# Teaching Leadership Online:
# An Exploratory Study of Instructional and Assessment Strategy Use

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## Abstract

This global, quantitative study explores the instructional and assessment strategy use of leadership educators who teach online, academic credit-bearing leadership studies courses at graduate- and undergraduate-levels. Participants include 81 graduate-level and 37 undergraduate-level instructors who taught an online leadership studies course within two years of completing the web-based survey used in this study. Findings suggest that discussion-based pedagogies, most commonly facilitated in online discussion boards, were the most widely used strategies. And, while reflection, case studies, and group or individual projects were also used frequently, instructors teaching graduate-level courses used ungraded formative quizzes significantly more often than undergraduate instructors. Findings also suggest that instructors attached the most weight to their students' overall course grades to discussion boards, major writing projects or term papers, and participation.

## Introduction

Despite the interest in leadership education and the vast growth of distance learning (Phelps, 2012), the few studies that have looked at instructional or assessment strategy use have been limited chiefly to face-to-face, undergraduate, and U.S.-based studies. Since 2000, only a few studies have explored instructional or assessment strategy use in leadership education (e.g., Allen & Hartman, 2009; Eich, 2008; Jenkins 2012, 2013). While these studies addressed learning in face-to-face environments, there is little research related to online teaching and learning environments in leadership education. Moreover, prior studies have been void of leadership educators who teach online courses, those who teach graduate-level courses, and those instructors based outside the United States. Yet, according to the International Leadership Association (ILA) Directory of Leadership Programs, of the more than 2,000 leadership programs that exist today, more than half offer blended or online courses and over 100 are based outside the U.S. In fact, almost no research exists in regard to leadership educators teaching online leadership studies courses. To address this gap in the literature, this study used a global survey to specifically target instructors who teach academic credit-bearing online undergraduate- and graduate-level leadership studies courses.

**Purpose and Significance of the Study.** The purpose of this study was to explore the instructional and assessment strategy use of leadership educators who teach fully online courses at the undergraduate or graduate level. A quantitative research design was used. Specifically,

an international web-based questionnaire was used to measure the frequency of use of a defined group of instructional and assessment strategies by instructors who teach online leadership studies courses. The survey was driven by the following research questions:

1. What are the most frequently employed instructional strategies used by instructors teaching fully online undergraduate- or graduate-level leadership studies courses?

2. With respect to frequency of instructional strategy use, what differences are there between instructors teaching undergraduate- and graduate-level online leadership studies courses?

3. What assessment strategies do instructors teaching fully online undergraduate- or graduate-level leadership studies give the most weight in overall grading?

A study of online instructional and assessment strategy use by instructors who teach undergraduate- and graduate-level online leadership studies courses is important for several reasons. First, more than 200 institutions in the ILA Directory of Leadership Programs offer online, academic programs in leadership—and the list is growing. Understanding the types of instruction and assessment employed by leadership educators in these programs can help reveal areas for professional development and open doors for additional inquiry on online leadership pedagogy. Second, this is the first study of its kind to explore the instructional and assessment strategy use of instructors who teach online courses in these leadership programs on a global scale. Knowledge of a general utilization of instructional and assessment choices can serve as input for faculty and administrators seeking to develop online leadership programs and curriculum. Third, researchers have looked only at instructional and assessment strategy use in face-to-face, undergraduate, and U.S.-based courses. This study seeks to add depth to the online leadership education literature and provide a snapshot of instructional and assessment strategy use.

## Literature Review

With the current state and growth of leadership studies as well as the development of online leadership education, the need for research exploring the various strategies for online teaching and learning in the discipline has never been greater. Although there is very little discussion of online instructional strategy use in leadership education specifically, the literature exploring online pedagogy generally offers cogent descriptions of the most salient practices (e.g., Bonk & Zhang, 2008; Salmon, 2002). Only very recently has the quality or use of specific instructional strategies in leadership education been explored empirically (see Jenkins, 2012, 2013), yet exploration into the use of instructional strategies such as reflection (Burbach, Matkin, & Fritz, 2004; Densten & Gray, 2001; White, 2012), service learning (Scharff, 2009; Seemiller, 2006), teambuilding (Moorhead & Griffin, 2010), research leadership (Jones & Kilburn, 2005), critical thinking (Gifford, 2010; Jenkins & Cutchens, 2011), feedback (Day, 2000), self-assessments (Buschlen, 2009), role-play (Jenkins & Cutchens, 2012; Sogurno, 2003), simulation (Allen, 2008), exams (Moore, 2010), and the case-in-point approach (Parks, 2005) individually has been marginal. Phelps (2012) explored a variety of technologies and provided suggestions on how to best leverage them for maximum student engagement in leadership education. Yet,

amid all the conversations and research related to leadership education, there is little, if any, mention of effective pedagogical incorporation of technology. Only a few studies have investigated instructional strategy use in online leadership education generally (e.g., Boyd & Murphrey, 2001; Cini, 1998; Jenkins, Endersby, & Guthrie, 2015; McCotter, 2008; Newberry, Culbertson, & Carter, 2013; Phelps, 2012; and Saks, 2009) or with respect to specific online instructional techniques such as discussion boards (Dollisso, 2011), blogs (Gifford, 2010; Giraud, Cain, Stedman, & Gifford, 2011), service learning (Guthrie & McCracken, 2010), social media (Odom, Jarvis, Sandlin & Peek, 2013; Steves, Keen, Hooker, Keane, Needles, & Fuess, 2011), and simulation (Weeks, 2013).

