

## **Servant Leadership: Teaching the Helping Professional**

### **Joyce W. Fields**

Professor of Child and Family Studies  
Child and Family Studies Program Coordinator  
Division of Behavioral Studies and Human Inquiry  
Columbia College  
Columbia, SC 29203  
jfields@columbiasc.edu

### **Karen C. Thompson**

Associate Professor of Psychology  
Psychology Program Coordinator  
Division of Behavioral Studies and Human Inquiry  
Columbia College

### **Julie R. Hawkins**

Midlands Service Coordinator  
Senior Community Service Employment Program  
Goodwill Industries of Upstate/Midlands South Carolina

## **Abstract**

Robert Greenleaf's principles of servant leadership are relevant to the helping professions, including empowerment and development of others, service to others, and open and participatory leadership. The study of servant leadership was infused into an undergraduate senior capstone experience (an internship) for emerging helping professionals (social work and child and family studies majors). Students read and discussed Greenleaf's work and applied it to their internship experiences through weekly written reflections. Analysis of student reflections revealed an internalization of servant leadership principles and an understanding of their application within a professional context. Field supervisor evaluations of students indicated professional development consistent with servant leadership ideals. Analysis of servant leadership self-evaluations by students recorded at the beginning and end of the capstone experience revealed increases in empowering and developing others and serving others. These findings support the value of servant leadership education in the training of future leaders within the helping professions.

## **Introduction**

Our task was unique. We teach at a small, private, liberal arts college for women affiliated with the Methodist Church and dedicated to developing leadership and an awareness of social justice in our students. We endeavored to incorporate a distinctive model of leadership encompassing service and social justice within the capstone experience for major programs in

the helping professions. Our general education curriculum requires a junior seminar through which students are exposed to different leadership schools and approaches central to the discussion of social justice. One goal for students' major capstone experience was to build upon the junior seminar to provide a definitive leadership guide most appropriate for their vocational choice, the servant leadership model. Servant leadership has been successfully infused into a clinical experience for undergraduate and graduate students in health-related disciplines (Neill, Hayward, & Peterson, 2007) but without prior formal instruction in leadership philosophies.

**Origins of Servant Leadership.** The model of servant leadership was first outlined by Robert Greenleaf (1970). Greenleaf begins his groundbreaking journey into the "nature of legitimate power and greatness" (Greenleaf, 1977) by recounting Hermann Hesse's *Journey to the East*. In the story, a group of men set out on a mythical quest accompanied by Leo, the servant of the group. He performs all their menial chores and supports them with encouraging words and song. When Leo disappears, all falls apart and the travelers abandon their quest. Years later, the narrator of the story finds Leo and is taken into the order that sponsored their original journey. He is surprised to find that Leo, who acted as their servant is, in reality, the head of the order, their "guiding spirit, a great and noble leader" (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 7). The story of the servant as guiding spirit and noble leader provided Greenleaf with an easily translatable illustration for his theory of servant leadership.

Greenleaf's interest in leadership began as a response to student unrest and the subsequent institutional reaction to the social turmoil in late 1960s early 1970s America. As a student, he was challenged to choose one of two paths, standing outside and criticizing or operating from within the institutions that seemed to be failing their constituencies thereby leading them to change for the greater good. He chose to address the latter. Greenleaf (1970) outlined ten characteristics of servant leaders, refined by Spears (2010). These are *listening* (hearing what is said with the intent to understand), *empathy* (showing genuine affection and unqualified acceptance of those being led), *healing* (sharing a search for wholeness), *awareness* ("opening wide the doors of perception" to increase possibilities [Greenleaf, 1970, p. 28]), *persuasion* (allowing for change through conviction rather than coercion), *conceptualization* (communicating the significance of circumstances and situations), *foresight* (seeing what is in the "now" and how it most probably will impact the future), *stewardship* (working beyond the self toward the needs and potentials of others), *commitment to the growth of others* (being able to accept responsibility for helping others as they work toward self-support), and *building community* (dedicating action to live and work productively and peacefully with others; Spears, 2010). After reviewing several variations of Greenleaf's core characteristics, van Dierendock (2011) reduced the number of key factors to six: empowering and developing people, demonstrating humility, being authentic, accepting people for who they are, providing direction, and exhibiting stewardship.

