

## **Examining the Role of Multicultural Competence in Leadership Program Design**

**Amy B. Wilson, PhD**

Assistant Professor

Higher Education Administration Department

Buffalo State

312F Bacon Hall

1300 Elmwood Ave.

Buffalo, NY 14222

wilsonab@buffalostate.edu

### **Abstract**

Research examining the multicultural competence of leadership educators across a variety of institutions demonstrated variance based on leadership program structure, program elements, and the ways in which diversity was addressed in the program. The Multicultural Competence in Student Affairs–Preliminary 2 (MCSA-P2) scale was used to measure multicultural competence among student affairs professionals responsible for leadership education and an analysis of results suggests that multicultural competence may be reflected in practice, more specifically the design and structure, of leadership programs.

### **Introduction**

The nature of student leadership education continues to evolve on college campuses as a result of research on effective practices and a greater understanding of the diversity of our students. Research from the Multi-Institution Study of Leadership (Dugan & Komives, 2007) continues to affirm that one-size does not fit all when it comes to leadership programs and our diverse student populations. In fact, evidence continues to demonstrate the need for more purposeful development of leadership programs, differentiating interventions based on the multiple aspects of student identity as well as varying degrees of student readiness (Dugan, Kodama, Correia, & Associates, 2013). What is becoming clear is that diverse students view and experience leadership in diverse ways.

While there appears to be a growing body of research and literature related to students and the impact of leadership programs and development, there is seemingly a gap in the literature with respect to the types of leadership programs and the purposeful design of those programs to facilitate optimal impact. Similarly, there is little to no research about student affairs professionals responsible for these programs and their capacity to design intentional and purposeful programs, particularly with respect to the identified high impact practices in student leadership development (Dugan, et al., 2013). A recent report from the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership states that leadership educator preparedness varies greatly, with most professionals reporting little to no coursework in leadership studies (Owens, 2012). In addition, research on

graduate preparation programs has explored the nature and adequacy of diversity training and education of new professionals (Flowers, 2003; Gayles & Kelly, 2007; Young & Janosik, 2007) and continues to emphasize the importance of developing multicultural competence beyond graduate school (Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller, 2004).

The multicultural competence of leadership educators is a significant consideration in designing inclusive and intentional leadership programs. The Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership continues to demonstrate that engagement with peers in socio-cultural conversations is a salient predictor of student capacity for socially responsible leadership across demographic groups (Dugan et al., 2013). This evidence warrants reflection upon the preparedness of leadership educators and their capacities to not only facilitate these conversations, but also to consider the ways in which they cultivate these conversations.

### **Leadership Program Development and Elements**

Increasing focus and attention on developing college student leadership ability has resulted in a continued proliferation of leadership programs on college and university campuses. The structure and nature of these leadership programs are typically as diverse as the institutions themselves. Various theoretical models and frameworks have been developed to assist leadership educators in the design of programs (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996; Komives, Lucas & McMahon, 2007; Kousez & Posner, 2007; Komives, Owen, Longersbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005), yet recent research suggests that a majority of campuses are using non-theoretical approaches, such as personality inventories, as a foundation for their programs (Owen, 2012) rather than grounding programs within a specific leadership framework or theory.

Similarly, the development of effective leadership programs involves much more than identifying a framework. Student leadership programs are often comprised of a number of systematically organized elements that may be purely co-curricular or curricular, or a combination of both, such as workshops, retreats, credit-bearing courses, community service, or speakers/lectures (Haber, 2006). Comprehensive student leadership programs should consider the students, as well as the structure, strategy and scope of leadership development (Haber, 2006). Consideration of students would include accessibility for participants, the inclusiveness of diverse or marginalized student populations, as well as an assessment of who the program is intended to serve. Programs can be described as open, targeted or positional based on the student population it serves. An open structured program would have many points of entry and be open to any student, such as a leadership workshop series. A targeted structure may focus on a specific population of students based on aspects of their identity, such as a Women's Leadership Institute or an Asian American leadership course. Similarly, a positional based structure may be designed specifically for students in campus based leadership positions, such as a student organization officer's retreat.