**Frequency of Use.** Quantity does not always contribute to quality. According to Lei's (2010) study of instructional technology use with respect to the quantity of technology (frequency of use) versus the quality of technology (how it is used), no significant impact was found with respect to the frequency of use and student outcomes. On the other hand, when considering the quality of how technology was used, Lei (2010) found significant outcomes connected to student learning. And, while Phelps (2012, p. 67) is keen to suggests that, "leadership educators often seek to 'meet students where they are at,' leading more and more practitioners to incorporate technology into their courses, program, and events," quantity does not necessarily translate into quality. Further, while the present study explores pedagogical use by leadership educators, it does not address the ongoing void of empirical studies that support the connection between technology and student outcomes (see Lei, 2010); a particular focus of which should be on *digital natives* (Prensky, 2001), those students born after 1980 who have never known a world where the Internet was not present and current information is no further away than their smartphone or tablet. According to Phelps (2012):

> With changing student populations and learner needs, e-learning applications provide a powerful tool through which to engage students in more accessible, flexible, and cost-effective ways. Considerations to keep in mind when engaging in distance or blended learning options include ensuring that e-learning applications engage versus unintentionally marginalize students (Liu, Liu, Lee, & Magjuka, 2010), diverse ways to increase integration and collaboration among learners, and attention to cultural and learning style preferences in online settings. (p. 68)

Scholars advise against the use of technology for its own sake (Jones & Cuthrell, 2011; Lei, 2010). Likewise, instructors should ensure technology integrates with content (Moody, 2010). Specifically, "including multimedia such as blogs, podcasts, and videos in presentations, classes, or to kick off programs can be effective in moderation. However, too much multimedia can be ineffective and confusing if not clearly tied to curriculum or content" (Phelps, 2012, p. 73). Phelps (2012) maintains, "both educators and students should have clarity and understanding around the intended use and benefit of technology" (p. 73); what implications does the frequency of use have for both clarity and understanding?

## Method

**Participants.** The 118 participants were 81 graduate-level and 37 undergraduate-level instructors who reported having taught an academic credit-bearing online leadership studies course within the previous two years. This is the largest reported study of this population to date. An initial question determined the eligibility of participants and a second follow-up question asked participants to select a delivery method option for the type of leadership course they taught most frequently. In the study reported here, only participants who selected the following are included: (a) Undergraduate-level, online (100% web-based); and (b) Graduate-level, online (100%) web-based. Participants were then asked to identify one specific academic credit-bearing course that met the delivery method option from the previous question, to type the name of that course in a textbox, and to use that course as a reference point when completing the survey. Course topics ranged from Organizational, Group, and Team-based Leadership (10.4%) to Special Topics in Leadership (8.4%), Theory (5.1%), and Ethics and Values (4.5%).

The analyzed data were collected from a web-based questionnaire through an international study that targeted thousands of leadership studies instructors through three primary sources from March 31, 2013, through May 3, 2013. The first source was the organizational memberships or databases of the following professional associations/organizations or their respective member interest groups: (a) the ILA; (b) the Association of Leadership Educators (ALE); (c) NASPA (Student Affairs Professionals in Higher Education) Student Leadership Programs Knowledge Community (SLPKC); and (d) the National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs (NCLP). The second source was the attendee list of the 2012 Leadership Educators Institute (LEI), an innovative bi-annual conference-like forum geared specifically towards new to mid-level student affairs professionals and leadership educators who coordinate, shape, and evaluate leadership courses and programs, create co-curricular leadership development opportunities and experiment with new technologies for doing so. The third source was a random sample of instructors drawn from the ILA Directory of Leadership Programs, a searchable directory of leadership programs available to all ILA members. While e-mail addresses were used to invite potential participants to take the survey, this research was anonymous.

While the first and second sources were more so "shotgun approaches," they were also more likely to have ideal participants as members or attendees. While the ILA member database, ILA Directory of Leadership Programs, and LEI Attendee list provided access to members or attendees respectively, the researcher did not have access to the individual e-mails for the NASPA SLPKC, ALE, and NCLP groups. And, while the latter did send out invitation e-mails to participate in this study's survey to their respective listservs, return rates are not available due to the undisclosed number of recipients. Nonetheless, the return rates for the ILA member directory (12.57%), ILA Directory of Leadership programs (11.25%) and LEI (25.08%) were promising. However, there was a potential for overlap among targeted groups, which may affect the precision of the return rates. Overall, these data collection procedures provided the researcher with the best possible sources to generalize the population.

