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Making the Case for Leadership Studies: "Where's the Discipline?"
By Marvin Druker and Betty Robinson

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As Leadership Studies continues to grow and emerge as an academic discipline with its own programs and degrees, it often finds itself in conflict with the mainstream of more traditional academic thinking. When questioned during the academic program approval process, leadership studies program planners must often confront issues that those in a more "traditional" field do not. Issues such as: "where's the discipline?" or "is this a legitimate academic field?" seldom arise normally. Yet we are asked these impertinent questions by reviewer after academic reviewer.

As Georgia Sorenson commented in her review of the development of Leadership Studies, "...the politics on campuses can be fierce when it comes to new disciplines and leadership studies has generated its share of controversy" (Sorenson, 2000, p. 12). And so, we must carefully walk the minefield of political, territorial, and academic turf issues to address questions such as "how is leadership studies different from business management?" "who is the audience for this program?" "what constitutes rigor in the program?" and "why do we need a separate 'generic' leadership studies program when we have disciplinary-based leadership programs?" As a result, program development, and particularly program approval, is often difficult and protracted while we scramble to find answers to justify the very nature of our field.

In this paper we will share our experience in meeting these challenges during the development of a masters in leadership studies at Lewiston-Auburn College of the University of Southern Maine. Ironically, our college's mission is to plan and develop innovative interdisciplinary

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programs (which we have done successfully for 15 years, including a successful undergraduate program in leadership and organizational studies), yet we encountered challenges to our leadership studies masters degree at every turn in the proposal process.

The Context of Lewiston-Auburn College

Lewiston-Auburn College (LAC) opened its doors in 1988 as an experiment for the University of Southern Maine. "The Lewiston-Auburn community wanted college graduates who could write and speak effectively: think critically: contribute solutions to community problems: and more broadly, conceptualize the world in ways that transcend academic molds. After considerable study and discussion, the planners wanted Lewiston-Auburn College, to develop interdisciplinary programs that would integrate the liberal arts with each other, with professional studies, and with the community and the workplace" (Schaible, et.al.,1995, p. 2).

Since its beginning, the college developed four undergraduate degrees in Social and Behavioral Sciences, Natural and Applied Sciences, Arts and Humanities, and Leadership and Organizational Studies. They are designed to meet LAC's mission of providing interdisciplinary degrees.

With the success of our undergraduate Leadership and Organizational Studies (LOS) program and at the urging of graduates, the community, and an external program reviewer, we concluded that the College would be an ideal academic location for a graduate degree in leadership. The master's degree could build upon the existing resources of the undergraduate LOS degree program. Designed in response to community input received through a needs assessment study, focus groups, and open public hearings, the resulting interdisciplinary LOS degree provides a professional degree that incorporates a heavy emphasis on the liberal arts.

As with most institutions of higher learning, the University of Maine System requires a multi-tiered approval process for any new academic program. Our initial work on the Masters in Leadership Studies (MLS) involved preparing an "Intent to Plan" which then had to proceed through several committees and senates before it could ultimately be approved by a committee made up of the chief academic officers of all seven campuses in the UM System. Both the intent to plan and then the final program proposal had to be vetted and approved by the faculty of the originating college (LAC); the local university's Board of Visitors, graduate studies council, president's internal budget advisory committee, and faculty senate; as well as the university system's chief academic officers and Board of Trustees. A total of thirteen separate groups then had to approve either the intent to plan or the final proposal. As political scientists might note, there were many "veto points" in which the idea could be squelched.

CHALLENGES

Throughout this process questions were raised about the appropriateness of a leadership degree or about the nature of a graduate interdisciplinary program. We present below the questions raised in the process and the arguments that we made in response.

1. Where's the discipline?

- Knowledge is socially constructed and organized.

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It is a basic tenant of the sociology of knowledge that knowledge is socially constructed and socially organized - it is bound by time and context. The prevailing organization of knowledge is that which is held by people who are in some sense, "prevailing." From this understanding, it follows that the academic disciplines are also social constructions, and, we know from history, that they change and evolve over time. When a new area of specialized study emerges as a compelling and helpful way to organize knowledge, whether to further human understanding or as a response to social phenomena, the academic tradition (culture) is to challenge it.

