

Longo, N.V., & Gibson, C. M. (Eds.). (2011). *From Command to Community: A New Approach to Leadership Education in Colleges and Universities*. Medford, MA: Tufts University Press.

Review by Mark A. Brennan

The call for leadership, civic engagement, and an active citizenry among university-level students has been echoed through our colleges and universities for decades. This need has only increased in our modern, globally interconnected world. In this setting, it is essential that students receive a comprehensive leadership training experience embedded within their degree programs. Today's students are increasingly expected to exhibit leadership skills and quickly assume a variety of leadership roles during, and after, their academic preparation. We cannot, however, simply provide our students with a loosely defined set of leadership tools and hope that these are sufficient to prepare them for the challenges they will face. Instead, we must train our future generations of leaders to recognize and develop the skills needed to adapt in a rapidly changing environment. The world they encounter will be faster paced, and riskier. It is, therefore, essential that they be leaders who are proactive, flexible, adaptive, innovative, and empowered with applicable real-world experience.

This focus on leadership is particularly appropriate, as recent generations have shown fluctuating interest in volunteering, activism, community service, and civic engagement activities. As a result, many colleges and universities have placed increasing emphasis on programs that provide organizational and community leadership skills. These range in structure from standard curriculum-based courses, to courses that call for significant applied civic engagement activities, with the latter being far less common.

In response to such conditions, Nicholas Longo and Cynthia Gibson present *From Command to Community: A New Approach to Leadership Education in Colleges and Universities*. The book calls on academic institutions to think differently about leadership education, and to create opportunities for students to gain significant leadership skills through experience in their organizations and communities. This applied learning is seen as an essential complement to their classroom experiences. In many ways, this book suggests a paradigm shift. The authors challenge traditional models of leadership development.

A wide range of contributors provide a series of essays about leadership education through civic engagement and active participation. From the perspective of the contributing authors, students become leaders through doing work in communities, and by taking ownership of activities, rather than through traditional methods of classroom instruction and curriculum-based skill building. The essay authors argue for a leadership approach in higher education that focuses on collaborative learning, applied problem solving, and results-orientation programs in community settings.

This call for applied learning and community-based practice may not come as a surprise to some readers, but it may to others. Applied learning pedagogy and curriculum-based practice are still rare in university practice, and in leadership curriculums. Internships and other activities designed to expose students to “real-world” leadership experiences are limited, and typically do little to significantly advance leadership skill building. This book fills an important gap in that much of the leadership development literature has historically lacked a focus on the “community” aspect of leadership. “Community” has, however, been central in community development, civic engagement, and activism literature, as well as practice. The inclusion of “community” in mainstream leadership development programming presents extraordinary possibilities for students. The contributing authors do an admirable job of setting the stage for realizing this possibility.

The book is divided into four sections: “Defining the New Leadership”; “Leadership and Civic Engagement in Context, Then and Now”; “Practices”; and “Moving Forward.” The structure and context of each section is unique and provides solid support to the ideas of the authors. “Section 1: Defining Leadership” succinctly defines the environment of previous and current leadership development training in college and university settings. The section nicely lays out the possibilities for new leadership development trainings, while challenging teachers to adapt and adopt new methods for engaging students. Alma Blount’s chapter, “Courage for the Tough Questions: Leadership and Adaptive Learning,” is particularly interesting in presenting a challenge to educators to be more adaptive in their leadership education.

“Section 2: Leadership and Civic Engagement in Context, Then and Now” provides further detail and exploration of past leadership development training, while merging this existing knowledge base with more applied community-based experiential development. The chapters “Public and Community-Based Leadership Education” (*Kathleen Knight Abowitz, Stephanie Raill Jayanandhan, and Sarah Woiteshek*) and “No One Leads Alone: Making Leadership a

Common Experience” (*Kathy Postel Kretman*) are noteworthy. Both analyze and discuss the community basis and connections that shape effective leaders. Overall, this section suggests a balance of theory, curriculum, and applied learning in applied community programs.

“Section 3: Practices” focuses on the application of the authors’ main ideas of leadership development through civic participation. Case studies illustrate leadership approaches, which emphasize the building of relationships and public action. The case studies focus on the application of civic engagement as a learning tool in a variety of academic settings, ranging from well-established university programs to emerging community college initiatives. Included are democratic, civic, and community-based leadership examples in which different leadership skills are developed. The following chapters highlight the application and impact of such programs: “Civic Leadership and Public Achievement at the University of Denver’s Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning” (*Sarah McCauley, Nicole Nicotera, Eric Fretz, Sarah Nickels, Charla Agnoletti, Hannah Goedert, Emelye Neff, Taylor Rowe, and Russell Takeall*) and “Community Colleges Returning Home: Community Institutions for Community Leadership” (*Decker Ngongang*).

“Section 4: Moving Forward” presents a call to action for university students and teachers. The call to action is for faculty and students to take active leadership roles in the classroom, community, and beyond. Two chapters stand out in Section 4: “The Role of Higher Education in Public Leadership” (*Paul C. Light*) and “Organizing 101: Lessons I Wish I’d Learned on Campus” (*Stephen Smith*). Both provide strong suggestions for educators as they shape innovative leadership development programs.

Although thought-provoking and well-written, *From Command to Community* leaves room in several areas for improvement or additional information that would greatly enhance its content and application. A central premise of the book is that leadership is best learned, and has the greatest impact, through application in the community. That said, little of the literature on “community” is mentioned or woven into models for application. Including the diverse community development and sociological literature, together with the theoretical bases of interactional field theory, social capital, and other leading community leadership perspectives, would further support the framework the authors propose. This additional literature would also provide a conceptual structure on which to base future leadership programs, and research on college student leadership development. Further, it could illuminate

the types of leadership programs and experiential learning best suited for different learning environments and diverse community settings. It would also strengthen the reader's understanding of "community," and the process by which "community" emerges.

This book is well-suited for academics, researchers, educational policy experts, practitioners, and others interested in better framing the context in which student leadership develops as part of the college and university learning experience. Teachers, activists, and community development professionals will also find it helpful when developing and implementing civic engagement activities that link university curriculum to applied community-based activities. In addition, the book would work well as a primary or secondary text in university graduate and undergraduate leadership courses, to help students understand how applied civic engagement activities can facilitate student leadership development, and how they can shape broader organizational and community development activities. In summary, *Command to Community: A New Approach to Leadership Education in Colleges and Universities* returns the focus of leadership development to the life experiences of students, and highlights how student life experiences, combined with academic training and support, provide a foundation for them as emerging leaders.

About the Reviewer

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