

## **A Curricular--Co-Curricular Approach to Student Leadership Development**

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### **Abstract**

Truman State University is a small (5700 students), public, highly selective, state-designated liberal arts and sciences university located in Kirksville, Missouri (population 17,300). As the public liberal arts and sciences university for the state of Missouri, one part of its mission is to cultivate in students the “willingness and ability to exercise personal and intellectual leadership in his or her chosen field of endeavor” (Truman State University Mission Statement). The Truman Leadership Scholars Program is designed to attract high ability students with leadership experience to the university through a “full-ride” scholarship with the opportunity to participate in a four-year leadership development program that incorporates curricular and co-curricular components. Participating students receive minimal credit for two required classes, volunteer for a minimum of fifty hours in the community under the direction of a community mentor, and develop and complete a personal development project and a public leadership project. During this process, students demonstrate personal development and leadership skills and contribute to the Kirksville community as well as to the Truman State University community. This model holds potential for universities to incorporate curricular and co-curricular leadership training for students.

Keywords: leadership, leadership training, student leadership development

## Introduction

The large number of leadership development programs, seminars, and books on the topics of leadership and leadership development suggest a need for leadership development in many organizations. The university seems like a logical and convenient setting for students to learn and experience leadership, either through curricular and/or co-curricular activities. However, it has been suggested that leadership education often does not tie leadership theory and application together well (J.P. Meyer, 2003). Combining curricular and co-curricular activities may provide the needed opportunity to learn and practice leadership theory. The Truman Leadership Scholar (TLS) model provides a framework for such experiential leadership education.

The Truman Leadership Scholar (TLS) Program was established in 1998 as a selective scholarship program for high ability students consisting of several meetings with participants throughout their freshman year at Truman, followed by a three day training retreat at the close of the spring semester. Following that retreat, there were no other requirements. The TLS Program was revised in 2002 as a means to recruit high ability students with strong leadership experiences to Truman State University and improve their leadership skills through curricular and co-curricular activities. Students selected for this program receive the Truman Leadership Scholarship (full tuition, room and board, and must be Missouri residents). The students are selected by the admissions office with input from the Truman Leadership Scholars (TLS) Committee. The program is administered by the Truman Leadership Scholars Committee, consisting of one faculty member, the Dean of Student Affairs and an Assistant Dean of Student Affairs.

The objectives of the Truman Leadership Scholar Program are:

- To attract outstanding students to Truman State University.
- To help achieve Truman's mission to cultivate in students the "willingness and ability to exercise personal and intellectual leadership in his or her chosen field of endeavor"(Truman State University mission statement).
- To provide student with an opportunity to grow and develop as leaders through training, focused experiences, and service opportunities.
- To provide Truman students with an opportunity to provide service and leadership to Truman and the larger community while working on their undergraduate degree at Truman.
- To prepare effective leaders for the roles and challenges they will face in the future.

Annually, thirty-five to forty-five first-time freshman receive Truman Leadership Scholarships based on academic performance and the demonstration of leadership during their high school experience. Although the TLS Program is a four-year experience, participants may opt out at the end of each year and still retain their scholarship by maintaining academic eligibility and fulfilling scholarship work-study hours each semester (scholarship recipients at Truman work on campus about fifty to seventy-five hours a semester as a condition of their scholarship). The scholarship work-study hours are waived for students who remain in the TLS Program. Truman Scholars remain with their cohort as they move through the program.

The Truman Leadership Scholar experience is based upon the idea that college students can acquire many of the important skills of leadership by combining in-class and out-of-class experiences. Also, to become effective leaders, they must first learn self-leadership and then they learn to lead others more effectively. The Franklin/Covey programs, The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People® and The Four Roles of Leadership® provide a framework to help

prepare the students to experience the curricular and co-curricular activities that help solidify leadership skills. An understanding of self-sacrifice through volunteering in the community, self-discipline to improve oneself and leading an approved project to give back to the Truman State University community are all experiences that help prepare students to be leaders as they move from a university setting to the world-at-large. The following details explain the TLS program year by year.

