

Learning, Leading, and Information Literacy

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Information literacy is an important component of exercising leadership and is critical in leadership development and education. This chapter explores the intersections of leadership development through collegiate co-curricular programming, the development of information literacy skills and abilities, and the possibilities that are emergent in these intersections. We posit information literacy as an enabling literacy and information-based problem-solving as an important leadership ability. The chapter is centered in a case study of the Illinois Leadership Center (ILC), which serves as a mechanism to exemplify the possibilities inherent in conceptualizing the intersections of leadership, learning, and information literacy.

Leadership

The question “what is leadership?” is a quintessential example of what McTighe and Wiggins (2013) term an “overarching essential question.” Essential questions are those that cannot be answered in brief, stimulate thought and inquiry, raise even more questions, spark discussion and debate, can be asked and re-asked over time, demand justification and support, and for which the answers may change as understanding deepens (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). An overarching essential question is one that moves “beyond any particular topic or skill, toward more general, transferable understandings” (McTighe & Wiggins, 2013, p. 9).

The Illinois Leadership Center is a partnership between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign that aims to provide a comprehensive leadership education program for students at Illinois as well as support for teaching and research related to leadership. The Illinois Leadership Center embraces



the nebulous, or ill-defined, nature of its topic and finds a generative productivity in that ambiguity that fosters an ever-growing campus community of practice that includes students, staff, faculty, and community members in engaged inquiry and learning.

The Illinois Philosophy and Model of Leadership is a comprehensive approach to student leadership development. The campus-wide multi-level model draws upon various leadership models and theories, including the Social Change Model of Leadership Development (Astin & Astin, 1996) and adaptive leadership (Heifetz, Linsky, & Grashow, 2009) but is uniquely designed for Illinois students. The influences of these theories are seen clearly in the tenants of Illinois Leadership Philosophy that guides the work of the Illinois Leadership Center and also serves as a touchstone for all leadership activities at Illinois:

- Leaders are individuals who work with others to create positive change. Leadership can be practiced by anyone interested in making a contribution, regardless of formal authority or position.
- Leadership development begins with self-knowledge—understanding one’s passions, motivations, strengths, limits, and personal values. Leaders are committed to continual self-discovery, reflection, and learning.
- Learning to work with others is essential since leadership never happens alone.
- Leadership is exercised as members of teams, business, civic, and community organizations, and as global citizens. Leaders recognize and value the multitude of voices, opinions, experiences, and identities in our workplaces and communities, and as leaders, we work to promote greater inclusivity and respect.
- At the University of Illinois, students learn and practice leadership in their academic coursework and out-of-classroom activities.

In 2014, the Illinois Leadership Center hosted multiple campus-wide conversations to enable the community to articulate and define leadership competencies to guide programmatic development and assessment. These discussions were messy, complex, and complicated as well as inspiring and motivating. The goal was not to define leadership abstractly but rather specifically for the leadership community of practice at Illinois. With input from more than 250 students, staff, and faculty, the Illinois Leadership Competencies took shape. These competencies define knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for effective leadership practice and provide structure for communicating how these knowledge, skills, and attitudes are interrelated (Seemiller, 2014).

The Illinois Leadership Competencies consist of four levels of practice with skills and attitudes articulated at each level. Within each level, there are various leadership competencies. The four levels are:

1. **Personal/Self Level.** The practice of effective leadership begins within oneself. Leaders work to develop a set of individual skills and attitudes necessary for being productive members of society.
2. **Interpersonal/Team Level.** Effective leadership requires working with and influencing others to achieve common goals and shared vision. Leaders need to develop skills for building personal, authentic, and productive relationships.
3. **Organization Level.** Significant accomplishments achieved within organizations are the result of teams interacting together. Leaders must navigate systems and

influence people when they do not have interpersonal relationships with all others.

4. Community/Society Level. The values and actions of individuals, teams, and organizations interact with and affect the broader communities in which they are situated. Leaders are role models and influencers with several communities simultaneously and must possess skills and attitudes consistent with success in this larger context.

Even a cursory review of the Illinois Leadership Philosophy and Illinois Leadership Competencies quickly reveals the necessity of information literacy for this leadership education.

Information Literacy

“What is information literacy?” is a question that has a relatively straightforward answer since the 1989 *ALA Presidential Report on Information Literacy*, which stated that “to be information literate, a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information” (American Library Association, 1989, p. 1). Though the recently adopted *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2015) has caused some libraries to revise their information literacy learning outcomes and perhaps their working definitions of information literacy, at Illinois, the Library’s *Statement on Learning Goals* (University of Illinois Library, 2003) was reviewed but left as is at the recommendation of the Library Faculty User Education Committee. Instead, the *Framework* has influenced the pedagogy and instructional design of our information literacy programs.

