

## **A Review and Critique of Guiding Questions: Guidelines for Leadership Education Programs**

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### **Abstract**

The International Leadership Association's *Guiding Questions: Guidelines for Leadership Education Programs* (Ritch & Mengel, 2009) provides a framework to attend to leadership program development, redesign, evaluation, organized program review, questions concerning academic legitimacy and developing common program benchmarks. This article provides a critique of the *Guiding Questions: Guidelines for Leadership Education Programs* and, in particular, the five major categories: Conceptual Framework, Context, Content, Teaching and Learning, and Outcomes/Assessment. The article also draws upon scholarly research within the field to provide both breadth and depth to the different *Guiding Questions* categories. Finally, the goal of this article is to encourage a collaborative dialogue which will ultimately increase the effectiveness of the *Guiding Questions*.

### **Introduction**

Over the past two decades there has been a dramatic increase in the number of leadership programs offered throughout universities and colleges in the United States (Brungardt, Greenleaf, Brungardt, & Arensdorf, 2006). Increases in curricular based leadership programs and degree-granting schools of leadership studies have prompted a need for a more complete understanding of leadership program emergence, sustainability, and outcomes. However, institutions of higher education and leadership programs are complex systems. Complexity and nonlinear interactivity between the different facets of a leadership program and the institution often provide a very unique environment for the creation and sustainability of a program. These unique characteristics of individual leadership programs distinguish one leadership program from another at different institutions. The question then becomes, "Can one set of questions provide proper guidance for all types of leadership programs?"

*Guiding Questions: Guidelines for Leadership Education Programs* provides a framework to attend to leadership program development, redesign, evaluation, organized program review, questions concerning academic legitimacy and developing common program benchmarks (Ritch & Mengel, 2009). This article provides a critique of the International Leadership Association's *Guiding Questions: Guidelines for Leadership Education Programs* and, in particular, the five major categories: Conceptual Framework, Context, Content, Teaching and Learning, and Outcomes/Assessment. The article also draws upon scholarly research within the field to provide both breadth and depth to the different *Guiding Questions* categories. Finally, the goal of this article is to encourage a collaborative dialogue, which will ultimately increase the effectiveness of the *Guiding Questions*. The following sections, in this article, provide an in-depth analysis into each of the five *Guiding Questions* categories.

## **Context**

Scholars in the field have argued that context plays a significant role in leadership and leadership studies. This is evident in Sowcik's (2012) definition of leadership studies, which he states is, "an interdisciplinary, academic and applied field of study that focuses on the fluid process and components of the interaction between leaders and followers in a particular context" (p. 4). The first of the *Guiding Questions* categories looks to understand the emergence of the leadership studies program within the context of the institution and how different contextual categories impact the conceptual framework, curriculum, teaching, and assessment of the program (Ritch & Mengel, 2009). Numerous contextual components (e.g., identity, academic, political, cultural, institutional) are interacting with each other to ultimately influence the design, structure, and delivery of the leadership program (International Leadership Association, 2009). Every leadership studies program is constantly being shaped by the interactions between these components, the system, and the environment. Through the complexity of these interactions, the leadership program emerges, both unique when compared to other individual programs, while sharing some characteristic in common with other programs throughout the field. To better understand the emergence of leadership studies programs, the impact context plays on leadership programs, and the complex dynamics within different programs, three areas of contextual interaction are presented (International Leadership Association, 2009).

### **Three Areas of Context Discovery**

The first of the contextual interaction areas focuses on the impact different contextual components have on the emergence and self-organization of a particular leadership studies program. This initial area looks at a variety of

general contextual categories, which include: identity, sector, the concept of place, the fields of practice served by the program, and the connection between leadership theory and practice. The decisions which concern these contextual components aid the design and delivery of the conceptual framework, program content, teaching modalities, and program assessment. For example, a leadership program's conceptual framework depends on the context of the program and whether it is undergraduate or graduate, co-curricular or curricular, on-line or on-campus, or other defining characteristics. The contextual factors play an important role in determining the uniqueness of the particular leadership program. Many of the decisions made concerning these contextual components occur during the emergence of the program within the institution. In order to better understand a program's components, it is important to be cognizant of the initial conditions in which the program emerged.

