

**2010 Association of Leadership Educators Conference Practice Paper**

## 1. Authors:

Barbara W. Altman  
Senior University Lecturer  
Division of Urban and Professional Studies  
University of North Texas at Dallas  
7300 Houston School Road  
Dallas, TX 75241  
[barbara.altman@unt.edu](mailto:barbara.altman@unt.edu)  
972-780-3649

Constance Lacy  
Division Director  
Division of Education and Human Services  
University of North Texas at Dallas  
7300 Houston School Road  
Dallas, TX 75241  
[constance.lacy@unt.edu](mailto:constance.lacy@unt.edu)  
972-780-3063

## 2. Practice Paper Title:

“An Interdisciplinary Approach to Teaching Senior Undergraduate Leadership for Business and Human Services Majors”

## 3. Abstract:

This practice paper describes the senior undergraduate Leadership course at the University of North Texas at Dallas (a new institution) taught in an interdisciplinary format for Business and Human Service majors. An integrative model structured to promote leadership development, and cross-sector understanding is presented. Short-term and long-term recommendations for course improvement are discussed.

## 4. Author Bios:

Barbara W. Altman is a pioneer faculty member at the new University of North Texas at Dallas. She has served as Coordinator of Management Programs on the campus, along with teaching courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels in Leadership, Business Ethics, Business and Society, and Organizational Change and Design. Her applied research interests are at the intersection of these topics, most notably Leadership Integrity, Corporate Community Relations, Cross-Sector Partnerships and Entrepreneurial Ethics.

Constance Lacy is a pioneer faculty at the new University of North Texas at Dallas. She has served as Coordinator of the Human Services Management Leadership program and Division Director for Education and Human Services. A Social Worker by training, Dr. Lacy's teaching interests are in Human Service practice, non-profit management and community development. She has an extensive background working in community behavioral healthcare settings, family courts, and serving as center manager for a school-based health program.

## AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO TEACHING SENIOR UNDERGRADUATE LEADERSHIP TO BUSINESS AND HUMAN SERVICES MAJORS

### Introduction

The University of North Texas at Dallas (UNTD or UNT Dallas) is an emerging institution committed to an interdisciplinary approach to training its students to be good citizens. A new institution that will officially be separate from the flagship campus, UNT at Denton, in Fall 2010, it is located in an economically challenged area of Dallas County previously underserved for higher education. As such its mission “is to enhance access to high quality education and to prepare students to become exemplary citizens who can assume leadership positions in a global environment” (UNT Dallas Campus, 2006). The Vision includes recognition for “distinctive interdisciplinary approaches to education,” “commitment to the well-being and full development of all students,” and “commitment to improve quality of life through civic engagement” (UNT Dallas Campus, 2006).

One example of UNTD’s interdisciplinary approach is the senior undergraduate Leadership course. Designated a Management (MGMT) course, it is housed and staffed out of the Division of Professional and Urban Studies, which includes undergraduate business programs in Entrepreneurship, Organizational Behavior/Human Resources Management and General Business. The course is also the designated leadership course for the Division of Education and Human Services “Human Services Management and Leadership (HSML)” degree program on the Dallas Campus.

The HSML program was developed to address the shortage of qualified human service personnel in the non-profit sector. The program targets students committed to careers in non-profit social and human service settings providing a foundation in the unique purposes and roles of non-profit organizations in a multi-sectored marketplace. A particular strength of the program is the fact that it was developed with extensive consultation with leaders in the non-profit human service community in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metropolis. According to the Center for Non-profit Management and Community Foundation of Texas (2009), 9,149 501 (c) 3 organizations are registered in Dallas County, which highlights the potentially significant size, economic impact and societal benefits provided by the non-profit sector in North Texas. As the only human service baccalaureate program in North Texas, the HSML degree represents the kind of unique programming available through the UNT Dallas campus in direct response to community needs and goals.

### Course Design and Learning Objectives

The MGMT 4470 Leadership course was redesigned in fall 2008 to acknowledge that both Business and HSML majors would be taking the course. The overarching goal for the course, as stated in the syllabus, is “to increase students’ understanding of major leadership behavior patterns and strategies that promote effectiveness in organizations” (Altman, 2009, p. 1). The specific learning objectives for MGMT 4470 stated in the syllabus include:

1. To acquire a basic understanding of key leadership theories and approaches;
2. To develop self-awareness of your personal leadership style and potential for leadership;

3. To identify the leadership traits and behaviors which you most respect, and an understanding of how this impacts working relationships with supervisors; and
4. To develop the ability to analyze situations which challenge business, and non-profit leaders, and to identify the strategies which make them either effective or ineffective in organizational settings. (Altman, 2009, p. 1)

These learning objectives fall into three categories: 1) those designated for the College of Business undergraduate programs in General Business, Entrepreneurship, and Organizational Behavior/Human Resources Management; 2) those designated for the HSML program, and satisfy requirements for students pursuing American Humanics (AH) certification; and 3) General learning goals for all UNT Dallas graduates, given its mission as stated above. Of this set, the most specific learning criteria are laid out by American Humanics ([www.humanics.org](http://www.humanics.org)); among the competencies this course must cover for purposes of their certification process are leadership principles, leadership methods, ethical principles, practice and decision making, self-assessment, public speaking skills, and writing skills.

