

**Building Leadership Skills in College: Outcomes of an Applied
Leadership Theory Undergraduate Business Course**

1) Presenter Information

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2) Title of Presentation

**Building Leadership Skills in College: Outcomes of an Applied
Leadership Theory Undergraduate Business Course**

3) Presentation Track - Practice

4) Presentation Description

This presentation shares the design and student outcomes of a newly revised undergraduate business leadership course, Leadership and Professional Development (LPD) at Morehouse College. The purpose of this class is to assist students in developing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to develop positive, professional, and ethical leadership perspectives.

5) Please consider for a poster if not accepted as a paper presentation.

6) Presenter's Biographical Profile

Belinda Johnson White is an Assistant Professor, Department of Business, at Morehouse College, Atlanta, Georgia. She earned a PhD in Educational Policy Studies at Georgia State University, a MS, Georgia Institute of Technology, and a BS, Spelman College. She teaches Leadership and Professional Development, a core course in the Morehouse College business program. Belinda has served as program coordinator for the Leadership Studies Minor, a curriculum she co-developed during her two-year tenure as the Associate Director of the Leadership Center at Morehouse College. Other leadership development activities include being the founding director of the Morehouse College Executive Mentorship Program and Executive Lecture Series, and a faculty mentor for the Morehouse College International Spring Tour. Outside of work, Belinda enjoys spending time with her family and lending her leadership expertise to her church and community service projects.

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Introduction

The mission of Morehouse College, a historically black, all-male, undergraduate, liberal arts college, is to prepare students for leadership. The mission of the management education program in the Department of Business Administration at Morehouse College is to develop skills requisite for excellence in leadership while emphasizing the importance of ethical behavior, civic engagement, and the pursuit of graduate studies. The core business program consists of 13 courses (39 hours). Twelve of these courses cover the business functions of accounting, finance, management, and marketing, and their associated concepts, often referred to as “hard skills.” One course in the business core, Leadership and Professional Development (LPD), was added to the business core in 1994, and focused on the interpersonal skills of business, often referred to as “soft skills.”

LPD has been very effective as a soft skills course (White and Hollingsworth, 2005). During its first decade, the focus of the three hour course centered on professional development discussions and exercises, including business attire, dining etiquette, corporate culture, and issues specifically related to success in corporate America for professionals of color. In Fall 2005, after the successful implementation of a 15 hour interdisciplinary leadership studies minor within the Department of Business (White, 2006), LDP was redesigned to provide students an engaging, interactive learning environment through which they can understand the theoretical constructs of leadership and how these constructs are applied in the workplace environment; and to assist students in developing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to develop positive, professional, and ethical leadership perspectives that will assist in their development into valuable assets for a global, civil society comprised of their organizations, communities, and families.

This redesign also called for LPD to take the lead role in achieving two departmental goals and expected student learning outcomes as follows:

- Departmental Goal: Ethics, Leadership, and Civic Engagement
Expected Outcome: Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the principles of ethics and leadership by participating in a service learning project.

- Departmental Goal: Interpersonal and Teamwork Skills
Expected Outcome: Students will be able demonstrate effective interpersonal relationship skills by working as members of a team.

In order to achieve these departmental goals and expected outcomes through an emphasis on the theoretical constructs of leadership, the pedagogy of the course had to be revised. Following is a review of the leadership pedagogy literature used to support the redesign of the class.

Background

Leadership educators have historically grappled with the question of whether leadership is a skill, trait, or innate behavior. In the field of business, this struggle by both academic and practitioner researchers has resulted in great bodies of scholarly and practitioner research. This research shows that most management educators agree that leadership is both a skill and a behavior that exhibits that skill (Doh, 2003). As a result of this dual definition, two additional questions have emerged: (1) whether leadership can be learned; and (2) whether leadership can be taught. Doh (2003) sought to find answers to these questions by interviewing leading management scholars involved in leadership research, education and development. Doh (2003) interviewed six educators who he defined as having made major contributions to research at the intersection of leadership and education. The schools represented by these professors were: Harvard Business School; University of Michigan Business School; London Business School and University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Arizona State University; Villanova University; and Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania. Doh's (2003) research findings to these two questions are (1) all six educators indicated belief that leadership could be learned; and (2) most agreed that some aspects of leadership could be taught.

The six leadership educators provided interesting insight to their arguments in support of their belief that leadership could be learned and some aspects of leadership could be taught. In regards to whether leadership can be learned, one educator stated: "Yes, most definitely. Here work experiences, bosses, special projects, role models, education all play a role in leadership development. Using an analogy with sports, . . . not everyone can become an outstanding player despite coaching, yet most will benefit and improve their 'game.' A few will go on to become stars or outstanding leaders given coaching, extensive experiences, and personal drive." In regards to whether leadership can be taught, one educator stated; "If leaders are born not made—and if no one can teach anyone else to improve—let's start investigating leadership in the biology lab rather than in the business world. So yes, unequivocally [leadership can be taught]." (Doh, 2003).

