

Design and Implementation of an Interdisciplinary Leadership Studies Minor at an Historically Black, Liberal Arts College

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Abstract

This article summarizes the design, implementation, and current status of an undergraduate interdisciplinary leadership studies minor at Morehouse College. The college's primary mission is to "develop men with disciplined minds who will lead lives of leadership, service, and self-realization," as well as provide students with an understanding of the African American heritage and cultural experience. The leadership studies minor was designed as a place within the academic curriculum of the college program for students to learn about and reflect upon the study, practice, and interdisciplinary nature of leadership, its theoretical and historical foundations, and explore critical ethical leadership challenges that impact civil society with special emphasis on issues as they relate to African Americans, their heritage, and their cultural experience. Program results to date and the future of the minor in the college's academic curriculum are also discussed.

Introduction

Over the past two decades, leadership studies have become a growing interdisciplinary field in American higher education. In 1987, the University of Richmond, through a multi-million dollar gift, embarked upon the establishment of the nation's first undergraduate school of leadership studies, The Jepson School of Leadership Studies, with an interdisciplinary curriculum rooted in the liberal arts (University of Richmond website). As of the turn of the 21st century, numerous other colleges and universities have formalized the study of leadership at both undergraduate and graduate levels through majors, minors, or selected course offerings. Recently Doh (2003) reported findings that more than three-fifths of the top 50 United States business schools offer some coursework in leadership. Clearly colleges and universities that strive to be the best of the best are leading the way in providing formalized academic course offerings in leadership studies. This trend was the impetus for a leadership studies minor at Morehouse College.

Ranked by *Black Enterprise* magazine as the number one college in the nation for educating African American students three consecutive times (Sykes, 2004; *The 50 Best Colleges for African Americans*, 2003), Morehouse College is the nation's largest, private liberal arts college for African American men. Founded in 1867, Morehouse enjoys a long standing tradition of excellence in leadership development. The college states as its primary mission the development of men with disciplined minds who will lead lives of leadership, service, and self-realization (*Morehouse College 2000-2001 Catalog*).

In 2002, Morehouse College saw the need to strengthen and enhance its leadership development initiatives and added the study of leadership as an academic subject matter through the implementation of a 15-hour interdisciplinary leadership studies minor. Although not the first college to offer a minor in leadership studies, Morehouse College, an HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities), felt the need to distinguish its offering from those of traditional colleges in two ways: (a) by incorporating the African American heritage and experience into the design and delivery of its leadership studies program and (b) challenging students' awareness of the critical ethical leadership issues of the 21st century as they relate to African American life and culture.

This paper highlights the Morehouse College interdisciplinary leadership studies minor program and its emphasis on the African American heritage and experience and 21st century ethical leadership issues by discussing (a) the goal and objectives of the leadership studies curriculum, (b) the leadership studies curriculum design, (c) the leadership studies minor core course descriptions; and (d) the leadership studies minor as it relates to the College's Educational Outcomes. The paper concludes with program results to date and implications for the future.

Leadership Studies Minor Curriculum Goal and Objectives

The Leadership Studies (LS) Minor is a program of the Leadership Center at Morehouse College and the Division of Business and Economics. It was designed during the 2000-2001 academic year by an 11-member, interdisciplinary faculty committee, under the leadership of the Executive Director and Associate Director of the Leadership Center.

The goal of the Morehouse College Leadership Studies Minor Curriculum is to prepare students to explore critical ethical leadership issues that impact civil society with special emphasis on issues as they relate to African Americans, their heritage, and their cultural experience.

Accomplished through a rigorous, interdisciplinary academic course of study, the objectives of the LS Minor are to prepare students to:

- Think critically about the relationship between knowledge, values, and the practice of leadership.

- Serve effectively in formal and informal leadership roles in diverse settings.
- Apply modes of inquiry and knowledge bases from many disciplines to the study and practice of leadership with particular emphasis on science and technology, humanities and the social sciences, and business and economics.
- Retrieve, examine, and when desirable and necessary, reinterpret leadership practices that have historically marked African American life and culture.
- Understand the personal and public roles of leadership in an increasingly diverse and global world.
- Discern, deliberate, and decide on appropriate strategies for action and change directed by values of courage, justice, and compassion.
- Develop adaptive strategies that promote teamwork and cooperation;
- Imagine worthwhile visions of the future and inspire others to join in bringing about change when desirable and necessary.
- Continue their development as leaders by self-directed, life-long learning.

