, organizing, and describing the opinions and viewpoints of participants on the phenomena being reviewed (Trochim, Donnelly & Arora, 2016). Surveys are one form of gathering research data and were used in a methodical way to ask people to volunteer knowledge regarding their thoughts, behaviors, and opinions. Survey research collects data on the participants' interests, thoughts, activities, and attitudes through various methods such as questionnaires, interviews, or focus groups (Trochim, Donnelly & Arora, 2016). In a non-experimental study, attempts were made to portray a population in terms of variable(s) without having an impact on or influencing the variable (Trochim, Donnelly & Arora, 2016).

The qualitative approach, one-on-one semi-structured interviews, was conducted following the survey submission and analysis and concentrated on a non-probability, purposive



sampling of participants from those who returned the survey and agreed to participate in the interview. Follow-up questions pertaining to the results of the survey, the AACC Competencies for Community College leaders (3<sup>rd</sup> edition), and professional development activities of the participants were asked to discuss the experiences that directly impacted acquiring knowledge identified by the AACC competencies and what steps the participant took to prepare for advanced opportunities (i.e., be better at current job, seek a promotion, seek a presidency, etc.).

#### POPULATION / SAMPLE SELECTION

A population in a research study is the group you want to generalize to and sample from in a study (Trochim, Donnelly & Arora, 2016). The defined population of this research study were the senior leaders of community colleges in the Midwest.

For Phase 1 (quantitative approach), the purposive sample of potential participants was senior leaders of a regional consortium of community colleges in the Midwest; a total of seven community colleges that are in close geographical proximity to each other. The senior leaders are defined as those employees who report directly to the CEO, omitting clerical staff. A total of 98 individuals were invited to participate in Phase 1.

The names and email addresses of these prospective participants were obtained from publicly accessible information from the identified college's website. To begin this research project, a letter of introduction for this study was emailed to each of the identified community college's CEO one week prior to the start of Phase 1. This action was completed to garner support and encouragement for the study.

An email introducing this research study was then sent to each prospective participant along with an informed consent form with a two-week completion timeline; after the two-week period, a second request was sent to encourage further participation.

For Phase 2, a purposive sample of survey respondents from each of the participating community colleges was identified. The criteria for each of the selected Phase 2 participants was the job title at the level of vice president or similar. These respondents were asked if they were interested in participating in a semi-structured interview to gather additional personalized information on this topic. Merriam and Tisdale (2016) defined purposeful sampling as, “the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 96). The interview responses of the participating candidates were coded and analyzed using pseudonyms (participant 1, 2, 3, etc.) to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

#### INSTRUMENTATION

The survey instrument used for this research study was created from the AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition 2018, and uses the exact wording of the competencies and associated behaviors. Additional questions were added to collect information pertinent to the research questions and to collect demographic information. A Likert scale is a method of scaling in which the survey items are assigned an interval-level scale value (Trochim, Donnelly & Arora, 2016). The Likert scale that was specifically developed for this research project, and their weighted values are:

1. High Level Proficiency (value = 5)
2. Moderate Level Proficiency (value = 4)
3. Average Level Proficiency (value = 3)
4. Low Level Proficiency (value = 2)
5. No Level Proficiency (value = 1)

These values were based on the importance of the level of proficiency and were used to gather descriptive statistics.

Follow-up interview questions were developed using a semi-structured design. Based on the survey responses, open-ended questions were created to gather supplementary experiential data. The semi-structured design allowed for additional questions to be formulated during the interview too further investigate responses from the base questions; these additional questions are called prompt questions and allow an interviewer to dig deeper into the participants' personal experiences (Urban & Van Eeden-Moorefield, 2018). This semi-structured design gives the interviewer flexibility to follow the experiences that participants share into new and emergent directions (Urban & Van Eeden-Moorefield, 2018).

#### DATA COLLECTION

The researcher used a mixed-methods research approach collecting both quantitative data collected from surveys and qualitative data collected from interviews. This is known as using a sequential explanatory design with the quantitative data collected first then the qualitative data clarifying the results in more detail (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). This type of research is intended to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives and experiences of the participants than it is for generalizing assumptions. Using both the quantitative and qualitative methods sequentially will allow for the identification of and possibly reduce biases characteristic in a singular research method (Creswell, 2002), while maintaining best use of the researcher's resources and time.

The best method of data collection for Phase 1, the quantitative research segment, was the use of an online survey tool. The survey created by the researcher focused on the AACC competencies for community college leaders, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, developed in 2018, senior-level competencies only (see Appendix A for complete survey).

The best method of data collection for Phase 2, the qualitative research segment, was a one-on-one semi-structured interview session conducted using an online meeting space audio recorded to ensure an accurate record and interpretation was presented. The Phase 2 interview questions were based on the Phase 1 survey questions relating to how the participants learned their current level of proficiency in the stated competency and how they intend to continue to gain knowledge going forward; these questions were personalized based on the participant's survey responses. Interviews are conversations with a purpose focused on a specific research topic, and semi-structured interviews have specific open-ended questions but allows for flexibility when examining specific topics in detail (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

#### ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The authorization to conduct this mixed-methods sequential explanatory design study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Ferris State University in Big Rapids, Michigan (see Appendix B). The purpose of this research study was to ascertain how senior leaders at a regional consortium of community colleges in the Midwest assess their level of proficiency in and apply the AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders. Therefore, IRB determined the study classified as a project that does not place any human subjects at unnecessary risk. Because of a delay in collecting Phase 2 data due to the impact of Covid-19, an IRB revision to change from a focus group session to one-on-one online (using Zoom) interviews was approved in November of 2020. Also, an IRB extension to continue to work with human subjects was also granted.

Participant informed consent was obtained during both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the study; confidentiality throughout this report is maintained using participant pseudonyms. A total of 19 responding survey participants made an informed decision about participating in Phase 1 of the

study, and five interview participants made an informed decision about participating in Phase 2 of the study. The Phase 1 survey included informed consent language in the introduction email and included the purpose of the study, estimated timing to complete the study, and acknowledgement that participation was voluntary and confidential. Participants of the Phase 2 one-on-one interviews were provided similar information including purpose, timing, and confidentiality.

To encourage participants to respond freely during the survey and semi-structured interview process, participants were assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity, also the name of their home college and geographical location was omitted from the study; no personally identifiable information was used at any time. The electronic survey website used in Phase 1 did capture the emails of participants; however, the researcher is the only person with direct access to this information, and once all information was collected, the data was permanently removed from the survey website. The exception to identifying the participant was the final question of the Phase 1 survey that asked participants to provide a method of contact if they were interested in participating in the follow-up Phase 2 interviews. The researcher is the only person who reviewed the raw data from Phase 1. The researcher and a hired transcriptionist are the only individuals who listened to or transcribed the Phase 2 interview audio recordings.

## **LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS**

This section identifies the limitations and delimitations of this research study.

### **LIMITATIONS**

Phase 1 of this research was completed by mid-February 2020, with Phase 2 estimated to start by April 1, 2020. However, by mid-March the coronavirus, known as Covid-19, had become a world-wide pandemic with a majority of the United States being closed down by late

March. The impact to this research study was immediate and made it impossible to collect Phase 2 data, which was originally scheduled as a focus group session with seven participants. The focus group session became one-on-one online interviews beginning seven months after the initial start date for Phase 2.

The Phase 1 survey was emailed to 98 potential respondents. There were 19 completed surveys received, a 19% response rate. Average response rates vary depending on the type of survey used (Trochim, Donnelly & Arora, 2016; Lindemann, 2019). Lindemann, 2019, states that the average survey response rate is 33% overall; however, when considering different types of surveys used, a typical response rate for electronic surveys is 20%, only 1% more than the rate for this survey. Another limitation identified was the retirement of and/or job change for five of the senior leaders that participated in Phase 1, limiting the number of Phase 2 participants that could be interviewed to acquire follow-up information for analysis.

#### DELIMITATIONS

This mixed-methods, sequential explanatory designed research study was limited to a regional consortium of community colleges in the Midwest (a total of seven geographically located community colleges), which may limit the generalizability of this study nationally, although urban, suburban, and rural community colleges participated in this research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The survey questionnaire focused on the AACC competencies for community college leaders at the senior-level; the five other AACC identified levels, or employee clusters, within a community college (identified as faculty, mid-managers, aspiring CEOs, new CEOs, and seasoned CEOs) were not surveyed; therefore, the results are specific to the senior-level of leadership (identified as those individuals, non-clerical staff, who report directly to the CEO).

## **CONTENT VALIDITY**

Phase 1 content validity, which is verifying the operationalization of the study against the applicable content domain for the construct (Trochim, Donnelly & Arora, 2016), was addressed by developing the survey using the exact wording of the AACC competencies for community college leaders, which is the focus of this research. The survey contained the exact wording of the AACC's third edition (2018) 11 focus areas and the 59 competencies along with their corresponding behaviors. This ensures that accurate measurement will be directly related to how the AACC competencies for community college leaders are perceived and used as a guideline for professional development.

Phase 2 content validity consisted of conducting member checks for the one-on-one online interviews by the participant interviewee. Each participant interviewee was emailed the complete transcript, without editing by the researcher, of their interview asking them to verify that the transcript was accurate and/or to make corrections if their views were misunderstood or represented incorrectly. These follow-up member checks of the individual interviews were to ensure initial results reflected the beliefs and experiences of those participating in the research study. Member checks, or participant validation, is “the most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 246). Finally, the researcher coded and analyzed all interview transcripts looking for emerging themes and similar experiences of the participants. This practice is known as having an “adequate engagement in data collection” (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016, p. 246) and ensures participants' views are understood, that sufficient time was spent both in the collection of data and in the analysis of said data, as well as allowing for purposeful scanning for variation in the perception of experiences.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

For the analysis of the quantitative research portion, weighted averages were used. Descriptive statistics is defined as “statistics used to describe the basic features of the data in a study,” and they represent valuable synopses so potential themes are developed and, when used with graphics, such as charts and tables, create the foundation for quantitative analysis in all its forms (Trochim, Donnelly & Arora, 2016, p. 393). The range and percentages were also used to give an overview of the results.

For the analysis of the qualitative research portion, the one-on-one interviews were recorded and transcribed, member checks were completed, and themes developed based on the responses. A content and narrative analysis was used to examine and interpret the collected data with relationships to the research questions being identified and analyzed.

## **SUMMARY**

This chapter describes the mixed-methods, sequential explanatory design used to conduct the research to determine how the AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders (3<sup>rd</sup> ed, 2018) are used by members of community college senior leaders, and to determine how those who seek advancement opportunities (i.e., be better at their current job, seek a promotion, seek a presidency, etc.) are preparing to do so as influenced by these competencies. The application of both quantitative and qualitative data afforded the researcher multiple ways to determine, identify, and understand the senior leaders’ level of proficiency in the AACC competencies, as well as identify the experiences that have helped to develop those proficiencies. Chapter Four will demonstrate the implementation of this research design and evaluate the results of the collected data.



## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews and discusses the results and analysis of this mixed-methods, sequential explanatory designed research study. The purpose of this study was to assess community college senior leaders' understanding of the AACC competencies, to assess how community college senior leaders self-assess their current level of proficiency with the AACC competencies, and to demonstrate how the AACC competencies are utilized in community colleges for leadership development. The following research questions were studied through the perspective of the senior leaders at a regional consortium of community colleges in the Midwest.

1. How do senior leaders in Midwestern community colleges self-assess their level of proficiency in the AACC competencies for community college leaders (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 2018)?
2. How do senior leaders in Midwestern community colleges prefer to acquire the competencies defined in the AACC competencies for community college leaders (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed., 2018)?

The following information and data results were collected in two phases. Phase 1 represents results and analysis collected from a quantitative survey conducted through an online survey tool. Phase 2 contains qualitative data collected during follow-up semi-structured interviews with Phase 1 survey participants at the senior-level who agreed to speak further about their experiences. Phase 2 interview participants were purposefully chosen from the Phase 1 participant pool based upon their title of vice president or vice chancellor (or similar) so they

might provide a deeper perspective and framework to the Phase 1 survey data as viewed by senior leaders.

The following sections describes the data gathered during the data collection process described in Chapter Three with an analysis immediately following the results. First, the leadership framework information is discussed. Second, to correspond with the first research question, the results and analysis of the AACC competency questions involving the 11 focus areas and the 59 competencies and associated behaviors are presented. Third, to correspond with the second research question, the information specifically developed to determine how these competencies were learned in the past, and how they will be acquired in the future is reviewed. Finally, a qualitative review of the experiences that specifically lead senior leaders to acquiring the competency knowledge will be discussed, and where appropriate, excerpts from the Phase 2 interview responses are utilized to provide more substantive information from the participants' experiences.

## **LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK**

The first goal of the study was to identify the participants' awareness of the AACC Competencies, or other similar leadership frameworks, as a method for defining essential skills for their leadership activities. This section summarizes the participants' experiences with the AACC Competencies, their awareness of leadership frameworks as a professional development tool, and their application of a leadership framework in developing their personal leadership skills and competencies.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

When asked if a leadership framework was used to develop leadership competencies, 42% of the survey participants stated that they use a framework for professional development,

with 58% choosing “Other” and stating they either use a different leadership framework or they do not use any specific leadership framework for their professional development activities.

