The Vermont Connection

January 2006

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Examining Latino/a Student Leadership

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Are the leadership development models that exist today inclusive of all student leaders? Does leadership take on different forms when examined through the lenses of different cultural communities? Is there enough research available for student affairs educators to successfully identify the needs and concerns of all student leaders? Although there have been thousands of research articles and books on the topic of leadership development, very few of them have addressed the ways in which students of color, more specifically Latino/a students, develop leadership skills and competencies. Student affairs educators must not become comfortable only identifying with the leadership theories that exist today as we must recognize the ever-changing world in which we live. "To successfully navigate in this world, new maps are needed—maps describing the leadership that is needed in an era of rapid change" (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 1998, p. 48). This article serves to broaden student affairs educators' perspectives regarding leadership development and provide recommendations to create space to support and maintain that development through a cultural lens.

"We search eagerly for leadership yet seek to cage and tame it."
-Burns, 1978

There is a long history of researching leadership development. Many theorists have formulated paradigms that encompass the diversity of leadership styles, behaviors, theories, and practices (Burns, 1978; DePree, 1989; Greenleaf, 1996; Komives et al., 1998; Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005). Leadership development among college students in the context of defining student leaders has been well studied, and many researchers have identified the various aspects of that definition. Some of these identifiable aspects can be ascribed, but not limited to a student's leadership history, personality, relationship development, and social capacity. In response to the many characteristics that identify a student leader, theories have been developed to provide student affairs educators with comprehensive definitions of leadership styles through clear theoretical constructs. It is through the lenses of these theoretical constructs that student affairs educators can assess leadership development among college students and provide appropriate support for students who will potentially possess a diversity of leadership styles, behaviors, and practices. However, we must not get too comfortable identifying only with the leadership theories that exist today as we must recognize the ever-changing world in which we live. "To successfully navigate in this world, new maps are needed—maps describing the leadership that is needed in an era of rapid change" (Komives et al., 1998, p. 48).

Leadership Development: Is it Inclusive?

As leadership development theories continue to provide student affairs educators with great insight into the development of student leaders, it is important that we become critical of the leadership models presented as their prevalence can imply that they can somehow adequately fit every student leader. Leadership pervades every aspect of our society, providing us with seamless examples of leaders, and allowing us to recognize the eccentricities of leadership. Through these examples, we continuously develop new ways to describe the complexity of leadership development. As Burns (1978) described:

Even if we exclude acts of nonleadership in our analysis, we must include an enormous variety and range of actions that in themselves constitute complete leadership acts–that is, the process an achievement of intended change–or that consciously make up significant links in the total process of achieving intended change. Not only the building of a new political party aimed at mobilizing tribal groups for the sake of social change, or a campaign against illiteracy, or a community development program, but a mother consciously acting in such a way that her small son's sensitivity to others will be improved, a taxi driver deliberately setting an example of considerate driving, a Red Guard leader making sure the food and drink are equally shared on a work project in the country–all these are parts of the totality of the leadership process. Leadership begins earlier, operates more

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widely, takes more forms, pervades more sectors of society, and lasts longer in the lives of most persons than has been generally recognized. (p. 427)

Examining leadership development among college student populations can lead student affairs educators to ask the following questions: Are the leadership development models that exist today inclusive of all student leaders? Should student affairs educators approach leadership development as a process as opposed to leadership as a thing? Does leadership take on different forms when examined through the lenses of different cultural communities? Is there enough research available for student affairs educators to successfully identify the needs and concerns of all student leaders?

Examining Leadership Development Among Latino/a Students

Although there have been thousands of research articles and books on the topic of leadership development, very few of them have addressed the ways in which students of color, more specifically Latino/a students, develop leadership skills and competencies. Research indicates that there is a significant difference in leadership development between students of color and their White counterparts. Some of these differences can be attributed to experiences of racism, historical roots, language, biculturalism, socioeconomic status, cultural values, nonverbal communication, and assumptions about the world (Arminio et al., 2000; Foeman & Pressley, 1985; Ho, 1987). Additionally, "these experiences may relate to why low numbers of students of color become involved in leadership programs" (Arminio et al., 2000, p. 498). Student affairs educators must work to develop a more inclusive leadership experience for all students, recognizing leadership organizationally, culturally, and socially.