**Relevance of Servant Leadership to the Helping Professions.** Servant leadership characteristics help define personal responsibility for issues of social justice, human growth and potential, and human relationships, all of which are essential for the helping professional. The characterization of the servant leader is both in character and in action. Sendjaya and Sarros (2002) clarified the philosophical basis of the servant leader along two dimensions – who the servant leader *is* (i.e., servant, with steward as self-concept) and what the servant *does* (i.e.,

serving others first as the primary intent). Hence, servant leaders define their primary mode of action as “I serve” instead of “I lead,” reflecting the core understanding that “I am the leader, therefore I serve” (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002, p. 60).

When helping professionals (e.g., social workers, family therapists, counselors) learn the essentials of serving others, the leadership qualities delineated by Greenleaf become the intrinsic and instinctual qualities which characterize a servant leader. He reminds us that,

The requirements of leadership impose some intellectual demands that are not measured by academic intelligence ratings... The leader needs two intellectual abilities that are usually not formally assessed in an academic way; (s)he needs to have a *sense for the unknowable* and be able to *foresee the unforeseeable*. (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 21)

This is essential for helping professionals. To be able to sense what is unknown to clients and to foresee possibilities that they may be unable to foresee is what helping professionals do; it is at the center of good assessment, diagnostic, and prognostic case work. The shape of the future can be estimated by analyzing patterns of human interaction. This pattern analysis is a basic skill for the student in the helping professions. Greenleaf (1977) writes, “This requires living by a sort of rhythm that encourages a high level of intuitive insight about the whole gamut of events from the indefinite past, through the present moment, to the indefinite future” (p. 25). Learning servant leadership is essential for those of us who teach and train the emerging professional.

Servant leadership is a humanistic approach that holds “an optimistic view of employees, believing that they will respond positively to leaders who demonstrate... SL characteristics” and motivates employees “primarily through creating a caring and supportive workplace” (Wong & Davey, 2007, p. 3). The goal of the helping professional is to bring clients to a place where they are able to acknowledge their best self. Greenleaf speaks of the rights of everyone to wise counsel: “Anybody could lead perfect people—if there were any... It is part of the enigma of human nature that the ‘typical’ person—immature, stumbling, inept, lazy—is capable of great dedication and heroism *if wisely led*” (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 21). He is referring to serving clients by assisting them in becoming leaders in their own realms. He advises that “people grow taller when those who lead them empathize and when they are accepted for what they are, even though their performance may be judged critically in terms of what they are capable of doing” (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 21). The helping professional recognizes that the assessment of the best self rests with the client, not with the therapist, counselor, or social worker.

**Ethical Practice in Servant Leadership.** In working with emerging helping professionals, it is essential to formally teach professional ethical behavior. Guides are often formalized into a professional code of ethics that, when coupled with personal values and beliefs, form a moral compass for the professional. It is this combination of formal and informal, professional and personal, that allows the helping professional to serve and hence, to lead, in concert with a guiding sense of communal right and wrong. Part of ethical conduct among servant leaders is creating a climate of inclusion and acceptance, even when mistakes are made (Greenleaf, 1970). This facilitates trust and the perception of fairness (van Dierendonck, 2001). In a safe psychological climate, students and those they serve may be more willing to engage in the process of learning and developing without fear of reproach.

Common ethical responsibilities for helping professionals are detailed in professional codes of ethics, such as those used by the American Psychological Association (APA, 2010), the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2008), the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR, 1998), the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT, 2015), and the American Counseling Association (ACA, 2014). Chief among them are confidentiality or the ability to listen empathetically and protect client communication, non-discrimination or the commitment to the growth of all people, clear definitions of professional relationships and establishing personal and professional boundaries, creating opportunities for stewardship, and understanding the limits of practices or being able to withdraw and act in the interest of others rather than self. Thus, the tenets of servant leadership and professional ethical behavior are mutually supportive.