At the onset of the program design many of the contextual components are decided. The history of the program and, specifically, the days leading up to the program delivery, can explain how many of the contextual categories are determined. As Douglass North (1990) stated, "History matters. It matters not just because we can learn from the past, but because the present and the future are connected to the past" (p. vii). One way to explore the history of a program is through narratives and stories which center on the emergence of the program. The telling of stories in organizations and institutions can be utilized as a tool for understanding systems, structures, and processes (Quong, Walker, & Bodycott, 1999). Stories told by the faculty and staff of the leadership program can present an opportunity to better understand the overt messages that signal what is acceptable within a program's context at a particular moment in time.

The second area in the Context category of the *Guiding Questions* documentation concerns the impact the institution has on the leadership studies program (International Leadership Association, 2009). To understand the emergence and sustainability of the leadership program, questions in this category address the role the college/university plays on the development and design of the program. The leadership program may be influenced by the institution in a number of ways. First, is the placement of the program within the institution. In research conducted by Brungardt, Greenleaf, Brungardt, and Arensdorf (2006), data showed little consistency between which academic departments housed the leadership studies program. Some leadership studies programs were stand alone schools, while others existed within already established disciplines. Decisions concerning the placement and formation of the leadership programs are often directly related to institution initiatives. Another point of influence, related to context, is the role the institution's mission plays in shaping the mission of the leadership program. The more cross over between the institution and the program's principles, the more impact the institution has on the leadership program (Byrne & Rees, 2006).

However, this overlap with institutional goals may serve as a political tool within the institution to provide a certain degree of power to the leadership program (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

Institutional politics can have a dramatic impact on the context of the leadership program. Since institutions of higher education are complex adaptive systems, they are made up of a diverse set of agents which consists of a complex web of individual and group interests. In attempting to satisfy these interests, the institution has a finite set of resources at its disposal (Bolman & Deal, 2003). These resources can include expenditures for faculty salaries, supplies used in instruction, education and research materials, academic advising/mentoring, and other student services (Smart, Ethington, Riggs, & Thompson, 2002). In their research, the researchers found a statistically significant impact of institutional expenditure patterns on the development of student leadership competencies. However, the allocation of these scarce resources can lead to a power struggle among the different interest groups within the institution (Bolman & Deal, 2003). This type of power struggle and the political positioning for resources can have an impact on the context of the leadership studies program and the relationship between the program and other academic areas within the institution.

Influences on contextual components of the leadership program can also occur outside the program and the institution. The final area in the Context section answers the question, “What cultural contexts impact the leadership education program?” (International Leadership Association, 2009). In this third area, context is analyzed by understanding the impact external forces have on the leadership program. As the world continues to change, the current student populations are changing within institutions of higher education (Porter, 1997). These changes have prompted adjustments in the way colleges and universities offer programs and services. Cherrey and Isgar (1998) discussed this changing culture of higher education and leadership studies when they stated:

As colleges and universities attract faculty with international expertise and students from around the world, an understanding of global importance is critical because it affects the way programs and services are offered at a university. Leadership education must be conducted in the context of global, cross-cultural awareness, and the ways in which information technology is bringing people together as never before. (p. 7)

Cherrey and Isgar suggested that along with the impact cultural has on the contextual components of a program, information and technology play a large role in shaping leadership education. New technologies are surfacing every day and are redefining the way in which higher education operates. Everything from on-line libraries to entire on-line universities can be found in the changing world of

academia. Students and educators can access the information they need instantaneously (International Leadership Association, 2009). However, the rapid increase in access to information has not increased one's ability to understand or incorporate that information. In a rapidly changing world, technology and information overload impact the way in which a leadership program's framework is built, the way faculty teach and students learn and, finally, the content which is covered in the program. Since institutions of higher education are complex systems, they have permeable boundaries which will continue to be impacted by culture, globalization, technology, and the increase of information.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Section two of the *Guiding Questions* document attends to the impact the program's conceptual framework has on the leadership studies program. A conceptual framework is the foundation of any leadership program (Byrne & Rees, 2006). The *Guiding Questions* (2009) document suggests, "When education leadership programs are conceptualized they should have a framework for development" (p. 10). Conceptual frameworks are derived from leadership theory. The leadership theory that is utilized to create a conceptual framework is important to guide the design, development, and evaluation of the program (Brathwaite, 2003). Leadership theory is also important in explaining how the program works and which elements of the program facilitate the program's goals (Ritch & Mengel, 2009). Finally, the conceptual framework, and the leadership theory inherent in the framework, provides consistency in beliefs, values, philosophies, and pedagogical choices (Byrnes & Rees, 2006). This, in turn, aids in educational decision making and communicating the program to stakeholders and the public (International Leadership Association, 2009).