When the participants who use a leadership framework were asked if they applied the AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders, 75% stated that they do indeed use the AACC Competencies for of Community College Leaders, while 25% either use a different leadership framework or only develop the skills they need for their specific college.

When asked which edition of the AACC competencies they applied, 14% of respondents stated they use the second edition because of familiarity, while the other 86% stated they have upgraded to the third edition. No respondent is currently using the first edition of the competencies.

Table 3: Leadership Framework Results

Use of Specific Leadership Framework	Yes: 42%	No: 58%
	AACC: 75%	Other: 25%
	2 <sup>nd</sup> edition: 14%	3 <sup>rd</sup> edition: 86%

These results indicate that the senior leaders are choosing to determine which competencies and professional development activities and knowledge they want to pursue, as well as to develop their competencies through on-the-job training and other experiences.

## **SURVEY RESULTS**

The first phase of this study examined how the participants evaluate their own proficiency in each of the 11 focus areas and 59 competencies and associated behaviors of the AACC’s Competencies for Community College Leaders. To begin, the results will describe the overall standings of the aforementioned competencies as rated for level of proficiency, will

progress to a brief analysis of each of the 11 focus areas, and finally will look at the highest and lowest rated competencies as chosen for level of proficiency.

#### OVERALL STANDING OF THE AACC COMPETENCIES

The participants self-reported their level of proficiency for each of the AACC Focus Area Competencies. Each respondent rated their individual proficiency level from low to high (No = 1, Low = 2, Average = 3, Moderate = 4, and High = 5); no one identified a total lack of proficiency in any area. Table 4 reports the overall ratings, in weighted averages and percentages, for each of the 11 focus areas. These are listed (and numbered for ease of discussion) in order from the focus areas with the highest to lowest weighted averages. Note that the highest overall weighted average would be 5.0. Although none of the focus areas resulted in a 5.0 score, one of the individual competencies did reach 5.0. Table 5 presents the full self-reported ratings for the 11 focus areas and the related competencies for each.

Table 4: AACC Focus Areas, Self-reported Proficiency Levels

FOCUS AREAS	N	PROFICIENCY LEVEL (%)					WEIGHTED AVERAGE
		HIGH 5	MOD 4	AVG 3	LOW 2	NO 1	
Organizational Culture	19	71.07	23.69	5.26	0	0	4.89
Institutional Leadership	19	77.78	21.05	1.17	0	0	4.77
Personal Traits & Abilities	19	73.68	23.98	2.34	0	0	4.71
Collaboration	19	76.32	18.42	2.63	2.63	0	4.68
Governance, Institutional Policy & Legislation	19	69.74	27.63	2.63	0	0	4.67
Communications	19	71.71	20.37	7.24	0.66	0	4.63
Student Success	18	63.62	34.27	2.11	0	0	4.61
Advocacy & Mobil./Motivating Others	19	65.79	23.69	9.21	1.32	0	4.54
Information & Analytics	19	50.00	39.48	5.26	5.26	0	4.35
Institutional Infrastructure	19	49.12	29.83	21.05	0	0	4.28
Fundraising & Relationship Cultivation	19	28.95	35.09	20.18	15.79	0	3.77

Table 5: Focus Area’s Related Competencies, Self-reported Proficiency Levels

FOCUS AREAS / RELATED COMPETENCIES	N	PROFICIENCY LEVEL (%)					WEIGHTED AVERAGE
		HIGH 5	MOD 4	AVG 3	LOW 2	NO 1	
1. Organizational Culture	19						
a. Mission, vision, and values of the community college		78.95	15.79	5.26	0	0	4.89
b. Culture of the institution and the external community		3.16	31.58	5.26	0	0	4.89
2. Institutional Leadership	19						
a. Be an influencer		84.21	15.79	0	0	0	4.84
b. Support team building		84.21	15.79	0	0	0	4.84
c. Performance mgmt.		63.16	26.32	10.53	0	0	4.53
d. Lead by example		94.74	5.26	0	0	0	4.95
e. Problem-solving tech.		78.95	1.05	0	0	0	4.79
f. Conflict mgmt.		57.89	2.11	0	0	0	4.58
g. Advocate for professional development across the institution		57.89	2.11	0	0	0	4.58
h. Customer service		89.47	0.53	0	0	0	4.89
i. Transparency		89.47	0.53	0	0	0	4.89
3. Personal Traits & Abilities	19						
a. Authenticity		78.95	21.05	0	0	0	4.79
b. Emotional intelligence		68.42	31.58	0	0	0	4.68
c. Courage		68.42	31.58	0	0	0	4.68
d. Ethical standards		100.0	0	0	0	0	5.00
e. Self-management and environmental scanning		84.21	10.53	5.26	0	0	4.79
f. Time management and planning		84.21	31.58	5.26	0	0	4.58
g. Familial impact		63.16	42.11	5.26	0	0	4.47
h. Forward-looking philosophy		52.63	36.84	0	0	0	4.63
i. Embrace change		63.16	10.53	5.26	0	0	4.79
4. Collaboration	19						
a. Interconnectivity and interdependence		89.47	10.53	0	0	0	4.89
		78.95	21.05	0	0	0	4.79
b. Work with supervisor		89.47	10.53	0	0	0	4.89
c. Institutional team building		47.37	31.58	10.53	10.53	0	4.16
d. Collective bargaining (if applicable)							
5. Governance, Institutional Policy & Legislation	19						
a. Organizational structure of the community college		89.47	10.53	0	0	0	4.89
b. Governance structure		84.21	15.79	0	0	0	4.84
c. College policies and procedures		57.89	36.84	5.26	0	0	4.53
d. Board relations		47.37	47.37	5.26	0	0	4.42

FOCUS AREAS / RELATED COMPETENCIES	N	PROFICIENCY LEVEL (%)					WEIGHTED AVERAGE
		HIGH 5	MOD 4	AVG 3	LOW 2	NO 1	
6. Communications							
a. Presentation, speaking, and writing skills		84.21	15.79	0	0	0	4.84
b. Active listening		89.47	10.53	0	0	0	4.89
c. Global and cultural competence		68.42	21.05	10.53	0	0	4.58
d. Strategies for multi-generational engagement	19	68.42	15.79	15.79	0	0	4.53
e. Email etiquette		78.95	21.05	0	0	0	4.79
f. Fluency with social media and emerging technologies		42.11	42.11	15.79	0	0	4.26
g. Consistency in messaging		63.16	36.84	0	0	0	4.63
h. Crisis communications		78.95	0	15.79	5.26	0	4.53
7. Student Success							
a. Student success		68.42	31.58	0	0	0	4.68
b. Consistency between college's operations & student-focused agenda	18	84.21	10.53	5.26	0	0	4.79
c. Data usage		44.44	55.56	0	0	0	4.44
d. Program / Perf. review		57.89	36.84	5.26	0	0	4.53
e. Evaluation for improvement		63.16	36.84	0	0	0	4.63
8. Advocacy & Mobilizing/ Motivating Others							
a. Community college ideals	19	84.21	15.79	0	0	0	4.84
b. Stakeholder mobilization		68.42	31.58	0	0	0	4.68
c. Media relations		57.89	26.32	15.79	0	0	4.42
d. Marketing and social media		52.63	21.05	21.05	5.26	0	4.21
9. Information & Analytics							
a. Qualitative and quant. data	19	47.37	42.11	5.26	5.26	0	4.32
b. Data analytics		52.63	36.84	5.26	5.26	0	4.37
10. Institutional Infrastructure							
a. Strategic and operational planning		73.68	15.79	10.53	0	0	4.63
b. Budgeting		47.37	21.05	31.58	0	0	4.16
c. Prioritization and allocation of resources		52.63	26.32	21.05	0	0	4.32
d. Accreditation	19	63.16	26.32	10.53	0	0	4.53
e. Facilities master planning and mgmt.		36.84	42.11	21.05	0	0	4.17
f. Technology master planning		21.05	47.37	31.58	0	0	3.89

FOCUS AREAS / RELATED COMPETENCIES	N	PROFICIENCY LEVEL (%)					WEIGHTED AVERAGE
		HIGH 5	MOD 4	AVG 3	LOW 2	NO 1	
11. Fundraising & Relationship Cultivation	19	10.53	31.58	36.84	21.05	0	3.32
a. Fundraising		15.79	26.32	36.84	21.05	0	3.37
b. Alumni relationships		26.32	42.11	15.79	15.79	0	3.79
c. Media relationships		31.58	36.84	10.53	21.05	0	3.79
d. Legislative relations		42.11	36.84	10.53	10.53	0	4.11
e. Public relations		47.37	36.84	10.53	5.26	0	4.26
f. Workforce partnerships							

## FOCUS AREA RESULTS: DISCUSSION

### 1. *Organizational Culture*

Organizational Culture, with two competencies, has the highest overall weighted average of 4.89, with 71.07% of respondents stating they have a high level of proficiency in this area; 23.69% reported moderate proficiency; and 5.26% reported average proficiency. Of the two competencies in the Organizational Focus Area, Mission, vision, and values of the community college (1a) rated 78.95% with the highest proficiency level in this area; however, Culture of the institution and the external community (1b) competency received higher ratings in the moderate proficiency level with 31.56% versus 15.79% from the mission, vision, and values competency listed in this focus area. Organizational Culture was ranked by senior leaders as the most important leadership competencies to acquire with behaviors listed as

have passion for teaching and learning, demonstrating a willingness to meet students where they are regardless of their level of readiness for college-level work, become familiar with the culture of the institution and the external community in an effort to design strategies to break down barriers that hinder students in their pursuit of higher education (AACC, 2018).

### 2. *Institutional Leadership*

Institutional Leadership, with nine competencies, has an overall weighted average of 4.77, with 77.78% of respondents reporting that they have a high level of proficiency in this area

(the highest ranked for proficiency overall); 21.05% reported moderate proficiency, and 1.17% reported average proficiency. Of the Institutional Leadership competencies, Lead by example (2d), with 94.74% proficiency level, was the highest ranked competency over Customer service (2h) and Transparency (2i), both ranking 89.47% proficiency. Conflict management (2f) and Advocate for professional development across the institution (2g) received the lowest high proficiency ratings with only 57.89% each. The competencies Be an influencer (2a) and Support team building (2b) both received 84.21%; Problem-solving techniques (2e) received 78.95%, and Performance management (2c) received 63.16% high proficiency ratings and was also the only competency that had two respondents who self-reported as being at the average level.

### *3. Personal Traits and Abilities*

Personal Traits and Abilities, with nine competencies, has an overall weighted average of 4.71, with 73.68% of respondents stating they have a high level of proficiency in this area; 23.98% reported moderate proficiency; and 2.34% reported average proficiency. Of the related competencies, Ethical standards (3d) is the only competency that received 100% self-reported ratings in the highest level of proficiency, which will be discussed later. The competencies Self-management and environmental scanning (3e) and Embrace change (3i) both ranked second with self-reported ratings of 84.21%. Authenticity (3a) had 78.95% high proficiency ratings, while both Emotional intelligence (3b) and Courage (3c) receiving 68.42% high proficiency self-reported ratings. Time management and planning (3f) as well as Forward-looking philosophy (3h) received 63.16% high proficiency ratings, followed by Familial impact (3g) with 52.63%. Familial impact (3g) received the lowest high proficiency ratings, although it received the highest moderate proficiency self-reported ratings at 42.11%.



#### *4. Collaboration*

Collaboration, with four competencies, has an overall weighted average of 4.68, with 76.32% of respondents stating they have a high level of proficiency in this area; 18.42% reported moderate proficiency; 2.63% reported average proficiency; and 2.63% reported low proficiency. Two of the related competencies Interconnectivity and interdependence (4a), and Institutional team building (4c) both ranked at 89.47% proficiency at the highest level. Work with supervisor (4b) and Collective bargaining (4d) were next with 78.95% and 47.37% respectively. For the competency Collective bargaining (4d), two participants, or 10.53%, reported average and low-level proficiencies; it is worth noting that these self-reported proficiencies are 31.58% lower than the next ranked competency. These ratings may indicate either a lack of experience in this area, or that senior leaders feel their knowledge and experience in this area needs development or improvement.

#### *5. Governance, Institutional Policy, and Legislation*

Governance, Institutional Policy, and Legislation, with four competencies, has an overall weighted average of 4.67, with 69.74% of respondents stating they have a high level of proficiency in this area; 27.63% reported moderate proficiency; and 2.63% reported average proficiency. Of the related competencies, Organizational structure of the community college (5a) was the top ranked competency with 89.4% of participants reporting a high level of proficiency; followed by Governance structure (5b) with 84.21%. College policies and procedures (5c) and Board relations (5d) received significantly lower self-reported ratings of 57.89% and 47.37% respectively. The difference between the highest and lowest proficiency ratings in this focus area is 42.10%, indicating that a majority of the participants may feel they need more exposure to board members to develop confidence and proficiency in this area.

## 6. *Communication*

Communication, with eight competencies, has an overall weighted average of 4.63, with 71.71% of respondents stating they have a high level of proficiency in this area; 20.37% self-reported moderate proficiency; 7.24% reported average proficiency, and 0.66% reported low proficiency. Of the related competencies, Active listening (6b) was the highest ranked competency with 89.47%, followed by Presentation, speaking, and writing skills (6a) at 84.21%. Email etiquette (6e) and Crisis communications (6h) both received ratings of 78.95%; and Strategies for multi-generational engagement (6d) and Global and cultural competence (6c) both received ratings of 68.42%; followed by Consistency in messaging (6g) with 68.16%, and Fluency with social media and emerging technologies (6f) with 42.11%.

