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Leadership Education in a Changing World: The Efficacy of Service-Learning as a Pedagogical Asset in Online University Leadership Courses

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Leadership Education in a Changing World: The Efficacy of Service-Learning as a Pedagogical
Asset in Online University Leadership Courses

A thesis

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the domains of service-learning, leadership education, and online education to generate new ideas relevant to providing a comprehensive educational experience that successfully aids students to lead in subsequent positions. This is an integrative literature review with supporting information from 35 sources including journals, books, dissertations, relevant media, and surveys that are used to discuss leadership education, online education, service-learning, and the leadership development potential for students when service-learning assignments are utilized in online leadership courses. Themes from each section will be identified and combined to produce new ideas in employing service-learning in online settings as it pertains to leadership education.

Keywords: leadership education, service-learning, service-learning online, online education, online learning, skill development

Chapter One: Introduction

In early 2020, the Coronavirus pandemic disrupted life as we knew it and the world of education changed almost overnight. The sudden need to distance led troves of students to continue their educational pursuits online (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Fortunately, online education through Learning Management Systems (LMS) is not a new practice. Virtual learning began its ascent to popularity in the 1990s (Alshalan, 2019, p. 4), and since then has grown to be an effective tool in facilitating a more comprehensive learning experience (Greenleaf & Goertzen, 2021); it has demonstrated potential as a viable answer to making classroom learning possible even when being together is not. In 2023 alone, over 75% of universities in the United States offered online degree programs (Los Angeles Business Journal, 2023, p. 91). Not only do students impacted by the pandemic benefit, but those who are unable to attend a physical campus due to illness, distance, or otherwise gain access to education because of Learning Management Systems and online degree programs.

An inherent deficit of virtual classrooms is reduced engagement. One way to address this challenge is by observing how the educational experience occurs. One pedagogical model, service-learning, synthesizes engagement with groups or organizations outside of the classroom with course material that results in a rich learning experience for students. This model is well-suited for this unique global situation because it has been applied in physical and virtual classrooms for decades. Service-learning integrates community service with classroom instruction with reflection that instills a sense of civic responsibility, strengthens communities, and ultimately enriches the overall learning experience for students (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2013, as cited in Bettencourt, 2015) and has been described by Bringle and Hatcher (1996) as:

a credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. (para. 6)

Although classroom education has traditionally occurred in a face-to-face setting, the capabilities of technology now allow students to participate in virtual volunteerism (Guthrie, 2016, p. 15). The reflection aspect that follows the act of service is critical because it challenges students thinking in a way that calls on them to converge memory of engaging in the act of service with their own thinking that includes classroom lectures and assigned readings. This enlists higher order thinking skills including analysis, comprehension, problem-solving, and evaluation (Rama et al., 2000) that a lecture-based course may not provoke. Additionally, taking the time to reflect gives students further by giving them a deliberate opportunity to compare the experience with their own values which supports their personal development (Hatcher & Bringle, 1997).

The Coronavirus pandemic conferred unprecedented challenges to the world of education. Students and educators alike grappled with adjusting to full-time online learning, especially those who were only comfortable operating in traditional face-to-face classrooms (Hagedorn et al., 2022). Institutions of higher education are imperative in developing professionals, leaders, and change agents who will address pertinent societal issues on local and international levels (Hurtado, 2005). As such, the leadership of colleges and universities must remain cognizant of global trends that may impact learning and accessibility to higher education. Service-Learning has been used for decades in online and virtual formats that can enrich a student's learning experience and better prepare them to lead in their external roles.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore the efficacy of service-learning as an instrument of experiential learning in online leadership education courses. The format of this study was an integrated literature review. This topic was selected with attention to the increased shift to online learning and the necessity to identify opportunities for meaningful educational experiences. While there is substantial literature regarding service-learning and online education, research focusing on the convergence of these domains is limited. Moreover, the body of scholarship centered on leadership education using service-learning in online classrooms is narrow. The existing literature focuses more on experience, tensions between parties, and outcomes more than specific skill development, strengths, and weaknesses of this approach. This study aimed to address those elements.

