Prescriptive Leadership Development: Developing Tomorrows Leaders Today

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Abstract

This article highlights the Chancellor's Leadership Class, a highly selective, four-year program for undergraduate students at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs. The four primary components of the program are coursework, community service, skill building, and mentoring. Although the program has a uniform structure for all students, it is tailored to meet the unique needs and goals of each student through a concept called prescriptive leadership development.

Introduction

Over the past 15 years, leadership programs have continued to proliferate throughout higher education. In 1986, the Association of American Colleges reported that 600 campuses engaged in leadership activities and, by the late 1990s, there were an estimated 800 leadership programs serving students across the country (Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1999). The components of programs vary and may include service learning, leadership studies courses, mentoring, and skill building workshops. There are comprehensive programs that combine several approaches to leadership development; however, most focus on one or two approaches. Of 50 undergraduate programs researched through the National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs website, only a very small percentage combine all four of the approaches listed above (NCLP, 2002).

In designing and evaluating a leadership program, it is important to consider why leadership development is important to the program's stakeholders. Community leaders will often become involved in a leadership program because of a desire to "pass the torch" to a bright and talented pool of young people. Most university officials and program staff would agree that producing more effective leaders benefits both the campus and the greater community. Students interested in leadership development often view such development as a key component of achieving a successful professional life. In order to attract a diverse group of students, it is essential that students understand that "leadership development is important and useful because it can enrich the undergraduate experience, empower students, and give them a greater sense of control over their lives" (Astin & Astin, 2000, p. 18).

It is also vital for program staff and faculty to consider the various definitions of leadership and agree upon on a definition that will serve to guide the program. The definition of leadership utilized in the development of Chancellor's Leadership Class at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs is "Leadership is human (symbolic) communication which modifies the attitudes and behaviors of others in order to meet shared group goals and needs" (Hackman & Johnson, 2004).

The Chancellor's Leadership Class (CLC) is a four-year, undergraduate leadership development program. The selection process is competitive. Of the 112 applications received for the 2002 entering class, only 14 students were selected. Selection criteria are as follows: students must demonstrate a cumulative grade point average of 3.5 for high school students and 3.0 for college students, involvement in their communities, and leadership potential defined as an interest in further developing their leadership skills as well as experience in leadership roles. For the 2002-2003 school year, there were 31 students in the class—21 females and 10 males. Thirty-two percent of the class represented an ethnic minority.

Background of the Chancellor's Leadership Class

Early in 1997, a group of leadership studies faculty at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs was charged with designing a leadership development program for undergraduate students. The program consisted of four primary components: (1) a leadership symposium that would bring faculty, staff, and students together with community leaders to discuss leadership trends and provide a bridge between academic learning and real life examples of leadership in the community; (2) elective course work in leadership studies; (3) a minor in leadership studies that included core leadership courses as well as additional interdisciplinary offerings from various content areas including sociology, ethnic studies, business, and economics, among others; and, (4) the Chancellor's Leadership Class, an honors program for a cohort of select students which would provide the greatest level of involvement and the most intensive leadership

training. A minimal one-time scholarship would accompany participation in the class. Students admitted into the Chancellor's Leadership Class would be expected to complete three core leadership studies courses, participate in community service activities both on campus and within the greater community, and attend weekly meetings to develop their leadership skills.

In the early years, the Chancellor's Leadership Class faced several significant challenges. A limited program budget precluded the hiring of a full-time faculty or staff member to fully develop and implement the program. There was low visibility and lack of community awareness of the program by potential supporters and prospective students. Scholarship dollars to attract and retain the best and brightest students were virtually nonexistent.

