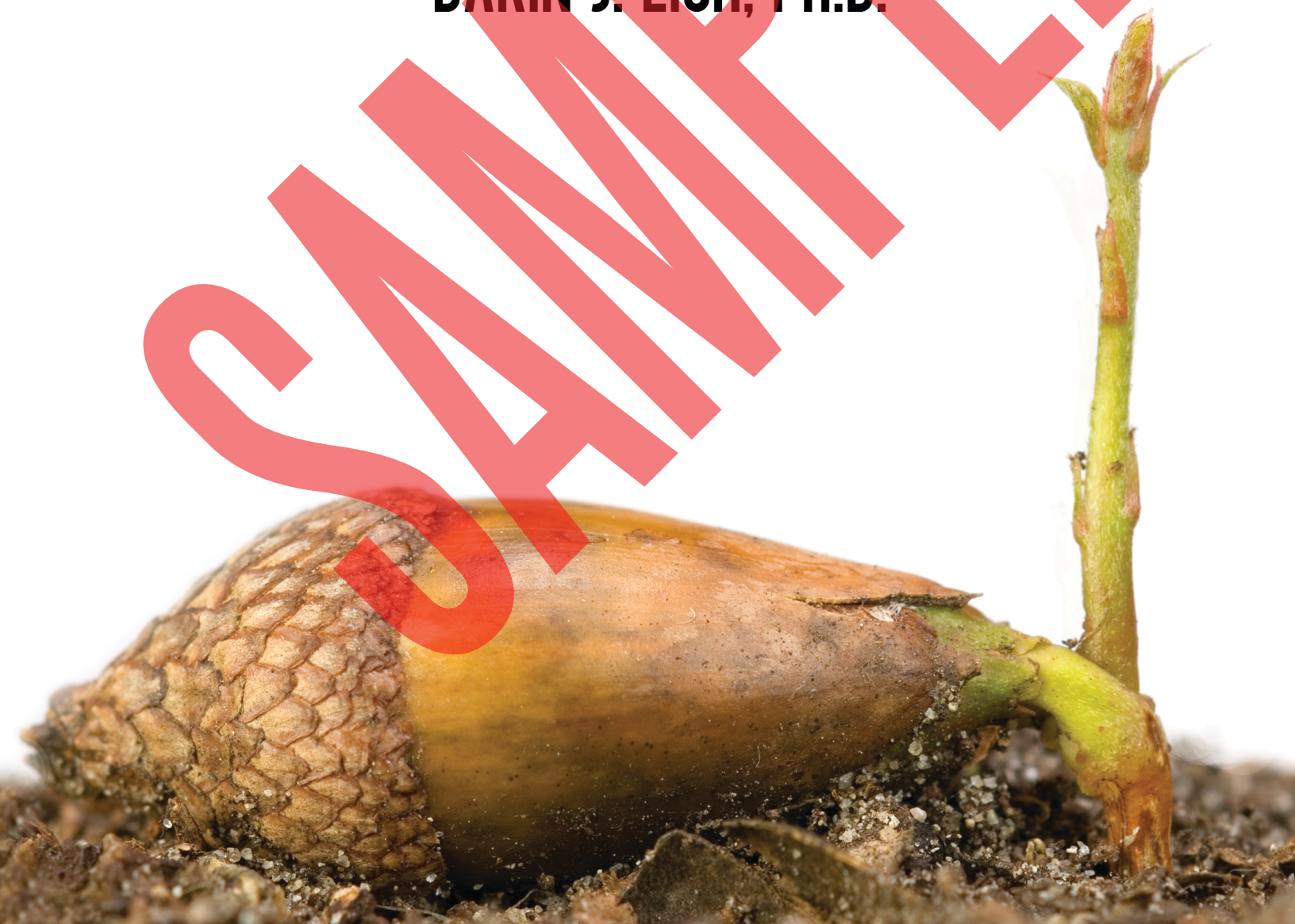


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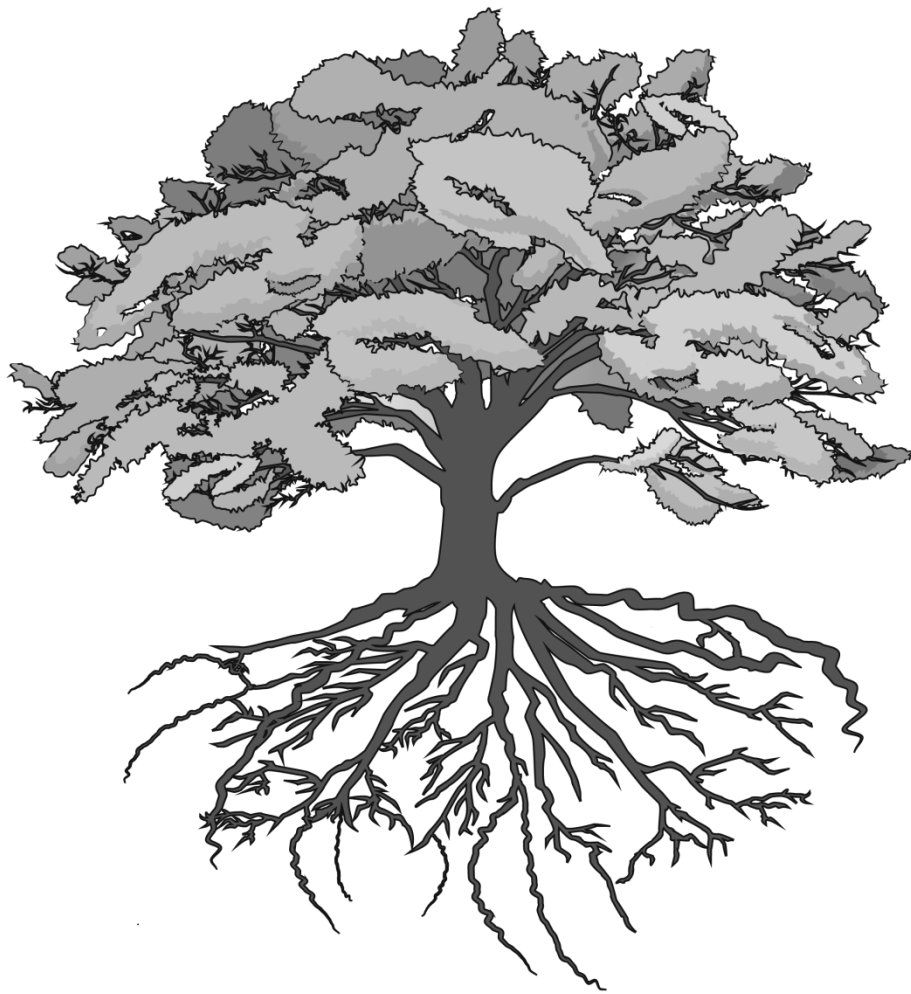
BEST PRACTICES FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

DARIN J. EICH, PH.D.



Root Down & Branch Out

**Best Practices for Leadership Development
Programs**



Darin J. Eich, Ph.D.

