Utilizing Co-Curricular Programs to Develop Student Civic Engagement and Leadership

Osama A. Marzouk, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Virginia, UNITED STATES

Abstract: Leadership can be defined as “caring about people and working toward completing a mission”. Consequently, there is a strong relationship between leadership and civic engagement (or commitment to and engagement with the community). Part of the mission of the university or college should be to develop the students’ leadership skills and their feeling of commitment toward the community (whether local or global, nearby or remote) and the nation at a large scale. In this study, I present seven co-curricular programs that were established and are being offered at Virginia Tech (a public land-grant American university) for harnessing these two issues (civic engagement, and leadership) among college students at their undergraduate and graduate studies. As a participant, observer, or facilitator; I provide comments and suggestions about the effectiveness and progress of these programs, and the reaction of the participating students to these them. The study aims at presenting these programs as good candidates for colleges and universities, worldwide, that are in the process of selecting, designing, or adopting programs to develop student civic engagement and leadership.

Keywords: College Students, Community, Civic Engagement, Commitment, Responsibility, Leadership

Introduction

FOR YEARS AND years, universities have been conceived as academic institutions whose mission is merely focused on teaching curricula of subjects and granting relevant degrees. It is true that there are, fortunately, many cases where this is not true, and we see strong partnership between the university and local or even remote or large-scale communities. In these cases, the knowledge and academic scholarship extend beyond the bounds of the campus and reach members of the community directly and indirectly. Also, several colleges and universities now pay attention to the importance of developing leadership skills of their students, which is becoming a common requirement in entry-level jobs.

The number of these effective-partnership cases is continuously increasing with parallel increase in the research studies, conferences, and initiatives that are devoted to address the need for engaged scholarship, useful partnership between the university and the community, and stronger spirit of commitment to the community among the students and graduates (Baker, 2001; Maurrasse, 2001; Bringle and Hatcher, 2002; Colby et al., 2003; Bruckhardt et al., 2004; Bloomfield, 2005; Butin, 2006; Creighton, 2006 and 2008; McIlrath and Labhrainn, 2007; Emmanuel, 2008; Annual University-Community Partnership Conference; Community-University Exposition –

Cuexpo). As an indication of the increasing emphasis on the university’s duty regarding partnership with the community, the Carnegie Foundation¹ has introduced in December 2006 a new elective classification based on community engagement (reflected in the collaboration between the college or university from one side and the local or global community from the other side, which yields bidirectional transfer of knowledge, expertise, and resources).

Baker (2001) chose Southeastern University (a private, non-profit, American university in Washington, D.C.) to conduct a qualitative case study that described how university-community engagement scholarship is valued and evaluated, especially in terms of the promotion and tenure process at the college level. The study also examined useful criteria for judging engagement scholarship. Through interviews with faculty and department heads and administrators at Southeastern University (especially in the College of Education), a review of university documents about the promotion and tenure process, and an examination of dossier comment forms; a model of engagement scholarship and a model for promoting engagement within a university setting were proposed.

Colby et al. (2003) examined the current role of higher education in the U.S., and provided a vision of how it should be in order to prepare undergraduate students for effective citizenship. This book supports

¹ The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching is an independent policy and research center that provides, among other activities, classifications of higher-education institutions in the U.S.

the opinion that while many colleges and universities emphasize the importance of preparing committed and socially responsible graduates, most of them still do not take serious actions toward implementing this. It was admitted that it is not easy for these colleges and universities to address this issue and adapt themselves to improve the quality of their graduates. However, several approaches and steps to overcome the expected challenges and difficulties were proposed.

In contrast to the book of Colby et al. (2003) that focused on undergraduate students, Bloomfield (2005) dedicated a short, yet instructive, study to graduate students. However, they both agree on the significance of student civic engagement and that it is not yet addressed sufficiently by higher-education institutions. Bloomfield defines civic engagement simply as “[c]onnection with the public”. The study asserts that higher education is more and more conceived by the public as “private good”, and the academic research is viewed by large segments of the population as either irrelevant or designed to enrich large corporations. Consequently, the university is in danger of losing public support. The study made four suggestions to the deans of graduate schools in order to foster civic engagement. However, graduate students (who were described as “... [desire] to make more connections between their scholarship and the real world.”) and their organizations and student bodies were not clearly present in these suggestions. I feel that they can also play an important role in the second suggestion (convincing the administrators that civic engagement is very important for continued support of research universities) and the third one (inviting community and business leaders to campus).

Creighton (2008) followed up on a Ph.D. action research (2006), and discussed three community partner indicators. These indicators are usefulness of service-learning, relevance of research, and equitable treatment. The study presented several descriptors for the effectiveness and ineffectiveness in implementing each of these indicators. One of the effectiveness descriptors for useful service-learning is to have an organized system for instructing students about the service and for coordinating effective placement in cooperation with community partner. Another descriptor is that the students be hired to become employees of the community partner. Both descriptors are present in the Service-Learning Center at Virginia Tech, which is to be examined here. The study gives a serious warning that civic engagement and service-learning programs could be threatened if the dissatisfaction of the community partners increased. It also points out that higher education needs to improve the relevance and applicability of its research to widespread community issues.

Similarly, more studies started to pay attention and to urge on the colleges and universities to do so regarding their responsibility to enable students to acquire leadership and management skills and experience, regardless of their academic major (Kezar and Moriarty, 2000; Cress et al., 2001; Shertzer and Schuh, 2004; Posner, 2004; National Academy of Engineering, 2005; Dugan, 2006; Havlik, 2006; Garger and Jacques, 2008). Leadership programs help students improve their academic achievement and result in higher retention rates (Strifflino and Saunders, 1989). These programs also allow students to gain necessary leadership skills (Zimmerman-Oster and Burkardt, 1999), including teamwork and self-awareness (Outcalt et al., 2001).

