

The Future of Graduate Leadership Education: An Exploration of Curriculum and Faculty Support to Meet the Needs of a Complex Society

Abstract

Within this panel, graduate leadership educators and administrators explore the future of graduate and professional leadership education. Panelists bring perspectives on how programs can best meet the needs of a complex society, integrate counter-narratives into leadership curriculum, and consider how to support leadership faculty experiencing high levels of burnout. Emerging themes from focus groups of leadership educators conducted in the fall of 2021 will also be shared. As contributors to an upcoming issue of *New Directions for Student Leadership* focused on the future of graduate and professional leadership education, panelists have been exploring unique opportunities within the field and are eager for a robust discussion of how we can together create a positive future for the field. This conversation, grounded in relevant literature, will provide tangible opportunities for attendees to improve their own programs and practices within leadership education.

Session Learning/Participant Objectives

Within this session, program participants will:

- Recognize how wicked problems and systems thinking are transforming leadership education.
- Explore inclusive leadership styles and theories, as well as opportunities for integration in graduate and professional leadership education.
- Uncover hidden facets within the Leadership Educator's career that can lead to significant burnout.

Panelists

Panel Chair/Moderator:

- Michael C. Gleason, PhD: Director/Associate Professor of Leadership; Irving R. Burling Distinguished Professor in Leadership; Wartburg College

Panelists:

- Eric K. Kaufman, PhD: Professor & Associate Head; Department of Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education; Virginia Tech
- James R. Martin Jr., PhD: Associate Professor; Creighton University
- Jennifer Moss Breen, PhD: Associate Professor; Creighton University
- Sydney D. Richardson, PhD: Department Chair/Associate Professor of Leadership Studies and Adult Education; North Carolina A&T State University

Introduction

Professional fields are exploring how and when to develop leaders, along with the organizational impact of this development (Grocock, 2020; Rybakova et al., 2020; Stoller, 2020). While

research has begun looking at graduate and professional leadership programs (Stork et al., 2015; Winton et al., 2018), a need for a comprehensive review of leadership programs exists. While Guthrie et al. (2018) and Guthrie et al. (2019) have completed analysis of the International Leadership Association Directory, the studies themselves have identified that information on programs “remains fairly inaccessible” (Guthrie et al., 2018, p. 3).

Recent literature has highlighted the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) environment in which leaders lead (Bombaro et al., 2019; Edmonstone et al., 2019; Grint, 2020; Winton et al., 2018). There is a need to study the essential leadership models, practices, approaches, and tenets to move society beyond 2022.

This panel, comprised of faculty and administrators within the graduate leadership education field, will have a dynamic conversation around how:

- Graduate leadership programs can best meet the changing needs of a complex society.
- Counter-narratives can be embedded and explored within leadership curriculum.
- Burnout can be identified within faculty members, and support can be provided to faculty.

Additionally, the panel shares insights emerging out of focus groups facilitated in the fall of 2021 focused on the future of graduate and professional leadership education. All panelists are contributing authors to an edition of *New Directions for Student Leadership* to be released late fall of 2022. Their work in this area will situate them well for a dynamic conversation on this topic as well as how we can work together within the field to develop the most effective graduate and professional leadership programs.

Background

Graduate and Leadership Education to Meet Society’s Needs

Graduate leadership education remains an emerging field and is quickly evolving. The evolution is driven in part by societal demand for leaders prepared to address current challenges.

According to national surveys, less than one-third of Americans believe leaders in the United States are effective, and more than half believe the issue has become worse in the last 20 years (Shollen & Gagnon, 2019). While many express healthy skepticism of the heroic approaches to leadership (Crosby & Bryson, 2017), recent evidence suggests key opportunities in the collective dimensions of leadership (Ospina et al., 2020).

In our rapidly changing world, we need leaders with interdisciplinary skills to solve complex societal issues on local, national, and international levels (Bear & Skorton, 2019). One response to the wicked challenges is the rise of the eco-leadership discourse (Western, 2020), which aligns with a systems thinking approach to education (Arnold & Wade, 2015; Laszlo, 2012). As a way of embracing this meta-leadership position, graduate leadership education programs can promote a leadership-as-practice (L-A-P) approach, enabling graduates to distribute leadership more widely and enhance an adaptive culture (Raelin, 2021).