Root Down and Branch Out: Best Practices for Leadership Development Programs

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Introduction



This book is designed to help you strengthen your leadership programs and leadership development efforts. Student learning and leadership development are both important desired outcomes of leadership education programs. Leadership degrees, courses, retreats, workshops, and other program experiences align well with the mission and purposes of higher education and many other types of organizations. This book communicates insights generated from a research study of high quality leadership programs. The research-based insights presented in this book can help to enhance institutions by improving their leadership program quality and impact on student learning and leadership development.

Students who learn and develop as leaders in leadership programs can put their skills to use immediately and make a difference in a variety of settings. Society can benefit when individuals engage in leadership processes at all levels across a range of institutions, organizations, families, and communities. Ultimately, if the information in this book is put into practice, it can make a contribution to society by enhancing the education and development of leaders who have the capacity to solve important problems and facilitate change in a variety of settings.

Root Down & Branch Out: A Metaphor for Growing Your Leadership Program

As a leadership educator, you want your participants and your program to grow. You want the program to be impactful and the participants to experience growth in a variety of ways. If growth is the essence of what we seek, we need a model that will cultivate our program and take it to the next level. The oak tree is a metaphor for sustaining growth: one acorn can produce an entire forest of

mighty oak trees over time. These oaks keep producing more acorns, the forest grows and the environment is impacted for the better. In our programs, we need to root down and branch out, much like the oak tree does. Let's discuss how the roots, branches and acorns of the oak tree represent the key elements of a high quality leadership development program.

Roots: These are the positive *attributes* of your program. In your leadership program, the roots are what your program is grounded in. They are your general best practices, theories, principles, values, etc. As the foundation, roots have an impact on student learning and leadership development, which is why your leadership program exists - the most fundamental purpose. Each root represents something about your program that is foundational to a strong program. Many times these are abstract characteristics or conditions. These roots are the *positive attributes* of your program. An example of a root or positive attribute of your program could be "diverse and engaged students," "students practice leadership," or "flexible program design."

Branches: These are the *actions* taken by program stakeholders to enact the positive attributes. Roots need to grow up and branch out. Like a person's positive attributes, the roots are not easy to see because they are under ground or more abstract. In contrast, the branches are the things that program participants can see and do and oftentimes bring your program to life. I call the branches the *actions* of the program. An example of a branch or action of a program is "use an application and selection procedure to select students." This action is connected to the "diverse and engaged students" root attribute because it is a specific action that people who facilitate the program took to get diverse and engaged students in the program.

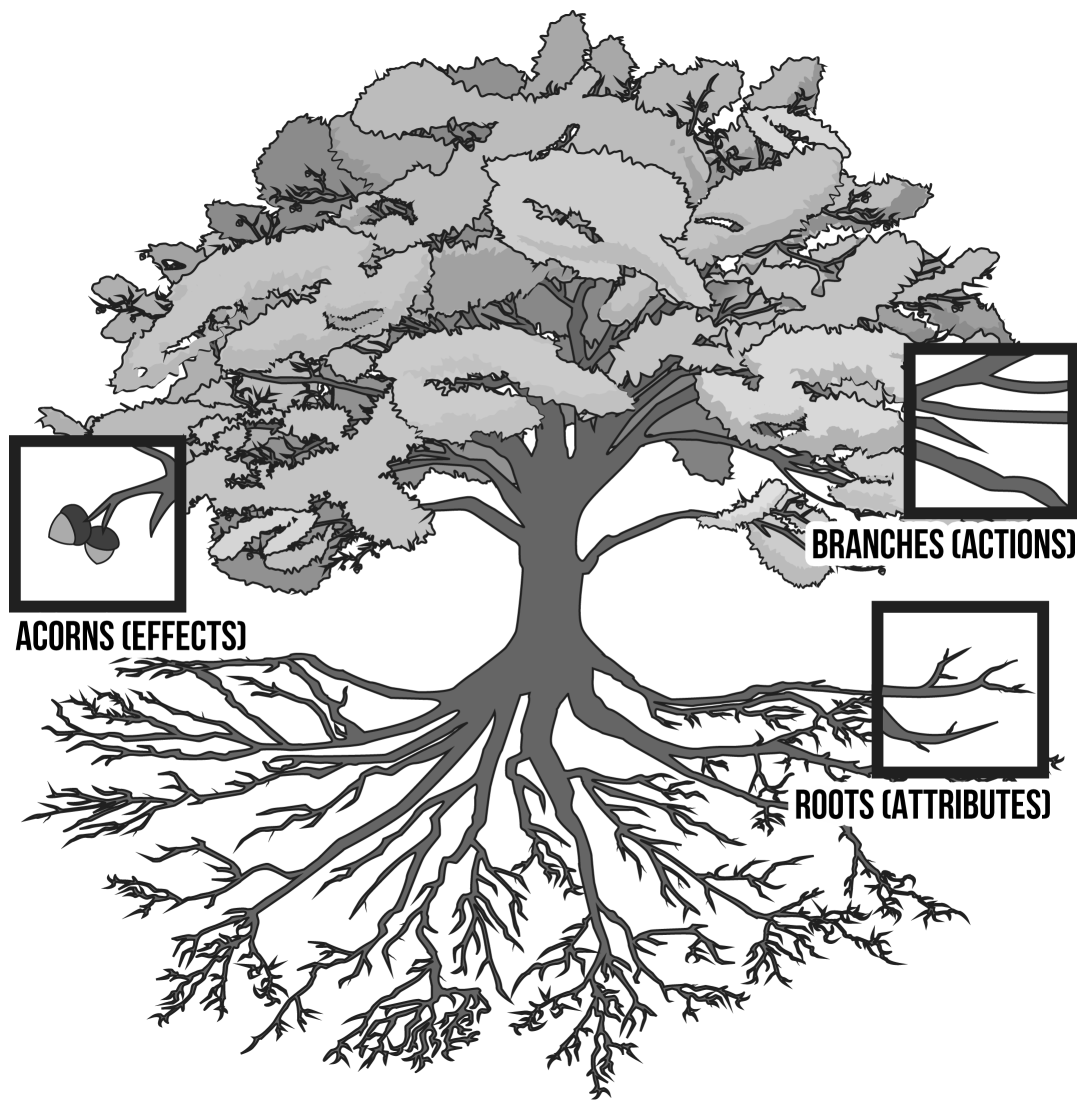
Acorns: These are the *effects* or learning and leadership development outcomes for students. Acorns grow on tree branches. These acorns can grow into oaks on their own and can even grow with others to create an entire forest. The acorns are the impacts the program is having on students that result from the actions (branches) and attributes (roots) of the program. An example acorn

effect or outcome is that “students learn to form collaborations and build a network for their leadership endeavors.” This is a specific learning outcome resulting from “diverse and engaged students” being one of the positive attributes or roots of the program.