In the last decade, many universities have revisited and amended their missions and incorporated internal changes to strengthen the connection between their educational programs and the community and national needs, especially by establishing new programs or modifying existing ones. There are two students-focused themes that have benefited from this trend, which are civic engagement and leadership. Proper attention to these components of higher education is important in order to raise the level of responsibility that students and graduates feel toward the community, and to develop sufficient leadership skills among students. This does not only impact the students, who will gain helpful skills and feel more involved in the community; it also enhances the public image of the university and directly affects the community, which will benefit more from the students during and after their college study.

There are two related issues that should be examined carefully in order to develop effective programs targeting students' civic engagement and leadership. The first is the perception of these themes by the college students, especially at their early stage in college. The second is what the university should provide to the students in order to promote these themes. I will address these issues here while describing and commenting on some of the ongoing co-curricular programs that have been established at Virginia Tech, one of the leading American universities, that promote civic engagement and leadership among students. Participation in most of these programs is open to both undergraduate and graduate students; some of them are open to faculty and staff members as well. They include seminars, discussion groups, community service, large-scale engagement projects, interactive workshops, simulation games, conferences, and academic courses. I consider here seven example programs; four of which are related to strengthening the feeling of belongingness and commitment to the community, in a general sense (e.g., the small nearby area, the state, the entire nation, or the whole world), among the students and

the importance of being aware of the problems and issues that affect the local community as well as those affecting the entire nation. In other terms, these programs focus on developing students' civic engagement. The other three programs are related to raising students' awareness about leadership and the qualities of a successful leader, helping them to acquire and promote the necessary skills of a leader, allowing them to experience leadership, and provide them with various levels of mentorship. In other terms, these programs focus on developing students' leadership. These selected programs that are examined here are all co-curricular² (although one of them has a curricular component) and thus have fewer formal requirements to enroll and also have more flexible enrollment periods than curricular programs. Some small details of the programs (e.g., exact schedules, fees, and distances) will be given although they might look insignificant; however, they are important to give a complete picture of these programs. Since this study focuses on a particular university in the U.S., some terms (e.g., land-grant university, and professional students) might not be familiar to some readers elsewhere. Thus, appropriate explanations of such terms will be provided as needed.

Virginia Tech: A Model Land-Grant University

The term "land-grant university" refers to a type of higher-education institutions in the United States that had originally received federal benefits in terms of state lands, and had a mission to teach agriculture, military tactics, and the mechanic arts as well as classical studies so that the working classes, who de facto did not have access to higher education, could obtain a liberal, practical education. This type of universities was established through the first Morrill Act (1862). Subsequent legislations have been made to include financial federal support to these universities on annual basis. Currently, there is at least one land-grant institution in each of the fifty states of the U.S. So, being a land-grant university implies a certain level of dedication to community development and outreach to the society. As a result, it is not surprising to see these universities paying special attention to service and civic-engagement programs on their campuses so that students learn the importance of employing the knowledge and skills they gain through their studies in serving and collaborating

with members and organizations of the local and global communities.

In the State of Virginia, there are two land-grant universities. Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (known as Virginia Tech, VTech, and VT) is one of them. It is also a leading research university at the national level. It has about 30,000 students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Virginia Tech is a model university that has taken long and successful steps toward designing, teaching, and implementing engagement and leadership programs for its students. The university motto since 1896 is *Ut Prosim*, which is the Latin translation of *That I May Serve*. This is the first reason I chose some of Virginia Tech programs to be presented here and I will describe and comment on them and their achievements. The second reason is my affiliation with Virginia Tech and my about five-year experience there as a graduate student, an instructor, a participant in scholarly-engagement programs, a leader officer in more than one student organization, and a facilitator for a session at a conference about community partnership; which enabled me to thoroughly examine and participate in the various programs that are presented here, and to observe the reaction of the participants and evaluate the achievement of these programs.

It serves the present study to mention that Virginia Tech has more than one campus, but the main one (about 23,000 undergraduate students and 5,000 graduate and professional³ students) is located in Blacksburg, which is a small town in the southwest part of the State of Virginia. In this paper, the word "campus" will refer to this main campus unless something else is indicated. This small and high-tech town of Blacksburg is surrounded by rural areas. It is a college-town, meaning that many residents are actually students who do not live there permanently. Most of these students leave the town during the summer; although some of them stay and take summer classes. Virginia Tech is the largest university in the State of Virginia.

Civic-Engagement Programs

I chose to start with the civic-engagement programs before the leadership ones since I believe that civic engagement (and what it implies of being concerned about the community and public issues, committed to improving the life and environment of others, and

² Co-curricular programs refer to a wide range of out-of-class, university-sponsored activities and experiences that complement the formal academic curriculum (or in-class courses), contribute to deep personal engagement, and foster student learning, growth and development. These activities include volunteer service projects, internships, workshops, and field trips.

³ In the American (and Canadian) higher education, the term "professional students" refers to students who have completed their undergraduate (bachelor) degree and are pursuing a second degree (called "professional degree") in certain majors, such as law, medicine, business administration, and pharmacy. This is different from many other higher-education systems, where these majors are taught at the undergraduate level similar to other majors.

In this study, professional students will be included in the term "graduate students" if no explicit reference to professional students is made.

actively engaged with members and leaders and other volunteers so that your knowledge and skills are appropriately used to serve and meet the needs of individuals and institutions of the community) is itself a prerequisite of leadership, thus should be addressed first.