In the spring of 2000, three years after the inception of the program, CLC was jumpstarted by a substantial grant from El Pomar Foundation, a Colorado-based grant making organization and entry into the Colorado Leadership Alliance, a consortium of five statewide university leadership development programs. The grant enables the campus to offer sizable scholarships (partially funded by El Pomar with program staff raising matching funds) that would not only make CU-Colorado Springs competitive in attracting the state's top students, but would allow those students to focus greater energies on leadership development and community service. The hiring of a full-time staff person as coordinator and veteran student affairs professional to direct the program resulted in a more comprehensive and holistic structure. Additionally, a more integrated and focused program and greater support for student participants allows the individual needs and goals of each student to be addressed.

Program Structure

Figure 1. Prescriptive leadership development

Course Work	Community Service	Skill Building	Mentoring
COMM 111 LEAD 211 LEAD 411	70 Hours Freshmen 60 Hours Sophomores 50 Hours Juniors 40 Hours Seniors	Professionalism Critical Thinking Career Development Personal Enrichment	First Year Students By Upperclassmen Upperclassmen by Community Board Members

Course Work

Each student in the program is required to take three core Leadership Studies courses. These courses are part of a six-course sequence that contributes to a minor in Leadership Studies. The first course in the sequence is Introduction to Leadership (COMM 111). This course provides a broad overview of leadership research and theory with emphasis on topics including, the difference between leadership and management, leadership communication styles, theoretical approaches to leadership (traits, situational, functional, and transformational), charisma, leadership ethics, group and team leadership, and leadership in diverse cultures. The second course in the sequence is Profiles of Leadership (LEAD 211). This course focuses on the individual leadership development of each student by challenging students to develop personal profiles of leadership based upon multiple factors including leadership theory and non-traditional forms of leadership. The capstone course is Experiences in Leadership (LEAD 411). In this course students research and develop their own leadership development programs with an emphasis on skill development. To accomplish this goal students work with an organization in their area of interest (government, the corporate sector, education, community service organizations, etc.). Students must work at the host organization 45 hours for every credit hour awarded by the university (135 hours for a three-credit hour internship or an average of nine hours per week). As the culmination of the course students are expected to present the work they have done and what they learned about leadership at a symposium. Many students in the program go on to complete the Leadership Studies minor by taking three additional elective courses in areas related to: (1) management and organizational leadership, (2) understanding diversity, and (3) social and political applications of leadership.

Community Service

The program's heavy emphasis on community service can be tied to Robert Greenleaf's concept of servant leadership. Servant leadership "begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*" (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 13). Service can facilitate self-efficacy in students, a sense that they have control over their lives, and control over the impact they can make on the lives of others. Concerning leadership development, Thomas Cronin states, "the single biggest factor is motivating or liberating would-be leaders in their attitude toward themselves and toward their responsibilities to others" (Cronin, 1984, p. 56).

First-year CLC scholars complete a minimum of 70 hours of service each semester. As students progress through the program, the amount of required hours decreases and their level of engagement and responsibility with service projects increases. Service is performed both on and off campus and must be tied to a 501(c)3 organization. To encourage student reflection after each project, CLC scholars submit electronically to the program coordinator a description of their service projects, the lessons learned, and the amount of service hours completed.

The Campus Outreach Opportunity League lists reflection as one of the five critical elements of thoughtful community service and proposes that "reflection is a crucial component of the community service learning experience" (Mintz & Hesser, 1996, p. 31).

Requiring a significant quantity of service exposes students to a wide variety of needs in the community and aids in skill development. While participating in individual and group projects, students report building upon the skills they are learning in the classroom. They practice improving communication and teamwork, working with diverse groups of people, organizing projects to meet unmet needs, and utilizing their time wisely in order to fulfill program requirements. Students are able to choose projects that are in line with their interests and fields of study and are encouraged to broaden their knowledge of community challenges by working on diverse projects and issues.

