

**Making a Difference: Two Case Studies Describing the
Impact of a Capstone Leadership Education
Experience provided through a National
Youth Leadership Training Program**

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Abstract

Many youth leadership organizations exist today and provide a variety of leadership experiences. One such organization provides a week long leadership experience to high school students with its primary purpose being to guide students through a process of identifying a community need and developing a plan to address that need. This article reports on two qualitative case studies which investigate this leadership education tool and its impacts on the students' involved, as well as the participating communities. The Living to Serve plans (LTS), the capstone leadership education experience, which the students develop are used to help students understand the process of identifying problems and solving those problems through identified steps.

Introduction

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Meade

There are numerous organizations and activities in which youth can be exposed to leadership such as Outward Bound, 4-H, Junior Achievement, and Boy Scouts and Girls Scouts of America. It is important to develop an understanding of the impact contributed by these programs (Foster, 2000). The Boy and Girl Scouts of America are focused on leadership and character education. Similarly, 4-H has a broad mission of providing education to youth in leadership, life skills, and citizenship. Outward Bound is specifically focused on character development while Junior Achievement is leadership and economics education. Each organization is successful in educating the youth of today in its unique way.

In an effort to continue the leadership development of youth across the nation, one national youth leadership organization has provided a week long in-depth opportunity to travel to Washington, DC to attend the Washington Leadership Conference (WLC). This national program offers youth the opportunity to enhance their leadership capabilities through a series of workshops throughout the summer (The National FFA Organization, 2005). During this week long initiative the students begin their work on Living to Serve Plans (LTS). This plan is used to help the students create, design, and implement a program to help their communities (The National FFA Organization, 2006).

The National FFA Organization provides a series of programs that coordinate with state and local efforts to provide a rich and meaningful understanding of the three components of their mission statement – leadership, personal growth, and career success. Programs in this continuum begin in middle school and are built

on best practices in youth development and defensible learning theory. WLC is designed as the capstone experience of programs offered to high school members of this organization. The overall program objective for the WLC conference is for students to design LTS plans which address a specific need (e.g., economic development, human welfare, healthy lifestyles, etc.) within their home community (The National FFA Organization, 2004).

With that, the initial step in determining the impact of the youth's LTS plan on a community must be grounded in the proper theoretical framework supporting positive youth development coupled with leadership education.

Historical and Theoretical Framework

Today's youth have the potential to understand leadership and develop their leadership potential (Fertman & van Linden, 1999). Through leadership education and programs focused on leadership development this potential can be recognized. In addition, youth have the ability to recognize situational factors which create an opportunity to build character. "Educators can help youth develop leadership and build character at the same time" (Fertman & van Linden, 1999, p. 9).

Van Linden and Fertman (1998) posit that youth leadership combines transactional and transformational leadership and understanding this, builds a bridge between leadership education and character education. "Think of the difference between transactional and transformational leadership as doing leadership tasks versus being a leader" (p. 78). Leadership educators can identify these theories and create opportunities for which students can complete tasks that will transform them into leaders.

In 2005 a report on Positive Youth Development sought to develop a common vocabulary for those trying to provide youth with leadership education. This was based on positive opportunities versus that of correcting negative ways (Lerner, et al., 2005). The five Cs as they described include: Competence; Confidence; Connection; Character; and, Caring/Compassion. The authors later address a sixth C, *contribution*, as a critical component where the students apply their knowledge of the 5Cs by contributing to their selves, their family, and community.

In order to accomplish this, personal experiences must be drawn upon. These personal experiences are a critical component of leadership education. This key component of leadership education provides application of leadership knowledge learned in the classroom. Programs of this nature should seek to provide youth with not only knowledge, but also the hands-on application of participation and

practice. Experiences through FFA activities have been shown to enhance the leadership traits of youth (Townsend & Carter, 1983).

After conducting a meta-analysis of youth leadership development literature, Ricketts and Rudd (2002) developed a model which describes a framework for teaching leadership to students. The five dimensions of the conceptual model are (a) Leadership Knowledge and Information, (b) Leadership Attitude, Will, and Desire, (c) Decision Making, Reasoning, and Critical Thinking, (d) Oral and Written Communication Skills, and (e) Intra and Interpersonal Relations. These dimensions overlap with three learning objectives from WLC – define character; describe the role of problem solving in leadership; and, evaluate ethical decision that impact a community.