Service-Learning Center: Student/Community Interface

Description

Perhaps this should be the first program to be discussed here because of its importance and its connection to many other civic-engagement and service programs coordinated by Virginia Tech, both on campus and off campus. The center is actually an interface between the students or student organizations (that are willing to devote part of their time and effort) and individuals or institutions (such as not-for-profit organizations, schools, and community agencies) across the State of Virginia and outside. Therefore, this center facilitates and organizes the engagement and partnership between the students and the communities from both sides: the students and the communities. It directs the energy and time of the volunteering students (including those performing the community service to fulfill a requirement of an academic course) to projects that are in need for them. The center has a website and an email list-serv (individuals can easily sign up to receive updates on the center and its activities). It is housed at one of the academic buildings at one side of the campus but also has a satellite office at the other side. Therefore, the center and the information about the ongoing projects are easily accessible, both physically and virtually. In addition, the website provides links to the coming conferences about service learning, where students can participate (e.g., the Annual National Service-Learning Conference). The center has received the *2007 President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll - With Distinction*.

Projects

A list of ongoing projects is updated continuously during the semesters (fall "or autumn" and spring). These projects provide community-engagement opportunities for the students at different levels, from very simple tasks that require minimal skills (e.g., collecting donated items, and cleaning highways) to specialized ones that require adequate knowledge about a certain subject and sometimes require short training that is provided by the center (e.g., tutoring,

and providing cultural awareness to refugees coming from African countries). The following is a partial list of the projects in the spring of 2008, with a short description, to familiarize the reader with the activities of the center. The actual list has more projects, longer descriptions, and links to websites of the individual projects, where students can sign up (or contact the service-learning center by email or phone) to participate.

- **Community Literacy Corps:** This is a partnership project with the Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid (local office at Virginia Tech), where students can be hired to serve as reading and math tutors to children in elementary schools⁴ in the neighbor area. The participating tutors are required to attend a day-long orientation at the beginning of the school year, in addition to subsequent training sessions every week.
- **Hometown Industries:** This project allows students to cooperate with citizen groups and non-profit organizations in different local communities. This cooperation aims at meeting the community needs in a variety of areas, such as addressing household needs of low-income individuals, assisting non-profits with collecting donated items and maintenance projects, assisting homebound older adults, and performing community beautification.
- **Pilot Street:** This project is a partnership with Refugee and Immigration Services (RIS), which is a non-profit organization in the State of Virginia that provides help and support to newcomers to the U.S. This project is housed in a rented apartment in a remote city (about 35 miles, 58 km from the campus) where many refugees and immigrants live (mostly from various countries in Africa). This apartment forms a community school for both children and adults of these families with the aim of building English language proficiency, assisting in easy settlement, and introducing them to the new culture.
- **Stroubles Creek Watershed Initiative:** This is an interdisciplinary project led by the Water Resources Research Center (established in 1965 by the U.S. Congress) that monitors the health of one of the creeks, called Stroubles Creek, which runs through the town of Blacksburg (where the main campus of Virginia Tech is located as mentioned before).
- **Virginia Tech Outreach Program to Schools:** This is a partnership project with local schools in the neighbor area, where students serve as mentors,

⁴ The term "elementary school" in the educational systems of the U.S. and Canada refers to the first stage of compulsory education. In other educational systems, the term "primary school" might be used instead. In the U.S., elementary schools are 5-year long with typical students' age of 6-11 years.

technology consultants, and special-subject tutors.

Notices and Comments

The service-learning center is a cornerstone in the process of both education and civic engagement. Students gain new knowledge, experience, and skills through their participation in the projects managed by the center. They become more aware of the community and its needs. Nevertheless, few students deal directly with the center. Rather, officers of the student organizations, especially those organizations with a mission of service, communicate with the center to identify the current service tasks and then communicate them to the other student members of the organization.

As shown so far, the center manages and provides a wide variety of projects to the students, with different levels of time and effort commitment. Some tasks require commuting to another city, whereas others are very local. Some tasks require continuous training, whereas others are elementary. Thus, everyone can find the suitable task that fits his or her schedule and readiness. This is a critical point for successful civic-engagement strategy. Moreover, some tasks are paid positions (this is the only program examined in this study with this feature), which is very useful to students as a source of financial support during the college study.

VT ENGAGE: Early Scholarly Engagement

Description

The VT-ENGAGE is a very recent program (started in October 2007), which is coordinated by a special steering committee that includes faculty, staff, students (undergraduate and graduate), administrators, and community leaders. The program requests that each member of the university (students, faculty, and staff), as well as the alumni, pledges ten hours of service work to any organization or project of his or her choice. Thus, there is no restriction on the type or location of the service. The program has declared a goal of 600,000 service hours (300,000 by the university members and another 300,000 by the alumni) to be performed by the end of the 2007/08 academic year (mid May 2008). It is interesting that the program is open to the families and friends of the university members as well. Therefore, this program (among the programs that are examined this study) has the broadest range of participants. The university (Virginia Tech) has created a permanent website for this program, which explains the program and its goals. The website also provides recent news about the program, volunteering opportunities that

are coming soon, and reflections by some participants. It allows anyone to pledge service hours and update the information of the performed hours as well.

Kickoff Event

Although the website of the program allows for learning many details about it and pledging hours, the university relied on other means to assure that this program is well-announced and advertised on its campus. For this purpose, a kickoff event was arranged on Tuesday, October 16, 2007, and a special flyer was designed and posted in the academic and non-academic buildings. The kickoff event lasted for three hours (4 pm – 7 pm) and took place in the central field of the campus. Many service organizations had booths which illustrated how prospective volunteers can participate in these organizations and what kinds of projects are conducted by them. Additional pledging booths were distributed in the field, where volunteers could pledge their service hours (minimum of ten hours) after they decide which organization or project they are interested in. The pledging included filling a small form with information about the volunteer, the service organization or project, and the number of pledged hours. The volunteer signs the form, and receives an attractive gift pen, which bears the word “VT-ENGAGE” and can produce light. Live and recorded music, free carnival food, and free games helped make the event attractive and successful. It was very nice to see faculty members and university leaders participating with students in this event in a very informal and friendly atmosphere. The kickoff event started with a speech by the Vice Provost for Outreach and International Affairs to introduce this new program.

