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## The Immersion Experience: Diving Deep into Leadership

Paul Pyrz

**D**epth versus breadth. Qualitative versus quantitative. Learning versus training.

Facilitating versus presenting. Development versus education. Quite often those of us involved with leadership education and development carry over the dualism so noted in the works of Perry (1970, 1981) and others to our work with young adults. We have little patience for complexity, for hard conversations, for challenges that can not be solved in one or two e-mail volleys. I am sure I am not the only one noticing how “easy” it has become to insulate our lives with the news, apps, groups, or communities that think similarly to us, treat us the way we want to be treated, and make us feel better about our situation. I see it all the time in interactions with students and professionals. You are either in or out, right or wrong, committed or not. We have lost nuance. The purpose of this article is to suggest how to get it back.

To begin, I would like to introduce you to a program that relies heavily, if not solely, on removing participants from their comfort zones and immersing them with other individuals interested in having a different conversa-

tion. LeaderShape® is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1988 as a result of the efforts of the Alpha Tau

Omega fraternity to build an ethics-based leadership experience for the men of that fraternity. The LeaderShape Institute is the flagship program and actually began prior to 1988 at a perfect site located just outside of Champaign, Illinois. More on how perfect the site is later on, but the “gift” of LeaderShape has a lot to do with this complexity of leadership education and how we break out of this dualistic thinking mentioned earlier. After a number of years, The LeaderShape Institute became recognized as an exemplary leadership program by the W.K.

Kellogg Foundation and entered a period of intense growth. In 1992, the first campus-based session of the program was held at a site close to the University of Michigan replicating the experience that had previously only been held in Champaign. In 2010, The LeaderShape Institute was held approximately 70 times at locations all across the country as well as the Middle East. The 38,000th participant of the program since 1986 completed the six-day experience this year.

*Almost by definition, being immersed in an activity for no matter how long allows us to clarify our focus, stretch further, breathe more deeply, and think more completely.*

*Continued on page 3*

# Connections From The Director

By Craig Slack

We are excited to share this edition of *Concepts & Connections – Leadership Through Immersion Experiences*. Our goal in this issue is to not only offer interesting information, but also to share thoughts that challenge conventional perspectives and practice in an effort to advance our leadership education work. I have spent significant time over the last few months thinking and dialoging with colleagues concerning our teaching methods and our focus on individuals as learners. I am constantly challenged with how we construct curricula that press the fringe of the student learners' capacity and how we design environments to serve as fertile ground to facilitate this deeper learning.

The dissonance racing around in my head centers on providing breadth of content and time for depth of complexity in our leadership programs. I keep remembering my experience as a little boy standing on the muddy banks of the Susquehanna River during the hot humid days of the summer. I would negotiate the uneven surface of the water's edge looking for the somewhat round-shaped rocks in preparation for a lazy afternoon spent skipping stones across the river. So, while this is a nice story, where is this going and what does it have to do with leadership education? Well, I became very good at flicking the rough grey and flat stones across the water creating a pinging sound as the belly of the stone skimmed the

crest of the flowing water. I mastered the art of skipping stones across the Susquehanna, but very seldom did I ever see them drop beneath the sheen of the water's surface. As exciting as it is to see leadership program curriculum covering the breadth of information-making at our fingertips, we need to focus our learning outcomes and strive for more complexity and greater depth of experience and knowledge. Dr. John Dugan, principal investigator of the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL), shared at the 2010 Annual Conference of NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education that the MSL data is clearly showing that the next level of our leadership education work needs to focus not solely on the number of programs in our leadership education portfolios, but also on the depth and complexity of the curriculum guiding students' learning. This issue of *Concepts & Connections* looks at how immersion experiences advance depth and complexity of the student learners' acquisition of knowledge. I hope you find that the writings by this issue's authors take you to new and deeper places as you advance your leadership thinking and educational practice.



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## The Immersion Experience: Diving Deep into Leadership

*Continued from page 1*

Why has this program been so successful? Believe it or not, it is actually quite simple. Amazing things happen when you provide time and space for people to have conversations that they do not normally have. There, I said it. Go copy it. In all seriousness, The LeaderShape Institute is actually an immersion experience meaning that we remove participants from their “normal” lives and place them together in uncomfortable (some more than others) surroundings where they talk. Not text. They talk. They also play board games. I am talking about Jenga, Mafia, and Ghost in the Graveyard. They spend time with each other without the distractions of an overly electronic society that demands immediate feedback, response, and action.

This is the beauty of the immersion experience. Almost by definition, being immersed in an activity for no matter how long allows us to clarify our focus, stretch further, breathe more deeply, and think more completely. The immersion experience seems to be perfect in that leadership is such an “experienced” topic that takes conversation, observation, and reflection to understand, let alone grasp. In my experience, creating an immersion experience needs to focus on three concepts: time, flow, and preparation.

It is not easy to create this kind of experience for many reasons, but – first and foremost – is the requirement of time. The difficulty of having an immersion experience for a day is quite hard. With schedules for classes, jobs, and other extra-curricular activities, finding time for individuals to disconnect is a daunting task. The majority of our sessions are held during May and June as classes complete for both semester and quarter schools and before summer classes start or internships begin. Then we have quite a number of sessions in January as well as August and September – again, when classes are not being held and schedules are a little lighter. Of course, this creates other challenges of participants

wanting to vacation, take a break, and tune out for a time before beginning coursework again.

Another key to creating a meaningful immersion experience is that no one is coerced into attending – only those that want to be there attend. At LeaderShape, we are quite clear and will go to unusual lengths to help participants leave if they are not committed to participating 100%. We owe it to the other participants that are committed to make those decisions without passion or prejudice. Of course, it is hard to discern who is committed and who is not; however, we have been pleasantly surprised that when you have high expectations for young people, they tend to meet and exceed them.

Quite often, we learn of colleagues who try to recreate experiences on par with LeaderShape by using modules, workshops, and seminars; however, something is lost in regards to the flow and building of the experience. The LeaderShape Institute is not a conference where someone can pick and choose what sessions to attend. A true immersion experience is built from a solid foundation, with the commitment of a community dedicated to learning and practicing new behaviors, and the willingness to be vulnerable and work through conflict. Participants are together in the experience and have time to observe how others react and respond. Trust is built through this process.