This discussion supports the collective information related to (a) the development of youth leadership, (b) positive youth development, and (c) dimensions of leadership education incorporating components of the LTC plan. The key emphasis of the study is on how a student driven service learning plan focused on ethical decisions impacts a community. By incorporating the aforementioned leadership theory and practice a better understanding of teaching leadership and character/ethical education can be accomplished.

Purpose

Many youth organizations provide a variety of leadership experience, both formal and informal. Little is known about the impact of these experiences through the voice of the student's or their communities. The purpose of the study is to investigate a leadership education tool and its impact on the students' involved as well as its impact on the participating communities. In addition, a discussion of how a leadership learning experience, specifically the LTS plan, acts as tool for leadership education will be provided.

Methods and Procedures

Researchers conducted two case studies to understand how the Living to Serve plans (LTS) can be successful. As Merriam (2004) states, "A qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit" (p. 27). The use of case studies helps the researcher to sort through a phenomenon within a bounded context. The case studies within this article represent a social unit and will provide an in-depth description of different aspects of the LTS plan provided by the students, teachers, and communities which were impacted by the plans.

These two case studies were focused on a particular program, the LTS plan. “The case itself is important for what it reveals about the phenomenon and for what it represents” (Merriam, 2004). Rich, thick descriptions were achieved through in-depth interviews and observations. The case studies presented will suggest to the reader what to do in a similar situation or what to do if a similar leadership education tool is used.

The researchers ensured validity of the data by not interpreting the data. The authors have a bias as two of them participated in the youth leadership program discussed in the article; however, little interpretation of the data is made because the reporting method is straight from the participants’ experiences. In addition, the names and identities of the schools and participants have been changed. Each participant signed a consent form and understood what their contribution to the study and how the information provided would be used.

Participants were purposively selected based on the online reporting system put in place by the national organization to monitor progress. Criteria included: completion of LTS plan, availability, and willingness to participate. Digital cameras were used as incentives for the youth organizations to participate in the study.

Members of the research team traveled to a small town in the mid-west and conducted interviews and observations with students, advisors, and administrators who were involved in executing the LTS plan. Initially the research team met with the WLC participants who developed the plan, followed by a variety of participants who played an integral part in helping the plan come to fruition. A discussion with the chapter advisor provided insight into the success and failures of the plan. To understand the impact of the plan, interviews were conducted with those whom the plan was intended to benefit. Learning the various aspects of how the plans were developed and executed provides a holistic understanding of the leadership experience.

A second team of researchers went to a small southern community and followed the same research methodology. This information provides a holistic look to various aspects of the plans and how the development and implementation was successful or not. Understanding the impact made on the community is important, so interviews were conducted with those who were affected by the plan. Many times participants will not take the time to evaluate their plans; however, this process provides a time of reflection for the WLC participants and others involved in helping them plan ahead for the future of the leadership programs and how to continue its successes.

The two LTS plans were considered successful by the researchers because they were encouraged by the maturity of the students and the stories told about the impact the programs have made.

Description of Case Study

In-depth interviews and small focus groups were conducted at two schools to gather qualitative data related to the development and implementation of LTS plans designed at WLC. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed for data reflective of community impact. Background on the schools is provided.

Findings

The idea that high school students can identify a community wide problem and develop an action plan to impact that problem seems overwhelming. Many of the students participating in this week long leadership experience have not left their state, much less traveled alone across country to our nation's capitol. The idea of meeting new people, having some fun, and experiencing the sights of Washington, DC attract students to the program as well as the commonality shared by the organization in which they are involved.

The week is busy, loaded with early morning tours of the museums and monuments. Speeches provided by national leaders and, of course, the eating and traveling between sights take time. Among this fun-filled, educational craziness lies a task. The task to remember back to that community from which you just traveled and think about what is there and how you can impact that far away place. Now, do not get me wrong, the task is clearly laid out and steps are provided to help you determine what you can do. Time is set aside for you to reflect and jot down an action plan to get you started.

The hard part is that you only get through half of the steps before heading back to your community to make a difference. Oh, you want to. You are inspired by a week-long experience of discovery showing you just what you can do. You have been encouraged by other students, inspired by leaders impacting our country, and moved to tears by the monuments of those honoring the many who have made a difference in the past, but now the work begins.

