The Need for Leadership Educator Development

BY KYLE MASSEY

Leadership education of students is an important and ongoing process within postsecondary institutions. Many colleges and universities offer programs labelled as "leadership certificates" or "leadership development opportunities" that deliver a curriculum largely based on leadership theory. Participation in this type of co-curricular program has been linked to gains in academic achievement as well as positive skill development (Bialek & Lloyd, 1998). Additionally, student leadership programs are also often aimed at providing positive social outcomes. An increasing number of students are recognizing that participation in a leadership program offers an opportunity to acquire transferable skills and knowledge which will supplement their undergraduate degree, and –not surprisingly -- student interest in these programs is on the rise.

The number of co-curricular student leadership development programs at Canadian colleges and universities has increased significantly in recent years, with emphasis on developing emerging leaders, promoting civic engagement, and/or enhancing the skills for those in existing leadership roles. These programs typically include elements such as workshops, lectures, conferences, retreats, capstone projects, and recognition events. The focus tends to be on experiential activities to promote skill development, in such areas as communication, conflict management, diversity, and values. Leadership educators play an essential role in coordinating, shaping, and evaluating this area of student learning by designing, developing, and implementing these leadership courses and programs.

The role of leadership educators

Leadership educators and other student affairs professionals have employed a number of theories and models of leadership development to inform their practice. These have included theories such as servant leadership, transformational leadership, systemic leadership, situational leadership, and emotionally intelligent leadership. Specific leadership models commonly used are the relational leadership model, leadership challenge model, leadership identity development model, and the social change model. With so many complex leadership theories and models to be mindful of -- not to mention the diversity of student development theories at play -- the task of designing and running the most effective leadership development curriculum can certainly be a challenge. Leadership educators need to be comfortable applying relevant theories, competent in delineating learning outcomes, masters of curriculum design and program delivery which use a variety of pedagogical strategies, and be equipped to soundly assess the student leadership outcomes. Given the importance of their mandate, and the scope of their assignment, there is clearly a need for specialized ongoing professional development for leadership educators at colleges and universities across the country.

It is the work of the leadership educator to help students identify the core knowledge and practices of leadership, and to make meaning of these in their own lives and the world around them. Rather than playing the role of the dispenser of wisdom and treating students as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge (famously critiqued by Paulo Freire (1970) as the "banking concept of education") the effective leadership educator employs a student-centred teaching philosophy, one which allows students to produce the substance for the learning experience through their activities. The role of the instructor is to monitor, shape, and guide the intellectual endeavour. Using this constructivist teaching style, the leadership educator focuses on making connections between ideas and fostering new understanding in students. The most effective leadership educators tailor their teaching strategies according to student responses and encourage students to analyze, interpret, and predict information. This can be accomplished in part by relying heavily on open-ended questions, promoting extensive dialogue among students, as well as a host of other constructivist pedagogical strategies.

The importance of highly skilled leadership educators is apparent in the results of a recent study by Dugan et al. (2011). This research found that with respect to building leadership capacity, the platform or type of leadership experience matters much less than the content. These findings, and similar conclusions drawn by Eich (2008), seem to suggest that leveraging student learning in leadership programs is much more a function of the degree to which high-impact learning strategies are embedded in the leadership program than the specific type of individual leadership experiences offered. The high-impact learning strategies identified as those which lead to greater gains in leadership capacity include mentorship relationships, sociocultural conversations with peers, community service learning, and group-based activities (Dugan et al., 2011).

Are we adequately prepared?

Some elements of the above discussion present potential barriers related to educators' understanding of and ability to implement sophisticated pedagogical approaches. As Dugan et al. (2011) point out, this may be particularly true for early career professionals with limited exposure to curriculum and co-curriculum development or learning theory. A successful leadership program demands a staff of critical scholar-practitioners to engage in informed practice, with a firm understanding of the underlying philosophical assumptions of their work. Those charged with running a leadership development program should first begin with a critical self-reflection regarding their developmental preparedness to engage with complex learning strategies, and work to fill any identified gaps in their current capacities. The leadership educator should be intrinsically motivated to gain competency and keep abreast of relevant established knowledge bases. The institution should also play a critical role in enhancing educators' preparedness. Formal training programs, conference participation, support for professional development, and opportunities for role modeling are all examples of ways to help build leadership educators' efficacy and effectiveness in using complex pedagogical approaches.