**Instrument Development.** To explore the research questions within the framework of distance learning and leadership education, a list of commonly utilized instructional and

assessment strategies used in both online and leadership education contexts was created. The selection of online instructional strategies was informed by the empirical studies of Djajalaksana (2011; see also Fletcher, Djajalaksana, & Eison, 2012; Djajalaksana, Dedrick, & Eison, 2013) as well as the work of Salmon (2002), Bonk, Graham, Cross, and Moore (2005), and Bonk and Zhang (2008), all of whom published extensive guidebooks for online learning in educational settings. Additionally, studies by Allen and Hartman (2008a, 2009b, 2009), who created one of the first comprehensive lists of leadership development teaching methods found in the literature (see also Avolio, 1999; Day, 2000; London, 2002; Yukl, 2006) and later, Jenkins (2012, 2013) who conducted an empirical exploration of instructional strategy use of undergraduate leadership educators, also informed the list of instructional strategies surveyed (see Table 1) to a large extent. The selection of assessment strategies (see Table 2) was also informed by many of the aforementioned scholars and practitioners who included data or resources on assessment techniques in higher or leadership education as well. In the end, final selection for inclusion in this study was based on a combination of recommendations from a panel of experts, tested in a pilot study, a review of the literature, and the researcher's expertise and experience. Admittedly, all instructional and assessment methods have their pros and cons. Indeed, because learning about leadership and developing leadership skills may be different than learning other content in a traditional classroom setting, leadership education may need different strategies for facilitating learning (Eich, 2008; Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2007; Wren, 1995). Accordingly, leadership education requires its own examination to determine how effective teaching and learning of leadership is done.

Table 1
*Online Instructional Strategies*

| No. | Instructional Strategy | Description |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Case studies | Students examine written or oral stories or vignettes that highlight a case of effective or ineffective leadership. |
| 2 | Class Polling and Surveys | Students complete online polls or surveys designed to collect data on peer or social ideas and constructs. |
| 3 | Computer-based Learning Exercises/Games/Simulations | Students complete interactive computer-based learning exercises. |
| 4 | Discussion Boards: Instructor-lead | Students participate in instructor moderated online discussions of course content. |
| 5 | Discussion Boards: Shared Instructor-Student | Students participate with each other and the instructor in shared online discussions of course content. |
| 6 | Discussion Boards: Student-lead | Students participate in and moderate online discussions of course content. |
| 7 | Group Discussion | Students read and respond to text or other prompts in assigned or self-selected subgroups. |
| 8 | Interactive Presentation | Students view an interactive presentation (i.e., PowerPoint, Prezi) prior to participating in online discussion with an assigned group. |
| 9 | Media Clips | Students learn about leadership theory/topics through film, television, or other media clips (e.g., YouTube, Hulu). |
| 10 | Online Collaborative Projects | Students contribute to creation of a course-based website or wiki. |
| 11 | Online Debates | Students form opposing groups (in response to instructor prompts or topics) and argue for or against a position using course concepts, evidence, logic, etc. |
| 12 | Online Formative Quizzes | Students take ungraded online quizzes covering course content. |
| 13 | Online Lecture | Students view instructor presentations delivered in online media (real-time streaming video/audio or off-line video/ audio recordings). |
| 14 | Participation in Social Networking | Instructor uses social networking (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) as a tool for student participation, activities, assignments, or communication. |
| 15 | Problem-based Learning | Students learn about leadership through the experience of problem solving in specific situations. |
| 16 | Reflective Journals/Blogs | Students create ungraded reflective online journal entries in a personal weblog/blog. |
| 17 | Scavenger Hunts | Students find and discuss web resources or accomplish a set of online tasks. |
| 18 | Self-Assessments & Instruments | Students complete questionnaires or other instruments designed to enhance their self-awareness in a variety of areas (e.g., learning style, personality type, leadership style, etc.). |
| 19 | Student Questions/Activities | Students create questions or design activities for peer participation. |
| 20 | Student-Peer Evaluation | Students critique other students' work using previously described criteria and provide specific suggestions for improvement. |

Table 2
*Online Assessment Strategies*

| No. | Assessment Strategy | Description |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Case or Case Study Analysis | Students are graded on coherence, relevancy to class, ideas generated, content integration, etc. |
| 2 | Discussion Boards | Students are graded on the quality and content of their discussion posts. |
| 3 | Exams | Students complete online tests or exams intended to assess subject matter mastery. |
| 4 | Group Projects/Presentations | Students are graded on work from a prescribed project or online presentation in a small group. |
| 5 | Individual Leadership Development Plans | Students develop specific goals and vision statements for individual leadership development. |
| 6 | Individual Research Projects/Presentations | Students actively research a leadership theory or topic and present findings in online presentation or written format. |
| 7 | Major Writing Project/Term Paper | Students write a significant paper exploring course content or research (such as a literature review) as a major course assignment. |
| 8 | Observation/Interview of a Leader | Students observe or interview an individual leading others effectively or ineffectively and report their findings to the instructor/class. |
| 9 | Online/E-Portfolio | Students document their own learning stored in an online/electronic portfolio on the internet. |
| 10 | Participation | Students are given points for active participation in online course activities such as discussions, chats, or other interactive computer-based learning exercises. |
| 11 | Quizzes | Student complete short graded online quizzes intended to assess subject matter mastery. |
| 12 | Read and Respond | Students are graded on their responses to questions generated by the instructor or from the end of the text chapter for the purpose of allowing students to explore specific ideas or statements in depth and breadth. |
| 13 | Reflective Journals | Students are graded on the quality of written reflections on their experiences or understandings of lessons learned about course content. |
| 14 | Self-evaluations | Students respond in writing to criteria set for evaluating their learning. |
| 15 | Short Papers | Students author one or more short papers (ten pages or fewer) exploring course content. |
| 16 | Student Peer Assessment | Students critique other students' work using previously described criteria and provide specific suggestions for improvement. |
| 17 | Video Creation or Digital Storytelling | Students create short video presentations and post them online. |