Just like roots grow into branches, which grow acorns, each attribute of a high-quality leadership development program is enacted in some way and affects an outcome. Here is an excerpt from the leadership program model chart you will see in the next chapter so you can see the relation between the positive attribute root, branch actions, and outcome effect acorns:

Attribute (Root)	Actions taken by stakeholders to enact the attribute (branches)	Learning & leadership development outcome or effect for students (acorns)
1. Diverse and engaged students	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Programs utilize an application and selection procedure to select students who are interested in their own and others’ development and will be committed to engaging fully in the program. 2. Programs recruit from many sources and bring together a mix of students from a variety of backgrounds to create a diverse learning community. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students learn to form collaborations and a network rich in social capital for their leadership endeavors. 2. Students acquire new ideas and an enriched understanding through hearing personal experiences and perspectives offered by diverse students in the program.

High quality leadership program developers and teachers are constantly innovating their program. They root down and develop their program up from these high impact best practices which include both the general positive attributes (roots) and the more specific actions (branches). They build their program around how students learn and develop as leaders. Their foundation is strong and rooted in what works.

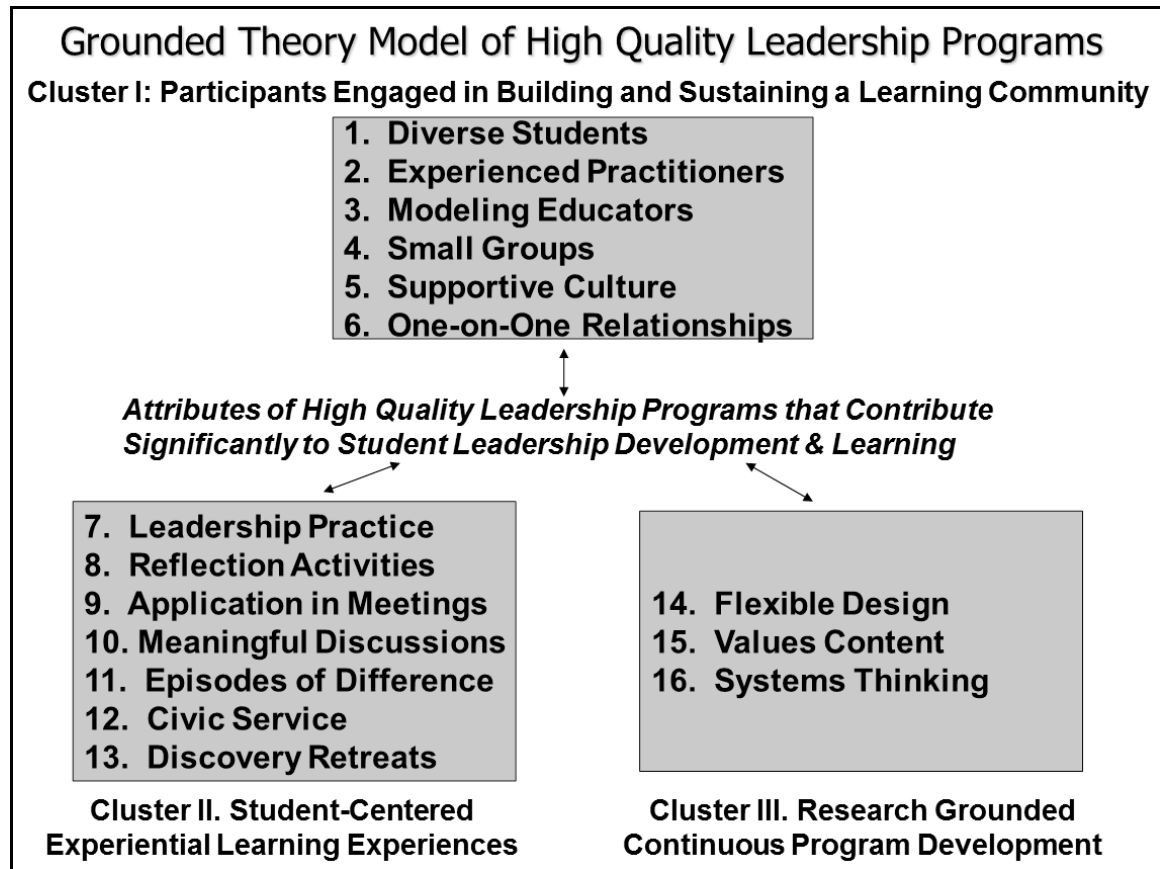


The Grounded Theory Model of High Quality Leadership Programs

From my research study and interviews, I developed a model entitled the Grounded Theory Model of High Quality Leadership Programs. The model, like the oak tree, has roots, branches and acorns. Specifically, the model has:

- 16 roots, or positive attributes that can serve as a strong foundation for your program,
- 40 branches or actions to bring the positive attributes to life, and
- 34 acorns or outcome effects that are a result of the positive attributes and actions.

The below chart slices this growing oak tree into three clusters or categories:



The results of this study can be applied and adapted to enhance leadership development programs in colleges and other organizations around the world. The Grounded Theory Model will allow institutions to enhance their programs and students' leadership development by helping students improve themselves through self-discovery, personal development, reflective practice, and collaborative leadership action. This book details the findings from this study and how to incorporate these distinguishing characteristics into your leadership development programs.

Leadership Programs Summary

In this book I tell the stories of four different leadership programs that were having a positive impact on their students. Students, teachers and staff share what they were doing and the effect it was having on those participating in the program. I sampled four programs that employ distinct methods of delivering leadership development experiences:

- **Site one. The LeadRetreat Summer Program (LS):** a week-long intensive institute in the form of an off-campus leadership development retreat.
- **Site two. Leadership Interdisciplinary course at Midwest University (MU):** a more traditional, semester-long academic course at a university.
- **Site three. Foundation ServeLead (FS) Program:** a service-focused leadership development program funded in conjunction with a foundation.
- **Site four. Big Comprehensive Leadership Program (BC):** a co-curricular program offered through the division of student affairs at a university.

For research publication purposes, I renamed these programs with the aliases above that describes the program and will refer to them throughout the rest of the book by their alias initials.

Using This Book

This book is a guide to facilitate growth. It began as a research study and my hope is that it will positively influence your leadership program. Consider the ideas that can be stimulated for your own program from the roots, branches, and acorns of the Grounded Theory Model - the 3 clusters, 16 positive attributes, 40 actions, and 34 outcome effects. Look at them as a checklist for things you could be doing in your program - as catalysts for innovation. Each root or attribute will hopefully generate ideas for how you could enact it within your group. What new branches could grow? What actions or branches could those outcomes grow from? Which roots are they associated with?

As you read the stories of people who were impacting and being impacted by the roots, branches and acorns of each program, I hope you will gain ideas from their stories. Or better yet, produce an innovation of your own that is unique to your setting.

Model of High Quality Leadership Programs



In this chapter, I introduce my theory of high quality leadership programs.

For the purposes of this study, I defined high quality leadership programs as those programs that have a significant positive impact on student learning and leadership development. Quality is defined in terms of student learning and leadership development for two primary reasons. First, student learning is the primary goal of educational programs and of the higher education mission. Second, leadership development of the student is the primary desired outcome of leadership programs; it is the learning and development of the individual in the context of the subject matter of the program.

In presenting my theory, my purpose is to provide a foundation for enriching dialogue, idea generation, and action planning which takes place for stakeholders developing new leadership education initiatives and improving existing leadership programs for the sake of student leadership development.