Leadership Studies Minor Curriculum Design

In order to achieve the goal and objectives outlined above, the LS Minor was designed as a 15-hour curriculum comprised of three leadership studies courses (nine-hour core), and two elective courses (six hours) to be selected by the students from a predetermined list of LS Minor electives.

The nine-hour core contains three courses which must be completed sequentially. They are LS 101 Foundations of Leadership, LS 201 History and Theories of Leadership, and LS 301 Ethical Leadership and African American Moral Traditions. Courses that may be selected as electives are found in each of the three college divisions, which are Business and Economics, Science and Mathematics, and Social Sciences and Humanities. The electives may be taken at any point after the student has completed LS 101. Students are required to take one elective from each division outside of their major division. This requirement reinforces the interdisciplinary design of the LS minor.

Leadership Studies Minor Core Courses

LS 101- Foundations of Leadership

Foundations of Leadership explores the broad and diverse literature of leadership studies and emphasizes the relationship between theory and leadership practice, and the moral and civic responsibilities of leadership. The course seeks to critically examine prominent theories and practices of leadership in context and to evaluate the competencies traditionally associated with the field. The fundamental theories and concepts that are studied include trait, situational, transactional, transformational, adaptive, and servant-leadership models.

The course also focuses on the practical aspects of leadership which are developed by learning and observing the skills, practices, and activities of effective leadership identified by leadership scholars. For example, students become familiar with the interpersonal and technical skills that are needed for effective communication, conflict resolution, change management, decision-making, group development, motivation, and policy making and implementation. The textbook utilized in the course is *Leadership: Enhancing the Lessons of Experience* (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 2006).

As a result of completing LS 101, the student should (a) become comfortable with the concept of leadership, (b) recognize the various theories of leadership, (c) have a working knowledge of the process of leadership, (d) demonstrate an increased awareness of the practice of leadership, (e) have a clear sense of the purposes of leadership, (f) have developing awareness of his strengths and weaknesses as a leader, and be able to articulate a personal approach to leadership, and (g) have an enhanced understanding of concepts and practices involved in leadership in a diverse society.

LS 201 - History and Theories of Leadership

History and Theories of Leadership broadly and inclusively explores theories of leadership in historical context and demonstrates how ideology and culture provide environments that produce different views of leadership and demand different styles of leadership. The course examines and evaluates competencies traditionally associated with leadership in varying historical and cultural contexts while reinforcing the theoretical dimensions of leadership with an emphasis on contemporary theories and models.

The course is designed as an “intellectual history” of leadership, allowing the student to come away with an enhanced understanding of the richness and diversity of the field of leadership studies. The course explores a wealth of differing sources and approaches to leadership, including ancient mythology, classic philosophy, literature, history, social, business, and scientific theories of leadership. The material is integrated in such a way that each perspective falls logically into an understandable pattern of evolving conceptions of leadership over time. The textbook utilized in the course is *The Leader’s Companion: Insights on Leadership through the Ages* (Wren, 1995).

As a result of completing LS 201 the student should (a) demonstrate a general working knowledge of the “intellectual history” of leadership, (b) recognize and understand major interpretive frameworks of leadership, (c) appreciate differing perspectives in the field of leadership studies, (d) be able to apply the major interpretive frameworks of leadership to real-life situations, and (e) devise his own conceptual approach to the subject based on his creative engagement with major thinkers and movements in leadership studies.

LS 301 - Ethical Leadership and African American Moral Traditions

Ethical Leadership and African American Moral Traditions examines African American leadership in historical and cultural context and the competencies traditionally associated with African American leadership practices, while evaluating the role of ethical leadership in addressing the issues and challenges facing 21st century African American leaders. Three specific areas of ethical leadership are emphasized: morally-anchored character, transformative acts of civility, and a sense of community.