An important point to remember is that it is not about the topics or content, but the context in which the topic is covered. I think much differently about social justice when I am in a group of individuals with whom I have a connection and some ground rules adhered to rather than

trying to dive deep with individuals with whom I am only spending a day. We have found that to be the case with the introduction of our one-day program, Catalyst. There are some things we just cannot replicate in a one-day program no matter how much our partners want to “make them cry in one day.” The experience builds and depends upon a path that is taken together, not presented or manipulated by individuals who impart knowledge. Everyone is a teacher and a learner in an immersion experience and the flow of the conversation is crucial to achieving the desired outcomes. As Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) refers to in his works, flow is all about getting lost in an experience, forgetting time and anything else outside of the moment because you are so enveloped in what you are doing. It is when we are in flow that we are in touch with our passions, our dreams, and our best self – when we perhaps are ready to lead.

*“A true immersion experience is built from a solid foundation, with the commitment of a community dedicated to learning and practicing new behaviors, and the willingness to be vulnerable and work through conflict.”*

So much of the experience is set up prior to participants arriving and beginning the formal agenda. In fact, I would say that the experience begins before the experience begins. Participants should be well informed of the expectations for attending and what is required of them in terms of participation. I have found that a number of students attend our program eager to learn, open minded, and ready to get up to their elbows in the conversation. I have also found students that feel that they have “arrived” as leaders, show up with the mentality of, “I wonder if they can teach me anything I do not already know,” and “I have done this before;” end up missing out on the first couple hours and sometimes

days of the experience and have to play catch up all week. When this happens, it is clear that we did not do a proper job of preparing them for what is going to occur.

It has been said, "repetition is the mother of skill." Given that concept, no session of The LeaderShape Institute has been the same even though we have facilitated roughly the same curriculum since 1986. The concepts have been updated and improvements made, but the participants make up the experience and it is theirs to own. I have heard from some campus partners that are disappointed that a session was not as emotional as the one they attended or that the students did not "get" the concept. They struggle when I tell them that I am fine with that because so much depends on where people are at that moment in their journey. Seeds are planted and I have been fortunate enough to see those seeds flower into wonderful individuals leading with integrity and living in possibility. It is impossible to judge an immersion experience by what happens at the immersion experience. The results are often not seen for years after the experience as it takes all of us time to absorb, process, and make sense of what occurs. Again, given our short attention spans and need for immediate feedback, it can be hard for those of us in this work to be patient and trust in the process. It is not in our

nature even though that is what transformative learning is all about – transformation is quite often not immediate.

It is with that knowledge that LeaderShape struggles as I am sure all leadership educators struggle. Given that the experience does not end with the Institute, how do we continue to connect, support, and challenge participants after having been in each other's presence? How do we create experiences that last weeks, months, and even years? When it comes down to it, the learning experience actually never ends and neither does learning to lead. What we can hope to create with immersion experiences is a community of individuals committed to the work, living as a true community committed to getting better. Perhaps they will get a taste of living authentically during that experience that will translate into different behaviors afterward.

I often ask myself what would happen if The LeaderShape Institute never ended and I quickly realize that, if that was the case, our vision would be achieved – a just, caring, thriving world where all lead with integrity and a healthy disregard for the impossible. I could learn to appreciate living in that world and I think you could, too. For more information on LeaderShape, visit [www.leadershape.org](http://www.leadershape.org). 

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# The Institute for Leadership Education and Development (I-LEAD®)

Justin Rudisille, Association of College Unions International, and Jennifer Violett, Webster University

The value of an immersive college student leadership development program like I-LEAD® cannot be easily described. A former participant said it best, “Nothing can prepare you for the intensity of [I-LEAD®]: the intensity of the curriculum, schedule, and relationships. However, in the end, you will emerge from the difficult path with an awesome experience that cannot be described except through actually experiencing it yourself.”

The Institute for Leadership Education and Development (I-LEAD®) is the premier student program of the Association of College Unions International (ACUI). The program began as an educational track for students attending the 1994 ACUI annual conference. Student leadership development is an important element throughout the college union and its functions: student governance, building operations, programming, student employment, and other activities. Because of these many facets, the program curriculum focused on leadership skill development and personal growth rather than applications to specific areas or positions of student involvement. Over the next four years, participation in this conference program soared and ACUI decided to make I-LEAD® a stand-alone institute in 1999. A key reason for this decision was to make the program an immersion experience, as its intensity and community-building was enhanced by removing the distractions that easily existed within a conference atmosphere.

*For I-LEAD®, an important part of the immersion experience is to maximize interaction as a means of enabling students to better evaluate themselves as leaders.*

Once on its own, I-LEAD® also became a non-selective program for participants, open to any college student. This allowed for a richer diversity of students rather than just those from institutions able to send students to the conference. Based on registrations from the past three years, most students who attend have campus involvement with activities/programming (39.3%), union operations/employment (29.5%), and student governance (21.9%), but students involved with orientation, residence life, leadership organizations, and diversity programs have also attended. Historically, I-LEAD® has attracted participants from a wide range of class standings, ages, ethnicities, and institutional types.

## Program Format

Today, the program is a six-day living-learning institute, with sessions that are typically held during June or July. A facilitation team arrives several days early for training, and student participants move into their residence on Sunday afternoon. Throughout the week, all major curriculum elements are presented in a large group format through various interactive activities, providing a consistency of key concepts for all participants. For intensive discussion and community during the program, participants break into small groups of 10–15 students, each facilitated by a pair of volunteer student affairs professionals. These sessions allow each group to create its own identity, give time to explore topics in depth, and enhance the opportunity for each

student to have a voice. Other important elements to the curriculum are the reflection exercises that are integrated into the program schedule to make the experience more personally meaningful. Finally, throughout the institute, wellness breaks, meals, social activities, and other down times create opportunities for self-directed learning and networking to occur. Each of these pieces of the program serves a deliberate role within the curriculum, as there are opportunities to analyze the information based on their personal impressions as well as from a group perspective. The institute concludes on Friday morning with commencement rituals.

For I-LEAD®, an important part of the immersion experience is to maximize interaction as a means of enabling students to better evaluate themselves as leaders. Conscious efforts are made to not assign students to residence rooms or small groups with other participants from their institution or region, and roommates are paired to place each student with someone who is not in their small group. Encouraging student participants to step outside of their comfort zone fosters the atmosphere of openness and understanding among the entire group rather than allowing them to fall into the patterns in which they are already comfortable. Likewise, it promotes informal discussions and reflections with diverse perspectives.

