Dostilio, L. D. (Ed.). (2017). *The community engagement professional in higher education: A competency model for an emerging field.* **Campus Compact. 224 pp.**

Dostilio, L. D., & Welch, M. (2019). *The community engagement professional's guidebook: A companion to the community engagement professional in higher education.* **Campus Compact. 250 pp.**

Review by Susan B. Harden

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Being perceived as competent is very important to me. When working in a one-of-a-kind community engagement role at a research university, the almost daily query, "Now . . . what is it you do?" contributed to a sense of insecurity. Regardless of whether it was noted explicitly, what I heard in that question was the lingering doubt, "And why are we doing this at our university?" Few colleagues understood what I did, and fewer understood why I was so good at it or why it was critical to our institution's success.

I learned that my experience as a community engagement worker was not unique when I and a handful of others working in higher education across the country formed OEPN, the Outreach and Engagement Practitioners Network, in 2010. OEPN is a community of practice convened and supported by the Engagement Scholarship Consortium. We often describe our group as "having found our people." Unifying aspects of our experience as community engagement workers include misunderstandings about our roles, underappreciation for our contributions, and attributions of any success as unique to our personalities rather than to a set of professional practices and beliefs. At OEPN, we recognize and appreciate the skill set and values that are foundational to success in our roles. Many OEPN conversations focus on how we make these skills and values clearly visible to coworkers, administrators, and peers. We also have common questions about career paths and best practices:

· What do we call ourselves?

· What are the fundamental values

and skills of our work in community engagement?

· How and when do community-engagement roles evolve into a profession with promotion pathways?

· How is competency as a community engagement professional consequently identified, embraced, and measured?

These existential questions asked by community engagement workers are the basis of two important new books from Campus Compact, *The Community Engagement Professional in Higher Education: A Competency Model for an Emerging Field*, edited by Lina Dostilio (2017) and its companion text, *The Community Engagement Professional's Guidebook*, authored by Dostilio and Marshall Welch (2019). For the purposes of this review, the former will be referred to as *A Competency Model*, and the latter will be referred to as *Guidebook*. *A Competency Model* is a discussion of a systematic collection of 103 competencies, in areas of knowledge, skills, abilities, and dispositions, for community engagement professionals and the process undertaken to develop the set. Chapters 1 and 2 describe the model, and Chapters 3 through 9 discuss the literature review research methodology used to create the model. The *Guidebook* is a compilation of advice, questions, and reflections to assist the reader in deep engagement and application of the competencies. I would suggest reading the two texts in sequence. Though the *Guidebook* stands alone, the primary text gives readers context and an explanation of the research methodology used to

develop and select the competencies. This background is helpful because readers of the *Guidebook* may question why certain competencies were included or excluded.

Readers should be aware that the two books differ in tone and intention. *A Competency Model* is an academic introduction to the model and is an edited volume, with different authors explaining their academic contributions to subsets of competencies. It reads like a formal panel presentation at an academic conference, with each chapter representing a research team's contributions to the whole. An authored text, the *Guidebook* feels more like a coaching session with a mentor—a singular voice in an informal tone encouraging reflection.

Job Classification: Community Engagement Professionals

Readers of *A Competency Model* are provided immediate satisfaction with an answer to a perpetual question that plagues community engagement workers: "What do we call ourselves?" Many of our titles and job descriptions are opaque, often defined by project titles, administrative descriptors, or language from the practitioner legacy of outreach and Cooperative Extension. In Chapter 1, "An Explanation of Community Engagement Professionals as Professionals and Leaders," chapter coauthors Dostilio and Perry put forward their preferred occupational title. "Community Engagement Professionals (CEPs) are professional staff whose primary job is to support and administer community–campus engagement" (p. 1). The use of the descriptor "professional" is a foundational precondition in establishing the need for a competency model, as a profession connotes a framing of work with specialized and distinct occupational knowledge, practices, identity, community, and ethics (Bowman et al., 2004; Dingwall, 2008; Keith, 2015). The authors then make their case for the need for a competency model, observing that although there is an abundance of research on community engagement practice, little research exists on the demonstrated behaviors and dispositions that describe CEPs as competent in their roles. Dostilio and Perry make it clear that the intention of the model and underlying research is aspirational, to improve the practice of CEPs through compiling a comprehensive set of skills and dispositions that are nuanced and complex.

Dostilio and Perry attribute this complex-ity to an evolution in the work of the CEP from logistical and instrumental (first generation) to transformational, democratic, and change oriented (second generation), spurred in higher education by calls for deepening public commitments, an accumulation of engaged scholarship, and an increase in institutionalization through infrastructure and centers. The authors perceive the second–generation CEP role as more leadership focused and nuanced, benefiting from the direction provided by a comprehensive set of competencies. The first generation/second generation CEP taxonomy (Welch & Saltmarsh, 2013) informs much of the interpretation of the competency model and is referenced frequently throughout the text. The authors attribute creation of the competencies to a desire to improve on the "trial and error" (p. 45) approach of first–generation CEPs.