## 7. *Student Success*

Student Success, with five competencies, has an overall weighted average of 4.61, with 63.62% of respondents stating they have a high level of proficiency in this area; 34.27% reporting moderate proficiency; and 2.11% reporting average proficiency. Of the Focus Area's related competencies, Consistency between the college's operation and a student-focused agenda (7b) was the top ranked competency with 84.21% of respondents stating they have a high level of proficiency in this area. Student success (7a), with 68.42% reporting high levels of proficiency, was followed by Evaluation for improvement (7e) with 63.16% reporting high proficiencies. Program/performance review (7d) and Data usage (7c) were ranked with 57.89% and 44.44% respectively.

## 8. *Advocacy and Mobilizing/Motivating Others*

Advocacy and Mobilizing/Motivating Others, with four competencies, has an overall weighted average of 4.54, with 65.79% of respondents stating they have a high level of

proficiency in this area; 23.69% reporting moderate proficiency; 9.21% reporting average proficiency; and 1.32% reporting low proficiency. Of the four related competencies in this Focus Area, Community college ideals (8a) was the highest ranked competency with 84.21% of the participants reporting high proficiency, and Stakeholder mobilization (8b) receiving 68.42% self-reported high proficiency ratings. Media relations (8c) and Marketing and social media (8d) were the participants' lowest rated competencies with 57.89% and 52.63% respectively reporting high proficiency.

#### *9. Information and Analytics*

Information and Analytics, with two competencies, has an overall weighted average of 4.35, with 50% of respondents stating they have a high level of proficiency in this area; 39.48% reporting moderate proficiency; 5.26% reporting average proficiency; and 5.26% reporting low proficiency. Of the two related competencies for this Focus Area, Data analytics (9b) received 52.63% self-reported high proficiency ratings, following by Qualitative and quantitative data skills (9a) with 47.37% reporting high proficiency. It is worth noting that for this Focus Area, most participants rated themselves as having either high-level proficiency or moderate proficiency. The second competency, Data analytics, had 36.84% of the participants rating themselves as having moderate levels of proficiency (a 15.79% difference between the high and moderate level ratings), and the first competency, Qualitative and quantitative data, results were even closer with a 5.26% difference between high and moderate level ratings.

#### *10. Institutional Infrastructure*

Institutional Infrastructure, with six competencies, has an overall weighted average of 4.28, with 49.12% of respondents stating they have a high level of proficiency in this area; 29.83% reporting moderate proficiency; and 21.05% reporting average proficiency. Of the six

related competencies, Strategic and operational planning (10a) was the topmost ranked competency with 73.68% of respondents stating they have a high level of proficiency in this area; followed by Accreditation (10d) with 63.16% receiving high proficiency ratings; Prioritization and allocation of resources (10c) with 52.63% of participants rating themselves as highly proficient; Budgeting (10b) with 47.37% high-level ratings; Facilities master planning and management (10e) with 36.84% high-level proficiency ratings; and finally, Technology master planning (10f) receiving only 21.05% high-level proficiency ratings. There is a difference of 52.63% from the topmost to the lowest ranked at the high proficiency level for this Focus Area, which is the largest difference through all of the Focus Areas. It is also noteworthy to state that this Focus Area entails managing resources and strategic planning of those resources, hard skills that are the foundation of any institution and encompass the money, facilities, and technology planning and process allocation of the institution's resources.

### *11. Fundraising and Relationship Cultivation*

Fundraising and Relationship Cultivation, with six competencies, has an overall weighted average of 3.77, with 28.95% of respondents stating they have a high level of proficiency in this area; 35.09% reporting moderate proficiency; 20.18% reporting average proficiency; and 15.79% reporting low proficiency. Of interest in this Focus Area are three key indicators: (1) a majority of the respondents scored their level of proficiency at the moderate level over the high level of proficiency, (2) this Focus Area received the most ratings of low-level proficiency of all of the focus areas with 15.79%, and (3) this Focus Area received the lowest percentage of high-level proficiency ratings at 47.37%. Also of note is that the competency Fundraising (11a) received the lowest "high-level" ratings overall. The competency Workforce Partnerships (11f) received 47.37% high-level ratings, the highest proficiency level in this Focus Area, followed by the

Public Relations (11e) competency with 42.11% self-reported high-level proficiency ratings. Of the remaining four competencies, Legislative relations (11d) received 31.58% high-level proficiency ratings, Media relationships (11c) received 26.32%, Alumni relationships (11b) received 15.79%, and Fundraising (11a) received the lowest “high-level proficiency” ratings overall at 10.53%.

#### SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS

The five Focus Areas that had the highest levels of self-reported high proficiency by the senior leader participants include (in order of ratings) Personal Traits and Abilities (#3); Institutional Leadership (#2); Governance, Institutional Policy & Legislation (#5); Communication (#6); and Collaboration (#4). The 19 respondents reported 171 “highest proficiency” ratings and 19 “moderate proficiency” ratings (see Table 6), with no participants identifying their proficiency levels as average, low, or no proficiency. All participants answered these questions with an overall weighted average of 4.90.

Table 6 illustrates the top 10 rated AACC competencies, from all of the Focus Areas, receiving the highest proficiency ratings. Table 7 includes the lowest rated competencies across all Focus Areas.

Table 6: Highest Rated AACC Competencies

COMPETENCY	FOCUS AREA	N	PROFICIENCY LEVEL (%)					WEIGHTED AVG
			HIGH 5	MOD 4	AVG 3	LOW 2	NO 1	
Ethical Standards	Personal Traits and Abilities (#3)	19	100.00	0	0	0	0	5.00
Lead by Example	Institutional Leadership (#2)	19	94.73	5.27	0	0	0	4.95
Organizational Structure of the CC	Governance, Institution Policy	19	89.47	10.53	0	0	0	4.89

COMPETENCY	FOCUS AREA	N	PROFICIENCY LEVEL (%)					WEIGHTED AVG
			HIGH 5	MOD 4	AVG 3	LOW 2	NO 1	
	& Legislation (#5)							
Customer Service	Institutional Leadership (#2)	19	89.47	10.53	0	0	0	4.89
Transparency	Institutional Leadership (#2)	19	89.47	10.53	0	0	0	4.89
Active Listening	Communication (#6)	19	89.47	10.53	0	0	0	4.89
Interconnectivity & Interdependence	Collaboration (#4)	19	89.47	10.53	0	0	0	4.89
Institutional Team Building	Collaboration (#4)	19	89.47	10.53	0	0	0	4.89
Governance Structure	Governance, Institution Policy & Legislation (#5)	19	84.21	15.79	0	0	0	4.84
Be an Influencer	Institutional Leadership (#3)	19	84.21	15.79	0	0	0	4.84

Table 7: Lowest Rated AACC Competencies

COMPETENCY	FOCUS AREA	N	PROFICIENCY LEVEL (%)					WEIGHTED AVG
			HIGH 5	MOD 4	AVG 3	LOW 2	NO 1	
Fundraising	Fundraising and Relationship Cultivation (#11)	19	10.53	31.58	36.84	21.05	0	3.32
Alumni Relationships	Fundraising and Relationship Cultivation (#11)	19	15.79	26.32	36.84	21.05	0	3.37
Media Relationships	Fundraising and Relationship Cultivation (#11)	19	26.31	42.11	15.79	15.79	0	3.79
Legislative Relations	Fundraising and Relationship Cultivation (#11)	19	31.58	36.84	10.53	21.05	0	3.79
Technology Master Planning	Institutional Infrastructure (#10)	19	21.05	47.37	31.58	0	0	3.89

COMPETENCY	FOCUS AREA	N	PROFICIENCY LEVEL (%)					WEIGHTED AVG
			HIGH 5	MOD 4	AVG 3	LOW 2	NO 1	
Public Relations	Fundraising and Relationship Cultivation (#11)	19	42.11	36.84	10.53	10.53	0	4.11
Budgeting	Institutional Infrastructure (#10)	19	47.37	21.05	31.58	0	0	4.16
Facilities Master Planning and Management	Institutional Infrastructure (#10)	19	36.84	42.11	21.05	0	0	4.16
Collective Bargaining	Collaboration (#4)	19	47.37	31.58	10.53	10.53	0	4.16
Data Usage	Student Success (#7)	18	44.44	55.56	0	0	0	4.21

The four Focus Areas that received the lowest self-reported proficiency levels from the community college senior leader participants is Fundraising and Relationship Cultivation; Institutional Infrastructure; Collaboration; and Student Success. The participants self-assessed their proficiency at high proficiency levels 61 times, moderate proficiency levels in 70 instances, average proficiency levels in 39 instances, low proficiency levels in 19 instances. In these lowest-rated competencies, none of the participants self-assessed their proficiency in any category as “no proficiency” (see Table 7). Note that, because one participant did not provide a self-assessment in the Student Success Focus Area, the overall weighted average for the lowest-rated competencies was 3.90.

## **SURVEY RESULTS ANALYSIS**

From these initial results, all respondents self-reported levels of proficiency, even if at a low level, for all the AACC Focus Areas. None of the respondents indicated a lack of proficiency in any area. The range of ability or proficiency, however, is quite broad and indicates the

participants' willingness and ability to reflect and self-assess honestly. The following discussion will focus on the highest and lowest rated areas of proficiency from these self-reported results.

#### TOP 10 HIGHEST RANKED COMPETENCIES

The Ethical standards (3d) competency, from Focus Area #3, Personal Traits and Abilities, was the highest rated competency with a 5.0 weighted average. From Focus Area #2, Institutional Leadership, the competency Lead by Example (2d) was also self-reported with high levels of proficiency with a 4.95 weighted average and all but one respondent stating their level of proficiency was high.

When examining the top 10 highest-ranked competencies (Table 6), it is evident that each of the competencies are centered around knowing yourself, knowing others, and treating others with respect. The behavioral focus of the competency Ethical standards is centered on promoting trust, good behavior, fairness, and kindness; all of which are geared toward acting and treating others respectfully. The competency Lead by Example (2d), from the Focus Area #2, Institutional Leadership, emphasizes modeling personal behavior so that staff and others across the organization will follow your example. The competency Organizational Structure of the Community College (5d), from Focus Area #5, Governance, Institutional Policy, and Legislation, focuses on a leader's understanding of their leadership role and ability to advocate within the leadership structure to promote the institution's goals. This competency emphasizes the leader's ability to make customer service a priority at all levels and establishing a service-based environment.

Another of the top 10 competencies, Transparency (2i), from the Focus Area #2, Institutional Leadership, stresses the importance of a leader to be honest, open, and forthright at all times while exhibiting a clear motivation to help others, not keeping a hidden agenda, and



combined with the competency Active Listening (6b), from Focus Area #6, Communication, promoting an understanding and appreciation for others' positions and opinions. From the Focus Area #4, Collaboration, the competency Interconnectivity and Interdependence (4a) focuses on knowing how everything is connected and aligned between your faculty, staff, administration, and students, while the competency, Institutional Team Building (4c), from Focus Area #4, Collaboration, emphasizes a leader's need to promote and value all members of the team, as well as identify professional development opportunities to assist in increasing skill levels where needed. The behaviors linked with competency Governance Structure (5c), from Focus Area #5, Governance, Institutional Policy, and Legislation, are focused on respecting the current structure and being transparent to the CEO, while the behaviors of competency Be an Influencer (2a) from Focus Areas #2, Institutional Leadership, complement these by stressing the importance of an individual to understand their role within their team and to champion the initiatives that make a direct and impactful difference in student's lives.

As is apparent from these behavioral attributes, all of the Top 10 highest ranked competencies involve soft skills, which are the individual characteristics, personality traits, and communication skills necessary for job performance and success; in other words, how an individual intermingles and associates in relationships with others and within groups (Doyle, 2020). Through their ranking all their competency levels, the senior leader participants in this study have reinforced that developing their own interpersonal skills has been essential in their success in achieving their goals, developing important initiatives, and enhancing student success. These competencies reflect the leadership behaviors that are the foundation for their leadership approach and the belief that their ability to rely on and interact with others is the most important aspect of performing at a high level of proficiency.

## TOP 10 LOWEST RANKED COMPETENCIES

Table 7 illustrates dramatically that half of the lowest ranked competencies are skills from the Focus Area #11, Fundraising and Relationship Cultivation. Within this Focus Area, Fundraising (11a) was the competency that received the lowest proficiency ratings from all participants, across all competencies and all Focus Areas, with a total weighted average of only 3.32 out of 5.0. The behaviors identified as central to the Fundraising competency include (1) the leader has in-depth knowledge for seeking grant funds that emphasizes the priorities of the college, and (2) the leader is able to engage individuals who have direct responsibility for implementation in the grant application process. The related competencies of Alumni Relationships (11b), Media Relationships (11c), and Legislative Relations (11c) have behaviors that are centered around having knowledge of the processes that drive these functions, as well as the ability to develop relationships with internal and external college stakeholders. For example, the competency Media Relationships (11c) includes the ability to develop relationships with the internal PR department as well as with local media personalities. Similarly, behaviors linked to the competency Legislative Relations (11d) include knowing internal college policies as well as building relationships with local and state representatives that can impact the priorities of the college. The Public Relations (11e) competency also reflects this dual impact, with behavioral focus on knowing and maintaining self-awareness and also knowing your impact as a representative of the institution.