**Educational Objectives of the Present Study.** The purpose of the project was to infuse servant leadership instruction into a required senior capstone experience (internship) for majors in the helping professions (social work and child and family studies). We had three primary concerns prior to undertaking the project: the first was insuring that students were prepared to internalize servant leadership values as emerging helping professionals. It has been noted that the millennial generation demonstrates more narcissistic tendencies (Twenge & Campbell, 2008; Westerman, Bergman, Bergman, & Daly, 2012) than previous generations, raising a concern about their ability to empathize, resist taking credit, and evidence organizational vision. Would students be able to serve others without considering self as a point of reference? The second concern was conceptual conflicts over servitude and submissiveness for women students in the helping professions, traditionally viewed as more “female” in orientation. Could students model servant leadership while simultaneously maintaining assertiveness and confidence? The third concern was the challenge of assessing growth and development along the path to academic maturity. Could we determine if servant leadership education positively impacted students’ vision for themselves and others as emerging leaders in their respective fields?

These concerns guided our efforts in teaching servant leadership principles to emerging helping professionals with the following objectives in mind: students will operate within ethical guidelines; students will be directed in professional service toward healing; and students will work to build meaningful relationships between people, institutions, and communities.

### **Instructional Method and Evaluation**

We incorporated servant leadership instruction into existing weekly seminar sessions in the capstone curriculum. Students used *The Servant as Leader* (Greenleaf, 1970) as their text. This 59-page monograph outlines the basic tenets of servant leadership in Greenleaf’s own language and provides a list of questions for reflection and discussion. This reading was to be completed by the first seminar session so that students were prepared to process servant leadership at the genesis of their internships. This allowed for active infusion of servant leadership principles during the course of seminar discussions. Students were required to respond to prompts provided each week during the seminar regarding various aspects of servant leadership as it applied to their placement (e.g., opportunities for servant leadership at the site, examples of servant leaders at the site). Students also reported on the outcomes of their servant leadership experience in a campus-wide forum as a course requirement.

Over the course of three years, we gathered data from 46 students in their senior capstone experience (internship), including child and family studies and social work majors. Students were placed in a variety of agencies and organizations, such as Boys and Girls Club, Ronald McDonald House, Palmetto Health Children's Hospital, Richland County First Steps, the South Carolina Department of Probation, Parole, and Pardons, Midlands Development Corporation, Dickerson Center for Children, Richland County Public Schools, and the Children's Shelter.

We used three outcome measures to assess the impact of servant leadership instruction in students' capstone course (all measures were approved by the college's IRB). First, we analyzed students' written reflections regarding servant leadership assigned during the weekly seminars. Specific prompts for the reflections included potential challenges at the site for the servant leader, how one's personal attributes may influence growth as a servant leader, how servant leadership is evidenced by professionals at the site, and how servant leadership is interpreted in action. The final reflection was a response to the prompt, "How have you developed as a servant leader through the internship experience?" Second, we administered a self-evaluation to students at the beginning and end of the course regarding servant leadership. Lastly, we evaluated field supervisor assessments regarding students' growth as a professional.

Students' self-evaluations were based on a conceptual framework for measuring the development of servant leadership provided by Page and Wong (Page & Wong, 2000; Wong & Page, 2003). Their framework is divided into twelve categories of characteristics grouped into four fundamental processes, each of which is composed of three central attributes (Page & Wong, 2000, Table 5.2). The first process is *Character-Orientation* ("Being"), reflecting the leader's character and attitude (integrity, humility, and servanthood). The second process is *People-Orientation* ("Relating"), reflecting the leader's relationship orientation and commitment to others (caring for others, empowering others, and developing others). The third process is *Task-Orientation* ("Doing"), reflecting the leader's ability to exercise the tasks and skills necessary for success (visioning, goal setting, and leading). The fourth process is *Process-Orientation* ("Organizing"), reflecting how the leader impacts organizational processes (modeling, team building, and shared decision-making). These processes are configured as concentric circles with Character-Orientation at the heart from which People-Orientation, Task-Orientation, and lastly Process-Orientation radiate in increasingly widening focus and effect (Page & Wong, 2000, Table 5.1).