Grounded Theory of High Quality Leadership Programs

This study identified 16 programmatic attributes of high quality leadership programs through drawing on the perspectives of stakeholders at four successful leadership programs in the United States. In concert with identification of key attributes, the theory explicates the connections to enact each of the attributes through actions and corresponding student outcomes. These 16 individual attributes are arranged into three respective clusters and visually represented in Figure 2.1: a) participants engaged in building and sustaining a learning community; b) student-centered experiential learning experiences; and c) research grounded continuous program development. I will introduce each cluster along with the individual attributes within the cluster that contribute significantly to student learning and leadership development.

Cluster One: Participants Engaged in Building and Sustaining a Learning Community

High quality leadership programs contribute positively to student leadership development as a result of the contributions and perspectives of a community of stakeholders whose participants collaborate to engage in building a learning community. This community fosters leadership development and learning for participants. The attributes of cluster one include:

- Diverse and engaged students
- Experienced and committed practitioners
- Educators model leadership and support
- Participants unite through small groups
- Participant foster a culture of challenge and support
- Participants cultivate one-on-one relationships

Cluster Two: Student-Centered Experiential Learning Experiences

How a program teaches leadership, the activities that are employed, and the formats that are utilized can have a profound impact on the students' leadership development and learning. Students cited this cluster of attributes most often when asked about the activities of the program that truly mattered in terms of their learning. Specifically, these programs utilized leadership teaching strategies far different than the traditional classroom experiences students were used to, such as lecture, textbooks, assigned readings, and multiple choice exams. The seven programmatic attributes of cluster two include:

- Students practice leadership individually and collectively
- Students engage in reflection activities: Connecting leadership theory, their experiences, and themselves
- Students apply leadership concepts to themselves in meetings
- Students make leadership meaning through dialogue and discussions
- Students encounter episodes of difference: Contexts, people, and ways of leading

- Students engage in service: Society, community, institutions, and program
- Students engage in self discovery through retreats

Cluster Three: Research grounded continuous program development

The third and final cluster entails much of the work taken by the program developer, administrators, and teachers behind the scenes to build and constantly improve their programs. This cluster embodies important activities to develop the program in a thoughtful student-centered way utilizing existing research, literature, assessment, models, theories, and other important sources. I learned that program development was continuous, with stakeholders regularly sharing in endeavors to improve their program or system of leadership development. The three attributes in cluster three include:

- Flexible program design to accommodate student interests
- Content anchored in modeled leadership values
- Systems thinking applied for constant program improvement

A detailed explanation of each attribute, consistent with the language interviewees used to describe them will come next. First, actions taken by stakeholders to enact each of the attributes are identified. Second, the primary learning outcomes or positive effects that these program attributes and actions have on students and their leadership development are explained.

A summary of the model is featured in the following table. Each attribute is listed on the table along with the corresponding actions to enact the attribute and, in turn, the learning and leadership development effect on students. Actions taken by the program stakeholders lead to the identified student outcome as identified by interviewees.

Grounded Theory Model of High Quality Leadership Programs

Cluster I: Participants Engaged in Building and Sustaining a Learning Community

Attribute	Actions taken by stakeholders to enact the attribute	Learning & leadership development outcome for students
1. Diverse and engaged students	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Programs utilize an application and selection procedure to select students who are interested in their own and others' development and will be committed to engaging fully in the program. 2. Programs recruit from many sources and bring together a mix of students from a variety of backgrounds to create a diverse learning community. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students learn to form collaborations and a network rich in social capital for their leadership endeavors. 2. Students acquire new ideas and an enriched understanding through hearing personal experiences and perspectives offered by diverse students in the program.
2. Experienced and committed practitioners	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Programs hire student-centered educational practitioners as teachers and administrators to facilitate students' leadership development. 2. Programs create opportunities for leadership practitioners from a variety of fields and careers to serve as guest leaders, sharing their experiences through panels, discussions, and conversations with students. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students clarify and broaden their leadership thinking including assumptions of who a leader is and how a leader leads from observing practitioners. 2. Students acquire a realness of how leadership can be used, supplemented by motivation to formulate a future vision for themselves from the guest leader real world practitioners.
3. Educators model leadership and support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Educators reduce status differences, are open and accessible, empower students, demonstrate integrity, care, and model exemplary leadership practice through their interactions with students. 2. Educators tell their stories, share real experiences, and ask thought-provoking questions. 3. Educators mentor and support students outside of program meetings. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students develop holistically and gain courage to be more authentic and congruent leaders from educator modeling and support.

Cluster I: Participants Engaged in Building and Sustaining a Learning Community (con't)

Attribute	Actions taken by stakeholders to enact the attribute	Learning & leadership development outcome for students
4. Participants unite through small groups	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Programs make the large learning community enrollment smaller through a structure that places students within smaller groups in the program. 2. Programs allow students to shape and share in a group identity and work together to develop the small group, cluster, or team to which they belong. 3. Programs utilize the small group as a laboratory to learn about leadership where students teach each other, engage in activities, work on projects, overcome challenges, and bond through developing as a team. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students learn how to have a positive relationship with individual group members and how to develop relationships with a group. 2. Students learn to practice collaborative leadership by identifying their own skills, taking on team roles, and utilizing skills of different people for a common group purpose and achieving as a team.
5. Participants foster a culture of challenge and support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participants challenge each other to risk and learn from mistakes, ask difficult questions, and think for themselves all within a safe encouraging atmosphere. 2. Practitioners set community standards and encourage participants to be approachable, encouraging, and willing to help fellow participants outside of the program as well as within. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students develop courage and expand their comfort zone through being challenged and encouraged to risk while supported. 2. Students establish trust with self and others through vulnerable honest dialogue focused on their personal growth when confronting important issues.
6. Participants cultivate one-on-one relationships	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Programs facilitate participants giving and receiving feedback to one another in critical instances after they have had time observing each others' leadership style. 2. Programs utilize a wide variety of teambuilding activities and structures at the beginning of the program and throughout to allow participants to meet and connect on a one-to-one basis. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students learn how to give and receive feedback through practice of giving and receiving feedback that contributes to their ability to implement positive changes in their leadership. 2. Students learn how to develop better interpersonal relationships through listening to others and seeking to understand.

Cluster II: Student-Centered Experiential Learning Experiences

Attribute	Actions taken by stakeholders to enact the attribute	Learning & leadership development outcome for students
7. Students practice leadership individually and collectively	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Programs engage students in practicing the leadership skills and concepts they are learning through group development processes within the program, in class projects, and with individual leadership plans. 2. Programs engage students in practicing leadership in various out of class projects in the community and on campus. 3. Programs engage students in practicing leadership through assuming positions and roles within the program to share responsibility in operating the program and teaching fellow students. 4. Programs create opportunities for students to become involved in tangible ways outside of the program in the community, campus, and within other organizations. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students find their voice, gain self efficacy, and see leadership as something they and others are capable of through experiencing first hand that one can overcome fear, challenges, and lead. 2. Students think about who leaders are and what leadership is in broader and inclusive ways. 3. Students gain a greater understanding of organizations, group dynamics, and how to develop a team through motivating others. 4. Students learn balance, time management, and problem solving from the demands and imperfections of their projects.
8. Students engage in reflection activities: Connecting leadership theory, their experiences, and themselves	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Programs engage students in written reflection activities in the form of journals, essays about readings, and other projects. 2. Programs engage students in verbal reflection in reaction to discussions, questions posed, and current events. 3. Programs formally engage students in completing vision and goal setting activities, and other projects which personalize concepts to the individual. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students learn more about themselves, develop future visions and goals, and become more purposeful with being themselves and making congruent decisions. 2. Students develop a meaningful leadership philosophy, model, or framework to analyze their own thoughts and actions to ultimately integrate improvements in their life and leadership.