Progress

- As of November 1, 2007, about 80,000 hours were pledged by the university members.
- On December 1, 2007, this number reached 131,467 hours.
- On January 6, 2008, the number increased to 152,304 hours.
- On July 27, 2008, the number increased to 479,996 hours (327,113 of which were already served).

Although the 2007/08 academic year passed without meeting the declared goal of the program, it noticeably succeeded in giving a strong push to all university members (and even their families and friends) and alumni, and a reminder about their duty in serving and engaging with their communities. This is reflected in the counter of pledged/served hours

on the program's website, which is continuously increasing.

Annual University-Community Partnership Conference

Description

This is another effort made by Virginia Tech to strengthen scholarly engagement and collaboration between the universities, in general, and their communities. This annual conference takes place in the summer (June or July). It is sponsored by multiple units at Virginia Tech, such as the Service-Learning Center, the Community-Campus Partnerships for Health, the Graduate School, and the Office of Multicultural Affairs. The conference is also co-sponsored by the University of Virginia (one of the well-known and ranked universities in the State of Virginia, but not a land-grant university, which is considered to be a peer university of Virginia Tech). While the VT-ENGAGE program addressed engagement and service and attempted to reach a very broad spectrum of participants, the university-community partnership conference is more concerned about the university leaders and the coordinators of service programs. However, graduate students have a role in it (besides attending the sessions and the poster exhibit). For example, they had a special forum in 2007 about how community calls them back to the university so that they can improve their impact on the community. In addition, the conference attracts faculty members, local government staff, and non-profit and nongovernmental leaders.

Unlike all other programs mentioned here, this co-curricular program has a registration fee, which was 249 US dollars for the two-day 2007 conference (equivalent to 169 Euros or 285 Australian dollars, based on exchange rates of January 2008). Participants from all over the U.S. attend the annual conference; they represent universities, colleges, governmental agencies, service centers, and leadership institutes.

Scope and Concerns

In 2006, the third university-community partnership conference addressed the importance of engagement as an inseparable part of the higher-education mission. As a follow up in the fourth conference, which was in July 2007, the main theme was "How do communities define engagement with institutions of higher education?" The conference explored the perspective of community partners about the collaboration between the university and the community, the implications for communities when they choose engagement with higher-education institutions, and

the consequences of the situation when communities call forth their universities.

The conference included practical and interactive workshops, case studies, best practice presentations, and a community partners resource fair. It aimed at providing those who participated in the conference with the necessary tools to start their own partnership experience successfully, after being aware of the pitfalls and peculiar issues that commonly arise during the partnership's development and maintenance.

Some Topics

To give a better idea about the conference and its objectives, a partial list of the titles of the 2007 presentations, sessions, forums, and posters is given below.

- How Our Work in Communities Called Us Back to the University: A Graduate Student Forum
- Achieving Authentic Community-Higher Education Partnerships by Mobilizing a National Network of Experienced Community Partners
- Citizen-Driven Planning and Opportunities for Building a Unique Learning Community of Neighborhood Leaders, Students, and Faculty
- Community Initiated Projects: Successes and Challenges
- Community-Campus Partnership for Health National Network
- Social and Economic Change Through Campus-Community Partnership
- The Young Women Leaders Program: Mentoring and Leadership for College Women and Adolescent Girls
- Listening & Learning from Community Voices
- Reciprocity: Community Agencies and Higher Education in Service-Learning
- Building University-Community Partnership to Support Local Economic and Workforce Development
- Developing Partnership for Environmental Service-Learning

Engagement Projects and Students

The keynote speaker session was followed by a facilitated discussion through Story Circles (the technique was introduced by Donna Porterfield from Roadside Theatre in the State of Virginia), which allowed each team (or discussion circle) to share stories about engagement and service projects, and to reflect on the meaning of true engagement. This part of the conference lasted for two hours and thirty minutes in the afternoon (including a break).

I served as a facilitator of one of these circles, which included faculty and staff members from

Virginia Tech and the University of Virginia. Fortunately, most the members of this circle had participated or were participating formally (as part of their job responsibilities) or informally in coordinating and supervising one or more service projects at the university level. In these service projects, the students (and sometimes the faculty and staff as well) get the chance to volunteer by giving time, effort, or unneeded personal items to members or organizations in the community around the university. What was common in these stories is the strong willingness of the students to participate in these projects, and their high level of dedication to them. In fact, we had an agreement that students who choose to participate in these programs enjoy the involvement and the performance of service (although it can be arduous and time consuming) and do this repeatedly. One of the outcomes of this story circle was the importance of establishing structured channels for students through which they can give to the community in various ways. It is the responsibility of the university to arrange such channels, in cooperation with existing service organizations on campus, in order to maximize the benefit that the communities can get from the students.

Citizen Scholar Engagement (CSE) and Seminar: Civic Engagement at the Graduate Level

Description

This is a very special program, which started recently (in the fall “or autumn” of 2005). Its unique feature is that it is directed to graduate (master and doctoral) and professional students only. Thus, this program realizes the importance of civic engagement as an integral part of the graduate education. As other programs examined in this study, the CSE program is co-curricular. It is primarily recognition of graduate students who have participated or are participating in an experience that demonstrates scholarly engagement, where they utilize their academic knowledge and skills in a real-world setting to benefit individuals, groups, or institutions in the society. The program calls for *public scholarship*, which is defined as “scholarship in service to the community, the state, the nation, and the world”. These experiences can be community-based collaborative projects, leadership training opportunities, or public-oriented (universally or locally) seminars. Participants in the program take the scholarship they gain from curricular studies and from research and apply it as good citizens. Thus they become *Citizen Scholars*. In fact, the goal of this program goes beyond awarding individuals, since introducing these individuals and their civic-engagement actions to

their colleagues motivates the others to behave similarly and to have more appreciation of their role in the society and their capability to utilize their own scholarship to serve and benefit others. Near the end of each semester, a special induction ceremony is held, where the new *Citizen Scholars* are recognized and receive the program certificate. Similar to the Service-Learning Center and VT-ENGAGE, the CSE program provides a list of ongoing projects and opportunities for interesting graduate and professional students in which they can participate and become eligible for the *Citizen Scholar* nomination.