**Type of Research Data.** The analyzed data were collected from a 41-item web-based survey. The questionnaire format of the web-based survey in this study implemented as many principles from Andres (2012), Evans and Mathur (2005), Dillman, Tortora, and Barker (1999) as possible. The questionnaire was modeled after the approach used by Jenkins (2012, 2013) to collect data identifying the most frequently used instructional strategies for teaching face-to-face leadership studies courses to undergraduates. Like Jenkins's studies, the instrument provided participants in the present study definitions of each instructional and assessment strategy. As noted above, the 20 instructional strategies and 17 assessment strategies were derived chiefly from Jenkins' (2012 & 2013) study, Allen and Hartman's Sources of Learning in Collegiate Leadership Development Programs (2008a, 2009b, & 2009), and empirical studies by Djajalaksana (e.g., Fletcher, Djajalaksana, & Eison, 2012) as well as Salmon (2002), Bonk, Graham, Cross, and Moore (2005), and Bonk and Zhang (2008), all of whom published extensive guidebooks on online learning in educational settings. Additionally, the survey instrument was used to collect demographic information to profile the participants.

**Data Analysis Techniques.** Descriptive statistics, including frequency tabulation and percentages, were used to determine the most frequently employed instructional strategies. Descriptive statistics were also used to analyze the means and confidence intervals of the item responses indicating frequency of instructional strategy use as well as the overall percentages of assessment strategy use. Participants were asked to describe their frequency of use of instructional strategies listed in Table 1. Since online courses do not have "class meetings" per se and all participants reported that their class was 100% web-based, the survey was designed to report frequency of use of each strategy using the following rating scale:

- 1 – Never
- 2 – Rarely
- 3 – Occasionally
- 4 – Frequently
- 5 – Almost Always/Always

The rating scale for assessment strategy use was designed to capture the overall weight instructors placed on each strategy with respect to students' overall grades in their courses. Accordingly, participants reported the level toward a student's final grade each assessment strategy was given in their courses using the following rating scale:

- 0%, I do not use this type of assessment in my course
- 1-10%
- 11-20%
- 21-30%
- 31-40%
- 41-50%
- 51% or more

Subsequent survey questions asked participants to identify the three instructional and three assessment strategies they used most frequently in their course. These questions included the same 20 instructional and 17 assessment strategies from the previous questions, but also

included an "other" field in which participants could add additional strategies. No "other" strategies appeared more than once. Tables 4 and 7 illustrate the instructional and assessment strategies participants reported in their "Top 3."

The comparison between the instructors who taught undergraduate- and graduate-level courses involved statistical analysis of independent *t*-tests using SPSS. The analysis compared the means of the frequency of use of the instructional and assessment strategies from the two groups of instructors. Additional discussion also includes Cohen's *d* statistics for the two group comparisons.

## Results

**Participant Demographics.** The participants in this study were mostly white (87.0%) or African American (8.5%), female (52.2%), and taught at an institution located in the United States (94.9%) or Canada (2.5%). Also, 77.4% had doctorates, 49.1% reported having more than five years of experience teaching leadership courses, and 36.4% reported having earned their terminal degree in leadership or organizational leadership. Further, while 36.5% of participants reported some post-baccalaureate focus on the study of higher education, college teaching, college student development, or a closely related field, 80.9% reported that their post-baccalaureate studies included significant coursework on leadership theory or development. Relatedly, 22.9% of participants reported completing undergraduate-level leadership coursework, while 81.4% reported the same at the graduate-level.

Participants' primary activity at their institutions was as full-time (40.9%) or part-time (24.3%) faculty. Less than 8% of participants reported their primary activity as full-time staff. Additionally, the institution type of participants was primarily a four-year private (55.6%) or four-year public (38.5%) university. In all, the academic college delivering the online leadership courses taught by the participants was usually Business or Management (16.1%), Education (11.0%), or Arts and Sciences (6.8%). The specific academic department offering these courses was most often Leadership (21.2%), Business (7.6%), or Political Science (5.1%).

**Instructional Strategy Use in Online Leadership Education.** Overall, instructors teaching online leadership studies courses use varying forms of discussion boards and group discussion, self-assessments & instruments, case studies, and reflective journals/blogs most frequently. In fact, more than half–with 58% of graduate-level--of the instructors listed shared instructor-student discussion boards in their "Top 3" (See Table 4). Conversely, online leadership studies instructors used computer-based learning, social networking, and web-based scavenger hunts far less. Further, no instructors listed scavenger hunts or social networking in their "Top 3."

