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The Impact of Scholarship in Servant Leadership: Journals and Institutions

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of research published in the two academic journals in servant leadership – International Journal of Servant-Leadership and the Servant Leadership: Theory & Practice. Although various metrics suggest that the latter (and younger) journal has generally been more impactful, other metrics indicate that more “home run” research has thus far appeared in the former (and older) outlet. Analysis of the institution-based data reveals that affiliates of the Spears Center for Servant Leadership have produced the most impactful research in servant leadership, followed by those faculty and others at Regent University, Utah Valley University, Our Lady of the Lake University and Indiana Wesleyan University. Other prominent institutions in the servant leadership realm include Ashford University, Gonzaga University, the U.S. Army, Palm Beach Atlantic University and Southeastern University.

Keywords: Servant Leadership Scholarship, Institution Rankings, Research Impact

A recent Microsoft Bing search of the term “servant leadership” turned up more than 650,000 results. At the top of the list were definitions of the term provided by Investopedia.com and Indeed.com. These were followed closely by web pages from the Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership and *Psychology Today* that offered more extensive discussions of the concept. By the bottom of the fifth

page of results, the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM), *Forbes* and *The Washington Post*, among others, had each weighed in on the topic. Intermingled among these websites were invitations from the Harvard Business School, Regent University, Pennsylvania State University and other academic institutions to explore educational opportunities with a focus on servant leadership. This latter element of our search reflects the growing demand for educational programs in servant leadership in the U.S. and abroad. In fact, a large and growing number of U.S. colleges and universities now offer both undergraduate and graduate degrees, typically in organizational leadership, with an emphasis (of varying degrees) on servant leadership.

With the growth in demand for these programs, academic scholarship focusing on servant leadership has also increased. Yet, no study to date has formally explored the opportunities for publishing in this field, or the impact that servant leadership research has made on the body of knowledge constituting the field. This study fills that void by presenting an analysis of the scholarly impact of the two core servant leadership journals – the *International Journal of Servant-Leadership* and *Servant Leadership: Theory & Practice* – and by providing what we believe is the first worldwide ranking of institutions that is based on the impact of published scholarship in the area of servant leadership. Although our exploration is discussed in more detail in the sections that follow, our analysis of the institution-based data reveals that affiliates of the Spears Center for Servant Leadership have produced the most impactful research in servant leadership, followed by faculty and others at Regent University, Utah Valley University, Our Lady of the Lake University and Indiana Wesleyan University, respectively. Before turning to the results of our institution-based results, we first explore the relative impacts of the two core servant leadership journals. This discussion includes information on the editorial structures of each journal, as well as various statistical metrics that indicate how impactful each has been on servant leadership scholarship in general.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Core Servant Leadership Journals

Currently, there are two academic journals dedicated to publishing in the area of servant leadership. As indicated in Table 1, the older of these journals, the *International Journal of Servant-Leadership* (IJSL), is affiliated with Gonzaga University and began publishing in 2005.¹ The younger journal, *Servant Leadership: Theory & Practice* (SLTP), is affiliated with Columbus State University and was launched in 2014. Although each of these journals publishes a single volume each year, the IJSL packages its annual body of work in a single

¹ This presentation follows the format in Asarta and Mixon (2019).

issue, while SLTP splits its annual output into two separate issues. Both journals are available in printed and electronic (online) formats, with the latter offered as open access in each case. Lastly, each journal utilizes a standard or traditional editorial structure, although the IJSL's editorial board is much larger than that of SLTP.

Table 1. Servant Leadership Journals

Journal Details	<i>International Journal of Servant-Leadership</i>	<i>Servant Leadership: Theory & Practice</i>
Affiliation	Gonzaga University	Columbus State University
First Issue	2005	2014
Frequency	1 volume, 1 issue per year	1 volume, 2 issues per year
Platform	print/online	print/online
Editorial Structure	Editor/Associate Editor/Sr. Advisory Editor	Executive Editor/Associate Editors
Editorial Board	50 Members ^a	5 members ^b

^a The IJSL also utilizes a Contributing Authors Board. ^b The Associate Editors constitute the Editorial Board of SLTP.

