

## **The Challenge of Developing Faculty to Teach Leadership as a Secondary Discipline**

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### **Abstract**

In colleges of agriculture leadership education is one area of study where enrollment and demand are outstripping the capacity of institutions to deliver the coursework. However, few faculty members are prepared to teach leadership contextually based in agriculture. Responding to this challenge, the Leadership Education Institute (LEI) for faculty in colleges of agriculture was created. The primary goal of the project was to prepare agricultural faculty to teach leadership as a secondary discipline. This multi-year project, funded by a USDA Higher Education Challenge Grant, was a collaboration of faculty from Oklahoma State University, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and the University of Georgia. The project resulted in directly impacting food and agricultural sciences education at 10 institutions across the nation by improving teaching competency of leadership education faculty in colleges of agriculture.

### **Challenge**

*Bass & Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership Development: Theory, Research, & Managerial Applications* (1990) notes education leadership is viewed in higher education as of major importance. Delineating between leadership training, education, and development, Brungardt (1996) wrote that leadership education

“includes those learning activities and educational environments that are intended to enhance and foster leadership abilities” (p. 83). Because leadership is a discipline created from the coalescing of many other disciplines, it is an arduous process to learn the complexities, contradictions and interrelated processes. The complexity of leadership studies led Greenwood (1996) to write “one gets the feeling that all these theorists are not talking about the same thing” (p. 13). Cronin (1995) furthered this idea by writing that “leadership in the most robust sense of the term is such an ecumenical and intellectually all-encompassing subject that it frightens not only the timid but even the most well educated of persons” (p. 29).

At many universities funding full-time faculty with appropriate leadership education preparation to teach leadership has grown with the student demand, but not necessarily with the supply of competent faculty. Knowles (1998) noted in his book *The Adult Learner*, “more employees each year are finding themselves in the role of trainer without having adequate preparation” (p. 227). Similarly, many faculty members are asked to teach leadership classes with little academic preparation to meet student needs. Developing faculty in the area of leadership education has far reaching implications throughout colleges and the industry impacted by those colleges.

Compounding this issue is the increasing demand for leadership coursework without a corresponding supply of faculty academically prepared to teach leadership (Pennington, 2005). In colleges of agriculture, leadership education is an area of study where enrollment and demand are outstripping the capacity of institutions to deliver the coursework. Because the agriculture industry continues to move toward a more consumer driven industry, many agriculture students either augment their technical, agricultural coursework with leadership courses, or major in agricultural leadership (Pennington & Weeks, 2006) in order to enter the workforce equipped with the skills to educate others in leadership axioms. Few faculty, however, are prepared to teach leadership contextually based in agriculture.

A 1994 study found that leadership was taught with great frequency within agricultural education departments. Thirty-six percent of the 55 responding departments of agricultural education offered leadership and/or human resource management/development courses with a total of 80 courses cited (Brown & Fritz, 1994). Faculty teaching these courses varied in their backgrounds with 56% being “taught by faculty with traditional agricultural education backgrounds” and 33% having traditional agricultural education backgrounds with “special preparation” in leadership or management (p. 2). Eleven percent had leadership teaching preparation with no agricultural background. A follow-up study with similar findings was conducted by Fritz and others in 2003, and found that, despite the passing of nine years, only 19% of respondents (N = 41) were formally trained in leadership or human resource management/development

(Fritz, et al., 2003). A compelling conclusion of the study “was that the agricultural leadership faculties were primarily traditional agricultural educators with specialized training in leadership” and therefore, “the opportunity for enhanced training in leadership is created” (p. 21).

### **The Leadership Education Institute**

In response to this challenge, a group of faculty representing three land-grant institutions proposed to create a program to develop the leadership education competencies of faculty teaching leadership in the context of agriculture. The faculty prepared a proposal and sought funding for the Leadership Education Institute (LEI) for faculty. The proposed project, LEI, would seek to unify, formalize and dramatically improve leadership education instruction by offering interested faculty a rich and in-depth leadership education program steeped in agriculture, debate, and dialogue.

#### **Project Objectives and Major Activities**

The purpose of LEI was to help prepare existing faculty to address future needs within the food and agricultural sciences system at the baccalaureate degree-level by improving teaching competency specifically in the area of leadership. The project objectives were: (a) to provide professional development to faculty responsible for delivering undergraduate leadership curriculum, (b) to support faculty in aligning leadership instruction and curriculum with current research and best practices in leadership education, (c) to develop a sustainable network of faculty in colleges of agriculture teaching leadership coursework, and (d) to disseminate contemporary models for leadership instruction and curriculum.