Table 3
*Instructional Strategy Use*

| Instructional Strategy | All Online (*N* = 118) | | Graduate Online (*N* = 81) | | UG Online (*N* = 37) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *M (SD)* | 95% CI | *M (SD)* | 95% CI | *M (SD)* | 95% CI |
| Discussion Boards: Shared Instructor-Student | 4.32 (1.16) | [4.11, 4.53] | 4.38 (1.14) | [4.13, 4.63] | 4.19 (1.22) | [3.80, 4.58] |
| Discussion Boards: Instructor-led | 4.10 (1.34) | [3.86, 4.34] | 4.09 (1.33) | [3.80, 4.38] | 4.14 (1.38) | [3.70, 4.58] |
| Group Discussion | 3.47 (1.52) | [3.2, 3.74] | 3.48 (1.51) | [3.15, 3.81] | 3.46 (1.56) | [2.96, 3.96] |
| Self-Assessments & Instruments | 3.38 (1.40) | [3.13, 3.63] | 3.32 (1.40) | [3.02, 3.62] | 3.51 (1.41) | [3.06, 3.96] |
| Case Studies | 3.32 (1.25) | [3.09, 3.55] | 3.23 (1.22) | [2.96, 3.50] | 3.51 (1.33) | [3.08, 3.94] |
| Media Clips | 3.32 (1.19) | [3.11, 3.53] | 3.35 (1.16) | [3.10, 3.60] | 3.27 (1.26) | [2.86, 3.68] |
| Reflective Journals/Blogs | 3.32 (1.57) | [3.04, 3.6] | 3.42 (1.51) | [3.09, 3.75] | 3.11 (1.70) | [2.56, 3.66] |
| Student Questions/ Activities | 3.30 (1.60) | [3.01, 3.59] | 3.28 (1.59) | [2.93, 3.63] | 3.32 (1.65) | [2.79, 3.85] |
| Discussion Boards: Student-lead | 3.29 (1.55) | [3.01, 3.57] | 3.37 (1.54) | [3.03, 3.71] | 3.11 (1.58) | [2.60, 3.62] |
| Interactive Presentation | 3.09 (1.43) | [2.83, 3.35] | 3.07 (1.43) | [2.76, 3.38] | 3.14 (1.44) | [2.68, 3.60] |
| Problem-based Learning | 3.08 (1.37) | [2.83, 3.33] | 3.14 (1.34) | [2.85, 3.43] | 2.97 (1.46) | [2.50, 3.44] |
| Online Lecture | 3.03 (1.60) | [2.74, 3.32] | 3.10 (1.59) | [2.75, 3.45] | 2.86 (1.64) | [2.33, 3.39] |
| Online Collaborative Project | 2.78 (1.46) | [2.52, 3.04] | 2.83 (1.42) | [2.52, 3.14] | 2.68 (1.56) | [2.18, 3.18] |
| Student-Peer Evaluation | 2.47 (1.43) | [2.21, 2.73] | 2.48 (1.40) | [2.18, 2.78] | 2.43 (1.52) | [1.94, 2.92] |
| Online Formative Quizzes | 2.26 (1.46) | [2, 2.52] | 1.93 (1.26) | [1.93, 1.26] | 3.00 (1.60) | [2.48, 3.52] |
| Online Debates | 2.21 (1.36) | [1.96, 2.46] | 2.17 (1.32) | [2.17, 1.32] | 2.30 (1.45) | [1.83, 2.77] |
| Class Polling and Surveys | 2.16 (1.09) | [1.96, 2.36] | 2.19 (1.12) | [1.95, 2.43] | 2.11 (1.02) | [1.78, 2.44] |
| Computer-based Learning | 2.10 (1.24) | [1.88, 2.23] | 2.02 (1.17) | [1.77, 2.27] | 2.27 (1.39) | [1.82, 2.72] |
| Social Networking | 1.96 (1.14) | [1.75, 2.17] | 1.95 (1.09) | [1.71, 2.19] | 1.97 (1.26) | [1.56, 2.38] |
| Scavenger Hunts | 1.51 (0.90) | [1.35, 1.67] | 1.42 (0.77) | [1.25, 1.59] | 1.70 (1.13) | [1.34, 2.06] |

Note: UG = Undergraduate

Table 4
*Instructor's "Top 3" Instructional Strategies*

| Instructional Strategy | All Instructors | | Graduate Instructors | | Undergraduate Instructors | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | % of sample | *N* | % of sample | *n* | % of sample |
| Discussion Boards: Shared Instructor-Student | 63 | 53.4 | 47 | 58.0 | 16 | 43.2 |
| Case Studies | 42 | 35.6 | 28 | 34.6 | 14 | 37.8 |
| Discussion Boards: Instructor-led | 41 | 34.7 | 25 | 30.9 | 25 | 30.9 |
| Reflective Journals/Blogs | 35 | 29.7 | 29 | 35.8 | 6 | 16.2 |
| Online Lecture | 21 | 17.8 | 14 | 17.3 | 7 | 18.9 |
| Self-Assessments & Instruments | 21 | 17.8 | 9 | 11.1 | 12 | 32.4 |
| Group Discussion | 20 | 16.9 | 18 | 22.2 | 2 | 5.4 |
| Media Clips | 17 | 14.4 | 10 | 12.3 | 7 | 18.9 |
| Problem-based Learning | 16 | 13.6 | 11 | 13.6 | 5 | 13.5 |
| Online Collaborative Project | 14 | 11.9 | 12 | 14.8 | 2 | 5.4 |
| Student Questions/Activities | 14 | 11.9 | 10 | 12.3 | 4 | 10.8 |
| Discussion Boards: Student-led | 12 | 10.2 | 6 | 7.4 | 6 | 16.2 |
| Online Formative Quizzes | 9 | 7.6 | 4 | 4.9 | 5 | 13.5 |
| Interactive Presentation | 9 | 7.6 | 6 | 7.4 | 3 | 8.1 |
| Class Polling | 2 | 1.7 | 2 | 2.5 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Computer-based Learning | 2 | 1.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 5.4 |
| Student-Peer Evaluation | 2 | 1.7 | 1 | 1.2 | 1 | 2.7 |
| Online Debates | 1 | 0.8 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 2.7 |
| Scavenger Hunts | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Social Networking | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 |

**Comparing Undergraduate- and Graduate-level Leadership Studies Online Instruction.** The two samples were identified as Group 1 and Group 2 for the purpose of means comparison using an independent *t*-test. Group 1 ($n = 37$) represented the instructors who taught undergraduate online leadership studies courses and Group 2 ($n = 81$) represented the sample of graduate instructors. The independent *t*-test method was selected as the primary statistical analysis in order to compare the means of responses in both groups. Since the sample sizes in the two groups are different, a pooled variance was computed.

