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11-21-2017

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Meeting the Needs of the Times: A Doctoral Program in Leadership Shifts Paradigms

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Abstract

In the 2013-2014 academic year, Spalding University charged the author with revamping its doctoral program in leadership education to, in the words of the University's mission statement, "meet the needs of the times" for "a diverse community of learners." This article focuses on how and why the increasingly interdisciplinary program revised its course delivery system, shifted the nature of its students' leadership research, and emphasized community and global thinking through obtaining organizational partners. The article also addresses considerations for administrators contemplating creating or revising a graduate program in leadership.

Early in the 1990s I enrolled in Spalding University's doctoral program in educational leadership due to its interdisciplinary nature, which appealed to my love of looking at life from all angles, but also because I could. That is, I lived in Louisville, Kentucky; taught English and journalism 60 miles away at the community college in Elizabethtown; and yearned to earn a Ph.D. in literature. However, the sole institution in Kentucky to offer such a degree was, and still is, located 70 miles in another direction. Worse still, that program's classes met at

the time I taught. Despite the depth of my desire to do so, I could not balance parsing Virginia Woolf, deconstructing Raymond Carver, and arguing the necessity of parallel structure with studying leadership, especially in three cities at once. So when a colleague told me about Spalding University's just-launched leadership program with its course delivery system designed for mid-career professionals and with its bent for focusing on leadership through a broad scholarly lens, I knew I had discovered a doctoral program in which I could marry my love of literature with my passion for history, social justice, and the arts. Hence, in 1993, I matriculated as a doctoral student at Spalding, and in 1997, I graduated with my Ed.D. in educational leadership after successfully defending my dissertation focused on Kentucky writers and the nature of creativity.

Fast forward 17 years, 5 years after I accepted my first administrative and teaching position at Spalding University, an institution at which, in my doctoral student days, I never imagined I would work. It was at the end of the 2013-2014 academic year that the provost asked me to direct what had been renamed the university's doctoral program in leadership education. The notion of restructuring the curricula to focus on contemporary leadership excited me, as did the possibility of shifting the program's paradigm to, in words at the heart of Spalding's mission statement, "meet the needs of the times" for "a diverse community of learners."¹ In accepting the provost's challenge, I knew I needed to examine the program's history, as well as current leadership literature, to negotiate a curriculum redesign rooted in compassion, as well as cutting-edge scholarship.

Three years before I began my doctoral studies, the University's pioneering President Sister Eileen Egan, a visionary educator with a sharp mind, a quick wit, and strong opinions,² launched Spalding University's Ed.D. in Educational Leadership degree in Spalding's College of Education. At that time, 90 percent of the program's instructors

1. Spalding University's mission statement reads: "Spalding University is a diverse community of learners dedicated to meeting the needs of the times in the tradition of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth through quality undergraduate and graduate liberal and professional studies, grounded in spiritual values, with emphasis on service and the promotion of peace and justice."
2. I recall inviting Dr. Egan to dinner at my home when I was a student. Upon her arrival she asked me to repeat my then-last name, *Beattie*. As soon as I did, she sniffed, shook her head, and said, "Ah, a Celt!"

were full-time College of Education faculty who also taught Kindergarten-through-grade-12-related undergraduate and master's-level courses. Similarly, although the program admitted professionals with master's degrees in various fields, approximately 90 percent of those students were administrators in public, as well as in faith-based, elementary, middle, and secondary schools, or instructors in community colleges. Many were assistant principals who intended to become principals, principals who hoped to become superintendents, and community college professors like myself who sought employment in four-year colleges and universities. Although the creator of Spalding's Ed.D. Program conceived the degree as interdisciplinary, the fact that the word *Education* followed the word *Leadership* in the program's title, and the fact that program recruitment of both faculty and students centered on educators, caused the program to focus on organizational management from a school-based stance. In the early 2000s, a change in the wording of the program's name from *Educational Leadership* to *Leadership Education* shifted the curriculum's emphasis from teaching educators to lead to teaching leadership principles, policies, ethical practices, and history to leaders in all fields.

Throughout the program's first two decades, its course delivery system adhered to a face-to-face model designed to attract mid-career working adults like me. Students took two courses concurrently on campus each semester, one for 3 hours on a weekday evening and one all day on 5 Saturdays. Students completed 3 years of 3-credit-hour courses and were expected to write and defend their dissertation the following academic year.

In the early 2000s, changes in Spalding University's administration and subsequent program restructuring resulted in more personnel changes. Part-time faculty, most of whom were educators, replaced full-time faculty, leaving the program director as the only full-time instructor.

Prior to my appointment as the doctoral program director, the university hired a business executive and a business consultant, consecutively, to design a second, parallel Ed.D. leadership program for executives. The intent was to have one doctoral program for business leaders and one for educators, each with its own director and each offering the same classes that would differ only in the nature of the case studies cited. However, before those plans materialized, I was appointed to direct both versions of the program as one program with

two tracks, one for educators and one for business and healthcare executives. I regarded this charge as an opportunity to re-envision both programs, one that had existed for 23 years in various iterations and one imagined only on paper.

