

**Implementing an Effective Leadership Development Program for Community
College Students**

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Abstract

Community colleges are a democratizing force in post-secondary education, different from but equal to universities. They offer an expedient route to the labour market. This suggests the need for colleges to focus on the development of their students' leadership ability and to implement strategies for evaluating the success of leadership development efforts on college campuses. Student leadership development administered as a comprehensive, integrated and complimentary program is a proactive and strategic investment in the students' educational experience. The goal of this paper is to document some of the ways community colleges can further promote student leadership development and implement innovative approaches to increase student engagement.

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Students

Introduction

Developing leadership skills and abilities among students takes pride of place in many college mission statements as an important aspect of creating vocationally trained individuals (Clark, 1985; Roberts, 1997). To pursue this goal community colleges need to pay more attention to the development of their students as leaders by offering specific leadership programs. Boatman (1999) proposes student leadership development be considered a relational model of empowerment and transformation rather than a formal program, activity or course. Within the campus community several leadership development opportunities exist for students to identify, enhance and reflect leadership abilities in numerous institutional programs, courses, or activities (Boatman, 1999). Colleges offering credit-bearing or co curricular programs will help students more fully develop their understanding and practice of leadership.

Colleges need to prepare graduates to deal with major economic, societal, and environmental issues by developing their leadership ethos and skills for effective civic involvement. Colleges have become sluggish in responsiveness to societal needs as educational programming today is primarily oriented to the operational needs of business, industry and the marketplace. (Levin, 2002) Community colleges have an institutional commitment to meet the needs of under-served communities. (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Dennison & Gallagher, 1986; Dennison & Levin, 1989).

Roueche and Mink (1976) found that through open admissions policies and vigorous recruitment efforts, community colleges are enrolling larger numbers of "non-traditional" students. The growing numbers of non-traditional students enrolled in college programs warrant the need for much emphasis to be placed in their personal development. Student development, career development and educational preparation have given way to skills development and work force training in colleges today. As the diversity of today's student population changes so does the need for teaching, learning, support and services. Several emerging cultural, social and diversity issues are combining to produce unprecedented expectations. As expectations change the college will need to be able to speak the language of students and to understand today's student subcultures. The college will need to give sufficient attention to understanding diverse student needs and assisting employees to be sensitive to them.

Consumers of education (students, parents and employers) are "registering increasing concerns over the quality of educational preparation" (Shaver, 1990: 9). Instead of preparing college students for a vocational career, community colleges equip students with terminal skills as they are packaged out into a job market that shifts rapidly with technology changes in the global economy. As employment opportunities for qualified college graduates fluctuate, colleges have not changed accordingly. Many of the jobs in the middle segment of the occupational structure require subsequent university education, to be licensed or to have optimal skills and credentials to pursue these careers. The consumers of a college education will wish to emphasize more of the value-added qualitative outcomes of the post-secondary experiences (Calder and Melanson, 1996).

Discussion

Student Developmental Outcomes

A growing body of research has indicated that the college years are a critical period for students' personal, social, and professional growth (Astin, 1985, 1993). Involvement in the college environment is positively related to developmental outcomes (Astin, 1977, 1984, 1993). Astin (1985) suggests that the amount of student learning and personal development is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in the process of learning, including participation in leadership experiences and activities. As suggested by Chickering (1969) and Tinto (1975), student development is a function of four sources of influence: student background; the organizational characteristics of the institution attended; social integration and academic integration.

Students involved in leadership activities have higher levels of educational attainment and openly demonstrate personal change than do students who do not participate in these activities (Astin, 1993). Cousineau and Landon (1989) confirmed that academic skills and satisfaction are affected positively by increased involvement in college life. In their study investigating the impact of leadership programs on students' college experiences, Cress et al. (2001) reports students' acknowledged personal changes, such as enhanced conflict resolution and commitment to civic responsibility. The positive influence of campus-wide interactions on students' attitudes, interests, and values has been documented for decades (Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Student Engagement & Community Building

Student engagement is defined as the time and energy that students devote to educationally purposeful activities and the extent to which the institution invites students to participate in activities that lead to student success (Kuh, 2003). Colleges offer students leadership opportunities through student engagement activities such as mentoring programs, leadership courses, extracurricular activities, sports, and service or volunteer activities. Student affairs personnel may facilitate the enhancement of students' leadership development by collaborating on both the content and pedagogy of the courses.