Further, this study investigated how engagement in service-learning-based assignments in online courses prepares students to lead effectively outside of the classroom, what leadership skills could be developed through this process, and what ones are not. In the context of this project, online service learning, virtual learning, and eService learning are used synonymously for the sake of redundancy. Understanding what leadership skills are honed through virtual learning environments may shed valuable insight on the ways in which this model prepares students to lead in their external roles and the type of leadership that may be expected from them. This information, paired with the process of reflection, may be useful in helping students identify their leadership style, strengths, and deficits. The goal of this review is to identify strengths and weaknesses of online service-learning with the intention of those insights and ideas being shared to benefit the practice of pedagogy. Following this section are sections regarding the research questions, hypotheses, relevant definitions, literature review, discussion, and conclusion.

Research Questions

RQ1. How do service-learning based assignments in online courses prepare students to lead effectively in their roles outside of the virtual classroom?

RQ2. What leadership skills are effectively developed through engaging in service-learning based assignments in online courses?

RQ3. What leadership skills are undeveloped or not sufficiently developed through engaging in online service-learning based assignments?

Hypotheses

H1. Participating in online service-learning based courses results in an increased development of leadership skills outlined in course content in a way that is unique from face-to-face courses.

H2. Leadership educators will target themes in the skills their students develop through participating in online service-learning based courses including deficits thereby shedding insight on how students are better prepared to lead in their roles outside of the classroom.

Definitions

Civic Engagement: “individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern” (American Psychological Association, 2009, para. 2)

Community partner: the main contact person under whom the student works at the service-learning site. The community partner is responsible for supervising and evaluating the student during the service-learning course (Scanlan, 2015). This is the individual who represents the organization the student is engaged in the service aspect of the course.

Community service: A free service provided by an individual to address a community need. Community service differs from service-learning in that it is not attached to reflection or academic goals (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009).

E-service learning: A development of traditional service learning where “the instructional component, the service component, or both are conducted online” (Waldner et al., 2012).

Experiential learning: The process of making meaning through direct experience. Experiential learning focuses on learning outside the classroom (Dewey, 1938 as cited in Scanlan, 2015).

Leader Development: Intrapersonal; focused on developing individual leaders (Day et al., 2014).

Leadership Development: Interpersonal; focused on enhancing the capacity of leadership skills (Day et al., 2014).

Leadership Educator: In the context of leadership education, this includes “all educators who intentionally design and foster leadership development” (Guthrie, 2018, p. 19).

Learning Management System: Digital educational platforms, also known as Learning Management Systems (LMS), are defined as “a software application that automates the administration, tracking, and reporting of training events” (Ellis, 2009, as cited in Goryunova & Jenkins, 2017, p. 82). Learning Management Systems are the digital platforms where online classrooms exist.

Online classroom: the primary shared learning environment between educators and students that is accessible through an LMS. This is the online space where course communications, assignment submissions, and attending class occur. In this paper, online classroom and virtual classroom refer to the same thing.

Service-Learning: “a credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation

of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility” (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996, para. 6)

Reflection: the intentional consideration of an experience through the lens of specific learning objectives. (Bringle & Hatcher, 1997). Reflection bridges experience of engaging in service with course content (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999).

Virtual learning: “the delivery of learning through electronic mediation which bridges the gap caused when the instructor and student are separated in either time or place” (adapted from Leonard, 1996; Fell, 1996 as cited in Stonebraker & Hazeltine, 2004, para. 2). In this paper, virtual learning and online learning are used interchangeably.

Virtual teams: a collection of geographically dispersed individuals from different functions, specialties, or even organizations, who become a group to complete specific, usually complex, tasks (Suchan & Hayzak, 2001, as cited in Angelo & McCarthy, 2020).

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Leadership Education

The origin of leadership education is two-fold and originates where the fields of leadership and education formally intersected. While history is bedecked with leaders and heroic feats, the beginnings of leadership as a formal discipline can be traced back to Thomas Carlyle’s lectures in the 1840’s centering on the “Great Men” of history (SAGE, 2011, p. 8). During the rise of the industrial boom, it is widely considered “the requirement – for leadership shifted from heroic individuals to rational systems and processes” (p. 8). Thus, studies of leadership shifted to center on the efficient processes of the Taylorist era. Eventually, Taylorism fell out of fashion with the argument “work could not be measured objectively because the very act of measurement altered the experience and thus the behaviour of those being measured” (p. 8). With the 1950’s

came American scholar Warren Bennis, the man who is widely considered a pioneer of the contemporary field of Leadership Studies. While Bennis believed leaders can be made and are not simply born great, paramount is the attention he drew to the field (Sterbenz, 2014). It is because of this the field has grown into what it is today and includes niche domains such as leadership education and online learning.

