

## **Leadership Isn't Minor—But It Can Be**

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### **Abstract**

Leadership educators looking to successfully create and implement an interdisciplinary leadership minor can often find themselves overwhelmed and apprehensive. Little exists to help guide our way as we attempt what often is an initial academic beachhead on campus. This paper explores the creation, implementation, and outcomes of a highly-successful leadership minor on a small, private, urban campus. Reflections are offered concerning the difficulties faced in gaining approval of the minor, the problems created if you are too successful, the importance and cost of mentoring, issues of gender and race, the importance of evaluation, and the necessity of constant collaboration. A practical step-by-step guide is offered as a possible exemplar for leadership educators plucky enough to bring a new leadership minor to campus.

### **Issue Statement**

As leadership education continues to find its way onto college campuses in increasing numbers (Dugan & Komives, 2007), there are special challenges faced by those of us who are looking to find an initial academic beachhead. Will the faculty and administration in the various colleges be supportive? Will enough students enroll to make it viable and sustainable? How will learning about leadership be seen as advancing the mission of our host institution?

One way that leadership studies has been introduced is in the form of an interdisciplinary leadership minor. Although there are some broad ideas and instructions on advancing leadership programs on campus (Komives, Dugan, Owen, Slack, & Wagner, 2011), little exists in the research to help leadership educators create and implement a leadership minor from scratch (Haber-Curran & Tillapaugh, 2013).

This paper is a practical look at the creation and implementation of a highly-successful leadership minor. It offers helpful reflections and a possible step-by-step guide as to how similar programs can be effectively embedded into the academic and cultural fabric of a university.

### **Literature Review**

Before anyone thinks about introducing a leadership minor onto campus, it is important to recognize that there are many pitfalls, frustrations, and possible turf wars you may face (Pennington, 2005). Just because we are passionate advocates of leadership education it doesn't mean that others will share our enthusiasm. Some broad guideposts have been offered as to the context, design, variety, and delivery of leadership programs (Astin & Astin, 2000; Haber, 2011; Komives et al., 2011) and what makes them successful (Osteen & Coburn, 2012; Zimmerman-

Oster & Burkhardt, 1999, 2000).

At the outset, leadership educators have found it critical that the leadership minor be closely linked to the mission and vision of the host institution (White, 2006). The minor should also reflect the broad goals of the university if we should expect to gain widespread support (Arminio, 2011). It is also suggested that a comprehensive theoretical framework that is scholarly based is also helpful (Boyce, 2006). Of note are programs effectively based on the Social Change Model of Leadership that include specific pedagogical strategies that teach individual values (consciousness of self, congruence, commitment), group process values (collaboration, common purpose, controversy with civility), and community/societal values (citizenship, change) as part of a course of study (Astin & Astin, 1996, 2000; Buschlen & Dvorak, 2011; Dugan, 2006a).

As leadership educators promote the notion that leadership can be learned and that we want all of our students to be able to recognize and increase their capacity to lead, our programs need to be democratic models that have a broad reach to students who are often marginalized on college campuses (Bass, 1990; Munin & Dugan, 2011; White, 2006). Specific curricular inputs can be found regarding interdisciplinary minors (McKim, Sorensen, & Velez, 2015; Sorensen, McKim, & Velez, 2016), especially in terms of identity formation (Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2006). In addition, we have insights into the kinds of instructional strategies most often used in leadership courses (Jenkins, 2012).

An important practical concern to be addressed is the necessity of evaluating the success of our leadership programs (Owen, 2011). This helps to legitimize the field of leadership studies on campus and makes the case for its inclusion in the curriculum. In addition, many of us are in the position of needing to fund all or part of new leadership programs being proposed and offered. We are wise to consider the economic pressures from the start (Vineyard & Slack, 2011).

Although no one has offered a step-by-step guide to creating and implementing a leadership minor, some have referenced Kotter's eight stage process of change as a helpful model (Kotter, 2012). Each campus will, no doubt, have their unique process, but most leadership educators are on their own in terms of creating and implementing a leadership minor that makes sense.

## **Description of the Application**

**Initial Phase – Creation and Proposal.** The impetus for the minor came out of the broad efforts of The Institute for Leadership and Service (The Institute) on our campus. The Institute serves to advance the mission of the university and, in particular, the vision which focuses on developing graduates who lead and serve in their communities.