When examining the ways in which students of color personally define leadership, research indicates that students of color perceive a leader to be somewhat of "the other." This finding is apparent in the study presented by Arminio et al. (2000) as they reported, "Most participants did not consider themselves 'leaders.' In fact, some resented the term 'leader' being used to describe them. They felt it separated them from other students in their racial group" (p. 500). This, however, was not the case for Caucasian men as Kezar and Moriarty (2000) reported, "Being elected to office was significant only for Caucasian men" (p. 61), where *positional leadership* was an overwhelming theme among Caucasian men throughout their research. In this case, positional leadership is characterized as a type of leadership achieved through elected office, where a title signifies a specific leadership role within a group or organization. The disparity that exists within the realm of leadership development between Latino/a and White students clearly gives student affairs educators a reason to assess the variables contributing to this cognitive disparity. This research analysis will address the possible variables that contribute to this disparity and examine how leadership development differs among Latino/a students and their White counterparts, thus recognizing the intersection of leadership and identity. Furthermore, this analysis will address how student affairs educators can better serve our community of Latino/a student leaders by transforming leadership training in ways that will hopefully foster their personal growth on our college campuses.

Relational Leadership: Positional vs. Nonpositional

The Relational Leadership Model as described by Komives et al. (1998) can be used to examine leadership development among Latino/a students. Within this model, different styles of leadership exist: positional and nonpositional leadership. While these are not the only styles that exist, both become more pronounced when examining the relationship between leadership development in White students and Latino/a students. Positional leadership occurs when one seeks to become a chair or president of an organization and frames his or her leadership role around such titles. In juxtaposition to this style, nonpositional leadership occurs when one seeks to simply be involved in an organization as a member or subcommittee member, with no particular interest in establishing a title for oneself.

Intersection of Leadership and Identity

The discussion of leadership development among Latino/a students at predominately White institutions inherently leads us to question how one's culture affects one's development as a leader. It is important to note

that students of color, particularly those attending predominately White institutions, face additional challenges (Hernandez, 2002; Justiz & Rendon, 1989; Oliver, Rodriguez, & Mickelson, 1985; Tinto, 1993). Some of those challenges include severe isolation and a lack of administrative leaders who identify as people of color. Additionally, Justiz and Rendon (1989) reported:

Many first-year Latino students are the first in their family to attend col- lege; may come from low-income households where Spanish is the pri- mary spoken language; may be academically underprepared; and may com- bat feelings of isolation, especially at predominately white institutions. (p. 267)

Consequently, how might these social and cultural conditions impact one's leadership experiences, and ultimately, one's leadership development?

According to research by Hernandez (2002), Latino/a students do not immediately get involved with student organizations upon entering college as they are not only transitioning academically, but socially, culturally, and emotionally. Rather, when "faced with a challenging academic environment and feeling a lack of preparation to compete and adjust to the rigor of college, these Latino students felt they had no choice but to put off involvement in campus organizations" (Hernandez, p. 76). It is apparent that Latino/a students hesitate to become involved with leadership opportunities, partly due to their social and cultural conditions. However, Fuertes and Sedlacek (1993) go even further and report that students of color "want the institution's services to reflect aspects of their unique culture" (p. 280). Research indicates that traditional models of leadership tend to be exclusive, meaning the models represent a view of leadership adopted from those traditionally in positions of power: a mostly Caucasian, male, upper-middle-class orientation to leadership (Amey & Twombly, 1992; Bensimon & Neumann, 1993; Cross & Ravekes, 1990; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000; Lyons, 1990). Leadership, in this sense, can be intimidating for students of color, a group that is not represented in these traditional models. Kezar and Moriarty (2000) provide a more tangible overview of leadership among Latino/a students:

Leadership development programs geared toward minority students ideally should be tailored to meet the needs of members of specific groups. Many Hispanics, for instance, may not be motivated to attend a leadership development program offered to all students. Many more would be motivated to attend such a program if it featured Hispanic and bilin- gual presenters and integrated various Hispanic cultures. The emphasis on Hispanic culture makes the program more relevant to the students so they feel more connected to it and more motivated to participate. (p. 280)