Munin & Dugan (2011) describe a model of inclusive design, borrowing from principles of universal design, which considers the social identity of students in the purposeful construction of leadership programs. More specifically, the model proposes three domains of application and consideration in the design of inclusive programs: personal dimensions, the nature of leadership program content, and the process of leadership program design. The nature of leadership

program content and the process of leadership program design in many ways reflect similar considerations found in the comprehensive model above, yet these domains may provide broader reflection for the leadership educator based on the associated *Principles of Inclusive Design* (Munin & Dugan, 2011). The personal dimension of inclusive design suggests that the growth and development of the leadership educator is equally important in the process of cultivating an inclusive leadership program. Munin & Dugan (2011) suggest two aspects of personal development that are critical for leadership educators: multicultural competence and ally development. It is their assertion that inclusive leadership programs are “maintained by allies who are actively engaged in the continual development of their multicultural competencies” (Munin & Dugan, 2011, p. 164).

### **Multicultural Competence and Leadership Educators**

Previous research examining the relationship between multicultural competence and the specific practices of leadership educators provides evidence to support intentionality in design of leadership programs. Specifically, the study looked at the relationship between multicultural competence of leadership educators and their use of the Social Change Model of Leadership Development (Wilson, 2012). To briefly summarize, this investigation determined there was a significant correlation between the multicultural competence (MCSA-P2, Pope & Mueller, 2000) of leadership educators and their use of the Social Change Model as a framework for program development. That is to say, leadership educators who used the Social Change Model demonstrated higher levels of multicultural competence than those who did not use any model. This evidence may support a connection between the diverse values of the model and the personal values of the leadership educator. More broadly, the study demonstrated that use of the Social Change Model in addition to another model or framework resulted in statistically significant higher levels of multicultural competence overall. The relationship between the use of a framework and level of multicultural competence may also indicate a level of intentionality in program design, reflective of the capacity and preparedness of the leadership educator. These results have several possible implications for leadership educators, particularly as they relate to the intentional and inclusive design of leadership programs that allow for students to engage in cross-cultural conversations and to explore aspects of self and others.

A more detailed examination of the structure and design of leadership programs, as well as the ways in which multicultural issues are addressed in leadership programs may provide additional insight on the multicultural competence of student affairs professionals responsible for designing and implementing leadership programs. Specifically, this paper will address the following two research questions:

- What is the variance in multicultural competence of leadership educators based on the identified structure and elements of their leadership program?
- What is the variance in multicultural competence of leadership educators based on the ways in which they address diversity issues in their leadership program?

## **Method**

### **Population, Sample and Data Collection**

Participants for this study were self-identified student affairs professionals who indicated some percentage of their portfolio was dedicated to leadership education on their campus. The sample was comprehensive in nature and included graduate students, entry-level staff, as well as mid-level and senior-level administrators. A very small portion of the sample identified as faculty in higher education. The diverse nature of the sample reflects both the comprehensive nature of leadership education on some campuses, as well as the inconsistencies from campus to campus. While some campuses have multiple individuals dedicated solely to leadership programs, other campuses have one individual whose position description suggests one-quarter of their time be spent on leadership education. Participants for this study were solicited via two national listservs affiliated with professional associations whose focus is leadership education and who provide support for leadership educators. A snowball sampling technique was also used to increase participant response and capture responses from those professionals who may not have been members of one of the aforementioned associations. The total sample size for the study was 167 and descriptive statistics are provided in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Descriptive statistics for sample population*

Variable		Frequency <i>n</i>	Percent (%) of Sample
Gender	Male	52	31.5
	Female	112	67.9
Race/Ethnicity	African American/Black	17	10.2
	Asian American/Pacific Islander	8	4.8
	Caucasian/White	126	75.4
	Latino(a)/Chicano(a)/Hispanic	13	7.8
	Native American/Alaskan Native	1	.6
	Multiracial	2	1.2
Highest degree Earned	Bachelors	11	6.6
	Masters	132	79.0
	Doctorate	15	7.6
	Other	1	.6
Years as a full-time professional	Less than 1 year	7	4.3
	1 year	8	4.9
	2-3 years	19	11.7
	4-5 years	27	16.6
	6-10 years	48	29.4
	11-15 years	23	14.1
	16-20 years	13	8.0
	21-25 years	12	7.4
25+ years	6	3.7	
Current position level	Graduate student	9	5.4
	Entry level	35	21.0
	Mid level	90	53.9
	Senior level	26	15.6
	Senior student affairs officer	6	3.6
	Other	1	.6
Time spent on leadership programming	0%	6	3.6
	25%	87	52.1
	50%	32	19.2
	75%	31	18.6
	100%	11	6.6

