

Leadership Across Disciplines: A Journey Not A Destination

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Introduction

Leadership is a fundamental and central process in human organizations. It has come to mean many things to people and has been studied from many perspectives. I believe the following quotation from James MacGregor Burns' 1978 seminal classic, *Leadership*, provides a very persuasive argument for the study of leadership being a moral imperative:

One of the most universal cravings of our time is a hunger for compelling and creative leadership.... The crisis of leadership today is the mediocrity or irresponsibility of so many of the men and women in power, but leadership rarely rises to the full need for it. The fundamental crisis underlying mediocrity is intellectual.... Without a powerful modern philosophical tradition, without theoretical and empirical culmination, without guiding concepts, and without practical experiences, we lack the very foundations for knowledge of a phenomenon - leadership in the arts, the academy, science, politics, the professions, war - that touches and shapes our lives. (pp. 1-2)

John Gardner in his 1990 classic, *On Leadership*, presents a persuasive justification for the multi-disciplinary approach:

At the college level, the best preparation [for leadership] is a liberal arts education. It is essential to broaden and deepen the understanding of those individuals who will have in their hands the future of our communities and our society. That means covering the whole range of liberal arts, from science to literature, from mathematics to history.... We expect our leaders to function within a framework of values. By absorbing, through literature, religion, psychology, sociology, drama and the like, the hopes, fears, aspirations and dilemmas of their people and of the species; by coming to understand what our ancestors valued and fought for; by coming to know through history and biography the extraordinary outlines of the human story, they may hope to discharge their duties with wisdom. (pp. 164-165)

And finally, Joseph C. Rost in his 1991 paradigm shifting work, *Leadership for the Twenty-first Century*, reinforces Gardner's argument:

Leadership scholars need to develop an academic presence as an interdisciplinary area of studies serving both undergraduate and graduate students in specialized programs that deal with the study and practice of leadership in organizations and in societies. Looking at leadership through the lens of a single discipline has not worked well in the past, and it will not work any better in

the future. indeed, a case could be made that organizations and societies in the future, with their collaborative, community, and global orientations, may not be hospitable to a concept of leadership that is grounded in only one academic discipline.... With this new kind of thinking, leadership scholars must develop a new school of leadership that is grounded in what is real, what actually happens when leaders and followers do engage in leadership. (pp. 182-183)

I believe that the multi-disciplinary study of leadership can serve as an integrating piece of a liberal education. This belief serves as the reason for my campaign to introduce leadership studies throughout our College's curriculum. The critical question is: how can you go about gaining support for and introducing leadership studies as an area worthy of investigation and dialogue into a liberal arts college?

Purpose

The purpose of this session is to present one approach to successfully introducing multi-disciplinary leadership studies into our curriculum. At this time, this includes four different seminars utilizing instructors from nine different disciplines and presented in different programs: College Honors, Gender Studies and Non-Western Studies, and cross-listed in five different majors. The seminars are: A Junior Year Honors -- "The Many Faces of Leadership"; "Profiles of Women Leaders"; "Japanese Leadership Style and Management Practices"; and "Leadership in Organizations." The content and process of the seminars and steps in a continuing journey across campus serve as the central focus of the presentation.

Context

Mount Saint Mary's four year core curriculum of 61 hours is integrated by design to bring students to a critical understanding of the distinctive perspective of western culture through a study of literature, history, philosophy, theology, language, the arts, and the social and natural sciences, along with a contrasting experience of non-western culture. It is designed to encourage students to develop a sense of responsibility for social justice, the preservation of human dignity and freedom, and appreciation of social pluralism and cultural diversity. The core focuses on developing critical thinking, writing, speaking, and quantitative skills. The core curriculum and in particular the Honors scholars core curriculum provides the context within which the first Leadership Seminar was introduced.

The College offers a minor in gender studies. This minor supports the mission of Mount Saint Mary's College by helping students to understand and anticipate social change. By examining how gender constructs affect the lives of men and women and how gender roles have changed over time, students can better understand a key factor that drives both change and continuity in our culture. A Leadership seminar has been introduced into the program.

The College offers upper-level non-western courses in various disciplines as part of the seminar core requirement to enhance major and minor programs, and to expand the general choice of electives. A new Leadership Seminar has been approved by the College's Undergraduate Academic Committee for meeting this core requirement.

