Building Leadership Relationships Online

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Abstract

LEAD 212: Introduction to Leadership Concepts, is the first course associated with the popular Leadership Studies minor held in the Staley School of Leadership Studies at Kansas State University. As a program built around the leadership premise that leadership is a relationship, in-person courses emphasize student engagement amongst each other and with instructors. The COVID-19 pandemic forced courses initially held in-person to be shifted to online platforms only, creating significant challenges. A literature review exploring the importance of teacher-student relationships in higher education, online learning in higher education, and a glimpse into emerging literature on the effects of education caused by COVID-19 share information that be influential in future adaptations of online courses. Studies exposing the need for educators to provide extensive personal and academic care and strategies for approachability connected closely with the positive impact that both learning communities and peer mentors can have on student satisfaction (Denzine & Pulos 2000) (Hurd & Stein 2004) (Kuh et al. 2008). Online platforms are increasingly important in creating space for social engagement in online courses, as well as the various roles that instructors must take on (Salmon 2000). Additionally, personal accounts based on experience as a class leader for the spring 2020 LEAD 212 create a foundation for supplemental material to provide future class leaders in preparation for another semester of online leadership curriculum.

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Leadership Studies

Established in 1996, the Staley School of Leadership Studies was built with the foundational aspiration to educate collegiate students on the premises of leadership and encourage them to pursue these efforts on and off of Kansas State's campus. Since its first class in 1997, the program has welcomed and worked with thousands of students. It has grown to house the largest academic minor on campus, partnership programs with the colleges of Agriculture, Business, Education, and Engineering, and service-learning opportunities around the world.

In what began as a single 18-credit-hour undergraduate minor in leadership studies, certain leadership principles have been held to a high standard when developing curriculum. When defining leadership, the Staley School of Leadership Studies defaults to a classification by Joseph C. Rost (1991) who states, "leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes." This emphasis on relationships has remained at the core of curriculum and program development, and what distinguishes this program from all else on Kansas State's campus. Just as faculty and staff have created an atmosphere of mutual exchange and support between one another, this is extended into classroom dynamics as instructors portray themselves as facilitators of conversation and of mutually responsible learning.

LEAD 212, or Introduction to Leadership Concepts, is a primary example of a course designed with relationships in mind. The lecture hall itself was constructed to encourage discussion between students and for faculty to easily walk around and engage with the entire class, regardless of seating location. Faculty conduct lectures in a conversational manner for

increased engagement and authenticity. Most significantly, students are grouped together in learning communities of 12-15, supported and facilitated by upperclassmen in the minor. This is done with the intention of building community among students, and to provide an additional and more approachable point of contact to the class and the school. Class Leaders are trained extensively in not only teaching assistant responsibilities, but in the roles of being a mentor, community builder, and role model (Bauer 2018). Their work – supported alongside the instructors – can range from planning social gatherings to build repport, holding 1-on-1 meetings with each student throughout the semester, creating spaces for vulnerability, and much more. In fulfilling these roles, deep relationships between students, class leaders, and instructors form around leadership ideals.

As a significant portion of leadership studies courses are built around in-person relationships, this creates a significant challenge in providing equally impactful content through an online setting. The recent spread of COVID-19 has caused extensive disruptions in all fields, including all levels of academia. In university settings, a transition to entirely online learning in a matter of weeks forced administration and faculty to determine the fundamentals needed to be taught in each course, understanding that preparation time and resources were limited. The LEAD 212 teaching team was fortunate in that we had already been utilizing online platforms to manage many assignments, making the transition less challenging for students. However, it became clear after a few weeks into this format that there was a significant loss in moving entirely online- student engagement in assignments had dropped, along with interactions between team leaders and students.

Although the world in midst of an unprecedented pandemic, these times also remind us that leadership must remain adaptable and seek out new ways to engage with others. As it is clear

that academia will likely continue to evolve through these new situations, courses like LEAD 212 must also do so. With a strong foundation in effectively teaching material online already, it is now a priority to determine how the Staley School of Leadership Studies can best create opportunities for deep relationships to be built in future courses held online. Background research on best practices for instructors and class leaders, online learning models and student success, as well as an exploration of recent publications on COVID-19 and student learning are all needed as a foundation for future planning.

As curriculum coordinators of the leadership program develop long-term adaptable plans, preparation for the upcoming fall semester remains a priority. With plans to continue with as much normalcy as possible, it will be important to provide additional training and resources to incoming class leader facilitators. Following the analysis of research will be a tentative proposal of a guide for LEAD 212 instructors to provide class leaders for the fall 2020 semester. This guide was created with the intention of growing as our understanding of and ability to navigate online learning and social platforms increases.