Based on the program evaluations over the past three years of the institute, students responded that the reflection activities contributed most greatly to their learning experience I-LEAD®, with opportunities for self-directed learning such as informal reflection with peers, informal reflection with facilitators, and living together for the week being among the top rated contributors. This supports the idea that immersion has a positive impact on student learning. Behind reflection,

students responded that small-group activities contributed more than large-group sessions. Further, students felt that the more personal and action-oriented activities supported their learning more than discussion-oriented sessions.

### ***Program Curriculum and Theoretical Foundation***

The curriculum of I-LEAD® is philosophically rooted in The Role of the College Union statement (ACUI, 1996), which defines the college union as an organization representing “a well-considered plan for the community life of the college” (para. 1). The union is not necessarily a facility, but rather a student-centered organization that values participatory decision-making, provides services to meet student needs, and offers a variety cultural, educational, social, and recreational activities. I-LEAD® takes on the college union idea by creating a community of learners that mirrors student life on campus. Activities allow participants to safely practice leadership, active participation, citizenship, and values development, and the self-directed activity that occurs through the institute maximizes opportunities for self-realization and the development of individual social competency and group effectiveness.

The program defines leadership as a group process that is not purely based on individual position or behaviors, but rather it “involves collaborative relationships that lead to collective action grounded in the shared values of people who work together to affect positive change” (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996). The five practices of exemplary leaders as outlined by Kouzes and Posner (2002) (i.e., model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart) are introduced to participants at the beginning of the institute, and activities throughout the curriculum use these practices to provide a structure and language for exploring leadership.

In addition to these leadership practices, activities are included during the institute on a variety of other topics. Several sessions focus on community and how communities

can be perceived differently by individuals from different subpopulations. Another content area is the power of the assumptions people make and how components of one’s personal identity influence interactions and experiences. The next key concept within the curriculum is the role of personal values and ethics in group decision-making and conflict resolution. Finally, participants set goals for action for when they leave the program. These topics are dispersed throughout to the week to complement activities related to the five practices of exemplary leadership.

Beyond the program content, I-LEAD® intentionally applies a few key theories. The curriculum delivery methods are based on the Kolb (1984) model of experiential learning. Participants are fully immersed into activities without having previous experience or bias (i.e., concrete experience); they begin to better understand ideas by watching others and considering different perspectives (i.e., reflective observation); they develop theories about what works based on their observations (i.e., abstract conceptualization); and they practice new concepts and behaviors by putting them into action (i.e., active experimentation). Another important theoretical foundation for I-LEAD® is the Tuckman (1965) developmental sequence in groups. Groups become familiar with each other and determine acceptable interpersonal behaviors (i.e., forming); they experience conflict and challenge each other as they become emotionally invested (i.e., storming); they develop cohesion as roles within the group are accepted (i.e., norming); and they become interdependent in achieving their group purpose (i.e., performing). Some activities are designed to create a storm within groups to promote progress, and this sequence is observed in multiple ways at

*“Great success in advancing college student leadership development and building strong community has been achieved by making I-LEAD® a stand-alone, immersion experience.”*

I-LEAD®—each small group, the large group, and even within the facilitation team. Noting the importance of providing closure and reflecting on the group experience during the weeklong immersion (i.e., adjourning) (Priest & Gass, 2005), scheduled time is also planned to celebrate accomplishments, set future goals, and recognize each other at the end of the institute.

In program evaluations, student respondents valued the activities focused on group development, team-building, values, and self-awareness as being the largest contributors to their overall learning during I-LEAD®. The content areas rated lowest by students were decision-making, ethics, and goal-setting. It is not clear from the eval-

uations whether this is a direct result of students’ preferences for the content or the way the particular content was delivered.

### ***Outcomes of the Program***

Overall, the key intended outcome of students participating in I-LEAD® is that students will be able to relate the meaning of community and its importance to the role of the college union and student activities back to their leadership experiences beyond the institute. It is also intended that participants will leave I-LEAD® with a sense of excitement, energy, and urgency to innovative leaders in their own lives and on their campuses. Following work by a curriculum review committee in 2010, the learning outcomes of I-LEAD® were reframed to reflect the ACUI core competencies for the college union and student activities profession. Particularly relevant competencies for the institute include communication, intercultural proficiency, and leadership. Thirty additional learning outcomes are identified within these competency areas (ACUI, 2010). Students self-rated their achievement of these outcomes in the 2010 post-

evaluation and they agreed most that, as a result of I-LEAD®, they were able to “sustain momentum to provide innovative and motivating leadership,” “develop an individual vision as a leader,” and “recognize that they are part of something larger than their group/campus.” The other high-scoring outcomes were those related to knowing personal values, leading with purpose and integrity, being self-aware, and facilitation group planning and goal-setting. The lowest rated outcomes in 2010 were those related to the application of leadership theories/techniques and the development of a compelling group vision.

### **Program Administration**

Steady leadership is crucial to sustain a program such as I-LEAD®. For this reason, its administration has evolved from being coordinated by volunteers members of the conference planning committee to the current model involving volunteers and the ACUI Central Office staff. This has allowed the program to have consistent structure and growth supported by the organization as a whole rather than a revolving committee. An ACUI educational program coordinator manages the logistical details of the program and works closely with a volunteer who serves a two-year appointment as the I-LEAD® Program Team leader. This person leads the selection of the facilitation team, coordinates the biannual curriculum review, markets the program, and serves as the lead facilitator at the institute. By having a rotating volunteer, the energy and focus of the program are continuously being evaluated. Other volunteer opportunities are available with I-LEAD® for professionals who can apply to be small group facilitators, and student alumni fill internship positions at each institute. These positions are some of the most intense offered by ACUI and are treated primarily as professional development opportunities. By including both professionals and students, I-LEAD® stays fresh with current trends while maintaining a connection to student participants’ interests.

There are a variety of methods used to keep alumni of the program connected. Facebook groups are created each year, and the online

interactions between student and facilitator participants continue well beyond the institute. Alumni can nominate potential facilitators and student participants through an online form. Also, gatherings regularly take place at ACUI annual conferences for I-LEAD® alumni, as many past participants are now student affairs professionals.