Description of the Four Leadership Seminars

The content and process strategies of the four leadership seminars are:

Junior Honors Seminar: The Many Faces of Leadership

This seminar is an attempt to create a multi-disciplinary synthesis of the phenomenon of leadership based on multiple modes of inquiry and knowledge bases housed in different disciplines. It is hoped that out of this seminar students will acquire an appreciation of an multi-disciplinary framework that can be used to guide their critical thinking and inform their practice of leadership in a number of diverse contexts. The goal of the seminar is to help students better formulate their own model of leadership by providing them with a variety of useful lenses through which to view and reflect on their own philosophy and practice of leadership. The seminar explores the complex concept of leadership from conceptual, relational and behavioral perspectives using a mixture of concepts and practices presented by scholars from a number of different disciplines, authors in the area of leadership studies, class discussion, research, writing, self-assessment opportunities, case analysis, experiential activities off-campus, and a popular film series.

Profiles of Women Leaders Seminar

The purpose of the seminar is to explore the basic question of whether women lead and exercise power differently than men. This course studies women leaders in an number of diverse contexts: western and non-western cultures, advanced and developing countries, elected national political leaders and leaders of national social and religious causes, in all sectors of society including business, education, and the community. The course examines the complex areas of gender and leadership within social, cultural, and historical contexts and from relational, behavioral and performance perspectives using a mixture of readings, class discussion, primary and secondary research, outside speakers, videos, self-assessment opportunities, and student oral and written reports.

Japanese Leadership Style and Management Practices Seminar

The purpose of this seminar is to expose students to and have them explore the richness and complexity of the Non-Western culture of Japan. This multi-disciplinary seminar focuses on an analysis of leadership style and management practices as a cultural phenomena inextricably linked to values and culture. The basic context of the seminar is Japanese business, but it also includes an examination of Japanese society and the culture's consequences in work-related values. The seminar examines the complex areas of leadership style and management practices in Japanese business within social, cultural, and historical contexts, using a mixture of readings, class discussion, research, off-campus trips, outside speakers, videos, self-assessment opportunities, student oral and written reports, response papers, student taught sessions, and a comparative analysis with western business.

Leadership in Organizations Seminar

The purposes of the seminar are to help students attain a more informed view of formal organizations and to better formulate their own model of leadership by providing them with a variety of useful lenses through which to view and reflect on their own practice of leadership in organizations. This multi-disciplinary course focuses on leadership in formal organizations in the private, public, and not-for-profit sectors. It presents an in-depth view of the organization context within leadership takes place and a broad survey of contemporary leadership theories and practices. The course explores the complex concepts of organization and leadership and the issues created by their connection. This will be done through readings, outside speakers, class discussions, research, oral presentations, self-assessment instruments, structure activities, case analysis, and individual and group projects. The central thread of the course is the development of an expansive organization system model and a personal leadership development plan.

The Journey

In the fall semester of 1993, the campaign to obtain the College's Honors Committee approval of the multi-disciplinary Leadership Seminar began. The design of the content and process of the seminar served as the central pedagogical focus of the campaign strategy, along with the actual consensus building process of getting the seminar approved and finally implemented in the spring semester of 1996. Because of the administrative procedures concerning the approval of the Junior Year Honors Seminar, the seminar was not approved again by the College's Honors Committee until spring of 1998, but this time for four years beginning in spring of 1999.

In the fall semester of 1996, the leadership seminar "Leadership in Organizations" was introduced into the curriculum and approved by Department Chairs for cross-listing in five different majors: Business, Political Science, Government, International Studies and Sociology.

In spring of 1998, the Gender Studies Steering Committee approved the seminar. "Profiles of Women Leaders" for credit toward the Gender Studies minor and scheduled it for spring semester of 1999.

The fourth seminar, "Japanese Leadership Style and Management Practices" was unanimously approved by the College's undergraduate committee for credit in meeting the core non-western requirement and scheduled for fall semester of 1999.

Consensus Building Strategy

The actual consensus building campaign strategy from attempting to gain approval of introducing the seminars throughout the curriculum, to resourcing them, to actually implementing them involved three stages, each with a set of key functions and roles being played by the seminar instructor. The critical focus of each of these three stages involved continuing actions across the entire College Community and with external academic and public institutions. The key functions of each stage will be discussed:

The Before Stage

Proposing - Collaborating - Programming -Integrating - Resourcing

The During Stage

Coordinating - Servanting - Facilitating - Teaching

The After Stage

Evaluating - Enhancing the current offerings - Creating new directions

Implications

Although this session attempts to describe only one approach to introducing multi-disciplinary leadership studies into and across a liberal arts curriculum, I believe the strategy used to create a multi-disciplinary approach to the complex subject of leadership along with the content and process of the seminars would be useful in successfully introducing leadership studies into a number of different contexts and programs.

References

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