As for experiential learning, in the 1930's, John Dewey introduced the idea of experience as an asset the pedagogy of education. It is necessary to point out Dewey's argument was not that classroom learning was not an experience, but rather the wrong kind (Dewey, 1938, pp. 26-27). The experiences he envisioned had interaction and continuity. The latter referring to how exactly a pupil is engaging with their educational environment, the former emphasizing the need to always consider the future (p. 44). While the kind of experience students had was important, it was the quality of those experiences that mattered most (p. 27). The goal was for students to be in the moment and engaged in a way Dewey felt was more meaningful than just books and lectures. In the context of leadership education, this is important because it called on students to be present and in the moment. Dewey's ideas gave way for possibility of education to be an engaging event in addition to books and lectures.

The next key developments in service-learning came with David Kolb's *Experiential Learning Theory* (1984) and *The Kolb Learning Cycle and Learning Styles* (Komives et al., 2011, pp. 117-119). Kolb asserts people learn in two primary ways: abstract conceptualization and concrete experience (p. 117). Essentially, people learn by working with ideas through books, lectures, and discussions or by actively engaging in an experience. *Experiential Learning Theory* combines experience, perception, cognition, and behavior. The result is a new pedagogical model that puts students' lived experiences and connections to course materials at the center.

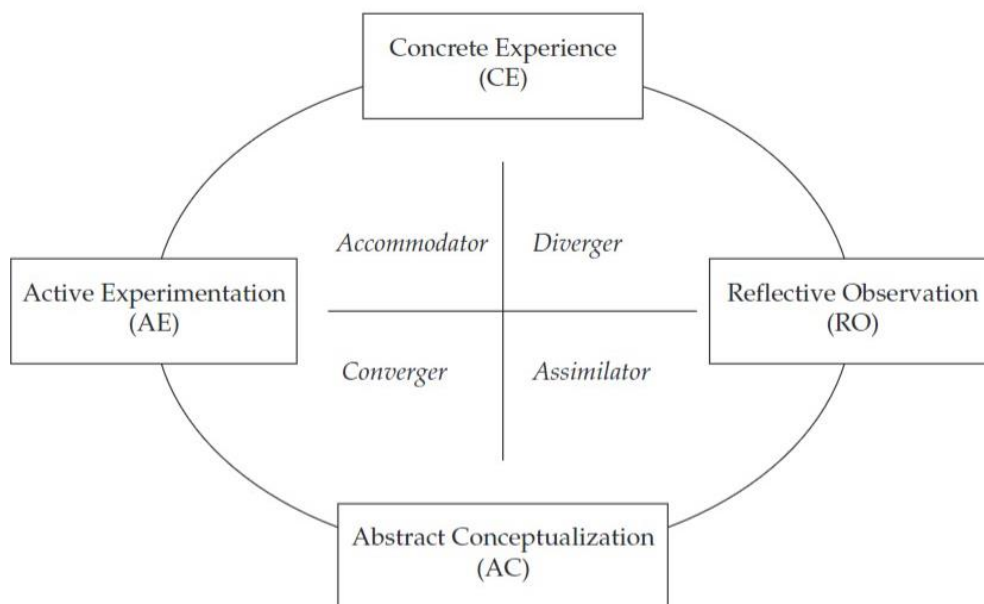
Experiential Learning Theory has four core characteristics: process prioritized over outcomes; learning being an ongoing process through experience; learning requires students to approach the world and the practice of learning itself in dialectically opposed ways; learning is a means of adapting to the world (Kolb, 1984, pp. 26-32). This means the process of learning is more important than the mark the student earns, and learning is a continuous process. Of the third tenet, Kolb describes “Learning requires skills that are polar opposites, and the learner, as a result, must continually choose which set of learning abilities he or she will bring to bear in any specific learning situation” (1984, p. 30). Learners must be able to adapt to the most appropriate means of learning for the given situation. Lastly, the continuous process of learning is how we understand and adapt to development in the world.