Cluster II: Student-Centered Experiential Learning Experiences (con't)

Attribute	Actions taken by stakeholders to enact the attribute	Learning & leadership development outcome for students
9. Students apply leadership concepts to themselves in meetings	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Programs engage students in a variety of curricular activities designed to help them gain a greater understanding of themselves, including personality, strengths, style, skills, and values assessments. 2. Programs engage students in simulations to give them practice with specific leadership skills, including strategic planning, ethics, and decision making. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students identify their own personality, leadership style, strengths, and opportunities for improvement through self analysis. 2. Students develop self confidence, preparation, specific skills and gain rapid experience through simulations.
10. Students make leadership meaning through dialogue and discussions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Programs engage students in group discussions, debriefings, and dialogues stimulated by events, activities, readings, and presentations. 2. Programs engage students in making meaning and connections to readings through discussing their out-of-program experiences. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students improve their thinking, listening, and speaking communication skills through listening to others and telling their own thoughts.
11. Students encounter episodes of difference: Contexts, people, and ways of leading	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Programs expose students to different situations, contexts, cultures, groups, and people through their stories and program activities. 2. Programs give students opportunities to practice new ways of leading, leadership roles, and engage with others with different leadership styles. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students gain eye opening new perspectives that they were unaware of through experiences and sharing in discussions with people different from them. 2. Students learn different ways of leading through witnessing different leadership styles. 3. Students become more open minded and less quick to judge while reconciling their worldview and realizing how much there is to learn.

Cluster II: Student-Centered Experiential Learning Experiences (con't)

Attribute	Actions taken by stakeholders to enact the attribute	Learning & leadership development outcome for students
12. Students engage in service: Society, community, institution, and program	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Programs provide opportunities for students to practice leadership and learn through service learning in groups and individually. 2. Programs expose students early to a wide breadth of multiple service sites, people, and organizations. 3. Programs allow students to have increasing responsibility and devote significant time for in depth service to the site they are most interested in or the cause they are most passionate about. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students clarify their passions, interests, strengths, and begin to find their life work by trying contexts and roles at different service placements. 2. Students expand their social awareness, empathy, gratitude, and respect for others by encountering issues such as poverty and injustice first hand with eye opening experiences. 3. Students understand how they can serve to make a difference and build an increased desire for servant leadership and involvement in leadership for social causes.
13. Students engage in self discovery through retreats	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Programs bring groups of students away from the routine of the campus and program for an accelerated and in depth exploration of themselves, their fellow participants and leadership. 2. Programs use alternative, group based, and experiential teaching methods such as a ropes courses, challenges, or intense exploration into a particular theme or issue. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students renew, gain motivation, and reorganize themselves at a higher level of leadership development through stepping back and digging deeper to explore inward.

Cluster III: Research Grounded Continuous Program Development

Attribute	Actions taken by stakeholders to enact the attribute	Learning & leadership development outcome for students
14. Flexible program design to accommodate student interests	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Programs consist of a variety of themes, service sites, group & individual project choices, and team memberships to allow students to choose their leadership context and skills to develop. 2. Programs incorporate a wide variety of different delivery methods to appeal to different student learning styles. 3. Programs integrate the various components students can choose into a common, coherent, larger whole curriculum that students experience in unique ways. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students build a leadership skill tool belt through relevant and salient curriculum that allows choice for them to develop practical skills. 2. Students explore interests and clarify their conception of leadership by viewing leadership from the lenses of multiple contexts and viewpoints on leadership.
15. Content anchored in modeled leadership values	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Program content is developed and offered based on previously established desired leadership development outcomes for the students. 2. Programs explicitly state the mission and values of the program and model the values through the curriculum and participant action. 3. Programs develop content that infuses student leadership and college student specific issues to make the curriculum real and have utility for the individual student. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students turn the magnifying glass inwards to acquire a greater social awareness through servant leadership with a social change focus of how their leadership can be focused on helping others. 2. Students acquire a language of leadership and gain an understanding and integration of leadership models in their life through clearer leadership thinking and desired leadership ends and means. 3. Students formulate their own values and model program values to be leaders of integrity with credibility cognizant of the social importance of leadership and service.

Cluster III: Research Grounded Continuous Program Development (con't)

Attribute	Actions taken by stakeholders to enact the attribute	Learning & leadership development outcome for students
16. Systems thinking applied for constant program improvement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Programs are developed utilizing current leadership, student development, leadership development, curriculum, teaching & learning, quality program development, and education research and models. 2. Program improvement is continual and both practitioner and student led, involving multiple assessment and feedback systems. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students gain a scholarly, research grounded perspective on leadership that they apply personally and incorporate the models into their leadership practice. 2. Students' concept of self and leadership identity development is advanced through program alignment with the students' development and program standards to uphold.

Systems Thinking Applied for Constant Program Improvement



In investigating the high quality programs in this study, I found they utilized systems thinking for constant program improvement. The programs were consistently acting on research about learning, program development, and leadership and conducting their own studies for assessment purposes. Programs were continually innovating and implementing new features.

Actions. Stakeholders bring the systems thinking applied for constant program improvement attribute to practice in programs through two important actions. First, programs are developed utilizing current leadership, student development, leadership development, curriculum, teaching & learning, quality program development, and education research and models. Second, program improvement is continual and both practitioner and student led, involving multiple assessment and feedback systems.

This first action refers to stakeholders developing the program based upon research and theory. The program is built scientifically on what has been found to be effective. Programs are developed utilizing current leadership, student development, leadership development, curriculum, teaching & learning, quality program development, and education research and models.

The leadership programs I investigated were developing their programs based on some foundational elements of leadership theories, learning models, and student development theory. A BC administrator told me, “There's always kind of a focus back on our leadership models, whether it's the relational model or social change model or exemplary practices there's lots of ‘What are we really going to be teaching these students?’ It's not just out of nowhere, its really

concrete - grounded in theory.” Another BC educator echoed this sentiment as well:

The three models that we use most are the relational model, the social change model and the service model, which has been adapted from the serve model. I think that for them, you can't separate the relational process out of it, so it's not hierarchical. It's not positional, it is a process between many people. The social change and social action piece is infused with pretty much everything that we do.