With the results obtained from the independent-groups *t*-test analysis to compare the 20 instructional strategies used in the two instructor groups, the researcher produced the necessary statistics for comparison. However, both groups had relatively small sample sizes, resulting in large standard deviations ranging from 0.77 to 1.70. Nonetheless, the independent *t*-test statistics show the *p*-values for all *t* statistics were insignificant with the exception of online formative quizzes (quizzes). According to the statistical analysis, the frequency of use of quizzes between the two groups varies significantly ($t(57) = 0.39$, $p = .001$. $d = 0.23$). This indicates that quizzes were quite different in terms of the frequency of use in both groups.

Specifically, the undergraduate instructors used quizzes significantly less frequently than the graduate instructors. However, the use of quizzes is in the bottom five, based on the mean scores. This is not a surprise as the researcher is aware of the infrequent use of quizzes in leadership education (e.g., Jenkins, 2012).

Table 5
*Instructional Strategy Use Differences between Instructors Who Teach Online Undergraduate- and Graduate Level Leadership Studies Courses*

| | | Graduate | | Undergraduate | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rank | Instructional Strategy | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* | *df* | *t* | *p* | Cohen's *d* |
| 5 | Case Studies | 3.23 | 1.22 | 3.51 | 1.33 | 65 | 0.08 | .264 | 0.23 |
| 17 | Class Polling | 2.16 | 1.09 | 2.19 | 1.12 | 76 | -0.04 | .722 | 0.02 |
| 13 | Online Collaborative Project | 2.78 | 1.46 | 2.83 | 1.42 | 64 | -0.05 | .604 | 0.03 |
| 18 | Computer-based Learning | 2.10 | 1.24 | 2.02 | 1.17 | 60 | 0.09 | .354 | 0.06 |
| 16 | Online Debates | 2.21 | 1.36 | 2.17 | 1.32 | 64 | 0.05 | .646 | 0.03 |
| 2 | DB: Instructor-led | 4.10 | 1.34 | 4.09 | 1.33 | 68 | 0.02 | .856 | 0.01 |
| 1 | DB: Shared Instructor-Student | 4.32 | 1.16 | 4.38 | 1.14 | 65 | -0.06 | .403 | 0.05 |
| 9 | DB: Student-led | 3.29 | 1.55 | 3.37 | 1.54 | 68 | -0.08 | .395 | 0.05 |
| 15 | Online Formative Quizzes | 2.26 | 1.46 | 1.93 | 1.26 | 57 | 0.39 | .001 | 0.23 |
| 3 | Group Discussion | 3.47 | 1.52 | 3.48 | 1.51 | 68 | -0.01 | .942 | 0.00 |
| 10 | Interactive Presentation | 3.09 | 1.43 | 3.07 | 1.43 | 70 | 0.02 | .830 | 0.01 |
| 12 | Online Lecture | 3.03 | 1.60 | 3.10 | 1.59 | 68 | -0.07 | .463 | -0.05 |
| 6 | Media Clips | 3.32 | 1.19 | 3.35 | 1.16 | 65 | -0.04 | .751 | -0.02 |
| 11 | Problem-based Learning | 3.08 | 1.37 | 3.14 | 1.34 | 65 | -0.06 | .553 | -0.04 |
| 7 | Reflective Journals/Blogs | 3.32 | 1.57 | 3.42 | 1.51 | 63 | -0.09 | .319 | -0.06 |
| 20 | Scavenger Hunts | 1.51 | 0.90 | 1.42 | 0.77 | 52 | 0.27 | .172 | 0.10 |
| 4 | Self-Assessments & Instruments | 3.38 | 1.40 | 3.32 | 1.40 | 70 | 0.08 | .491 | 0.04 |
| 19 | Social Networking | 1.96 | 1.14 | 1.95 | 1.09 | 62 | 0.01 | .922 | 0.01 |
| 14 | Student-Peer Evaluation | 2.47 | 1.43 | 2.48 | 1.40 | 65 | -0.02 | .864 | -0.01 |
| 8 | Student Questions/Activities | 3.30 | 1.60 | 3.28 | 1.59 | 68 | 0.01 | .900 | 0.01 |

Note: Rank column indicates rank of instructional strategy use of graduate and undergraduate instructors combined, based on mean scores.; DB = Discussion Boards

**Assessment Strategy Use in Online Leadership Education.** Generally, instructors attached the most weight in their overall course grades to discussion boards, major writing projects or term papers, and participation. In fact, more than 70% of instructors listed discussion boards in their "Top 3," more than half listed major writing / term papers, and just over a quarter listed individual research projects/presentations. Conversely, instructors give little or no weight—sometimes not including them at all in their courses—to video creation, student-peer assessment, and e-portfolios (See Table 7). Moreover, no instructors reported including student-

peer assessments or video creation in their "Top 3."