The course has been designed with a multifaceted approach, grounded in Pratt's "model on how to integrate leadership theory and practice in a manner that provides a foundation but also invites students to explore their own leadership futures" (Pratt, 2007, p. 59). Centered in the integration of leadership theory and practice, Pratt's model is implemented through four strategies: 1) exploring leadership theory; 2) interacting with exemplary leaders; 3) engaging in personal assessment; and 4) pondering and reflection. Pratt suggests that her model is particularly relevant in linking the course learning objectives with program objectives, which is also the case with the UNTD course, given its linkage to the campus mission and overarching objectives for the Business, HSML and American Humanics programs.

### **Course Topics and Assignments**

The flow of topics in the course starts with Module 1, "Overview of Leadership Theories," including Leader Traits and Behavioral Theories and Contingency Theory. This is followed by Module 2, "Leadership Integrity, Motivation and Communication," and Module 3, "Creating Vision and Strategic Direction." The last set of topics, Module 4, is "Leading Change." The assignments described below fall heavily into Pratt's four categories noted above. In several places adjustments have been made to Pratt's model to fit the student population or setting at UNT Dallas.

A survey text, *The Leadership Experience*, by Daft (2008) is used as the basis for the course. Pratt (2007) proposes that too much leadership theory (and thereby survey texts) can be problematic at the undergraduate level if not integrated with practice. The Daft text integrates theory and practice, and was specifically chosen because of its self-assessment questionnaires and experiential

exercises. At the close of each chapter, Daft includes a “Leadership at Work” exercise that challenges students to make sense of their current work life in light of the theories and frameworks being studied. UNTD’s average student age is 33 and most are either working part- or full-time. They are therefore able to bring varied work experiences to these “Leadership at Work” exercises, which are also used as a basis for class discussion.

Another facet of Pratt’s model, “Engage in Personal Assessment,” is accomplished through a series of self-assessment tools, labeled “Leader’s Self-Insight” included throughout the Daft text. Examples include “Your leadership orientation,” “Substitutes for leadership,” “Instrumental and end values,” “Power of followership,” and “Listening self inventory” (Daft, 2008). Students are asked to complete these self-assessments and engage in written reflection (“Leadership Log”) about them. Excerpts from the Leadership Log assignment follow:

Engaging with the leadership frameworks through self-reflection is a critical piece of learning in this class. The self insight tools assigned with the text chapters are the basis for writing your log entries. Ten entries are required throughout the semester. Your completed self-insight and initial thoughts on the results should be brought to class on the day the assessment is assigned; they will be discussed in class. Following each class, students should take the time to reflect again, and prepare their formal written log entry on that self-insight tool. Students should “dig deep” to seriously think about their leadership findings and what implications they have for past, current, and future work/life settings and career goals. Each log entry should be 3-4 single-spaced typed paragraphs with the following content: 1) Explanation of your scores on the self-insight tool; 2) Discussion of whether you were surprised by the results: Is it consistent with previous actions you have taken in a past or present leadership situation? If not, what was different? and 3) Discussion of how you will use the information you learned from the assessment in the future. Grading for the logs will be based on truly insightful self-analysis and reflection; understanding of the frameworks being applied by the tool; and ability to apply those frameworks and the tool’s findings to past, present and future work and extracurricular group/leadership settings you have experienced or anticipate. (Altman, 2009, p.3)

Self-reflection as a necessary part of leadership development is included in Pratt’s (2007) model, but also well supported by other management and education theorists (Daudelin, 1996; Schon, 1983). Training for human service and nonprofit leaders has also endorsed the use of self-reflection (McClam, Diambra, Burton, Fuss & Fudge, 2008; McMichael & McKee, 2008). These scholars emphasize the importance of student self-reflection and for the instructor as well. It communicates whether the learning process has been effective, and it can be used in devising new teaching strategies.

The written “Leadership Logs” are turned in twice during the semester. Students often struggle with the assignment as they have never been asked to engage in deep self-reflection. Turning in one draft Log early in the semester for feedback is encouraged; however many students do not and grades on Logs 1-5 are generally low. Logs 6-10 are usually much more in-depth and truly reflective after receiving feedback on the first set of Logs. End of the semester student evaluation comments credit these log assignments as one of the avenues that resulted in the most learning.