The twelve original conceptual categories of servant leadership were reduced to eight and then to seven, summarized in Wong and Page (2007) and reflected in the Servant Leadership Profile – Revised (SLP-R) instrument (Wong & Page, n.d.). The SLP-R contains 62 Likert-type statements capturing the following factors: empowering and developing people; vulnerability and humility; serving others; open, participatory leadership; inspiring leadership; visionary leadership; and courageous leadership (integrity and authenticity). These factors align with van Dierendonck's (2011) aforementioned six core features of servant leaders.

## Results

**Student Self-Reflection Results.** The first reflection was assigned after students read Greenleaf (1970), prompting students to identify their own challenges to servant leadership.

Although these were powerful insights for students just beginning to study servant leadership principles, they represented a “me-first” orientation - an unsophisticated, natural approach to working with others by magnifying solutions from their own experiences as might be expected of millennials. One student recorded,

Commitment to the growth of people is a challenge of mine. I like to help others, hence why I am aiming to be in the helping professions. But along with helping others, I want to help myself in the process, which makes me feel like I’m being selfish in a sense.

Another wrote,

A challenge for me regarding this aspect of servant-leadership would involve me separating my own disability from those I serve and making sure that I do not develop a sense of sympathy for the clients because of the challenges they may experience because of their disabilities.

A third concluded that,

I have recently learned I cannot use others for my own personal healing. I have to address my internal conflicts before I can try to help others. It was hard coming to the realization that I gravitated to people I thought needed my help or people I thought I could save.

On the final semester reflections, students’ orientations had shifted to the “other,” particularly with respect to empowerment and development. One student wrote that, I feel like I’ve grown to be a servant leader. No longer do I sit in the back and stay to myself. Now I interact with an array of people. I also value what they say and how they feel.

Another student summarized her growth in this way: “Being a leader often involves putting yourself on the back burner while putting everyone else in front.” These comments demonstrate students’ comprehension of the value of empowering and developing others within a professional context. One student directly observed the powerful impact of leading by serving:

The workers in this agency are servant leaders in their own way because when the agency gets recognition, it is only the agency getting that recognition. The agents that I got to follow are definitely servant leaders because they took me in without extra pay or recognition just to make sure that I got the experience that I needed to have.

Another initial weakness in servant leadership emerged in students’ reflections with respect to vulnerability and humility, such as,

One challenge that I have in front of me is to be able to know that I will fail sometimes but that is okay. I am concerned that my feelings will get the best of me or feeling guilty that I could not help everyone that I come across.

Another student observed that “I can see that some youth are seeking to have a relationship with me, but I am not responding. I don’t know what component I am missing to establish this relationship.” By the end of the semester, students’ reflections demonstrated their understanding of vulnerability and humility as a servant leadership strength instead of a weakness. For instance, one student remarked that

I learned that people do not have to know that you did the right thing. I have gained the trait of being humble instead of looking for recognition. I also learned that leaders must first be servers to be great leaders.

Another student acknowledged potential vulnerability when moving from a scripted therapy plan while working with a youth group. Relying on their own abilities rather than written, specific therapy plans can create a challenge for students: “You have to lead in each moment. You cannot plan what will happen and expect things to go as planned. So when things do turn out different, embrace the change and make something even better.”

In their initial reflections, several students expressed strength with respect to serving others, another core servant leadership factor (Page & Wong, 2000; Wong & Page, 2003). Serving others reflects a willingness to be of assistance in diverse settings and circumstances. Students likely expressed this as a strength because their academic disciplines are primarily focused on assisting others. One student summarized this sentiment for a majority of her peers: “I am in the helping professions, therefore I am out there to serve. I have no problem serving others, from people over me to people who are under me. Leaders must first be servers to be great leaders.” On the final reflection, however, the concept of serving others became more refined, represented by the following reflection:

Servant leadership is a mixture and balance between leader and servant. A servant leader is one who values diverse opinions. This is when a servant leader must value everyone’s ideas, thoughts, and contributions and must seek out opinions. A servant leader will never tell someone they are wrong and that they may need to sit in the back and be quiet. No, a true servant leader will find truth of some way to incorporate what they’re saying into the pot as well.