Grace's 2011 encouragement of leaders to stress the significance of the global community above personal and organizational gain proved a model for my program redesign, as did the National Leadership Education Research Agenda's (NLERA) (Andenoro, 2013) call for quality control in leadership programs in higher education by citing the importance of such programs delineating course content priorities and student learning outcomes in order to move toward establishing "well-crafted [curricula] for the development of leadership learners" (p. 9). Significant too is that eight years earlier, scholars such as Bridgeforth (2005) had begun to urge leadership programs to assess student and program learning outcomes to revise their curricula as needed to promote student learning, as well as to keep current with contemporary scholarship.

These parameters proved significant guidelines as my concept of how to reimagine Spalding's doctoral program in leadership emerged, but I also deemed it essential to align discipline practices with institutional values. And so to a bit of back story. In 1814, Mother Catherine Spalding, a courageous Roman Catholic nun who ventured from the Maryland shores to the Kentucky frontier, founded the order of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth. She believed in educating women and children of color and so also founded Nazareth Academy, which, over two centuries, evolved into Spalding University. Today, 204 years later, Spalding, an urban university with approximately 2,300 students, 40% of whom are enrolled in graduate programs, is the first designated Charter for Compassion³ institution of higher education in the nation. Although its affiliation with the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth continues, as does its association with the Archdiocese of Louisville, it is a catholic as well as a Catholic educational institution, as it emphasizes to students, staff, and faculty more strongly than ever its support of diversity and the importance of meeting the needs of the times. Indeed, the university's mission statement, printed on all employees' business cards, reminds university administrators and instructors to champion Mother Catherine's service-centered values.

3. Charter for Compassion International is a global effort to embrace and promote compassion in 10 sectors, among them education.

So it was with the needs of the times in mind that I proceeded to redesign the doctoral program first by eliminating the plan for two separate Ed.D. tracks in favor of one strong curricula, one attraction of which would be the inclusion of a diverse community of learners with disparate experiences, careers, and ideas. To render the degree even more interdisciplinary in practice, I also eliminated the word *Education* from the program name itself, thereby launching the University's Ed.D.: Leadership Program.

To render the degree more attainable for, and attractive to, community leaders and executives beyond Kentucky, I replaced the face-to-face course delivery construct that had served the program for more than 20 years with a more flexible, hybrid model. Each class now launches with an intensive, Friday afternoon, Saturday, and Sunday face-to-face on-campus learning experience followed by 8 weeks of online instruction. Since the program remains cohort-based, students who enter the program and take all their courses together get to know each other and their professors well over every 22-hour class launch and, in subsequent weeks, continue their academic discussions online, whether the students reside in the region or out of state.

Another recent change in program design is the substitution of 10 6-credit-hour classes that students take consecutively, for the two 3-credit-hour classes that students took every term simultaneously. In addition, the policy that previously permitted students to transfer as many as 12 credit hours into the program is no longer practiced, based on the recognition that requiring all program courses be taken at one institution adds academic rigor to the program. And although the number of credit hours for each course has doubled, the time a student takes to graduate is now lessened by at least a year. The current two-and-one-half-year curriculum concludes with two capstone courses, and the capstone and its presentation, which replaces the dissertation and its defense, occurs at the conclusion of the program's last class.

Spalding's Ed.D.: Leadership design revisions are significant, but are also most relevant when considered in conjunction with advances in program content. The practical nature of the Doctor of Education degree, coupled with Spalding University's commitment to meet the needs of the times with compassion, encouraged me to contemplate how the Ed.D.: Leadership Program might give back to the local and global communities. Another nod to the practical caused me to want Spalding's Ed.D. students to engage with organizational leaders to

learn about the political, environmental, sociological, and other challenges of which 21st-century leaders of all types of organizations must be cognizant in this, as journalist Thomas Friedman (2016) has deemed it, age of accelerations. To that end, I recruited community and global organizational partners of for-profit, as well as not-for-profit, organizations to address Spalding's doctoral students in the face-to-face portion of classes during the students' first year and a half in the program. The purpose of their visits are to comment on the nature and mission of their business, health-care organization, educational institution or other enterprise and to discuss one or two actual, long-term leadership issues with which they are dealing and would welcome assistance in the form of one or more students conducting capstone project research that might assist in alleviating the problem. The students benefit from engaging in small-group discussions with approximately 30 prominent leaders, as well as with working with one or more of those leaders or with the leader of their own workplace. Organizational partners profit from doctoral students' pro bono consulting and from the inclusion of their logo on the program's marketing material and web page. In addition, students learn from the experience of submitting the written portion of their capstone project to a peer-reviewed journal and, potentially, from their submission's resulting in a scholarly publication. Organizational partners profit, as well, from the written executive summary and oral presentation students are required to deliver to the organization in which they conducted their research.