Yet another BC staff member shared with me how these models also influence development of specific parts of the program, like retreats. She said “We've designed the retreat using the relational leadership model overlapped with social justice education. So the way we've done it is we look at social justice through the lens of five different components of the relational leadership model.” She also went on to explain the design for the whole program:

We have a very set, intentional curriculum for the way we run Phase 1 and Phase 2. Specifically, the team meeting agendas, and we have manuals about how to facilitate every activity. It's all based on student development theory, and by the time they get to their second year, we base it on specific theme theory, equal leadership, global leadership. And the students have such a capacity to understand their curriculum that by the time they're fourth-year students, a lot of them have stepped up and asked if they can write portions of the curriculum.

With the MU course, the research and theory guide the structure of the program. The MU course instructor explained to me the value of structure and what influenced this, the teaching theories of Parker Palmer:

This whole idea of structure versus rules and policies in the classroom is a critical one. Part of the purpose of it is that we use Parker Palmer's way of seeing things, building on experience and content knowledge, and using a lens focused on leadership, pulling those experiences through into learning outcomes. The structure provides us the opportunity to provide the content

through the readings, to provide the experiential content where they can focus the reading. The structure allows us to provide the content and the experiential contact.

The FS program has constructed a model to anchor the learning experiences in the program. Inherent in this model are models of what leadership can be. A FS program educator explained this in depth:

We have a definite model of the way we define it. We contrast positional leadership with influential leadership. We don't spend a lot of time helping students get positions of leadership like SGA or CEO. We don't think about hierarchical positional leadership. We talk about influential leadership wherever you're at, whoever you are, whatever organizational structure you have spheres of influence. So we define leadership as deepen the impact within your sphere of influence, expanding your spheres of influence. You may or may not be elected to be anything. You may not ever have a title of anything, but you may be the most influential person to get things done. So it's building the capacity with the toolbox of knowledge, skills, values and experiences to deepen the impact within your sphere of influence.

Program educators explained to me how their program was constructed. It appears that high quality leadership programs are not created out of thin air, but rather intentionally and rigorously developed based on research in the social sciences. The literature, theories, ideas, and research from the fields of leadership, education, teaching, learning, curriculum, student development, and quality programs, were utilized by high quality programs to create a high quality leadership development experience for students.

Program improvement is continual and both practitioner and student led, involving multiple assessment and feedback systems, which is an important action of the attribute. In order to create high quality programs, stakeholders must continually innovate them. This innovation is done with continual assessment, feedback gathering, and implementing new activities for the sake of advancing student leadership development further.

Across all of the programs I researched, all were continually changing and evolving. They were not merely created and then operated the same way year after year. Continuous feedback and assessment was occurring for the sake of identifying improvements to implement. The BC program not only utilizes student feedback, but they also let students play a role in creating the curriculum. One BC student told me, "We have to do a part of facilitating a curriculum re-write where we take a week and we re-write it as something we would like to get done in the future. That gives us definitely an opportunity for input and getting our experiences out and getting a direct response from the team if they think something doesn't work well then we can say this isn't working well, we should change it." High quality programs seek feedback and ideas for improvement, and they take action to implement new things.

A BC administrator explained more about the way they take action and how the program is continuously changing for the better. She told me about the valuable role the students who help to run the program have in creating and improving the curriculum:

One would be that they run the program. Their recommendations, their questions, they see where they want to take the program. It really does happen when they come to us and say, "This isn't working. We'd like to do this and this and this." We usually say to run with it - to figure out a way to make it happen.

A BC student testified that the program has been improving as a result of multiple stakeholder involvement in continuously improving the curriculum. When looking back at her four years in the program she told me:

This program has changed a lot throughout the years. We've messed with the curriculum to try to make it better and better. I look back at my freshman year, and I had a great time, but it was a little sketchy around the edges, a little unorganized in some areas, whereas now, it's definitely better. It's one of those things that you just have to trial and error but it's gotten better and the phases have gotten more concentrated and more meaningful.

A BC teacher shared with me the history of the program and how it has developed continuously with the help of the students. She told me this story:

When the program first developed, it was definitely the creator's baby, but it's transitioned a lot over the years. I think the students are slowly but surely having a little bit more ownership of it and helping shape it with the development of the theme curriculum. The first time doing that curriculum was rough around the edges, but then students gave their feedback and it's just slowly but surely changing for the better. The students are giving us the insights because it's easy for us to think we know what they need. The students are evaluating it very critically while they're going through the curriculum from Phase 2 and 3 or if they're one of the team facilitators. They're really helping us see the holes in it and the areas for growth. Having a generation of BC over and done has gotten us into this new phase where students are actually taking the lead and we're almost following them where we need to go. And that couldn't happen if we didn't have them involved as leaders - whether be on the programming team or team leading or whatever we just wouldn't have that feedback.

Just like the four year programs, a single course can also implement student feedback for continuous program improvement. A MU course student told me what she did as a student in the class to provide feedback and assessment. She said:

The fact that the teacher would have us fill out anonymous forms, three things he wanted us to know. One thing that is going good that shouldn't be changed. One thing that should be improved or taken out all together. One thing that he doesn't know that you want him to know. I've been in classes where we did the mid-semester feedback survey. You weren't sure if it was direct feedback or would change the way the rest of the class would go or if it would change the following classes. Because you didn't see any change. You wondered if they had even read it. The teacher actually referenced some of the suggestions that students made, and there were actually immediate changes based on what we said. He even asked if there were any readings

you didn't like, any readings you'd suggest we put in the reading packet for next year. He listens to us. He actually does these things.

This MU course teacher told me a bit more about how the students are involved in developing the course. He said:

They are not developing the course as they go, but they are developing the class for the next year. That allows students to have power in the classroom. It allows students to direct the learning in such a way that they can get out of it what they want. And it makes them more accountable and responsible.

To be sure, high impact leadership programs are continually asking students to assess the program activities and their learning as a result. To go even further, high quality programs allow students the opportunity to not only provide feedback but to co-create the curriculum and to take action in implementing the improvements.



Effects on students. Participants are impacted by systems thinking applied for constant program improvement in two ways. First, students gain a scholarly, research grounded perspective on leadership that they apply personally and incorporate the models into their leadership practice. Second, students' concept of self and leadership identity development is advanced through program alignment with the students' development and program standards to uphold.

Students gain a scholarly, research grounded perspective on leadership that they apply personally and incorporate the models into their leadership practice. This first effect refers to students being able to integrate the academic learning of leadership into their own practice as leaders. Many students do not know there are models of leadership and ways to approach it academically. One MU course student shared with me this:

I never thought about leadership in an academic or scholarly way before. I didn't know there was writing and models about leadership. I think that was important, because reading about it, I could identify. Reading the scholarly

work and then reflecting on our own styles was very helpful. They fed off each other. The scholarly work led nicely into reflection and analyzing myself. Another MU course student once exposed to the scholarly study of leadership, not only integrated the models into his own life but also chose to devote his study to it by creating his own major. He told me:

The course helped me give it a kick-start. I didn't know what I was going to do with a comm arts degree in rhetoric. The teacher helped me get an independent major in leadership. He had suggestions of courses. There is a certificate available, but it is not really classroom based. By getting an independent major I was able to go to military leadership courses, business courses, as well as history courses. It all seems very random, but it's great. It's one of those connections being made that I might not find if I only studied one specific major.