### Instrumentation and Data Analysis

All participants were asked to complete two self-reporting instruments. The Personal Data Form [PDF] (adapted from Pope, Miklitsch, & Weigand, 2004), was designed to identify basic demographic factors as well as provide information on the structure and elements of participants respective leadership programs. Specifically, the PDF asked participants to identify their program as open, targeted or structured in nature and then to identify the various elements that comprised their program. Multicultural competence was measured using the Multicultural

Competence in Student Affairs-Preliminary 2 scale [MCSA-P2] (Pope & Mueller, 2000). The MCSA-P2 was designed based on a tripartite model of multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills, but produces an overall score for multicultural competence. The 34-item questionnaire asks participants to describe their beliefs when working in a student affairs setting, using a 7-point Likert scale. The MCSA-P2 continues to demonstrate an adequate level of internal consistency with an alpha coefficient of .90 or higher (King & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Miklitsch, 2005; Mueller & Pope, 2001; Pope & Mueller, 2000; Weigand, 2005).

Data analysis involved comparing the mean multicultural competence scores of participants based on the structure of their leadership programs, elements of inclusion in their leadership programs, and the ways in which diversity was addressed in leadership programs. Specifically, one-way ANOVA's were conducted to examine whether there was a statistically significant difference in the variance of mean multicultural competence scores of leadership educators based on the nature of their leadership programs and the ways in which diversity was addressed.

## Results

### Elements and Types of Program

The initial analysis examined the differences in multicultural competence scores (MCSA-P2) of leadership educators with respect to the self-identified structure of their leadership program as open, targeted, positional, or "other" type of structure (see Table 2). While the results indicate no statistically significant difference in multicultural competence scores for professionals who utilize open, targeted, or positional program structures, the data suggests that professionals who have positional or targeted leadership programs may have slightly higher mean MCSA-P2 scores. That is to say professionals who facilitate programs focused on specific populations of students, be it student government leaders (positional) or diverse groups of students (targeted), may demonstrate slightly higher levels of multicultural competence than those who facilitate more open programs for the general student body.

Table 2  
*Comparison of Variance in Multicultural Competence by Program Structure*

Variable	Mean MSCA-P2 Scores	Overall Frequency <i>n</i>	SD	<i>r</i>
Open	179.49	125	27.80	.760
Targeted	181.22	88	28.83	.335
Positional	183.32	82	28.21	.075
Other	180.15	162	29.44	.018*

\* $p < .05$

The second analysis involved a comparison of the multicultural competence scores of educators based on their use of various elements of design in their leadership program(s). In comparing the mean MCSA-P2 scores of leadership educators and their use of selected elements

in their leadership programs, only one variable demonstrated significance in the analysis of variance (see Table 3). Leadership educators who utilized speakers as an element in their leadership program demonstrated lower MCSA-P2 scores than those who did not utilize speakers ( $M = 185.73$ ,  $n = 66$ ). This result may provide some insight or additional inquiry about the leadership educator's skill and capacity and their level of comfort with facilitation. Those who are less comfortable or confident in their capacity may be more likely to utilize guest speakers as a supplement for some material. This dynamic is further examined in the final analysis below.