There is a curricular component (although it is optional) of this program, which is a three-credit graduate course: *Citizen Scholar Seminar*. This course is strongly connected with the scope of the CSE program, and can be used to fulfill its requirements (to be a *Citizen Scholar*) as will be discussed later. The course is focused on understanding the value of being a *Citizen Scholar*, elucidating the connection between scholarship and citizenship in contemporary global society, and encouraging engagement in *public scholarship*. The course (one weekly meeting) involves case studies, open discussion, and individual and group ‘proposed’ service project. It should be mentioned here that completing the course by itself does not qualify as fulfillment of the CSE requirements. However, those who enroll in the course explore a variety of CSE case studies and get a chance to collaborate in them. They are also encouraged to develop their own CSE experience during the course and to nominate themselves in order to eventually become new *Citizen Scholars*. In addition, graduate or professional student who perform a project of scholarly engagement to fulfill the *Citizen Scholar* requirements can formalize this service project by enrolling in a “Special Study” or “Independent Study” course option for the duration of the project. With this, these projects can be counted in the student’s plan of study and degree requirements.

Program Requirements

As mentioned before, the program is open to graduate and professional students only. Individuals should be nominated by themselves or by others. There is an application form on the program’s website and a deadline for the nomination (each semester). The program and the application process are advertised through weekly emails from the Graduate School to all graduate and professional students. In general, the nominee should complete at least sixteen hours of *Citizen Scholar* work. However, the specific requirements of each nominee can vary depending on the length and type of his or her individual CSE experience, which can be:

- Service Project: This should be a self-designed, community-based project aimed at helping the student put theory to practice. Students choose a project that will be challenging and educational. Projects will vary greatly in their scope and time-commitment from one student to another.
- *Citizen Scholar* Internships: These internships are offered by the Graduate School at Virginia Tech as collaboration with Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE)⁵. The VCE *Citizen Scholar* interns participate in developing and implementing need-based projects for the State of Virginia.
- *Citizen Scholar* Seminar: This is a three-credit course taught by the Graduate School. As mentioned before, the course addresses topics related to *public scholarship*, leadership, citizenship, and ethics.

Some CSE Experiences

In the fall “or autumn” semester of 2005, which is the first semester of the CSE program, twenty students were recognized as *Citizen Scholars*. In the following semester (spring 2006), this number dropped to nine, which is a typical number in the subsequent semesters. The following is a partial list of what students have done to fulfill the CSE requirements. The common part of these experiences is the noticeable scholarly component, where the graduate students applied their knowledge (as a necessary and instrumental element of the CSE experience) in these projects.

- Created a couple-relationship program for use around the country to help low-income, at-risk couples.
- Served as a board member of the Journal of Undergraduate Materials Research⁶.
- Served as a mentor to a middle-school⁷ teacher in Halifax, State of North Carolina.
- Worked as a research mentor for the Summer Undergraduate Research Program of the National Science Foundation.
- Worked on a project that resulted in a video that targets parents, teachers, guidance counselors,

and college advisors. The title is “Women in Information Technology: Pivotal Transitions from School to Careers.”

- Served as a volunteer teacher in a multicultural school.
- Mentored two high-school⁸ students through two research projects.
- Served as tour coordinator for *Bug Tours!* (a program in the Department of Entomology at Virginia Tech that exposes members of the community to the world of insects).

Graduate versus Undergraduate

There are four general (exceptions are possible of course) differences between graduate students and undergraduate students that should be taken into consideration when designing a civic-engagement at the graduate level:

- Graduate students have a higher level of maturity and global thinking.
- Graduate students have gained deeper knowledge and experience with multidisciplinary research
- Graduate students are more involved with research, thus more involved with the understanding of problems and the discovery of solutions to be applied at all levels (local, national, and international).
- Graduate students are expected, after graduation, to work in positions that make them more influential.

With these differences, programs targeting graduate students can (and should) be about realistic public issues that put them in a problem-solving situation and requesting their proposed solutions. When I recall the time when I was enrolling the *Citizen Scholar* Seminar, I appreciate the design of the course and the efforts of the instructor (or the facilitator to give a better idea about the course’s environment). The core theme of the course was a selected collaboration project between Virginia Tech and an underserved region and population in one of the Caribbean countries. It was a complicated project, as any real-life problem would be, with deficiencies

⁵ Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) is a product of cooperation among local, state, and federal governments in partnership with tens of thousands of citizens. It is an educational outreach program of the two land-grant universities in the State of Virginia (Virginia Tech, and Virginia State University), and a part of the national Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, which is in turn an agency of the United States Department of Agriculture. VCE responds to the needs of individuals, families, groups and organizations with educational programs in three broad areas: agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences, and youth development.

⁶ The Journal of Undergraduate Materials Research (JUMR) is a local scientific periodical published annually by the Department of Materials Science and Engineering at Virginia Tech. It is a student-run endeavor dedicated to research performed by undergraduate students in materials-related fields. The editorial board is currently made up of graduate and undergraduate students from the Department of Materials Science and Engineering and the Department of English.

⁷ The term “middle school” here refers to the second educational stage for school students. This can be called “junior high schools” or “preparatory school” in some other educational systems. In the U.S., middle schools are 3-year long with typical students’ age of 11-14 years.