As much as Spalding's Ed.D.: Leadership partnerships relate to the University's mission, they also respond to the National Leadership Education Research Agenda's 2013 call for leadership programs to incorporate components of community development and social change (Anenoro et al., 2013), as well as J. P. Dugan's 2017 advocacy of the significance of values-based leadership to students' ethical development and future leadership practice. In addition, Spalding's program partnerships follow the Social Change Model of Leadership Development (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996) that defines leadership as behavior that results in social change for the common good, just as they adhere to Warren G. Bennis's view of the viability of servant leadership in the 21st century (2002). Although Ed.D.: Leadership partnerships are not focused strictly on promoting either the social change model of leadership or servant leadership, they are compatible with both and promulgate the notion that a significant aspect of leading

any group or organization is a focus on the interconnected nature of all members of a community in a global economy. Similarly, Spalding's partnerships encourage doctoral students to respond to Chrislip & O'Malley's 2013 book, *For the common good: Redefining civic leadership*, a treatise in which they admonish leaders to assume "a broader sense of responsibility for civic concerns, and thus our responsibility for helping make progress on them" (p. 159).

As program director, I, as well as the Ed.D.: Leadership Program instructors, invite additional leaders to address Spalding's doctoral students via individual presentations, panel discussions, or Skype to speak to or exemplify topics specific to each course. For example, my course in Ethical Leadership included a panel discussion that featured Louisville's chief of police, the executive director of Louisville's Center for Women and Families, the executive director of the city's Office for Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods, and the director of the city's Peace Coalition; a workplace law presentation by an human resources attorney; and a conversation with the executive director of Louisville's Urban League. The same class was privy to a two-hour Skype presentation by the head teacher of the only educational institution to date to have fully adapted the 21st-century principles for global sustainability espoused by the Prince of Wales in his book *Harmony* (2010)⁴ Even as Spalding's students are exposed to a variety of leaders and types of organizations, talking with leaders encourages students to realize the similarities in different organizations' leadership struggles and also permits them to see business executives and academic administrators as people like themselves who share their civic concerns.

Recent program changes also include a faculty focus. Although all current instructors except myself are part-time employees of the Ed.D.: Leadership Program, each is a doctorally prepared, full-time organizational leader who, in addition to having the credentials to teach, can speak to his or her leadership experience. These instructors now participate in the program admission and design processes and meet as a faculty throughout the year to exchange information and coordinate efforts. And, in accordance with the 2013 NLERA recommendations (Andenoro) cited earlier, all program instructors include in their syllabi a culminating project that tracks and assesses mastery of student learning outcomes.

4. Richard Dunne is Headteacher of Ashley Church of England Primary School in Walton-on-Thames, England.

Today, Spalding's Ed.D.: Leadership Program—designed for and marketed to “a diverse community of learners”—is interdisciplinary in student body composition and in outlook. A growing number of business executives, healthcare professionals, social service organization directors, and educational administrators are attracted to this leadership program that permits them to balance disciplinary breadth with interdisciplinary depth.

The transformation of Spalding's doctoral program in leadership has been and continues to be an evolution grounded in organizational values; contemporary leadership thought; and my personal passion for promoting social justice and critical and creative thinking. Others contemplating launching or redesigning a doctoral program in leadership should examine the culture of their academic institution by reflecting on its mission, history, and constituencies; should objectively contemplate and decide how to best implement their own philosophical passions; and should know the answer to the following questions to assess the viability of creating or revising such a program:

- With how many such doctoral programs would your program be competing, both locally and online?
- Does a needs assessment point to a gap in or to an absence of particular types of graduate-level leadership programs in your city, state or region?
- In what way(s) do competing programs distinguish themselves and in what way(s) do you foresee distinguishing your graduate-level leadership program (e.g., Ph.D. versus Ed.D., K-12 education focus, business/organizational management focus, social justice focus, course delivery system, student type)?
- Does your institution of higher learning encourage intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary partnerships within your own college or university and/or with other institutions?
- What does a review of current literature suggest will be essential for leaders to know and be able to do 50 years from now, and how might that knowledge inform curriculum development and/or revision?
- What does a survey of your community political and organizational leaders conclude is missing in the realm of

leadership development in your region, either in terms of meeting current needs or in terms of preparing for the future?

- Do you have sufficient full-time faculty educated in leadership and related disciplines and/or can you acquire part-time faculty with leadership experience to match their academic credentials?

Contemporary leadership constitutes one of the few academic fields that encompasses historical truths, current practices, and global planning. As such, its boundaries continue to expand, and the challenge for academicians as this century unfolds will be to focus on developing that aspect of the field or that leadership program that most closely coincides with the theories and values we strive to promote.

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