

# Building Capacity through Student Leadership Development and Practices



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## OVERVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to identify and discuss student focused capacity building programs that develop leadership skills. Research has provided evidence that students develop leadership skills through a variety of activities and experiences (Andrews & Crowther, 2006; Astin, 1985, 1993; Carter, Bennetts, & Carter, 2003; Crowther, Hann & McMaster, 2001; Logue, Hutchens, & Hector, 2005; McMahon & Bramhall, 2004; Mitra, 2005; Posner, 2004; Roach, 1999). The concept of leadership has changed over the past several decades to be more process and service-oriented and systems-focused. Relationships and collaboration matter more than just being a member of an organization or association. Interest in student leadership programs may be due to a renewed interest in cultivating citizenship within our students and encouraging individuals to take on leadership roles. Leadership development programs and research have primarily acknowledged adult perspectives and not student viewpoints. Although student leadership programs are normally populated by students interested in enhancing their skills, there is still a need for extended leadership development at all levels of students within the higher education setting. The need to highlight and reinforce best practices continues in the field of higher education. Doing so will ensure environments are created that are engaging and rich for students and that will allow them to prepare for leadership roles in the future.

## INTRODUCTION

Developing leaders is a primary tenant and focus in the field of higher education. Leadership development for students is an anticipated outcome for educational institutions and can be found in institutional missions and values. Student focused curriculum will most likely include leadership development concepts. Student leadership traits and characteristics can be developed or strengthened and can be cultivated in higher education institutional programs. There continues to be a research interest in student leadership in schools and community settings. Dempster and Lizzio (2007) investigated what younger individuals believed leadership was and why it was important. The interest in student leadership may be on the rise

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since there is a perceived shortage of individuals willing to take on leadership roles. There has been a decline of potential leaders in educational areas (Gannon, 2001; Gronn, 2007; MacBeath, 2006). In fields such as education, psychology, nursing, and pharmacy, professionalism refers to the incorporation of coursework, experiences, research, teaching, and professional development. A way to effectively enhance and deepen these experiences is through developing a student's leadership skills. Kois, King, LaDuke, and Cook (2016) suggested recommendations for cultivating student leadership in professional psychology programs through mentorship, graduate training programs, enhancing diversity in leadership opportunities, and using a range of settings for student leadership experiences.

Membership in educational associations has also experienced a decline and organizations are being reshaped by powerful economic trends. Over the past 100 years, membership in an association has been a tradition as individuals join to support the mission, values, and efforts of the organization. Not all associations are facing a reduction in membership. Today, *Facebook* has over a billion members and is the world's largest association and there is no cost to become a member (Kahan, 2013). Professional membership may be morphing into separate engaged actions in which individuals participate based on intentions and collective behaviors such as negotiating with policy makers, attending a live event, or tweeting en masse (Kahan, 2013).

General civic participation and community leadership has also been on the decline and are topics of investigation especially since the United States' democracy relies on individuals making voluntary contributions. Gannon (2001) reported that voter turnout, public meeting attendance, community involvement, trust in the government, and participation in parent-teacher organizations have decreased in numbers over the past couple of decades. Therefore, the resurgence in student leadership programs may be a call for renewing interest in citizenship duties and encouraging individuals to become more active in leadership roles.

Civic participation within the community has been categorized as being loyal to organizations or institutions and joining political parties; however, there have been changes as to what constitutes community involvement based on younger adult's individualism and self-interests. Millennials, or those born between the early 1980's to the early 2000's, have become less attached to political and religious affiliations as well as more distrustful of people and less inclined to marry (Pew Research Center, 2014). This group of young adults have been instrumental in using digital platforms to connect and construct personal networks through the use of the internet, mobile technology, and social media. Technology has been a constant in these digital natives' lives and although they are highly networked with their friends, they are detached from institutions and generally describe themselves as political independents (Pew Research Center, 2014). This group of transitional individuals are also the most racially diverse generation in American history as there has been an increase of Hispanic and Asian immigrants over these past several decades. According to the Pew Research Center, 43% of millennial adults are non-white and half of the newborns in America are non-white. It was estimated that non-whites will be the majority United States population around the year 2043. The racial identities of the Millennials may be a key factor in explaining this group's political liberalism. The low levels of social trust may be a result of racial diversity. The Pew Research Center reported that minorities and low-income adults had lower levels of social trust than other groups as the vulnerable or disadvantaged may find it riskier to trust and then deal with repercussions that may follow. One third of the Millennials (ages 26 to 33) have a four-year degree which makes them the best-educated group of young adults (Pew Research Center, 2014). Educational attainment has been correlated with increased economic success as those who do not further their education beyond high school will encounter lower wages and higher unemployment. The development of student leaders throughout higher education institutions has become a strategic imperative (Hill, 2005).

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