From the list of low-proficiency competencies, three competencies are from the Focus Area #10, Institutional Infrastructure. These include Technology Master Planning (10f), Budgeting (10b), and Facilities Master Planning and Management (10e). The behaviors linked to the Technology Master Planning competency include having extensive knowledge of the technological needs of the institution and knowing the internal procedure and key players of the

process. The behaviors linked to the Budgeting competency emphasize that a leader needs to have extensive, in-depth knowledge of the budgeting process, be engaged in the process from an institutional standpoint, and be a good steward of the funds directly related to their area. The behaviors reflected in the Facilities Master Planning and Management (10e) focus on knowing the core components of, and the process for, developing the college's plan for maintaining and updating facilities where and when needed.

The last two competencies that ranked in the lowest ten are competencies for Collective bargaining (4d), from Focus Area #4, Collaboration, and Data Usage (7c), from Focus Area #7, Student Success. Collective bargaining behaviors concentrate on being familiar with state laws and regulations as well as those of the institution and the unions and emphasizes the leader's ability to engage with the organization and to voice appropriate concerns. In examining these results and the participant group, the lower ratings in this area may be linked to the participants' level of familiarity and experience with the collective bargaining process (if from a non-union institution), more than lack of proficiency. Finally, the behaviors tied to the Data Usage competency detail the leader's need to develop expertise in using quantitative and qualitative data to assess the department's effectiveness and to make data-driven decisions.

All of the lowest ranked competencies involve hard skills, which are defined as skills that are learned, developed, and improved through practice, repetition, and training, increase the productivity and effectiveness of the individual, and impact employee satisfaction (Kagan, 2020). The senior leader participants who participated in this study indicated with their self-assessed low ratings of proficiency that they recognize the importance of these competencies and their own need to improve and development proficiency in these areas.

## DEVELOPING THE COMPETENCIES

In addition to asking participants to rate their level of proficiency in the Focus Areas and Competencies, they were asked to identify how they developed their proficiencies in the past and how they intend to continue to develop them in the future; these are the only two questions throughout the survey that asked respondents to choose all that applied to them. Participants identified their development approach, selecting from the following options:

1. Graduate Degree
2. In-House Grow Your Own Programs
3. Conferences/Workshops/Webinars
4. Mentoring/Coaching
5. Progressive Administrative Responsibilities
6. Other

When describing the method for developing their current level of proficiency in each of the 59 competencies, 58.85% of the participants stated that they acquired their current level of proficiency through progressive administrative responsibility, followed by acquiring a graduate degree with 19.62% (a 39.23% difference). These results indicate that most of the senior leaders have hands-on, or experiential, learning tendencies and have developed to their current level using this method. The “Other” category was selected by 7.66% of participants, also reflecting a possible combination of methods. The bottom three ranked choices were Mentoring/Coaching (7.18%), Conferences/ Workshops/Webinars (4.78%), and In-house Grow Your Own Programs (1.91%).

Table 8: Methods for Developing Current Proficiency

	TOTAL RESPONSES	MEAN	PERCENTAGE
Graduate Degree	41	3.73	19.62
In-House Grow Your Own	4	0.36	1.91
Conferences/Workshops/Webinars	10	0.91	4.78
Mentoring/Coaching	15	1.36	7.18
Progressive Administrative Responsibilities	123	11.18	58.85
Other	16	1.45	7.66

*Note: Respondents were instructed to select all that apply; thus, the totals will not equal 100%.*

When discussing how the respondents intended to continue to learn and develop proficiency in the 59 competencies and develop professionally, the results were very different from how they had already learned their current level of proficiency. For future development plans, Conferences/Workshops/ Webinars were the highest ranked option with 44.39%, moving from fourth place as the initial development method, with only 4.78%. While Progressive Administrative Responsibility was the dominant development method for current proficiency levels at 58.85%, for future development plans, the method dropped to 25.51%, reflecting a 33.34% decrease. The Mentoring/Coaching method moved from fourth place in the current level development methods with 7.18% to third place for future development plans with 20.95%. In addition to the increase in frequency, the number of senior leader participants who intend to use mentoring/coaching as a mentor increased from 15 to 41. Acquiring a Graduate Degree also reflected decreased preference as a future development method, moving from 19.62% (or 41 responses) as a method for current levels of proficiency to 4.59% (or 9 responses) as a method for future development. This difference is likely reflective of the number of respondents who have earned doctoral degrees and, therefore, will not need to pursue this avenue of professional development. Responses to the “Other” category, which reflects those using a combination of the various avenues of learning, dropped from 7.66% to 2.55%, in part because individuals are

becoming more focused on specific development strategies, as noted in the survey responses.

Finally, In-House Grow Your Own Programs as a professional development method remained as the last choice, possibly reflecting a lack of opportunities available from succession planning and in-house programming, moving from 1.91% to 2.04%, reflecting a slight increase overall.

Table 9: Methods for Developing Future Proficiency

	TOTAL RESPONSES	MEAN	PERCENTAGE
Graduate Degree	9	0.82	4.59
In-House Grow Your Own	4	0.36	2.04
Conferences/Workshops/Webinars	87	7.91	44.39
Mentoring/Coaching	41	3.73	20.92
Progressive Administrative Responsibilities	50	4.55	25.51
Other	5	0.45	2.55

*Note: Respondents were instructed to select all that apply; thus, the totals will not equal 100%.*

## INTERVIEW(S) RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In order to gain additional insight into the participants’ self-reported assessments of their leadership proficiencies, the researcher conducted five semi-structured interviews with a select group from the original survey participants. A convenience sample of participants were purposefully selected for the follow-up interviews using the criteria of senior-level job title, which was identified as vice president, vice chancellor, or similar senior-level administrator title. The interview participant’s college demographics are included in Table 10.

Table 10: Interview Participant’s College Demographics

PARTICIPANT	ROLE	TYPE OF INSTITUTION
1	Vice Chancellor	Urban/Suburban
2	Vice President & Chief Academic Officer	Suburban/Rural
3	Vice President	Suburban

PARTICIPANT	ROLE	TYPE OF INSTITUTION
4	Vice President	Suburban/Rural
5	Vice Chancellor	Urban/Suburban

The key findings and trends from the survey responses became the foundation for the follow-up interviews with the researcher investigating aspects directly related to the participants' experiences in acquiring and developing their level of proficiency in the Focus Areas and related competency areas. A review of the results from each question asked will be detailed from the standpoint of five participants.

#### EXPLORATION #1: IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES ON DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETENCIES

Because the survey responses indicated that the primary method for development of the leadership competencies was Progressive Administrative Responsibilities, the first focus of the follow-up interviews was to investigate participants' leadership experiences and how they directly impacted learning or development of specific competencies.

Several themes were established as prevalent in the participants' responses. First, the most common experience noted by participants has having a direct impact on acquiring leadership competencies was being involved in the accreditation process— either by serving on committees, gathering data, writing the reports, or acting as the Accreditation Liaison Officer. One respondent stated that being the Accreditation Liaison Officer helped her understand the AACC competencies much better:

So, this particular experience has so many different interweaving kinds of elements to it. It was having to get everybody all on the same page, get everyone to collaborate, it was to keep everybody organized. It was again to be the cheerleader of the process. It was being the content expert... I was given the lead of the Covid response team because I had learned so much throughout that accreditation work that realistically so many of the competencies that you would need to be able to successful navigate that were things I had to learn throughout that process, it was the building blocks.

A second commonly expressed theme from across interviews was how accreditation work developed their ability to communicate throughout the organization at all levels and their ability to talk to people no matter what position or role they are in. The participants noted that these responsibilities provide increased opportunities to collaborate with different departments on committees or projects and involve networking with people in other functional areas. One respondent made several different comments about the role of increased communication through this process:

... there was a lot of public speaking involved in that because I had to kind of make the rounds all over campus as I interacted with various employee groups and also knowing how to tailor my message and make the concept of accreditation accessible to people... So as far as the communication goes, I had to learn how to, or to make sure that I was, injecting some warmth into that, some empathy into my communications, and doing so in a way that wasn't unprofessional but was letting people know we care about you as people, not just as employees who have a job to do.

A third theme in this area was that leadership competencies are developed over time; as the jobs and responsibilities become more progressive, the competencies developed also grow with the level of responsibility. One respondent said, "institutional leadership just developed over time. I think that some of it is trial and error, you learn what works. You kind of develop who you are organically... Who you are intrinsically just develops over time." While another participant, who started as a faculty member prior to going into an administrative role, stated, "Each of those positions had graded responsibilities, and as I moved up the ranks, it allowed me to not only develop but become a little bit more proficient in the AACC competencies."

#### EXPLORATION #2: ACTIVITIES THAT DEVELOP COMPETENCY

The second area for further examination were the activities that assisted participants in developing their level of proficiency in the AACC competencies. The survey results that



prompted this additional investigation were tied to the dominance among the highest rated competencies for the “soft skills” of active listening, leading by example, and team building.

From the interview discussions on this topic, two themes emerged: (1) collaboration and being involved, and (2) networking with others, whether through mentorship opportunities, leading committees or strategic initiatives, or some other form of collaborating with others. A participant stated,

I volunteered to be on committees so that I can understand... by doing, that I gained a better understanding of the programs we have and why we have them, of why we insist on what certain faculties teach...I gained why we have limits...

Another participant stated that the best example was

probably committee leadership, where there’s no shortage of committees to be on in a college... part of my role is to be on several different committees and chair different committees.

Finally, another participant stated that,

have a very strong mentor has certainly helped me... engaging a formal mentor, for me, has been transformative... so, I think I found it to be more important as I got to that point where I needed someone else who I could talk to and who I could bounce ideas off of more so than I felt in earlier stages of my career.

Another participant stated that,

just having the comradery with community college presidents who I could probably reach out to or learn from or talk with. I think that’s important to have those individuals, those thought partners.

The second theme that surfaced in the discussions of competency development was that development happens over time: as the activities and responsibilities become more progressive, the proficiencies and competencies also grow with the level of responsibility. One participant said,

it's an accumulation of your life's experiences and what you know works and what you know doesn't work. You kind of get that feel for it — and it's who you are as a person.

Another participant, who used his experiences of leading a team, stated,

I created a culture of an entrepreneurial spirit and safe environment that they could try new things... they were empowered, so they grew as well.

### EXPLORATION #3: PLANS FOR DEVELOPING COMPETENCIES — AREAS NEEDING DEVELOPMENT

Prompted by the low proficiency ratings for several of the competencies as well as the survey responses regarding future development options, the next topic explored was the participants' plans for their areas of future development as leaders. The participants were asked to identify which of the AACC competencies they needed more experience with and why.

The first area identified by a majority of the participants was Fundraising and Relationship Cultivation; this is the leading area that the senior leaders believe they need the most help with in gaining experience. This area includes the functions of fundraising (identifying and writing grants, campaigns, etc.), building legislative relationships, and developing effective interactions with the media. The participants all stressed that this Focus Area encompasses very specific competencies and tasks and noted that most institutions have experts who deal with these areas and that they (as senior leaders) typically do not have the opportunity to do so. A few of the respondents also stated that they have no desire to be involved in these areas. One participant stated,

In my current position, especially at our institution, everybody gets kind of pigeonholed in a role, so we have very specific folks who do the fundraising, so we don't get that opportunity.

The second Focus Area the leaders identified as an area for improvement was Governance, Institutional Policy, and Legislation. Specifically, the areas of building board

relationships and understanding the internal politics of the college were emphasized. Participants again noted that having increased opportunities with increasing awareness and interactions with board members were key to the continued growth in this area. One participant stated that at the senior level, “it may be a little more of the political part of the organization” and went on to say that the lack of exposure to board members may cause unintentional effects that could be reversed with more exposure,

The challenge about boards is that they are elected officials and some of them may or may not have a good understanding of higher education...as an elected official, you’re not necessarily required to be an expert in this area that you are elected in.

Another participant stated,

we have departments at our institution that are responsible for working with the legislative process and networking with the lobbyists, so I never really had that oversight or experience.

The third area for improvement identified by participants was linked to the Institutional Infrastructure. The overall budgeting process and how the process is handled at the highest level was the focus of participants’ comments. Resource development was also identified as an area for competency development as the participants noted that knowing more about technology and facilities master planning is extremely important at the CEO level and, while they feel that they know about the process, they would like to have more experience in the process — be more involved in the process — to gain experiential learning.

#### EXPLORATION #4: PLANS FOR DEVELOPING COMPETENCIES — ACTIVITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The fourth area examined in detail built from the survey responses about the respondents’ plans for developing competencies, and the contrast between past and future development methods reflected by the survey responses.

The interviews prompted the participants to identify activities that they plan to pursue to acquire additional knowledge where they believe they need further competency development. Participant responses centered around two themes: (1) internal opportunities for involvement and collaboration and (2) external activities and opportunities for developing competencies.

