Combining Leadership Theory and Practice with Community Service-Learning
Practice Presentation Proposal
Association of Leadership Educators

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Title: Combining Leadership Theory and Practice with Community Service-Learning

Presentation Track: Practice

Description: The purpose of this session is to provide participants with an overview of how learners can enhance their personal leadership development and increase their understanding of social justice issues through community service-learning. With guidance from the presenters, participants get a chance to practice what they learn and then brainstorm how they might incorporate a service-learning experience into new/existing leadership courses or programs.

Presenter Information:
Dr. Lynn Hertrick Leavitt provides direction to and management of the Center for Service-Learning and Leadership (CSL) at George Mason University (GMU) in Fairfax, Virginia. Lynn teaches a “Leadership Theory and Practice” course for the undergraduate Integrative Studies College (New Century College) and also is a faculty member in the Higher Education graduate degree program. Prior to becoming director of CSL, Lynn served as the Associate Director of the Center for New Students/Freshman Center and as the Training Coordinator in the former Student Leadership Center at GMU.

Kris Binard, Dean of Student Services at Front Range Community College in Fort Collins, Colorado, provides direction and leadership for the Division of Student Services. Departments include Student Life and Involvement, Advising and Retention, Recruiting and Outreach, Admissions and Records, Learning Support Center, Assessment, and Financial Aid. Previously, Kris advised clubs and organizations and provided leadership opportunities for students on campus. In addition, Kris managed the Longs Peak Student Center, provided leadership training to the students who work in the center, and has taught Leadership Development courses.
Introduction:
Service-learning is an effective way to learn leadership methods by applying knowledge and analyzing how experience relates to theory. In order to understand how service-learning and theoretical leadership concepts relate, it is important to review several leadership concepts and a contemporary model/theory. Contemporary leadership theory suggests a shift in focus from institutional to individual leadership and “bottom-up” versus traditional “top-down” methods. Community-based service-learning projects provide students a venue where they can practice leadership skills through active involvement in the community (Billingsley, 1995). In addition, the community experience encourages students to think critically about how service relates to learning, increased leadership potential, and civic responsibility.

The purpose of this paper is to provide participants with an overview of how learners from various backgrounds can enhance their personal leadership development and increase their understanding of social justice issues through community service-learning. With guidance from the authors, participants get a chance to practice what they learn by identifying social justice issues in their communities and then brainstorming how they might incorporate a service-learning experience into new/existing leadership courses or leadership development programs.

Background:
The authors incorporated service-learning in their leadership programs and courses almost ten years ago. In addition, the authors published a workbook, Discovering Leadership through Service. This workbook was published in 2000 and has been used by several colleges, universities, and leadership programs across the country. The second edition of the workbook will be available soon. The authors will provide feedback on how they have used the workbook in their own leadership programs.

How it works:
Discovering Leadership through Service provides students, faculty, and community agencies with the necessary tools to implement a meaningful service-learning experience to enhance leadership development. This workbook is written in four sections designed to assist the student in understanding service-learning and how it applies to leadership in the classroom. Each section provides information and exercises relating to the subject of service and leadership.

Section I explores leadership concepts and a theory/model that relate to service-learning. The concepts include vision, collaboration and change. The related theory is the Social Change Model of Leadership. Exercises at the end of each section assist students with developing their personal views of leadership.

Section II provides information on service-learning and answers the questions of who, what, when, and where of service-learning. This section provides lists of information and exercises to assist the student with his/her service-learning site selection. Students learn that service-learning provides an advantage over traditional classroom methods because they are able to use newly acquired academic skills and knowledge in real-life situations.

Section III explains the purpose of reflection in service-learning. Reflection fosters leadership development, cognitive learning, personal growth, and critical thinking. This section provides models, examples, and exercises on reflection to assist students with writing reflective journals.

Section IV assists the students and faculty members by providing sample forms, assessments, and other materials that relate to the service-learning experience. These forms serve as templates for faculty to adapt and use as they implement service-learning in a course or curriculum.
Results to Date:
Through end-of-semester reflective papers and course evaluation forms, there is documented evidence that students have a better understanding of leadership theories/approaches and, more importantly, their personal strengths and challenges as leaders due to the service-learning component of the leadership courses. The presenters will share some student quotes during their session.

Conclusions and Recommendations:
Service-learning is a critical component of leadership classes or programs and it has a positive impact on students. Students learn by doing and reflection. The outcomes include a more thorough understanding of leadership concepts, a deeper sense of individual strengths and challenges as leaders and increased student involvement on campus and in the surrounding communities.