

A Journey in Leadership

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In 1997, two faculty members at Kansas State University began the process of creating something special and distinctive that never existed before. They clearly understood that they were embarking on a journey that would be exciting, yet not totally within their control. They understood that a creative alchemy was needed to bring about institutional change. And they knew that they were likely to encounter resistance. They were passionate about the value of developing a leadership studies undergraduate minor, but they knew that their plans would not work unless they were flexible in the design of the program. From the outset, the program was value-driven. It was not designed simply to teach specific skills of leadership. It was designed to assist each student prepare to answer the question, "What is leadership for?"

It was clear that as the new millennium began, individuals interested and involved in leadership across the nation were taking stock of the current status of leadership and preparing visions for the next decade. There appeared to be no limit to the amount of problems and concerns facing society. Many changes were on the horizon. Future leaders with new ideas would be needed. It was critical that society develop a large pool of highly qualified individuals prepared to lead. In order to be considered a highly qualified leader, one must be a diversified and informed individual who not only possesses a high level of knowledge about leadership but also has leadership capacity. Leadership capacity is what is believed to make the difference between effective and noneffective leaders (Lambert, 2003). Lambert defined this concept of leadership capacity as "broad-based skillful participation in the work of leadership" (p. 4). She further indicated that leadership capacity is the ability to effectively involve others in the process of creating visions for the organization, collaborating with others regarding the vision, and keeping the goal of group success at the forefront of all decisions.

Kansas State University was not a newcomer to the development of future leaders. Its commitment was first formalized into a program in the fall of 1988. The Associate Vice President of the university believed that leadership was learned. He wondered what prepared student leaders at K-State to assume leadership roles at the collegiate

level. In 1988, he conducted a study to learn about the high school background of the leaders of the K-State student body. In addition to having higher than average ACT scores, he discovered that collegiate leaders began practicing leadership in high school. A group of university leaders then initiated a leadership scholarship program that identified high school leaders who demonstrated an interest in leadership. One hundred thirty six students received leadership scholarships that first year. In 2008, two hundred fifty-eight students received leadership scholarships.

In 1995, the Department of Educational Administration in the College of Education made a commitment to preparing leaders rather than simply training school administrators. This shift in commitment was symbolized when the department changed its name to the Department of Educational Leadership. A faculty member in the department began developing undergraduate courses in leadership.

In the spring of 1996, these two initiatives came together when the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership was approached by the Dean of Student Life regarding the joint sponsorship of an interdisciplinary minor in leadership studies. The Associate Dean of Student Life and a professor from the Educational Leadership department wrote the initial proposal for the interdisciplinary minor in leadership studies. Their vision included increasing the number of students who had the opportunity to study leadership and expanding the opportunity of focusing on leadership to all students. They supported the notion of identifying high school leaders for the program. However, they wanted the program to be open to all incoming students, not just those who had leadership experience. The minor was based upon the foundation principle that leadership can be taught and learned. From its start, the program was committed to the premise that everyone has the potential to improve his or her capacity to lead. Perhaps most importantly, the program was based on a mission statement founded on the concept of preparing knowledgeable, ethical, caring leaders for a diverse world. As a result of student initiative, "inclusive" was added. Students and faculty added "changing" to describe the world for which leaders are prepared.

With the support of the President of the University and Dean of the College of Education, the Provost and the Vice President for Institutional Advancement appointed an interdisciplinary task force to study the need for a minor in leadership studies and to design such a program if it was deemed to be essential to the mission of the university. This task force was composed of administrators, faculty members, and students from across the university community. The two founding professors who developed the first draft of the interdisciplinary minor in leadership studies convened the first meeting of the task force. The minor consolidated previous leadership education efforts with the intention of offering Kansas State students the opportunity to learn about and apply leadership theories and skills across academic disciplines. As was expected, issues of turf, tradition, and threat needed to be addressed. Clearly, no department would be interested in supporting any program that had the potential of reducing their enrollment or competing with their courses. It was essential that the new minor truly be a value-added program and not compete with or duplicate other leadership offerings. Representatives from every academic department on campus were contacted and invited to nominate courses from their disciplines that they believed had a place in a leadership studies program. The task force made a commitment that half of the credit hours in the minor would be electives drawn from existing leadership courses.