Table 3  
*Comparison of Variance in Multicultural Competence by Program Element*

Variable	Mean MSCA-P2 Scores	Overall Frequency <i>n</i>	SD	<i>r</i>
Capstone project	173.36	42	27.87	.157
Community Service	180.13	117	29.51	.491
Courses for credit	181.77	66	26.39	.352
Skills & Personality Inventories	179.50	120	29.14	.771
Mentoring programs	177.01	90	30.10	.343
Retreats	178.80	108	30.90	.874
Speakers	174.72	101	30.04	.021*
Workshops	178.74	133	29.57	.783

\* $p < .05$

The final analysis compared the mean multicultural competence scores of leadership educators related to the ways in which they addressed diversity within their respective leadership programs. Participants were asked to indicate in what manner multicultural issues were addressed in their leadership programs. The largest majority of participants (75.4%) indicated multicultural issues were addressed in workshops, followed by guest speakers (56.3%), targeted programming (50.9%) such as women's leadership conference or LGBT leadership conference, and specific leadership retreats (29%). Approximately 30% indicated multicultural issues were addressed through a section of a leadership course and only 7.2% indicated they were addressed as part of a full diversity leadership course (i.e., Cross-Cultural Leadership). The results suggest that leadership educators who addressed multicultural issues through specific workshops, targeted programming, retreats, or through full courses demonstrated higher MCSA-P2 scores than those who utilized guest speakers or addressed diversity in only a section of a course (see Table 4). Additionally, educators who indicated that diversity issues were not addressed in their leadership programs had a lower mean MCSA-P2 score.

Table 4  
*Comparison of Variance in Multicultural Competence by How Diversity Issues are Addressed in Leadership Programs*

Variable	Mean MSCA-P2 Scores	Overall Frequency <i>n</i>	SD	<i>r</i>
Addressed in Workshops	182.20	126	29.47	.019*
Addressed in targeted programming	185.90	85	27.50	.003*
Addressed in retreats	187.73	49	30.53	.017*
Addressed with guest speakers	181.99	94	30.41	.158
Addressed in a section of a course	182.84	50	27.57	.294
Addressed as a full course	200.08	12	27.20	.012*
Not addressed	176.35	26	29.08	.618

\* $p < .05$

### Discussion and Implications for Practice

The purpose of this study was to examine multicultural competence among student affairs professionals responsible for leadership education and programming on campus. Specifically, this piece highlights the variance in multicultural competence as it relates to leadership educator practices, including the structure and elements of program design, as well as the nature in which diversity is addressed in leadership programming.

With respect to variance in multicultural competence and program structure, the study demonstrated no significant difference in leadership educator's multicultural competence scores based on their program structure as open, targeted or positional. However, the results did suggest that despite a larger portion of the sample indicating a more "open" structured program and fewer utilizing a targeted or positional structure, leadership educators who utilized a targeted or positional structure had slightly higher multicultural competence scores. Again, targeted programs are those designed for a specific population of students, a group of individuals who perhaps share a common characteristic, be it based on race or ethnicity, gender or some other aspect of their identity. Positional programs would be those programs designed for students based on their associated position on campus, for example a first-year leadership program or a program for student organization leaders. It is assumed that these students share a common experience or contextual learning environment. Therefore, the results may support a previously asserted relationship between intentionality in the use of models and multicultural competence (Wilson, 2012), and may support the intentionality that exists in designing targeted or positional leadership programs, simply suggesting that leadership educators who are more multiculturally competent may be more intentional in their program design.

This study also examined the variance in leadership educators multicultural competence related to their utilization of selected elements in program design or format. The results indicated a statistically significant difference for those who used guest speakers as an element in their programming compared with those who used other elements. Specifically, those who indicated using guest speakers had lower mean multicultural competence scores than those who used other elements (i.e. community service, credit-bearing course, skills/personality inventories, retreats, workshops, and mentoring programs). This may provide cause for further reflection and upon leadership educator's preparedness or comfort level in speaking and or facilitating conversations. Munin & Dugan (2011) highlight the personal dimension of program design, which requires reflection on the educator's part to consider their level of comfort in facilitating dialogue, specifically around issues of difference. While not statistically significant, the results also suggest that those who utilize credit-bearing courses as an element in their leadership program had slightly higher mean multicultural competence scores than all other categories. It is important to note, however, that the proportion of educators who indicated using this element (N=66, 40%) was the second lowest, suggesting that perhaps few educators have this opportunity given the nature of their program and their institution. Yet, it may also be indicative of leadership educator preparedness and/or comfort level. Those who are more multiculturally competent may be more comfortable facilitating dialogue or teaching within a course setting.