These characteristics inform the Kolb Learning Cycle. The Kolb Learning Cycle is a model consisting of four styles of learning and four types of learners. Kolb’s model identifies concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation as the four ways of learning (Komives et al., 2011, p. 119). An individual has an experience, they take time to reflect on it, consider new ideas generated from reflecting, and then test these new ideas in a context they deem applicable. The four types of learners include Divergers, Assimilators, Convergers, and Accommodators. Divergers enjoy concrete experiences to be processed through reflection and value interpersonal skills such as emotional intelligence, being imaginative, and being a good listener. Assimilators receive information through abstract conceptualization which is then reflected upon and tend to organize information and apply conceptual models. Convergers are those who learn through abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. These learners are associated with being skilled in problem solving, goal setting, and experimenting with and practically applying their ideas. Accommodators learn by

undergoing a concrete experience which is processed through a period of active experimentation and may be highly adaptable, influential and solve problems by trial-and-error (Komives et al. 2011, pp. 117-118). This model can inform how the engagement requirements of a class can be structured and how individual students can be developed.

Figure 1

The Kolb Learning Cycle and Learning Styles



Note. Kolb's model of the learning cycle and learning styles developed in 1984. From *The Handbook for Student Leadership Development* (2nd ed., p.119), Komives, S., 2011, Jossey-Bass.

The Association of Leadership Educators (ALE) was established in 1991 to address the need for formalized scholarly activity around leadership development programs. The ALE was founded over the course of three sessions in the 1980's and 90's (Walker, 2002, p. 11). The organization had two primary goals: "(1) strengthen the competencies of the career professional who works in the area of leadership education, and (2) broaden the overall knowledge base of

leadership education” (p. 13). The ALE introduced *The Journal of Leadership Education* (JOLE) as part of their vision to develop the field and inspire educators (p. 24). The link between the ALE and *JOLE* continues to provide a niche community for leadership educators to contribute to and learn from the field.

Online Education

From 2019-2021, the number of online students enrolled in undergraduate programs around the United States more than doubled rising from 2.4 million to 7 million, an increase of 186%. 84% of these students reported their educational pursuits had moved online due to changes they experienced because of the pandemic (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Although online education started to gain lasting attention in the 1990s, the growth in students enrolled in online undergraduate degree programs between 2019-2021 is indicative virtual learning is not going away.

Additionally, online classrooms were already becoming increasingly popular before the pandemic because of developments in technology that improved the online learning experience (Greenleaf & Goertzen, 2021). With consideration to this trend and finding, it is likely online education will only become more prevalent over time.

Online environments that allow for group collaboration are becoming increasingly common for learners in higher education and businesses as remote options for both continue to expand. In education, these environments offer instructors a new platform to facilitate the development of students’ skills that will be necessary in their future careers (Angelo & McCarthy, 2020). Virtual learning is described as “the delivery of learning through electronic mediation which bridges the gap caused when the instructor and student are separated in either time or place” (adapted from Leonard, 1996; Fell, 1996, as cited in Stonebraker & Hazeltine,

2004, p. 209). Virtual learning occurs in online classrooms; the shared learning environment accessed by educators in students via Learning Management Systems such as Brightspace, Blackboard, and others where classroom operations such as communications, submitting assignments occur, and attending class occur.

E-service learning is described by Waldner et al. (2012, p. 125) as “when the instructional component, the service component, or both are conducted online”. This means that to some extent, attending class and/or engaging in service, occur in a virtual capacity. The authors recognize four categories of e-service learning: (a) traditional service learning; (b) e-service learning hybrid type one; (c) e-service learning hybrid type two; (d) extreme service learning. A traditional service-learning model has both the classroom and service components occur in on-site, in-person locations. Hybrid type one has classes occur in online classrooms and service on-site. Hybrid type two requires in-person classrooms with a virtual service component. Hybrid type three allows the classroom and service components to be a mix of on-site and online. Lastly, hybrid type four requires both online and service facets to be completely online (Waldner et al., 2012, pp. 134-138).