⁸ The term “high school” here is equivalent to “secondary school” in some educational systems outside the U.S., Canada, and Australia. In the U.S., high schools are 4-year long with typical students’ age of 14-18 years.

in the health and hygiene, environment, education, and economy. Some members from that region were even invited at some of the seminars and we inquired them about that population and the status of these deficiencies and how people are responding to them. With this complexity, finding solutions required short-term and long-term plans, extensive use of one's background and knowledge, seeking knowledge outside one's discipline, and conducting research to check the feasibility of the proposed solutions. Therefore, this experience was invaluable and the gains were significant. When I compare this to the focused and fully-mentored service and civic engagement of undergraduate students, I realize the big influence that graduate students can have on the community and value their effective civic engagement. Fortunately, graduate students in general are motivated and aware of the importance of linking their research and academic knowledge to the community's problems and the public concerns. This what the outcomes from the Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate (CID) survey indicate, where more than 2000 graduate students in six disciplines were asked about the top three items they would like to see improved in their graduate experience. "Learning more about the public issues addressed by the discipline" ranked third of 21 (after "how to formulate and carry out teaching and research programs").

Leadership Programs

Leadership Tech Certificate: Early Leadership Awareness

Description

This is a two-year program targeting undergraduate students at their early college life (usually first and second year)⁹. Therefore, among all programs investigated in this study, this is the longest one. In fact, this is the only one that expands over more than one year. It is coordinated by the Leadership Development Office at the Department of Student Activities. The program involves a diverse list of activities and experiential learning and student involvement, designed to better student leadership development. Upon completing certain requirements, the student receives the Leadership Tech Certificate.

First-year participants (who are usually, but not necessarily, in their first year in college) are called "Emerging Leaders", whereas second-year participants (who are usually, but not necessarily, in their second year in college) are called "Engaging Leaders". Besides the arranged workshops and team meetings, assigned readings, and requested reflections; the students need to attend elective events and

meet service requirements. In order to make it attractive, and in order to allow the participants to know each in informal settings, the program involves several recreational activities, such as a hiking trip and a movie night. The program convenes with an opening reception in the beginning of the fall "or autumn" semester at a dining hall on campus. Near the end of that semester, each student has to submit a form with the chosen events to attend and service hours to perform. In the following (the spring) semester, the program continues and finally concludes with a closing ceremony near the end of the academic year. Participants are encouraged to give individual short (less than five minutes) talks about their gains from the program over the entire year.

Core Values

The goal of Leadership Tech Certificate program is to foster certain values; some of which were in fact taken from the Virginia Tech Strategic Plan. Through the program, the participating students will be encouraged to discuss and reflect upon these values, and develop their own understanding of them. These core values are:

- Self-understanding, self-discipline, and development of one's potential
- Personal integrity
- Taking responsibility and accountability for one's actions
- Critical thinking and reflection
- Mutual respect and understanding of others
- Appreciation and respect for human dignity, diversity and potential
- Dialogue through active listening and civil discourse
- Community service and contributing to society
- A lifelong commitment to learning

Requirements

The participating students need to fulfill certain requirements that depend on whether they are "Emerging Leaders" or "Engaging Leaders". The "Engaging Leaders" need to:

- Attend an opening reception (at the beginning of the fall "or autumn" semester)
- Participate in a team (there are five team meetings per semester)
- Complete a service project (in teams, one project per year)
- Perform community service (ten hours per semester)

⁹ The typical duration for undergraduate degrees in the U.S. is four years.

- Attend campus events (five elective events per semester)
- Read and discuss assigned leadership readings (in teams)
- Plan a leadership journey (which is a plan of one's leadership development during the remainder of the college study)
- Be reflective (by completing two journals per semester about the leadership experiences)

The "Emerging Leaders" have fewer requirements, where they do not need to complete a service project or plan a leadership journey. For the elective events, students can check the Virginia Tech calendar online and choose whatever events to attend (e.g., seminars by invited speakers) as long as they are related to the scope of the program and its core values. This adds flexibility to the program and, more important, lets the student make a decision based on self-understanding of his or her preferences and interests; this is one of the core values of this program.

Leadership Seminar Series: A Series of Lessons

Description

Similar to the Leadership Tech program, the Leadership Seminar Series (LSS) program is sponsored by the Leadership Development Office at the Department of Student Activities. It is open to the university members (undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and staff members). However, after three years of observing and attending the seminars, I found that most of the participants are first- and second-year undergraduate students. To encourage participation, the program provides a certificate that attests the participation of the student if he or she attends seven or more seminars (the number was reduced from nine to seven) in the academic year. These certificates are presented at a special event (University Student Leadership Awards) near the end of the academic year. The LSS program arranges about eleven seminars and workshops over the entire academic year. They address different aspects of leadership, which are not the same every year. The seminars have different formats, such as lectures, interactive activities, discussion groups, panels, and educational movies. Another common component of this program with the Leadership Tech program is the inclusion of fun activities, such as an ice-cream social and a pizza party. The students were careful to attend these activities even during the midterm exams and near the final ones. Most seminars include a guest speaker (or a group of speakers). Each seminar lasts for one hour in the evening (5:30 pm to 6:30 pm), which is convenient to the students since

there are fewer classes at that time than in the morning or the afternoon.

Sample Topics

To give the reader a better view about the LSS program, a list of some of the topics that have been covered recently or have been scheduled to be covered in the near future is given below.

- Diversity 101: My Contributions to a Multicultural Society
- Time Management
- Real World Leadership
- Service Learning
- Leadership for Women
- Spirituality & Leadership
- International Perspective
- Leadership: What Does It Mean to You?
- Finding Your Place Through Student Organizations
- Getting Involved in Your Community
- Is Leadership Really Leadership without Ethics?
- You Can Lead, But Can You Mentor?
- Followership, the Other Side of Leadership
- Gender and Leadership: the Glass Ceiling Revisited
- Making Your Leadership Experience Work for You
- Leadership in a Global Society

We can see that the focus of this program is not limited to 'pure' leadership. It acknowledges what was mentioned earlier that leadership has a strong connection with civic engagement and service, which is reflected in having several seminars about them.