- Challenges to new organizations of knowledge are normal.

Some familiar challenges include "rigor," "coherence," "legitimacy," "usefulness," and so on. These challenges have been raised in recent history as the fields of American studies, African-American studies, media studies, and women's studies, among others emerged. Often too a proposed reorganization of knowledge and study around an emergent interest is defined as "interdisciplinary." The same challenges are levied at these fields. In fact, most often a newly proposed field of study is labeled as "interdisciplinary," based on an unstated assumption that all the bona fide "disciplines" already exist, so any new proposals must, by definition, be "interdisciplines."

In addressing this phenomena, a colleague of ours wrote, "For the first group, those professionally employed in academia and research, the description of interdisciplinarity may indeed need to be a defense; we are responding to a preexisting and very strong framework of ways of organizing information that has taken on professional as well as intellectual significance in the socialization of all involved. Like any other cultural construct, it has the potential to be held by those within the culture as not only the superior order, but also the natural, even the only possible order in the world" (Hitchcock, 1995, p. 1).

- Interdisciplinary education takes on more importance in a more complex world with computer technology.

Ogilvy (1991) calls for an education that enhances our understanding of how things are systematically interconnected. Given the expanding capacity of computers to store and manipulate information and the increasing complexity of society, new knowledge paradigms promote *associative* and *integrative* patterns of thought and research rather than analysis based upon specialization and the isolation of phenomena. A focus on complexity and association also supports increased integration of the university with the community, since the educational process is seen now as an ongoing and integral part of social production.

The challenge is clear: Institutions of higher learning need to provide a healing kind of leadership for a pluralistic, disoriented and fragmented society. The question then becomes, can we reform the work of our present higher-learning institutions or create new ones with structures and philosophies that obviate turf wars: reward integrative, boundary-crossing thought and communication: and bring college and community into a mutually supportive working relationship? (Ogilvy, 1991)

2. What is Leadership Studies?

- A field that discusses the relationship of leader to followers.

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James Burns (1978, p. 4) also stresses the importance of the moral aspects of leadership: "Moral leadership emerges from, and always returns to, the fundamental wants and needs, aspirations, and values of the followers....the kind of leadership that can produce social change that will satisfy followers' authentic needs." He further states that "Leadership over human beings is exercised when persons with certain motives and purposes mobilize, in competition or conflict with others, institutional, political, psychological, and other resources so as to arouse, engage, and satisfy the motives of followers." It is "relational, collective, and purposeful."

- A field of study that looks beyond situations or cultures.

More than an interdisciplinary study many writers argue that the study of leadership is "multidisciplinary," in that it requires knowledge from many fields in order for the phenomenon to be understood. Other scholars pose leadership as a phenomenon to be "understood," thus, putting the emphasis of the study on the meaning of leadership and the significance of its meaning in particular ages or situations or cultures.

- Programs in leadership studies are rapidly growing all over the United States as well as in other countries.

In proposing our degree program we presented examples of graduate leadership studies in operation around the country that matched our intentions. We also cited recent articles in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and other studies that show that hundreds of colleges and universities are adopting some form of leadership studies.

The development of this field is in part a response to James MacGregor Burns' call for renewed theorizing and research on leadership that is both responsive to our age and able to assist us in generalizing about leadership over time and across cultures (1978). It is a field of study which reunites "the literature on leadership and the literature on follower-ship." (1978, p. 3) And the field responds to a call by academics and citizens for the development of more leaders through a more intentional educational process.

3. How is Leadership Studies different than other (arguably related) disciplinary-based programs?

- Not a technical or commercial field of study.

Master's students in our program will not be those desiring graduate level education in technical or commercial areas, but rather those seeking an educational opportunity in leadership that is not discipline-specific, opening new doors of thought and analysis by synthesizing knowledge from the humanities, social sciences, communication, and the natural and environmental sciences.

- Not discipline or professional field specific

As noted by the German philosopher of history Hans Georg Gadamer (1975), history is the learning process that we engage in to decipher ourselves through encounters with the past.