In order to evaluate the scholarly impact of each of these journals, we compare a number of metrics on papers published over the period from launch (in each case) through 2018. The first of these is CpP, or citations per paper, which is the sum of the citation counts across all papers published by a journal, divided by the total number of published papers. Next, AWCR is a body of work's age-weighted citation rate. Following Jin (2007), the AWCR measures the number of citations to an entire body of work (e.g., all publications in a journal), adjusted for the age of each individual paper. The AWCRpA is the age-weighted citation rate per author, which is similar to the AWCR, but is normalized to the number of authors of each paper. Next is the *h*-index. Following Hirsch (2005), given a journal's set of articles ranked in decreasing order of the number of citations that they have received, a journal's *h*-index is the (unique) largest number such that the top *h* articles have each received at least *h* citations.² Lastly, following Egghe (2006), given a journal's set of articles ranked in decreasing order of the number of citations that they have received, the journal's *g*-index is the (unique) largest number such that the top *g* articles received (together) at least *g*² citations.³

A comparison of the scholarly impact of the two journals that is based on the metrics described above is presented in Table 2. Each metric was collected using the open source software program *Publish or Perish* (Harzing, 2007), which collects and analyzes Google Scholar citations data (Harzing and Wal, 2008). As indicated in Table 2, the body of work published through 2018 by the IJSL has to date garnered 4.93 citations per paper. Interestingly, the publications portfolio of SLTP, the younger of the two journals, has to date generated 9.46 citations per

² For example, a scholar who has published 25 papers has an *h*-index of 16 if 16 of his or her papers have at least 16 citations each, and none of the remaining nine papers has more than 15 citations.

³ Returning to the previous example, a scholar who has published 25 papers has an *g*-index of 19 if his or her 19 most cited papers have at least 361 citations (together), yet neither his or her 19 or 20 most cited papers do not (yet) have 400 citations (together).

paper. Similarly, the age-weighted citation rate (AWCR) for papers published in SLTP is about 118, which compares favorably to its counterpart of about 89 for the IJSL. However, when normalized by the number of authors, this rate (AWCRpA) is equal to about 75 for each of the two journals.

Table 2. A Summary of the Impact of Servant Leadership Journals

Journal Title	CpP	AWCR	AWCRpA	<i>h</i> -index	<i>g</i> -index
<i>International Journal of Servant-Leadership</i>	4.93	88.7	74.6	12	30
<i>Servant Leadership: Theory & Practice</i>	9.46	118.3	74.9	11	20

Key: CpP = citations per paper. AWCR = age-weighted citation rate. AWCRpA = age-weighted citation rate per author.

One limitation of the aforementioned comparisons that generally favors SLTP is, however, that the IJSL publishes servant leadership-related poetry and other essays that are not likely selected for publication on the basis of their expected future scholarly impact.⁴ To account for this, we turn to a comparison of the *h*-indexes. As shown in Table 2, SLTP’s *h*-index is 11, meaning that the journal’s 11 most impactful papers have each garnered at least 11 citations. The IJSL’s *h*-index is currently 12, meaning that its 12 most impactful papers have each garnered at least 12 citations. This comparison suggests that these journals are similar in terms of their consistent production of impactful scholarship.⁵

The remaining metric is the *g*-index, which, as Egghe (2006) points out, aims to improve on the *h*-index by giving more weight to highly-cited articles. These highly-cited publications are often referred to in the scientometrics literature as “home runs.”⁶ Examination of Table 2 indicates that a *g*-index comparison favors the IJSL. As shown in Table 2, the IJSL’s *g*-index is 30, which means that the 30 most impactful publications in the IJSL have together garnered at least 900 citations to date. With a *g*-index of 20, SLTP’s 20 most impactful publications have together generated at least 400 citations to date.⁷

The next section of the study examines the details of the analysis above in order to provide a ranking of institutions based on the impact of scholarly work in servant leadership produced by their affiliates. This examination will focus only on academic, governmental and non-profit organizations.

Institution Rankings

In order to provide a worldwide ranking of institutions based on the impact of research in the two core servant leadership journals, we gathered Google Scholar

⁴ Consistent with this claim, the IJSL’s performance vis-à-vis SLTP using the aforementioned metrics is impacted by a relative abundance of uncited papers, referred to in the scientometrics literature as “dry holes.” For more, see Laband and Tollison (2003 and 2004), Mayer (2004) and Mixon and Upadhyaya (2008).

⁵ Admittedly, the IJSL’s greater age provides an advantage here.

⁶ For more on “home runs” and “swinging for the fences” in academic research, see and Brogaard, Engleberg and Van Wesep (2018) and Mixon (2018).