A well defined conceptual framework plays an important role in the success of an undergraduate leadership program. However, with numerous leadership theories and multiple leadership frameworks, it can be difficult for program developers to choose one conceptual framework from which to design their program (Boyce, 2006). In a study conducted by Ayman, Adams, Fisher, and Hartmen (2003) the researchers found that institutions with leadership programs did not build the program with a conceptual framework. Furthermore, the leadership programs in the study did not articulate specific leadership theories that provided a foundation for the program. The researchers did find that the competencies in the curriculum of the program were backed by leadership research (Ayman et al., 2003). Although some leadership programs may not have a well defined conceptual framework, different elements of the program like reoccurring competencies, mission statements, vision statements, values, goals, and strategic initiatives may serve a similar function.

The Jepson School, the first degree-granting school of Leadership Studies, was founded with no clear leadership theory or conceptual framework in which to guide the design and delivery of the program (Prince, 2001). However, as Prince wrote in the article, *Teaching Leadership: A Journey into the Unknown*:

When the Jepson School was founded, the University of Richmond gave the Jepson faculty the mission to “*educate for and about leadership.*” The leadership studies faculty interpreted this to mean that they had to go beyond the presentation of traditional college courses that convey knowledge and develop critical thinking. We decided to include experiences that would inspire the willingness and confidence to serve in leadership roles, enable students to integrate knowledge and values in leadership behavior, and equip them to use knowledge of leadership and their imagination to create new responses to leadership situations that would only unfold after the student had graduated. (p. 1)

This is just one example of the powerful impact a statement of mission can have on a leadership program. Mission statements provide a source of inspiration, help define social interactions, build a community atmosphere, and structure the relationship between the program and the larger community (Velcoff & Ferrari, 2006; Woodrow, 2006). Mission statements also help faculty and staff understand how to operate within the guidelines of the program’s interests and objects, all while providing a clear focus on the priorities of the program. A well thought out mission statement can be the roadmap providing the direction for a successful leadership program (Woodrow, 2006).

Mission statements and the benefits inherent in a well thought out mission, are much more than just a compilation of words expressing values of a program (Woodrow, 2006). The Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) in Higher Education (2009) proposes that leadership programs provide a mission that engage undergraduate students in the process of leadership. The standards also suggest that the mission of the leadership program:

(1) be grounded in the belief that leadership can be learned; (2) be based upon clearly stated principles, values, and assumptions; (3) use multiple leadership theories, models, and approaches; (4) provide students with opportunities to develop and enhance a personal philosophy of leadership that includes understanding of self, others, and community, and acceptance of responsibilities inherent in community membership; (5) promote intentional student involvement and learning in varied leadership experiences; (6) acknowledge effective leadership behaviors and processes; (7) be inclusive and accessible, by encouraging and seeking out underrepresented populations. (p. 368)

The CAS standards also suggest that a program's mission should be consistently reviewed. After each review the mission should be redeveloped, disseminated and implemented. The final recommendation by CAS is that the mission statement of the leadership program should be consistent with the overall mission of the institution. Building this consistency will help establish strong ties back to the strategic initiatives of the institution, which, in turn, will provide political support and resource sustainability. The aim of the conceptual framework section in the *Guiding Questions* is to explore a program's underlying beliefs, theories, and philosophies. Questions in this section look to understand how the specific leadership program's framework translates to the program's mission, vision, goals and pedagogical choices.

### **Content**

The third section of *Guiding Questions* (2009) document inquires into "a core knowledge base guiding content in leadership programs" (Kaufman, Rudd, & Morgan, 2007). Colvin (2003) suggested that leadership development can be broken down into at least three different realms: behavioral, affective, and cognitive. The behavioral realm of leadership development takes into account procedural knowledge which includes skills like written and oral communication, reasoning, team building, motivating, listening, and planning. The affective realm deals with attitudinal knowledge which includes personal responsibility, ethical foundation, choices of values, and personal commitments (International Leadership Association, 2009). Finally, the cognitive realm highlights declarative knowledge like facts and theories. Utilizing the three types of knowledge bases to interweave elements of leadership throughout courses in various disciplines is the key to incorporating leadership studies throughout a curriculum (Colvin, 2003).