The last four servant leadership factors conceptualized by Page and Wong (open and participatory, inspiring, visionary, and courageous) represent distinctive forms of leadership. At the beginning of the semester, most students were hesitant to assume a leadership role. Although they had been exposed to models of effective leadership in their required general education junior seminar, many students associated leadership with moving aggressively toward a goal and “putting yourself out there.” One wrote, “I have a hard time taking on tasks without being told what to do. I struggle with not being right, so I would rather wait until someone tells me what to do and how to do it.” She continued,

I have a vision to help build my community, yet I have a hard time trying to make it happen because I feel like I don’t know where to start, therefore, I keep all of my ideas in my head.

Another student articulated a lack of courage that many expressed initially:

I think that my biggest challenge when it comes to this experience is the public speaking aspect of servant leadership within my internship. With different scenarios, we as servant leaders will need to be able to speak up for different populations as well as sometimes make presentations to other students, community members, or your fellow employees. Growth in the four final servant leadership factors was evident in the final reflections.

One student began her final reflection by incorporating visionary and inspiring leadership:

As I served the targeted population of the organization, whether directly or indirectly, I noticed an uplift starting with the individual which then rippled to the community and eventually it will impact the world we are living in as a whole. Knowing and understanding the mission of the organization was helpful in bringing a positive impact on my passion for helping my community.

Another student evidenced courageous and visionary leadership:

My service leadership experience has validated my passion for helping others. I have assumed full responsibility for becoming an advocate for the disadvantaged populations within the community. I am sure that my purpose in life is to be able to help others; working as a servant for organizations whose mission is to help better the world. As far as deciding a job, I am still not sure where I want to dive but I know I have stepped in the right direction.”

Taken together, the student reflections revealed increased sophistication in the understanding of servant leadership principles from the beginning to the end of their capstone experience and direct application to a professional setting and set aside our earlier concerns.

Table 1. *Students' Servant Leadership Self-Evaluation Results*

Factor	Pretest		Posttest		<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Empowering and Developing People	4.03	0.38	4.26	0.41	2.63*
Vulnerability and Humility	3.95	0.62	3.90	0.81	0.31
Serving Others	4.17	0.47	4.37	0.48	2.53*
Open, Participatory Leadership	4.55	0.31	4.55	0.38	0.14
Inspiring Leadership	4.10	0.58	4.23	0.54	1.81
Visionary Leadership	3.76	0.55	3.97	0.43	2.04
Courageous Leadership (Integrity and Authenticity)	4.35	0.43	4.39	0.32	0.43
Overall	4.13	0.28	4.24	0.30	1.80

Note. *n*=22; *M*=Mean; *SD*=Standard Deviation; \**p*<.05 two-tailed.

**Student Servant Leadership Profile Results.** Complete pre-post data using the SLP-R for self-evaluation of servant leadership perceptions and behaviors were available for twenty-two students. Each of the seven servant leadership factors was evaluated as well as an overall score (see Table 1). The SLP-R pretest means, all close to or above 4 on a 5-point scale, indicated that students tended to evaluate themselves quite favorably at the beginning of the semester. This could be due to prior exposure to leadership philosophies in the junior seminar, leading to bias in self-evaluation of leadership traits (favoring those that are considered more ideal). Favorable pretest self-evaluations could also represent the millennial generation's general trend toward inflated self-evaluations (Twenge, Campbell, & Gentile, 2012). On the posttest, there were significant increases in the servant leadership factors of empowering and developing people and serving others (*p*<.05); the increase in visionary leadership was marginally significant (*p*=.054). Inspiring leadership, courageous leadership (integrity and authenticity), and overall servant

leadership also increased on the posttest but did not reach statistical significance ( $p > .05$ ). We take these findings as evidence that students internalize servant leadership traits as a result of the senior capstone experience and recognize these as desirable traits among leaders in the helping professions.