The Illinois Library *Statement on Learning Goals* offers two pathways for developing learning outcomes for any given information literacy session or program—a conceptual approach and a process approach. Both approaches are aligned with the overall information literacy program and allow librarians to design instruction that best integrates with a given curriculum or program learning outcomes on campus. The conceptual approach focuses primarily on information gathering, scholarly expertise, and bibliographic structures and has four main learning goals:

1. The user understands how information is defined by experts and recognizes how that knowledge can help determine the direction of his/her search for specific information.
2. The user understands the importance of the organizational content, bibliographic structure, function, and use of information sources.
3. The user can identify useful information from information sources or information systems.
4. The user understands the way collections of information sources are physically organized and accessed.

The process-oriented approach that encompasses information gathering as well as information evaluation and use and has five main learning goals:

1. The information-literate student determines the nature and extent of the information needed.
2. The information-literate student accesses needed information effectively and efficiently.
3. The information-literate student evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system.
4. The information-literate student, individually or as a member of a group, uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose.
5. The information-literate student understands many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally.

Through a locally developed and offered multi-session professional development program called the Instruction Studio, library instructors are introduced to these goals, writing learning outcomes, identifying key concepts and understandings, and assessing student learning through the backward design process articulated in Wiggins and McTighe (2005), which is referenced in the introduction to the *Framework*. Library instructors tailor information literacy instruction to the needs of campus programs and may use one or both of the approaches to achieve learning goals. Student information literacy learning in the Illinois Leadership Center draws upon both models as appropriate to the particular programmatic setting.

Information Literacy Enabling Leadership

As previously mentioned, information literacy is conceptualized as an enabling literacy for leadership learning and practice in the Illinois Leadership Center. In other words, information literacy is a mechanism or capacity for learning or exercising leadership. This is not to argue that information literacy does not also have inherent value or utility in other settings but only to recognize that information literacy—like communication skills, writing skills, etc.—are conceptualized as being in service to another learning outcome or practice in this context.

As such, although information literacy is not listed as a stand-alone competency within the model, information literacy is woven throughout the philosophy and specific competencies. For example, the Illinois Philosophy of Leadership stresses that leadership is a process, not a position, and that leadership development begins with “self-knowledge—understanding one’s passions, motivations, strengths, limits, and personal values” (Illinois Leadership Center, 2016, para. 2). The philosophy goes on to emphasize the imperative for leaders to work with others and to recognize the many “voices, opinions, experiences, and identities” (Illinois Leadership Center, 2016, para. 4). This approach closely aligns with the purpose of information literacy by acknowledging that authority is constructed and recognizing the multitude of voices that create information and guide decisions (ACRL, 2015). This case study now turns to an examination of specific components of programming from the Illinois Leadership Center.

CREATING AN INFORMATION-RICH ENVIRONMENT

The ILC has infused information literacy into leadership education by creating an information-rich environment through the provision of resources, activities, and mentoring. Information literacy practices are supported, encouraged, and modeled through a variety of approaches and strategies. A review of some of the more prominent models follows.

DIRECTING LEARNERS TO INFORMATION RESOURCES

The Cavanaugh Leadership Resource Library, located within the ILC, is an endowed collection that contains a variety of leadership resources, including academic texts, popular press books, and team-building activities. The library has approximately 800 materials available for checkout to all Illinois students, faculty, or staff. The ILC has used the library as a tool to promote information literacy for stakeholders. Student employees are given cursory training on the Library of Congress classification system and taught how to provide patrons with resources based on their needs. For those seeking leadership-related resources, the ILC staff often guides patrons to investigate resources from multiple sources and highlights differences in leadership scholarship.

In an effort to highlight the wealth of leadership resources available on campus, the ILC collaborated with the Office of Information Literacy in University Library to create a series of LibGuides based on the Illinois Leadership Model. The LibGuides are arranged by the levels of practice in the leadership model (Personal/Self, Interpersonal/Team, Organization, and Community/Society) and serve as a guide to resources for each competency highlighting books, journal articles, TEDtalks, podcasts, and other online resources.