Skill Building

"Universities should be responsible for both the intellectual preparation as well as training on those other factors that account for people who are successful. Things like listening skills, personal values…things that create an effective leader" (Thompson, 1999, p. 107). The development of skills that may be considered peripheral to leadership, but essential to success, such as those mentioned above, is the focus of the weekly class that CLC scholars are required to attend. The desired outcome of the Chancellor's Leadership Class is to produce graduates who think critically, who are invested in resolving critical community issues, and who are marketable in the workplace. The classes not only reinforce the leadership course work and give students the opportunity to practice and reflect what they have learned, but also provide practical training to prepare them for their lives after college. With this in mind, each weekly class is designed to address personal enrichment, critical thinking, professionalism, and career development.

Personal enrichment activities have included workshops on personal finance, public speaking, and developing listening skills. The speakers' series allows community leaders to model professional behavior, share their life experiences, and demonstrate that leadership exists in many different forms. Activities that foster professionalism have included hosting an etiquette dinner and role-playing to prepare for formal social events. Hands-on instruction in resume writing and interviewing and a workshop on finding career purpose are examples of career development activities that have been provided.

According to the Center for Creative Leadership's *Handbook of Leadership Development*, an effective skill-based environment for training is one allowing participants to learn conceptual information or requisite behaviors, practice use of new information and behaviors, and receive feedback on performance. The monthly discussion groups provide such opportunities for learning, practice and

feedback. All students are provided with readings on current events and relevant leadership topics. Upperclass CLC scholars devise a plan to creatively present the material and facilitate the discussion. This practice helps to refine the students' critical thinking skills, allows the students to participate in their own learning, and builds self-confidence. Interaction on this level with their CLC peers helps to develop those leadership qualities conducive for the collaborative working environment espoused in W. K. Kellogg's *Leadership Reconsidered*. Those qualities are empathy, self-knowledge, authenticity, and disagreement with respect (Astin & Astin, 2000). Simply put, students learn how to engage in the necessary self-reflection to formulate a stance on an issue and be able to defend it without discounting others' views.

Mentoring

The mentoring component of the program is two fold involving peer mentorship and community leader mentorship. Student mentorship begins in the spring when new CLC scholars are selected. Each new student is paired with a CLC upperclassmen based on fields of study, interests, or hometowns. The upperclass students write their new mentees a letter congratulating them on their selection to the program and encouraging the new students to contact them before fall orientation to discuss any questions or concerns they have about CLC or college life in general. The pairs then interact at the retreat and plan a regular time to meet throughout the beginning of fall semester. Mentors offer advice to their mentees on how to be a successful student, assist their mentees in fulfilling program requirements, and connect mentees with resources both on and off campus. Student feedback on the mentorship component of the program has confirmed the assertion that "when students see themselves as both learners and teachers, they take more responsibility for their own learning and help create more favorable learning environments for each other" (Astin & Astin, 2000, p.19).

Community leaders who serve on the CLC Community Board participate in a mentorship program with upperclass students in CLC. Board members developed the program because of their belief that mentoring is one of the most crucial factors in determining a students' professional success and that mentoring provides a safe, protected environment in which students can learn. They agree with William Rosenbach's expectation that "the mentor opens doors for the protégé and helps that person learn to arrive at decisions through support and feedback. The relationship is based on an intellectual and emotional exchange that offers challenge and excitement" (Rosenbach, 1989, p.140).

It is important to the board that participation in the mentoring program is voluntary both for upperclassmen and for board members. Upperclass participants choose their board mentors based on their interest in the board member's career field or a relationship that has developed through interaction with the board members at program events. During the first meetings of board mentors and student mentees, the pairs discuss their desired goals and outcomes, and the action

steps that will be required to reach those goals. This organized approach complements the research that affirms, "Mentoring is too important a journey to commence without a prior investment of time and effort to develop an organized road map or plan of action" (Kunich & Lester, 2000, p.27). The board has clearly defined the responsibilities of the board mentors. Responsibilities include scheduling convenient and regular meeting times, providing honest and thoughtful feedback to students, directing students to other community leaders who can assist them, keeping confidences, and serving as a role-model and friend to the students.