While the format and curriculum have changed over time, there are no plans to move away from the intensive living-learning model. Great success in advancing college student leadership development and building strong community has been achieved by making I-LEAD® a stand-alone, immersion experience. More details about upcoming program opportunities can be found at <http://www.acui.org/ilead>, including the opportunity to host a session in 2011. 🏠

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# Learning by Design

## *An Immersed Experience in Leadership:*

### *Eight Recommendations to Enhance Your Alternative Service Breaks Program*

Jennifer Espinola

Lectures, workshops, retreats, courses, certificates, book clubs, speakers – colleges and universities create numerous meaningful opportunities for students to learn about theories and strategies behind effective leadership. These educational venues are critical to deeper understanding so students have a chance to consider and discuss somewhat intangible concepts such as vision, empowerment, and emotional intelligence. But as we know, the application of knowledge is where the magic happens. Chickering and Reisser (1993) state that:

*Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much by just sitting in classes listening to teachers, memorizing pre-packaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences, [and] apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves (pp. 374-375).*

Experiential learning allows students to practice a concept in context, analyze results, explore new strategies, and refine their skills – necessary activities for the development of leadership. In Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle, the learner utilizes two strategies for grasping experiences – concrete experience and abstract conceptualization, and two strategies for transforming experiences – reflective observation and active experimentation (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 2000). Each component plays heavily into a successful Alternative Service Break (ASB) experience and affords us a living laboratory for leadership.

Higher education has a long history of utilizing ASB programs to provide civic and community engagement experiences to students. They are incredibly effective for this

purpose and continue to be signature programs across the country. This is also a prime breeding ground for leadership. We must not allow for it to simply be a tertiary gain. These programs can continue to achieve goals for civic education while also bolstering the leadership development of each participant. Therefore, here are eight recommendations for enhancing the leadership development experience offered by your Alternative Service Break program:

#### **1. Clearly define ASB learning outcomes on leadership principles**

The "Active Citizen Continuum" promoted by Break Away ([www.alternativebreaks.org](http://www.alternativebreaks.org)), the leading non-profit supporting the development of alternative break programs, is a common foundation for the learning outcomes of these programs. This is an excellent model for developing lifelong active citizens and naturally aligns to the mission of any ASB program. However, there is great opportunity to design additional learning outcomes based on principles of leadership such as critical thinking, team development, interpersonal communication, and social change theory. Refer to your institution's strategic plans and learning objectives to see how your ASB program can also advance those leadership related outcomes as well.

#### **2. Design a comprehensive leadership development curriculum for site leader training**

Serving as an ASB Site Leader can be one of the most intensive leadership experiences on campus considering the breadth and depth of experience potentially gained. Students in these roles require a great deal of education and training in order to be successful. Review your training

program so that there is not only instruction on the logistical planning and risk management associated with travel, but also extensive leadership education fitting the situation of this position as a campus leader. These students could benefit from topics such as emotionally intelligent team development, conflict resolution, program planning, and even business etiquette. An investment in these students will generate a ripple effect to all participants.

#### **3. Offer an optional credit-bearing course with an emphasis on leadership**

Particularly if your institution offers academic leadership studies courses, a directed study could be designed for interested participants to compliment their ASB experience. It could be a *Leadership and Social Change* course or even *Global Leadership* for an ASB abroad experience. Readings, lectures, and interviews could be assigned to students prior to departure, and intensive reflections and final projects could be generated that would allow for the students to educate their peers about the relevant social issues and leadership practices that yield effective social change initiatives.

#### **4. Select a leadership model to incorporate in reflection activities**

Reflection is the key activity to crystallize the learning moments in ASB. Often, discussions are centered on the social issues being explored and the students' ability to impact the community. While worthy and significant topics, there is a great opportunity to teach models or practices of leadership through the reflection process as well. Whether you utilize Greenleaf's perspectives on servant leadership, Kouzes &

Posner's practices of exemplary leadership, Lencione's dysfunctions of a team, Kotter's change model, or another author of choice, these can be infused easily into the reflective dialogue of the group to analyze how the principles are playing out in their current circumstances and how they can be utilized to enhance their effectiveness as a team.

**5. Design a leadership development journal for each participant to complete**

Boyd and Fales (1983) defined reflective learning as "the process of internally examining and exploring an issue of concern, triggered by an experience, which creates and clarifies meaning in terms of self, and which results in a changed conceptual perspective" (p. 100). Reflection is essential to learning from experience. It is the "core difference between whether a person repeats the same experience several times, becoming highly proficient at one behavior, or learns from experience in such a way that he or she is cognitively or affectively changed" (p. 100). A leadership learning journal can provide students with the time and freedom to consider how learned principles are applied to their own contexts.

*"Experiential learning allows students to practice a concept in context, analyze results, explore new strategies, and refine their skills – necessary activities for the development of leadership."*

Plus, it serves as a tangible take-away to remind the students of what they gained through the experience.

**6. Incorporate information literacy into pre-departure education of participants**

A growing concern for students who seek to become active citizens and leaders is determining where to acquire responsible and accurate information. This addresses leadership as it involves critical thinking, credibility, and analysis. Students should learn to select responsible sources for information and how to question critically what they read. They should also understand how to share information with others in a credible way to maximize their influence while attempting to initiate social change.

**7. Organize a leadership mentoring session with a connected local leader**

Mentoring continues to gain prominence as a significant leadership development experience. Local leaders working to affect social change in relation to the ASB issue being addressed could be invited for a mentoring session with the ASB team. They could be asked to share their definition of leadership and key strategies for effective and ethical leadership. They could also share anecdotes about successes and challenges they have faced personally in their leadership roles.

**8. Reinvent the reputation of ASB as more than just a volunteer program**

The promotion of your program obviously impacts student interest and their expectations as well. Design your promotional campaign to sell more than a volunteer and service experience. Share with students that they can gain leadership skills applicable in all areas of their lives through the ASB experi-

ence. Outline your learning objectives in a relatable way so that students know what there is to gain. It may attract a new pool of students to ASB and can also create a richer experience by having student participants ready to live into their leadership on the trip.