In addition, Waldner et al. maintain that not only does online learning facilitate a worthwhile service-learning experience, but that e-service learning allows students to experience the benefits of intertwining their studies with community engagement including civic-engagement and increased learning outcomes (Waldner et al., 2012, p. 145). One way e-service learning supports a valuable learning experience is by removing geographical barriers that may prevent them from attending face-to-face classes. Dismantling geographic barriers allows students who may otherwise be unable to attend classes can still engage in meaningful learning experiences. These populations can include individuals living with physical or mental disability

(Malvey et al., 2006, as cited in Waldner et al., 2012), students who do not live near their institutions (Strait & Hamerlinck, 2010), and those who do not gravitate toward social engagement (Seifer & Mihalyuk, 2005, as cited in Waldner et al., 2012). E-service learning creates opportunities for more students to socialize and learn in groups that may be more diverse in thought, background, and like thereof. Groups that consist of individuals similar in thought and background may share ideas and perspectives that do not challenge their thinking whereas diverse groups with varied perspectives may engage in richer discussions that encourage deeper cognitive learning processes (Poort et al., 2020).

Online learning has benefits and drawbacks. Again, virtual settings allow greater access to schooling for those impacted by distance, weather, or other barriers. These environments often require engagement in discussion posts as part of students' grades, meaning every student must participate. In classroom discussions this may not always be the case; many find they receive feedback better because they all have to participate whereas in a classroom it is possible a peer may overshare, and fewer classmates' input is taken into consideration. Online courses also provide chatrooms and other methods of virtual grouping (Los Angeles Business Journal, p. 91, 2023). This allows students to work in pairs or teams without the noise of other groups working nearby and may help them focus. Students can learn effectively in online environments because of benefits distinct from face-to-face settings including convenience of access, mandated engagement, and the adaptations made to accommodate as familiar a classroom experience as possible.

Service-Learning

Service-learning has roots in John Dewey's concept of learning through experience and has an extensive history in American education that began in the 1930s. It

is a descendant of David Kolb's model of experiential learning. Service-learning has been described by Bringle and Hatcher (1996) as:

a credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. (para. 6)

It is important to note service-learning is distinct from community service, activism, and other modalities of experiential learning. Service-learning assignments are intentionally scaffolded to layer periods of intentional reflection where the synthesis of both classroom materials and direct experience are required to achieve academic goals (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009). Critical reflective thought bridges the act of engaging in the experience to learning. Engaging in reflection creates new meaning for students and encourages growth and the capacity to take informed actions (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999, p. 180). At every step of the way, students are asked to think critically about what they are learning, what they are doing, and required to demonstrate that growth in classroom discussions and other assignments.

This is a system that developed over decades. The history of experiential learning can be thought of in four phases: (a) the early wave of Deweyite educators; (b) the civil rights movement and rise of Peace Corps; (c) Vietnam-era political activism of the 1970s (Kolb, 1984, p. 5); and (d) the time that followed in of unprecedented technological development through the present day.

Studies show service-learning is linked to greater academic motivation and performance, (Celio et al., 2011; Conway et al., 2009, as cited in Greenleaf & Goertzen, 2021), the development of writing, critical-thinking, problem-solving, self-efficacy, and moral development

skills (Yorio & Ye, 2012, as cited in Greenleaf & Goertzen, 2021). These capabilities foster development that aid in preparing students for their leadership roles outside of the classroom. Moreover, time spent in virtual learning environments complemented with on-site service allows students unique opportunities to engage in learning activities that are relevant to real-world issues (Guthrie & McCracken, 2010). These unique co-curricular experiences not only foster skills that contribute to career readiness but enhance students' awareness of the realities in their communities. Service-learning is recognized as learning strategy that actively contributes to the achievement of greater institutional goals (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009). Research has found when institutionalized, service-learning is woven into the culture of the organization and becomes a lasting facet of curriculum, positively influences other areas of education, opens doors to other methods of civic scholarship, influences faculty roles and rewards, becomes a meaningful part of the experience of students, and earns extensive support, understanding, and involvement of the administration, faculty, students, and the community (Bringle et al., 2001).

To further understand the robust impact service-learning can have in an organization, Bringle and Hatcher (2009) have observed its influence in terms of breadth and depth. Breadth is assessed by looking at data that includes the quantity of service-learning courses at an institution, the number of hours students engage in service, the number of faculty involved, their range of disciplines, the number of community partners, and what issues were addressed through those types of assignments. The depth, the lasting affect left on the philosophy of an organization, specifies the extent to which service-learning programs are integral to academic programs, specific majors, faculty work and rewards, the organization's mission, and quality long-term community partnerships (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009). This information is important because it

demonstrates the value service-learning has on students and institutions and is part of how education is developed to meet the needs of most effectively and prepare students.