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The minor requires 18 semester hours. Some of these courses may already be part of a student's major while others will be courses taken to enhance their programs of study. The minor requires four core courses: Introduction to Leadership Concepts; Culture and Context in Leadership; Leadership in Practice; and Senior Seminar in Leadership Studies. The introduction course focuses on both the academic study of leadership concepts and the development of leadership skills. The topics focus on the themes in the program mission statement: knowledge; ethics; caring; and diversity. Added in 2003 as a result of student and faculty initiatives, the Culture and Context in Leadership is organized to provide students with a formal opportunity to integrate their course and leadership experiences in light of contemporary issues in the study of leadership behavior across cultures and contexts. The course is based on current research and writing that introduce and discuss the impact of culture and context on the concept of leadership and development of individuals as interculturally competent leaders. In Leadership in Practice, each student identifies a leadership setting associated with his or her academic major in a community or business organization, or a student leadership position. Student observation and participation in these leadership settings serves as a means of integrating theory and practice. Students then analyze what transpired in their leadership settings through class discussions, weekly worksheets, and a synthesis paper. The goal of the Senior Seminar in Leadership Studies is to assist students in the integration of their academic study of leadership and their leadership experiences in preparation for their roles as citizens and members of the contemporary work force. Foundation texts on leadership studies as well as current research are highlighted. This capstone course provides students with an opportunity to reflect and act on what they have learned about leadership.

Additionally, students must earn at least nine hours of elective credit. Electives are divided into three categories: Ethics; Theories; and Foundations and Applications. Each student must earn three hours of credit from each category. This list is modified as new courses are introduced in the various departments. The first list of electives included courses from 25 different departments on campus.

The first Introduction to Leadership Concepts course open to the general student body was offered in the spring of 1997. The two founders of the program taught the course. The class had eleven students and met in one of the instructor's office. That same year the first Practicum in Leadership Studies class (later known as Leadership in Practice) was also taught. On March 3, 1997 the Kansas Board of Regents approved the 18-hour interdisciplinary minor in leadership. In the spring of 1998, the Introduction to Leadership Concepts course was approved for general education credit. That same year the first Leadership for the 21st Century senior seminar class, later known as Senior Seminar in Leadership, was taught. In order to ensure that the program was responsive to the needs of the students, a Leadership Studies Student Advisory Board was established. This board was later named the Leadership Studies and Programs Student Ambassadors. Each year the current Student Ambassadors select the students to serve as ambassadors.

The growth of the program can be seen by looking at the University's repository of information about courses and enrollments. In 1997, there were two courses offered. By 2001, 14 courses or sections were offered with an enrollment of 108. In 2008, there were 48 courses or sections offered with an enrollment of 2,735 students. By the fall of 2008, the leadership studies program had grown into the largest

academic program at K-State with nearly 1,500 students enrolled in the minor. Of that number, more than 900 were incoming students. Enrollment in the Leadership Studies minor includes students from every college on campus with the College of Arts & Sciences and the College of Business having the largest representation, 45% and 32% respectively. As of January 2009, there were 582 K-State graduates with a Leadership Studies minor. Despite the large number of students, the program maintains relatively small enrollments in the core courses where student input and involvement are encouraged. This focus on student participation within the leadership studies minor and the various extracurricular programs offered continue to be the foundation for the program's success.

In August of 2008, the Kansas Board of Regents approved the establishment of the Mary Lynn and Warren Staley School of Leadership Studies at Kansas State University under the direct administrative supervision of the University Provost. In 2009, construction began on a 36,500 square foot Leadership Studies building.

The founders of the program have continued to work with other faculty members and students to ensure that the Leadership Studies program continues its commitment to learning that is transformational, constructivist, interactive, novel, and transferable. They believe that learners and instructors must jointly engage in making meaning through active inquiry. Instructors are intentional in actions, expectations, and decisions. This means that learning outcomes for each activity are theory-driven, planned, and measurable. The growth of the program clearly demonstrates that undergraduate students want to become better leaders and want to be involved in developing the design of their learning. Perhaps the program was summed up best by a recent graduate who wrote:

I can apply this minor to anything I want to. This is one of the most flexible minors and one of the most useful minors ever in Kansas State University history. The minor focuses on interaction of self with others as well as self-reflection. Anyone can learn facts and equations, but to learn to deal with moral dilemmas and group conflict is vital. ¹

The faculty continues to be alert to the risk that as the program grows there is a danger of losing touch with the founding principles. Consequently, the staff and students continually meet to question every decision and determine if new actions are consistent with the concept of developing knowledgeable, ethical, caring, inclusive leaders for a diverse and changing world.

Reference

Lambert, L. (1998). How to build leadership capacity. *Educational Leadership*, 55(7) 17-19.

Endnote

¹ Source: Student evaluations, Summer 2006.