And finally, this study examined the variance in multicultural competence of leadership educators with respect to how they addressed diversity issues within their leadership program(s). Participants who indicated they addressed diversity issues through workshops, retreats, targeted programming (based on race, gender, religion or sexuality), or as a full course demonstrated statistically significant higher multicultural competence scores than those who addressed diversity through speakers or a section of a course. This supports earlier assertions about the comfort and preparedness of leadership educators to facilitate dialogue around diversity issues. Those professionals with lower multicultural competence may rely on other professionals to facilitate conversations about diversity within their leadership program and may be less inclusive in how they address diversity, simply adding it on as a section of a course versus integrating it into the whole course. Research on high impact leadership practices continues to assert that leadership educators must consistently integrate socio-cultural conversations into leadership development programs (Dugan, et al., 2013) and challenges leadership educators to utilize these dialogues as a primary pedagogical tool, embedding them within the structure and content of the program. The findings from the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership continue to highlight the need for leadership educators to critically reflect upon their own skill set and comfort level in facilitating dialogue around differences and developing programs for diverse populations, supporting this current examination of leadership educators, their practices, and their multicultural competence.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

This study has several limitations, which may also prove to be areas for future research consideration. First, the comprehensive and inclusive nature of the sample provides some difficulty in interpreting or generalizing results, given that less than half of the sample was responsible primarily for leadership education on their campus. Future research may consider a

smaller population that is solely responsible for leadership education, so as to provide a more homogeneous sample to compare and consider.

A second limitation of this particular study is that it does not consider other factors that may contribute to multicultural competence (i.e. racial identity and multicultural education and experiences). While previous studies have considered these factors (Wilson, 2012; Wilson, 2013), this particular examination focused solely on variances based on professional practices. Given that the MCSA-P2 has not demonstrated that it measures three separate constructs of multicultural awareness, knowledge and skill, but rather provides one measure of multicultural competence, it is possible that a professional may be multiculturally aware and knowledgeable, yet lacks the skill to translate this knowledge and awareness into practice. This assertion echoes previous studies on the multicultural competence of student affairs professionals (Martin, 2005; Weigand, 2005). Weigand found no significant relationships between multicultural competence and the professional practices of orientation professionals, suggesting that by measure of the MCSA-P2 they may be generally multiculturally competent; however, they lack the ability to apply their competence to their specific functional responsibilities. Future research may consider the distinct nature of these three elements, their interrelatedness, and impact on practice.

### **Conclusion**

Multicultural competence requires awareness, knowledge, and skills, which are the behaviors that allow student affairs professionals to effectively address issues of diversity (Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller, 2004). This has become an increasingly important competency for leadership educators who are charged with designing and delivering leadership programs that are both inclusive and engaging of diverse populations and diverse dialogue (Munin & Dugan, 2011; Dugan, et al., 2013). This requires critical reflection on the part of leadership educators about one's own leadership beliefs, attitudes, privileges, and potential biases, and how they may impact program design and delivery (Owen, 2012). In the case of student affairs professionals responsible for leadership education, they may be very well aware of their own personal worldviews and biases, and may even be highly skilled in communicating across differences; however, they may lack the general ability to apply that knowledge to their specific responsibilities and programming initiatives.

This study offers several points for consideration as leadership educators reflect upon their own multicultural competence and current practices. How is the design and structure of your leadership program(s) a reflection of your multicultural competence? How prepared are you to facilitate diverse dialogue among your students? How comfortable are you leading and modeling these conversations or do you bring in guest speakers to talk about diversity? Are these conversations embedded and integrated throughout your program or are they added on as a special topic? The results of this study, while limited in conclusiveness, shed some light on practices reflective of a multiculturally competent professional and raise many more questions for us as leadership educators. Ultimately, the development of multicultural or intercultural competence is of utmost importance for ethical and impactful practice, which requires self-reflection, continued engagement in multicultural experiences and a life-long commitment to enhancing one's multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills.

