

## TEACHING AN UNDERGRADUATE COURSE IN CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN LEADERSHIP

An ALE Round Table Discussion - Anchorage, Alaska - July 16, 2003

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In the spring 2002, Oklahoma State University added a course entitled Contemporary Issues in Leadership as part of a 14 credit hour minor in Leadership Education (see Table 1). This upper division undergraduate course follows lower division courses in leadership theory and values based leadership. The instructors sought to develop a course that bridged the two prerequisite courses with current readings in leadership. The following course objectives were developed:

- articulate an understanding of contemporary leadership issues and problems;
- contextually integrate leadership theories with contemporary issues; and,
- synthesize knowledge of leadership theories with contemporary leadership issues.

Two required texts, Contemporary Issues in Leadership, (5<sup>th</sup> edition, Rosenbach & Taylor) and Now, Discover Your Strengths (Buckingham & Clifton) were selected. The Buckingham and Clifton text is a popular press book that includes a web-based strengths inventory. The inventory proved to be an appropriate link to the values-based leadership taught in a lower division leadership course. Approximately one fourth of the class sessions were devoted to this text. Students were asked to select a book to review based on the strengths identified in the inventory.

The Rosenbach and Taylor text was selected because it is an anthology of leadership articles written by prominent leadership scholars. Divided into four sections, the text offered a wide range of topics ranging from women in leadership to biographies of current leaders. A total of twelve articles, centered on four themes, were selected for class discussion. Students were asked to bring a single discussion question with them to each class session.

Additionally, students were divided into equal teams and were to meet each week to study a selected agricultural issue. Teams studied the issue and prepared a strategic plan for leadership within the context of the selected agricultural issue.

At the conclusion of the course, instructors reflected on the course (see Table 2). Based on that reflection and comments made during the ALE round table discussion, the following modifications are planned for the fall 2003 semester.

- Continue the course using a discussion format
- Continue to use “Strengths” and “Contemporary Issues” textbooks
- Eliminate agricultural issue team project
- Replace team project with current issues surfaced through reading the daily newspaper

Table 1

Leadership coursework at Oklahoma State University

AGED 1511	<u>Introduction to Leadership</u> - A one-credit hour freshman level course designed to introduce students to the field of leadership. Application to student organization is encouraged.
AGED 2303	<u>Personal Leadership Development</u> - This course allows students to explore their personal values system as it applies to leadership.
AGED 3303	<u>Agricultural Leadership: Theory and Practice</u> - Leadership theory and application to organizations is the theme. Students also learn about motivation, power, and group dynamics.
<b>AGED 3333</b>	<b><u>Contemporary Issues in Leadership</u> - Students explore leadership through the writings of current theorists in leadership.</b>
AGED 4101	<u>Seminar in Leadership Education</u> - A one-credit hour junior level course designed to provide an in-depth study of a particular topic in the study of leadership behavior.
AGED 4303	<u>Facilitating Leadership Education Programs</u> - This capstone course prepares students to conduct leadership training in and out of the classroom.

Table 2

## Lessons learned in a course on contemporary issues in leadership

<b>What Worked</b>	<b>Why it Worked</b>
<i>Now Discover Your Strengths</i>	Served as a good transition from the values-based leadership class; students liked the personal application gained through the inventory
<i>Contemporary Issues in Leadership</i>	The text contained a wide range of leadership topics; the majority of the readings were related to topics discussed in previous classes
Face-to-face feedback on class performance	Student participation and dialogue improved after individual conferences
Great discussion	Students liked articles which were short and an “easy” read
“Theory to Practice” – one session in every four class sessions	Allowed time to take a break from the discussion format and to add topics of specific interest to the students; sessions included Shackelton’s Great Adventure at IMAX (road trip), Kouzes & Posner LPI Assessment (personal inventory), and creating a student organization for leadership education minors
Student paper addressing a critical issue uncovered in class	Students showed their ability to synthesize information in class with a current issues
Ended class with a Film/Case Study on Adolf Hitler	Film prepped the case and the case prepped the discussion; the topic was selected based upon discussions previously held in class and student interest

<b>What Didn’t Work</b>	<b>Why it Didn’t Work</b>
Book reviews on personal strengths	Reviews lacked depth of thought, students had trouble selecting a book appropriate for the assignment
Group project	Groups failed to fully utilize class time available for team meetings, students failed to adequately research their critical issue and to apply leadership theory to the issue, students “fought” the assignment and saw strength in collective mediocrity, instructors failed to communicate expectations clearly
Weak discussion on some articles	A handful of articles were too long, discussion was weak when a majority of the class did not fully read the articles
Students writing discussion questions	The instructors (both Theory Y) did not collect the discussion questions and when the students realized they could “get away” with not writing the DQ on paper, then they stopped writing discussion questions

Bill Weeks

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Professor, Agricultural Education

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#### Educational Background

- 1989 Ph.D. Texas A&M University; College Station, TX  
Major: Agricultural Education
- 1987 M.Ed. University of Illinois; Champaign Urbana, IL  
Major: Vocational Education
- 1983 B.S. Illinois State University; Normal, IL  
Major: Agricultural Education
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#### Courses Taught

- AGED 3203 Planning Communications Programs in Agricultural Education
- AGED 3303 Leadership Skills for Agricultural Organizations
- AGED 3333 Contemporary Issues in Leadership
- AGED 5823 Advanced Teaching Methods
- AGED 6103 History and Philosophy of Agricultural Education
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#### Personal

Weeks teaches courses in teacher education, leadership, and philosophy of Agricultural Education. He serves as Graduate Coordinator for the Department and is a past recipient of the Regents Outstanding Teaching Award. In his spare time Weeks likes to talk about fishing, likes to actually go fishing, and he can be seen with his children fishing at Theta Pond. He likes to cook, is an avid gardener, enjoys movies that other people hate, and plays all Nintendo 64, and most PlayStation2 games. An Aries, he is often moody, but forgets easily.

Penny Pennington

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Assistant Professor, Agricultural Education

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#### Educational Background

- 2001 Ph.D., Texas A&M University, College Station, TX  
Major: Agricultural Education
- 1991 M.S., Texas A&M University, College Station, TX  
Major: Educational Psychology
- 1989 B.S., Texas A&M University, College Station, TX  
Major: Psychology
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#### Courses Taught

- AGED 2303: Personal Leadership Development
- AGED 3333: Contemporary Issues in Leadership
- AGED 4203: Professional Development in Agriculture
- AGED 5752: Leadership in Context
- AGED 5940: Styles of Leadership in Agriculture
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#### Personal

Pennington teaches courses in leadership theory and education. She serves as Coordinator for the Leadership and Service Option in the Department of Agricultural Education and is involved with Oklahoma State University's Minor in Leadership Education. She has been a member of the Association of Leadership Educators for 4 years and currently serves on the Board. Outside of work, Penny spends most of her spare time running her daughter, Kamle, to cheerleading or volleyball practice. She also enjoys scrap booking, keeping up with the latest movies, and has recently begun working as a volunteer for CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) for Kids.