The knowledge presented in a leadership studies program may be presented in a number of different formats. Roberts (1995) stated, "One of the biggest mistakes we make is assuming that the leadership course is a generic experience that is equally applicable to a variety of students no matter who they are or where they are in their leadership experiences" (p. 3). In the first part of the Content section, questions take into account the participants' level of leadership development. Questions in the Content section also focus on the sequence and connectedness of the content offered throughout the program (International Leadership Association, 2009, p. 16). One of the few consistencies of leadership studies programs is that courses are usually presented in sequential pattern (Owen & Komives, 2007). Finally, questions in the general content section examine the materials (e.g., textbooks, articles, case studies) utilized in the program to enhance student learning (International Leadership Association, 2009).

After the general content questions are covered, the Content section addresses specific curricular components within a leadership studies program. The *Guiding Questions* (2009) document utilizes five topical areas to explore the content and courses offered within a particular leadership program. The five themes include: (a) Foundations of Leadership, (b) Strategic Leadership, (c) Personal Development, (d) Organizational Leadership, and (e) Ethical Leadership. The five topical areas covered in the Content section surfaced during the National Summit for Agricultural Leadership Education in March 2004 (Kaufman, Rudd, & Morgan, 2007). At the conference, a Delphi panel recommended that experts in the field of agricultural leadership meet to identify national goals and objectives for undergraduate leadership programs (Kaufman, Rudd, & Morgan, 2007). Out of these discussions, a conceptual model for organizing a curriculum of leadership courses emerged. Included in the five topical areas the experts recommended a Leadership Development Capstone Course and Leadership seminars, independent studies and internships (Kaufman, Rudd, & Morgan, 2007). Within the *Guiding Questions* section on program content, each of these five topical areas has corresponding questions to better understand the uniqueness of the individual leadership program (International Leadership Association, 2009).

As suggested by the *Guiding Questions* (2009) document, an exhaustive list of leadership themes would be difficult to provide. However, research conducted by Brungardt, Greenleaf, Brungardt, and Arensdorf (2006) on the curriculum of leadership studies programs added to the *Guiding Questions* five topical areas. They collected and analyzed data on 15 leadership studies programs six different leadership studies areas of coursework. Similar to the foundations of leadership class discussed in the previous section, the first area of coursework that surfaced in the research concentrated on theories and historical foundation courses. The next category found in the research included skills and behavior courses. The most common skills and behaviors covered in leadership courses in higher education include communication skills, teamwork skills, problem solving, self-awareness, and goal setting (Ayman, Adams, Fisher, & Hartman, 2003). The third category mentioned in Brungardt, Greenleaf, Brungardt, and Arensdorf's (2006) research included leadership context courses. These classes explore leadership in a specific context including organizations, non-profit, and high functioning teams, to name a few. This research is in line with Riggio, Ciulla, and Sorenson (2003) who discuss the need for coursework which introduces students to the role group dynamics plays in the process of leadership. The authors suggest that leadership is a reciprocal process and a more complete understanding of followership, teams, and membership of groups, should be included within the leadership studies curriculum. The next area covered by Brungardt et al.'s (2006) research is specific issues which may include areas such as ethics, gender, and law. Fifth, are practicum classes, which can take the form of internships, study abroad programs, and hands-on experiences. The final area of leadership education is comprised of

leadership support courses which are usually offered outside the leadership studies department to support a student's liberal arts leadership education.

## **Teaching and Learning**

Section four of the *Guiding Questions: Guidelines for Leadership Education Programs* (2009) focuses on pedagogy and learning within the *leadership studies* program. As in the other sections of the *Guiding Questions* document, specific questions are employed to answer the overarching question, "What are the students' developmental levels and what teaching and learning methods are most appropriate to ensure maximum student learning?" In this particular section the specific questions are framed within the Leadership Identity Development (LID) research conducted by Komives, Owen, Longersbeam, Mianella, and Osteen (International Leadership Association, 2009). The LID model provides a lens with which to view the pedagogical choices made throughout the program based on six stages of leadership identification (Komives, Longersbeam, Owen, Mianella, & Osteen, 2006). As explained by Komives et al., "The grounded theory study resulted in the identification of a developmental process of how students situate themselves in the construct of leadership over time" (p. 403). The six stages include: (a) awareness, (b) exploration, (c) leader identified, (d) leader differentiated, (e) generativity, and (f) integration/synthesis (International Leadership Association, 2009). The LID stage model provides one systematic way to address both the different students being taught and how to go about successfully teaching them at different stages of development.