## References

- Dugan, J.P., Kodama, C., Correia, B., & Associates. (2013). *Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership insight report: Leadership program delivery*. College Park, MD: National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs.
- Dugan, J.P. & Komives, S.R. (2007). *Developing leadership capacity in college students: Findings from a national study*. A report from the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership. College Park, MD: National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs.
- Flowers, L.A. (2003). National study of diversity requirements in student affairs graduate programs. *NASPA Journal*, 40, 72-82.
- Gayles, G.J. & Kelly, T.G. (2007). Experience with diversity in the curriculum: Implications for graduate programs and student affairs practices. *NASPA Journal*, 44(1), 193-208.
- Haber, P. (2006). Structure, design and models of student leadership programs. In S.R. Komives, J.P. Dugan, J.E. Owen, C. Slack, & W. Wagner (Eds.), *Handbook for student leadership programs* (pp.29-51). College Park, MD: National Clearinghouse of Leadership Programs.
- Higher Education Research Institute. (1996). *A Social Change Model of Leadership Development: Guidebook version III*. College Park, MD: National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs.
- King, P.M. & Howard-Hamilton, M. (2003). An assessment of multicultural competence. *NASPA Journal*, 40(2), 119-133.
- Komives, S.R., Lucas, N., McMahon, T.R. (2007). *Exploring leadership: For college students who want to make a difference*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Komives, S.R., Owen, J.E., Longerbeam, S., Mainella, F.C., & Osteen, L. (2005). Developing a leadership identity: A grounded theory. *Journal of College Student Development*, 6, 593-611.
- Kousez, J.M. & Posner, B.Z. (2002). *The leadership challenge*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Martin, S. C. (2005). A pragmatic exploration of the multicultural competence of community college student affairs practitioners. (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3156013).
- Miklitsch, T. (2005). The relationship between multicultural education, multicultural experiences, racial identity, and multicultural competence among student affairs professionals. (Doctoral Dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3185290).

- Mueller, J.A. & Pope, R.L. (2001). The relationship between multicultural competence and White racial consciousness among student affairs practitioners. *Journal of College Student Development*, 42, 133-144.
- Munin, A. & Dugan, J.P. (2011). Inclusive design. In S. R. Komives, J.P. Dugan, J.E. Owen, C. Slack, & W. Wagner (Eds.), *Handbook for student leadership development* (pp. 157-176). College Park, MD: National Clearinghouse of Leadership Programs.
- Owen, J.E. (2012). *Findings from the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership Institutional Survey: A National Report*. College Park, MD: National Clearinghouse of Leadership Programs.
- Pope, R.L., Reynolds, A.L., & Muller, J.A. (2004). *Multicultural competence in student affairs*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Pope, R. L., Miklitsch, T. A., & Weigand, M. J. (2004). *Personal Data Form*. Instrument, available from the senior author, Raechele L. Pope, State University of New York at Buffalo.
- Pope, R. L., & Mueller, J. A. (2000). Development and initial validation of the Multicultural Competence in Student Affairs-Preliminary 2 (MCSA-P2) scale. *Journal of College Student Development*, 41 (6), 599-608.
- Weigand, M.J. (2005). *The relationships between multicultural competence, racial identity, and multicultural education and experiences among students affairs professionals responsible for first-year student orientation programs*. (Doctoral Dissertation, University at Buffalo, 2005). *Digital Dissertations*. (3169117).
- Wilson, A. (2012). Redefining the role and practices of leadership educators: The relationship between multicultural competence and the use of the social change model of leadership development. *CSPA-NYS Journal of Student Affairs*, 12(1), 36-64.
- Wilson, A. (2013). Exploring the multicultural competence of leadership educators. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 12(2), 35-55.
- Young, D.G. & Janosik, S.M. (2007). Using CAS standards to measure learning outcomes of student affairs preparation programs. *NASPA Journal*, 44(2), 341-366.

### Author Biography

Dr. Amy Wilson is an assistant professor in the Higher Education and Student Affairs Administration program at Buffalo State in Buffalo, NY. She was previously an administrator in student affairs for 12+ years, serving most recently as the Director of the Center for Student Leadership and Community Engagement at the University at Buffalo. Dr. Wilson earned her

PhD in Higher Education Administration from the University at Buffalo and her masters in College Student Personnel from Western Illinois University.