Major institute components proposed included (a) three multi-day, face-to-face leadership education workshops, (b) guided ongoing professional development facilitated by online discussions, (c) participant observation of exemplary agricultural leadership programs, (d) development of leadership libraries at each of the participant’s campuses, and (e) the development of an online agricultural leadership clearinghouse. The major components of the project were designed to serve multiple project objectives as detailed in Figure 1.

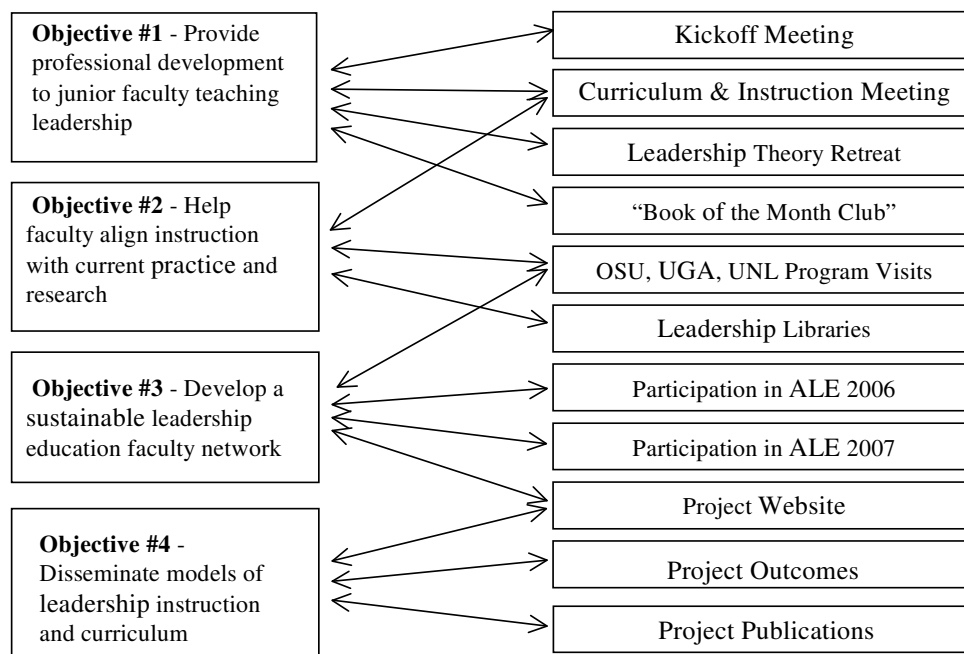


Figure 1. Project objectives and corresponding project activities.

## Funding

The proposed project, Leadership Education Institute for Faculty in Colleges of Agriculture, was awarded funding through a USDA Higher Education Challenge Grant in the amount of \$282,321. Project funds were directed to the three collaborating institutions based upon lead responsibilities for project components. To maximize the use of project funds, the project directors allocated the majority of funds to expenses related to the professional development of the faculty cohort including travel costs (i.e., airfare, room, and board) to face-to-face meetings.

## The Project

During the initial stages of the project, project directors held a face-to-face planning meeting followed by monthly phone conferences to manage the project. Graduate students were hired by each of the collaborating institutions and a project website and online discussion board was created to support communication among future institute participants and project collaborators. Applications to participate in LEI were solicited fall 2005 and selections were announced spring 2006.

## The Participants

A faculty cohort of ten participants, representing ten different institutions, was selected to participate in LEI. Three of the cohort members were employed at regional state supported universities, and the remaining seven cohort members worked at land grant universities. Participants' educational backgrounds were in agriculture, agricultural education or education related programs. Although none of the participants had earned degrees in leadership, their teaching experience in leadership ranged between two and 12 years. Participants (Innovative Leadership Solutions, 2008) reported applying to the program for the following reasons: (a) deepening their knowledge of leadership theory, research, pedagogy, and practice, (b) hoping to enhance and grow their leadership development courses, certificates, majors and minors, and (c) connecting with and learning from colleagues who are well-established in the profession.

### **Faculty Development Workshops**

Three face-to-face, multi-day workshops provided opportunities for the participants to work with experts in leadership education from other universities and colleges. Two of the workshops were offered as extended pre-sessions to the Association of Leadership Educators (ALE) 2006 and 2007 national meetings and a third workshop was offered as a separate retreat for Institute participants.