The traditional ASB experience is a developmental gold mine for college students. Learning about new communities, social issues, and their ability to make a positive difference is invaluable. However, with some intentional design, a rich understanding and application of leadership is also there for the taking and an opportunity that should not be missed. ■

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# Program Spotlight

## LeaderShape on Campus: Stories from Campus-based Programs

Dave Rosch (University of Illinois), Sarah Edwards (Texas A&M University), and Natalie K. Pariano (Denison University)

*“LeaderShape played an important role in how I develop my personal goals. It helped me focus on what I am truly passionate about and how to achieve the desired outcome”*

*2009 Texas A&M LeaderShape Participant*

### *The University of Illinois*

*David Rosch*

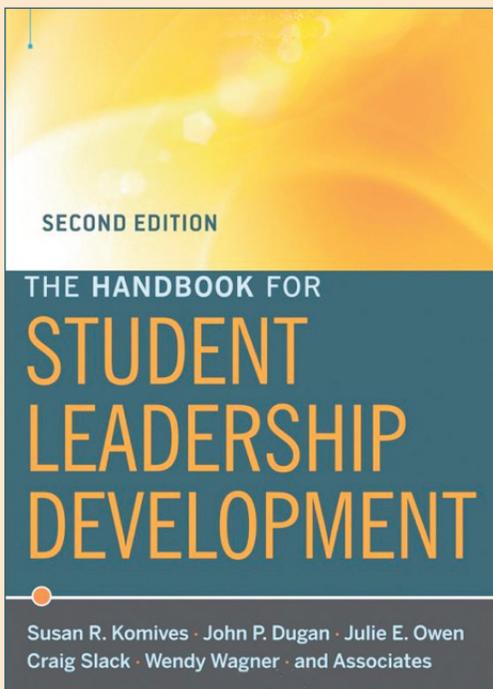
Every summer at the Leadership Center at the University of Illinois, we send a survey out to specific classes of our alumni – those who have participated in our leadership programs as undergraduate students. Every year, we receive back statements such as, “LeaderShape changed my life. Not only did it open my eyes as to what was possible, it introduced me to other students I never would have met if I hadn’t attended.” Our office coordinates a variety of short leadership programs and retreats, but comments that reflect the transformational nature of a student’s leadership development come from LeaderShape participants more than any other single initiative.

The value of the LeaderShape curriculum on our campus is two-fold. First, it provides a six-day holding environment for students to struggle with the question, “What do I really want to do with my life?” and, due to the way we select students, helps con-

nect them to peers they may not have met otherwise. This broadens their perspectives to better reflect the diversity of students here at Illinois. We have coordinated a campus LeaderShape session since 1993. I feel that it has not only benefitted our campus as a whole, it has transformed countless individual participants.

We regularly ask students what they want to major in or what they want to do when they graduate. However, seldom is the follow-up “Why did you choose that?” asked. All LeaderShape participants – regardless of the site – are faced with this question. Because the program lasts for six long days, it is unavoidable; students can neither dodge the question, nor can they go through the motions of answering. Since the foundation of leading with integrity involves knowing and practicing one’s values, one of the central benefits of the LeaderShape experience is the way that the curriculum and facilitators help students to develop complex, critical thinking in this manner.

One of the strengths of the University of Illinois edition of The LeaderShape Institute is in the way in which we select students. Selection is done through competitive processes within each of the University’s eight academic colleges. Students, therefore, do not apply through the Leadership Center, but rather through their academic dean’s office. Each office selects its students, who are then forwarded to the Leadership Center where everything is coordinated. This ensures that students from a variety of academic backgrounds attend. To help balance the diversity of participants in other ways, the Leadership Center intentionally advertises the program and selection process using a variety of methods to a variety of student populations. Moreover, the benefits of bringing these students together is multiplicative – not only do they create connections for when they return to campus, they introduce their new friends to their old friends, creating a tighter social network of involved students at our highly decentralized campus.



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There can be no doubt about the transformational nature of The LeaderShape Institute experience here at Illinois. Students without a strong social network leave with new lifelong friends, students unhappy with their major or goals find meaning and purpose for their lives, and leaders from a variety of backgrounds learn the skills necessary to collaborate and expand their horizons.

### **Texas A&M University**

*Sarah Edwards*

*Integrity. Personal Growth. Reflection. Social Change. Experience.* These are a small sample of the tenants that cause The LeaderShape Institute to stand apart from other leadership programs and immersion experiences. While these are all essential aspects to the LeaderShape experience, the most important tenant to this unique experience is vision.

Throughout this six day experience, students will create a vision that stems from a personal passion – the environment, global health, or hunger awareness, to name a few. They must, then, develop an action plan toward achieving this desired vision. Students who participate in the LeaderShape experience leave with the larger goals of how they want to focus their energies and to what end, but also with developed plans for how they can start moving toward that goal immediately. Each year, 60 students devoted to enacting positive change at a local or global level graduate from the Texas A&M University session with an action plan on how to achieve their vision.

Susan, a junior who attended The LeaderShape Institute at Texas A&M in 2009, is a great example of this. Her ultimate vision culminates in the eradication of all cancer. In addition to studying to become a doctor – the linear path toward the achievement of her goal, she works year

round to promote and raise money for the American Cancer Society and is actively involved in Relay for Life efforts on the Texas A&M campus. Susan recognizes how her involvement and participation can affect her goal achievement in ways that are different but equally important as her studies, and she works diligently in both arenas.

The transformation that occurs in and with the students who attend LeaderShape is remarkable, and it does not end after the six days are over. One participant from a 2006 session of The LeaderShape Institute noted that, “I hold myself to a higher standard because of LeaderShape.” Due to the nomination process at Texas A&M, students from across campus

who might never otherwise interact have a shared experience which then produces cross-campus collaborations upon their return. Additionally, the component of LeaderShape that encourages leading with integrity resonates strongly with many of our students, thereby reinforcing other messages they receive throughout the Department of Student Activities and Texas A&M University.

### **Denison University**

*Natalie K. Pariano*

Many Denisonians return from a week at The LeaderShape Institute struggling for the words to describe it to friends. Time and time again I hear “life-changing” used to describe their time at the Institute. Recently, I asked our LeaderShape graduates to reflect on those thoughts and feelings and explain in their own words what that change and transformation meant for them. I found, to my satisfaction, but not to my surprise, that our students’ reflections on the living-learning laboratory experience of LeaderShape mirror the mission and values we strive for at Denison.