Prescriptive Leadership Development

In the Chancellor's Leadership Class, all scholars, regardless of age or grade level, move through the program in a single cohort. This approach has several advantages and provides easy, cost effective delivery of program offerings. Keeping students together allows them to learn from each other and fosters a collaborative and supportive environment. According to the Center for Creative Leadership, acceptance, support, and encouragement from others are necessary ingredients for optimal growth and leadership development (McCauley, et al., 1998). However, maintenance of a single cohort of students and uniform programming without attention to their individual needs can result in waning interest and lack of challenge, adversely affecting student retention.

Acknowledging these potential drawbacks, program staff spent a year observing how the structure and programming was working. Notes were taken on student performance and reaction to programming. Attention was paid to students' talents as well as their areas of weakness. At the end of the year, program staff scheduled individual meetings with students not only to gather feedback on program offerings, but also to compile information on students' interests and their perceptions of their strengths and skill development needs. Students were asked to review their participation and level of engagement in the program over the past year and to create their own leadership development goals.

Armed with this information, an individualized or prescriptive leadership development plan was crafted for each student based upon their goals and interests and the assessment by program staff of their leadership development progress and performance in the program. Program faculty and staff provide support for students in attainment of their annual goals. In the process of developing the annual plan for CLC, program staff work to connect students with projects and events that would help fulfill their goals or address deficiencies. Students with deficiencies in certain areas are "prescribed" additional attention to bolster those weak areas. For example, students who express a desire to work on their public speaking skills are given opportunities to speak throughout the year. This year, students served as masters of ceremonies at an annual town and gown event. Students with talents in certain areas are given opportunities to showcase those talents. In all cases, students are told that they should expect to be

challenged by situations that will take them out of their comfort zone. Only when this happens does growth occur.

This process of assessment, challenge, and support is based upon the leadership development model espoused by the Center for Creative Leadership (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Leadership development model

Assessment   Challenge   Support

Developmental experiences
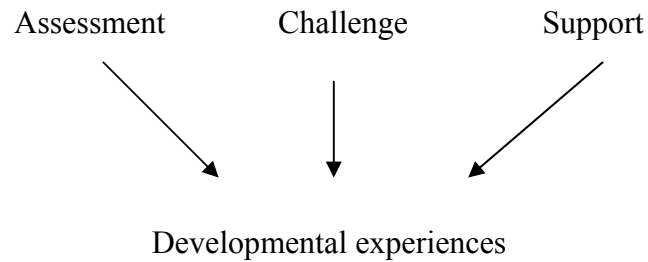
Leadership development is stimulated by "situations that stretch an individual and are feedback-rich while providing a sense of support" (McCauley, et al., 1998, p. 6-7). With this in mind, program staff works to provide developmental experiences for each student that will be challenging and will assist students in achieving their leadership development goals.

Conclusion

CLC's structure and prescriptive leadership model appear to be impacting students positively and facilitating noticeable growth in students' leadership skills and sense of self-efficacy. Long-term assessment of the prescriptive leader model is required to assess the overall impact it will have on the development of CLC students. In order to provide the best education possible for students, constant evaluation is necessary for all aspects of the program. Feedback is gathered after each weekly class, during individual meetings with students, and during Student Steering Committee meetings at the end of each semester. As part of the Colorado Leadership Alliance, a third party evaluation of the program is conducted annually. In the future, it would be beneficial for community leaders to contribute to program evaluation.

As the number of students in the program increases, a significant challenge will be to provide the same level of individualized attention to each student. Solutions may lie in placing more responsibility on peer mentors or board mentors, or in hiring additional staff. Although the prescriptive leadership model is intensive, CLC program staff, faculty, and community board members agree that it is a holistic and comprehensive approach that provides the highest educational value for students.

In conclusion, "it is the person, the leader as an individual, who counts. Systems, theories, organization structures are secondary. It is the inspiration and initiative of individual persons that move the world along" (Greenleaf, 1996, p. 334).

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