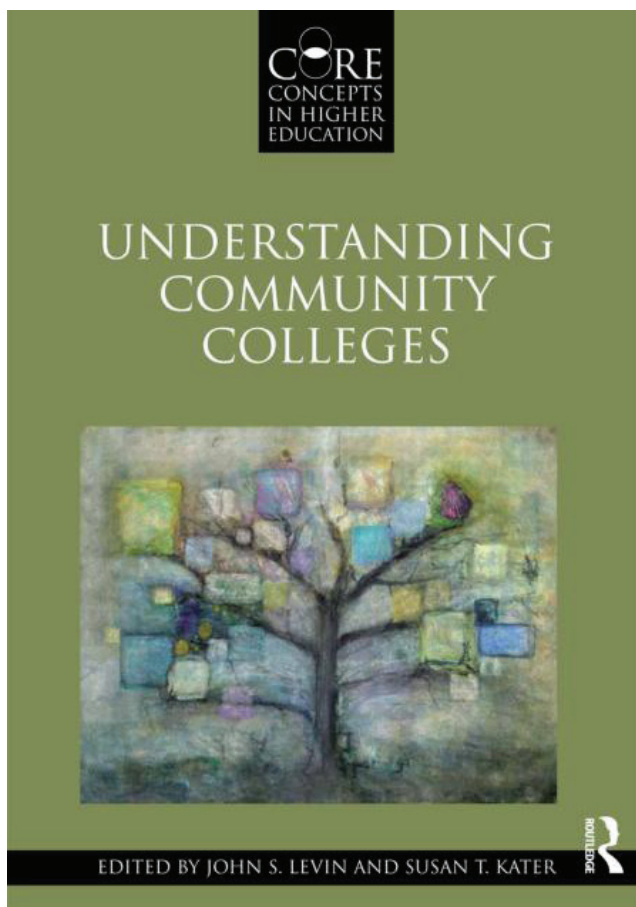


## BOOK REVIEW

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### *Understanding Community Colleges*

edited by John S. Levin and Susan T. Kater

Routledge, 2012, 288 pp.

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A greater understanding of community college dynamics is vital in order for emerging leaders to make effective decisions. Understanding both operational and structural functions allows leaders to make decisions that are reflective of the past and focus on the future. *Understanding Community Colleges*, edited by John S. Levin and Susan T. Kater, provides a comprehensive overview of the history of community colleges and gives insight to meeting their mission. The various authors of this edited book provide suggestions for improving access for students and recognize that in order to influence the diverse populations they serve, instructors must be aware of how to teach the skills needed in a way that meet the needs of diverse learners. *Understanding Community Colleges* provides a comprehensive look into the theories that leaders utilize in their practice, the financial background of the business and proffers suggestions for community college leaders.

This book tenders a relevant and fundamental collection of theories and practice on a series of important topics within community colleges. It provides a comprehensive analysis from a critical and theoretical perspective of scholarly research that sets a precedent for future scholarship in related fields. Although timely, the need for more analysis in these areas is overdue, as political, social and fiscal issues have emerged within colleges. In light of these factors, the text uniquely reviews topics including student success, diversity, leadership, and governance.

Given this, the book was reviewed using what is known as a transformational leadership lens to evaluate the applicability of these topics to the emerging needs of community college leaders and scholars interested in this topic. Transformational leadership is a collaborative style of management that empowers individuals within the or-

ganization in such a way that they often give more than what is required of them. Transformational leaders lead by example and exemplify the value and expectations that they seek from their employees (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). Utilizing this lens to review the book will provide a unique look into whether it applies such a practice to theory and vice versa.

As reviewers, we realize there are numerous leadership styles (e.g. transitional, authoritarian, and transactional), the transformational leadership lens was strategically chosen due to the impact such a style can have for emerging college leaders making institutional changes. As Nevarez and Wood (2010) state, "The need to prepare a new kind of community college leader is of the utmost importance, as the roles and duties of community college leaders have changed greatly from previous generations" (p. vii). We have selected four of the fifteen chapters of the book to review using this lens. These chapters were chosen as they provide vital issues for effective educational leadership and they directly correlate to the American Association of Community College's core competencies for community college leaders (American Association of Community Colleges, 2005).

### Chapter Synthesis

Chapter 2, *Student Diversity in Community Colleges* by Lindsey E. Malcom, examines the trends and challenges associated with diverse student populations among community colleges. Malcom highlights social, economic, and policy factors that create a wide range of student populations with varied levels of academic preparation and educational goals, which ultimately challenge community college leaders, faculty, and staff. A theoretical framework is presented to explicate the pathways associated with different student populations and their relationship to contextual factors impacting community college enrollment. Furthermore, an emphasis is placed on diversity and equity, which further analyzes the need to consider past and present outcomes of the various diverse student populations citing issues of access and historical "risk factors."

Next, Chapter 6, *Teaching Academically Underprepared Students in Community Colleges* by Dolores Perin, reviews the characteristics of academically underprepared students, discusses various ways community colleges currently support these students, and concludes with two strategies leaders can consider when organizing a college

wide approach to services. Community college leaders looking for best structural tactics to incorporate in order to benefit academically underprepared students will find approaches that can be implemented effectively if done in a systematic and collective manner. From an instructional view, Perin (2013) explains in great detail the issue of "contextualization" and describes it as a student-centered approach to teaching. Finally, suggestions are provided for implementing the strategies given to support underprepared students.