A review of the literature on teaching methodology in leadership studies points to a plethora of ways to deliver information and develop students' leadership skills (Avolio, 1999; Bridgeforth, 2005; Curtin, 2002; Hackman, Kirlin, & Tharp, 2004). However, one common thread throughout the leadership development literature is the similarity between the process of teaching and leadership (Swatez, 1995; Hickman, 1994; James, 1997). Analogous to leadership, teaching requires the setting of goals to be accomplished in a limited time frame, the ability to influence, persuade, motivate, enlighten, transform and ultimately empower others to achieve their own goals and become capable of teaching and leading themselves (James, 1997). This process of empowerment does not happen by standing in front of a class and lecturing about leaders or leadership (Swatez, 1995). As an academic discipline *leadership studies* does not have the luxury of simply being memorized or passively absorbed. Instead teachers need to model effective leadership in the classroom and present different learning opportunities to empower students to achieve their own goals and actively understand the process of leadership.

Within section four of the *Guiding Questions* (2009) document attention is also drawn to the student or learner within the leadership studies program. Specific questions address the role/responsibilities of the learner, the possible activities, projects and experiences appropriate for the learner at different LID stages, and finally the associated learning outcomes of the student (International Leadership Association, 2009). In 2004, a reexamination of teaching and learning within higher education was conducted by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators and the American College Personnel Association (Keeling, 2004; International Leadership Association, 2009). The outcome of this reexamination was the document, *Learning Reconsidered: A Campus-wide Focus on the Student Experience*, which provides a new outlook on learning within higher education and offers a number of recommendations on ways in which to foster student learning and development (Keeling, 2004).

The student population within academia is changing and becoming more diverse (Keeling, 2004). Research suggests that these changes are already resulting in attitudinal and behavioral changes among current students (Roberts, 2003). These changes are also requiring a different type of educational system in which to teach this new and diverse population. One of the main tenets within *Learning Reconsidered* is the integrated use of all of the resources within higher education to impact the development of the whole student (Keeling, 2004). In order to accomplish holistic development the document suggests transformative education which places the student and the student's experiences at the center of the educational process. Within transformative education both in-class and out-of-class experiences are considered to be value added opportunities for student learning and development.

These out-of-class learning opportunities or experiential learning opportunities are recognized throughout the literature on higher education and leadership development as being an extremely valuable learning model (Anselmi & Frankel, 2004). Brungardt, Gould, Moore, and Potts (1997) argued that both classroom-based-learning and experiential coursework, including internships, service learning, and clubs, were important for the success of leadership studies programs. Zimmerman-Oster and Burkhardt (1999), in one of the first comprehensive evaluation of privately funded leadership programs, found that one of the 30 hallmarks for a successful leadership program includes a "comprehensive, coordinated educational strategy, which includes experiential learning opportunities" (p. 52). In the book, *The Future of Leadership Development*, Riggio, Ciulla and Sorenson (2003) propose curricular guidelines for effective leadership studies programs. One of the key curricular components recommended was experiential coursework, which the authors stated, "in addition to providing practical leadership experiences, it has been argued that

service/experiential learning can help teach students social responsibility and increase multicultural awareness” (p. 233).

The *Guiding Questions* (2009) document attempts to identify all the ways in which leadership studies programs utilize different environments and opportunities to promote leadership identity development (International Leadership Association, 2009). Besides in-class lecture and out-of-class experiential activities, the research suggests there are a number of ways a program can promote leadership learning including: (a) activities, (b) presentations, (c) games and simulations, (d) group projects, videos, or current media events, and (e) speakers (Prince, 2001; Riggio et al., 2003; Roberts, 2003; Welch, 2000; Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1999). Although none of these activities alone can build effective leaders, a program built on a combination of these activities can aid students in a better understanding of their leadership styles, group dynamics, teamwork, conflict negotiation, and goal setting (Welch, 2000). Another outcome of inclusion of these types of activities into a leadership studies program is an increase in students’ motivation to learn due to different activity addressing different learning styles and students enjoying the activity (Riggio et al., 2003). Ultimately, the activities are one more way in which students can “critically examine every act, message, speaker, and process...to tease out the lessons about leadership” (Roberts, 2003, p. 6).