Counter-Narratives in Leadership Curriculum

Leadership education lessons, while diversifying, remain mostly aligned to former majority lessons about leadership within organizations. Unfortunately, this omits a large population of those using leadership in alternative ways (women, POC, non-binary, racial minorities, etc.). Counter-narratives are often not included in today's leadership education. For example, Community Cultural Wealth theory states that people bring their upbringing, heritage lessons, and familial rules into different situations (Samuelson & Litzler, 2016), which influence one's perspective (Fernandez et. al., 2020). As such, inclusion of counter narratives is an important element in leader development.

Self-development within self-leadership recognizes the strength of a leader who invests in their own development before focusing on an organization or group (Bailey et. al., 2018; Reichard, et. al., 2017). Another leadership style that is gaining recognition is Indigenous Cultural Mindset (ICM). Looking at the work of tribal leaders, especially women tribal leaders, along with minority groups within the U.S., interconnectedness through ICM means prioritizing the group over the individual (Gambrell, 2018) and could work in various organizational and group settings.

Faculty Burnout

Burnout has been a recognized problem for human beings for some time (Nagoski & Nagoski, 2019). Unsurprisingly, this phenomenon affects faculty too; approximately one-third of faculty reported feelings of burnout in a survey conducted prior to the pandemic (Alves, de Fatima Oliveira & da Silva Paro, 2019). This malady has accelerated during the pandemic, with most faculty reporting stress, exhaustion, and mental health concerns (McMurtrie, 2020). Burnout is defined as “a special type of work-related stress—a state of physical or emotional exhaustion that involves a sense of reduced accomplishment and loss of personal identity” (Mayo Clinic, 2021, para 1).

In academia, increasing teaching and service workloads and the pressures of seeking promotion and tenure all contribute to burnout. For contingent faculty, the risks are higher: staying employed. The pandemic has added new levels of stress for many. Some faced the transition to online or blended learning while others faced the enhanced isolation of working mostly or exclusively from home. These have particularly affected parents and people of color. The unseen workload of the leadership educator is also a major contributor to burnout.

Description

This panel is facilitated by one of the editors of the upcoming edition of *New Directions for Student Leadership* focused on graduate and professional leadership education. The session is structured to address the issues explored in the background section and focus on future efforts to address these issues. We anticipate the conversation to follow the outline below, which allows for individuals to share their expertise and for a culmination of the conversation to include a synthesis of these ideas and findings, as well as implications for the field.

- 1) Moderator and panel introductions (5 min) – professional affiliations and research interest within graduate and professional leadership education
- 2) High level overview of the need for conversations and research on the future of graduate and leadership education (5 min) – Jennifer Moss Breen and Michael Gleason
- 3) Leadership education to address wicked problems – primarily Eric Kaufman with contributions of all (15 min). Prompts for conversation include:
 - a. How are your leadership education programs changing in response to the increased emergence or attention to wicked problems?
 - b. What evidence do you see of graduate leadership education evolving relative to societal priorities and shifts in leadership discourses?
 - c. How might the eco-leadership discourse and leadership-as-practice (L-A-P) transform graduate leadership education outcomes?
- 4) Utilizing counter-narratives within the curriculum – primarily Sydney D. Richardson and Jennifer Moss-Breen, but with contributions of all (15 min). Prompts for conversation include:
 - a. How can we introduce leadership theories and styles that are based on different cultures?
 - b. In what ways do multicultural or cross-cultural leadership styles or theories influence leadership education?
- 5) Identify and addressing faculty burnout – primarily Jim Martin, but with contributions of all (15 min). Prompts for conversation include:
 - a. How do we identify signs of burnout within our colleagues?
 - b. What can we do to help our faculty colleagues mitigate these deleterious effects?
- 6) Emergent focus group themes of concern and opportunity for the future of graduate and professional leadership education – Michael Gleason and Jennifer Moss Breen (15 min). Prompts for conversation include:
 - a. Emerging themes drawn from focus groups of faculty/administrators.
 - b. How these themes guide future priorities for the field of graduate and professional leadership education.
- 7) Synthesis of ideas and future steps – all (20 minutes)
 - a. What are the most imperative priorities for our field?
 - b. How do we advance our conversation about the future of graduate and professional leadership education?

Foreseeable Implications

By drawing together leadership educators through this panel discussion, we anticipate three primary implications. The first is we anticipate common language around emerging curricular areas that are essential to leadership education will emerge. Second, a community of leadership educators vested in advancing leadership education, especially in graduate and professional programs can be formed. And third, leadership education and leadership educators will collectively redefine the field in service to students as well as the broader society as today's wicked problems demand.

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