JCAPS

THEORY-DRIVEN APPROACH TO DEVELOPING SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS WHO MENTOR: COMMITMENT

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Abstract

The current scholarship-to-practice brief discusses a theoretically grounded intervention on developing Commitment, an individual value of the Social Change Model of Leadership (SCM), among college student mentors and adolescent mentees. The authors have previously shared developmental interventions on Consciousness of Self and Congruence (Sunderman & Hastings, 2021, in press), the other two values of the SCM. This brief highlights a two-part leader development intervention: (a) a one-hour content block with interactive activities and (b) a small-group, discussion-focused meeting. Specifically, the intervention focused on identifying areas of passion, examining Commitment in others, and planning a task or activity to demonstrate Commitment. Accompanying the intervention is an assessment strategy based on the learning objectives. By sharing a description of the intervention and an evaluation strategy, leadership educators and student affairs practitioners can implement their own Commitment curriculum in myriad settings.

INTRODUCTION

The Social Change Model of Leadership (SCM) promotes social change through individual and group development (Higher Education Research Institute [HERI], 1996). Seeking to engage students in social responsibility (HERI, 1996; Dugan, 2006), the SCM is the most widely used student leadership development model in higher education (Haber & Komives, 2009). The SCM seeks to engage students in social responsibility and develop socially responsible leaders (HERI, 1996; Dugan, 2006). Notably, leadership and social responsibility are critical student learning outcomes of higher education (Adelman et al., 2011; AAC&U & NLC, 2007; CAS, 2015; Dreschsler Sharp et al., 2011; NACE, 2016).

Given the relevance of socially responsible leadership to institutions of higher education, the purpose of our manuscript is to discuss the development, execution, and evaluation of an intervention focused on Commitment, a value of the SCM (HERI, 1996). Specifically, we will outline the SCM and Commitment before sharing a detailed description of the intervention, including samples of workbook pages. Finally, we discuss the assessment and evaluation plan based on the learning objectives. Notably, the Commitment intervention is year three of a seven-year series of yearlong interventions that follow the seven values of the SCM (HERI, 1996). Notably, the Commitment intervention is year three of a seven-year series of yearlong interventions that follow the seven values of the SCM (HERI, 1996). The first and second parts of the seven-year series, Consciousness of Self and Congruence, have been previously published in The Journal for Campus Activities (Sunderman & Hastings, 2021, in press).

REVIEW OF RELATED SCHOLARSHIP

The Social Change Model (SCM) focuses on furthering positive social change in a community or community setting (HERI, 1996). The model aims to develop self-awareness and leadership competence in individuals who then serve as agents of change and leadership. Through the agents of change, collective action among individuals builds.

Figure 1. *Values of the Social Change Model of Leadership (HERI, 1996).*
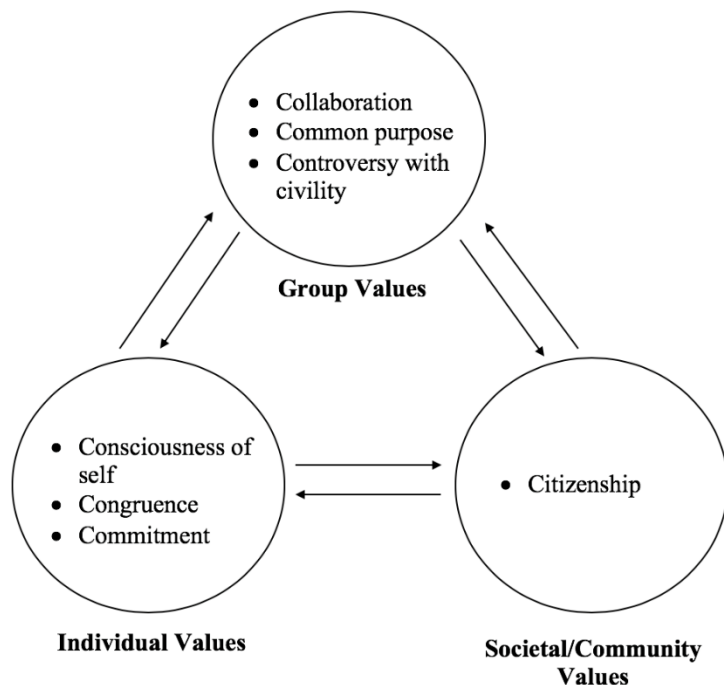

The SCM has seven values: (a) Consciousness of Self, (b) Congruence, (c) Commitment, (d) Collaboration, (e) Common Purpose, (f) Controversy with Civility, and (g) Citizenship (see Figure 1; HERI, 1996). The seven values are organized into three categories: (a) Individual Values, (b) Group Values, and (c) Societal/Community Values (see Figure 1; HERI, 1996). For a more thorough review of the SCM, see Sunderman and Hastings (2021). For a more complete discussion of the SCM, see HERI (1996) and Komives and Wagner (2016).