Living to Serve – A Mentoring Program for FFA Members

The first LTS plan studied occurred in a small rural town, population 1,269, about one hour north of a major city in the mid-west. The high school is one of two high schools in the county and services a 60-mile radius. There were 454 students in grades 9-12 with 80 students enrolled in the Agricultural Sciences Program. All

80 students are involved in the youth leadership organization discussed in this study, but only one student got to attend WLC.

The area is rural and participants have a strong understanding of agriculture because are directly involved in small family dairy operations. A majority of the participants have first-hand experience with production agriculture and plan to continue to work in this area after graduating from high school. Half of the participants plan to attend college and most of those will attend a community college relatively close to home so they can continue to support the family dairy.

The leadership organization is led by one adult advisor, five female student officers in the primary leadership positions and four male students with secondary leadership positions. The chapter is active and is moving to a renovated classroom/shop area. There is one agricultural science teacher and the participants enjoy working with her. The participants find her to be supportive of their ideas. She encourages them to try new things.

Tina, the one student attended WLC, is outgoing and smart. She is dressed like your normal high school senior – jeans and a t-shirt. She rises early to help with chores on her family's dairy and faces a busy day ahead with school and other activities. Tina went to Washington, DC in the summer 2005 and she just lights up at the mention of the experience. She is a senior and was the 2005-2006 student president of her local leadership organization. Tina was the first attendee to WLC from the school in several years. Tina's overall impression was positive, "it was a bit scary going that far away, but once I got there it was just GREAT!" The actual leadership education tool, the LTS plan had its up and downs.

Living to Serve Plan

Tina's original LTS plan was to "brighten" up the local nursing home.

"I focused on what we needed in our community, and a big thing was our nursing home is very inactive, and boring, and the people don't do much. The nursing home is kind of boring, and the colors are kind of plain, and I don't believe they have any activities for the people actually living there, so I thought about doing something with them. This idea came from two of the girls in my group [at WLC] who had planned to do nursing homes, and I decided to do something about ours by helping to spruce it up a little and by coloring the walls and getting programs started, and then I filled out my plan, and it was all good, and then I got home, and I worked with the nursing home's attendants a lot, and it seemed like they didn't care about it and wouldn't benefit from it." (Tina)

Tina was influenced by the other students at WLC and thought their idea was great so she considered doing the same for her community. She came home

excited and even went to meet the nursing home coordinator, only to be disappointed by the lack of enthusiasm and support she received. Besides the organizational adult advisor there is no face-to-face support for the students' LTS plan; however, an online interactive website has been set up for students to interact with each other and the leaders of WLC.

This tool provided Tina just what she needed to keep going.

A New Focus

Tina decided to think about a new plan.

“Some of the kids that I talked to online from WLC were like, “Well, what else do you need help with? How can you help the kids in your community, because that is a big part of it?” So...my new plan is the mentorship program. A lot of our kids in our community, they either relate to drugs or alcohol or just do bad things, and we have a high teen pregnancy rate. We don't have much to do around here, because the nearest thing to go to is forty five minutes away. So, I took that back way into where it all begin, and looked for things we have in common - we are in high school, and we learn what crowds to be with, and I believe that as a freshman, you do what is so called “cool.” If you hang out with the seniors or someone drinking, you are going to walk out of there as “cool.” So, I decided to develop a mentorship program where the upperclassmen that have good morals and good standing in high school would adopt the younger students, the first year members, and just basically mentor them throughout this year. They would help them with organizational activities and school stuff. They would encourage them to be involved and go even as far as helping them outside of school, like if they have family problems, or if they need help with school homework, or they will basically be a good friend to them, like a big sister.” (Tina)

“We have the upperclassman and officers of our organization and they are the mentors to the first year members. The mentors are the upperclassman, and then the first year students are all of the people that we mentor. They are all first- year members whether they are junior, senior or freshman, and basically we just set them up as girls mentoring girls and guys mentoring guys, so there is not a conflict of interest. That was my advisor's advice. I hope this mentorship program is expanded to the whole school some day. And basically, we just help them out if they have problems in school, if they have problems in our organization or at home. It is not just necessarily for our organization; if they are mentored, they are helped out with anything they need in school. So, it helps them along their way.” (Tina)

This may not sound like an overwhelming experience, but Tina reflected on what she could do to help others and put into action each step of the LTC plan. The

students in this school have a negative attitude (as described by the student's interviewed) and need help staying involved and out of trouble. Tina realizes this was not a project she did by herself and is eager to share the credit.