The capstone course assignment due late in the semester is the “Leader in the News” research project. This assignment deviates from Pratt’s (2007) model, which prescribes the use of guest speakers for students to “Interact with Exemplary Leaders.” The course designers choose this alternative assignment based on research of current high profile leaders so that students would engage in research, and be required to present that research in both written and oral form. Students still get to interact with local leaders, as guest lecturers are frequently on campus and in other business and human services classes, and limited extra credit is offered for students who attend such lectures and write a summary memo about them.

The “Leader in the News” project challenges students to apply the leadership traits, behaviors and styles to research and analyze the profile and actions of a current business or non-profit organization leader. Students must find a leader who has been profiled or written about in three to four mainstream press outlets. Student research culminates in an eight to ten-page paper and associated ten to fifteen minute oral class presentation that must include the following:

- a) Description of the leader’s current position and summary of career highlights;
- b) Identification of the traits of the leader, including specific data (brief examples) to back-up your conclusions;
- c) Assessment of the leadership behaviors and strategies most often used by the leader, including data (brief examples) to back up your conclusions;
- d) Evaluation/description of a situation where the leader was effective; and
- e) A situation where the leader was not effective. For the non-effective situations, offer recommendations for what he/she might have done differently. (Altman, 2009, p. 3)

Business students generally choose a chief executive officer (CEO) from the *Fortune* lists of “Most Admired Companies” (Colvin, 2009), or “50 Most Powerful Women” (Shambora & Kowitz, 2009). HSML majors choose from a listing like the “Non-Profit Times Power & Influence Top 50” (Non-Profit Times, 2009) or “Charity Leaders Who Topped the Chronicle’s List (Chronicle of Philanthropy, 2009). This paper is extremely challenging for students, given its research intensity, extent of data analysis, and required synthesis of critical factors in both written and oral form. Examples of leaders profiled in the Fall 2009 class are Steve Jobs, Andrea Jung, Wendy Kopp, Bill Gates, Warren Buffett and Lance Armstrong.

### **Setting the Stage for Cross-Sector Understanding**

The need for cross-sector partnerships between for-profit and non-profit organizations to solve complex social issues on the local and global levels is well documented (Googins & Rochlin, 2000; LeBar & Branzi, 2010). Accomplishing these partnerships is extremely challenging on many counts, one of which is leaders’ understanding of the frame of reference, approach and language used by their partner organization’s leaders (Gray, 1989; Waddock, 1988). Non-profit leaders understanding how business leaders think and relate, and vice versa, can be one avenue for improving the success of cross-sector partnership in the future. Battista (2009), in a recent study of firm managers and social workers engaged in a cross-sector partnership, explores the underlying psychodynamics experienced by these individuals. The findings show that for business managers “fear of losing control” and “over commitment” are two common themes:

The manager is afraid that if he publicly presents his engagement in the community, a public expectation and pressure for him to engage further, or even increase his engagement and...if the company doesn't meet the expectations of community-based initiatives through continued service, the company will 'suffer negative consequences'--poor image in the community and loss of reputation. (Battista, 2009, p. 102)

On the other hand, the social workers in Battista's study talk about the possibility of mutual learning and the opportunity to address social problems with creativity and more resources yet they tend to have a "wait and see" attitude. This might be interpreted as mild indifference or apathy. The reality is that social workers fear becoming dependent on short-term solutions to long-term social challenges. (Battista, 2009)

As other research (Googins & Rochlin, 2000; Gray, 1986; LeBar & Branzei, 2010; Waddock, 1988) and Battista's (2009) study demonstrates, the complexities of cross-sector partnerships cannot be understated. Underlying the learning objectives of this interdisciplinary leadership course, therefore, is a desire by the co-designers to improve the understanding of future business and non-profit leaders to the challenges and frames of reference each bring to their work.

Students come to the MGMT 4470 course with varied work experiences and are encouraged to share these in classroom discussions. The nature of work in both business and non-profit settings is therefore actively discussed. Common ground is set early in the semester, when students are asked to share not only their work experience, but also experience in volunteer or community settings. This activity levels the field for business students who commonly do not realize that non-profit work is relevant to them and vice versa. All of the exercises described earlier, such as the "Leader Self Insights" and "Leadership at Work," are integrated in to class discussion and students offer examples from both business and non-profit settings. This begins to sensitize students to their fellow students' challenges in other work settings, either within or across sectors.

The "Leader in the News" oral presentations are the capstone opportunity for students to engage in discussion about how high profile business and non-profit leaders handled organizational challenges both effectively and ineffectively. The question/answer period following each presentation is very lively with student observations. At this point in the semester, students are very comfortable and discussion can flow freely.