### **Mutual Respect and Civility**

The work done in the safe space of Family Clusters provides an atmosphere of support, courage and openness, inspiring a trust and care for one another that is extraordinary. This atmosphere continues into the general Learning Community, where participants form their own community values to guide their time at the Institute and diligently uphold these throughout, illustrating a commitment to treat each other and the environment with mutual respect, tolerance, and civility.

### **Breaking Down Barriers**

At Denison, we strive for a community founded on a firm belief in human dignity and compassion unlimited by cultural, racial, sexual, religious or economic barriers. At LeaderShape, a Learning Community is created that allows for the barriers that oftentimes divide our campus, to crumble. Long last connections are formed that are collaborative and transformational.

### **Transformative Learning**

Through an emphasis on active learning, Denison strives to foster self-determination and demonstrate the transformative power of education. The experiential learning methods employed at LeaderShape allow for hands-on work, but also incorpo-

*“Overall,  
LeaderShape was a  
rebirthing experience  
for me – a week that  
made me start my  
semester illuminated  
with diligence, ignited  
with passion and  
lucid with vision.*

*H.B. Augustine,  
Denison University,  
Class of 2012*

*"I had always been taught that leadership was positional, having to do with power and management. At LeaderShape I realized that integrity and values were integral to good leadership. My perspective was forever changed."*

*Joseph Winegardner,  
Denison University,  
Class of 2012*

rate ample time for reflection. Through both interactive and introspective assignments, students are encouraged to practice a healthy disregard for the impossible. Being invited to think and act that way leaves a lasting impression on students.

### **Community & Service**

Denison aims to inspire our students to become active citizens of a democratic society, grounded in a concern for community. When students leave LeaderShape with a Vision and accompanying Breakthrough Blueprint, they have been provided a safe space to discover and define their passions in ways that are both idealistic and tangible, focusing on service to society both locally and globally. The focus on service fits neatly into Denison's emphasis on leadership for social change, encouraging our students to be leaders on campus and beyond.

### **Values & Integrity**

Denison believes its purpose is to educate our students to become autonomous thinkers and discerning moral agents. At LeaderShape, students are asked to not only think about their core values, but to wear them for everyone to see. Practicing decision-making based on values empowers students to be individuals of character, not only in their co-curricular endeavors, but far beyond. The message of leading with integrity is long-lasting and is one of the primary takeaways of the Institute for Denison students.

Ambitious, forward-thinking and somewhat idealistic, Denison's mission statement [available here: [http://www.denison.edu/about/values\\_mission.html](http://www.denison.edu/about/values_mission.html)] paints the picture of a living and learning environment, where mutual respect, personal growth, integrity, and scholarship are the fixtures of our community. Sometimes the picture appears foggy to us as we are often too focused on our own responsibilities to celebrate the good work going on all across campus. But, in the laboratory that is LeaderShape, this is palatable; we can clearly see Denison's idealism and mission lived out through our students. Students that are willing to take on the challenges associated with being a true Denisonian and leading with integrity.



SUSAN R. KOMIVES, WENDY WAGNER, AND ASSOCIATES

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# Leadership Bookshelf

## *Immunity to Change*

Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey

Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009, \$29.95 (hardcover)

Reviewed by: Erica Johnson, University of Maryland – College Park

Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey (2009) take us into the world of creating change via psychosocial development in their newest book, *Immunity to Change*. The authors offer a theoretical approach to practical techniques designed to help leaders bring about behavioral and complex psychosocial change in themselves and their organizations. The authors provide a convincing argument that people of any age can change even their most ingrained patterns if armed with a more complete understanding of the behaviors and beliefs that need changing, a strong commitment to the process, and the support of an honest learning partner. *Immunity to Change* is written in three sections to help readers first understand the developmental theory behind what prevents people from changing, the second offers examples of people and teams who overcame their joint immunities to change, and the third provides a guided opportunity for readers to put the process to work for themselves.

In addition to their roles as educators at Harvard University, Kegan and Lahey are consultants on creating change to both individuals and organizations across a broad array of industries, cultures, and countries. Their work as consultants has brought them significant insights into the ways and reasons that people commit to change. In this book, the authors use their background in developmental theory

*“Through their psychosocial development lens, the authors provide a unique response to the inability to change and provide group solutions through both individual and group developmental growth.”*

to illuminate the reasons why individuals and organizations fail to move past making resolutions to change into lasting behavior changes. Though their work as consultants, they gathered the many rich examples featured in this book.

Through their psychosocial development lens, the authors provide a unique response to the inability to change and provide group solutions through both individual and group developmental growth. The authors believe that to meet the complex, multi-layer challenges facing individuals and organizations today, individuals must develop a more complex meaning making capacity and continually

analyze their individual and collective development for areas of potential growth. The dilemma created by the need for this capacity is that the significant personal and organizational change needed to create it can no longer be brought about by technical or behavioral changes we are so attuned to making in response to our challenges. The type of change needed to succeed in today’s environment requires is adaptive. In order to create adaptive change, people and organizations must transform their behavior as well as their understanding of themselves and the issue. The authors claim that in order to create this adaptive change, people and organizations must uncover the commitments they hold as well as the commitments that hold them.

In order to analyze individual or collective opportunities for developmental growth, the authors present an immunity map, which is a four-column map designed to uncover the unknown commitments held by an individual or group that prevent them from fulfilling a sincere commitment to change. These unknown commitments are called competing commitments as they are in direct conflict with the behavior the individual or group wishes to change. One of the authors’ clients refers to this phenomenon as having “...one foot on the gas and one foot on the brake” (Kegan and Lahey, 2009, p. 39). The authors call this notion of competing commitments that prevent progress toward a change goal an immunity to change. Further, Kegan and Lahey go on to explain that these competing commitments are often a result of an unknown and rarely discovered assumption held by an individual or group. The authors believe these assumptions are related to the development of individuals and that each person within a group must test their assumptions in order to overturn those that are inaccurate. While individuals work toward individual developmental growth, the group also works to overturn assumptions held collectively. Together, the combined individual and collective developmental growth allows groups to see their challenges in new and more complex ways, in turn allowing them to create solutions they were previously unable to produce.