Learning from each other

Leadership educators across Canada have been involved in, and responsible for, a multitude of truly amazing leadership programs—programs in which students certainly gained valuable leadership skills and experiences to serve them presently and in the future. So where is all the published literature about the success of these leadership programs and initiatives? A very limited amount of published work exists demonstrating student leadership outcomes

in the context of Canadian leadership programs. Without published research and assessment studies, one either assumes the assessment and research is not being conducted, or not being done well, or that the information is not being shared -- which also hinders broader development and program enhancement. It is my view that leadership educators across Canada need to engage in thorough assessment of student learning in their programs, and that they should also embrace a culture of sharing and disseminating their results (whatever they are) with their colleagues across the country. Through this sharing of experiences, we can learn what has worked and what has not and to what degree; with local context we may also consider the reasons programs succeed or fail and in this way, the practice of student leadership development can be further informed and enhanced by relevant evidence.

The birth of a SASA/CACUSS online Knowledge Community for leadership educators is an important step in this direction. The Leadership Educators and Resources Network (LEARN) is a virtual venue for leadership educators across Canada to connect, share, learn and network. If my experience is not unique, the initiation and early facebook posts from LEARN community members has already increased our engagement with our own work and that of our leadership educator colleagues. As we grow together and professionalize our field, and as we share with one another our successes and our inevitable setbacks, we better equip our community of educators to engage in informed practice to meet our postsecondary students' growing need for leadership development.

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Some Sober Reflections on Canadian University Rankings

Students as Marketing Tools

by STEWART PAGE AND KENNETH M. CRAMER

I n November, 2010, *Maclean's* published its most recent 19th annual rankings of Canadian universities. Indeed, the ranking of universities has become a popular exercise with which to assess and promote higher education in North America (e.g., Cramer & Page, 2007, 2008, 2010). The ranking approach is similar to that used by publications such as *Consumer Reports*, in which goods or services are assigned scores, and then assigned relative rank standings.

Rankings of universities continue to be advertised annually by the magazine as being "required reading" for prospective students. Although this practice has attracted some modest reaction among Canadian academics, and minor though nonsubstantive revision in procedures and supposed "performance indicators" over time, the *Maclean's* system remains largely unchanged in terms of its basic idiom, and in the measures and indices used to construct its final rankings. In fact, in its 2010 university rankings issue (p. 128), *Maclean's* directly assures and informs student readers that it "marks the schools the same way your intro psych professor will mark you. We assess universities on several key skills and then weigh them to find out who is top of the class."

To date, the relatively few serious reactions to the Maclean's system have been mainly editorial expressions of personal views, values, and perspectives. As such, data-based analyses of these data, that is, assessments of their actual empirical characteristics, their level of reliability, and actual usefulness to students, continue to be almost nonexistent.

Following closely our previous reports concerning the Maclean's system in previous issues of Communique, we therefore examined the 2010, also the 2009, ranking data in terms of several aspects, described below.

Procedures in the Maclean's System

Maclean's, in the 2010 ranking exercise, again classifies universities (N = 49) into three types: Medical/Doctoral universities (N = 15), which contain medical schools and large graduate departments, Comprehensive universities (N = 12), which have no medical schools but have graduate programs, and Primarily Undergraduate universities (N = 22).

Because many if not all Canadian schools have now withdrawn their active cooperation in supplying information to *Maclean's*, the data underlying the magazine's annual rankings are now drawn largely from publicly available sources such as Statistics Canada. Six main measures continue to be used: Student Body (comprised of indices of students' past performance); Classes (including indices of class size and percentage of classes taught by tenured faculty); Faculty (indices of faculty members' academic qualifications; Finances (indices of budget parameters and student services; Library (indices assessing holdings); and Reputation (indices based on alumni support and a reputational survey—not including student respondents). Over the six measures, *Maclean's* has typically used a total of 24 indices for Medical/Doctoral universities, 23 for Comprehensive universities, and 22 for Primarily Undergraduate universities. However, as a result of changes in the level of university cooperation in providing data, the number of indices comprising each measure has been recently reduced to 14, 13, and 13, respectively.

2010 Ranking Data

For 2010, using Spearman rho (rank-based) correlations, which assess the level of association between two rank-based variables, we find that many indices are unrelated to final rankings. For each university type, as in previous studies, many of the rho correlations are actually negative, that is, with higher final rankings correlated with lower rankings on several indices, and vice versa. For Medical/Doctoral universities, 6 of the 14 possible correlations with rank (42 % cent) were statistically significant, i.e., at the conventional criterion of less than five chances in 100 of the correlation occurring by chance. For Comprehensive universities, 4 out of the 13 correlations with rank (30 %) were significant, and, for Undergraduate universities, 5 out of 13 (38 %) were significant. Also, although they are conceptually similar across Maclean's three university types, inspection of the intercorrelation of indices in 2010 shows again that