Utilizing a narrative pedagogy, LS 301 acquaints students with major figures, movements, and issues in black American spiritual and ethical traditions. This intermediate seminar focuses heavily on leadership emerging from 19th and 20th century black culture, explores theoretical concerns within respective traditions, and offers a forum for practical engagement with contemporary problems associated with African American life and culture. Two textbooks are used in the class, *Uplifting the Race* (Gaines, 2002) and *The Stones that the Builders Rejected* (Fluker, 1995). Secondary source material in the form of readings from and about significant African American writers, thinkers, and leaders are also used. These prominent figures include Harold Cruse, Sojourner Truth, Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. DuBois, Anna Julia Cooper, Darlene Clark Hines, Peter Paris, Marable Manning, and Cornel West.

As a result of completing LS 301, the student should (a) demonstrate an understanding of the historical underpinnings of moral traditions that have nurtured leaders in African American life and practice, (b) demonstrate an appreciation of the interdisciplinary nature of the study of leadership within an ethical framework, i.e., utilizing disciplines of human and social sciences, philosophy, theology, ethics, and the arts, (c) demonstrate an appreciation of the place of narratives and stories that illumine historical, religious, ideological, and cultural antecedents in African American leadership, and (d) demonstrate an ability to identify key leaders and movements that have shaped the context and meaning for African American life and culture.

Relationship to the College's Educational Outcomes

Morehouse College, an HBCU, proudly holds within its mission an obligation and responsibility to educate its students to understand and appreciate leadership and leadership development through the lenses of the African American heritage and cultural experience, as outlined by the college's Educational Outcomes (EO). The LS Minor incorporates the college's 12 educational outcomes into its course content as follows:

EO 1 – Understanding the African American Experience

In the LS Minor capstone course, Ethical Leadership and African American Moral Traditions, the historical analyses of African American traditions and exemplary leaders provide a framework for the studying of major events, dates, and persons in African American history. Other ways which this course highlights the African American experience is through discussing the linkage between the African American and African; revisiting the ideological, cultural, religious, and historical counterpoints of the heritage and legacy of European history through readings, discussions, and group work; critically examining and discussing the intellectual and empirical evidence of the significant roles Morehouse men have played in the African American experience and in national and global communities; and examining the holistic and interdisciplinary relationship among the various disciplines associated with black life.

EO 2 – Leadership Skills

All three of the LS Minor core courses provide venues for students to critically examine theory and practice of leadership where skills and competencies of visionary and charismatic leadership are discussed along with other prominent theories and strategies of leadership. The interdisciplinary nature of the subject matter demands that students stay focused, disciplined, and communicate in speech, writing, and through aesthetic forms. Specifically, the capstone course allows reflection on students' own personal views of justice and equality in light of the positions taken by African American leaders.

EO 3 – Problem-Solving Skills/EO 4 – Critical Thinking/Analytical Abilities

The LS Minor, through its interdisciplinary offerings, requires students to utilize skills of synthesis, comparison, and contrast to understand the varying concepts, definitions, and examples of leadership. Students are expected to understand how environmental realities shape questions and challenges for leadership and how an interdisciplinary approach to problem-solving is required for effective leadership. The ability to synthesize, compare and contrast, and show whether and how a solution is valid and reliable is required of the students in each of the three core course offerings.

EO 5 – Citizenship Skills

A major objective of the LS Minor is the development of skills and competencies that allow students to explore leadership issues that impact civil society. Citizenship skills as they relate to the national and global work of leadership, the impact of science and technology on societies, and the role that leaders must play in change are significant parts of the study and discussions of all LS Minor core courses.

EO 6 – Effective Communication Skills

The interdisciplinary approach to leadership studies places major emphasis on communication skills. In all of the core courses and in designated electives, communication skills are central (see EO 2 above). This EO is also realized through use of student-required exercises in class such as public speaking and presentations.