Throughout the book, especially in Part Two, the authors provide detailed examples of individual and group immunity maps and the assumption testing strategies they employed to overcome their immunity to change. These examples highlight the many challenges faced by leaders and leadership teams today as a result of personal and group development. Part Three of *Immunity to Change* offers an opportunity for readers to create their own immunity maps and discover what is holding them back from making that change they have repeatedly committed to making with little success. This part also provides suggested tools necessary to overcome an immunity to change, such as a learning partner. While the authors suggest finding a trusted partner with whom to work through your immunity map, this book can also provide the needed support throughout the process.

### **Implications for Practice**

*Immunity to Change* offers individuals and teams a unique and rare opportunity to dig deep and find unknown areas for their own development. By promoting individual and collective developmental growth, teams can create change and become more effective while helping individuals do the same. Together, individual and team changes can create significant opportunities for organizations to address challenges in new and creative ways.

As suggested by the authors, the information in this book offers teams a common language to discuss previously unknown or unspoken commitments; the immunity maps also provide meaningful opportunities for all members of a team to discover the ways in which they contribute

to their team's immunity to change. As discussed in one example, the authors' techniques can be quickly effective for teams where trust among members is high, or offers an opportunity to develop the trust in teams where there is little. While the work presented in this book offers the opportunity to create significantly more effective teams, if colleagues do not develop a trust for their team's leadership, the tools and resources in this book will have little effect on the team goal.

Finally, for individuals and teams alike, *Immunity to Change* offers an opportunity to be your own learning partner on a developmental journey by using tools such as guided reflections, and analysis of carefully planned tests of assumptions. As these immunity maps typically bring up quite personal developmental opportunities, this book provides individuals with a great opportunity to explore them in a safe manner.

The book itself is also a great tool for educators and leaders across all organizations to make continual team and personal learning and development a priority. This book will be especially helpful to those responsible for the development of staff, such as the leader of a department, as well as those responsible for team development. The lessons in this book will work best when revisited as a group over an extended period of time; atmospheres such as staff retreats would provide an excellent environment for creating a group immunity map.

*“Throughout the book, especially in Part Two, the authors provide detailed examples of individual and group immunity maps and the assumption testing strategies they employed to overcome their immunity to change.”*

### **Recommendation**

In conclusion, this book is a practical tool to help create effective team change and to build a learning culture within organizations. Whether working with colleagues, students, or yourself, this book is an essential read for leadership educators. Now ask yourself what you would like to change and grab a copy of this book to find out how to make it happen.

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# Scholarship and Research Updates

## *Immersion Experiences*

*Kristan Cilente*

Personal experiences and passions often drive research interests. I am no exception. As a leadership educator, I have planned and implemented numerous retreats, workshops, trainings, courses, and conferences. I have also had the opportunity to serve as a Leader-Shape cluster and lead facilitator and coordinated the Alternative Spring Break (ASB) program at the University of Maryland. I observed that while retreats, workshops, trainings, courses, and conferences are wonderful pedagogical techniques, there seemed to be something magical when students participated in something like LeaderShape or ASB. As a result, I began to wonder why students seemed so transformed after a six or seven day experience. Were these programs magical? What was contributing to student's learning differently through ASB than through a leadership workshop?

From that wonder came a deep passion for exploring immersion experiences, particularly short-term immersions such as Leader-Shape or ASB, as pedagogy for leadership education. I quickly realized a gap in research and practice. The Leader-Shape Institute will celebrate its 25th anniversary in 2011 and has over 30,000 alumni including Larry Page of Google fame. I-LEAD celebrated its 16th anniversary this year, with 11 of those as a stand-alone week-long summer Institute. According to Break Away ([alternativebreaks.org](http://alternativebreaks.org)), a national organization committed to assisting campuses and communities create and implement high-quality alternative break programs that was founded in 1991, more than 36,000 students participated in alternative breaks in the spring 2006. Those numbers continue to grow. Despite the longevity and high participation in these programs, little empirical research has been done to demonstrate student learning or to better understand the impact of such programs on the development of leadership capacities.

### *Service*

In contrast, the benefits of participation in community service and service-learning are well documented (e.g. Astin & Sax, 1998; Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999; Butin, 2005; Einfield & Collins, 2008; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Jacoby, 1996; Jones & Abes 2003, 2004; Jones & Hill, 2001). The landmark work of Eyler and Giles (1999) documents the learning outcomes associated with service-learning that include: personal and interpersonal development; understanding and applying knowledge; engagement, curiosity, and reflective practice; critical thinking; perspective transformation; and citizenship. The connection of citizenship to service participation was well researched by Astin and associates (Astin & Sax, 1998; Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999; Sax & Astin, 1998). The value of community service participation extends beyond campus and the student. Policy encouraging community service, particularly the Serve America Act (Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, 2009), federally-funded programs such as America Reads\* America Counts, Americorps, and the Peace Corps, and programs like Teach for America and City Year contribute to the increased participation and growth of service-related programs on campus. Further, the increased interest in service-learning participation on campus has led researchers to explore predictors of involvement in such programs (Cruce & Moore, 2007; Gasiorski, 2009).

Despite the vast amount of research arguing for the value service-learning, not all outcomes associated with participation in community service are positive. Jones (2002) and Jones, Gilbride-Brown, and Gasiorski (2005) explored the "underside" of service-learning and some of the unintended consequences that can occur for students and in community organizations. Morton's (1995) paradigms of serv-

ice introduced three ways of thinking about service-learning participation – charity, project, and change. Each paradigm could occur at the thin or thick level depending upon the level of knowledge of root causes and the relationship of those engaged in service. His model distinguishes between types of service-learning participation, with a nod to both positive and negative outcomes. McGovern's (1998) experience in Africa shed light on the flip side of "doing good." She highlighted the tensions associated with service-learning by her writing on the effect of boycotting ivory, which resulted in less food for those who lived on elephant. In a critical approach to service-learning, Butin (2005) underscores the political nature of service-learning and the sometimes unintended consequences of involvement.

Given the heightened attention to service-learning research over the past 15 years, researchers examined participation in various forms; curricular, co-curricular, and through alternative spring break (ASB) programs. Much of the early research on ASB participation was really to examine the role of service-learning, rather than understanding the ASB-specific role in contributing to various learning outcomes (Kiely, 2004; 2005; Parker & Dautoff, 2007; Porter & Monard, 2001; Rhoads, 1997; Rhoads & Neururer, 1998).