The lack of visibility of Latinos/as in administrative positions and among the faculty on college campuses can be a detriment to Latino/a students' leadership development. Without visible Latino/a leaders on campus, Latino/a students may be less likely to seek opportunities to interact with faculty, staff members, and students, or become involved in leadership activities. This obstacle becomes problematic as Astin (1975) confirmed that "students who are active as leaders in campus organizations are more likely to persist in college and graduate than those who are not" (p. 86). Consequently, "integrating Hispanic culture into the activities of the university may encourage Hispanic students to participate in them and to seek leadership positions in organizations" (Fuertes & Sedlacek, 1993, p. 281). The intersection between leadership and identity must be recognized by student affairs educators. Colleges and universities must develop ways to integrate their Latino/a students in the promotion of their leadership programs, providing Latino/a students with leadership development opportunities that will speak to their experiences, both socially and culturally.

Latinos/as Emerging as Student Leaders

The difficulty in assessing the leadership development among Latinos/as is partly due to the fact that the traditional leadership theories have been solely based on White students. According to Kezar and Moriarty (2000), "the major theories that have been (and still are) used as frameworks for designing most programs and services to enhance student development have evolved largely from studies of Caucasian, middle and upper income men" (p. 56). Unfortunately, there has been very little research on leadership development among Latinos/as, so it is difficult to accurately describe specific leadership styles and behaviors conducive to this population. This does not preclude the discussion of leadership development among students of color, as some comprehensive research exists in this area. Although the research provided does not exclusively speak about

Latino/a students, it seems appropriate to make some extrapolations that speak to the leadership experiences of Latino/a students.

When analyzing the leadership development among Latino/a students it was apparent that their experiences were incongruent with the traditional notions of leadership. Most participants in the study by Arminio et al. (2000) did not consider themselves leaders. In fact, one student stated that "being a leader meant being part of the 'enemy,' no longer separated from the oppressor or an oppressive system" (p. 500). It was interesting that "few participants used the word 'leader' to describe themselves, and many participants were sincerely surprised that student affairs educators viewed them as leaders" (Arminio et al., p. 500). Although these students did not view themselves as leaders, as it is traditionally defined, they undoubtedly possessed leadership qualities that exemplified relational leadership as described by Komives et al. (1998):

Relational leadership involves a focus in five primary components. This approach to leadership is *inclusive* of people and diverse points of view, *empowers* those involved, is *purposeful* and builds commitment toward common purposes, is *ethical*, and recognizes that all four of those elements are accomplished by being *process-oriented*. (p. 68)

These five primary components were found throughout the research conducted by Arminio et al. (2000). The students in this study were inclusive of fellow members in their organization, as the students stated that their membership included shared organizational responsibilities. This finding was further explored when a student stated, "We work together like a human body; how can the foot say to the eyes, I don't need you?" (Arminio et al., p. 503). The notion of community resonated throughout many of the student's responses, as they constantly reaffirmed that they needed one another to be successful as an organization.

Consequently, the students empowered each other, having faith in the actions that each member performed for his or her particular organization. One woman humbly stated, "I'm not really leading, what I'm really trying to do is instill confidence in them so that they know next year when I'm not here, they can still do it," and "This team is kind of young. I'm trying to make them more active and responsible...so that next year they can do it without me" (Arminio et al., 2000, p. 501). Other students described being purposeful, as there was a sense of responsibility they felt toward their community. Another student of color said, "I became a leader to pull the organization out of the muck" (Arminio et al., p. 504). Additionally, those students of color who sought to have a role in a group did so for the betterment of the group, not for themselves.

There seemed to be an overarching theme of community throughout these students' responses, establishing an ethical overtone for their involvement in their organizations. "Those who were intentional about seeking the role did so for the group, not for their personal benefit. Virtually all students interviewed discussed the importance of the team or the group" (Arminio et al., 2000, p. 503). There is also evidence of a focus on being process-oriented. One grouping of students described how "their group provided a service that made a difference, like bringing speakers to campus who engaged students in acquiring knowledge and working through a decision the group felt comfortable with, rather than rushing to make a decision" (Arminio et al., p. 504).

