ABSTRACT

NONCREDIT AND CREDIT DIVISIONS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES:

THE DILEMMA OF MULTIPLE ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITIES

December 2012

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Despite the importance of effective linkages between credit and noncredit divisions, significant barriers interfere with and detract from these units working well together. Community college leaders are challenged to manage these multiple and sometimes competing organizational identities in a complex and rapidly-changing educational landscape.

This study examined how community college members conceptualized organizational identity and how leaders responded to the challenges/ benefits of multiple identities, particularly those of credit and noncredit divisions. These research questions guided this study: 1) How is community college identity conceptualized by community college organizational members? 2) How do community college faculty and staff respond to multiple organizational identities in their day to day activities? 3) How do community college leaders respond to the costs and benefits of multiple organizational identities?

Interviews were conducted at three community colleges with administrators, faculty, and staff from both divisions. Findings suggest that community college organizational identities are

fluid (not static) and organizational identities shape and are shaped by the perspectives and decisions of college leaders.

The study was based on the work of Pratt and Foreman (2000) who suggest that leaders prioritize the number of identities supported by the organization and determine how much interaction is desired between identities based on conditions such as stakeholder support, legitimacy, strategic value, resources constraints, compatibility, interdependence, and diffusion. Of the four ways that Pratt and Foreman's classification scheme suggest managers can respond to multiple organizational identities, the data demonstrated evidence of three: subordination, aggregation, and identity pruning.

When leaders assigned a high level of importance to revenue generation from the noncredit area, they encountered more significant challenges in managing multiple organizational identities. Barriers were difficult to manage and tensions exacerbated when revenue rather than mission was the overarching goal. Common mechanisms such as reporting relationships and decision-making bodies were created to manage multiple organizational identities. Those mechanisms were in alignment with the responses of subordination, aggregation, and identity pruning and shaped how organizational members interpreted the importance of the noncredit division. The aggregation response provided more opportunity for collaborative working relationships between the noncredit and credit divisions and resulted in higher productivity.