Support for the Plan

“My biggest support, I guess it is not really one person; when I first started it I got help at home, and my parents told me what they would like to do and we shared the ideas. Then my teacher gave some good suggestions like, girls mentoring girls and boys mentoring boys, because of the relationship issues, you don't want to get that involved with your partners, and then have them break up or have a big ordeal. Once I got started my chapter got in with it, the officers, they really liked the idea, and they were like, “Yeah! We are going to help you push it.” And our advisor has been great and super nice helping us get it going. So, it is almost like it has been a big team effort to get it going, everyone has contributed.” (Tina)

Strengths of the program

The other students involved in the program recognize the benefits and share in its success [success being self reported].

“The participants who mentored felt they provided some encouragement to other students as well as support throughout life. The participants enjoyed learning about those people whom they might not have otherwise interacted.” (Margaret, Organization Vice President)

“I really like the mentorship because we get to interact with people throughout the school. They are in our organization, but we can interact with them in other school activities, too, and it lets you know a lot more people.” (Shelley)

“Our organization is not always the “popular” thing at this school and the mentorship program helps others get involved. I think mentorship is a really good idea, because a lot of the kids without an older person helping them would not get involved, because they would be too scared to try anything. And with having people help you, they can tell you about their experience and how fun it was and push them to do it.” (Sue, Freshmen Mentee)

“One thing that is great is actually getting active and not being too afraid to get active, because I know my freshmen year I wish I would have had a mentor, because I know that I didn't really get active until this year, because I wasn't driving, and my parents work, and I couldn't get to a lot of activities, and I know that if I would have had somebody that would have pushed me to get more involved I would have earlier.” (John, Junior Mentor)

Challenges

Being able to reflect and evaluate the successes and failures is critical the growth of any program. Tina and her team have done just that. They have provided some insight into the challenges of implementing their LTS plan.

“It has been yes and no successful if that makes sense. We have had a few members who really push it and really work with the kids, and we have had some who don’t really know how to be mentors, and they kind of just are friendly to their mentees. The really don’t know what to do. So, for that it hasn’t been successful.” (Tina)

“There needs to be more structure and communication. The idea is good, but now that we have done it one year we need to focus the program more. We have learned so much this year that next we can organize it better and hopefully continue the programs growth.” (Margaret, Chapter Vice President)

“It is hard to make people do what they don’t want to, and I never realized how bad it could be until this year. If somebody doesn’t want to do anything, you can’t make them do it, and that is the hardest part. It is hard to get all the members on the same page.” (Michelle, YOUTH Officer)

Implications on Local Chapters

Based on the information provided during the visit, the program will definitely continue. Four of the officers are juniors who plan to run for office again next year. Their goal is to continue the mentorship program within the chapter. It will take several years, but the retention rate of the members should increase over time and the involvement levels will improve. Another goal is to see youth behavior becoming more positive. Tina provides a specific story that will have lasting effects on the chapter and on one individual.

“I believe the biggest success story would be one of our freshman girls, Kayla, she seemed like a really shy person that didn’t want to do much, and after us mentoring her, she is really joining lots of things. She joined the judging team, and she didn’t even know how to judge. She learned the week before how to judge and went to a contest, and I think she got sixty something out of a hundred. She did pretty well, and then she went on to do another state contest, and she is going to keep doing it, and she has just been really involved. Her goal is to get the star Greenhand award, and she wants to try out for an office, and I think that is all a result of us pushing her and showing her what she can accomplish.” (Tina)

Minors in Charge – Drug and Alcohol Responsibility Week

The second study occurred in rural community of 11, 963 people in the southern central United States. This county reported nearly 13% of its population living below the poverty level. One high school serves the area and is reflective of the local demographics. There are 871 students enrolled in grades 9-12. School data show that one-half of the student population qualifies for federal subsidies, so the school is considered a low Socio-Economic Status (SES) school. The school is attempting to build its Advanced Placement (AP) curriculum and access for participants in the district.

The youth organization lists 100 active members and three full-time two men and a woman severing as advisors/teachers. The chapter is well-known throughout the school for its commitment to community service and its achievements within the state and national organization. The current leadership team is five female student officers. An issue facing the chapter is retention of junior and senior members. Over one-half of the membership is freshman and sophomores.