### **First Year**

Objectives for the first year experience are:

- Students will develop and utilize a personal mission statement to set priorities in their lives.
- Students will improve in their ability to manage time effectively.
- Students will develop habits that improve their physical, emotional, social, intellectual and/or spiritual health.

Students enroll in the course, INDV 120 Leadership Scholar 1, to participate in Franklin/Covey's The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People® training in the first year of the program. This program is taught by a faculty member and the Dean of Student Affairs who are both certified Franklin/Covey facilitators. Students attend the class during the second block of their first semester and the first block of their second semester at Truman (sixteen weeks total). The training involves structured presentations, exercises, readings, and videos designed to help participants achieve a high level of understanding and application of the seven habits identified by author Steven Covey, as characteristic of highly effective people. They receive .5 credit hours each block as well as a certificate for completing the course. Immediately following the completion of the course, students are briefly interviewed by the Truman Leadership Scholars Committee to determine if the students desire to continue in the program for the second year or opt out. Continuing students also have the opportunity to express preference for volunteer sites for their second year experience.

### **Second Year**

Objectives for the second year experience are:

- Students will give selflessly of their time and talents to serve others.
- Students will gain an understanding of the needs of others through their service.
- Students will feel more connected with the Kirksville community.
- Students will gain a deeper understanding of The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People® through experience and observation.
- Students will demonstrate personal responsibility and proactivity in participating in volunteer opportunities.

The second year experience consists of the students completing a minimum of fifty hours of volunteer service under the direction of a community mentor. A member of the TLS Committee arranges numerous volunteer sites from which students select. Students have volunteered at such sites as the Kirksville Chamber of Commerce, the Kirksville Police Department, city government offices, United Way, YMCA, Kirksville Arts Society, Head Start, and elementary, middle and high schools and camps for disadvantaged youth. A meeting is held at the beginning of the school year to introduce the students to their community mentor and learn

more about their volunteer experience. The students are divided into three groups and assigned to a member of the TLS Committee as their campus coordinator. The campus coordinator meets bi-monthly with his/her assigned group for discussion meetings to process the experiences the students are having and to tie those volunteer experiences back to The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People® training. The students keep a log of their volunteer service hours which is signed by their community mentor. Following the completion of this experience, the community mentor completes an evaluation of the student and the experience.

### **Third Year**

Objectives of the third and fourth years:

- Students will reflect critically on their leadership development skills.
- Students will receive feedback from others regarding their abilities as a leader.
- Students will demonstrate knowledge of leadership theory.
- Students will develop in their ability to challenge processes.
- Students will develop in their ability to empower others.
- Students will develop in their ability to model appropriate values.
- Students will develop in their ability to encourage others.

Students in the third year of the program enroll in the course, INDV 220 Leadership Scholar 2, to participate in Franklin/Covey's The Four Roles of Leadership™ training. This class is offered the first block of the fall semester for .5 credit hours. The Four Roles of Leadership™ training is designed to assist students in developing skills as leaders and managers. The training examines a theory of leadership based on the leadership roles of Pathfinding (creating a joint vision that connects leaders and stakeholders); Aligning (creating the right system of processes and structure to achieve the desired results); Empowering (releasing the talent, energy, and contributions of people toward the desired end); Modeling (being trustworthy, and living and leading by principles).

Following successful completion of The Four Roles of Leadership™, the students then submit a written proposal to the TLS Committee for the Private Victory Project. This project is designed by the student and approved by the TLS Committee. This project allows the student to develop and practice “private victory” principles and skills learned in The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People® training. It involves the commitment of approximately seventy-five hours by the student. The project must be designed specifically to increase the student's understanding and application of one or more concepts from their 7 Habits training such as character development, circle of influence, change cycles, win-win rescripting and character, and four dimensions of renewal. Upon completion of the project, a final report consisting of the proposal description, a results section summarizing the outcomes and benefits of the project, and any supporting documentation that helps to demonstrate the preparation, completion and results of the project. Examples of Private Victory projects include creation of a “favorite quotes” book, writing a novel, studying and creating a family history, writing a book of poetry, study abroad and focus on reading and skill development in the area of international communication, and completing a summer internship as a stage manager for several theater productions.