Limitations of Service-Learning

Because life and learning are innately to some degree subjective experiences, no method of education is without flaws. A study by Mills (2012) focused on experiences of service-learners with special attention to the relationship between students and community partners. The study featured in his paper *The Four Furies: Primary Tensions Between Service-Learners and Host Agencies* utilized quantitative and qualitative methods. Data collection occurred in two stages. First, 20 community agencies and 118 undergraduate service learners were anonymously surveyed. Then, four agencies and five of those service learners participated in formal interviews. It is important to note Mills embarked on this study based on trends he noticed in 13 years of teaching service-learning based classes. His findings were not to justify the themes, but to highlight their prevalence in the student/community agency partnership. The tensions arise from the natural differences in the roles of students and agencies and are (a) students' emphasis on completing hourly requirements vs. agencies' emphasis on commitment to organizational goals; (b) students' emphasis on learning vs. agencies' emphasis on accomplishing tasks; (c) students' emphasis on flexibility vs. agencies' emphasis on dependability, and students' emphasis on idealism vs. agencies' emphasis on realism (Mills, 2012, p. 33). All of these arise out of different expectations relevant to the priorities of each within their roles. Notably, agencies' communicated their primary frustrations as (a) poor returns on time invested due to low student commitment, student resistance or resentment over mandatory service-learning requirements, and an absence of relational continuity over time; (b) ethical issues with transient students providing direct service to vulnerable populations in need of consistent, dependable

relationships; (c) a limited capacity to adequately train and supervise students when a lasting contribution was not usually expected or possible; (d) unrealistic expectations of students preparing, conducting, and reflecting on a meaningful community project in one semester; and (e) frustration with the academic calendar and its frequent breaks where service-learners were not available to the agency (Mills, 2012, p. 34). To prevent this tension from becoming detrimental to the partnership and thus, service-learning, the author suggests each side undergo reflective adaptive framing wherein they look for the benefits of their individual tasks, the responsibilities of the other, and communicate them with each other. Similarly, the author emphasizes the necessity of both sides communicating clear expectations around hours, mannerisms, norms, and course requirements at the start of the partnership (Mills, 2012, pp. 35-39). Lastly, Mills suggests there may be benefit in agencies and educators fostering a collaborative relationship to maximize meaningful academic and organization results with minimal tensions between parties (2012, p. 38).

E-Service Learning

Although classroom education has traditionally been an in-person experience, the capabilities of this technology have expanded and now allow virtual volunteerism to be possible (Guthrie, 2016, p. 15). Angelo and McCarthy (2020) claim fostering virtual environments where students can effectively collaborate is essential to the growth of higher education. Beyond the classroom, assessing that collaboration and teaching in this way is necessary to developing students who will be successful in business, education, and other industries (Webster & Sudweeks, 2017, as cited in Angelo & McCarthy, 2020). This model is designed to develop students by joining the experiences of social activism with course content and is viewed as a model pedagogy for leadership development in institutions of higher education (Scharff, 2009, as

cited in Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018, p. 240). It is not limited to face-to-face classrooms; online service-learning is a relatively new synthesis of pedagogies that provides unique opportunities for leadership education (Guthrie, 2016, p. 15). Intentional design of leadership learning opportunities that effectively combine service-learning, leadership, and experiential learning are imperative to the success of this co-curricular model (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018, p. 245). As online education becomes increasingly popular, the criterion regarding what makes an effective online service-learning experience have been considered in a couple of ways in recent years.