Although it was determined that there were plenty of leadership activities on campus, they were not pulled together in an intentional academic way. Needs assessments, multiple focus groups, and communications with a host of campus constituents revealed an apparent desire for an academic leadership minor that was interdisciplinary. It became clear that leadership skills, in

multiple forms, were being taught in a number of our courses but with no organizing theoretical frame, overarching schema, or related academic purpose.

A critical part of this process was initial and visionary support from the provost as well as the formation of the Leadership Minor Advisory Committee (Advisory Committee). Faculty, administration, and staff from across the university convened to provide direction to the initiative and to serve as allies and supporters. Faculty members on the committee were also tasked with the approval of courses for the minor and deciding other curricular matters.

In creating the formal proposal for adding a leadership minor, the Advisory Committee decided to use an adaptation of the Social Change Model of Leadership as our theoretical frame (Astin & Astin, 2000). This mirrors what was already being used in The Institute and a number of universities across the country and would provide a strong academic foothold to augment the co-curricular features of the Emerging Leaders Program on campus.

Our proposal included the use of two bookend courses that were already approved on campus through the psychology department. One was an introductory leadership class and the other was a directed capstone experience. We gained approval to cross-list these as leadership or “LEAD” classes and structured it so that the introductory class would preferably be taken in the freshmen year and the capstone experience during senior year. These complimentary courses are used to prepare students for their leadership development journey and to help scaffold their learning and increase reflection.

In addition to the the two bookend courses, it was originally proposed that students be required to take one course in each of the three skill areas associate with the Social Change Model: individual skills, group skills, and community skills. After discussions with the dean and faculty from the College of Business Administration, it was decided that we add an additional skill area—Organizational/Human Relations skills. Courses were approved across disciplines from the fields of African American studies, architecture, biology, business, Catholic studies, chemistry, communication, criminal justice, education, engineering, english, ethics, health information, health services, mathematics, nursing, philosophy, political science, psychology, religious studies, social work, and women’s and gender studies. The full minor would then be six courses (18 credits)—two common classes and then four leadership skills classes reflecting each of the four areas of our model as show in Table 1.

Table 1.  
*Curricular Components of a Leadership Minor*

Interdisciplinary Leadership Minor	
Introductory Leadership Course	3 credits
Individual Leadership Skills Course -self-awareness -character and integrity -ethics and values (10 approved courses)	3 credits
Group Leadership Skills Course -communication -team-building -developing relationships (15 approved courses)	3 credits
Organizational/HR Leadership Skills Course -organizational management -project management -human relations -public relations (16 approved courses)	3 credits
Community Engagement Leadership Skills Course -social change-social justice -partnerships for the common good -mission and vision in broad context (24 approved courses)	3 credits
Capstone Leadership Course	3 credits
Total	18 credits

Once the theoretical frame was agreed upon, faculty were encouraged to view our leadership development model, familiarize themselves with the four skill areas and learning outcomes, and submit their course(s) for inclusion in the leadership minor. A master list of approved courses was created, our model was framed, our proposal was submitted and eventually approved.

**Implementation Phase.** Once the minor was approved (December 2011), the Advisory Committee was tasked with successful implementation of the minor. With the help of campus instructional design professionals, the leadership minor website was launched. This site lays out an invitation to students, describes the details of the minor, provides contact information to communicate with the coordinator, and helps build enthusiasm for enrollment. A distinguishing

feature of the website is a link to an advising card tailored for each of the majors on campus. This site allows students to click on their specific major and access a clear course of study to attain the minor. As we built support for the minor, it was clear that advising coordinators, deans, and faculty members wanted to fashion the leadership minor to allow their students to meet the credit requirements in the most efficient way possible. Great time and care were taken in the creation of the advising sheets and each was approved by the coordinator of undergraduate advising in each college as well as the appropriate faculty department chair.

Members of the Advisory Committee promoted the minor to students, visited classes throughout the university, met with athletic teams and student organizations, and presented the minor to various faculty, administration, staff, and campus gatherings. The minor was vigorously promoted at our university “Minor Fair” and throughout orientation events. In addition, the board of trustees was kept updated on the initiative.

As part of signing up for the leadership minor, each student meets with the coordinator to begin a mentoring relationship and map out courses towards completion of the requirements. In addition to initial paperwork, the student is enrolled in a listserve for members of the minor and given their “LEADERSHIP isn’t MINOR” shirt. Regular online communication with the students keeps them abreast of campus leadership and service activities as well as important announcements concerning any curricular matters.

### Discussion of Outcomes

**Membership in the Minor.** The number of current students who have signed up for the leadership minor has showed stunning gains in the four full academic years of existence, as seen below in Table 2. At this point, the leadership minor has more students in it than all of the other minors on campus, combined. This is a dramatic development that has not gone unnoticed by our internal and external university constituents.