First, several of the participants identified a current challenge as great way to gain leadership experience and build competencies: Leading or being on the Covid-19 Response Team. Also identified as key activities and opportunities were being part of the President's Council, involvement in Board activities, being involved in various college committees, and interacting with people at all levels of the organization. These responses all included a heavy emphasis on internal institutional communication and collaboration.

The second theme revealed from their responses focused on external activities or opportunities for gaining additional knowledge or experience, including attending conferences and earning third party certifications. Among the opportunities participants identified were the AACC President's Council and conference for leadership and networking and the ACCT conference for "building board relations, governance, and the leadership between the boards and the president of institutions." The League of Innovation's conference for faculty innovation and involvement was another activity identified by participants as providing leadership knowledge necessary for competency development, professional advancement, and the skills needed for reaching their goals. One participant noted that they value the opportunity afforded by attending conferences because conferences also provide the opportunity to network with others:

I think networking, and I know quite a few people nationally in different institutions, is very important, and leveraging resources, and learning what other institutions are doing... Conferences give you that great insight to go to a presentation and see and hear and ask questions on best practices; I think it's very valuable.

A couple of the interview participants also mentioned third-party certifications as an area of interest because the certifications stay with the person when they seek other advancement opportunities and because they can provide in-depth understanding in the areas they oversee as leaders. A participant described these certifications as “intentional training that is focused on a particular topic” and, thus, is beneficial because of its narrow focus.

#### EXPLORATION #5: PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTING COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT

The interviews also examined the leaders’ perceptions of the most valuable resources and organizations essential for developing leadership competencies. The discussions focused on identifying specific organizations as well as specific professional development activities that are perceived as being helpful.

The participants all identified AACC as a central resource and the number one organization for gaining leadership knowledge, including the various institutes and activities, such as the Emerging Leaders Institute, the President’s Institute, and the Commission on Student Success. The League of Innovation was identified as being key for faculty development and involvement, and the Higher Learning Commission for its Accreditation focus. These two organizations were recognized as being essential for improving skillsets and acquiring leadership competencies. The ACCT, Aspen Institute, and various other organizations were also identified, although to a lesser extent, by participants.

Several participants noted that the *Chronicle of Higher Education* was a leading resource for articles and other printed information beneficial for improvement in a higher education setting as well as for leadership development. One participant stated,

The Chronicle [has] free content and also member content... their free content includes lots of things such as infographics ... that are... helpful pointers and things to remember.

The participants identified a wide range of professional development activities that were helpful and beneficial to their leadership development, both at the local and state levels, within the institution and the local community. One participant also stressed that networking with others in the position you want to hold, such as the CEO position, is key to learning what the position requires on both a personal and professional level. Participants also mentioned the value of participating in clubs, serving on boards, and networking with others across all areas that affect the college. The main focus of the conversations was the importance of being active in the local community by volunteering or running for office for Boards, such as K-12 schools, hospitals, and other non-profit boards that are located in the community. As one participant said

It's being engaged in your community and volunteering your time to be able to help others. I think it's important to give... there's the give and the get, and maybe that's not the most impactful as far as a CEO. But actually, it probably is...having that knowledge of what our community resources are and how we can give back.

#### EXPLORATION #6: THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSONAL TRAITS

The next area explored through the interviews was the only competency that received a perfect 5.0 score from participants. The Focus Area of "Personal Traits" was prominent because all respondents (100%) said they had a high level of proficiency in this area. Within the Focus Area, the competency that also received self-reported ratings of high proficiency from 100% of respondents was "Ethical Standards," demonstrated by the behavior of "Approach[ing] your interactions with students, peers, and college leaders by promoting trust, good behavior, fairness, and/or kindness."

In discussing their individual strengths in this Focus Area, the participants focused on three primary concepts; the first two centered around what is intrinsic to effective leadership, and the third on the life-long development of ethical standards.

The first theme evident from their comments was that ethical standards reflect outward and focus on interactions with people. Comments, for example, included being people focused and putting their needs above your own, having empathy and being inclusive, as well as practicing Servant Leadership and putting others above oneself. As one of the participants stated,

It's about being inclusive... I have some responsibilities across the whole college and so it's creating teams and partnerships and working relationships with every individual across the campus.... So that they truly understand our conversation, what our mission and vision are...to have people feel that they were part of it.

The second theme of these discussions centered around the importance of having a high internal commitment to leading and leadership, including having passion for the community college mission, having high personal values in performing one's responsibilities, and exhibiting ownership for the vision of the college. One participant stated,

I think it would have to be values, personal values... sometimes with leaders it may be a combination of your personal values and your institutional values, especially when they align.

Another participant said,

I'm more of a believer in trait leadership, so what that means is that you have to have the traits to become a good leader to begin with, you have to be born with them... it means if you have the traits, and if you're given the right professional development, you can become a great leader. But you have to be born with the gifts to begin with, with the skills to begin with.

The third theme that was evident in the participant interviews was the career-long development process for ethical standards. Several noted that their standards were developed and refined as they progressed through the institution and through their progression from position to position; as they gained a broader range of responsibilities, they needed to develop a higher level of ethical responsibility. One participant noted, for example, that a vice president needs to refine

and build their ethical standards and awareness more than a lab aide or clerk or a lower-level supervisor would. One participant stated,

I think that you gain experience as you are put into higher level circumstances, higher stakes circumstances.... I think that a lot of it could just be said when you're faced with higher level decisions and you're given more and more responsibilities over time, it helps you kind of develop in that area and maintain that high level standard.

It's when you start facing these issues that are more complex, that have all these different players, that you could be swayed by one side or the other, you have a lot of different factors that come into play with those more complex issues. I think that's when your ethics become challenged a little bit more, and so that's really the test of it. You develop those muscles more in those type of situations.

#### EXPLORATION #7: RECOGNIZING AND DEVELOPING LOW-PROFICIENCY SKILLS

The next topic explored in the interviews was the competency that received the lowest self-reported proficiency ratings; only 10.53% of the survey respondents stated they had a high level of proficiency in Focus Area #11, Fundraising and Relationship Cultivation and the related competency (11a) of Fundraising. The behaviors associated with this competency include the abilities to “Follow college policy for seeking grant funds. Do not pursue opportunities that do not directly align with the college’s priorities. Engage all individuals who would have responsibility for grant implementation in the application process” (AACC, 2018).

The interviews asked participants to consider what factors might have contributed to the low self-reported levels of proficiency and what opportunities they felt were available to help leaders develop and increase these levels of proficiency.

A majority of the participants felt that the overwhelming reason for low proficiency ratings in this area is limited exposure to the function of fundraising, including not being required or expected to participate. Several respondents stated that their level of involvement is limited to being asked to give, but never really being involved in the asking. One respondent stated that silos still exist in this area, and that fundraising is a silo that is best left for the experts.



Another respondent stated they honestly had no interest in this area of the college's work and would prefer to focus on students. Another participant reinforced their lack of involvement saying

... there are fundraising experts... I'm not required to put together a strategic fundraising plan. I'm not required to set objectives as far as financial benchmarks and stuff for the college to reach, so to me that's a very defined role within a lot of organizations. The Foundation has a board. The Foundation has people who are dedicated; that's their job to do.

Another participant stated,

I can't sell anything; I can't raise money for anything. You have to be able to sell your idea, I can't. When you look at the institutions I worked for, there weren't many fundraising opportunities for us.

Almost every one of the participants had similar situations and stories to tell, reinforcing the message of limited access and involvement.

I think we've carved it out as a department, and it hasn't become the work of every administrator... I wasn't required to participate in any of the fundraising activities other than to donate.

One participant summed up the situation this way:

When it comes to fundraising, everyone's like "hands-off, that's yours, not mine. I don't want to be involved in that." We shy away from that, people tend to shy away from things that make them uncomfortable, and grants with all of their rules and regulations and all of the pitfalls that you could come up against, that's another one where I've noticed people are like "ho-ho, that's your problem."

The participants did, however, identify several opportunities where they could, if they wanted to, increase their skills and knowledge in this area, from active involvement in their institution's Foundation Board to immersion in the fundraising process, including grant writing and involvement with community-based organizations. Several noted the importance of keeping

abreast of the various grant opportunities and building relationships externally with local agencies before trying to write grants and finding ways to link grant resources to college innovation and new programs.

#### EXPLORATION #8: NEXT STEPS FOR AACC'S LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES

The final area explored during the interviews was the AACC competencies themselves. Participants were asked to share experiences, suggestions, or comments about the AACC competencies and the senior leaders' proficiency levels that were identified during this study.

The participants' responses centered around three main themes. First, offering more focused leadership training is imperative to the continued growth of the community college and its employees. Offering more localized leadership opportunities for lower and mid-level supervisors was one area that was mentioned as needing additional growth and opportunity. Succession Planning practices and opportunity were also identified as imperative, as well as rotating the senior leaders across departments as a way to expand leaders' understanding of all of the college's functions. One participant noted that this approach was key to breaking down the silos mentioned earlier.

A second dominant theme of the participant responses was the centrality of effective communication for every leader, no matter what stage or level; being able to communicate what you do and how your role fits within the scope of the college's mission is imperative for employee satisfaction and growth, no matter the job title or where the position fits in the hierarchy.

Finally, participants acknowledged the value of gaining a better understanding of the AACC competencies and how they fit within the college environment and leadership pathway, as well as understanding emotional intelligence and how to develop and use emotional intelligence

in conjunction with the AACC competencies. One participant quoted a colleague who made this statement about the link between the competencies, emotional intelligence, and emotional labor:

That's one thing with the competencies is that there are personal traits on here that talk about it [emotional intelligence], but it's really that layer of how you act or the emotions on the job, and that's a key piece. While you could go through and say, "Yes, I know how to do the budget, I know how to create relationships, I know how to do all of this," it's really that leadership ability and how you address the emotion in the workplace... this is another layer over the competencies.

## **SUMMARY**

Chapter Four presented the data collected in this mixed-methods research study. For this two-phase study, the senior leaders from a consortium of community colleges in the Midwest initially participated in an online survey, and, of the survey participants, five agreed to take part in a semi-structured interview to explore the results in more depth. Findings from both phases of the study have been presented in this chapter, with the key themes from the interview discussions included to contribute additional depth and clarity to the survey data. Chapter Five will provide overall conclusions from the research, implications for developing best practices will be discussed, and suggestions for further research will be outlined.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a summary of this research study which investigated the self-reported leadership proficiency levels of a group of senior leaders from a Midwestern consortium of community colleges. Participants rated their levels of competency in the focus areas defined by the AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders and identified the methods or experiences that were most useful in attaining their knowledge and skill level. Chapter Four reviewed and analyzed the study results. In this chapter, the researcher will summarize the key findings, discuss the implications of these findings, and define several recommendations for future research based on limitations and delimitations of this study's design and implementation.

### DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The primary goals of this study were to assess community college senior leader's understanding of the AACC competencies, to assess how community college senior leaders self-assess their current level of proficiency with the AACC competencies, and to demonstrate how the AACC competencies are utilized in community colleges for leadership development. The findings from this research study are detailed below as they address the study's two research questions.

## RESEARCH QUESTION 1: ASSESSING LEVELS OF PROFICIENCY

As defined in the methodology, the first research question is as follows: How do senior leaders in Midwestern community colleges self-assess their level of proficiency in the AACC competencies for community college leaders (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 2018)?

### *Key Finding #1: Leadership Framework*

In order to understand the foundation for the participants' understanding and use of the AACC competencies — and then, their self-assessment of their level of proficiency in these competencies — the study's participants were initially asked if they utilize a leadership framework for professional development activities and, if so, which one. Less than half of the respondents, only 42%, stated they use a leadership framework for professional development, while 58% stated they are not using any one specific leadership framework but, instead, develop their skills based on what knowledge is needed at the time. Of the 42% who use a leadership framework, 75% stated they use the AACC leadership competencies.

The implications of these results are far reaching for leadership development activities at community colleges as AACC is the leading institution that specializes in leadership development at all levels in the community college. To enhance their goal of supporting community college leaders' development, AACC should consider increasing opportunities for and concentrate their future efforts on gaining a broader base for active and intentional utilization and application of the competencies.

While this study's results show that the senior leaders at community colleges are aware of and informed about the AACC competencies, they are choosing not to focus their professional development activities around them. These results may also indicate that AACC could focus additional efforts on communicating the value of the competencies and creating development

opportunities directly tied to specific competencies. The AACC's activities that focus on leadership development, include the John E. Roueche Future Leaders Institute (Roueche-Flip), the AACC Future President's Institute (FPI), the New CEO Academy, and the President Academy Summer Institute (PASI). While these programs provide significant and valuable development opportunities, the direct connection between the stated leadership competencies and the programs are not emphasized or highlighted.

AACC has made significant efforts to encourage professional leadership development activities, from providing specialized services and programs such as the Community College Journal and the AACC John E. Roueche Future Leaders Institute, as well as offering methods to evaluate and incorporate the AACC competencies into grow-your-own programs (AACC, 2018). However, these efforts appear to be falling short as many senior leaders are not incorporating the competencies into their professional development activities. One suggestion is to sponsor webinars focused on how to use the competencies and how to incorporate them into professional leadership development activities. It is also valuable for CEOs to use the competencies with their direct reports (vice presidents, etc.) to develop career/professional development targets. AACC could/should support these efforts by encouraging and helping to develop templates, training, etc., to support the CEOs development of their direct reports; all based on the appropriate competencies and behaviors (this kind of professional development programming would be valuable for all levels).