Table 6
*Percentage of Instructor Assessment Strategy Use by Percentage of Student Total Course Grade (N = 118)*

| Assessment Strategy | 0% of CG | 1-10% of CG | 11-20% of CG | 21-30% of CG | 31-40% of CG | 41-50% of CG | 50% or more of CG |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Discussion Boards | 5.9% | 14.4% | 19.5% | 16.9% | 10.2% | 5.1% | 28.0% |
| Major Writing Project / Term Paper | 21.2% | 6.8% | 11.9% | 16.1% | 11.9% | 9.3% | 22.9% |
| Participation | 24.6% | 18.6% | 20.3% | 4.2% | 3.4% | 5.9% | 22.9% |
| Individual Research Projects/Presentations | 28.8% | 11.0% | 12.7 | 10.2% | 11.0% | 10.2% | 16.1% |
| Short Papers | 30.5% | 18.6% | 15.3% | 7.6% | 6.8% | 5.9% | 15.3% |
| Reflective Journals | 42.4% | 18.6% | 12.7% | 5.9% | 2.5% | 4.2% | 13.6% |
| Read and Respond | 42.4% | 16.1% | 12.7% | 8.5% | 4.2% | 5.1% | 11.0% |
| Case or Case Study Analysis | 31.4% | 23.7% | 14.4% | 13.6% | 5.9% | 0.8% | 10.2% |
| Individual Leader Development Plans | 38.1% | 25.4% | 11.9% | 8.5% | 3.4% | 5.1% | 7.6% |
| Quizzes | 66.1% | 8.5% | 7.6% | 3.4% | 5.1% | 1.7% | 7.6% |
| Exams | 61.9% | 6.8% | 9.3% | 6.8% | 3.4% | 5.1% | 6.8% |
| Self-evaluations | 53.4% | 22.0% | 9.3% | 3.4% | 1.7% | 5.1% | 5.1% |
| Group Projects/Presentations | 43.2% | 16.9% | 11.9% | 9.3% | 7.6% | 7.6% | 3.4% |
| Observation/Interview of a Leader | 55.9% | 16.1% | 10.2% | 5.1% | 2.5% | 7.6% | 2.5% |
| Video Creation or Digital Storytelling | 78.0% | 11.0% | 3.4% | 3.4% | 0.8% | 1.7% | 1.7% |
| Student Peer Assessment | 67.8% | 16.9% | 3.4% | 1.7% | 3.4% | 5.9% | 0.8% |
| E-Portfolio | 81.4% | 5.9% | 4.2% | 3.4% | 2.5% | 2.5% | 0.0% |

Note: CG = Course Grade

Table 7
*Instructor's "Top 3" Most Heavily Weighted Assessment Strategies*

| | All Instructors | | Graduate Instructors | | Undergraduate Instructors | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Method | *n* | % of Sample | *n* | % of Sample | *n* | % of Sample |
| Discussion Boards | 83 | 70.3 | 58 | 71.6 | 25 | 67.4 |
| Major Writing Project / Term Paper | 60 | 50.8 | 43 | 53.1 | 17 | 45.9 |
| Individual Research Projects/Presentations | 32 | 27.1 | 23 | 28.4 | 9 | 24.3 |
| Case Analysis | 26 | 22 | 17 | 21 | 9 | 24.3 |
| Short Papers | 24 | 20.3 | 18 | 22.2 | 6 | 16.2 |
| Reflective Journals | 21 | 17.8 | 16 | 19.8 | 5 | 13.5 |
| Exams | 19 | 16.1 | 7 | 8.6 | 12 | 32.4 |
| Group Projects/Presentations | 18 | 15.3 | 7 | 8.6 | 12 | 32.4 |
| Participation | 16 | 13.6 | 12 | 14.8 | 4 | 10.8 |
| Individual Leader Development Plans | 15 | 12.7 | 10 | 12.3 | 5 | 13.5 |
| Quizzes | 12 | 10.2 | 5 | 6.2 | 7 | 18.9 |
| Read and Respond | 9 | 7.6 | 6 | 7.4 | 3 | 8.1 |
| Self-evaluations | 8 | 6.8 | 4 | 4.9 | 4 | 10.8 |
| Observation/Interview of a Leader | 4 | 3.4 | 3 | 3.7 | 1 | 2.7 |
| E-Portfolio | 1 | 0.8 | 1 | 1.2 | 0 | 0 |
| Student Peer Assessment | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Video Creation or Digital Storytelling | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

## Discussion

This research had several limitations. The relatively small sample sizes—81 graduate-level and 37 undergraduate-level online instructors—could have affected the generalizability and repeatability of the study. As a result of the small sample sizes, the standard deviations reported in this study were generally larger than normal. Access to leadership educators who teach online beyond the listservs and databases targeted in this study is limited, however, future researchers should seek to include members of the Academic of Management, American College Personnel Association (ACPA) College Student Educators International, and non-U.S. based management- and leadership-focused professional associations. Although the study was intended to be global, the participants represented a narrow range of nationalities. And, while a larger sample with more diversity would have benefited the results presented here, the ILA Directory of Leadership Programs lists only 36 non-U.S. based colleges and universities that offer online leadership programs.