Table 2.  
*Current Students Signing Up for the Undergraduate Leadership Minor*

	Academic Year	Total Number of Students in Minor	Approximate % of undergraduate student population
Year One	2012-2013	41	2.0 %
Year Two	2013-2014	92	4.5 %
Year Three	2014-2015	170	8.5 %
Year Four	2015-2016	310	15.7 %

The success of the minor is somewhat staggering. It suggests that our students are smart “consumers” in that they perceived value added and rallied to join. We had hoped that students would feel more connected to the university, and to each other, and that certainly has happened. There are plenty of stories of personal transformation while going through the minor, and that

fits well with our mission and vision. We also suspected that the leadership minor students would lead more effectively on campus, and evidence of this is abundant. What I did not anticipate is the advantage students would gain in terms of earning internships, landing prized jobs, and successful admission into prestigious graduate programs. These dynamics contributed to student loyalty and they quickly became our strongest marketers on campus.

**Campus Culture.** The Leadership Minor has clearly embedded itself into the fabric of our university. Whether it is assisting students on Move-In Day their freshmen year or running commencement activities, our students are noticed and valued partners across campus. Students can often be seen wearing their leadership minor shirts while engaging in any number of university activities. When individual colleges consider changes to their curriculum or course offerings, they willingly calculate the impact on their leadership minor students. We are now at the point in the minor where our students are in leadership positions in virtually every student organization. When students receive acceptance from our university, the materials they receive greet them as Emerging Leaders.

**Student Feedback.** From reflections in the capstone course to the interviews of those pursuing our Leadership Medallion honor, students report numerous positive benefits from attaining the minor. Many describe an increase in self-awareness and confidence. Others say they were able to lead their student organizations and athletic teams much better. Some have learned to say “no” and lead in a more healthy manner or employ adaptive styles of leadership they would not have attempted previously (DiPaolo, 2008). As leadership educators, we hope that the lessons learned are helpful beyond college and applied to all aspects of their life. Our students report a greater understanding of their place and functioning as members of their family of origin and their communities.

There is overwhelming anecdotal evidence that our leadership minor students are getting internships, jobs, and admission to elite graduate programs because they augmented their academic major with the minor. In one case, the dean of an out-of-state college interrupted a follow-up admissions interview so that our student could walk them through our website and teach them how to infuse leadership into their curriculum.

**Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership.** In addition to types of outcomes listed above, it is important to note that assessing the impact of the leadership minor is aided by our university participating in the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL) in 2009, 2012, and 2015. Results suggest that our leadership minor students demonstrate an increased level of understanding of individual values, group values, society and community values, social perspective-taking, cognitive skills, and leadership efficacy. In addition, they report a clearer understating of our mission (77%), a clearer understanding of our vision to lead and serve in our communities (79%), and have participated in activities (71%) to enhance their understanding of leadership and service (Zimmerman-Oster, 2016).

## Reflections

**Whistling in the dark.** Although a format exists for submitting a new minor on campus, there is no blueprint for implementing one. This would have been very helpful in the process,

even as a point of departure. I acknowledge the help leadership educators have offered, but nothing exists as a step-by-step practical guide for the process (Arminio, 2011; Haber-Curran & Tillapaugh, 2013; Komives et al., 2011; Kotter, 2012; Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 2000). I certainly underestimated, and was unprepared for, the degree of collaboration necessary with all the colleges and programs on campus. On the administrative side, nothing would have primed us for the level of intricacy needed to coordinate the program with the office of the registrar, transfer team, admissions department, and existing university strategic plan.

**The importance and cost of mentoring.** Students need a guidepost for personal leadership mentoring (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Jacobi, 1991). The role of the coordinator comes with enormous responsibility if you are going to be such a mentor—responsibilities that I underestimated. As the number of students enrolled in the minor increased, the interpersonal needs of the students also rose. Letters of recommendation, identifying helpful courses, assistance with registration, discussions about course load, and guidance through difficult leadership decisions on campus become part of the job description. Students wanted and *expected* mentoring as part of the leadership minor and regularly sought it out.