Commitment is "the purposive investment of time and physical and psychological energy in the leadership development process" (HERI, 1996, p. 40). Kerkhoff and Ostick (2016) discussed Commitment as the "anchor for change" (p. 365) as it is fueled by passion, required to achieve change, and necessary to integrate the other SCM values. Commitment involves two aspects of investment. First, Commitment requires the investment of time. Often great change requires sustained Commitment over a significant time. Second, Commitment requires the investment of physical and psychological energy, driving the group process and facilitating group goals. The leadership development associated with Commitment has three aspects through which leaders bring change: (a) help the group find a common purpose and formulate strategies to realize that purpose, (b) sustain the group during controversy, and (c) facilitate the realization of group's goals (HERI, 1996). Figure 2 models this SCM process of leadership development connected with Commitment in a group setting. Further, Figure 2 highlights the investment of time, as well as physical and psychological energy, required by the process of Commitment.

The SCM is the most frequently utilized leadership development model at institutions of higher education (Haber & Komives, 2009). Therefore, leadership educators and student affairs practitioners should incorporate activities and discussions on Commitment into curricular and co-curricular experiences. The current manuscript offers one pathway for utilizing the SCM value of Commitment in leadership education and student development.

Figure 2. *Process of commitment in the Social Change Model of Leadership.*
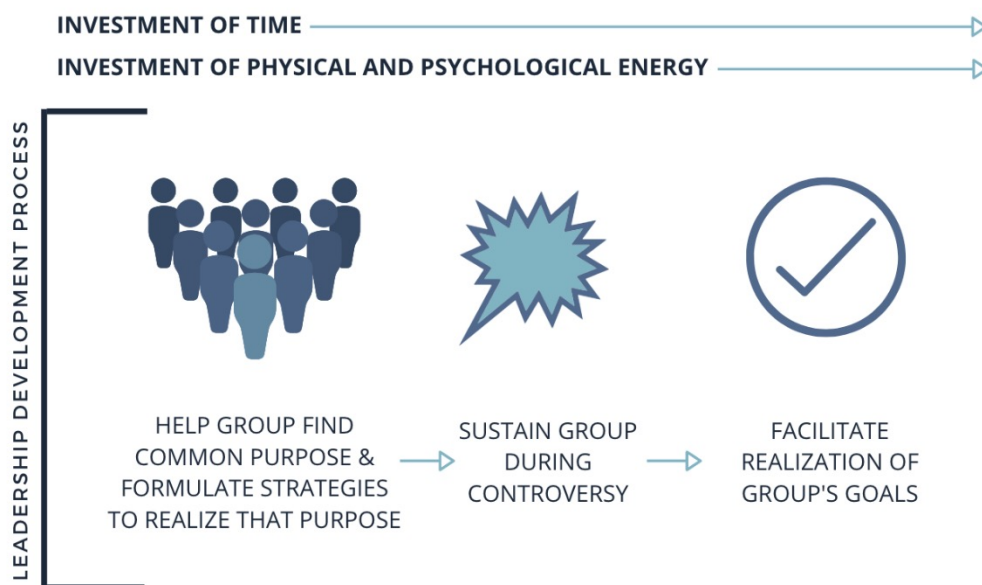
DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

This scholarship-to-practice manuscript discusses the development, execution, and evaluation of a leadership development intervention on Commitment, a value of the SCM (HERI, 1996). The intervention's target population was a 360-student (180 mentors; 180 mentees) leadership mentoring program at a four-year, public, Midwestern university. Peers, faculty, and staff nominate college student leaders for demonstrating leadership behaviors. Through a structured interview process, the mentoring program selects approximately 60 students to be mentors each year. Each mentor spends three years working weekly with a 1st – 12th-grade student in the community whom teachers and school staff have nominated for positively influencing others.

The current intervention had two primary components. First, mentors and mentees participated in a one-hour, in-person content block with interactive activities and discussions during the fall semester. Mentors and mentees who could not attend the in-person session had access to the content via an online module. The second component of the intervention was a one-hour discussion of research and mass media materials related to Commitment with a small group during the spring semester. The following section shares the material's objectives, activities, and discussion topics for the college student mentors and mentees who are middle or high school students. The college student mentors with K-5 mentees utilized material adapted for a younger audience. The materials focused on the K-5 population are not the focus of the current paper.