In Chapter 2, "Planning a Path Forward: Identifying the Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions of Second–Generation Community Engagement Professionals," Dostilio provides a review of literature for occupational competencies and a description of the methodology utilized in the development of the competency model. Benefits of professional competency systems include establishing a threshold of knowledge for success, providing a road map for professional development and learning, understanding effective practice, and influencing the field toward certain aims. Much of the literature for competency systems, when analyzed critically, describes models that can be used to create barriers to entry into the field, impede advancement, or rigidly police the profession through an inflexible or simplistic system that privileges a narrow or dominant cultural context or a group in power. In response to these concerns, Dostilio offers a disclaimer: "As for the use of the competency model, our genuine hope is that the model is used as a formative and path–making device into iterative and reflexive professional development (rather than as a tool for hiring and firing)" (p. 30). I appreciate the author's hopefulness with regard to the positive application of the competency model for CEPs. However, we owe it to the profession to recognize the historical marginalization of CEPs and lack of job security, especially when compared to that of tenured faculty and, therefore, to carefully monitor how the model is used.

In the second half of Chapter 2 Dostilio

describes the methodology she and her colleagues selected to develop the set of competencies. The methodology consisted of four major steps: a literature review of competencies, pilot testing the competency framework, a review by community engagement leaders, and a survey to gather feedback. The starting point of the competency list was grounded in a review of literature, rather than field observations of CEPs. To assist in the research, 15 research fellows from across the country were selected to conduct a large-scale literature review. Researchers were combined into research groups that reviewed specific categories of literature. Because the literature review yielded very little data speaking directly to competencies of CEPs, research groups used inference to identify the knowledge, skills, abilities, or dispositions required of CEPs to effectively practice within the context of the literature. This methodology has been validated through a similar approach in the development of competencies for the occupational field of professional evaluators within higher education.

The literature review and inference process yielded a first draft of 102 competencies across seven areas of focus. Drafts were peer reviewed at community engagement conferences and revised based on feedback. An online survey was distributed to all Campus Compact members to capture additional feedback. The final set of 103 competencies describes knowledge, skills and abilities, dispositions, and critical commitments in six areas: leading change within higher education (Chapter 5), institutionalizing community engagement on a campus (Chapter 6), facilitating students' civic learning and development (Chapter 7), administering community engagement programs (Chapter 4), facilitating faculty development and support (Chapter 9), and cultivating high-quality partnerships (Chapter 8). The final six chapters in *A Competency Model* detail the inference methodology utilized for each respective area.

Critical Commitments: A Special Category in the Competency Model

Within the process of deliberation among the research group, a high priority category of behavior, "critical commitments," was identified as requiring special attention. In Chapter 3, "Critical Perspectives and Commitments Deserving Attention From Community Engagement Professionals,"

authors Hernandez and Pasquesi frame community engagement work within a set of critical theories and practices that acknowledges the power within relationships, commits to the elimination of oppressive structure, and works for social justice. This chapter presents research about the deeply problematic aspects of occupational competency models. Hernandez and Pasquesi acutely point to literature that grounds competency models, and the underlying values of competition, universality, and decontextualization from moral and ethical considerations, within a positivist, neoliberal, and oppressive ideology. Therefore, "even carefully crafted guidelines for practice can do damage if they are not placed in context of social realities, namely different and competing interests as well as outright conflict . . . for example, class, race, gender and even nationality" (Cruz, 1990, p. 322).

It is in light of the critique of competency models presented in Chapter 3 that the CEP competency model menu has three categories of competencies—knowledge, skills and abilities, and dispositions—and a separate break-out menu for critical commitments (which are not the same as competencies, according to the authors). The literature influencing the development of the critical commitments was drawn from research in the areas of social change, power, and authenticity. Examples of the critical commitments in the CEP model (pp. 46–51) include

- understanding the dynamics of power and privilege in faculty roles in moving toward emancipatory and democratic practices

- ability to name injustices and power differentials

- ability to challenge problematic language use (e.g., paternalistic, dehumanizing, oppressive).

I applaud Dostilio and the research team for acknowledging the contradictions and the paradox of designing a competency model that prioritizes social justice within broader systems of oppression. With the inclusion of critical commitments, the authors make clear their intentions and attempt to create an explicit counternarrative to offset an exploitative application of the competencies.