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Similarly, the MLS program pursues the intricacies of leadership through reflective encounters between today's organizations and the lessons learned from the human sciences, history, philosophy, literature, and culture. It is in this context that the self, as leader, is examined.

"Leadership scholars need to develop an academic presence as an interdisciplinary area of studies serving both undergraduate and graduate students in specialized programs that deal with the study and practice of leadership in organizations and in societies. Looking at leadership through the lens of a single discipline has not worked well in the past, and it will not work any better in the future. Indeed, a case could be made that organizations and societies in the future, with their collaborative, community, and global orientations, may not be hospitable to a concept of leadership that is grounded in only one academic discipline...With this new kind of thinking, leadership scholars must develop a new school of leadership that is grounded in what is real, what actually happens when leaders and followers do engage in leadership. (Rost, 1991, pp. 182-183)

Ogilvy's vision for higher education posits a future in which scholars and students from all disciplines work together with their communities: "From participatory knowledge it is then a short step to participatory democracy...knowing is a part of doing" (1993).

- Not management as traditionally defined nor a collection of control theories

The study of leadership is not the same as the study of management. Management has traditionally been defined within academia as "the process of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling the efforts of organization members and of using all other organizational resources to achieve stated organizational goals" (Stoner & Freeman, 1989, p. 4). A recent study of leadership in Organizational Behavior textbooks concludes: "This article claims that leadership, as represented by the approach taken in the genre of the sampled OB textbooks used in schools of business, may not be teaching leadership at all but a collection of control theories that ignore essential aspects of the leadership concept and convey to students the misguided impression that leadership is achieved merely by being promoted into a supervisory role.leadership education is trivialized when it is treated in these OB texts as simply a handful of questionable theories. At the same time they dismiss many realities, and competing systems of thought, regarding the meaning leadership.the conventional wisdom perpetuates may beliefs and understanding about leadership that are actually myths when viewed from the perspective of both practitioners and an emergent leadership paradigm" (Nirenberg, 1998, p. 84).

4. Why should Leadership Studies have a Liberal Arts orientation?

- The artistry of leadership requires a sophisticated use of the liberal arts in pursuing the knowledge, skills, and orientation required for its development.

Each course in our degree program integrates multiple disciplines, including many from the liberal arts, into the study of leadership. Joseph Campbell in *Heroes of a Thousand Faces* (1977) writes that myth, literature, and philosophy "help individuals past limiting horizons into spheres of expanding realizations" (p. 256). Of necessity, the curriculum provides more breadth than depth, as the relevant literature pertaining to leadership in many of the liberal arts is vast.

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The program provides a rigorous introduction to the use of liberal arts in *pursuing* the knowledge, skills, and orientation required for the development of artistry and excellence in leadership. Joseph Rost (1991) made the argument for this focus in his book, *Leadership for the Twenty-first Century*, stating: "Leadership scholars need to develop an academic presence as an interdisciplinary area of studies serving both undergraduate and graduate students in specialized programs that deal with the study and practice of leadership in organizations and in societies. Looking at leadership through the lens of a single discipline has not worked well in the past, and it will not work any better in the future; indeed, a case could be made that organizations and societies in the future, with their collaborative, community, and global orientations, may not be hospitable to a concept of leadership that is grounded in any one academic discipline... With this new kind of thinking, leadership scholars must develop a new school of leadership that is grounded in what is real, what actually happens when leaders and followers do engage in leadership" (pp. 182-3).

Literal understanding of and ability to use particular processes or management tools is only one step. Qualitative, metaphoric, interpretive understandings developed through rigorous study of the liberal arts provide a richer knowledge base for leadership or leadership studies.

5. Why is Leadership Studies a legitimate field of studies?

- Legitimacy is a social construct in which the rightness or truthfulness of something is claimed through appeals to authority and normative beliefs.

Several of our program reviewers along the way commented on the great number of citations and quotes from respected social scientists and philosophers we employed in our written and oral arguments on behalf of the new masters' program. This was not without intent on our part. While developing the program, we searched extensively for documentation on other leadership programs at other institutions, particularly those recognized as more prestigious. In fact, even at the Board of Trustees level, in the final stages of appeal, several Board members raised questions about the "seriousness" of such a degree program, necessitating our university president to cite renowned authors on leadership who hold prominent positions at the elite private school from which one of the Board members hails.