Firstly, in 2016 Guthrie (p. 16) suggested four areas to address when designing online service-learning engagements in a leadership education framework. These include:

1. Constructing virtual environments that allow for continuous interaction, communication, and relationship building
2. Utilizing educational strategies that support autonomy and collaboration
3. Developing, implementing, and mandating diverse opportunities for reflection and inquiry
4. Enriching primary leadership learning goals along with secondary technical skills relevant to operating effectively in an online capacity

In a 2021 study by Greenleaf and Goertzen, the researchers identified three areas to enhance when building e-service learning projects including (a) leadership insights; (b) personal growth and development; and (c) overcoming community obstacles. Regarding leadership insights, the researchers identified five prominent themes including leadership lessons learned, collaboration, communication, influence, and combining leadership theories. Participants noted increased capabilities within themselves to become organized, collaborate, adapt, and to be persistent as well as expressing a sense of connectedness to the community. Developed facets of personal

growth and development included an increased capacity for self-challenge, greater awareness, practical application, personal affect, an enhanced sense self-efficacy toward personal and community pursuits, and new service-learning insights. Lastly, participants learned about overcoming community obstacles. Those areas of development pertained to navigating community challenges, forming positive insights about those they worked with, and an enhanced capacity to innovate (Greenleaf & Goertzen, 2021). The researchers believe enhancing these capacities contribute to developing the foundational knowledge and skills graduates need to secure employment in their intended areas (Tomlinson, 2017, as cited in Greenleaf & Goertzen, 2021). Guthrie's assessment prioritizes the overall leadership development potential of the course whereas Greenleaf & Goertzen put their emphasis on the elements of service-learning. When used together, these combined guidelines may help leadership educators design more effective courses.

Moreover, researchers in the Leadership Learning Research Center found there are 1,558 post-secondary leadership education programs in the United States alone (Guthrie et al., 2018). These programs may have been more prepared to address the adaptive challenges posed by the pandemic world because confronting change is a touchstone of the field; new environments demand new tactics and versatile leadership to effectively guide them (Heifetz et al., 2009). Although the traditional classroom has not been erased, online learning is quickly becoming the new norm. This does not mean individuals will learn or lead alone in making the transition. Effective online and hybrid modalities of learning along with leadership education itself are only becoming more important (Purcell, 2017). The fact of the matter is online education is becoming more prevalent. Because of this, the pedagogy through which learning occurs in a virtual capacity needs to be further explored to optimize both the learning experience and outcomes.

Chapter 3: Discussion

This study set out to explore three aspects of the relationship between service-learning in online leadership courses and outcomes: (1) how service-learning based assignments in online courses prepare students to lead in their external roles; (2) what leadership skills are developed through service-learning in online courses; (3) what leadership skills are underdeveloped through service-learning in online courses with two hypothesis: (H1) Participating in online service-learning based courses results in an increased development of leadership skills outlined in course content in a way that is unique from face-to-face courses; (H2) Leadership educators will target themes in the skills their students develop through participating in online service-learning based courses including deficits thereby shedding insight on how students are better prepared to lead in their roles outside of the classroom.

Service-learning based assignments may be an answer to enhancing the online learning experience. While traditional classroom lectures, discussions, and posts are experiences, they may not be the best kind to captivate learners and stimulate development (Dewey, 1938, pp. 26-27). Additionally, the rise in undergraduate enrollment from 2019-2021 suggests virtual learning environments will remain a fixture in education (Greenleaf & Goertzen, 2021). Online classrooms give instructors another platform to facilitate the development of skills students will rely on in their careers (Angelo & McCarthy, 2020). This time spent in online classrooms paired with on-site service gives students opportunities to participate in learning activities that are relevant to real-world issues (Guthrie & McCracken, 2010). These co-curricular experiences foster skills that contribute to career readiness while developing students' awareness of the realities in their communities. Experiential learning calls on students to develop a range of often opposing skills and constantly decide what learning abilities are most appropriate for the given

situation (Kolb, 1984, p. 30). This process of ongoing learning informs our understanding of the world and guides our navigation through it. E-service learning prepares students to lead in their roles outside of the classroom in several ways. By allowing student opportunities to work with peers diverse in thought, background, and other aspects of identity and operation, the ideas exchanged are less likely to share homogeneity and may challenge group members' thinking that leads to rich discussions and possibly deeper cognitive learning processes.

A key pillar of student success in service-learning is how these programs are structured. Service-learning occurs in four modalities including. Waldner et al. (2012, p. 125) identified four categories of e-service learning based on remote/face-to-face balance: (a) traditional service learning; (b) e-service learning hybrid type one; (c) e-service learning hybrid type two; (d) extreme service learning (Waldner et al., 2012, p. 125). Hybrid type one hosts classes online and service on-site. Hybrid type two mandates students to attend face-to-face classes with a virtual service component. Hybrid type three combines the classroom and service pieces into a mixture of on-site and online experiences. Hybrid type four occurs when both aspects occur exclusively online (Waldner et al., 2012, pp. 134-138).