Learning outcomes are also addressed by the specific questions in the *Guiding Questions* document. Although a comprehensive literature review is covered in the next section, it is important to point out that outcomes should be one of the first areas addressed when developing pedagogy for a leadership program (Prince, 2001). It is also important to note that the *Guiding Questions* (2009) is a living document and the intention of the original authors were to create a tool that could be continually changed as more research and information became available (International Leadership Association, 2009). One opportunity for growth, within this particular section, is to provide more breadth and depth by offering up additional models, which may help to inform programs about student development/learning. Additionally, as programs utilize this document, for program assessment and review, an opportunity exists to expand upon the current focus placed exclusively on student identity development and create questions that address faculty and staff related issues (i.e., research, credentialing criteria).

### **Assessment and Outcomes**

Over the past three decades, there has been an active movement within higher education to strengthen the practice of measuring student learning (Goertzen, 2009). The first conference on assessment in higher education was held in the fall of 1985 due to political pressures established from politicians who believed

higher education was the driving force behind both economic and workforce development. By the 1990s state legislatures had established minimum standards and mandates for assessment within higher education. Since these initial mandates, accreditation agencies like the Association for the Advancement of Colleges and Schools of Business, have taken over some of the responsibility for assessment of particular areas within higher education.

Additional pressures to increase the effectiveness of academic assessment come from individuals within higher education who debate over the most beneficial strategies for teaching and developing students (Messick, 1999). Recently, these debates have grown louder due to the growing diversity in the population entering academia and the increase of a competitive global economy. Assessment and evaluation of academic programs is an essential tool in working with these constraints (Brungardt & Crawford, 1996). Assessment, evaluation, and the associated outcomes are all essential components for verifying the effectiveness of a leadership studies program. Even with the political pressure and growing interest from faculty and staff within the field, there is a lack of published literature on comprehensive practices of assessment and evaluation in leadership studies programs (Goertzen, 2009).

The final section of the *Guiding Questions* (2009) document explores five key questions regarding assessment and outcomes components of a leadership studies program. These questions include: (a) What are the desired outcomes of the program at the institutional, program and student levels? (b) What are the identified leadership competencies and proficiencies? How do they relate to the program's philosophical and theoretical perspectives? (c) How do the desired outcomes relate to conceptual, contextual, content and delivery related elements (see previous sections)? (d) How will you know when you have achieved those outcomes? What are your essential indicators? What is the assessment system? and (e) How are criteria for excellence incorporated into assessment?

After the general guiding questions are addressed, the document investigates three specific levels at which assessment can occur. Within the Outcomes and Assessment section, the first level of assessment occurs on participants within the program (e.g., student assessment) (International Leadership Association, 2009). The second level of assessment, according to the specific questions in the *Guiding Questions* (2009) document, addresses programmatic level assessment. The document then makes a distinction between specific guiding questions that explore the programmatic level assessment and specific questions addressing the impact of assessment on institutional efforts.

### **Student Assessment Level**

The purpose of assessment within the student level is twofold. First assessments are given to students as learning tools to increase self-awareness and promote leadership development (Brungardt & Crawford, 1996). Assessment at the student level is administered and feedback, along with action plans, is delivered to develop different leadership competencies within the particular student. Feedback is a critical part of the learning environment, which emerges through the use of assessments (Ayman, Adams, Fisher, & Hartman, 2003). Feedback can come in various forms including formalized feedback like graded work or informal verbal feedback given by a teacher or facilitator. Although, in the end, it does not matter whether the feedback is formal or informal, the main purpose of the feedback is to establish an open, supportive, and information sharing environment, which sets the stage for future development of the participants' skills and competencies.

The second purpose of student level assessment is to utilize the data captured in the assessment to measure student learning and leadership development (Brungardt & Crawford, 1996). These assessments come in the form of student projects, classroom participation, self-evaluations, examinations, involvement in campus or community activities, journals, and pre- and post-tests (Howe & Freeman, 1997). Student assessments are given in both formal settings, like classrooms or training centers, and informally in clubs or campus activities (Brungardt & Crawford, 1996). Regardless of the type of assessment or the environment in which it is delivered, the main focus of student assessment is to measure the impact the leadership program had on a student's understanding of leadership theory and practice.