*Key Finding #2: Top Ten Competencies.*

As the results indicate, the top ten highest ranked competencies are all centered on interacting with and connecting to other people at all levels. For instance, Ethical Standards is the only competencies that received perfect scores for high proficiency with a 5.0 weighted

average. The behaviors linked to this competency have been defined as promoting trust, good behavior, fairness, and kindness in all of your interactions with students, peers, and college leaders (AACC, 2018). Also, within the top ten highest ranked competencies are Lead by Example, Organizational Structure of the Community College, Customer Service, Transparency, Active Listening, Interconnectivity and Interdependence, Institutional Team Building, Governance Structure, and Be an Influencer; all of these competencies are focused on the soft skills of interacting with others and using empathy and respect while doing so.

The high rankings in these competency areas imply that being people focused, developing and implementing soft skills, and putting the needs of others first are the most important aspects of the leadership competencies for the study's participants. Extending this finding to a broader community college environment, these results indicate that community college leadership development programming should consider increasing emphasis on and development of soft and interpersonal skills. Also, additional development attention should concentrate on leadership frameworks, such as Servant Leadership, that are focused on putting people first (Spendlove, 2007; Lazarus, 2013; Rishi, 2016; and Hassan, Gallear, and Sivarajah 2018).

### *Key Finding #3: Ten Lowest Competencies*

The bottom ten competencies with the lowest reported high proficiency level are also very concentrated in specific areas. For example, five of the competencies under the Fundraising and Relationship Cultivation Focus Area were ranked by the participants as low proficiency skills; four of them, in fact, comprised the lowest-ranked competencies of all. Included among the lowest ranked competencies were three competencies from the Institutional Infrastructure, Collaboration, and Student Success Focus Areas. Among the lowest ranked competencies are the

function of Fundraising (which is the lowest ranked of all the competencies with only 10.53% of the participants self-reporting a high proficiency level); Alumni, Media, Legislative, and Public Relations; Technology and Facilities Master Planning; Budgeting; Collective Bargaining; and Data Usage.

The key implication of these results is that the specialized hard skills — a thorough understanding of the operational functions of the institution — are areas that need the most professional development by senior leaders. Commenting on their skills in these areas, several of the interviewees from Phase 2 stated they did not develop in these areas because they are highly specialized areas and that they did not have either the desire or the opportunity to learn these skills.

If this area of low proficiency is considered more broadly across community colleges, the impact of this weakness in our current leadership could negatively affect effective financial operations of the institution. Having more than a cursory knowledge in the functional areas of any institution is essential and its lack can significantly impact systems across the board. As community colleges' top executives retire and the leadership changes, emerging leaders must have the knowledge of the functional areas to ensure that viability of the community college can sustain the mission of the community college and to ensure sound decision-making capabilities exist. The senior leaders must make decisions that impact all areas of the institutions and without the appropriate level of knowledge to make those decisions, institutions will suffer, and student success will be limited (Shahmandi, Silong & Ismail, 2012; Achieving the Dream, Inc. & The Aspen Institute, 2013). As emphasized by AACC (2018), to remain relevant in changing educational times, we must not only change the educational experiences of our students, we must also commit to changing our operations to meet the changing needs of those students. Increasing



proficiency in these specialized and operational areas will lead to greater student success as operational opportunities are identified to increase efficiency. CEOs and their senior leaders must commit to increase their knowledge and proficiency in these specialized areas, as experience with or knowledge of each of these low proficiency competencies are essential for sustainability and growth. Community colleges are multifaceted institutions and being effective leaders with the ability to lead them necessitates a complex set of skills (AACCC, 2018).

#### RESEARCH QUESTION 2: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT APPROACHES

The second research question was defined as follows: How do senior leaders in Midwestern community colleges prefer to acquire the competencies defined in the AACCC competencies for community college leaders (3rd Ed., 2018)?

The results for research question 2 come from both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of this research study. In the Phase 1 survey, participants were asked how they acquired their current knowledge of the competencies, and how they intend to continue to learn for future development activities. In the Phase 2 interviews, participants were asked to share their experiences that directly helped them with their professional development to date. In Phase 1, the choices given for acquiring their current level of proficiency and how they intend to continue to grow and develop their proficiency are graduate degree, in-house grow your own programs, conferences / workshops / webinars, mentoring / coaching, progressive administrative responsibilities, and other. The key findings for this section are listed below.

#### *Key Finding #4: Learned Proficiency*

Progressive administrative responsibilities were the highest ranked method for gaining proficiency with 58.85% of the respondents stating they gained their current level of proficiency as they moved through their career progression. The next highest ranked method was earning a

graduate degree, with 19.62% of respondents stated their have earned a graduate degree. These data can be confirmed as 11 of our participants, or 57.89%, have earned a doctorate degree; the remaining participants have earned master's degrees in various educational disciplines.

The implications of this finding are that senior leaders have developed their levels of proficiency in the AACC competencies by doing the work and being involved in the processes that give them hands-on experiential learning they need, whether it is working through projects, serving on committees, or putting into place programs and procedures that meet the needs and goals of the institution. Each level of leadership progression brings with it a different level of responsibility and learning, and by progressing through the institution, the senior leaders learned and incorporated various competencies into their professional lives through experiences and situations they have been exposed to. The value of hands-on and experience-based development cannot be understated; however, this finding also identifies a potential weakness in our current leaders' appreciation for and value of seeking established professional development opportunities that could provide useful and necessary knowledge. These senior leaders have access to an abundance of organizations that concentrate their efforts, not only on leadership development, but also on functional area development as well. These organizations include the AACC, the ACCT, The League of Innovation, the Aspen Institute, and many others, that have programs, conferences, and workshops that focus on different aspects of, and skills for, leading a community college.

#### *Key Finding #5: Gaining Additional Proficiencies*

When looking at how participants plan to continue to develop their proficiency levels, the responses were a little more widespread. As expected, because all the participants have earned graduate degrees (all with a minimum of a master's degree), earning a graduate degree dropped

to 4.59% as an identified future development option. Attending conferences, workshops, and webinars was identified as the leading preferred method for development with 44.39% of respondents stating this is how they intend to further develop. However, progressive administrative responsibilities came in second with 25.51% of respondents stating they will continue to learn and develop as they move through their career cycle. Mentoring and/or Coaching scored high with 20.92% of respondents stating that they are either working with a mentor or coach or they intend to formalize this process.

These data imply that although numerous opportunities are available from organizations such as AACCC, ACCT, the Aspen Institute, as well as conferences, workshops, and webinars, these are typically short-term, highly focused programs. While they can be valuable and intensive learning experiences, they may not provide the in-depth, progressive development necessary for long-term growth. This finding also suggests that long-term growth may be supported effectively with grow-your-own programs that would encourage and enhance reflection. Formalized mentoring and coaching programs should also be a part of these programs, as they have been shown to be effective especially in developing the essential interpersonal skills noted previously (McNair, 2009; Hebert-Swartzler & McNair, 2010; McNair, Duree and Ebbers, 2011; McNair, 2015; Ullman, 2015; Pierce, 2017; and Taylor & Bodurka, 2017).

#### *Key Finding #6: Institutional Knowledge*

Another finding that was significant from this study was the importance participants noted for gaining institutional knowledge through internal committee involvement, especially participating to some extent on accreditation work. Most interviewees stated that they have learned aspects of the organization and have become familiar with the people in each of the college's departments by participating on various committees, especially those committees not

directly related to their area of expertise. These experiences not only enhanced their visibility throughout the organization, but they made it possible to develop relationships at all levels and throughout all departments by making internal networking easier and richly rewarding, both personally and professionally.

The implications of these results are immediate and widespread. Understanding the entire structure of the organization and knowing every aspect of the institution is key to effective governance and leadership. Leaders must also know and understand the people in the institution if they hope to fulfill the mission and vision of the college; it takes teamwork and collaboration to reach the goals and objectives of the institution. As noted previously, training and professional development programs must build intentional focus on this organizational awareness by using a systems approach that emphasizes how each area, each office, each function, and each person works together to accomplish specific tasks that, as a whole, make up the success of the institution (Plinske & Packard, 2010; Ellis & Garcia, 2017; Boggs, 2019; and Mandrell, 2019).

One suggestion for programs that provide people opportunities is to sponsor internal webinars on various key functions of the institution, such as budgeting, that encompass what the functional area is, how it is developed, the inputs and outputs, personnel who are involved, and why decisions are made. These programs could ensure that people across the institution are more knowledgeable about how and why certain decisions are made and give them more insight into how what they do fits into the organization. Also, broadening committee membership, especially accreditation work, will not only ensure exposure to various issues, but also give people the opportunity to work with a team outside their area and expose them to the how and why of area decisions. Using cross-functional teams for projects or committees enhances the abilities of the participants and exposes them to more responsibilities and opportunities to learn; these teams

should also include people from all levels of the institutions, such as faculty, supervisors, directors, and deans (Yoon, et al, 2010; Ellis & Garcia, 2017; Whissemore, 2018; Mandrell, 2019; and Zhuo, 2019).

## **LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS**

This section will highlight the limitations and delimitations that have influenced this research study.

### **LIMITATIONS**

The timing of the restrictions accompanying the Covid-19 pandemic limited how the second phase of this study was accomplished: not only did the restrictions affect the timeframe of the data collection, but they also affected the Phase 2 methodology. Originally, Phase 2 was to begin late March or early April in 2020; however, by mid-March 2020, all educational institutions and staff functions were moved to virtual settings, thus impacting participants' time to complete surveys and participate in interviews. Therefore, Phase 2 did not begin until approximately seven months later in the autumn of 2020. In addition, Phase 2 was originally scheduled as a one-time, face-to-face focus group discussion with a select group of survey respondents; however, the restrictions of face-to-face activities prompted the shift to one-on-one interviews conducted virtually to ensure social distancing guidelines.

A second limitation was the low response rate from targeted participants, senior leaders from a regional consortium of community colleges located in the Midwest. Of the 98 surveys emailed, 19 surveys were completed, a 19% response rate. These 19 completed surveys constituted the pool of potential focus group (now interview) participants. In addition to the limited number of survey respondents, prior to the interviews taking place seven months following the initial survey data collection, five of the potential interviewees retired and/or left

their current job, making them ineligible to participate in Phase 2. Therefore, only five of the original 19 survey respondents were eligible and agreed to be interviewed for the second phase.

#### DELIMITATIONS

This study focused on a regional consortium of community colleges geographically located within 75 miles of each other that are concentrated around a large urban area. Thus, the geographic structure of this study may limit the generalizability to community colleges nationally. However, the participant pool was representative of the broader community college population in that leaders from urban, suburban, and rural community colleges participated in the study.

The AACC competencies referenced and used for this study were developed for six different levels within a community college, including faculty, mid-level leaders, senior-level leaders, aspiring CEOs, new CEOs, and CEOs with three or more years of experience. However, this study focused on only one level, the senior-level leader, and did not examine the progression of competencies or proficiencies from one level to another within the community college.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Because of the limitations and delimitations affecting this study's design and implementation, as well as the implications of the study results, the researcher recommends the following approaches for future research.

##### RECOMMENDATION #1: ADDITIONAL RESEARCH INTO THE APPLICATION OF THE AACC COMPETENCIES

This study focused on determining community college senior leaders' self-reported level of proficiency in the AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders and identifying the methods or experiences that were directly related to their proficiency development. The results

indicated that less than half, only 42%, of the participants, used the AACC competencies as their leadership framework. Thus, the first recommendation for further study of the AACC competencies would be to explore the reasons for this low level of application and use of this leadership framework for professional development. Future researchers could focus on participants from all six levels identified by the AACC (faculty, mid-level leaders, senior-level leaders, aspiring CEOs, new CEOs, and CEOs with three or more years of experience) to determine (1) if they use the competencies, (2) if not, why the competencies are not used. Additionally, exploring ways that AACC can better ensure utilization of the competencies at all levels as intended would be a valuable exercise.

#### RECOMMENDATION #2: EXAMINE THE REMAINING LEVELS OF AACC COMPETENCIES

As noted, a delimitation of this study was its focus on the senior-level competencies within the AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders; therefore, the second recommendation for future study would be to replicate this study focusing on each of the other five levels, examining not only the self-reported levels of proficiency (and their expected increases over time/experience), but the preferred methods for professional development and skill enhancement. A related study could also focus on community college support staff and supervisors across the organization, especially those in non-academic areas, as they are typically front-line workers with direct responsibility for student success and may aspire to leadership positions as part of their career path.

#### RECOMMENDATION #3: EXPAND THE GEOGRAPHIC PARAMETERS

This recommendation for future study would be to replicate this study on a broader geographic or national scale, as this study concentrated on a small consortium of community colleges regionally located in the Midwest. The participants represented leadership at seven

community colleges. Enlarging the study to an entire state or state system, or expanding with national representation would ensure broader generalizability and might also identify professional development opportunities that are either regionally based, or unknown outside of this study's reach.

#### RECOMMENDATION #4: ASPIRE TO CEO POSITION

Another related study would be to examine the correlations between the responses with the participants' (1) tenure / time in their current role, and (2) their aspirations to fill the CEO position. The goal would be to look at possible connections between these two factors and their desire to expand knowledge in the low-rated competencies such as fundraising, budgeting, facilities master planning, and other identified operational functions.

