



# LaGuardia Community College

## ***Minding the Dream:*** ***The Process and Practice of the American Community College***

By Gail O. Mellow and Cynthia Heelan

In ***Minding the Dream***, authors Mellow and Heelan argue that America as we know it today would not exist without community colleges. They provide an overview of the inclusive, democratic and meritocratic impulses of the community colleges, and their transparent boundaries between college, work and social life. *Minding the Dream* is explicit in its goal of keeping alive community colleges' promise of advancement and opportunity that functions unlike any other institution in the U.S. Mellow and Heelan argue that, without community colleges, America would not have a middle class, and the financial disparities that plague the U.S. would be much more severe than they are now. Yet ***Minding the Dream*** also takes the perspective of a critical friend, detailing how the promise of community colleges is only imperfectly realized.

No other single book currently provides challenging, reflective information about community colleges that is data-based, clear and accessible. *Minding the Dream* is a scholarly text written with a large audience in mind. The fourteen chapters cover the common policy areas and practices of community colleges, such as financing, pedagogy, leadership and developmental education. Each of the fourteen chapters begins by articulating the *Dream* (the aspirations associated with each topic), and the *Unfulfilled Dream* (the ways community colleges fall short), and then describes the *Real Story* by reviewing the scholarship in each area. A new Board of Trustee member unfamiliar with the issues would be well served to just to read the *Dream* and *Unfulfilled Dream* sections, while a new faculty member would be well served to read several of the practice chapters in their entirety. Each chapter concludes with *Challenges to the Field*, where the authors make specific and actionable recommendations.

This accessible, comprehensive book provides an impassioned call for sustaining and improving the community college sector. Over 100 years old, community colleges were created to revolutionize college education in the United States. A uniquely American contribution to higher education, community colleges now enroll nearly half of all American undergraduates in credit-bearing programs, while receiving only 20% of the nation's higher education funding. The authors' own experience of the transformative power of a community college education in students' lives runs against the predominant stories of failure so frequently voiced by others; their clear-eyed critique provides the necessary orientation for future improvements.



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In *Minding the Dream*, authors Gail O. Mellow and Cynthia Heelan demonstrate another unique aspect of American community colleges: the passion that has made community colleges a “movement.” Community college leaders like Dr. Mellow and Dr. Heelan often see themselves as missionaries of educational opportunity. But the authors also remind us of the challenges and problems that we need to solve if community colleges—and America—are to realize their true potential. Students who lack financial resources and face other obstacles need more help than is now being provided. Lack of transfer policies discourage too many students from moving on to receive baccalaureate degrees. The growing numbers of under-prepared students severely tax the ability of community colleges to improve student success rates. Above all, persistent under-funding threatens to undermine this most vulnerable segment of American higher education.

As the authors point out, the dream really does need minding. A new generation of faculty and leaders will soon be taking the reins at these institutions. They must be adequately prepared to be successful, and they must understand—and be able to defend—the unique values of the Community College Movement and the challenges faced by its students. The authors make a persuasive argument that adequate resources must be provided both to the institutions and to their students. Community colleges really have accomplished miracles, but Drs Mellow and Heelan eloquently argue for how much more community colleges could accomplish if they were incorporated as full partners American higher education policies and practices.

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