Doh (2003) also asked the six educators to identify techniques they felt would be successful in transmitting some of the leadership skills that could be imparted through formal or informal management education. An educator stated: "The dimensions of leadership you wish to teach determine the appropriate pedagogy. For example, case studies and action learning may be most useful for developing strategic thinking. Experiential exercises are most useful for teaching and honing behavioral skills such as

communication and persuasion. Feedback questionnaires and coaching can be very helpful in benchmarking one's current capacities in leadership. Personal growth methods can be helpful in focusing individuals on what types of work situations they can be most skillful in and most passionate about and therefore have a higher probability of being an effective leader." Common pedagogical themes uncovered by Doh were that the management education programs should be highly practical, include training or coaching from practitioners, that students may learn as much or more from failures in leadership as they would in attempting to replicate successes, and that to effectively teach leadership, programs must be tailored to the particular needs, attitudes and circumstances of the students (Doh, 2003).

Hogan and Warrenfeltz (2003) adds to our understanding of the assertion agreed to by these six researchers with expertise in leadership and education that leadership can be learned and some aspects taught via well designed academic programming. Hogan and Warrenfeltz (2003) offer a "domain model" of managerial education based on the concept of competency—the usual outcome of the learning process. Within the 21st century sphere of business language, the concept of skill is synonymous with the concept of competency, defined as a performance capability that distinguishes effective from ineffective managers in a particular organization (Hogan and Warrenfeltz, 2003). Hogan and Warrenfeltz's research has resulted in the identification of four competency domains, which they refer to as (1) intrapersonal skills, (2) interpersonal skills, (3) leadership skills, and (4) business skills. Hogan and Warrenfeltz (2003) believe these four domains define the content of management education and provide a basis for designing curricula, assigning people to training and evaluating management education. As previously stated, leadership can be defined as both a skill and a behavior, which supports the argument that a well designed management education program that provides learning opportunities for students in each of the four competency domains would be effective in developing leadership.

Based on the literature review, LPD was redesigned to focus on the competency domains of (1) intrapersonal skills—core self esteem, attitudes toward authority, and self-control; (2) interpersonal skills—initiating, building, and maintaining relationships with a variety of people who might differ from oneself in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, social class, or political agendas; and (3) leadership skills—building and maintaining effective teams.

In addition to the literature review, during the 2005 – 2006 academic year, I reviewed my research results on student perceptions of the effectiveness of LPD in two areas: (1) course content; and (2) course logistics. In regards to course content, my research showed 85.7% (75 students, n=91) of Spring 2005 survey respondents strongly agree or agree with the statement, "Overall, LPD has increased my understanding of the skills, traits, behaviors, and knowledge necessary for a professional of color to become a World Class Professional." 84% (42 students, n=50) of Spring 2003 survey respondents strongly agree or agree with the statement "Overall, I feel LPD has increased my ability to be an effective leader." 88% (44 students, n=50) of Spring 2003 survey respondents strongly agree or agree with the statement "LPD is a relevant and useful course." And a Fall 2004 survey of Morehouse business alumni, classes 1994 – 2004, on LPD course effectiveness found 61% (n=132), agree with the statement, "Classroom workshops and discussions on

integrity, ethics and values were beneficial to my success in my chosen career.” 73% (n=132) agree with the statement, “Classroom workshops and discussions on professional decorum, including dining etiquette and business dress, were beneficial to my success in my chosen career.” And 69% (n=133) agree with the statement, “Classroom workshops and discussions on corporate culture and the impact of being African American in a corporate setting were beneficial to my success in my chosen career.”

In regards to course logistics, my research also showed that students were concerned with class size and the physical environment of the classroom. 28.1% of the Spring 2005 survey respondents (25 students, n=90) strongly disagree or disagree with the statement, “The class size (100 students) in LPD was beneficial to my understanding of the subject matter.” 60% of the Spring 2005 survey respondents (54 students, n=89) strongly disagree or disagree with the statement, “The physical environment (seating, lighting, cooling/heating system) of the classroom in LPD was beneficial to my understanding of the subject matter.” And 60% of the Spring 2003 class respondents (30 students, n=50) strongly disagree or disagree with the statement, “The class size of LPD was conducive to learning.”

As a result of my literature review of effective leadership pedagogy and my research into student perception of course structure effectiveness as it relates to student learning, I made changes to the logistical structure and pedagogy of LPD, beginning in academic year 2006 - 2007.