#### RECOMMENDATION #5: SIMILAR STUDY

The final recommendation would be to implement this study and include the senior leaders' direct reports. The goal would be to find out the effects of self-assessing levels of proficiencies with these competencies. In a 360-degree evaluation, would these ratings/rankings be similar or different? What areas might be rated differently by those who work with these senior leaders and CEOs?

### **SUMMARY**

This study, and others like it, are significant as we struggle to understand and resolve the leadership challenges facing community colleges. We have witnessed an increasing number of CEO and senior leaders leave their positions for multiple reasons including retirements, seeking other positions, terminations or death (AACC, 2018; Smith, 2016), and the current pool of leaders either lack the necessary skills or are not interested in filling the vacuum (The Aspen



Institute, 2017; Ellis & Garcia, 2017; AACC & ACCT, 2018). The lack of widespread succession planning programs has compounded the problem (The Aspen Institute, 2017).

Chapter Five has presented a summary of the study results and the implications of these results. Six key findings were identified:

1. The AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders are used by less than half of the senior leaders who participated in this study.
2. The top ten ranked levels of proficiency were in people focused, or soft skills, competencies.
3. The lowest ranked levels of proficiency were in task-focused, or specialized hard skills, competencies.
4. The senior leaders developed their current levels of proficiency by utilizing the knowledge gained through progressive administrative responsibilities and/or by earning a graduate degree.
5. The senior leaders intend to continue to develop their levels of proficiency by attending conferences, workshops, and webinars; by gaining knowledge through progressive administrative responsibilities; and by attaining the services of a formal mentor or coach; or a combination of the three.
6. Institutional knowledge developed over time and committee involvement is an essential element for gaining proficiency in the AACC competencies. The most common identified methods included, (a) internal to the institution, accreditation work, and (b) external to the institution, participating in local community activities (getting to know the institution's constituents).

In 2018, the AACC revised the Competencies for Community College Leaders with three considerations in mind: to provide a framework that would be considered the North Star for student access and success, to influence and direct institutional transformation, and to provide guidelines for career progression or growth within current position (AACC, 2018). At the forefront of innovations for leadership specifically designed for community colleges, the AACC provides guidance in leadership development specific to the community colleges and strives to work nationally to address new challenges and innovations. This research project is a step toward

understanding the awareness and use of these competencies at the senior leader level, and in pinpointing the methods and experiences that support proficiency enhancement and professional development.

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## APPENDIX A: RESEARCH SURVEY

## Senior-Level Competencies

To ensure that the community college leadership pipeline is filled with knowledgeable individuals, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) developed the Competencies for Community College Leaders. The endeavor to tackle the shrinking pool of qualified community college candidates was initiated for several reasons: 1) to address the dwindling pool of candidates ready to assume executive-level positions within the community college, especially the CEO position, 2) to provide a guideline for community college grow-your-programs, and 3) to provide colleges and universities with a set of competencies necessary for graduate level program development. Please complete this research survey so it can be determined if these competencies are widely adopted by executive leadership teams and, if so, how they are used by members of community college executive teams, and to determine how those who seek advancement opportunities (i.e., be better at their current job, seek a promotion, seek a presidency, etc.) are preparing to do so as influenced by the AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders.

**For Questions 4 – 34:** Please indicate your **level of proficiency** for the competencies and associated behaviors outlined by the AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders, Third Edition, 2018.

### **Likert Scale:**

<b>5 High Level</b>	<b>4 Moderate Level</b>	<b>3 Average Level</b>	<b>2 Low Level</b>	<b>1 No Level</b>
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Do you use a leadership framework for professional development? Leadership Framework is defined as a conceptual structure designed to develop leadership skills and motivate people to act towards achieving a common goal.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If Yes, which leadership framework are you using to plan professional development activities?

- AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

If AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders, which edition are you using?

First (2005) \_\_\_\_\_ Second (2013) \_\_\_\_\_ Third (2018) \_\_\_\_\_

**Organizational Culture:** An effective community college leader embraces the mission, vision, and values of the community college, and acknowledges the significance of the institution's past while charting a path for its future.

Competency	Behavior	Level of Proficiency				
		5	4	3	2	1
Mission, vision, and values of the community college	Embrace the tenets of the community college and ensure that department and unit priorities are always aligned with the priorities and goals of the college.					
Culture of the institution and the external community	Find ways within the department to honor past accomplishments and demonstrate how those accomplishments pave the way for the department's current and future goals.					

How did you attain the above level of proficiency? (choose all that apply)

- Graduate Degree
- In-House Grow-Your-Own Program

- Conferences, Workshops and/or Webinars
- Mentoring and/or Coaching
- Progressive Administrative Responsibilities within a Community College
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

How do you plan to continue to acquire proficiency in the areas that need additional development?  
(choose all that apply)

- Graduate Degree
- In-House Grow-Your-Own Program
- Conferences, Workshops and/or Webinars
- Mentoring and/or Coaching
- Progressive Administrative Responsibilities within a Community College
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Governance, Institutional Policy, and Legislation:** An effective leader is knowledgeable about the institution’s governance framework and the policies that guide its operation.

Competency	Behavior	Level of Proficiency				
		5	4	3	2	1
Organizational structure of the community college	Understand your leadership role within the college’s organizational structure, and how to advocate within the structure to advance your department’s goals in support of student success.					
Governance structure	Have respect for, and adhere to, the governance structure of the college. Maintain transparency in working with the various committees and councils involved in your department’s work. Always keep the CEO abreast of the status of your work in advancing initiatives with various stakeholders.					
College policies and procedures	Have intimate knowledge of the institution’s policies and procedures and their impact on students and internal stakeholders under your supervision. Be willing to advance recommendations for strengthening or modifying policies that pose undue hardship while maintaining compliance with federal guidelines (as appropriate).					
Board relations	Be knowledgeable about the types of boards (elected versus appointed) and the challenges and opportunities that exist in working with each.					

How did you attain the above level of proficiency? (choose all that apply)

- Graduate Degree
- In-House Grow-Your-Own Program
- Conferences, Workshops and/or Webinars
- Mentoring and/or Coaching
- Progressive Administrative Responsibilities within a Community College
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

How do you plan to continue to acquire proficiency in the areas that need additional development?  
(choose all that apply)

- Graduate Degree
- In-House Grow-Your-Own Program
- Conferences, Workshops and/or Webinars
- Mentoring and/or Coaching
- Progressive Administrative Responsibilities within a Community College
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Student Success:** An effective leader supports student success across the institution, and embraces opportunities to improve access, retention, and success.

Competency	Behavior	Level of Proficiency				
		5	4	3	2	1
Student success	Play an active role in leading the student success agenda for the institution and be willing to engage in continuous communication about the effectiveness of the services that you oversee. Consistently focus on ways to ensure that students enter the classroom in the best condition for learning.					
Consistency between the college's operation and a student-focused agenda	Work with the CEO to ensure that the units under your responsibility are performing functions consistent with the student success agenda. Be willing to make recommendations to restructure operations if they are not aligned with promoting a focus on students.					
Data usage	Develop expertise in using qualitative and quantitative data in assessing the effectiveness of your unit's operations. Ensure that your decisions are supported by data.					
Program/performance review	Conduct periodic reviews of programs, services, and employees under your supervision. Set clear expectations and outcomes, and routinely determine progress. Document all actions and meetings for the record. If changes/modifications must be made, have sound justification.					
Evaluation for improvement	Review evaluation results to improve performance. In areas where deficits may exist, determine what more can be done to potentially improve outcomes. Develop a plan for improvement with subordinates or supervisor with specific dates to assess progress.					

How did you attain the above level of proficiency? (choose all that apply)

- Graduate Degree
- In-House Grow-Your-Own Program
- Conferences, Workshops and/or Webinars
- Mentoring and/or Coaching
- Progressive Administrative Responsibilities within a Community College
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

How do you plan to continue to acquire proficiency in the areas that need additional development?  
(choose all that apply)

- Graduate Degree
- In-House Grow-Your-Own Program
- Conferences, Workshops and/or Webinars
- Mentoring and/or Coaching
- Progressive Administrative Responsibilities within a Community College
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Institutional Leadership:** An effective leader understands the importance of interpersonal relationships, personal philosophy, and management skills to creating a student-centered institution.

Competency	Behavior	Level of Proficiency				
		5	4	3	2	1
Be an influencer	Understand your role as influencer with your subordinates. Take this role very seriously, and only champion those initiatives that will really make a difference in the lives of students.					
Support team building	Engage in activities that build trust and transparency across the unit(s) that you supervise. Routinely engage in activities that allow team members to build strong relationships.					
Performance management	Be familiar with the college's system for performance management. Establish expectations for your subordinates and engage in quarterly assessment to offer suggestions for improvement where appropriate. Model this process in dealing with your supervisor as well.					
Lead by example	Lead by modeling the behavior that you would want to see in your subordinates. Do not ask individuals to perform functions that you are not willing to perform.					
Problem-solving techniques	When approaching a problem, seek to learn what attributed to the problem, use all resources available to develop alternate solutions, choose and implement a solution and evaluate its effectiveness.					
Conflict management	Be familiar with the day-to-day operations that you supervise. Step in to resolve conflict taking place in areas under your supervision if subordinates cannot resolve it. Use sound conflict management processes to get to the bottom of the situation, and use data and other information to come up with a fair outcome.					
Advocate for professional development across the institution	Support professional development for your subordinates, especially to assist them with improving services to students. Seek opportunities to help peers and subordinates grow and develop leadership skills.					
Customer service	Make customer service a priority for the areas that you supervise. Establish a culture of customer service excellence and lead employees by example.					

Transparency	Always be open, honest, and forthright. Do not harbor a hidden agenda. Be clear about your motivation.					
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How did you attain the above level of proficiency? (choose all that apply)

- Graduate Degree
- In-House Grow-Your-Own Program
- Conferences, Workshops and/or Webinars
- Mentoring and/or Coaching
- Progressive Administrative Responsibilities within a Community College
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

How do you plan to continue to acquire proficiency in the areas that need additional development? (choose all that apply)

- Graduate Degree
- In-House Grow-Your-Own Program
- Conferences, Workshops and/or Webinars
- Mentoring and/or Coaching
- Progressive Administrative Responsibilities within a Community College
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Institutional Infrastructure:** An effective community college leader is fluent in the management of the foundational aspects of the institution, including the establishment of a strategic plan, financial and facilities management, accreditation, and technology master planning.

Competency	Behavior	Level of Proficiency				
		5	4	3	2	1
Strategic and operational planning	Be familiar with the college’s strategic planning process. Ensure that the unit(s) under your supervision is/are represented in institutional planning, and that it/they have the resources needed to achieve its/their goals in support of the college’s strategic plan.					
Budgeting	Have in-depth knowledge about the institution’s budgeting process to ensure that you are advancing resource requests through the proper channels within the college. Be highly engaged in budget hearings for campus leadership, and be a good steward of the resources that you are provided. Have strong budget management skills.					
Prioritization and allocation of resources	Understand how to prioritize human, financial, and capital resources to advance the priorities of the institution. Possess the skills necessary to successfully navigate situations where resources are impacted by competing interests.					
Accreditation	Understand the standards for your college’s regional accreditor, and the criteria where your department’s work applies. Periodically review operations, policies, and procedures to ensure that your department is in					

	compliance with accreditor standards. Alert your CEO if you find weaknesses in your department's ability to carry out activities that could impact the college's compliance with accreditor standards.					
Facilities master planning and management	Be familiar with the core components of the college's plans for facility master planning and management so that you can do your part to make sure the facilities are in the best shape possible to create a welcoming environment for students.					
Technology master planning	Have knowledge of the ongoing technology needs of the unit(s) under your supervision. Be familiar with the college's process for technology master planning to ensure that your unit's need.					

How did you attain the above level of proficiency? (choose all that apply)

- Graduate Degree
- In-House Grow-Your-Own Program
- Conferences, Workshops and/or Webinars
- Mentoring and/or Coaching
- Progressive Administrative Responsibilities within a Community College
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

How do you plan to continue to acquire proficiency in the areas that need additional development? (choose all that apply)

- Graduate Degree
- In-House Grow-Your-Own Program
- Conferences, Workshops and/or Webinars
- Mentoring and/or Coaching
- Progressive Administrative Responsibilities within a Community College
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Information and Analytics:** An effective community college leader understands how to use data in ways that give a holistic representation of the institution's performance, and is open to the fact that data might reveal unexpected or previously unknown trends or issues.

Competency	Behavior	Level of Proficiency				
		5	4	3	2	1
Qualitative and quantitative data	Understand how to use quantitative and qualitative data for decision-making and to support process improvement.					
Data analytics	Understand how to analyze data to improve efficiency within your unit, to support subordinates with resolving problems or identifying new solutions for a student need, and for discontinuing or modifying existing activities.					

How did you attain the above level of proficiency? (choose all that apply)

- Graduate Degree



- In-House Grow-Your-Own Program
- Conferences, Workshops and/or Webinars
- Mentoring and/or Coaching
- Progressive Administrative Responsibilities within a Community College
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

How do you plan to continue to acquire proficiency in the areas that need additional development?  
(choose all that apply)

- Graduate Degree
- In-House Grow-Your-Own Program
- Conferences, Workshops and/or Webinars
- Mentoring and/or Coaching
- Progressive Administrative Responsibilities within a Community College
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Advocacy and Mobilizing/Motivating Others:** 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.