### **Program Level**

Program assessment is the comprehensive effort to understand the value of a leadership program rather than the individual outcomes of specific participants (Brungardt & Crawford, 1996). The difference between student level and program level assessment can be seen in the difference between the terms assessment and evaluation. Although the terms assessment and evaluation are often used interchangeably there are distinctions that impact the outcome of these processes (Anderson, Anaya, Bird, & Moore, 2005). Assessment emphasizes the progress made by a specific individual within a program concerning the desired educational outcomes. Assessment is the continual process of understanding the impact an educational program has on an individual students learning or performance. On the other hand, evaluation utilizes this and other data to form a holistic outlook on whether program or curricular components are successfully achieving desired goals. Rather than individually assessing students, program evaluation aims to understand the success of program components and long term

applicability of leadership knowledge, skills, and abilities students learned throughout the program (Brungardt & Crawford, 1996).

Program evaluation most often comes in the form of end of the course or program critiques, student portfolios, pre- and post-test of students, and outside evaluations (Howe & Freeman, 1997). The main role of program evaluation is to maintain the quality of the leadership program by utilizing the information to lead process improvements in program design (Blackwell & Cummins, 2007). It is not enough to just gather data on a leadership studies program. Based on the program evaluation results, continual changes should be made to ensure program sustainability and success (Johnson, 2005). Watt (2003) went as far as to suggest that the reasons for the dramatic increase in leadership studies programs and the success of these programs are a direct result of “a commitment to continuous improvement of these various programs through regular assessment” (p. 23).

### **Institutional Level**

The next level of evaluation that can occur in a leadership studies program is institution level evaluation. This level of evaluation shares many of the same indicators as the program level of evaluation. Common institutional and program level data can include enrollment data, student retention rates, graduation rates, and course/curriculum performance indicators, to name a few (Anderson, Anaya, Bird, & Moore, 2005). However, the major difference between program and institutional level evaluation is in the usage of outcome data. In program evaluation, data are utilized to make changes to the program. At the institutional level, data are used to justify the leadership studies program to decision makers within the institution. As Brungardt and Crawford (1996) suggested, “Leadership educators in an era of fiscal tightness understand the importance of program justification and survival” (p. 39). At the institutional level the data are also used to provide ongoing feedback to the necessary stakeholders inside the higher education institution (Zimmerman-Oster, 2003). The institutional level feedback provides both the opportunity for institutional attention to the program and a continued movement toward valuing leadership studies within the institution.

### **Conclusion**

The *Guiding Questions: Guidelines for Leadership Education* (2009) project was an ambitious undertaking, which took numerous years and extensive collaborative efforts between professionals in the field of leadership studies (Ritch & Mengel, 2009). The aim of the project was to offer a resource, which could provide flexibility by accounting for program differences but still establish best practices and scholarship within the field (Ritch, 2007). As Ritch suggested, “These guidelines are intended to assist leadership education programs as they grapple

with crossroads questions such as resources for new and developing programs, references for responses to regional and professional accreditation processes, and issues of legitimacy both internal and external to academia” (p. 11).

This article looks to add to the current knowledge base on leadership education and takes the next step in establishing these guidelines as a resource for individuals in higher education designing and evaluating leadership education programs. Throughout the article, a number of different sources are discussed to establish the credibility of the *Guiding Questions* (2009) and the five major categories: Conceptual Framework, Context, Content, Teaching and Learning, and Outcomes and Assessment. Additionally, the author brings to light a number of opportunities to reexamine, and possibly change, the *Guiding Questions* (2009) document to better address concerns within field of leadership education.

As suggested by Axelrod and Cohen (2000), “All of this follows from the fundamental premise: we are coping with systems that are complex and adaptive, not simple or static. In the short run, we are not likely to have a direct approach that gets it completely right” (p. 138). Due to the nature and complexity of leadership, the field will continue to have multiple strategies to develop and assess leadership programs. The *Guiding Questions: Guidelines for Leadership Education Programs* (2009) is one tool that can provide tremendous value in the design and organized review of current leadership programs. However, this research only begins to scratch the surface of the complexity involved in assessing leadership education programs. Further exploration, research, and revision will be needed if the *Guiding Questions* are to be successfully utilized by a majority of leadership education programs in the future.

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