Further examination of the pretest-posttest results revealed that the factor of open, participatory leadership did not change, and the factor of vulnerability and humility actually decreased on the posttest (though not significantly). As noted in the student reflections, students who initially felt intimidated by our leadership expectations found their voices as servant leaders, but this may have not translated to the construct represented on the SLP-R. Because the nature of an internship is experiential and oriented toward participatory leadership, confidence gained in students' own abilities as a result may have led to decreased levels of vulnerability on the SLP-R.

Pearson correlations were performed on the seven servant leadership factors for the posttest SLP-R data (see Table 2). Scores for empowering and developing people were significantly correlated with those of most of the other servant leadership factors. Open, participatory leadership was also significantly correlated with several other servant leadership factors. Additionally, the correlation between inspiring leadership and visionary leadership was significant ( $p < .01$ ). The correlation between courageous leadership and serving others ( $r = .42$ ) was marginally significant ( $p = .056$ ). These findings confirm that servant leadership is comprised of several interwoven factors articulated by Wong and Page (2007) and unified by our students in their final servant leadership self-evaluation.

Table 2. *Correlations for Students' Posttest Servant Leadership Factors*

Factor	VH	SERV	OPEN	INSP	VIS	COUR
EMP	.16	.73**	.64**	.65**	.54**	.34
VH		.27	.14	-.03	-.28	.20
SERV			.67**	.22	.25	.42
OPEN				.30	.26	.46*
INSP					.61**	.03
VIS						.20

Note. EMP= empowering and developing people; VH=vulnerability and humility; SERV=serving others; OPEN=open, participatory leadership; INSP=inspiring leadership; VIS=visionary leadership; COUR=courageous leadership (integrity and authenticity);  $n=22$ ; \* $p < .05$  two-tailed; \*\* $p < .01$  two-tailed.

**Field Supervisor Evaluation Results.** Student evaluations from field supervisors were divided into three areas (professional behavior and demeanor, therapeutic skills, and personal and professional growth) with opportunities for narrative input. On a five point Likert scale, students averaged 4.72 on professional behavior and demeanor, 4.66 on therapeutic skills, and 4.63 on personal and professional growth. Narrative comments included, "Student was eager to learn, grow, and evolve." "(The student) has developed a great sense of compassion and dedication to help those around her." "(The student) has an amazing ability to empathize with others as well as articulate concerns in a respectful manner." While not addressing servant

leadership specifically, these comments characterize traits associated with a servant leader. Field supervisors noted growth in all three areas of development at the end of the semester and saw professional potential in the students. For child and family studies majors specifically, field supervisors rated students' academic preparation for the internship very favorably (4.8) as well as student motivation and identification with the profession (5.0).

## Discussion and Implications

These results support embedding servant leadership instruction within undergraduate capstone curricula for the helping professions. Even students who are predisposed to valuing the "other," such as those in the helping professions, can benefit from underpinning professional training with servant leadership principles. Student reflections within their capstone internship experience reflected a deep, contextualized understanding of servant leadership within a professional setting. They connected leadership to action and intent as well as position, which is emphasized in Sendjaya and Sarros' (2002) characterization of servant leadership. The most noteworthy outcomes in both student reflections and self-evaluations were increases in empowering and developing others and in serving others. Although students in the helping professions are typically unsure of their skills and unused to professional settings when they begin their internships, they are imbedded in the passion and desire that initially led them to the discipline. Students addressed frustration with respect to a strong desire to serve juxtaposed against their uncertainty as to how to proceed in their initial reflections. However, they discovered ways to be effective even if they were not recognized as leaders. An example is from a student reflection:

I am learning to be the best servant leader, you must not be afraid to do the messiest of tasks. You also cannot expect your volunteers to do something that you yourself would not do; therefore, you must be willing to do the dirtiest or meaningless of jobs to show our volunteers that you are willing to do everything that they do to help you."

The realization that leaders can make an impact with seemingly small, "un-leadership" like actions allowed students to understand their potential as change agents in their respective organizations.