There were three retreat objectives, which stated that, by the end of the intervention, participants would be able to do the following: (a) identify areas of passion, (b) examine Commitment in others, and (c) plan a task or activity to demonstrate Commitment. While developing leadership competencies through short-term leadership interventions can be challenging, demonstrated SCM competencies have significantly increased immediately and three months after a short-term training (Rosch & Caza, 2012).

The one-hour content block began by asking participants to discuss the following question: "What does the term Commitment mean, and why is it important?" After discussing their initial thoughts on the topic, the facilitator provided a brief lecture on Commitment, highlighting the definition, describing the SCM, and discussing the model of Commitment (see Figure 2). In particular, the lecture highlighted that Commitment requires two aspects of investment that are sustained throughout the leadership development process: (a) time and (b) physical and psychological energy (HERI, 1996). Additionally, the facilitators discussed that Commitment matters

because it is essential to achieving change. In other words, to have a significant impact, we must invest our time and energy into activities that align with our values, strengths, and passions.

After the opening lecture, participants were provided a refresher on Consciousness of Self, the first value of the SCM (HERI, 1996). Pages four (see Figure 3) and five of the workbook were devoted to the refresher because the foundation of Commitment is one's values and strengths, which are critical topics within the SCM values of Consciousness of Self. Within the Consciousness of Self refresher, participants wrote down their top three values and top five strengths. Additionally, they reflected on what their values and strengths mean for their leadership.

Figure 3. *Consciousness of self refresher.*

CONSCIOUSNESS OF SELF REFRESHER

What are your top 3 values
(in no particular order)?
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What are your top 3 leadership strengths?
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Reflection
_____
_____
_____

Following the Consciousness of Self refresher, participants completed an incomplete sentences activity. Specifically, we asked participants to identify areas where they might be willing to commit (see Figure 4). Specifically, as recommended by HERI (1996), participants completed ten sentences that began with "I really care about…." Facilitators challenged participants to think deeper than their initial reaction (e.g., we suggested using the word "sports" with examples [e.g., "football, lacrosse"] to complete one sentence versus five different kinds of sports to complete five sentences). After completing the five sentences, participants compared their completed sentences to their values and strengths within their mentoring pairs. Participants answered the following questions: "Did your values inform completed sentences? Do you see an overlap between the top values and the sentences you wrote? If so, what led to this? How will your values influence your ability to be committed? If not, what led to this? How can you bring your sentences into alignment and Congruence with your values?" In addition to discussing their responses in their mentoring pairs, participants also shared their thoughts with a small group.

Figure 4. *Incomplete sentences activity.*

INCOMPLETE SENTENCES ACTIVITY

1. I really care about _____

2. I really care about _____

3. I really care about _____

4. I really care about _____

5. I really care about _____

6. I really care about _____

7. I really care about _____

8. I really care about _____

9. I really care about _____

10. I really care about _____

Reflection

_____

_____

_____

The next activity was a case study on Commitment. During this activity, we challenged participants to practice identifying values in others and recognizing Commitment. The activity began with facilitators sharing the backstory of the 1988 Jamaican bobsled team, the focus of the fictionalized Disney movie *Cool Runnings* (Turteltaub, 1993). The 1988 Jamaican bobsled team were the first Jamaican athletes to compete in the Winter Olympics. While none of the bobsledders had previously participated in the sport, they practiced for months before crashing at the Olympics. A fictionalized account of the crash is depicted in *Cool Runnings* (Semisocial215, 2009). Following the backstory, participants watched the video about the crash and discussed how they saw Commitment in this group (see Figure 5). Additionally, we asked participants to reflect on the behaviors and statements that might indicate a lack of Commitment.

Figure 5. *Case study reflection.*

CASE STUDY OF COMMITMENT & LEADERSHIP

What is going on in this case study?

_____

_____

_____

How did the bobsledders demonstrate commitment?

_____

_____

_____

How can you apply what you learned to your own leadership?

_____

_____

_____

The final portion of the retreat was an area of Commitment activity. After seeing Commitment in others, participants reflected on what Commitment might look like in their own leadership and planned an area where they would demonstrate Commitment (see Figure 6). We intentionally asked participants to consider their values and strengths (i.e., the Consciousness of Self refresher), as well as the incomplete sentences activity when identifying an area of Commitment. Participants then shared their thoughts in the mentoring pairs and small groups. The content block ended with mentors and mentees reflecting on two things they learned that they would utilize with their teams, schools, organizations, families, or communities.