Instructor, T.A., and Student Relationships

Research at any age-group identifies the significant impact teachers have on student learning and success. Psychological studies show that from a young age, teachers quickly become a primary cause for developing a positive relationship with school, and therefore a higher chance for social and academic success (Flanders 1965) (Hamre & Pianta 2006). The role of teacher – student relationships adjust through school ages from establishing foundational cognitive skills, to instilling a drive for learning (Daniels 2011). As some students transition to

forms of higher education, new challenges arise that can be best met by supportive relationships from faculty, indicating their importance (Hagenauer & Volet 2014) (Stevenson et al. 2006).

Studies examining best practices for establishing meaningful teacher – student relationships have identified a need for faculty care and consideration of both the personal and academic wellness of students (Anderson & Carta-Falsa 2002) (Gholami & Tirri 2012). Even within care-based faculty, strategies and successes vary. Instructors who create space for increased personal engagement with students increase measures of approachability and perception of care (Denzine & Pulos 2000) (Easton 2008). One of the most prominent examples of increased personal engagement includes personalized communication with students before and after class (Dobransky & Frymier 2004) (Denzine & Pulos 2000). Additional challenges in providing high levels of individualization and engagement can arise as class sizes can reach extremely large ratios.

The introduction of teaching assistants or peer mentors into the classroom provides an additional resource for students to have more accessibility to instructors, individualized guidance, and increased engagement in academic content (Colvin & Ashman 2010) (Kuh et al. 2008) (Rodger & Tremblay 2003). Simply put, the introduction of more teachers in a course increases the opportunity for care-based strategies to take place and provide the necessary support to students.

Learning communities supported by peer mentors combine the importance of significant engagement with content and the value of close interaction with instructors. Among many attributes, learning communities have been found to significantly enhance communication between faculty and students (Hurd & Stein 2004). Learning community leaders are able to act as an extension of the instructor in their care for personal and academic wellness while also

providing more hands-on support due to the smaller group size (Hurd & Stein 2004). In combining frameworks of care-centered instructors, peer mentoring, and learning communities, increased engagement and success of students should be anticipated.

Higher Education Online

The development of online technology has created an entirely new means of providing higher education. Recent surveys have measured a general decrease in in-person education, with relatively significant increase in online enrollment, via classes or entirely online universities (Seaman 2018). While online education arguably provides increased accessibility to those who would otherwise be unable to attend post-secondary education, understanding and establishing standards remains important (Goodman et al. 2019) (Hosie et al. 2005) (Baldwin & Trespalacios 2017). Evaluations of current standards established by online universities indicate a strong emphasis on curriculum and contact between students and faculty (Bladwin & Trespalacios 2017). As universities include relationships in their criteria, establishing effective methods for instructors to carry out online is crucial.

Instructors establishing online social strategies improve students' satisfaction and academic success in a majority of their online classes (Richardson & Swan 2003) (Wallace 2003). Online course strategies must take into account the diverse roles that students and instructors take on whilst participating in the course. Instructors are expected to engage as conversation and community facilitators, graders, and individual supports; this requires an overall increased online presence and perception of accessibility (Salmon 2003) (Wallace 2003). Students rely on the foundation provided by the instructor in order to establish routines of online engagement with peers and said instructor (Salmon 2003). This necessary engagement is one of

the fundamental attributes of successful online learning. As Linda Harasim (2000) states, the internet's "asynchronous nature both enables and requires collaborative learning: collaboration provides the social glue of a community that engages learners and motivates them to participate." The development of online learning communities becomes natural in the development of successful online courses.

Just as technology continues to advance, strategies for online coursework will continue to modify with new expectations in creating exceptional online programs. Programs designed specifically for the betterment of online education, as well as the adaptation of additional online platforms, generate new possibilities to fulfill student needs. These platforms, methods of using them, and their influence on engagement and learning will need to continue to be explored (Benta et al. 2014) (Chu & Kennedy 2011).

COVID-19 and Higher Education Online

As COVID-19 spread around the world, social distancing protocol led to national closures of schools in 107 countries by March 18, 2020. This abrupt transition to entirely online learning has already forced school systems to redefine priorities, best practices, and the role of technology in future classrooms. Due to the current status of the COVID-19 pandemic, research on present online education practices is both limited and highly situational (Viner et al. 2020). Reviews on recent publications have primarily covered K-12 learning due to the public and widespread nature of these institutions. One of the most notable cases being explored is the online-learning program established in China, providing education to millions (Zhou et al. 2020) Presently, there are little to no alternatives to online curriculum, which increases concerns about equity and accessibility (Reich et al. 2020). Online platforms used as supplements have often

become the core of many classes (Basilaia & Kvavadze 2020). Although discomforting to some, it is undeniable that the impact caused will lead to further conversations about the future of online education, amongst many other things.