Zhao & Kuh (2004) are of the opinion that engaged students actively participate in various out-of-class activities. They form learning communities to connect with an affinity group of peers, which in turn fosters higher persistence rates, student retention, success, and personal development. (Astin, 1984; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991; Rendon, 1994; Tinto, 1993). Kezar & Moriarty, (2000) also suggest that participation in co-curricular experiences such as leadership training, internships, etc. designed to promote leadership development among students, enhance self- perceptions of leadership ability, self-confidence and their ability to communicate through public speaking and writing. In a collaborative culture where student leadership activities are supported, community building and student engagement in the learning environment are bound to increase. Student leadership development should be considered a proactive and strategic investment in increasing student retention.

Understanding Leadership Models

An enhanced understanding and functional congruence between student affairs staff and students regarding leadership etiquette, behaviour, and method which moves from a “leading by the chosen few” hierarchical perspective to a “leadership by all” systemic perspective may better facilitate leadership empowerment and success (Shertzer & Schuh, 2004).

Leadership theories that rely on traits, behaviours, and situations to explain leadership worked well in an industrial era when the predominant goals of leadership were production and efficiency. (Komives, 2005) Typically student leadership development programs of the past tended to favour a hierarchical perspective. Hierarchical Thinking is based on the traditional top-down leadership structure, in which the upper echelon is in complete control of the decision-making process and hence, organizational success (Thompson, 2006, pg.344). The hierarchical perspective has concentrated on the effectiveness and efficiency of the individual because hierarchy-based leadership emphasizes the progression and maintenance of one’s place and rank within an organization (Bass, 1990; Bolman & Deal, 2003; House & Podsakoff, 1994).

Hierarchical leadership models tend to emphasize rank, one-way or directive power and influence processes, individuals in competition for rewards, productivity, rationality, one way communication, formal, structured relationships with others, and separation between leaders and followers (Astin & Leland, 1991). Research indicates that traditional models of leadership tend to be exclusive and represent an orientation to

leadership derived from those traditionally in positions of power that is a mostly Caucasian, male, upper-middle-class orientation to leadership (Amey & Twombly, 1992; Bensimon, 1989; Bensimon & Neumann, 1993; Calas & Smirich, 1992; Cross & Ravekes, 1990; Lyons, 1990).

Organizational hierarchies were built to categorize decision making and communication through layered departmental structures, to centralize authority and information, and to differentiate talents and functions (Toregas, 2002). Today the effectiveness of hierarchies is being challenged by the complexity of issues, information overload available via the Internet, and the proliferation of human communication networks. Communication technologies, which foster informal communities, are fundamentally changing the way businesses, educational institutions, government agencies, and other organizations operate because they allow individuals and organizations to connect with each other across boundaries in ways heretofore never imagined. Thus, enabling quick, flexible and adaptable responses facilitated by decentralized decision making and non-hierarchical power.

Leadership as it is commonly understood focuses on the accomplishment of the mission and goals of particular organizations. The performance of leaders of organizations is measured by the delivery of products and services to meet the needs of its customers. Boundaries or borders matter because they outline authority, power, responsibility, funding, and mission of an organization. Successful leaders of organizations have well-developed “vertical muscles” but leaders who assume

responsibility for cross boundary change initiatives need to exercise “horizontal muscles” (Price Waterhouse Change Integration Team, 1995).

College students require not just to cope but to thrive in the knowledge economy. Students and employers need new skills and expertise to compete in today's rapidly changing economy. Avant-garde corporatists with networked satellite or pod-like structured companies require nimble leadership that facilitate partnerships, collaboration, and sharing of time, personnel, resources, and credit with other units and organizations. “To cope effectively and creatively with these emerging national and world trends, future leaders will not only need to possess new knowledge and skills, but will also be called upon to display a high level of emotional and spiritual wisdom and maturity.” (Astin & Astin, 2000, p. 1) Advancements in technology, increasing globalization, complexity, and interconnectedness reveal the new post-industrial paradigm of a networked world and call for “new ways of leading, relating, learning, and influencing change” (Allen & Cherrey, 2000, p. 1; Rost, 1993).

Many of the leadership development programs designed for college students are based upon studies and models that were developed with managers in business and public-sector organizations (Freeman, Knott, & Schwartz, 1994). Serious questions have been raised about whether such models are applicable to college students and collegiate environments, which differ considerably from the environments in which managers and corporations operate. Furthermore the differences between the two populations in age, experience, and leadership styles add to the dilemma. These factors compel the need for a

new approach to leadership development at the college level. An approach that includes the re-evaluation of hierarchy, emphasizing diversity, complexity, and interdependence. (Outcalt et al., 2001)

Brodsky's (1988) observation "Valid instruments designed specifically for college students to measure their leadership development do not exist" (p. 23) holds water today as it did 18 years ago. Rost compliments the claim and goes on to say that leadership educators, "should admit honestly that we don't know how to develop leaders" (Rost, 1993, p. 102). Rost encourages a paradigm shift from "leader development" to "leadership development". According to Rost "Leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and their collaborators who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes" (1993, p. 99). He proposes that leadership be regarded an interactive phenomenon and shared responsibility, where the dynamics of interpersonal conduct of both leaders and followers are directed towards reaching higher ethical actions and aspirations of mutual benefit.