Guidebook: A Way for CEPs to Dig Into the Competency Model

If *The Competency Model* describes the

"what" for CEP competencies, the *Guidebook* provides the "how." The book is intended to help CEPs integrate the CEP competency model into practice. As the competency model is a large set, composed of 103 competencies (knowledge, skills and abilities, dispositions, and critical commitments) divided into six areas, the *Guidebook* is organized to help the reader by breaking the model into smaller pieces. Chapters are divided into eight practice contexts, generally in alignment with the model: for example, Chapter 5, "Knowing Community Engagement Administration"; Chapter 7, "Facilitating Students' Civic Learning and Development"; and Chapter 9, "Cultivating High-Quality Partnerships." Each chapter begins by presenting the relevant competencies and critical commitments for each practice context. Chapter 2, "Adopting and Promoting the Public Purposes of Higher Education," explores 10 competencies and critical practices associated with adopting and promoting the public purposes of higher education. Examples include Competency 2.1, "knowledge of ideologies and political, social, and historical contexts underpinning higher education," and Competency 2.2, "knowledge of and ability to encourage a democratic engagement orientation (participatory processes, co-creation of knowledge, co-planning, inclusivity, etc.)" (p. 14). The authors, Dostilio and Welch, provide useful theoretical frameworks, resources, advice, stories, and self-reflections as tools for readers to assist in the integration of the competencies into practice.

In Chapter 1, "The Pathway," the authors encourage readers to understand competency as a process rather than a destination and therefore use metaphors of journey, path, road, trail, and guide throughout the text. Chapters 2 through 10 can be read as standalone works so readers can jump between chapters as needed. Within each chapter, Dostilio and Welch take an inquiry and critical self-reflection approach to engage readers. Each chapter has multiple breakout features, "compass points," which are an extension of the journey metaphor and invite readers to answer thought-provoking questions, such as "The word *competency* conveys a range of notions and meaning. What does the word *competence* mean to you?" (p. 10).

The compass point activities vary in length and depth. Some activities span multiple pages and encourage the reader to undertake detailed and involved actions. Readers may find themselves dwelling in a chapter for weeks, as many of the compass point questions require extended activities and reflections. For example, Chapter 3, "Leading Change in Higher Education," challenges the reader with a CEP competency associated with leading change, Competency 3.3, "able to articulate connection between institutional mission and community engagement" (p. 36). Dostilio and Welch provide eight compass point activities in this chapter to facilitate competency integration. The compass point activity Leading Change—C asks the reader to collect the following institutional artifacts: mission and vision statements, history of the institution's founding and any major historical moments, most recent strategic plan, recent accreditation self-study documents, peer institutions, presidential speeches, alumni newsletters, and website content, then asks the reader to answer a series of questions about how these documents convey and propel institutional community engagement. Compiling the relevant documents alone might take the reader weeks. Although highly involved, it is easy to see that this artifact inquiry activity is necessary and helpful for a CEP in developing competency. Furthermore, many of the compass point activities can be beneficial activities for groups, teams, or departments.

I found Chapter 5, "Knowing Community Engagement Administration," and Chapter 6, "Doing Community Engagement Administration," particularly interesting as an emerging area of importance for CEPs as centers, offices, and staff in this area continue to proliferate. Understanding the context knowledge ground in community-engaged pedagogy and scholarship, and managing staff, students, partners, programs, and budgets are critical to successful administration. Improving our performance as community engagement managers and administrators seems underresearched and little discussed in CEP literature, and I was pleased to see two chapters devoted to its importance.

Most chapters in the *Guidebook* end with a feature called "Our Critical Commitments: Questions to Ask," which helps readers to consider deeply the social justice aspects of the competency model through a series of queries about power, privilege, and equity. For example, Chapter 7, "Facilitating Students' Civic Learning and Development," discusses eight competencies and two critical commitments from the CEP competency

model. Under "Our Critical Commitments," the authors ask readers: "What is your current ability, or level of skill, to have discussions with students about critical consciousness?" (p. 154). As a reader, I found it difficult to answer this question without a baseline level of knowledge regarding what levels of skills look like.

This question points to a truth in the *Competency Model* and *Guidebook.* The competencies are aspirational statements. For example, a competency in the area of institutionalizing community engagement on a campus is "able to advocate for community engagement and communicate its value, vision, and goals in your context" (*Competency Model*, p. 47). The behaviors that comprise proficiency or high-quality practice are left unstated. The CEP competency model gives us a comprehensive list of things to do, which is helpful. Of course, a logical next question is, "Am I performing the competency at a high level?" The *Guidebook* prompts us to ask these questions, but answers about high-quality practice are left to readers to determine for themselves. I am certain that future areas of research on the competency model will start to consider descriptions of high-quality practices.

Readers of this review might wonder if the CEP competency model is applicable for all varieties of community-engaged work. Although this model clearly speaks to the predominant CEP role within teaching and learning, it is important to question the relevance of these books for community-engaged work that does not involve students. The daily composition of CEP work is different for professionals in areas such as policy analysis or program evaluation, and many of the 103 competencies nonetheless describe the work of professional staff whose primary job is to support and administer community–campus engagement regardless of the presence of students. These texts may be even more significant for these CEPs because of their marginalized and often hidden roles in a higher education system that functions around students. The ability to describe and independently nurture career paths for these non-student-centered CEP roles may be even more critical.

Without question, Dostilio and her coauthors have made a monumental contribution to the field of community engagement with the CEP competency model. Surely this model will ignite more research on the profession of CEPs, provide a framework for professional development, and enhance community–campus partnerships. These texts should be required reading for all CEPs.

About the Reviewer

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