6. Where is the rigor in Leadership Studies?

- Just because it is an emergent field doesn't mean the content will not be rigorous.

Critics of leadership studies claim the emerging field lacks coherence and rigor. We found it interesting that the issue of academic rigor was linked to the fact that the leadership field was emerging. Just because a field is emergent, doesn't logically reduce the likelihood that the content and skills included in a program will lack rigor or be pursued in an academically respectable way.

Amadeo Girogi writing in 'Toward the Articulation of Psychology as a Coherent Discipline' demonstrates that the goal of coherence and rigor may be a false aspiration. 'Psychology did not have an early or adequate coherence that we lost over time; we were never coherent in the mature sense of the term. While from time to time there has been agreement with respect to a label-the study of the mind, consciousness, psyche, experience or behavior-a common in-depth knowledge of each of the terms was never achieved (Girogi in Sorenson, 2000, p. 14).

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- Emphasize the rigor of the admissions process.

In our program we deliberately set high standards for admissions. We emphasized the pre-requisites for entry into the program, as well as detailing the student requirements within the curriculum to a degree not seen in prior program plans. Written work, interviews, and examples of completed professional research are required in their as part of a thorough admissions process.

- Demonstrate that the curriculum will be demanding of students.

To complete the program students must complete intensive writing assignments, applied projects, and the capstone thesis or project, as well as participating in a structured series of reading intensive seminars. Here, the weight we gave to the writing requirements, applied field projects, and the capstone project or thesis were also helpful in allaying colleagues' concerns over rigor.

7. Who is the audience (market) for Leadership Studies?

- Community support.

In making the case for the need and demand for the MLS we sought letters from prominent business organizations, local elected leaders, and other community leaders.

- Early marketing research using both surveys and focus groups.

We sent surveys to the largest employers in the metropolitan area as well as drawing on the college's Citizen Advisory Council for focus group discussions about graduate programming in the areas of management, business, and leadership. It didn't hurt that our packet of support letters included the presidents of the local chamber of commerce and local economic growth and development council, as well as the editor of the local paper who stated that he'd enroll in the degree program as soon as it was on line.

- Identification of potential students.

Our case for usefulness relied heavily on community support and early marketing research from when we were trying to determine what sort of masters program would be of most interest to our local business market. We developed a list of areas in the community where we might find people who had relevant technical skill sets for their work, but who sought an educational opportunity to broaden their thinking and become more sophisticated about the larger, rapidly changing world through contacts developed in our market research and our informal community networks.

Interestingly, much of the feedback in both surveys and focus groups with our community advisory council, as well as unsolicited input from the state employee training office indicated that potential students and employers were looking for a masters-level degree that embraced the humanities and social sciences equally. Many respondents indicated that they already had

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relevant technical skill sets for their work, but that they sought an educational opportunity to broaden their thinking, re-capture "the big picture," and become more sophisticated about the larger world in which they were operating.

- Awareness of increase in number of graduate leadership programs across the United States and other countries.

Through internet research and our professional association contacts we developed an extensive list of such programs to demonstrate that interest in them was national and even international.

8. What is the value-added for graduates of a Leadership Studies program?

- Development of the *attitude* of the individual as a perpetual reflective practitioner of leadership.

Graduate programs develop attitudes as well as skills. In the study of leadership, the work of scholars such as Kanter (1997) and Schon (1982) calls for the academy to continue to break new ground, to expand research, and to provide advanced students of leadership opportunities to immerse themselves in intellectual exploration and thoughtful self-reflection. Such reflection and study moves students toward becoming continually reflective practitioners of leadership in all the arenas in which they work and live. The MLS program seeks to answer Kanter's call to provide "the tools and conditions that liberate people to use their brainpower to make a difference in a world of constant challenge and change" (p. xiii).

Students will have considerable opportunity to reflect on their strengths and challenges as leaders and how organizational relationships contribute to their sense of self and position. This will enable students to lead more effectively, not only in routine leadership roles, but also in the extraordinarily demanding ones stemming from fast paced change in an increasingly complex environment.