In turn, Chapter 9, *Leadership: Community College Transitions* by Marilyn J. Amey, delivers a synopsis of various leadership styles and informs the audience of significant effective and ineffective characteristics of the approaches discussed. Amey posits the need for community college leaders to be reflective of one's own beliefs, one's leadership style, and the culture of the college. Multiple theory-based suggestions are offered for consideration in respect to hiring leaders, training future leaders, and developing a leadership style. In addition, information is provided on how current leadership must vary from past leadership styles due to the current diverse functions of community colleges.

Finally, Chapter 10, *Deconstructing Governance and Expectations for the Community Colleges* by Carrie B. Kisker and Susan T. Kater, discusses the literature related to community college governance. The chapter begins with an explanation of the approaches community college leaders have taken in the past. Kisker and Kater provide greater specificity on the various styles of governance and the stakeholders who are involved within each model. Yet, they recommend that scholars explore more recent governance styles which are more conducive to modern community college environments. Specific attention is given to Federal Systems, Unified Systems, Confederate Systems, Confederated Institutions, and P-16 systems; each is explained with relevant examples of application and discussion as to how the systems affect the college stakeholders. Kisker and Kater conclude with a more recent theoretical explanation pertaining to how and why the governance of a college affects its ability to achieve its objectives.

### Significance of measurement

The authors of *Understanding Community Colleges* offer discussion questions at the end of each chapter as

Table 1  
*Transformational Leadership Matrix: Degree of Focus*

Sampled Chapters	Primary	Secondary	Absent
Chapter 2 <i>Student Diversity in Community Colleges</i>	- Utilize Theory - Informed through practice - Support - Inspire	- Innovative - Empower	- Intrinsically motivate
Chapter 6 <i>Teaching Academically Underprepared Students in Community Colleges</i>	- Utilize Theory - Informed through practice	- Innovative - Empower - Inspire - Support	- Intrinsically motivate
Chapter 9 <i>Leadership: Community College Transitions</i>	- Utilize Theory - Informed through practice - Innovative	- Empower - Intrinsically motivate - Support	- Inspire
Chapter 10 <i>Deconstructing Governance and Expectations for the Community Colleges</i>	- Utilize Theory - Informed through practice - Inspire	- Innovative - Empower - Intrinsically motivate	- Support

their approach to the practical application of their book. To evaluate each chapter and the questions found at the end of each of the selected chapters, we used the following matrix to analyze whether the attributes associated with transformational leadership were applied.

The matrix evaluates whether each of the selected chapters' questions bring forth discussion involving the seven attributes that are consistently used to describe a transformational leader (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Nevarez & Wood, 2012; Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987; Kotter, 2007). The attributes are: empowers, intrinsically motivates, inspires, supports, innovates, utilizes theory and informs through practice. We classify each attribute as either primary, secondary or absent in the discussion questions for each chapter. Primary suggests the attribute is one of the primary focuses of the discussion. Secondary proposes that

the attribute is secondary in the discussion. And finally, absent indicates the attribute is not visible within the discussion at all.

### Critical Analysis

The findings from the matrix suggest the authors of the selected chapters do a thorough job providing questions that invoke both the utilization of theory and informed through practice attributes. Both attributes of a transformational leader were primary focuses of the discussion questions in all 4 chapters analyzed. Theory being a primary focus in all 4 chapters contributes to the book's structure because the book supports differentiated models of practice throughout. However, being informed through practice is not covered significantly and there are few examples in the chapters we reviewed. We found the

authors included 6 of the 7 attributes in each chapter's discussion questions as either a primary or secondary focus. Having included 6 of the 7 attributes ensures emerging leaders receive some exposure to transformational leadership.

In light of the emerging demand for well-equipped educational leaders with a greater understanding of community colleges, the need to balance the historical and theoretical contexts with practical and dynamic applications of transformational leadership would strengthen the book's intent to "motivate future scholars to continue the comprehensive, critical, and empirical study of community colleges..." (Meier et al., 2013, p. vii). Specifically, the inclusion of relevant case studies from practitioners such as chancellors, presidents, and vice presidents would introduce progressive models and other strategies (See, for example, the Transformational Leadership Inventory by Nevarez, Wood, & Penrose, 2013). We believe such components would enhance the richness of this book.

### Synopsis

As educational leaders at all levels face unprecedented institutional issues both internally and externally, a greater understanding of U.S. community colleges is essential. Future leaders require a comprehensive review of historical and theoretical contexts to support emerging issues amongst community colleges. Equally as important, the profession of educational administration and leadership has become multifaceted and places a heavy emphasis on student success. Other issues come into play such as politics, community college missions, governance, leadership theories/models, and praxis. As stated by Nevarez and Wood (2013), given the multiplicity of issues, a greater need to develop the analytical thinking and problem-solving skills of educational leaders is needed. *Understanding Community Colleges* provides this analytical lens.

### Further Reading

- Bolman, L. G., & Terrence D. E. (2008). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice, and leadership* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
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- Levin J. S., & Kater, S. T. (Eds.). (2013). *Understanding community colleges*. New York, NY: Taylor and Francis.
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