⁷ Again, the IJSL’s greater age provides an advantage.

citations to articles published in these journals, again over the period from launch (in each case) through 2018, that garnered at least one Google Scholar citation since publication. For each article, the total citation count was divided by the age of the article in order to produce a citations per year count, after which each author received proportional credit for that count, thus generating a citations per year and per author count. In cases where an author lists a dual (or greater) affiliation, that author's pro-rata share of the article's citations was split between the two (or more) affiliations. Next, these individual citation counts were transferred to each author's listed institutional affiliation. Citations counts for each institution were summed, generating a single number for each institution. Lastly, these counts were then indexed to the count of the top-performing institution, with the resulting index number referred to as the CitesYA Index.⁸

The top 50 institutions are presented in Table 3. At the top of the ranking is the Larry C. Spears Center for Servant Leadership, which was founded by Larry Spears in 2008 and is based in Indianapolis, Indiana.⁹ The mission of Spears Center "is to create a more caring and serving world through the understanding and practice of servant-leadership." In addition to directing a servant leadership-focused center bearing his name, in 2010 Larry Spears was named as the inaugural holder of Gonzaga University's Servant Leadership Scholar chair. At the time of the announcement, Spears was described as "the world's foremost scholar in the field of servant leadership." The analysis producing the results shown in Table 2 supports this description, as his essay appearing in the inaugural issue of the *IJSL* (Spears, 2005) has been cited more than 300 times to date, which is more than any other paper appearing in either of the two servant leadership journals examined in this study.

Table 3. Top 50 Institutions Worldwide

Rank	Institution	CitesYA Index	Rank	Institution	CitesYA Index
1	Larry C. Spears Center for Servant-Leadership	100.0000	26	Grace College of Divinity	5.0734
2	Regent University	71.5239	27	Finnish Institute of Occupational Health	4.8827
3	Utah Valley University	64.0854	28	Indiana State University	4.8446
4	Our Lady of the Lake University	56.5039	29	Whitworth University	4.2277
5	Indiana Wesleyan University	53.1375	30	West Negros University	4.1579
6	Ashford University	37.1924	31	Frostburg State University	3.9290
7	Gonzaga University	28.2121	32	Mission pour la Nouvelle Créature	3.8146
8	U.S. Army	24.2228		Presbyterian School ^b	3.8146
9	Palm Beach Atlantic University	22.8877	34	University of Santo Amaro	3.6620
10	Southeastern University	21.9340	35	University of Glamorgan	3.1661
11	Erasmus University	18.9205	36	ETH Zurich	2.8610
12	Lone Star College	18.8346		Technical University of Munich	2.8610

⁸ For a given institution, i , this index is equal to i 's citation count per published paper divided by the citation count per published paper of the top-ranked institution, j . Thus, where $i = j$, CitesYA Index is equal to 100, and where $i \neq j$, CitesYA Index is less than 100.

⁹ Details about this and other institutions appearing in Table 3 that are provided in this study are collected from each institution's website.

13	Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership	18.1385	38	Johnson University	2.5558
14	Columbus State University	17.0704	39	Rutgers University	2.3841
15	Kansas State University	11.4438	40	Concordia University	2.0599
16	University of Bristol	10.4902	41	Alvernia University	1.9073
17	University of South Dakota	10.1850		City University of New York	1.9073
18	University of Georgia	9.5365		University of London	1.9073
19	Eastern Washington University	8.9071	44	Blue Springs School District ^c	1.5258
20	University of Victoria	8.8117		Mountain Lake Christian School ^d	1.5258
21	Seattle University	7.6292	46	University of Michigan	1.4114
22	Villanova University	7.1524	47	Air University	1.2588
23	Bethel University	6.0271		St. Edward's University	1.2588
24	University of Idaho	5.9382	49	Camosun College	1.1444
25	VHA National Center for Organizational Development ^a	5.5628	50	University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point	0.9537

^a Washington, D.C.

^b Houston, TX

^c Blue Springs, MO

^d Mountain Lake, MN

Ranked second in Table 2 is Regent University, which is a private Christian university located in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Servant leadership scholars representing Regent University, among which Kathleen Patterson's work has been especially impactful, have produced scholarship in both the IJSL and SLTP that has made an impact on the overall body of knowledge of servant leadership. Perhaps Regent University's position should not be surprising, as the institution currently offers a master's degree in organizational leadership and a doctorate in servant leadership, and it sponsors the Servant Leadership Research Roundtable.