The components of relational leadership pervaded the research conducted by Arminio et al. (2000). Furthermore, the differences in leadership styles between students of color and White students were significant. As White students were found to value positional leadership (e.g., being elected to serve as president), students of color were found to value nonpositional leadership (e.g., being an active member in their club or organization without having a title), therefore valuing the importance of community and collaboration. This difference is further affirmed in a study by Kezar and Moriarty (2000) in which they reported "being elected to office was the strongest extracurricular predictor of leadership ability for Caucasian men" and "the only significant extracurricular experience for African American men was participation in volunteer work" (pp. 59-60). Interestingly, for African American men "working on class projects and participating in a racial or cultural awareness workshop emerged as significant predictors of leadership ability," whereas "participation in ROTC, serving as resident advisor, and holding an internship emerged as significant predictors" (Kezar & Moriarty, 2000, pp. 59-60) for White students.

Transforming Leadership Training

By examining this research analysis, it is highly probable that there could be significant differences in the leadership development of Latino/a students when compared to their White counterparts. Importantly, there are some cultural components to take into account when assessing leadership skills among Latinos/as, and there are established differences in how leadership is perceived among Latinos/as. Student affairs educators must recognize these differences and develop innovative ways to provide meaningful leadership opportunities for Latinos/as. "Campuses with leadership development programs should assess the populations attending their programs to determine if students of color are adequately being served" (Arminio et al., 2000, p. 506).

As educators continue to understand the differences that exist within leadership development among Latino/as and other students of color, they can begin to transform leadership training and development to meet the needs of specified groups and make an effort to be sensitive to the cultural components that directly and indirectly affect Latino/a students. This will not only serve Latino/a students, but all students, acknowledging the diversity in leadership styles.

Conclusion

Greenleaf once said, "we seem to be in a crisis of leadership" (1996, p. 287). Today, the crisis of leadership is apparent in how exclusive leadership development theories have been toward students of color and other marginalized populations. It is apparent that there are significant differences in leadership styles, behaviors, and practices among Latino/a students across college campuses. It is important to note these differences as student affairs educators must understand how to effectively serve our students in ways that will help each of them distinctly flourish as student leaders. As educators continue to examine the Latino/a student leader experience, they will hopefully begin to understand how to diversify and broaden leadership development, creating a space where each group can be successful in their environment. "Outcome research…has found that leadership experience is among the best predictors of student grades and retention" (White & Sedlacek, 1986, p. 176). If student affairs educators cannot successfully outreach to Latino/a college students in ways that will empower them to get involved in leadership opportunities, they run the risk of losing some of those students—students who could potentially succeed by simply being involved with their institution's leadership opportunities. By developing leadership programs with which Latino/a students can identify, "it may enrich the quality of the programs for other Hispanic students as well" (Fuertes & Sedlacek, 1993, p. 282).

The current crisis of leadership is due to the lack of knowledge regarding the varying paths to leadership development that exist not only among Latino/a students, but also with other students of color, women, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students. "As a consequence, the disparity is too great between the promise (what is reasonably possible with our resources of material and knowledge) and the performance (what our whole range of institutions actually deliver)" (Greenleaf, 1996, p. 287). Only when educators gain more knowledge about the promise that exists among student leaders in the academy will they then be able to appreciate the fruits of the students' potential.

It is also important to note that the way leadership identity actually develops is something that had not been researched until very recently. Komives et al. (2005) noted, "Despite the broad scope of this literature [leadership], there is little scholarship about how leadership develops or how a leadership identity develops over time" (p. 593). Practitioners must keep this fact in mind when critiquing the lack of research on leadership development among students of color, as leadership identity development is not yet established, and this development can potentially look different for students of color, in this case, Latino/a students.

Finally, student affairs educators must continue to scrutinize the ways in which leadership opportunities are being demonstrated on college campuses, and must work toward a common goal to create a voice for Latino/a leaders, as well as all students of color, women, and LGBTQ student leaders.

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