Observations

After about three years of attending and actively participating in the seminars of this program and observing the students reactions and comments, it became clear that incoming college students are in need for such seminars that help them define leadership and understand its implications and the characteristics of a successful leader. The students gained a good amount of knowledge and skills related to leadership; such as time management, the difference between local and global leadership, and the difference between mentorship and leadership. Near the end of the program, the participants became more confident in defining leadership and distinguishing it from mentorship or supervising. They also became aware of several required qualities of the leader (which they overlooked at the beginning of the program), such as integrity, decisiveness, and having good personal relationships with the followers.

Most of the students who attended the program at the beginning continued to attend till the end, which reflects how interesting and beneficial this program was for them. However, this number was very small compared to the total number of students (graduate and undergraduate) at the university. I can interpret this as a result of insufficient advertisement for the program. The website of the program is hard to find, and there are very few flyers about the program posted on campus.

The fact that young undergraduate students dominate the attendance of this program reflects little interest in the subject among the older undergraduate students and the graduate ones. This should be taken into consideration by the organizers of such leadership programs. They should introduce new topics such that they appeal more to this range of students. For example, topics related to leadership in the workplace are of special interest to those students.

World Simulation Game-Workshop: International Leadership

Description

This is another co-curricular program that focuses on leadership. Unlike the Leadership Tech and Leadership Seminar Series programs, the World Simulation game-workshop is a one-time event rather than a series of events. Also, this program attempts to develop leadership skills at the global or international level. The program is sponsored by the Cranwell International Center (which is the main university unit that coordinates events and programs for international students and provides several immigration services to them as well) and the Council of International Student Organizations. This annual event lasts for three hours in the evening. Again, this is a preferred time to minimize conflicts with classes. The program is open to undergraduate and graduate students.

The Workshop

Since the allowed number of participants in the 2007 program (which took place in November) was limited to 150, interested students had to register online before attending the event. The theme was "How Would You Run the World?"

Some of the participants formed teams that represent countries. Other participants represented global companies that provide services, such as education, energy, and water. Each team initially had a certain amount of wealth and natural resources in the form of a certain number of tokens. In order to get a service from a company, the team needs to purchase it using these tokens. Also, they may sell some of their natural resources to the relevant companies, and thus

get additional tokens. The teams can bargain with the companies for better rates. They dynamically need to decide the appropriate amounts of services they should purchase in order to develop their country in the best way. Political, economic, and military international dilemmas were inevitably present in the simulation and the teams needed to deal with them carefully.

Comments

I observed that the majority of the participants were international students and almost no American students attended. Although this can partially be ascribed to the fact that the program announcements indicated that it is organized by the university's International Center and the Council of International Student Organizations, this can also reflect a low level of interest in global leadership and international-level issues among citizen students. The last explanation is supported by another observation from the LSS program, where during one of the seminars "International Perspective" the students (dominated by citizen students) showed weak knowledge of basic facts (such as the geographic location) about countries that are active and influential at the international level. This calls for more attention regarding the participation rate of citizen students in coming workshops and for raising the awareness of international challenges and leadership of multinational institutions. With today's globalization, it becomes more important for a successful leader to be aware of what happens outside the 'geographical or virtual' borders of his or her organization, community, or nation; since the influence of such external and very far events can cross these borders directly or indirectly.

The event was very successful not only in developing global leadership skills, but also in raising the awareness among the participating students about international problems that need collective effort and collaboration among different countries in order to overcome them, such as global warming, limited energy resources, and pollution. At the end, each participant got a T-shirt with a printed logo about the workshop (this was not announced prior to the event and thus was a nice surprise!)

Conclusions and Recommendations

The educational role of the university (which often has been confined for centuries in teaching scientific and liberal-arts curricular programs, evaluating academic performance of students, and granting relevant degrees) is evolving in response to the rapid changes and new challenges in the twenty-first century. The society needs college graduates who are not only equipped with disciplinary and even interdisciplinary

knowledge, but also with appreciation of civic engagement, readiness to effectively serve the community, and sufficient leadership skills and experience. This study visited seven of the co-curricular programs that attempt (using different approaches) to increase the level of civic engagement and harness leadership of college students (undergraduate and graduate) at one of the leading land-grant universities in the U.S., which is Virginia Tech. These programs might be of interest to colleges and universities in other geographical regions that plan to adopt co-curricular programs with similar goals, or to adapt ongoing ones.

As a participant, observer, and facilitator, I described four engagement-focused programs and three leadership-focused programs, and commented on their achievements, their differences, students' responses to them, and some problems (such as a narrow spectrum of participating students) and proposed improvements.

It is the responsibility of the university, in cooperation with existing on-campus service organizations, to arrange service and civic-engagement projects that act as channels that allow students to volunteer their time and effort, or donate unneeded items conveniently and efficiently to the members or institutions in the community that are in need of them.

It is also the responsibility of the university to arrange programs that clarify the meaning of leader-

ship, its implications, and various relevant topics (such as ethics and good leader-followers relationships). These programs are not expected to appeal to all students at all years of college study (undergraduate and graduate). So, several programs are needed with different scopes that fit each group.

Since large-scale leadership requires proper awareness of important international issues, it is very useful to include this aspect in any leadership-development program to ensure proper understanding of current events (and the ability to understand the future ones) at the global and international level, which can eventually influence the local community and the whole nation.

Advertisement for these co-curricular programs (civic engagement or leadership) is important and has direct impact on the attendance and participation rates. For undergraduate students, the inclusion of fun and social activities is an attractive factor and also enables the participants to build friendships that help later when forming teams or having group discussions. For graduate students, who have deeper research experience and more mature thinking, the civic-engagement programs should address realistic problems (in their complex and multi-solution nature). Simple, mentored service projects are more suitable to undergraduate students (especially the younger ones) but are not effective at the graduate level.