Following Regent University is Utah Valley University, a public institution located in Orem, Utah. Like Regent University, servant leadership scholars affiliated with third-ranked Utah Valley University have produced impactful scholarship in both the IJSL and SLTP. Ranked fourth is Our Lady of the Lake University, which is a Catholic university located in San Antonio, Texas. Like Regent University, Our Lady of the Lake University offers a master's degree in organizational leadership. Rounding out the top five is Indiana Wesleyan University, which is a Wesleyan Church-affiliated liberal arts university located in Marion, Indiana. Indiana Wesleyan University's institutional structure includes a School of Service and Leadership, which offers bachelor's, master's and doctoral programs in organizational leadership.

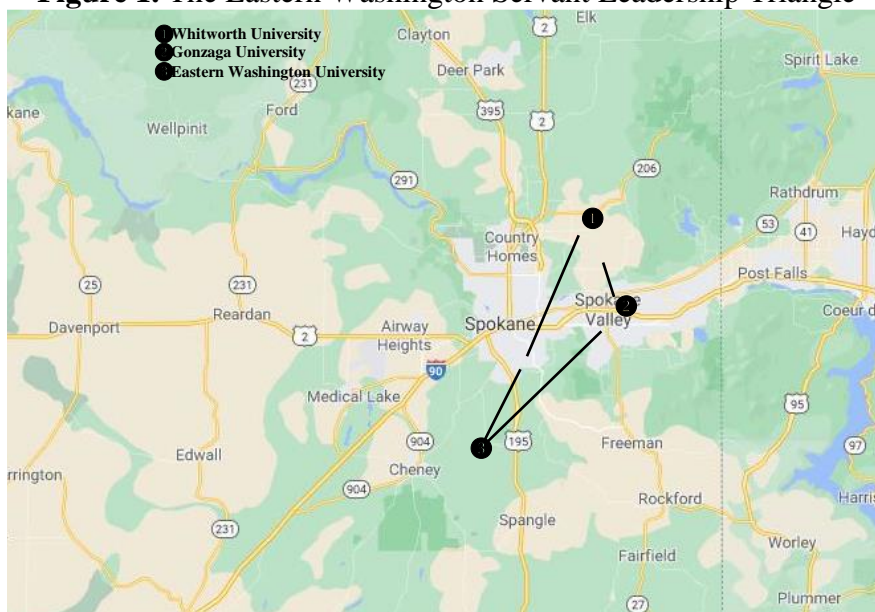
Heading up the second set of five institutions in Table 3 are Ashford University, a private university located in San Diego, California, and Gonzaga University, which is a Catholic University located in Spokane, Washington. Seventh-ranked Gonzaga University's institutional structure not only includes a School of Leadership Studies, as indicated above it is also home to the editorial offices of the *International Journal of Servant-Leadership*.¹⁰ Interestingly, a second Spokane-based institution, namely Whitworth University, is also ranked among the top 50 in Table 3. Twenty ninth-ranked Whitworth University is a

¹⁰ Gonzaga University also offers a certificate program in servant leadership, as well as a master's degree in organizational leadership.

Presbyterian Church-affiliated university whose School of Business offers a minor in leadership that includes student immersion in servant leadership.¹¹ Just to the southwest of Spokane resides Eastern Washington University, which is a public university located in Cheney, Washington. Eastern Washington University is home to a cadre of servant leadership scholars that has produced a ranking of nineteen (see Table 3).

Much like the research triangle created by the location of three prominent institutions in North Carolina (i.e., Duke University, North Carolina State University and the University of North Carolina), these three Spokane/Cheney-area institutions create what we refer to in Figure 1 as the Eastern Washington Servant Leadership Triangle.¹² Moreover, the lofty ranking (i.e., twenty first) of Seattle University, a Jesuit University in the western portion of the state, makes Washington a powerhouse in terms of servant leadership scholarship.

Figure 1. The Eastern Washington Servant Leadership Triangle



Just behind Gonzaga University, in eighth, is the U.S. Army. Most of the impactful servant leadership scholarship produced by members of the U.S. Army emanates from graduates of the master's program in organizational leadership at Columbus State University, which is a public university located in Columbus, Georgia. This particular institution is ranked fourteenth (see Table 3), and, as mentioned earlier, is home to the editorial offices of *Servant Leadership: Theory & Practice* and the Turner Center for Servant Leadership.¹³ Lastly, ranked ninth and

¹¹ Whitworth University also sponsors the Whitworth Servant Leadership Award, "which honors a graduating senior who has exhibited an extraordinary commitment to serving the campus and the larger community."