EO 7 – Value Judgments

Understanding the relationship between knowledge, values, and the practice of leadership is a critical and significant part of the LS Minor. The place of values is a consistent feature of the core course offerings, which highlights the role of values in decision-making, strategizing, and change. In addition, this EO states that students will be able to analyze values found in the various expressions of culture, including artistic, religious, social, humanistic, and scientific. In concert with the college's liberal arts core program of study, the LS Minor requires students to choose as electives from a pre-determined list, one course from each of the two divisions outside of their major division. This requirement provides the venue for LS minor students to explore at deeper levels cultural values from each of the college's academic repositories.

EO 8 – Understanding of Social Institutions and Processes

The LS Minor studies the process of leadership within the major social institutions of our society (political, religious, business, non-profit, and educational) thereby fostering a deeper understanding of the institutions and their inter-workings. Specifically, the minor prepares students to be able to negotiate personal and public roles of leadership in a variety of settings by exploring ways in which social institutions both form and inform the character, agency, and prospects of leadership in historical context.

EO 9 – Aesthetic Intelligence

This educational outcome states that students should understand that the aesthetic experience synthesizes the senses, reason, memory, imagination, morality, dreams, and emotions. The LS Minor, through its interdisciplinary approach, challenges its students to engage all aspects of their aesthetic intelligence in the study of leadership. The capstone course in particular uses innovative pedagogical techniques, namely narrative and other aesthetic dimensions of experience, as a means of engaging moral imagination.

EO 10 – Knowledge of Various Philosophies and Religions

This educational outcome states that students should have an appreciation of diversity of religions and familiarity with major philosophical traditions.

Although the study of leadership is a relatively new field, the topics outlined in the History and Theories of Leadership course and the capstone course give critical attention to ideology, religion, and culture as significant variables in the study and practice of leadership. Central to this discussion are the ways in which religion and ethics provide the framework for critique of cultural contexts in which leadership emerges and is practiced.

EO 11 – Knowledge of the Natural World

This educational outcome states that students should have an understanding of the relationship between the sciences and other academic disciplines. Students of the LS Minor are challenged to examine issues of leadership in light of the solutions provided through the sciences and applied by business, political, and non-profit institutions. Through interdisciplinary readings and discussions, students are provided with problems and challenges for leadership related to the natural environment and the ethical issues associated with scientific innovation, such as cloning, stem cell research, and biochemical warfare.

EO 12 – Appreciation of Interdependent Nations and Cultures

This educational outcome states that students are to have knowledge of the commonality and diversity of cultures with intent to instill empathy. One of the LS Minor curriculum objectives is to prepare students to understand the personal and public roles of leadership in an increasingly diverse and global world. The LS Minor examines leadership through a global lens, identifying specific issues of diverse cultures and shifting historical, political, and economic contexts that shape leadership challenges and opportunities.

Results

The LS Minor curriculum was approved by the college faculty in Spring 2001. The first offering of LS 101 Foundations of Leadership, occurred in Spring 2002, with five students. One section of LS 101 has been offered each Fall and Spring semester since Spring 2002, with an average class size of 25 students.

LS 201, History and Theories of Leadership, a Fall semester course offering, saw 11 students enrolled in Fall 2004, six in Fall 2005 and seven in Fall 2006.

LS 301, a Spring semester offering, had five students enrolled in Spring 2005 and eight students, Spring 2006.

Three students graduated with a minor in leadership studies in Spring 2005 and two graduated in Spring 2006. Currently, there are six seniors who have completed the requirements and two seniors who will complete their requirements in Spring 2007, resulting in a total of eight graduates with a minor in leadership studies in Spring 2007.

Student evaluations, both formal and informal, are very positive regarding the impact of the program on their collegiate leadership development experience and growth. Student demand for the LS 101 has consistently exceeded the class enrollment cap of 25 students and current limitations on faculty resources does not allow for additional sections. However, the college has recognized the critical need to provide exposure to the entire student body to the material covered in the leadership studies minor, which focuses on critical ethical leadership issues that impact civil society with special emphasis on issues as they relate to African Americans, their heritage, and their cultural experience. The college is currently undergoing a revision of its general core curriculum and is investigating the feasibility of the incorporation of the leadership studies minor core courses into the general core curriculum of the college.

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Biography

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