**Issues of Gender—Where have all the young men gone?** Initially, enrollment in the minor was male dominant in relation to the gender make-up of our undergraduate population. This raised concerns about how we were recruiting female students and what they may be perceiving their capacity as leaders to be. Did we have our own version of the glass ceiling going on? However, females now outnumber males by a margin of 57-43% in the minor and, at this writing, 78% of the students enrolled in the introductory courses next fall are women. This has led to a discussion of whether or not we should just let the phenomenon play out or review our options for recruitment of young men. Do young men just *think* they will be leaders because of their gender and thus, don't need this credential? Do young women now see themselves as more capable of leadership—drawing them into the minor? What gender messages are we sending across campus? The dynamics of women and leadership on college campuses has been explored and will drive our investigation and future steps (Helgesen, 1990; Hickman, 2015; Kindlon, 2006; Ward, DiPaolo, & Popson, 2008).

**Issues of Race.** Currently, we do not keep track of how students self-identify regarding race and ethnicity. This is a difficult paradox to solve. There are recent voices on campus that suggest we should start doing this and, possibly, offer specific programs to recruit and support minority and marginalized students in the leadership minor. There is research that supports this point of view and leads us to wonder if we are doing enough (Campbell & Dampbell, 2007). While there are a number of leadership development activities that we facilitate and provide that are targeted to first-generation and minority students, should we be doing more?

**Communication with faculty that are teaching approved courses.** With 65 courses on campus approved for one of the skill areas for the minor, it is important to maintain regular communication with the various instructors. As teaching personnel changes semester to semester, we noticed that someone might be teaching a “leadership course” and not even know it. This was an unexpected problem that we resolved by sending reminder emails each semester to the appropriate teachers. At the start of the semester, instructors of leadership minor classes

each receive the theoretical frame of the minor, are reminded of the skill area their course addresses, and are invited to collaborate with the coordinator or any member of the Advisory Committee.

**User-Friendly Matters.** One of the most common features of the minor that students cite as being helpful is that they see it as user-friendly. Students can access components of the minor online through the Leadership Minor website and view an academic advising sheet tailored for their personal program of study. In addition, the two core leadership classes are offered on days and times that do not compete with their majors nor other key campus activities, such as athletic practices and standard organizational meeting times. Not only do students report that their progress in the minor is easy to chart, but campus advisors and external constituents find it clear as well.

**Collaboration Between the Bookend Course Instructors is Critical.** It is crucial that there is great collaboration between the teachers of the introductory and capstone courses. The students benefit when leadership educators are seen as mutually supportive partners. In this context, student work and leadership portfolios from the introductory course can be accessed and further expanded upon when students take the capstone course. This provides a level of analysis and reflection that is key to maximizing student learning and development. On our campus, instructors of the introductory and capstone courses are frequent visitors to each other's classes and collaborate on a host of campus leadership activities and events.

**Be Sure to Evaluate.** It is important to remember to evaluate the minor from the beginning stages. Coordinators can become so busy trying to grow the program that they forget to sufficiently measure the success of the program (Owen, 2011). If there are existing measures on campus, this can be a great advantage. At our university, we employ a number of formal and informal measures such as our participation in the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership. This allows us to customized questions to our student body and gather data about their understanding of our vision to lead and serve, their experiences with service learning, and their increased sense of efficacy as leaders. In addition, we gather student feedback in the capstone course exit interviews, evaluate data collected in leadership courses, and analyze pre and post-test results from surveys of service learning courses. Aligning the undergraduate minor with an existing graduate program is helpful because it can provide the kind of data collection and analysis that can serve both programs and advance scholarly inquiry.

**Linking with Existing Campus Initiatives and Theoretical Models is Key.** It helps when a new undergraduate leadership minor is not an orphan. By that I mean when an academic credential can be tied into a larger leadership development initiative on campus, there is a kind of momentum and impetus that is hard to create alone. We need allies. On our campus, the Institute for Leadership and Service has been recognized for providing significant and important leadership development for many years and was a perfect partner in making the case for the minor and supporting its centrality as an academic endeavor. Related to this, the theoretical frame being used by The Institute provided an intellectual compass for the new leadership minor. This was paramount in getting the minor approved and in providing a way for faculty to see how their particular course learning outcomes paired with the skill area outcomes of the leadership minor.



**Be Careful What You Ask For.** Now that the minor has grown quickly on campus, it has caused unintended problems—problems that I suppose we should be happy to have. There are so many students wanting the minor that we are facing a situation where we need to hire more faculty to teach the core leadership courses. Along with this comes greater resource demands for administrative support, increased needs for funding, and a significant investment in the mentoring and advising dynamic of the faculty-student relationship. It is also fair to say that not everyone on campus is delighted by the success of the leadership minor as some have declared that it is “cannibalizing” the other minors. These kinds of tensions seem predictable as they have been experienced by other leadership educators introducing leadership minors on campus (Pennington, 2005).