Description of the Practice

In academic year 2006 – 2007, major logistical changes were made to LPD. It became a two section course with 50 students each. Section 1 met on Mondays, 3:00 pm – 5:30 pm and Section 2 met on Wednesdays, 3:00 pm – 5:30 pm. The instruction team was reduced in size from three members, which included the faculty instructor, director of career services, and an adjunct professor for community service outreach, to the one faculty instructor. Academic rigor was introduced via the adoption of the textbook by Shriberg, A., Shriberg, D. & Kumari, R. (2005), titled *Practicing Leadership Principles and Applications*, 3rd ed. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. And more in-class team exercises and discussions were incorporated.

Student responses on the Morehouse College Student Evaluations of Course and Instructor Effectiveness for Academic Year 2006 – 2007 were higher than previous years, with no statements having a response rating of less than 80% favorable (% of students who strongly agree/agree). Student written responses were also very favorable when asked to comment on the overall effectiveness of the professor and the course. Responses included were ‘great, great course,’ ‘effective teaching style for the topics discussed,’ ‘very effective,’ ‘very informative,’ ‘great course which should continue to be a requirement,’ ‘this was a very valuable course to take,’ and ‘I’ve learned a great amount in the class.’

In academic year 2007 – 2008, further logistical changes along with pedagogical changes were made to restructure the class based on the Hogan and Warrenfeltz (2003) four competency hierarchical domain model of managerial education. The logistical changes included having each section of 50 students meet two days a week for 1 hour and 15 minutes; Section 1 meets Mondays and Wednesdays, 3:00 pm – 4:15 pm and Section 2 meets Mondays and Wednesdays, 4:30 pm – 5:45 pm. The Shriberg, Shriberg, and Kumari textbook was replaced by a self-authored textbook, written to meet the specific needs of emerging leaders of color titled *Dr. White's 21st Century Guide to Leadership and Professional Development: Life Success Tools and Strategies for Emerging Leaders of Color*.

In support of increased student learning, an interactive pedagogical approach to teaching and learning was adopted which entails the following:

- Theory – Professor presents theoretical frameworks of leadership, ethics, professionalism, and communication through classroom lecture and discussions.
- Preparation – Students complete individual and team homework assignments.
- Participation – Students attend classroom sessions and participate in the discussions and classroom individual and team exercises.
- Practice – Students apply theoretical constructs in their team-based service learning project and other extra-curricular activities.
- Reflection – Students create a portfolio which contains a variety of assignments that require critical, analytical, and reflective thinking on their leadership development experiences.

Supportive pedagogical techniques include

- Classroom Activities – Lectures, discussions, team exercises, and presentations
- Learning Community Activities – Team assignments and exercises outside of classroom
- Executive Lectures – Interactions outside of classroom with significant contemporary leaders
- Leadership and Professional Development Practicums - Sessions that focus on workplace issues lead by company representatives from the Division's Corporate Partners Program.
- Service Learning Project - Hands on involvement within the Atlanta community
- Leadership Portfolio – Compilation of course assignments
- Exams – Measurement of knowledge attainment and comprehension

At the heart of the pedagogical change to support the incorporation of the Hogan and Warrenfeltz (2003) four competency hierarchical domain model of managerial education is the team-based service learning project. The 50 student class is divided into four teams of students, with 12 – 13 students per team. Each team elects a leader and chooses a service site. Each team member is required to complete 20 hours of service at the site. At the end

of the course, each team makes a formal multimedia presentation to the class on their service learning project. The team structure of the project allows for students to experiment with and experience the leadership theories discussed in class such as transformational, charismatic, transactional, citizen, ethical, and servant leadership, and leadership concepts such as stages of team development, conflict resolution, power and influence, and the big 5 personality dimensions.

Results to Date

Although student responses to the Morehouse College Student Evaluations of Course and Instructor Effectiveness for Fall 2007 have not been provided to the instructor, anecdotal evidence through Fall 2007 student comments to the instructor were extremely positive in regards to the course effectiveness, especially in regards to the service learning project. Students were required to write a three-page reflection paper on their service learning project experience, including what personal lessons in leadership they learned. Each essay told a wonderful story of overcoming personal challenges to complete the project and the resulting personal leadership growth. One randomly selected essay is contained in Appendix A.

In April 2008, I will conduct a student survey to collect empirical data on their perception of the effects of participating in a team-based service learning project on their leadership development. The survey instrument will be based on a survey used by Khramtsova (2008) to measure character strengths of an undergraduate student population. [The empirical data collected from this survey along with the Fall 2007 student evaluation of course and instructor effectiveness will be presented at ALE 2008.]