- Understanding the importance of the construct of "relationship" as it pertains to all aspects of leadership and followership.

Relationships and reflection-two key principles: As in the humanities, quantum physics, and many social sciences, the field of leadership recognizes that relationships are a key phenomenon. The urgent realities of today's world require that universities provide intellectual space for the exploration of the meanings and impact of these relationships. Indeed, the university's own mission of leadership within our society demands our engagement. Recognizing the importance of the construct of "relationships" and its wide ranging significance, the MLS program provides opportunities to study interpersonal relationships, interorganizational relationships, interdisciplinary relationships, and intercultural relationships. is intentionally designed to provide a bridge between the professions and the liberal arts. Course readings and classroom study will focus on texts from history, philosophy, literature, communication, political science, sociology, and psychology, as well as the current scholarship of the emergent field of leadership studies.

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- Orientations including: social responsibility, concern for ethics, commitment to public good, valuing of diversity

In addition to developing the above attitudes and new competencies, the program aims to develop behavioral orientations so that students may approach their leadership roles with a sense of social responsibility, a concern for ethics, and a commitment to the public good.

9. What are the expected outcomes for students in a Leadership Studies Program?

Using Donald Schon's (1987) concept of reflective practice, each of the program's courses will integrate knowledge and practice with a particular emphasis on "education for artistry" as well as an application (p. 309). A reflective service-learning component will be designed into coursework, facilitating the student's increasing ability to move between reflection and action. Just as Schon does, this curriculum draws on Dewey's three factors of learning to organize the study of leadership: "knowledge, skill, and character" (1974, p. 181). We understand the concept of character here as orientation or attitude. We also include a model of the outcomes that students should expect to achieve through our leadership studies program.

Students who graduate from this program will:

Increase their **knowledge** through:

- Gaining an understanding of the complex *history and diverse theories of leadership*
- Developing a *systemic and humanistic understanding of organizational and community life*. Students in the MLS program will gain insight by studying phenomena such as large and complex human systems as well as local systems through the cultures, histories, and environmental contexts that impact human beings. Students will also be able to identify challenges and design solutions that take culture into consideration. Students will use multi-disciplinary theoretical frameworks and apply their experience to develop effective methods of organizational and community intervention.
- Building a deep understanding of the nature of *collaboration and followership*. Students in the MLS program will examine these issues as they are exhibited in human behavior and facilitated or blocked through institutionalization.

Students who graduate from this program will develop **skills** such as:

- Ability to critically and creatively evaluate information to effectively influence the behavior of individuals and groups
- Capability to work with, respond to, and manage organizational and community conflict.
- Collaborative working skills (e.g., communication, motivation) that will allow students to assume the challenge and responsibility of working with others to advance organizational and community goals.

And assume an **orientation** which:

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- Indicates greater awareness of an individual's own strengths and challenges as a leader.
- Shows sensitivity to diversity and exhibits cultural competence.
- Demonstrates a concern for ethical issues.
- Includes a sense of social responsibility so that decisions in work or community organizations reflect judgments that consider liberty, equality, and justice.
- Uses reflective practice to foster on-going professional development

Conclusion

Faced with the social reality within academia, how are we to respond when developing new programs in leadership? We chose a two-pronged approach. The first, as detailed here, was to provide a definition of the leadership field of study that our program would cover and then defend the field with arguments for its coherence, usefulness, and rigor, as well as making appeals to legitimacy conferred by current scholarship, existing leadership programs, and our business community. Included in this approach is our case for the need for a leadership program and its market. The second was a pragmatic political approach based on alliance-building and fear-reduction and responded to the undercurrents in the objections to the program. In the latter instance, our challenges were to assure colleagues that our leadership studies program would not hurt enrollment in other programs, detract from their pool of resources, or pose itself as a critique of currently existing programs which have any similarities to our own. We plan a fuller exploration and discussion of this second approach in a later paper.

At the end of the process the Board of Trustees approved our masters in leadership program. We also feel that our faculty and program met the challenges presented, and that our future students will have the benefit of a stronger curriculum with a more coherent vision of the leadership degree due to the reflection required on our part to make the case.

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Master's in Leadership Studies Student Outcomes



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