The leadership theories and models presented in the program allow students a lens to view their own life. "We've had students walking away from here with as many questions as they have answers, but they have a process by which they can critically think about leadership and their role in it," said a BC administrator. He also said that as a result of the program, students "can communicate well, both orally and in the written word because we force that on them. They have a sense of being a part of a professional community because we make them go through in their leadership plan here we make them understand how things happen behind the scenes and just little things that we do to professionally prepare them." Though the leadership plan students have in the program, they integrate the theories in the present activities. A BC student told me a story about how he was able to diagnose problems in his leadership and make improvements due to integrating theory he learned into his practice. He told me:

I'm not a real big fan of theory generally, and I never thought in a million years you'd catch me saying this, but the theory makes sense. It just doesn't make sense if you haven't done it. It seems like everything I fail at a project it comes down to the same principle of what I messed up on. It's always the same

thing - I didn't communicate the vision properly. We learned this stuff freshman year, but it doesn't make sense until you've not done it or done it and then you see - oh wow, I see it now. For sure it happened to me my sophomore year. I didn't communicate the vision, I didn't create a clear vision, if you will. I didn't wait for everyone to get on board with the vision. I didn't try to push people and instead of trying to encourage them to be a part of the project I tried to run things myself. I didn't delegate anything. So it's the same stuff you read in leadership books, it just means so much more when you've failed or not failed.

Ultimately, students not only integrate the leadership theories and models into their practice, but they combine it with scholarship and other sources of constructing knowledge. They test the scholarly learning with real leadership experiences. A FS educator explained to me this:

They see that there is a connection between a philosophy class that is looking at epistemology and they have been working with folks at shelter programs, or youth group at a church and they are forced to say, "Okay, what kind of knowledge do those street folks have, and how does that feed in to what the card says?" They recognize that academic learning is testable and that what they learn in service placement and the real world is not unrelated to what they are studying. I think that is what education is about is making connections with, between and among things that you haven't connected before.

It is important that high quality leadership programs utilize a scholarly, research grounded perspective on leadership. This perspective has opened doors to further seeking and experiencing for students when they are exposed to books, theories, models, and research based ways of leading that they can apply personally and incorporate into their leadership practice. Being grounded in some of the most highly acclaimed theory helps students practice leadership better and make meaning of what they are observing.

Students' concept of self and leadership identity development is advanced through program alignment with the students' development and program standards to uphold. This second effect of the attribute is a personal one for students. Their identity as a leader and concept of self is progressed when high quality programs align their curriculum with students' development and commit the students to honor the standards set for the benefit of their own learning and development.

Some of the most interesting conversations I had with students were the ones where they discussed how their own identity as someone capable of leadership formed as a result of the program. In speaking of her experience in the MU course, a student described this identity development for her as making her "less afraid to take on leadership roles. I would be afraid that if I couldn't do everything than I couldn't be the leader of the group. I think it made me less afraid to step up and take charge of things." Another MU course student not only saw himself as a leader but as a higher level leader. He stated:

The class helped me raise the bar to think of what I thought I could do. I am senior vice president right now. As a sophomore I would have never thought I would be here. The class helped me take it to the next level. I have stayed with student government and elected representative aspects of campus, and I haven't stretched from that. But I challenged myself to go up and up and up, and that's what's different.

A BC student described to me in what way her concept of self and her leadership ability has improved when looking back on her program experience. She said:

I'm much more assertive and much more directed in what I want to do. As a freshman, I was still very afraid and timid of the whole university - afraid of everybody else. I think because of BC, it really helped me become confident in who I am and in what I want to do. I think a big part of this program is they let you start when you're a freshman. It helps build you up to the best type of person you can be by the time you're a senior.

Another BC student described how her leadership identity has developed as a result of engaging in leadership roles within the program into a more confident leader. She said:

And that's something with the phases too - as you get higher and higher in the program, they kind of let you do your own thing. You go off and become a team leader, or you go off and you get involved in whatever. It prepares you to be more "go getter" sort of person. It teaches you to have confidence. When you start doing these things, you realize that I can do this, there's your confidence right there. Because it forces you to do that, it's one of those things where if I wasn't forced to do that, would I ever have done it? Would I be the same person?

I also encountered students whose identity as a leader and concept of self was improved by simply being known as a participant in the leadership program. This affiliation gave them standards, a reputation to uphold, and a reason to project themselves as a capable leader. A FS student shared with me:

When people know that you're FS, it's like an extra bonus. When they see you doing well in school and getting involved with other things - it's a good reputation. Teachers in the school think of the FS students as leaders. People in authority like to see those that challenge themselves, not taking an easy class, not slacking off all the time. Some guys on the football team actually call me "FS" I'm making straight As all the time. People actually respect those who challenge themselves - I think that's part of leadership, having people see you as an example and that's leadership enough for me. Letting other folks see what you are doing.

One thing that I personally enjoyed hearing most in the interviews were stories of students who completed the program and found their identity as a leader. A FS program coordinator told me about some specific students who found themselves as leaders through the program. He first told me that at their institution, "students come so unsure of themselves if they can even make it in college because they don't have the family support, the cultural support, like

‘Why are you going, spending so much money?’ So they come here with low confidence, low preparation and then to see those students discover their intellectual capacity, their leadership capacity.” He went on to tell the story of one student:

The first semester, she is not a happy camper and not sure if she was in the right place. She went on to be a stellar leader on campus, designed this community outreach program in local low income projects. She got them to even dedicate one apartment for an after school program, and they took an apartment offline so she could create this kids program. She got volunteers and had it up and running. She went from here to grad school and got a full scholarship and excelled in grad school and is now the service learning director at a university. It’s cool where she came from and the progress she made.

He told me another story about another student:

He came as a jock - just wanted to play sports, had absolutely no confidence in his ability as a student, didn’t care about that. He took a potter class and somehow discovered that was his gift that he loved and was good at it. For his outreach to community, he did some research and found this project, and he and his friend made 200 chili bowls and did a fundraising event and raised a couple thousand dollars for a local crisis. He created all of these programs as an artist - just to see his transformation, that’s certainly a success story.

There were many more stories of and from individual students who had found their identity as a leader as a result of the program. Being a part of the leadership program gave the students standards to uphold and a reputation as a leader. High quality programs hold students to these standards in alignment with their own development as students. The students’ concept of self improves to the place that they were confident and saw themselves as people who had not only a capacity but also a responsibility for leadership.

Systems Thinking Applied for Constant Program Improvement

Idea Development Worksheet

Actions	Programs are developed utilizing current leadership, student development, leadership development, curriculum, teaching & learning, quality program development, and education research and models.	Program improvement is continual and both practitioner and student led, involving multiple assessment and feedback systems.
Outcomes	Students gain a scholarly, research grounded perspective on leadership that they apply personally and incorporate the models into their leadership practice.	Students' concept of self and leadership identity development is advanced through program alignment with the students' development and program standards to uphold.
Ideas	Action Ideas: What are you doing in this area that is working well already? What innovative, new and different, or even experimental actions can you take specific to your setting or program?	
	Outcome Ideas: What are your opportunities for improvement to have a greater impact in this area? What specific desired outcomes do you have and how might they be affected?	