Conclusions/Recommendations

Anecdotal evidence, student essays and limited empirical data collected on this curriculum practice supports the conclusion that an undergraduate business course in leadership and professional development, using the Hogan and Warrenfeltz (2003) four competency hierarchical domain model of managerial education and team-based service learning projects can positively effective the following departmental goals and student learning outcomes:

- Departmental Goal: Ethics, Leadership, and Civic Engagement
Expected Outcome: Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the principles of ethics and leadership by participating in a service learning project.
- Departmental Goal: Interpersonal and Teamwork Skills
Expected Outcome: Students will be able demonstrate effective interpersonal relationship skills by working as members of a team.

The researcher recommends conducting additional research to collect longitudinal data to support this conclusion.

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Appendix

SLP Reflection Paper: F.L. Stanton (Fall 2007)

I will have to admit, I am not very experienced when it comes to community service activities or service learning projects for that matter; nor am I very open to those ideas. Truthfully, it is not because I do not want to take part in the idea, it is because I am never completely sure how to fit it into my schedule as a student and a member of a very active and time consuming organization in the Morehouse College Glee Club. I realized then that if I really wanted to do it, I would find time. Luckily, I did. When told, at the beginning of the semester in my Leadership and Professional Development class with Dr. Belinda Johnson White, the queen of leaders, that we as students of her class and as “emerging 21st century leaders” must (meaning requirement for you to get credit for class) volunteer in a service learning project in which a minimum of twenty hours must be completed by semester-end. My emotional response was not that of eager enthusiasm. It just seemed like it was too much outside of class activity which would make my semester a lot tougher. I questioned what this project had anything to do with the purpose of the class and how it would be of any benefit to me? I could do nothing but just trust her on this one and see where I wind up.

The hard task for my team was not performing the activity but choosing what activity it is we wish to do as a team. A general consensus was that we enjoyed working with children and that they deemed to be the future. We, as “rising stars” and “emerging leaders” have to spill knowledge on them and prepare them for what life has in store for them in their later years. A member of our group, Christian Ragin, was familiar with perfect spot. The school’s name is Frank L. Stanton Elementary School in Atlanta,

Georgia. Ragin felt it would be a great place to bond with children and develop long lasting relationships.

F.L. Stanton is an all African –American elementary school with students of various backgrounds. I thought going into this that I would be dealing with loud and rambunctious children who cared nothing about school and did not set straight the priorities that were introduced early in the childhood. As a result, I decided to look on the positive side. It was a mentoring program. The students needed role models and teenage figures that have been successful thus far into their college years. I enjoy pouring my knowledge of a subject on minds so fresh and pristine as elementary students. I remember as a child the mentors that came to my elementary school and helped me out with my homework and helped improve my social skills. They were like family to me and sought to be the same for these students.

My first day at F.L. Stanton helped make it possible for me to be a role model. As a mentor for the after school program I worked with Jessica and Alliyah, two fourth grade students who were similar but different in many ways. In that after school program, I could not stop staring at the smiles that were on their faces when they saw me standing in the room. They wanted me there. The after school teacher Ms. Ford always said they enjoy working with the mentors and that it is a highlight to their day. That allowed me to believe that this experience will not be so bad after all. Seeing the students enter the after school program classroom was like watching rats race to cheese scattered all over the room. They were full of life and energy and always had to something to say. From that point, I knew a certain source of power possibly reward, or referent, or coercive, would need to be brought forth so as to create order in the room.

In our LPD class and at the beginning of class, Dr. White seeks to instill in us the five features that are tied together that will help make us rising stars. These features include leadership, professionalism, ethics, global awareness/diversity, and civic engagement/social responsibility. I have developed a greater understanding of each of these key features. Through this project, I realized that leadership is very key because I was put into that role model position. I had to be the example for them and both my mentees, I believe, turned out to be leaders themselves. Maintaining a level of professionalism during the program allowed me to gain the respect I deserved from students. They were polite and were eager to learn. Diversity and ethics really played a pivotal role as well. There are many children with different backgrounds and especially in a learning environment, many different learning abilities and disabilities. Some students catch on quick while others not so quick. These were situations that I needed to adapt to. With regards to ethics, teaching right from wrong was the must-do of every visit. I made sure that they knew what to do in certain situations and encouraged them not to panic.

On a holistic view, this project really was a highlight to my semester. Going to visit my mentees and working with the teachers was a way of escaping the stress of my schoolwork. If I sit down and think about it, though there were some rough days with one or two encounters, these children really are intelligent and have potential. The school was very well structured and teachers really were dedicated to their profession; which you do not find very often in elementary schools. Not once was there any chaos or did I feel that things were not under control by administrators. Walking into the school everyday was like taking in a new breathe of fresh air. Everyday was a new day; yet through it all nothing is better that hearing a student saying to me, "Chris, Thank you."