## Recommendations

**A Step-by-Step Guide to the Creation and Implementation of a Successful Undergraduate Interdisciplinary Leadership Minor.** I offer this as a possible help to leadership educators who find themselves “whistling in the dark,” trying to introduce a leadership minor on campus but not quite sure how to pull it all off.

### Initial phase.

1. Ascertain the level of interest in proposing a minor and the university capacity to appropriately host the endeavor.
2. Enlist the initial support of the provost and specific deans and faculty that could be long-term partners.
3. Create and convene a leadership minor advisory team with key allies from every appropriate college on campus. Be sure to invite staff from athletics, student life, and other key departments or divisions on campus.
4. Complete a survey of what currently is going on regarding the teaching of leadership skills on your campus. Summarize the results in a snapshot form.
5. Conduct a needs assessment as appropriate for your college or university.
6. Have discussions with your development office in terms of possible naming opportunities for the leadership minor.
7. If all looks hopeful, make the decision to move ahead with a proposal.

### Proposal phase.

8. Go to appropriate faculty and deans in each college and garner their feedback and support for your proposal.
9. Research and pick a theoretical frame for the minor that is likely to gain interest and support from internal and external constituents.
10. Be sure the core leadership courses are well-coordinated with clear and complimentary learning outcomes.
11. Once you have your frame, be sure to follow (or develop) the process by which courses at your university can be approved for inclusion in the minor.
12. Craft a minor that has components that are clear, simple, and powerful that reflect your theoretical frame and the mission and/or vision of your institution.
13. Be sure your proposal is student-friendly in that it allows for completion of the classes in the most efficient way possible. This would include highlighting any opportunities where

students could use courses from their major or the university core to satisfy requirements in the minor.

14. Stay flexible in the approval process. Ideas and feedback that will slow you down will likely make the minor better.
15. Make the leadership minor proposal widely available for review.
16. Submit the leadership minor for approval and, hopefully, gain approval.

#### **Implementation phase.**

17. Create a website that will serve as a repository for all information regarding the leadership minor on your campus—welcoming and engaging students, outlining the framework of the minor, communicating approved courses, and presenting the advising sheets for each major.
18. Create a brand and market the brand. We have found it very helpful to have the brand represented on a piece of apparel to help identify your students and market the minor. Be sure to coordinate this with the marketing department at your university and other appropriate departments and divisions.
19. Get the word out—visit classes, athletic teams, orientation leaders, admissions, resident advisors, fraternities, sororities, student government, campus ministry, college faculty meetings, university academic councils, everyone you can think of.
20. Establish a process by which students will be signing up for the minor. Help the students feel a personal connection to faculty and staff involved. Coordinate with academic advisors and the registrar so that there is official notice of the student adding the minor. Be sure this process adequately informs the student's major advisor.
21. Select key events on campus that will feature your students and market the program. While wearing their "LEADERSHIP isn't MINOR" shirts, our students greet and assist freshmen and families on move-in day and serve as the volunteers for all commencement day activities, to name a few. There are vast opportunities on your campus to be seen.
22. Create a process that regularly monitors and communicates enrollment in the minor and cross-checks information with the office of the registrar.

#### **Maintenance phase.**

23. Regularly convene your Leadership Minor Advisory Committee.
24. Communicate with all instructors of leadership courses each semester to make sure they are aware that they are teaching a leadership minor course and outline, if possible, common learning outcomes.
25. Find public and meaningful ways to celebrate your success and the success of your students.
26. Involve students in all aspects of the minor as appropriate. This will give them an opportunity to learn and demonstrate leadership skills and they will often become your best ambassadors and recruiters for the program.
27. If you haven't done it already, be sure to find intentional ways to evaluate learning outcomes and assess the effectiveness of the minor, then communicate those findings.

#### **Dream phase.**

28. Discuss with like-minded people the possibility of adding a leadership major on campus or even creating a direct linkage with a graduate program. Be creative and have

discussions about how to grow your program and the impact it has on campus and in terms of community engagement.

29. Once it has been in place a few years, what is the role of students who have graduated with the minor? How could they be helpful as mentors and donors?
30. Find ways to continue to garner support and ideas from other leadership educators who have traveled this path.

Now you have it—your 30-step guide to creating an interdisciplinary leadership minor that helps transform students, supports the mission and vision of your institution, and embeds leadership education into the rich fabric of your university.

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