**Implications.** This exploratory study of instructional and assessment strategy use in online leadership education has numerous implications for a variety of stakeholders seeking

advance teaching and learning in online leadership education (e.g., online instructors, higher education administrators, department chairs). These findings provide a broad survey of the instructional and assessment strategies available for online leadership education. Further, these findings can provide a foundation to develop or enhance workshops for leadership educators who teach online. Finally, findings from this study may also catalyze ideas for innovations to the way leadership is taught or promote focused research on the use and best practices of the most frequently used online instructional and assessment strategies.

**Instructional Strategy Use.** The findings of this study suggest that discussion-based pedagogies—whether in a shared or instructor-led discussion board format—are used most frequently. Concurrently, opportunities to analyze real world issues through case studies and reflect through journals or blogs were the next most frequently used strategies. When compared to the study completed by Jenkins (2012, 2013) on instructional strategy use by leadership educators in undergraduate face-to-face classrooms, similarities abound. In particular, discussion-based pedagogies were used so frequently Jenkins coined them as the "signature pedagogy" (see Shulman, 2005) in undergraduate leadership education (Jenkins, 2012). Additionally, Jenkins (2012) found that the use of reflective journals, self-assessments and instruments, media clips, and case studies was also quite frequent. In the same study, Jenkins (2012) included group and individual projects and presentations as an "instructional strategy." He found them to be the fourth and fifth most frequently used, respectively. In the present study, discussion boards are given the most weight in a student's grade, followed by major writing projects / term papers and individual research projects/presentations, respectively.

Results from this study call for more "scholarship of teaching and learning" and workshops on best practices in online leadership education because more information is needed to inform the work of leadership educators who teach online. The literature reviewed in this study is a synthesis of distance learning education generally and an amalgamation of peer-reviewed papers from leadership conferences related specifically to leadership education in online learning environments. Workshops that emphasize best practices, including instructional design overall and more specifically with respect to individual learning activities—showcasing what high quality work looks like—and how to assess their effectiveness could prove extremely beneficial in the discipline. With respect to available resources, Phelps (2012) offers that, "many professional associations in the leadership field including the International Leadership Association (www.ila.net) and the Center for Creative Leadership (www.ccl.org) provide a variety of electronic resources that can be integrated into courses or programs around leadership topics and concepts" (p. 67-68). Still, scholarship that demonstrates firsthand accounts of what works and where the challenges lie in online leadership education would prove quite valuable.

**Group Projects in Online Versus Face-to-Face Leadership Courses.** In this study, Group Projects/Presentations were the fifth least heavily weighted assessment strategy, with 55.9% of respondents reporting not assessing this type of learning at all. Comparatively, only 28.8% of respondents reported the same for individual research projects/presentations, giving this type of work far more weight in their classes. While Jenkins (2012, 2013) did not review assessment strategy use specifically, his study—which focused on face-to-face instructional strategy use in undergraduate leadership courses--included the instructional strategies "group projects & presentations" and "research project/presentation." Accordingly, "group projects &

presentations" was the fourth most frequently used instructional strategy, ranking above "research project/presentation." This seems to suggest that while group work is valued in face-to-face leadership courses, the opposite is true in online leadership courses. All other factors remaining the same (e.g., course type or subject matter), why are instructors choosing to exclude group work in their online classes? Arguably, less is known about how to facilitate such learning in online courses. In response, workshops like those suggested above—focusing on how to effectively facilitate and evaluate group work in online leadership courses--should be welcomed by the academy.

**Future Research.** The use of instructional and assessment strategies in online collegiate leadership education are significantly underdeveloped in the literature and thus a potentially rich area for future research. For example, while the present study looked at frequency of use, quantity does not always contribute to quality. Future research should look to assess the learning outcomes of students in online leadership studies courses and compare these outcomes with students in comparable courses in face-to-face and blended learning modalities.

## Conclusions

In closing, the findings from this study offer new knowledge into the distance learning attributes—specifically from the instructor's point of view—of online, academic credit-bearing leadership studies courses. The purpose of this study was to explore the online instructional and assessment strategies used most frequently by leadership educators. In the absence of any prior studies exploring such, these findings provided insight in the current state of online leadership education and identified the instructional and assessment strategies most currently utilized.

The most widely used instructional strategies in leadership education are weighed heavily by discussion-based pedagogies, with reflection and opportunities to present knowledge through projects and presentations following closely behind. Online, instructors facilitate leadership learning through discussion, allow opportunities for reflection on theory, research, and content, and provide problems through case studies and the like for review. Yet, one might ask if this is enough—this "online" learning—to build human capacity for leadership.

At the broadest level, the researcher hopes that the findings presented here will be helpful for leadership educators and institutional stakeholders to evaluate and plan online leadership education in meaningful ways. Moreover, it is an aim of this research that future scholars implement workshops, conference sessions, and publications inclusive of best practice in online leadership education. At a more scalable level, the researcher hopes these findings will be able to catalyze innovation in online leadership education and stimulate new ideas in the virtual classroom. At the very least, these findings should offer attributes that a variety of leadership educations have shared for distance learning within the discipline. Additionally, the findings from this study may facilitate the development of new leadership programming policies, provide direction for future research, and contribute to the existing body of literature. Incorporating ideas for the sake of quality and innovation in online leadership education can offer opportunities for further assessment and research that can contribute both nationally and globally.

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