### **Preliminary Analysis and Recommended Course Changes**

The data from course exercises, assignments and exams for the two times this course has been taught in this format (Fall 2008 and Fall 2009) support successful accomplishment of the course learning objectives, as repeated below:

1. To acquire a basic understanding of key leadership theories and approaches;
2. To develop self-awareness of your personal leadership style and potential for leadership;
3. To identify the leadership traits and behaviors which you most respect, and an understanding of how this impacts working relationships with supervisors; and

4. To develop the ability to analyze situations which challenge business, and non-profit leaders, and to identify the strategies which make them either effective or ineffective in organizational settings. (Altman, 2009, p. 1)

As course designers, we feel positive about the interdisciplinary success of these two pilot course delivery trials. We intend to move forward with course improvements that move beyond sensitizing students to the challenges confronted by leaders of other sectors, to explicitly training them about the positive benefits and challenges of cross-sector partnerships. In the short-term, the Fall 2010 offering of the course will incorporate a fifth learning objective: *To develop an understanding of the need for cross-sector collaboration to confront social issues; and methods to confront the challenges leaders must face to be successful in such partnerships.* The specific course materials and assignments that will be used to achieve this learning objective will be designed during Summer 2010.

More radical changes to the course curriculum will need to wait until UNT Dallas is accredited as a separate institution. While UNT Dallas has been approved by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to operate as a separate institution in Fall 2010, for accreditation purposes, UNT Dallas will remain under the UNT Denton umbrella until we are able to apply for independent accreditation, which we hope to accomplish in 2012. Such a restraint hinders the ability to incorporate new instructional strategies at this time. Once we have separate accreditation, we will have the opportunity to make substantive changes in this and other courses to better match the specific mission of UNT Dallas, which states a commitment to both interdisciplinary learning and community engagement.

Two substantive changes come to our minds that could/should be implemented once we achieve independent accreditation. First is team teaching, and second is the requirement of a service learning project.

### *Team Teaching*

Pratt's (2007) model of integrative leadership education notes, "If modeling of leaders is important to helping students learn as they explore the leadership road, the teacher has the responsibility to model leadership as well" (p. 62). Therefore, if our goal is much deeper understanding of issues across sectors, what better way to model collaborative work than team teaching by Business and Human Services faculty members? Our academic disciplinary barriers often do not allow such work, but interdisciplinarity ultimately means academic policies that allow for and foster cross disciplinary collaboration (Franks, Dale, Hindmarsh, Fellows, Buckridge & Cybinski, 2007). Given UNTD's mission's interdisciplinary focus, we hope that team teaching will be supported at UNT Dallas in the future.

### *Cross-Sector Service Learning Project*

A recent edition of the *Journal of Management Education* was devoted entirely to the subject of service learning, documenting that the field has matured from its early roots (Kenworthy & Fornaciari, 2010). In the review of a "Social Entrepreneurship and Community Leadership" capstone course for Master's leadership development students, a course with similar cross-sector learning goals, Lizky, Godhsalk and Walton-Bongers (2010) state:

Service learning is an excellent pedagogy, as it allows students to apply theoretical concepts and principles learned in the classroom to real-world situations and advances the partnerships between the community, university, and students, where all parties can learn from one another. (p. 142)

The unique core curriculum of UNTD has been designed with a freshman service learning component, which will be implemented in 2010-2011, when we enroll our first freshman class. The curriculum plan is to carry this service learning component forward to junior and senior level courses in each student's major. The HSML program already has several service learning opportunities built in to the core courses and a senior internship, so these students have multiple opportunities for experiential learning and practical application. The undergraduate business program, however, sorely lags behind with no current required community service or internship requirement. Integration of experiential learning for undergraduate business students will be foundational to students' integration of theory and practice. Future planned curriculum changes in the business programs will add several service learning or internship opportunities.

The service learning projects and internships housed within the HSML or Business programs, however, do not achieve a cross-sector focus, as they are still discipline based. Integrating a cross-sector service learning project within MGMT 4470, with its already established interdisciplinary framework, has the potential to train both future Human Services and Business leaders through a cross-sector field-based learning model.

### **Conclusion**

Teaching the senior leadership class to undergraduate Human Services and Business students together has already been found to produce learning outcomes that support the development of these students, their degree program competencies, and the mission of the emerging University of North Texas at Dallas. This paper has attempted to highlight the structure of this course, the assignments unique to it, and the class environment built to promote cross-sector understanding. Foundational concepts of organizational leadership are interwoven with self-assessment and reflection exercises, along with class discussion and research on challenges current leaders face, to ensure that students learn from each other as well as experientially.

Future enhancements have been identified to further build on this understanding by studying cross-sector partnerships in the short-term, and in the long-term modeling of cross-sector partnerships, both in the classroom and in the field. These enhancements, once implemented, will hopefully support additional learning outcomes for the students, their respective degree programs, the University and the broader community.

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