



## **Lights, Camera, Student Action – A Novel Way to Teach and Learn About Leadership**

The importance of leadership knowledge and skills in one's professional and personal life cannot be overstated. Development of leadership capabilities can have a positive impact on a student's personal and professional growth, as well as make a profound difference in their lives. Faculty who teach in the administrative sciences are passionate about the topic of leadership. But what is an effective method of inciting that same passion in their students? Corporate titan Harold Geneen once stated, "Leadership cannot really be taught. It can only be learned" (Amdur, 2021). It is not only important to learn about leadership theory, but students should be able to recognize it when they see it. In other words, we must go beyond teaching and learning by connecting with each student in a way that lights an emotional spark within. From this, we have developed a course which utilizes media to not only learn about leadership but enables students to identify the leader within.



## Use of media in leadership instruction

Various forms of media have been used in leadership instruction. The use of media allows students to observe actions and behaviors and hear the words of individuals in leadership situations. Homan (2016) used media in leadership instruction by showing a media clip and then posing questions to students to engage a class discussion. Hannay and Venne (2012) have also used media clips and discussion boards in online leadership courses. Our course design builds upon these models. We utilize media in an active teaching and learning model, which enables students to lead the instruction through formal analysis and presentation of media, as well as by facilitating class discussion.

## Course design

Our course is titled *Profiles in Leadership, and The Leadership Challenge*, 6th ed., (Kouzes and Posner, 2017) serves as the textbook for the course. This well-known model of leadership consists of five leadership practices:

- Model the Way
- Inspire a Shared Vision
- Challenge the Process
- Enable Others to Act
- Encourage the Heart

Each practice is covered in a three-week module designed to allow students to critically assess leaders and provides examples of each leader's management techniques that illustrate the leadership practices. In the first week of each module, the instructor describes the theory associated with the respective leadership practice. The instructor then provides an example of a famous leader who the instructor feels exemplifies the leadership practice. Class discussion of the famous leader follows the instructor's presentation. For example, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is presented as an example of a leader who inspires a shared vision using his "I Have a Dream" speech. Students then carry the teaching in the remaining two weeks of each module through a series of activities. Each student analyzes leadership conveyed in a movie clip assigned to them by the instructor and writes a brief paper of their analysis. Assigned movie clips are typically selected from "85



Movies Which Highlight Great Leadership” (Wraith, 2017). This publication provides movie clips specifically related to *The Leadership Challenge’s* five practices. The instructors also identify leadership scenes and incorporate previous student-identified leaders for use in future classes. Each student then formally presents the assigned movie clip in class with their analysis. In the last week of each module, each student identifies, analyzes, and presents a leader who they feel embodies a leadership practice in words, actions, and/or behaviors. Presentations include student-selected media clips. Lastly, students write a reflection paper at the end of the semester. In this paper, students explain how they will adopt each of the five leadership practices into their personal and professional lives.

### **Student action**

Course design elements were also designed to engage students in the course and support student-led instruction. Students’ interest in the course develops with each module as students become more engaged in the assigned movie clip and the identification of leaders who they feel exemplify leadership practices. The choices students make in their selection of leaders provides insight to the student for the faculty member and their fellow classmates. The diversity of the student choices, and learning how the chosen leader has inspired each student, is gratifying. Some student presentations are uplifting, while others are poignant and emotional as students describe what their selected leader means to them. For example, the father of Derek Redmond (his son was a competitor in the 1992 Summer Olympics) was chosen by a student as a leader who exemplifies the leadership practice of enabling others to act.

To assess the effectiveness of the course design elements in meeting goals related to each student’s personal and professional development, a student survey was administered in the last four offerings of the course. The results indicated that each course design element was rated as effective or highly effective in meeting these objectives by at least 86% of students.

### **Student self-discovery**

Leadership is an abstract topic. Our goal is to turn on a light within each student; to stoke the passion in students and to enable them to recognize the leader within. Statements written in the self-reflection final papers suggest that we have achieved our goal. For example:

*“The class came to feel less like a required meeting of students and more like a community of leaders who shared stories and supported each other.”*

These statements suggest that students have gained knowledge about leadership practices and have learned something about themselves. While we know that leadership is a subject that requires life-long learning, we believe this course is a solid, early step in our students’ leadership development journey.

Additionally, attention to the course design yielded many benefits. We chose active learning components such as having students actively engaged in the analysis and presentation of assigned movie clips and in the research, analysis, and presentation of their selected leaders. These design features were the framework of a student-led course. Active learning, coupled with the use of media, evoked emotions in the classroom and enabled us to make connections with students. In addition, we found an added benefit with this type of course design that we did not consider in the course design process. The pandemic has presented challenges in making connections with students, and this type of course design allowed us to easily pivot from in-person instruction to a synchronous online environment. We taught this course without losing the ability to share videos, present on camera, and most importantly, to make connections with students.

One of the greatest achievements a faculty member can make is to help students discover a new subject in a way that lights something within the student—a spark that will grow within each student over the course of their lifetime. Emotional connections to a topic foster such development. Our course has proven to be a catalyst for our students, launching them on a journey of self-discovery by utilizing learning as opposed to relying on teaching.

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