Personal Account

Starting in January 2020, I joined a teaching team of 3 graduate students and Staley School of Leadership Studies Assistant Professor Mike Finnegan for the spring 2020 semester of LEAD 212: Intro to Leadership Concepts. The first half of the semester followed the traditional syllabus and teaching model established by LEAD 212 instructors over the last few years. Acting as class leaders for two learning communities each, we engaged in many practices mentioned in engagement-based literature for higher education, including care-based behavior, facilitation, and community building. During spring break, students were first informed of a week-delay in the return of classes, followed by a notice that courses were to be held online for the rest of the spring semester. As previously mentioned, LEAD 212 had already utilized the online system Canvas for assignments and other online communication; however, new methods had to be generated in hopes of maintaining the relationships built between students through the first half of the semester. The 212 teaching team adapted each week's plans into an online setting primarily through Zoom; student responses throughout this transition varied, which may be further described in a future publication. As 3-time class leader, my experiences now include both traditional classes and the same course shifted online due to the pandemic. With this experience comes the opportunity to share my own learning with future class leaders on best practices for LEAD 212 if held online again.

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

Staley School of
Leadership Studies

From In-Person to Online: Recreating the 212 Experience

From In-Person to Online: Recreating the 212 Experience

Just as COVID-19 has transformed many of our lives, it will likely transform the classroom as we know it for the upcoming semester. With the understanding that classes are to be held primarily online, while the purpose of the class and your designated roles as class leaders remain the same, the way in which we carry it out may differ. We have the opportunity to exercise genuinely adaptable leadership with the incoming 212 students, and this guide will hopefully provide the guidance and support you need in order to succeed!

What will be different about 212 this fall? [can be added once plans verified]

➔ All Online

➔ Hybrid/ In-Person Reduction

What will be the same?

➔ **The curriculum:** The 212 teaching team has prepared our plan for the upcoming semester with the same course material
➔ **Class Preps:** We'll continue to support you weekly with the possibilities for learning community time through class preparation guides and meetings
➔ **YOU.** We have had class leaders for the last 20 years because of the innate value you bring to the learning experience for LEAD 212 students!

YOUR TURN   **What confusion do you still have about the new structure for LEAD 212?**

The rest of this guide is designed with the belief that a majority of class will be held online. As mentioned, there are possibilities for more of a hybrid structure, but by providing guidance on both traditional 212 and an entirely online 212, we'll be best prepared to take on whatever situations unfold!

Online Communication

We are fortunate to live in a time where technology provides many opportunities to stay in touch virtually. This is a compilation of online platforms available to us, as well as how best to set them up to best suit your learning community and class leader style! Remember, creating meaningful relationships surrounding leadership is our goal, which means staying in contact while remote will be very important!

Grading, Emails, & Groupme:

There are separate sections that we have provided that detail our expected guidelines for communication with students through these platforms in a traditional LEAD 212. While these guidelines remain and give an overview for best practices, there is an increased importance in generating dialogue and further thought to encourage engagement.

Canvas & Grading-
- Provide both in-assignment comments, and overall comments below the rubric to increase odds of exposure
- Encourage their settings on Canvas to send them notifications with the comments provided when you grade
- Participate in discussion board assignments to push students further
- Feedback can include calls to action that involve interacting with fellow LC members!
  - i.e. "I loved how you said "…" and hope you'll share it in our class Groupme!

Groupme-
- This app provides a space for non-class dialogue, as well as continuation of content from discussion boards, individual assignments, and zoom meetings
- 1 on 1 messaging can be used to more easily reach students to check in and/or answer questions while remaining separated from just texting!
- Think of it as a space for the group/individual conversations that would typically happen right after class…
- Remember. . . building strong community requires socialization outside of class content!

Emails-
- Your instructor will continue to provide weekly technical information via an email to the entire class, but a supplemental email from you can give additional reminders (including zoom links), and weekly inspiration! Use these as a way to start the week off on a good note.
- Remind students to use email for topics of increased importance
- Any conversation the instructor should be included in should take place via email

Zoom:

Zoom is an online video-conferencing platform that LEAD 212 will use as the primary means of engaging in class time remotely. Every K-State student has access to Zoom services via https://ksu.zoom.us/, allowing you as class leaders to host video conferences with your learning community. Suggestions on what to do during Zoom calls are provided in the next section; this is to give an overview of the site itself!