Servant leadership principles are in concert with ethical codes that guide helping professionals. For example, ethical codes direct professionals to be clear about practice and professional boundaries and services. Helping professionals are also expected to be transparent, working without deception or hidden motives. These behaviors exemplify professional integrity that are reflective of open, participatory leadership. Ethical guidelines also call for the ability to understand the limitations of practice that permit withdrawal and an emphasis on the interest of others over self. These guidelines are tied to servant leadership by initiating efforts to place "other" before self and trust in the ability of the other to know how best to progress. The job of helping professionals is facilitating, not directing, personal growth. Servant leadership places the responsibility for change on the client. Thus, emerging professionals are able to embark on careers as dedicated change agents but credit the change to the client and the client's own work. This shift in responsibility helps the emerging professional depend on their developing vision for others and their communities.

Servant leadership education is not without challenges. The underlying philosophy of servant leadership as expressed by Greenleaf (1977) is complex and interwoven. At the onset, Greenleaf's ideas seem very simple and direct, making them ideal for beginning leadership students. His writing is honest and clear, unadulterated by complex models and examples. He tends to inspire rather than prove and in this, finds himself at harmony with student sympathies. However, under closer scrutiny, his concepts are deep and very personal, and efforts to explicate their meaning for a profession or large body of practitioners requires study and reflection. Greenleaf's work is based on the concept of hope, which he says "is absolutely essential to both sanity and wholeness of life" (Greenleaf, 1997, p. 3). Therefore, while challenging to learn and practice, the concept of hope makes servant leadership ideal for the helping professional. Without hope, social workers, psychologists, family therapists, and behavior scientists have no basis for exercising the skills and attitudes central to professional practice. They are taught to work toward hope, healing, and mending the broken spirit.

## Conclusion

Servant leadership is an ideal model for the helping professions because of the inherent selflessness and the giving away of oneself that it embodies. The increase in values associated with servant leadership among our students aligns with Neill et al.'s (2007) findings within a collaborative learning experience among students in healthcare professions. The possibility of a united vision of leadership for many helping professionals is affirmed by a call for servant leadership to be the primary leadership model used in physician assistant (P.A.) training (Huckabee & Wheeler, 2008) and for servant leadership to be used as an aid to recruit and retain nurses (Swearingen & Liberman, 2004).

Upon completion of the senior capstone course, our students are awarded a leadership cord as part of graduation regalia. For us, these cords represent the marriage of servant leadership theory and action. We noted movement toward healing and building meaningful roles as outlined in our course objectives. Our student responses included increased awareness of responsibility toward others and building strong relationships and communities. By embracing the principles of servant leadership and ethical practice, students meet our original course goal and are better prepared to meet the challenges facing them in professional life. As one student concluded, "Although it took some time, I believe Robert K. Greenleaf was absolutely correct when he said, 'servant leadership is a journey within itself.' However, before you can combine the roles of servant and leader you must make the journey within yourself." Embedding servant leadership into the training for the helping professions can provide students with a valuable guide for their journey.

By incorporating Greenleaf's model for leadership into supervised professional experience, we create a direct route to learning important skills and attitudes for young practitioners that may, in other circumstances, take years to mature. We do not have the luxury of time when considering the professionals' impact on human life. Servant leadership allows the organic growth of student insight, responsibility, and confidence which translates, as in the case of Leo, the servant, into empowerment of others.