References

- About the Land-Grant System <http://www.wvu.edu/~exten/about/land.htm>
- Baker, D. A., 2001, *The Evaluation of University-Community Engagement Scholarship Within the College Level Promotion and Tenure Process*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.
- Bloomfield, V., 2005, "Civic Engagement and Graduate Education," *Communicator*, vol. 38(3).
- Bringle, R., and Hatcher, J., 2002, "Campus-Community Partnerships: The Terms of Engagement," *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 58(3), pp. 503-516.
- Bruckhardt, M. J., Jane, M., Holland, B., and Percy, S. L., 2004, *Calling the Question: Is Higher Education Really Ready to Commit to Community Engagement?: A Wingspread Statement*, University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee.
- Butin, D. W., 2006, "The Limits of Service-Learning in Higher Education," *The Review of Higher Education*, vol. 29(4), pp. 473-498.
- Citizen Scholar Engagement (Virginia Tech) http://www.grads.vt.edu/graduate_school/tge/cse/index.html
- Colby, A., Ehrlich, T., Beaumont, E., and Stephens, J., 2003, *Educating Citizens: Preparing America's Undergraduates for Lives of Moral and Civic Responsibility*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
- Community-University Exposition – CUexpo <http://www.cuexpo08.ca>
- Creighton, S., 2006, *Community Partner Indicators of Engagement: An Action Research Study on Campus-Community Partnership*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Leadership and Change Program, Antioch University, Yellow Springs, Ohio.
- Creighton, S., 2008, "Significant Findings in Campus-Community Engagement: Community Partner Perspective," *Journal of Civic Commitment*, issue 10.
- Cress, C. M., Astin, H. S., Zimmerman-Oster, K., and Burkhardt, J. C., 2001, "Developmental Outcomes of College Students' Involvement in Leadership Activities," *Journal of College Student Development*, vol. 42(1), pp. 15-27.
- Dugan, J. P., 2006, "Involvement and Leadership: A Descriptive Analysis of Socially Responsible Leadership," *Journal of College Student Development*, vol. 47(3), pp. 335-343.
- Emmanuel, J., 2008, "Community-University Partnerships: A Co-operative Approach," *Proceedings of Community-University Exposition – CUexpo*, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, May 4-7, 2008, pp. 73-76.
- Garger, J., and Jacques, P. H., 2008, "A Levels Approach to Student Perceptions of Leadership," *International Journal of Educational Management*, vol. 22(3), pp. 251-258.
- Havlik, M. K., 2006, *An Assessment of a First-Year Leadership Program*, M.A. Thesis, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

- Kezar, A., and Moriarty, D., 2000, "Expanding Our Understanding of Student Leadership Development: A Study Exploring Gender and Ethnic Identity," *Journal of College Student Development*, vol. 41(1), pp. 55-69.
- Land Grant Institutions (listed) http://www.higher-ed.org/resources/land_grant_colleges.htm
- Leadership Tech (Virginia Tech) <https://secure.hosting.vt.edu/www.leadershiptech.uusa.vt.edu/>
- Leadership Seminar Series (Virginia Tech) <http://www.uusa.vt.edu/studentActivities/leadershipseminars.php>
- Maurrasse, D. J., 2001, *Beyond the Campus: How Colleges and Universities Form Partnerships with Their Communities*, Routledge, New York.
- McIlrath, L., and Labhrainn, I., 2007, *Higher Education and Civic Engagement: International Perspectives*, Ashgate, Oxon, UK.
- National Academy of Engineering, 2005, *Educating the Engineer of 2020: Adapting Engineering Education to the New Century*, The National Academies Press, Washington, D.C.
- Outcalt, C. L., Faris, S. K., McMahon, K. N., Tahtakran, P. M., and Noll, C. B., 2001, "A Leadership Approach for the New Millennium: A Case Study of UCLA's Bruin Leaders Project," *NASPA (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators) Journal*, vol. 38(2), pp. 178-188.
- Posner, B. Z., 2004, "A Leadership Development Instrument for Students: Updated," *Journal of College Student Development*, vol. 45(4), pp. 443-456.
- Service-Learning Center (Virginia Tech) <http://www.vtserves.vt.edu:81/>
- Shertzer, J. E., and Schuh, J. H., 2004, "College Student Perceptions of Leadership: Empowering and Constraining Beliefs," *NASPA (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators) Journal*, vol. 42(1), pp. 111-131.
- Strifflino, P., and Saunders, S. A., 1989, "Emerging Leaders: Students in Need of Development," *NASPA (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators) Journal*, vol. 27(1), pp. 51-58.
- The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org>
- The Council of International Student Organizations (Virginia Tech) <http://www.ciso.org.vt.edu/>
- The Cranwell International Center (Virginia Tech) <http://www.uusa.vt.edu/cranwell/>
- The Fourth Annual University-Community Partnership Conference: The Community Calls Forth the University <http://www.cpe.vt.edu/unicom/>
- VT-ENGAGE (Virginia Tech) <http://www.engage.vt.edu/>
- Zimmerman-Oster, K., and Burkhardt, J., 1999, *Leadership in the Making: Impact and Insights from Leadership Development Programs in U.S. Colleges and Universities*, W. K. Kellogg Foundation, Battle Creek, Michigan.

About the Author

Osama A. Marzouk

Osama A. Marzouk is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Engineering Science and Mechanics at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) in the United States. In addition to his research on the simulation and modeling of the wakes and fluid-structure interaction of offshore structures, and on the stabilization of ship motion; he has strong interest in college education, especially in engineering, and in the challenges facing higher-education institutions in the 21st century. He received the *Preparing Future Professors Graduate Certificate* and the *Engineering Education Graduate Certificate* from Virginia Tech. During the last six years, he has been an instructor or a teaching assistant for college students.