Scheduling-
- Create recurring Zoom meetings at your designated learning community times, sending the link out to students once created, and send reminders with that link!
- A recurring room with no set time can be created as a space that is always open for students to access to come together, regardless of the time and your own availability

Zoom Etiquette-
- Encouraging students to remain muted unless they are about to talk reduces background noise and gives a visual for when someone does want to chime in
- Create a list of all students in the meeting to provide an order for speaking when everyone is asked to share and put it in the chat
- Minimize light from behind you to reduce glare
- Use the chat feature to add on to the conversation without interrupting the person speaking, and encourage students to do the same
    - i.e. "I had the same thing happen to me" or "I'm glad you could make it, Sam!"

Breakout Rooms- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jbPpdyn16sY
- This feature allows you to split up the learning community into smaller sections, enabling easier conversation
    - Utilize this the same way you would break students up into pairs or small groups if in person!
- You can organize the members in each group and the duration of the session

Other features-
- Screen share- you or any student can share screens to the rest of the learning community, which is great for showing info on canvas, videos from youtube, etc
- Gallery view allows you to see all participants on the call at the same time
- Virtual backgrounds can keep things interesting!

YOUR TURN | What resources are you most comfortable with? Least comfortable? What are ways that you could practice using them before class starts? (hint: plan a zoom meeting with some friends/family and try it out!

Learning Community Time (Remote)

Even online, utilizing the 4 C's will continue to provide efficient and effective structure for dedicated learning community time. That being said, it will be important to remain adaptable as we navigate best strategies for transferring this model to online learning. Learning community time remains a space for class leaders to exercise leadership in finding the ways that best engage your learning community. As mentioned, Zoom will be the primary site used to conduct learning community sessions remotely- although we encourage you to explore ways to connect your zoom meetings to other sites or activities off of Zoom!

Connections:
Connection to course content or each other has become an even more crucial element in LEAD 212. When formatted entirely online, it will be important to give students increased time to get to know one another, reflect on their wellbeing, and recap main points previously addressed. We highly suggest creating a routine to start the class, as that will help students transition into a space of learning! (Remember, they no longer have the physical transition of actually sitting down in class)

The start of the semester will require even more community connection activities to help students bond virtually and set a positive foundation for the duration of the semester. Being personally vulnerable – while challenging – will also be a great contribution to creating a safe atmosphere.

Content
Your 212 instructors will continue to provide the foundation of course material, but learning community time allows us to address questions, dive deeper, and apply it. Rather than just reminding students of the content find ways to engage them, such as:
- Have students "popcorn" what they remember from Town Hall until they cover it all
- Pull up diagrams posted on canvas, introduce a video with a summary

Concrete Practice
In many ways, concrete practice activities are going to be the most challenging element to recreate in an online setting. As a team, we will always provide options in how to create new and interesting ways to apply class content, although you are always welcome to introduce other ideas! Examples may include:
- Using Kahoot to make a quiz/game over the material
- Create breakout sessions and have students talk through the points they brought up during their SDL
- Use the whiteboard Zoom feature to make a collective image

Conclusion:

Just as we would in person, the conclusion helps turn "what?" into "now what?." As students will likely be in different environments, this will be a great chance to explore how they will be able to take the material and use it in their own circumstances. Remember to solidify the most important parts, and encourage them to act on it! Calls to action allow for students to continue engaging in class concepts after a Zoom session ends:

- Have them share a big idea with their family
- Continue dialogue in the Groupme: ask them to send a shoutout during the week
- Give them a chance to write down where they think this concept will be most useful

Virtual Activity Ideas and Platforms

As online learning becomes more common, new and exciting resources become available for us to try out in LEAD 212! At this time, here are some sites and features that could be used remotely!

Kahoot

- https://kahoot.com/
- Kahoot allows for you to create trivia-type quizzes and have students respond by logging in with a code. You can use this easily by sharing your screen during a zoom session and having students connect with their phones or laptops!

Quizziz

- https://quizizz.com/
- This is a similar platform to Kahoot, with more easy access to public quizzes! This may be a fun resource to build community, taking random group quizzes over fun subjects everyone enjoys.

Zoom Whiteboard

- Another unique feature that may be useful while doing group activities. When sharing your screen, you can share a "whiteboard" that you and the students can interact on. Try using this for online Pictionary, or a challenge to illustrate a leadership topic!

YOUR TURN

Next week, 212 will be covering ethical temptations vs. ethical dilemmas. Brainstorm some ideas for how you could guide your learning community through the 4C's online!

Connection:

Content:

Concrete Practice:

Conclusion:

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