Workshop themes, locations, and selected topics are provided:

- *Models of Teaching Leadership*, July 2006, Big Sky, Montana Selected topics: Requirements for leadership minors and majors, course sequencing, leadership texts, and classroom activities. Undergraduate leadership program models. Held as pre-session to ALE's 2006 conference.
- *Foundations of Leadership Theory*, October 2006, Jackson, New Hampshire Selected topics: Definitions and historical perspectives, behavioral and contingency theories, charismatic leadership, power and influence tactics, followership theories, leadership development and change.
- *Leadership Education Research*, July 2007, Fort Worth, Texas Selected topics: Research methods in leadership, trends, publishing guidelines, instrumentation, and program evaluation. Held as a pre-session to ALE's 2007 conference.

### **Professional Development Activities**

Beyond the faculty development workshops, each faculty member participated in a university program visit during the second year of the project. Program visits allowed cohort members to examine current models of leadership education in colleges of agriculture at Oklahoma State University, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or University of Georgia. Participants were encouraged to select the

institution that most closely modeled the vision they had for their programs and/or courses.

Finally, the faculty cohort participated in monthly on-line discussions. This activity was intended to allow cohort members to review both classic and seminal works, as well as current research in leadership education with the guidance of the project directors and the support of the cohort network.

## **Results to Date**

### **External Evaluation**

To provide an objective look at the project, a leadership education consultant not connected to LEI was assigned to evaluate the project. The executive summary of the evaluation reports that “In its totality LEI met the goals of the project. Some aspects of the Institute were more highly evaluated by participants and faculty than others. Participants also reported gains in their knowledge and comfort levels in teaching and conducting research on leadership. [Also,] it does appear that the professional networks and sharing will continue long after the grant has ended” (Innovative Leadership Solutions, 2007, p. ii).

The evaluation report also revealed that the face-to-face meetings were the most successful aspect of the program and the online professional development activities were not as fruitful. Additionally, the campus visits hosted by the project directors but funded by the Institute participants were highly favored and proved to be an integral part of the project.

One of the Institute participants reported LEI “has really helped me to grasp the magnitude of leadership education and research around the country, especially what is going on outside of my traditional agricultural education/teacher education circles” (Innovative Leadership Solutions, 2007, p. 22). Other Institute participants reported the following gains from their LEI experience (Innovative Leadership Solutions, 2007):

- Exposure to new ideas.
- Knowledge and confidence to be a better leadership educator.
- More passion for leadership education.
- Networking opportunities.
- An increased understanding of leadership.
- Resources to help with leadership courses and programs.
- Knowledge related to the research role.

## **Results and Implications for Leadership Educators**

In general, LEI served as a successful faculty development project impacting leadership education at ten institutions across the nation. Project results included: (a) leadership libraries in programs at ten different colleges designed to support ongoing curriculum development in leadership education, (b) improving teaching competency of leadership education faculty, (c) the development of a sustainable network of leadership education faculty, and, (d) reshaping leadership education curricula contextually based in agriculture to meet current research and best practices in leadership education.

Implications for leadership educators included: (a) pairing faculty development opportunities with existing professional development opportunities (such as national meetings) is an effective use of resources, including faculty time and professional development monies. Professional organizations may consider hosting more specialized professional development events as a means to build and retain membership while supporting networking opportunities; (b) traditional means of faculty development (face to face workshops) are more successful in preparing faculty to teach leadership than online discussions. While full-time teaching faculty made time to attend in-person workgroups, most struggled to participate in the on-line portion of the development program. Participants reported that online discussions might be more effective if they were held accountable for their participation; and, (c) a continued need exists to develop faculty to teach leadership at the university level, not only in agriculture, but in disciplines across the university. Although LEI successfully served as a professional development opportunity for faculty, the scope of LEI was not broad enough (serving ten faculty members) to meet the current faculty development needs in leadership education, specifically in colleges of agriculture.

## **Discussion**

A need exists across the country to prepare faculty to teach leadership within specific disciplines. Many universities offer leadership courses and programs for specific populations and at the same time are assigning the responsibility of teaching leadership to faculty not academically trained to teach leadership. LEI sought to address this challenge by providing academic training in leadership education to one of those special populations.

The evaluation of LEI indicated that the program met the defined objectives and that the immediate effects of the program have benefited leadership education at ten different college campuses. However, some results of faculty development programs, including LEI, must be measured over many years as new programs and courses are developed, eventually cleared by university curriculum

committees and then offered. After the red tape is managed, the faculty member has the opportunity to fully utilize the newly created knowledge and impact student learning. Future plans for LEI include a longitudinal examination.

Finally, the project directors wish to thank the USDA for supporting the LEI project and the future of leadership education as well as the ten leadership educators that participated in LEI and their department heads/chairs. Faculty development programs designed to prepare new leadership educators require not only the funds to support a multi-year endeavor, but support of administrators and commitment from faculty willing to invest generous amounts of time to professional development outside their primary discipline.

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