### *Alternative Spring Break (ASB)*

While "strong direct service" is one of Break Away's (n.d.) eight components of a quality alternative break, there are many other aspects to ASB participation that could contribute to outcomes in addition to service-learning. Research on ASB, in particular, is limited, recent, and often, unpublished. Cooper (2002) and McElhaney (1998) have both conducted dissertation research on alternative spring break participation and Hui's (2009) thesis addressed participant meaning-

making. Further, Jones, Rowan-Kenyon, Cilente, Hui, and Niehaus (in press) used a multi-site case study to better understand the experiences of students who participate in ASB. A common thread of research on ASB is the qualitative nature of the research.

There is debate as to how and when ASB programs began, with some attributing the beginning to Vanderbilt in the early 1990s and others hesitant to identify a specific campus (Bohn, 2009; Break Away, n.d.; McElhaney, 1998). Regardless of how ASB began, there is much consensus on the growth following Hurricane Katrina in 2005 (Break Away, n.d.; Luft, 2008; Santich, 2010). Better understanding the context, learning, and leadership associated with ASB participation will aid educators as programs continue to grow and funding decreases.

One of first researchers to study ASB was McElhaney (1998) who examined participation for her dissertation research. While McElhaney's focus was actually on the effects of service-learning participation, her use of ASB participants as her sample yielded possible outcomes related to their participation. Cooper (2002) also conducted his dissertation research using ASB participants in his sample, though his research interest was in comparing participants to peers who engaged in service through Alpha Phi Omega (APO) and those who participated in academic service-learning. His findings showed that ASB and APO participants scored higher on the social responsibility inventory than those who participated in academic service-learning.

Boyle-Baise and Langford (2004) conducted a case study of ASB participants in a unique, six-week course. The eight participants spent three weeks in class preparing for ASB, one week serving at a camp for low-income, urban youth, and two weeks in class following the program. The course involved assigned readings, reflection, and a capstone, social action paper. The findings of the study showed that students learned from both personal experiences and their community and were motivated to serve.

To capitalize on the increased interest in ASB, the National Parks Service (NPS) developed a program called "Park Break." The program was designed to address a concern in regard to the projected number of NPS staff who will retire in the near future and to collaborate with academic institutions and agencies. Park Break grounds its philosophy in experiential education pedagogy (Bustam, Moorman, van Riper, Stehn, and McCown, 2009). Another study that examined ASB as a mechanism to implement pedagogy was Calderon's (2004) attempt to use an ASB trip with the United Farm Works as part of a course on participatory research. The author was able to integrate critical pedagogy as a "viable alternative to the traditional 'banking' concept of knowledge that connects abstract theoretical concepts to lived experience and community engagement" (p. 90).

Motivations for service participation are often hard to determine, but in a study of ASB participants, Hynes and Nykiel (2004) used a framework from psychology literature to understand why students participated in Habitat for Humanity ASB program. Comparing a student's motivation for participation measured through the Volunteer Function Inventory,

which was originally developed by Clary, Snyder, Ridge, Copeland, Stukas, Haugen, and Miene (1998) the researchers found that the greater congruence between a student's expectation and their experience, the more satisfied they reported to be. Though the sample was quite small (N=23) for the number of items on the questionnaire, the authors do provide an interesting perspective on understanding students' motives for participating in programs.

Daldeniz and Hampton (2010) and Kelner and Sanders (2009) examine ASB within the context of tourism. Daldeniz and Hampton compared long-term volunteers who traveled for a social cause with those who worked their way through travel. They compare their research interest with the rise of ASB in the United States. They state, "in the US, it can also witness the development of the 'alternative' spring break with organisations and companies offering volunteering projects abroad as an alternative to the traditional party-centred spring break [sic]" (p. 4). Kelner and Sanders, however, were interested in using tourism as a pedagogy to teach about sociology. They used the concepts of gaze, group, and culture to think about tourism and found that including community-building exercises often found in ASB programs, such as icebreakers, to be important in teaching their course. In another study of pedagogy, Battistoni, Longo, and Jayanandhan (2009) used immersions to understand ways in which students could learn about global issues. The authors find that local immersion experiences can replicate the outcomes often associated with global immersions.

Yet another perspective on ASB is offered by Luft (2008), who used a program that hosted many ASB volunteers in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina in 2006 as a case study for understanding the intersection of racism and sexism. Luft's research exposed sexual assaults that occurred during ASB that March and she analyzed the consequence of the those assaults on the balance of power in an area devastated by nature through a racial lens, a gender lens, and the intersection of those lenses. Her findings illumi-

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nate the complexities of ASB participation and some of the unintended consequences of service immersions.

### **LeaderShape and I-LEAD**

If research on ASB is limited, empirical research on participation as such programs as The LeaderShape Institute and I-LEAD is non-existent. Dial (2006) conducted a master's thesis on the role of LeaderShape in shaping students' perceptions of leadership and their leadership development. Other research typically uses students who have participated in LeaderShape as a comparative sample, but interest is concerned with leadership in general as opposed to the experience in particular (need cites). While I-LEAD and LeaderShape both conduct program assessments and have access to data about student participation, very little is published in regard to the findings.

ASB, LeaderShape, I-LEAD, and other similar types of programs provide rich experiences for participants, but little is known about the empirical role of the participation in such programs. There are several dissertations forthcoming studying the experience of ASB participations (Cilente, in progress; Niehaus, in progress) and a longitudinal follow-up by Jones, Robbins, and LePeau (in press), however, there is still a gap in understanding immersion experiences. More research on LeaderShape, I-LEAD, and other leadership immersion programs would provide insight into and support for the anecdotal positive feedback given about participation in such experiences. ■

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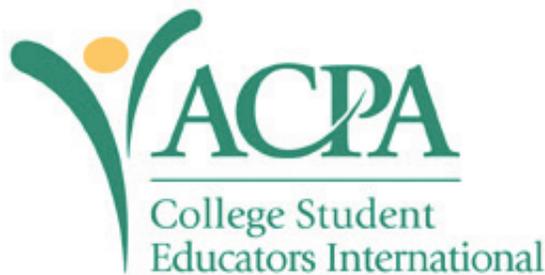
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## ACPA – College Student Educators International Pre-Conference Workshop

*The Be More Leadership Path Starts with Learning*

March 27, 2011 • 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

*In association with the Commission for Student Involvement*

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