“Minors in Control” was the first Living to Serve Plan carried to fruition by this organization even though the advisors are strong supporters of the WLC program and every year send participants to Washington, DC. Marcia was one of six participants to attend WLC in 2005. She developed “Minors in Control” at WLC and expanded the program with support from her advisors, principal, school resource officer, and chapter officer team.

Living to Serve Plan

Marcia was aware of many issues facing her community, but knew that drugs and alcohol awareness are often some of the most dangerous things facing her peers today. Here is how Marcia implemented her plan.

“I attended WLC in 2005 and my living to serve plan was Minors in Control – it was just something to make our town aware of the drugs and alcohol that we have, it is a situation in our town that needs to be looked at. We did several different things throughout the week: posters hung throughout the halls and on the lockers, two speakers came in to talk about drinking and driving and being impaired on drugs while driving, we also had a car out front that had been involved in an accident and pledges for the participants to sign so they would not drink and drive or do drugs and drive. When they signed their pledges they also received a bracelet that said ‘EMPOWER’.” (Marcia)

Support for the Plan

The entire school community realized the benefits of such a program and really supported Marcia and her team, but it must be recognized that the work was done by the students.

“The most help would be from my advisors, student officers, principals, and resource officers. The student officers and advisors helped us get our pledges printed up and the bracelets ordered. They helped us put them up in the hallways and on the lockers. The principal helped me find days the speakers could come and talk to the school. The student officers helped me get the car here. The school covered the costs of the copies and the organization covered the cost of the bracelets. It was a team effort.” (Marcia)

Strengths of the Program

To measure the impact this program has had on the school and community would be very beneficial. Just hearing the stories told by the students provides a glance into the success of this leadership experience.

Understanding That You Can Make a Difference

“You have to have the faith that you can do something great. You have to have the willpower and really want to make a difference. If no one is supporting your idea you will probably give up on it, the main thing you need is support. You are going to fizzle out. They had accountability partners.” (Susan, Kelly, and Mike)

“It showed me that you can give to your community and you don’t have to get anything from it. You can be a good leader – you can just become a better person.” (Marcia)

Making a Difference

“The participants could sign a sheet saying they wouldn’t drink and drive. They didn’t sign it alone; they signed with a friend so the friend could help them and hold the accountable for what they said they would do. Help your friends not drink and drive. If I was in a group that made this decision I would help stop them.” (Carl)

“I heard a couple of participants talking about it and they were talking about how they didn’t know that you could get addicted to certain drugs and they were wearing their bracelets and truly not drinking and driving.” (Marcia)

“My favorite part was sitting out during lunch and having the participants sign the pledges and receive their bracelets. Because you got to see so many participants come up and find partners and say, “hey, would you get my back and make sure I don’t drink and drive? If I chose to drink – it was neat to see how many people actually took part in it all.” (Marcia)

“High school participants don’t think about things until they see the real thing. The majority of people who saw this car must have had their stomachs shift – we are not promoting drinking, but if you do drink you must be responsible. You aren’t just affecting yourself you are affecting others around you.” (Ericka)

“I didn’t know some of the things that actually happen when you drink and drive; I didn’t know how many people died. I learned how people are impaired and what happens to them when they drink and drive.” (Marcia)

“There was great feedback from the participants, they were intrigued by it and they wanted to be involved. They put statistics on the lockers and really learned from it.” (Ericka)

“The bracelet EMPOWER are everywhere, a lot of kids keep wearing them. They took it seriously and they want to be a part of the group that is responsible and want to move forward and help each other out.” (Kelly and Ericka)

Challenges

Again, the students involved in this plan have reflected on the experience and realize the challenges and changes that could made for future programs to continue.

“The hardest part was deciding how to actually put it into action. I wasn’t sure how people would actually take it and admit that we do have a drug and drinking problem in this town. People do drink and drive and get killed in our town – I wasn’t sure how people would actually take it and what they would do about it.” (Marcia)

“The hardest part was finding something that affects our town and be able to actually come back to our town and do it. I probably wouldn’t have done it, but the advisor really pushed me, because they said it was something that really needed to be done and they knew it would make an impact on the participants of our school.” (Marcia)

“No matter how much I wanted it to work, I still wasn’t sure. Participants who are in high school usually have their minds made up about how they will handle things and I wasn’t sure this project and six girls would make a difference, but the

response was wonderful and I believe it really increased their maturity level.”
(Jennifer)

Future Implications on Local Chapters

As described by those involved and the administrators of the school, this project did make a huge impact on the school, which in turn will impact the community. The participants who plan to run for office next year will continue the “Minors in Control” project and hope to improve the program to make a bigger impact.