During the 2017–2018 academic year, the ILC created the Illinois Leadership Inventory (ILI), an online leadership self-assessment tool. Designed to expand the ILC's outreach to students who may not engage in a formal leadership training and to encourage students to explore the wide range of leadership resources available, the ILI provides a synopsis of the user's aptitude on each competency coupled with a series of recommendations to promote continued leadership learning. The ILC staff curated a list of approximately 1,000 on-campus activities, academic classes, and online/print resources that are included as recommendations for users. Recommendations are provided to users based on their skill level (beginner, developing, and expert) and the college in which they are enrolled at the university. Thus, a student from the College of Business who scores in the beginner range will receive different recommendations on each competency than a student from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences that scored in the developing range.

PROVIDING FORMAL INSTRUCTION

The ILC provides formal curricular and co-curricular leadership programs that enhance students' leadership capacities and their ability to solve complex problems. The suite of ILC programs vary in scope and length to accommodate the diverse needs of the student body and includes workshops, leadership seminars, a multi-semester leadership certificate program, and a curricular leadership minor.

A series of day-long leadership seminars, called i-programs, are designed to focus on a specific aspect of leadership practice, such as group/team development, ethical decision-making, innovation, and inclusive leadership. These programs combine

introductions to theoretical concepts with small-group discussion, personal reflection, and application activities. In each i-program, participants are provided with information about leadership as defined by experts and encouraged to analyze the material and draw connections to their own lived experiences. Case studies are used to encourage information-based problem-solving around leadership challenges. As an example, in the Integrity i-program, participants are taught common cognitive biases that can impair ethical decision-making, drawing on cases from McCombs School of Business (2018). Participants engage in critical self-reflection on these biases and are then tasked to evaluate a series of scenarios, apply multiple ethical decision-making approaches, and decide a course of action.

FOSTERING SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

Leadership development and information literacy are skills that require ongoing learning and critical self-examination. The Illinois Leadership Philosophy emphasizes the need for leaders to engage in lifelong learning and reflection. To foster self-discovery and leadership learning in a reflective, extended format, the ILC offers a self-directed leadership certificate program. The multi-semester co-curricular certificate program prompts students to integrate leadership education, practice, and reflection. Participants take courses on leadership theory, attend formal leadership training, engage in team-based experiences, and are mentored by a leadership coach. Additionally, students are asked to complete regular reflections about leadership learning and are encouraged to make connections between the experiences and the literature on leadership and leadership development.

The program is designed to push students to explore essential questions. Students pursuing a leadership certificate are asked to create their own philosophy of leadership and revise it based on the knowledge gained throughout the program. At the beginning of the program, students also create a Personal Development Plan (PDP) that will act as their individualized guide through the experience. Participants identify six competencies from the Illinois Leadership Competencies that they want to learn more about and determine strategies for learning and practicing each competency. These strategies draw heavily on the information resources provided by the ILC and in the University Library. At the conclusion of the program, participants create an electronic portfolio to showcase what they have learned over the course of the certificate program in an information-rich environment and provides students with the tools to continue their leadership learning post-graduation.

The ILC also promotes self-directed learning through intentional activities that promote career readiness. The National Association for Colleges and Employers (2017) defined career readiness as “the attainment and demonstration of requisite competencies that broadly prepare college graduates for a successful transition into the workplace” (p. 1). Students attending i-programs are encouraged to apply leadership concepts to their future employment and explore how continued learning could enhance their career readiness. Finally, the ILC provides practicum experiences for students studying library science and information management. Practicum students shape their experience to apply classroom concepts to an authentic work environment in areas such as data analytics, library management, and collection development.

Conclusion

By positioning information literacy as an enabling literacy and information-based problem-solving as an important leadership ability, the ILC has developed a range of approaches that further information literacy learning goals in the context of leadership education and development. As demonstrated in the case study presented here, the possibilities inherent in conceptualizing the intersections of leadership, learning, and information literacy are generative and robust. Through these programs, Illinois students are prepared for lives of civic and community engagement and lifelong learning, through which they will continue to confront the ambiguous and essential question of “what is leadership?” and how they engage their own personal response to that question. Ultimately, leadership development and information literacy are both seeking to produce informed and engaged members of our communities.

Though the ILC information literacy programs exemplify how leadership education and information literacy can be intertwined and mutually reinforcing, the specifics of these programs emerged from deep campus engagement that developed the Illinois Leadership Philosophy and Competencies. This is the kind of engagement that *The Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education* recommends; that is, this chapter should serve as inspiration for other campus processes but not a blueprint for programmatic implementation. Specific competencies and leadership programs should be designed based on the context of an institution (Andenoro, et al., 2013), rooted in its mission and vision.

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