Strategically Preparing the Next Generation for Leading in a World of Social Change

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Joanne DeMark
Western Washington University, USA

Christina Van Wingerden
Western Washington University, USA

INTRODUCTION

There has not always been focus and forethought on developing college students to be leaders, much less a field of academic study and studied practices to achieve that goal. The history of student leadership development, from the 1970s when fragmentation and a widely diverse set of development activities prevailed, to a more planned, theoretically- and scientifically-bounded field of today, is an interesting story (Komives, 2011). It was the Kellogg Foundation in the 1990s who provided funding to the relatively newly formed (1989) James MacGregor Burns Academy of Leadership at the University of Maryland to host several institutes, leadership events, and formative discussions that resulted in the publication of papers, books, and providing the foundation for leadership studies and the establishment of the International Leadership Association (Komives, 2011, p. 5). Vis-à-vis being thoughtful about developing college students to become social change leaders, William C. Richardson, then President and CEO of the Kellogg Foundation, wrote:

The fundamental belief that social change results only when people take it on themselves to get involved and make a difference now characterizes the work of the Kellogg Foundation throughout the world... We believe that effective leadership is an essential ingredient of positive social change. No society can continue to evolve without it, no family or neighborhood holds together in its absence, and no institution prospers where it is unavailable…Students will implicitly generate their notions and conceptions of leadership from what is taught intentionally and unintentionally across the educational experience will be led by those we have taught, and they will lead us as we have shown them they should. (Astin & Astin, 2000, iv-v)

It is in the vein of those origins of college student leadership development that the authors have undertaken to provide an articulation of one university's experience measuring the capacities of college student leaders for positive social change, exploring favorable results for the themes which will expand or affirm certain principles and practices in student leadership development, and describe some of the workings directly with student leaders, and indirectly as a leadership program working co-collaboratively with other student affairs units, to achieve results.

Developing Students as Leaders for Social Change

The education and development of students as leaders has gained ground as a central purpose for institutions of higher education as evidenced in mission statements and the increased presence of both curricular and co-curricular leadership development programs on college and university campuses (Astin & Astin, 2000; Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1999). Astin and Astin go as far as to suggest that, "higher education plays a major part in shaping the quality of leadership in modern society" (p. 1) and a growing number of scholars and professional associations have identified the relational leadership model of socially responsible leadership as a core college outcome (Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2007; Astin & Astin, 2000; Hoy & Meisel, 2008; National Association of Student Personnel Administrators & American College Personnel Association, 2004). Yet, research on the topic, until more recently, has reflected an incomplete picture suffering from a lack of theoretical grounding consistent with contemporary conceptualizations (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Komives, Dugan, Owen, Slack, Wagner, and Associates, 2011; Posner, 2004) as well as a lack of clarity regarding individual and institutional factors influencing leadership development (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006). It was thought that if higher education institutions could begin to address these issues, the ability to enhance leadership development and the preparation of civically engaged citizens would increase dramatically. The Multi-institutional Study of Leadership (MSL) was designed to contribute to both theory and practice on college student leadership development at the national and single university levels with that in mind.

At the university described in this chapter, the hope was that results would add further understanding of the leadership development needs of the institution's students. As a result, this would guide and advance the ability of student leadership program staff and leadership educators to deliver programs

Figure 1. Figure change model
Adapted from Astin & Astin, 1996
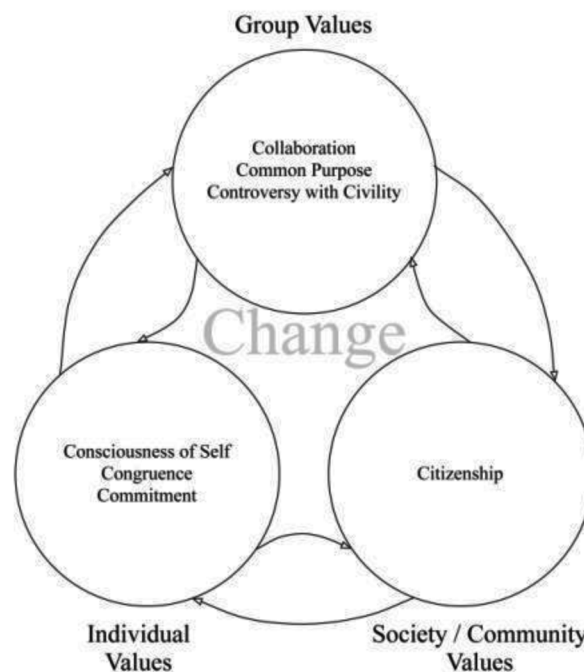
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