Model of High Quality Leadership Programs Assessment & Action Idea Worksheet

1. How strongly is this attribute enacted in your program or leadership development effort? Rate it.
2. What are more specific actions to take to enact this attribute at your setting or innovate your efforts?

Cluster I: Participants Engaged in Building and Sustaining a Learning Community		
Attribute	Actions	Assessment & Key Actions to Take
1. Diverse and engaged students	1. Programs utilize an application and selection procedure to select students who are interested in their own and others' development and will be committed to engaging fully in the program. 2. Programs recruit from many sources and bring together a mix of students from a variety of backgrounds to create a diverse learning community.	1 2 3 4 5
2. Experienced and committed practitioners	1. Programs hire student-centered educational practitioners as teachers and administrators to facilitate students' leadership development. 2. Programs create opportunities for leadership practitioners from a variety of fields and careers to serve as guest leaders, sharing their experiences through panels, discussions, and conversations with students.	1 2 3 4 5
3. Educators model leadership and support	1. Educators reduce status differences, are open and accessible, empower students, demonstrate integrity, care, and model exemplary leadership practice through their interactions with students. 2. Educators tell their stories, share real experiences, and ask thought-provoking questions. 3. Educators mentor and support students outside of program meetings.	1 2 3 4 5
4. Participants unite through small groups	1. Programs make the large learning community enrollment smaller through a structure that places students within smaller groups in the program. 2. Programs allow students to shape and share in a group identity and work together to develop the small group, cluster, or team to which they belong. 3. Programs utilize the small group as a laboratory to learn about leadership where students teach each other, engage in activities, work on projects, overcome challenges, and bond through developing as a team.	1 2 3 4 5

5. Participants foster a culture of challenge and support	<p>1. Participants challenge each other to risk and learn from mistakes, ask difficult questions, and think for themselves all within a safe encouraging atmosphere.</p> <p>2. Practitioners set community standards and encourage participants to be approachable, encouraging, and willing to help fellow participants outside of the program as well as within.</p>	1 2 3 4 5
6. Participants cultivate one- on-one relationships	<p>1. Programs facilitate participants giving and receiving feedback to one another in critical instances after they have had time observing each other's leadership style.</p> <p>2. Programs utilize a wide variety of teambuilding activities and structures at the beginning of the program and throughout to allow participants to meet and connect on a one-to-one basis.</p>	1 2 3 4 5
Cluster II: Student-Centered Experiential Learning Experiences		
Attribute	Actions	Assessment & Key Actions to Take
7. Students practice leadership individually and collectively	<p>1. Programs engage students in practicing the leadership skills and concepts they are learning through group development processes within the program, in class projects, and with individual leadership plans.</p> <p>2. Programs engage students in practicing leadership in various out-of-class projects.</p> <p>3. Programs engage students in practicing leadership through assuming positions and roles within the program to share responsibility in operating the program and teaching fellow students.</p> <p>4. Programs create opportunities for students to become involved in tangible ways outside of the program in the community, campus, and within other organizations.</p>	1 2 3 4 5
8. Students engage in reflection activities: Connecting leadership theory, their experiences, and themselves	<p>1. Programs engage students in written reflection activities in the form of journals, essays about readings, and other projects.</p> <p>2. Programs engage students in verbal reflection in reaction to discussions, questions posed, and current events.</p> <p>3. Programs formally engage students in completing vision and goal setting activities, and other projects which personalize concepts to the individual.</p>	1 2 3 4 5

9. Students apply leadership concepts to themselves in meetings	<p>1. Programs engage students in a variety of curricular activities designed to help them gain a greater understanding of themselves, including personality, strengths, style, skills, and values assessments.</p> <p>2. Programs engage students in simulations to give them practice with specific leadership skills, including strategic planning, ethics, and decision-making.</p>	1 2 3 4 5
10. Students make leadership meaning through dialogue and discussions	<p>1. Programs engage students in group discussions, debriefings, and dialogues stimulated by events, activities, readings, and presentations.</p> <p>2. Programs engage students in making meaning and connections to readings through discussing their out-of-program experiences.</p>	1 2 3 4 5
11. Students encounter episodes of difference: Contexts, people and ways of leading	<p>1. Programs expose students to different situations, contexts, cultures, groups, and people through their stories and program activities.</p> <p>2. Programs give students opportunities to practice new leadership roles and engage with others with different leadership styles.</p>	1 2 3 4 5
12. Students engage in service: Society, community, institution, and program	<p>1. Programs provide opportunities for students to practice leadership and learn through service learning in groups and individually.</p> <p>2. Programs expose students early to a wide breadth of multiple service sites, people, and organizations.</p> <p>3. Programs allow students to have increasing responsibility and devote significant time for in depth service to the site they are most interested in or the cause they are most passionate about.</p>	1 2 3 4 5
13. Students engage in self-discovery through retreats	<p>1. Programs bring groups of students away from the routine of the campus and program for an accelerated and in depth exploration of themselves, their fellow participants and leadership.</p> <p>2. Programs use alternative, group based, and experiential teaching methods such as a ropes courses, challenges, or intense exploration into a particular theme or issue.</p>	1 2 3 4 5

Cluster III: Research Grounded Continuous Program Development		
Attribute	Actions	Assessment & Key Actions to Take
14. Flexible program design to accommodate student interests	1. Programs consist of a variety of themes, service sites, group & individual project choices, and team memberships to allow students to choose their leadership context and skills to develop. 2. Programs incorporate a wide variety of different delivery methods to appeal to different student learning styles. 3. Programs integrate the various components students can choose into a common, coherent, larger whole curriculum that students experience in unique ways.	1 2 3 4 5
15. Content anchored in modeled leadership values	1. Program content is developed and offered based on previously established desired leadership development outcomes for the students. 2. Programs explicitly state the mission and values of the program and model the values through the curriculum and participant action. 3. Programs develop content that infuses student leadership and college student specific issues to make the curriculum real and have utility for the individual student.	1 2 3 4 5
16. Systems thinking applied for constant program improvement	1. Programs are developed utilizing current leadership, student development, leadership development, curriculum, teaching & learning, quality program development, and education research and models. 2. Program improvement is continual and both practitioner and student led, involving multiple assessment and feedback systems.	1 2 3 4 5

See **DarinEich.com/Book** for more premium content and resources from the book
Root Down & Brach Out: Best Practices for Leadership Development Programs



This book brings key findings to practice from a research study I conducted to determine the most important characteristics of high quality leadership development programs. I spoke with program developers, educators and participants from four programs to uncover what mattered most – what made leadership programs most effective. From the study findings, I created the Grounded Theory Model of High Quality Leadership Programs to outline important characteristics of effective programs that positively contribute to students' learning and leadership development. I also lay out the actions you can take and what types of outcomes these actions produce. Pieces of the model can be used as a checklist for things you could be doing in your program – as catalysts for innovation. My hope is that this knowledge can assist you, whether you are a program developer or teacher, in creating and administering high-quality leadership programs that enhance the learning and leadership development of your program participants.

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