“I thought at the beginning it was a school project, but then on Friday they put a car at the school that had been in a drinking driving accident and it became more of a community project. The car was there and people could see the car from the front of building and the whole community could see the impact that drinking and driving has on the community. I want to do this again next year and maybe even bring in bigger and better speakers so this project will grow.” (Sarah)

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall the experiences of the students and the impact made on the communities are very positive. Creating a leadership education tool that provides students the opportunity to truly delve into their community and try to make a difference in a real situation should be a wonderful learning experience. But, these are two case studies of students who completed their LTS plan, many students do not. Before starting such a program or using this tool certain measures need to be in place to guarantee a higher rate of success. Several factors play into account as to why the students are not completing their plans. As mentioned by the students, time is the biggest factor in not completing the project. Many of the students return from WLC to complete their senior year in high school. It is easy for other things to take priority such as college applications, other youth projects, and sporting events.

The second factor contributing to the failed efforts was that the projects were just “too big.” Students get caught up in the idea of helping their community and want to save the world, especially when being compared to their friends each one wants to do better than the one before. Using a reward system, such as scholarship money or other incentives may provide the motivation students need to create and complete a successful project.

Much of what is seen with the WLC and the LTS plans completed by the participants is a reinforcement of the importance of the specific leadership characteristics identified by Ricketts and Rudd (2002) and by the objectives set by the WLC. This reaffirms the importance of leadership programs like Outward

Bound, 4-H, Junior Achievement, and Boy Scouts and Girls Scouts of America supporting the leadership development of youth.

Townsend and Carter (1983) posited that these types of programs were central to leadership development and through the WLC it is further evidenced that youth require additional programmatic experiences to enhance this development. Lerner et al. (2005) focused Positive Youth Development on the five C's. It is extraordinary that providing youth with an outlet to become involved in their communities encourages youth to develop Competence; Confidence; Connection; Character; and Caring and Compassion.

The role of adults in the implementation of the LTS plans was evaluated by WLC participants. Consistently they agreed having the support of the home youth advisors and local chapters was instrumental in the implementation of their LTS plans. The participants agreed that their parents and family support proved to be instrumental in the implementation of their LTS plans. This further supports the notion that parents should be active participants in their children's character and leadership education. In addition, training for involved adults may provide a clearer direction for what the students may need as they develop their plans.

The primary recommendation of this study is to use a LTS type project for students to develop leadership. In order to truly provide the education needed it is best to create a curriculum around the plan to ensure the students have ample time and accountability to complete the project. If the plan was incorporated into a classroom environment, more resources and support would be available to the students. The encouragement from teachers and fellow students would help just as it did in the second case study reported. It is seen through these two experiences that students need ongoing support and direction in completing the LTS plan. The implementation stage is very in-depth and could be used as a group project in a class to allow the work load to be broadly distributed.

Leadership education can be accomplished in many ways; however, the more "real" the projects are and the more impact a student makes, the deeper the student understands may be. The students in these case studies reported having learned lessons that will guide them in future endeavors.

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Biographies

Manda H. Rosser received a Ph.D. in Human Resource Development at Texas A&M University. She currently works at Texas A&M University as an assistant professor in the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in leadership theory. Her current research interest includes mentoring and the use of popular media as a tool in leadership education.

Nicole Stedman is an Assistant Professor and coordinates the university wide leadership minor at the University of Florida. She teaches courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels with an emphasis on leadership development. Her current research interests are how educators can create experiences to increase capacity for critical thinking in the leadership classroom including the use of artwork and other creative mediums.

Chanda Elbert is an Associate Professor in the Agricultural, Leadership, and Education Department at Texas A&M University. She teaches both undergraduate and graduate levels courses in Women's Leadership, Multicultural Leadership, Diversity Issues in Higher Education and Program Evaluation and Organizational Accountability. Her current research interests are an extension of the courses she teaches.

Dr. Tracy Rutherford is an associate professor in the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications at Texas A&M University. Her research interests include visual communication, agricultural communication, and students' attitudes and beliefs. Dr. Rutherford teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in agricultural communications including agricultural publication production, digital photography, electronic media, and research writing.