The structure of online service-learning programs should be considerate of leadership development and service-learning respectively. Guthrie (2016, p. 16) suggests four areas to consider when designing a course with a virtual service-learning element. Ensuring the virtual environment operates smoothly and allows for continuous interaction allows students to build relationships which may support their ability to collaborate. Employing learning strategies that support both autonomy and collaboration may support the development of different dialectical skills and enhance one's critical thinking. Developing, implementing, and overseeing varied opportunities and inquiry allow students to work with the material in different ways which may

help them internalize what they are learning more effectively, the fourth criteria calls on educators to enrich primary leadership learning goals as well as secondary technical skills. This may help students operate with greater ease in an online environment. Focusing more on the personal leadership development, Greenleaf and Goertzen (2021) identified three areas to center when building e-service learning projects: (a) leadership insights; (b) personal growth and development; and (c) overcoming community obstacles. Courses and service-learning assignments designed with adherence to these guidelines could generate a comprehensive and engaging learning experience in a virtual capacity. This may be an asset in facilitating skill development along with improved academic and post-academic outcomes. The 1,558 post-secondary leadership education programs across the United States (Guthrie et al., 2018) could benefit from this framework.

Several skills have been identified to have been developed by service-learning in virtual and physical capacities. Research shows service-learning is related to stronger academic motivation and performance (Celio et al., 2011; Conway et al., 2009, as cited in Greenleaf & Goertzen, 2021) as well as the development of writing, critical-thinking, problem-solving, self-efficacy, and moral development skills (Yorio & Ye, 2012, as cited in Greenleaf & Goertzen, 2021). The findings are unfortunately unable to provide direct answers to either hypothesis as there is simply not enough data to satisfy the intricacies of those questions. It is also important to note the literature reviewed did not include underdeveloped or undeveloped skills in either online or face-to-face settings. Going forward, identifying the deficits would help improve service-learning as a whole and on the individual class level. Knowing what the benefits and outcomes are important, but identifying the deficits will help target where this model can be improved.

However, this study is able to conclude service-learning in either capacity contributes to

increased skill development or shed insight on trends in utilizing service-learning based assignments in online environments. Skills observed to have been developed through e-service learning include organization, collaboration, adaptability, persistence, relationship building, increased capacity for self-challenge, awareness, practical application, personal affect, overcoming obstacles, innovation, navigating community challenges, forming positive insights about peers, new service-learning insights, a heightened sense of self-efficacy toward the self and community (Greenleaf & Goertzen, 2021) greater understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). These are skills necessary in preparing individuals to lead effectively in society. Moreover, engaging in periods of reflection generates new meaning for students and empowers them to grow take informed actions (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999, p. 180). Service-learning assignments as part of student leadership education offers extensive potential to develop critical skills that may not be attainable by traditional classroom models alone and may be an answer to developing the next generation of leaders.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Service-learning is a model of education where students undergo a cycle of lived experience, reflection, and application. It is distinct from community service, activism, and other forms of experiential learning in that it occurs in or from an educational institution. There are 1,558 post-secondary leadership education programs in the United States alone (Guthrie et al., 2018). These programs, especially those that were already online, may have been better prepared to the challenges brought on by the pandemic because navigating change is a omnipresent reality in the field. While online education embarked on its ascent to the mainstream in the 1990s, the 4.6 million increase in students enrolled in online undergraduate from 2019-2021 strongly

suggests online learning is here to stay (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). As such, leadership educators should consider employing service-learning in their online courses because these multifaceted experiences call for greater engagement and development of the skills they will need to be leaders in our world.

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Appendix A

FINAL APPROVAL FORM
The University of Southern Maine

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We hereby recommend that the thesis of Sam Perry entitled *Leadership Education in a Changing World: The Efficacy of Service-Learning as a Pedagogical Asset in Online University Leadership Courses* be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Leadership Studies.



Dr. Elizabeth Goryunova, Thesis Advisor

(signature)



Dr. Daniel Jenkins, Second Reader

(signature)

Accepted



Chair, Department of Leadership Studies

(signature)