Prescribing to leadership competence when defined as the "capacity to mobilize oneself and others to serve and to work collaboratively" (HERI, 1996, p. 19); paves the way for value-based, collaborative and non-hierarchical leadership to "instill in young persons a strong sense of civic responsibility and a desire for social change" (Astin, 1996). Outcalt et al. (2000) plead to include post-modernist, feminist, multicultural, and other perspectives to the roster as leadership development programs are touted to the coming generations of college students.

Choosing a Non-Hierarchical Leadership Model

The principles involved in post-industrial leadership support a values-centered approach (Chrislip & Larson, 1994; Kouzes & Posner, 2003; Matusak, 1997) and have influenced several new pedagogical leadership models. Many of these “new ways of leading” include components of principle centered leadership such as collaboration, ethical action, moral purposes, and leaders who transform followers into leaders themselves (Burns, 1978; Covey, 1992; Rost, 1993). The post-industrial paradigm, also suggests that leadership is a relational, transformative, process-oriented, learned, and change-directed phenomenon (Rogers, 2003; Rost, 1993). Themes of interdependence and connectedness and new models of identity development, emerging in personal development theories are similar to themes being discussed in the emerging paradigms of leadership – collaboration, connectedness, empowerment, and leadership as a process. (Kezar & Moriarty, 2000).

In recent years leadership educators and student affairs professionals have introduced various theories and models of leadership including -

- Relational Leadership Model (Komives, Lucas, and McMahan, 1998)
- Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 1977)
- Situational Leadership (Hersey, Blanchard, and Johnson, 2000)
- Social Change Model of Leadership (Astin and Astin, 1995)
- Systemic Leadership (Allen and Cherrey, 2000) and
- Transformational Leadership (Burns, 1978)

All of which are primarily directed towards achieving one of the purposes of higher education - developing students into leaders (Astin and Astin, 1995).

Student affairs staff engaged in the developmental activities of student leaders find the leadership development challenge for higher education is empowering students (McMahon & Bramhall, 2004; Astin & Astin, 2000). The essential ingredient of effective leadership is helping students develop their talents and attitudes enabling them to become positive social change agents (Astin & Astin, 2000). “Leadership is now understood by many to imply collective action, orchestrated in such a way as to bring about significant change while raising the competencies and motivation of all those involved” (Bornstein & Smith, 1996, p. 281).

Several institutions run highly effective yet isolated leadership development programs and therefore there exists a need for an accessible, practical, inexpensive mode of delivering a comprehensive leadership development program. Roberts and Ullorn (1989, p. 69) advocate that “a leadership program is strongest when clearly set in historical institutional values.” Adopting the traditions and values of the institution into a comprehensive leadership development model establishes a culture that celebrates leadership and encourages all students to develop it. To facilitate an effective leadership development program institutional commitment and favourable organizational climate are expected. Co-curricular program standards and guidelines must be established to which existing leadership programs will be expected to subscribe to.

Conclusion

Since leadership potential exists in every student, colleges need to provide, promote and involve students in leadership training and education programs. These co-curricular experiences can increase their leadership skills, abilities and knowledge. According to Cress et al. (2001) student leadership participants cite increased confidence in their abilities, leadership skills, and willingness to serve in leadership roles. Also, compared to non-participants, leadership program participants were noticeably more cooperative and less authoritarian and held more ethical views of leadership.

Implementing an effective student leadership development program will facilitate a more sustainable practice of leadership. Teaching students how to hone their internal leadership skills through a process where they identify their own beliefs, values, emotions and practices. Students having experienced effective leadership as part of their education are likely to commit to making changes in society since the institutions in which they were trained inculcated in them this commitment. Qualitative and quantitative data collected from students about their leadership development experiences in the program, can be used by institutional researchers to evaluate the longitudinal outcomes of the program. The competencies of today's community college student should begin to include leadership studies. This will allow students to be more globally competent learners with added competencies. This ability will enhance their marketability and foster an attitude of affective competency. In turn, they become better able to sustain themselves as they direct their energies toward things that matter to them.

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