Competency	Behavior	Level of Proficiency				
		5	4	3	2	1
Community college ideals	Understand that you are always representing your college. Be willing to speak up and advocate for the mission and goals of the community college in your community.					
Stakeholder mobilization	Understand that to mobilize stakeholders to champion initiatives, you must establish trust and be seen as having mutual respect for colleagues. Be willing to lock arms with team members to advance initiatives that support student success.					
Media relations	Understand the college's procedures for engaging with the media. If you are called upon for a print or on-camera interview, understand that average consumers need clear, concise messaging. Work with your college's public relations staff to develop your talking points.					
Marketing and social media	Take opportunities to promote college successes, accomplishments, and new activities.					

How did you attain the above level of proficiency? (choose all that apply)

- Graduate Degree
- In-House Grow-Your-Own Program
- Conferences, Workshops and/or Webinars
- Mentoring and/or Coaching
- Progressive Administrative Responsibilities within a Community College
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

How do you plan to continue to acquire proficiency in the areas that need additional development?  
(choose all that apply)

- Graduate Degree
- In-House Grow-Your-Own Program
- Conferences, Workshops and/or Webinars
- Mentoring and/or Coaching
- Progressive Administrative Responsibilities within a Community College
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Fundraising and Relationship Cultivation:** An effective community college leader cultivates relationships across sectors that support the institution and advance the community college agenda.

Competency	Behavior	Level of Proficiency				
		5	4	3	2	1
Fundraising	Follow college policy for seeking grant funds. Do not pursue opportunities that do not directly align with the college's priorities. Engage all individuals who would have responsibility for grant implementation in the application process.					
Alumni relationships	Work with the college's alumni relations office to provide support, if appropriate, to advance the college's goals for engagement.					
Media relationships	Be familiar with the college's policy and procedures for media engagement. Be willing to engage with media on behalf of the college if called upon to do so. Understand the importance of working with the college's public relations team to advance the college's messages.					
Legislative relations	Understand your state's legislative process, including budgeting. Look for opportunities to observe the college's CEO engaging with legislative and congressional leaders. Take note of the importance of relationship building in advancing the college's agenda.					
Public relations	Maintain awareness that as an employee of the institution you are always representing the college. Institutional representation is everyone's responsibility.					
Workforce partnerships	Always keep your eyes open for potential opportunities to build workforce partnerships for the college. If you encounter a lead for a promising partnership, be willing to connect the potential partner to the college's workforce officer as well as to other members of the leadership team who would fulfill a critical role in implementing a successful partnership.					

How did you attain the above level of proficiency? (choose all that apply)

- Graduate Degree
- In-House Grow-Your-Own Program
- Conferences, Workshops and/or Webinars
- Mentoring and/or Coaching
- Progressive Administrative Responsibilities within a Community College

Other \_\_\_\_\_

How do you plan to continue to acquire proficiency in the areas that need additional development?  
(choose all that apply)

- Graduate Degree
- In-House Grow-Your-Own Program
- Conferences, Workshops and/or Webinars
- Mentoring and/or Coaching
- Progressive Administrative Responsibilities within a Community College
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Communications:** An effective community college leader demonstrates strong communication skills, leads and fully embraces the role of community college spokesperson.

Competency	Behavior	Level of Proficiency				
		5	4	3	2	1
Presentation, speaking, and writing skills	Practice your communication skills. Take opportunities to make presentations and speak on topics that you are passionate about. Be willing to engage with your subordinates to ensure that your communications to them are clear and easy to understand.					
Active listening	Practice active listening so that you may gain appreciation for, and understanding of, other positions. Do not enter every conversation with responses formulated before questions are asked.					
Global and cultural competence	Seek opportunities within your role at the college to gain knowledge about the cultures of the students that the institution serves so that you may focus on ways to support your subordinates in designing strategies that meet their needs.					
Strategies for multi-generational engagement	Understand that every student does not receive information in the same way, and that generational differences can impact the way that a student engages with the college. Be willing to adapt your administrative strategies to reach students from different generations so they can meet their goals.					
Email etiquette	Be cognizant of email etiquette and rules governing communications in writing. In cases where tone and message can potentially be misinterpreted, ask a colleague for feedback before sending.					
Fluency with social media and emerging technologies	Engage with the latest technologies that impact student learning and institutional operations. Be willing to advocate for the use of technologies that will meet institutional needs.					
Consistency in messaging	Be consistent in messaging within and outside of the college. Ensure that all messaging is consistent with the operations of the institution.					
Crisis communications	Know your leadership responsibilities within the context of the college's crisis management and					

	communications plans. Be available to provide your staff with updates on the event, and ensure that they are fulfilling their duties in response to the event.					
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How did you attain the above level of proficiency? (choose all that apply)

- Graduate Degree
- In-House Grow-Your-Own Program
- Conferences, Workshops and/or Webinars
- Mentoring and/or Coaching
- Progressive Administrative Responsibilities within a Community College
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

How do you plan to continue to acquire proficiency in the areas that need additional development? (choose all that apply)

- Graduate Degree
- In-House Grow-Your-Own Program
- Conferences, Workshops and/or Webinars
- Mentoring and/or Coaching
- Progressive Administrative Responsibilities within a Community College
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**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 the college community, and sustain the community college mission.

Competency	Behavior	Level of Proficiency				
		5	4	3	2	1
Interconnectivity and interdependence	Understand and appreciate the interconnectivity and interdependence between faculty, staff, and administrators in advancing student success initiatives.					
Work with supervisor	Establish a process for routine communications with your supervisor. Ensure that you are clear on your supervisor's expectations. Alert your supervisor promptly regarding any personal or professional challenges that may impact your job performance.					
Institutional team building	Promote a team-focused culture within your department. Value each member's contributions to the overall goals of the department. Seek to learn about areas where your team members can improve and offer them professional development opportunities to strengthen their performance.					
Collective bargaining (for employees in collective bargaining states)	Have familiarity with your state's collective bargaining process. Engage with the organization representing you to voice any concerns you may have.					

How did you attain the above level of proficiency? (choose all that apply)

- Graduate Degree
- In-House Grow-Your-Own Program
- Conferences, Workshops and/or Webinars
- Mentoring and/or Coaching
- Progressive Administrative Responsibilities within a Community College
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

How do you plan to continue to acquire proficiency in the areas that need additional development?  
(choose all that apply)

- Graduate Degree
- In-House Grow-Your-Own Program
- Conferences, Workshops and/or Webinars
- Mentoring and/or Coaching
- Progressive Administrative Responsibilities within a Community College
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Personal Traits and Abilities:** An effective leader possesses certain personal traits and adopts a focus on honing abilities that promote the community college agenda.

Competency	Behavior	Level of Proficiency				
		5	4	3	2	1
Authenticity	Know who you are as a leader, including opportunities where you can improve. Be willing to surround yourself with talented people who help you become stronger in areas that are a challenge for you.					
Emotional intelligence	Never allow your emotions to overshadow the issue at hand. Maintain a clear, objective position in dealing with issues. Consult college policies and ensure that your decision is aligned.					
Courage	Be willing to advocate for the right course of action, even when your colleagues are not willing to stand up for it. The sign of a true leader is not just doing the popular thing, but having the courage to speak up for the right thing even when it is difficult.					
Ethical standards	Approach your interactions with students, peers, and college leaders by promoting trust, good behavior, fairness, and/or kindness.					
Self-management and environmental scanning	Manage yourself with professionalism. Ensure that you are knowledgeable about the institution's culture and operations, and conduct yourself in accordance to accomplish goals.					
Time management and planning	Prioritize your assignments and responsibilities based upon most pressing needs, deadlines, and items of most importance. Work with your subordinates to provide them with the support necessary to complete critical assignments in a timely manner.					
Familial impact	Understand the time requirements of your job and the duties that you are assigned, and how that might impact					

	external responsibilities so that you may plan accordingly.					
Forward-looking philosophy	While focusing on the current state of the organization, always survey the landscape for trends and issues that may impact the institution in the future. Be willing to use data and other resources to develop conceptual plans to address trends and issues on the horizon.					
Embrace change	Have a willingness to make changes if they lead to improving programs and services for students.					

How did you attain the above level of proficiency? (choose all that apply)

- Graduate Degree
- In-House Grow-Your-Own Program
- Conferences, Workshops and/or Webinars
- Mentoring and/or Coaching
- Progressive Administrative Responsibilities within a Community College
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

How do you plan to continue to acquire proficiency in the areas that need additional development? (choose all that apply)

- Graduate Degree
- In-House Grow-Your-Own Program
- Conferences, Workshops and/or Webinars
- Mentoring and/or Coaching
- Progressive Administrative Responsibilities within a Community College
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Are you an Aspiring CEO (defined as the person ultimately responsible to answer to the Board of Trustees, whether the title is Chancellor, President or similar)?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Possibly, Haven't Decided \_\_\_\_\_

If you utilize the AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders, how often to you refer to them?

- Weekly
- Monthly
- Quarterly
- Yearly
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Please select Age from the list below?

- 18 – 24
- 25 – 34
- 35 – 44
- 45 – 54
- 55 – 65
- 65 +

Please select Race from the list below:

- American Indian / Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black / African American
- Hispanic / Latino(a)
- Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islander

- White / Caucasian
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Please select Gender from the list below:

- Female
- Male
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like to participate in a Focus Group on this topic?

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## APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL LETTERS



# FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
1010 Campus Drive FLITE 410 Big Rapids, MI 49307  
www.ferris.edu/irb

Date: December 6, 2019

To: Susan DeCamillis, Cora Payne

From: Gregory Wellman, R.Ph, Ph.D, IRB Chair

Re: IRB Application *IRB-FY19-20-92 How do the executive leadership staff at a regional consortium of community colleges in the Midwest assess their level of proficiency in and apply the AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders*

The Ferris State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application for using human subjects in the study, *How do the executive leadership staff at a regional consortium of community colleges in the Midwest assess their level of proficiency in and apply the AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders (IRB-FY19-20-92)* and approved this project under Federal Regulations Exempt Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Your protocol has been assigned project number IRB-FY19-20-92. Approval mandates that you follow all University policy and procedures, in addition to applicable governmental regulations. Approval applies only to the activities described in the protocol submission; should revisions need to be made, all materials must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to initiation. In addition, the IRB must be made aware of any serious and unexpected and/or unanticipated adverse events as well as complaints and non-compliance issues.

Understand that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and participant rights, with the assurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document and investigators maintain consent records for a minimum of three years.

As mandated by Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 46 (45 CFR 46) the IRB requires submission of annual reviews during the life of the research project and a Final Report Form upon study completion. Thank you for your compliance with these guidelines and best wishes for a successful research endeavor.

Regards,



Gregory Wellman, R.Ph, Ph.D, IRB Chair  
Ferris State University Institutional Review Board

# FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**  
1010 Campus Drive FLITE 410 Big Rapids, MI 49307  
www.ferris.edu/irb

Date: November 10, 2020

To: Susan DeCamillis, EdD, Cora Payne

From: Gregory Wellman, R.Ph, Ph.D, IRB Chair

Re: IRB Application *IRB-FY19-20-92 How do the executive leadership staff at a regional consortium of community colleges in the Midwest assess their level of proficiency in and apply the AACCC Competencies for Community College Leaders*

The Ferris State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved your request for revisions to the study, *How do the executive leadership staff at community colleges in Michigan assess their level of proficiency in and apply the AACCC Competencies for Community College Leaders (IRB-FY19-20-92)*.

Your project will continue to be subject to the research protocols as mandated by Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 46 (45 CFR 46) for using human subjects in research. It is your obligation to inform the IRB of any changes in your research protocol that would substantially alter the methods and procedures reviewed and approved by the IRB in your application. Thank you for your compliance with these guidelines and best wishes for a successful research endeavor. Please let us know if the IRB can be of any future assistance.

Regards,



Gregory Wellman, R.Ph, Ph.D, IRB Chair  
Ferris State University Institutional Review Board

# FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
1010 Campus Drive FLITE 410 Big Rapids, MI 49307  
www.ferris.edu/irb

Date: December 7, 2020

To: Susan DeCamillis, EdD and Cora Payne

From: Gregory Wellman, R.Ph, Ph.D, IRB Chair

Re: IRB Application *IRB-FY19-20-92 How do the executive leadership staff at community colleges assess their level of proficiency in and apply the AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders*

The Ferris State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved your request for an extension to continue using human subjects in the study, *How do the executive leadership staff at community colleges assess their level of proficiency in and apply the AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders (IRB-FY19-20-92)*.

Your project will continue to be subject to the research protocols as mandated by Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 46 (45 CFR 46) for using human subjects in research. It is your obligation to inform the IRB of any changes in your research protocol that would substantially alter the methods and procedures reviewed and approved by the IRB in your application. Thank you for your compliance with these guidelines and best wishes for a successful research endeavor. Please let us know if the IRB can be of any future assistance.

Regards,



Gregory Wellman, R.Ph, Ph.D, IRB Chair  
Ferris State University Institutional Review Board