## References

- American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. (2015). *AAMFT code of ethics*. Alexandria, VA: Author. Retrieved from [http://www.aamft.org/iMIS15/AAMFT/Content/Legal\\_Ethics/Code\\_of\\_Ethics.aspx](http://www.aamft.org/iMIS15/AAMFT/Content/Legal_Ethics/Code_of_Ethics.aspx)
- American Counseling Association. (2014). *ACA code of ethics*. Alexandria, VA: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.counseling.org/knowledge-center/ethics>
- American Psychological Association. (2010). *Ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/ethics/code/>
- Greenleaf, R. K. (1970). *The servant as leader*. Westfield, IN: The Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership.
- Greenleaf, R. K. (1977). *Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.
- Huckabee, M. J., & Wheeler, D. W. (2008). Defining leadership training for physician assistant education. *Journal of Physician Assistant Education*, 19(1), 24-28.
- National Association of Social Workers. (2008). *Code of ethics of the National Association of Social Workers*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/code.asp>
- National Council on Family Relations. (1998). *Ethical principles and guidelines for family scientists*. Minneapolis, MN: Author. Retrieved from [https://www.ncfr.org/sites/default/files/downloads/news/ncfr\\_ethical\\_guidelines\\_0.pdf](https://www.ncfr.org/sites/default/files/downloads/news/ncfr_ethical_guidelines_0.pdf)
- Neill, M., Hayward, K. S., & Peterson, T. (2007). Students' perceptions of the interpersonal team in practice through the application of servant leadership principles. *Journal of Interprofessional Care*, 21(4), 425-432. doi:10.1080/13561820701443512
- Page, D., & Wong, P. T. P. (2000). A conceptual framework for measuring servant leadership. In S. Adjibolosoo (Ed.), *The human factor in shaping the course of history and development*. Lanham, MD: American University Press.
- Sendjaya, S., & Sarros, J. C. (2002). Servant leadership: Its origin, development, and application to organizations. *Journal of Leadership and Organization Studies*, 9(2), 57-64.
- Spears, L. C. (2010). Character and servant leadership: Ten characteristics of effective, caring leaders. *The Journal of Virtues & Leadership*, 1(1), 25-30.
- Swearingen, S., & Liberman, A. (2004). Nursing leadership: Serving those who serve others. *The Health Care Manager*, 23, 100-109.

- Twenge, J. M., & Campbell, S. M. (2008). Generational differences in psychological traits and their impact on the workplace. *Journal of Managerial Psychology, 23*(8), 862-877. doi:10.1108/02683940810904367
- Twenge, J. M., Campbell, W. K., & Gentile, B. (2012). Generational increases in agentic self-evaluations among American college students, 1966–2009. *Self and Identity, 11*, 409-427. doi:10.1080/15298868.2011.576820
- Van Dierendonck, D. (2011). Servant leadership: A review and synthesis. *Journal of Management, 37*(4), 1228-1261. doi:10.1177/0149206310380462
- Westerman, J. W., Bergman, J. Z., Bergman, S. M., & Daly, J. P. (2012). Are universities creating millennial narcissistic employees? An empirical examination of narcissism in business students and its implications. *Journal of Management Education, 36*(1), 5–32. doi:10.1177/1052562911408097
- Wong, P. T. P., & Davey, D. (2007). Best practices in servant leadership. Paper presented at the Servant Leadership Research Roundtable, Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA. Retrieved from [http://www.regentuniversityonline.com/acad/global/publications/sl\\_proceedings/2007/wong-davey.pdf](http://www.regentuniversityonline.com/acad/global/publications/sl_proceedings/2007/wong-davey.pdf)
- Wong, P. T. P., & Page, D. (n.d.). Servant leadership profile – revised. Available at <http://www.drpaullwong.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Servant-Leadership-Profile-Revised.pdf>
- Wong, P. T. P., & Page, D. (2003). Servant leadership: An opponent-process model and the revised servant leadership profile. Paper presented at the Servant Leadership Research Roundtable, Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA. Retrieved from [https://www.regent.edu/acad/global/publications/sl\\_proceedings/2003/wong\\_servant\\_leadership.pdf](https://www.regent.edu/acad/global/publications/sl_proceedings/2003/wong_servant_leadership.pdf)

## **Author Biographies**

Dr. Joyce W. Fields (jfields@columbiasc.edu) is Professor and Program Coordinator for the Child and Family Studies program at Columbia College, SC. She received her doctorate from Florida State University. She crafted the theory section of Columbia College's leadership model; her research interests are service-learning, leadership development, and mentoring in higher education.

Karen Thompson (kthompson@columbiasc.edu) is an Associate Professor of Psychology and Psychology Program Coordinator at Columbia College, SC. She received her doctorate in experimental psychology from the University of South Carolina. Her research interests include leadership education and methods of scientific inquiry among psychology majors.

Julie Hawkins (juliehawkins8@gmail.com), formerly the Director of Social Work Field Experiences at Columbia College, is the Midlands Service Coordinator for the Senior Community Service Employment Program at Goodwill Industries of Upstate/Midlands South Carolina. She received her Master of Social Work from the University of Alabama.