¹² According to Google Maps, the distance between Cheney and Spokane is only 16.5 miles.

¹³ The William B. Turner Center for Servant Leadership was established in 2019 by a \$1 million donation from

tenth are Palm Beach Atlantic University and Southeastern University, respectively. Palm Beach Atlantic University is a private Christian university located in West Palm Beach, Florida.¹⁴ Southeastern University is a private Christian liberal arts university located in Lakeland, Florida, that offers bachelor's and doctoral degrees in organizational leadership.

The second set of 10 institutions shown in Table 3 includes several of what *U.S. News & World Report* considers to be national universities. This list includes fifteenth-ranked Kansas State University, seventeenth-ranked University of South Dakota, and eighteenth-ranked University of Georgia.¹⁵ Also included among the second group of 10 are the first non U.S.-based institutions – eleventh-ranked Erasmus University, sixteenth-ranked Bristol University, and twentieth-ranked University of Victoria – along with the thirteenth-ranked Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership. The Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership is an international nonprofit organization located in South Orange, New Jersey, whose mission is “to advance the awareness, understanding and practice of servant leadership by individuals and organizations.”¹⁶ Its namesake, Robert Greenleaf, is generally considered the foundational servant leadership scholar whose seminal publication proposed that the best leaders were servants first, and the key tools for a servant-leader included listening, persuasion, access to intuition and foresight, use of language, and pragmatic measurements of outcomes (Greenleaf, 1973).

Finally, the second half of the rankings presented in Table 3 provide yet another indication of how wide the diffusion of impactful servant leadership scholarship has been over the past 15 years. For example, the latter entries in the table indicate that impactful servant leadership scholarship is not only emanating from prominent European institutions, such as the forty first-ranked University of London, local school districts in the U.S., such as Blue Lake School District in Missouri, are also contributing to the body of knowledge in the field. As the two core journals in the field mature, the scope of impactful research on servant leadership will likely continue to grow.

the Coca-Cola Foundation (<https://www.wtvm.com/2019/05/08/coca-cola-donates-m-csu-create-servant-leadership-center/>). Private support for servant leadership also maintains the Frank Brown Distinguished Chair in Servant Leadership at Columbus State University. Lastly, members of the Columbus State University business faculty have produced impactful servant leadership scholarship in both the *IJSL* and *SLTP*.

¹⁴ Palm Beach Atlantic University hosts an annual servant leadership conference at its campus in Orlando, Florida.

¹⁵ Other national universities included in Table 3 are twenty second-ranked Villanova University, twenty fourth-ranked University of Idaho, twenty eighth-ranked Indiana State University, thirty ninth-ranked Rutgers University and forty sixth-ranked University of Michigan.

¹⁶ The Greenleaf Center hosts an annual conference on servant leadership, and offers an extensive catalog of publications on the subject that is accessible to the public.

CONCLUSION

Little, if any, study has occurred to date concerning the impact of scholarship in the emerging academic field of servant leadership. This paper address the void in the literature by presenting an analysis of the scholarly impact of the two core servant leadership journals – the *International Journal of Servant-Leadership* and *Servant Leadership: Theory & Practice* – and by providing what we believe is the first worldwide ranking of institutions that is based on the impact of published scholarship in the area of servant leadership. The results presented and discussed above suggest that while both of these journals are similar in terms of their consistent production of impactful scholarship, the *International Journal of Servant-Leadership* has, at least partly owing to its advantage in age, produced more “home run” research than its counterpart. Lastly, analysis of the institution-based data reveals that affiliates of the Spears Center for Servant Leadership have produced the most impactful research in servant leadership, followed by those faculty and others at Regent University, Utah Valley University, Our Lady of the Lake University and Indiana Wesleyan University.

As support for servant leadership as a field of academic study continues to grow, and as the two core servant leadership journals continue to mature, the benefit of additional iterations of the type of analysis presented in this study will also likely grow. Thus, future research might seek to replicate the type of approach presented in this study. Future research might also consider alternative methods, such as analyses of published page counts in servant leadership per institution, success (productivity) of doctorate programs in servant leadership, or even conferral of imprimatur-type recognition on individuals and institutions that is related to the advancement of scholarship in servant leadership.

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