## Fourth Year

The fourth year consists of a Public Victory project. This project is designed by the student, supported by a mentor from the university community, and approved by the TLS Committee. The project's purpose is to provide the student with opportunities to demonstrate his/her ability as a leader, develop leadership skills in others, and enhance the Truman State University community. The Public Victory project involves the commitment of approximately one hundred fifty hours of the student's time during the academic year and directly benefits students, faculty, and/or staff of Truman State University. It must be designed specifically to increase the student's understanding and application of one or more of the concepts from The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People® and The Four Roles of Leadership™ training (for example, aligning, levels of empowerment, modeling, creating third alternatives, and celebrating differences). The student submits a proposal to the TLS Committee for approval. The proposal contains a general introduction and mission statement for the project; expected outcomes (the end in mind) and how the processes are aligned with the mission; the project's contribution to the student's Public Victory and how the results benefit the Truman community; the mentor agreement explaining the roles and responsibilities of the mentor and mentee in completing the project (the win-win agreement); the process of the steps, activities, time lines, strategies, etc., (the plan of action); and the evaluation section explaining the methods used to evaluate and demonstrate the effectiveness of the project in achieving the expected outcomes. The student and the mentor (a member of the Truman faculty, administration or staff) will meet and create a win-win agreement for the project. Based on that agreement, the student and mentor will meet periodically for supervision, advice and/or consultation regarding the project. When the project is finished, the mentor will complete an evaluation of the student's leadership skills and the success of the project. Upon completion of the project, the student will submit a final report to the TLS Committee. The report would include a description of the proposal, a results section where the outcomes and benefits of the project are summarized in a maximum of ten pages. Appendices providing supportive documentation such as evaluation results, progress reports, etc., could be added to the report. Examples of Public Victory projects include developing a curriculum and teaching Truman students how to do technical theater (mentored by two drama faculty); developing and implementing a training program for Student Ambassadors (mentored by the Student Ambassador advisor); assisting the Student Health Center with an assessment project and co-chairing the Student Health Fee Committee (mentored by the Student Health Center Director) and creating and implementing a transition leadership training program for the Psi Chi fraternity (mentored by the organization advisor).

## Conclusion

Written evaluations from community and campus mentors (and the number of letters of recommendation students have asked the facilitators to write) suggest the Truman Leadership Scholars Program is achieving at least some of the program objectives. Anecdotal comments by program graduates also suggest successes.

One graduating student suggested she had become more confident in her leadership and personal relationship skills and had learned how to react to certain situations better. She also felt she had developed more self-awareness as a leader. Another student thought the 4-Roles and 7 Habits training helped her lead an organization more effectively as he created mission

statements, gained support of his group and empowered others to meet their personal goals as well as the organization's goals. Another indicated leadership had become a priority in his life, enabling him to use his talents and skills to effect positive change and lead others.

The President's Distinguished Leader Recognition Breakfast is held annually to celebrate and recognize those students who have successfully completed the Truman Leadership Scholars Program. The students receive congratulations and a certificate of completion from the president of the university at this breakfast.

Although anecdotal responses can be valuable in evaluating a program such as the TLS Program, a more formal evaluation method is proposed to better clarify leadership strengths and weaknesses of the "graduates" and that might suggest program improvements. A possible tool for this type of assessment might be the student version of the *Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI)*, the *Student LPI* developed by James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner (Kouzes and Posner, 2006). Students entering the TLS Program could be assessed initially and then again at the completion of the program using the *Student LPI—Self* version and the results compared as a pre-test—post-test evaluation.

A suggestion for future research would be to expand the evaluation process following a student's completion of the program to include leadership assessment of the student by her Public Victory mentor and others involved in her Public Victory project, using the *Student LPI—Other* version and compare the results with the student's self evaluation. This could provide insight into the effectiveness of the program as perceived by the student and as viewed by "outside" evaluators.

## References

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