Figure 6. *Area of commitment reflection.*

AREA OF COMMITMENT

I really care about _____

What needs to be done? What change is needed?
_____
_____
_____

What led you to this area? Why does it matter to you?
_____
_____
_____

What will you do to demonstrate commitment towards this area and promote positive social change? (Reminder: These should be measurable, controllable, and achievable.
1. I will _____
_____
2. I will _____
_____

The workbook participants received also had additional activities for mentoring pairs to complete. The additional activities included a case study on Dorothy Height, a lifelong civil rights and women's rights social movement leader who worked within teams to advance innovative solutions to comprehensive challenges (Height, 2009; see Figures 7-9). After reading the case study on Dorothy Height, mentors and mentees were asked to reflect on the following questions: (a) "Based on her actions, what might Height value?"; (b) "How did Height demonstrate Commitment?"; and (c) "How did Commitment influence Height's leadership?"

Figure 7. *Case study of commitment part one.*

CASE STUDY OF COMMITMENT

On August 28, 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. declared from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, "From every mountainside, let freedom ring" (Height, 2003, p. 145). Within an arm's length stood Dr. Dorothy Height, the President of the National Council of Negro Women (NCW) and a civils rights and women's rights social movement leader. Although Height was not allowed to speak at the March on Washington, her voice rang for decades in the fight to pry open the gates of freedom for all. Throughout a lifetime of service, Height positively influence social change on issues such as unemployment, illiteracy, poverty, and voter registration (Height, 2003). Despite obstacles, she led with strategic vision and a talent for inviting others to take up the fight (Morris & Staggenborg, 2004).

Born in Richmond, Virginia, Height's parents moved to Rankin, Pennsylvania as part of the Great Migration to the North by southern African Americans (Height, 2003). Raised in the suburbs of Pittsburgh, Height grew up attending racially integrated schools with peers who were largely foreign-born. Despite significant health issues with asthma throughout childhood, Height excelled academically and was praised for her oratorical skills. The schools that Height attended also provided opportunities for activism, such as an anti-lynching campaign. Height said that she was largely unfamiliar with prejudice in childhood, however, in adolescence, she was not allowed to swim in the YWCA pool on account of her race. Additionally. when competing in a local oratory competition, Height was not allowed to stay at the hotel where her school had made reservations.

Despite this prejudice, Height won a national speaking competition her senior year of high school and received a scholarship from the Elks, which played a significant role in her ability to attend college (Height, 2003) After earning two degrees from New York University, Height began working at the YWCA in Marlem in 1937. There she met Eleanor Roosevelt and Mary McLeod Bethune, who had just founded the National Council of Negro Women (NCNV). Bethune immediately recruited Height to volunteer with the NCNW and served as a source of inspiration and guidance for Height until her death in 1955.

While volunteering and working with the NCNW. Height faced numerous situations that were particularly challenging as a leader. The civil rights and women's rights movements, of which Height was a part, required people to critically examine their beliefs and values. These complex issues were unable to be answered solely through a leader's skills or influence. For example. Height realized that the advancement of women's rights and civil rights would require root issues to be addressed, such as economic development and education.

Figure 8. *Case study of commitment part two*

CASE STUDY OF COMMITMENT

To address this challenge, the Mississippi NCNW fought to keep Head Start programs functioning as a means of educating underprivileged children and employing caretakers. To save the programs, the NCNW facilitated the development of a "pig bank" where participating families cared for a pig and brought two piglets back to the bank from each litter to develop economic resources in the community. Before the establishment of the "pig bank, community members had been bribed to vote for politicians who did not support Head Start programs. Once the pig bank was in place, individuals were less swayed by financial incentives from politicians and, therefore, better able to vote for candidates who advocated in their best interest and maintained funding for Head Start. This creative endeavor was later replicated by the king of Swaziland among rural women to promote economic viability.

Height joined the national staff of the YWCA in 1944 where she led the integration of all of the organization's facilities and served as the first director of the WCA's Center for Racial Justice (Height, 2003). Additionally, Height served as president of the NCNW from 1957–1997. During her time at the NCNW, Height championed efforts such as the Black Family Reunion Celebration, an event that attracted over 12 million people in a celebration of traditions and values of the African American family

(Jackson, n.d.). The NCNW led integration efforts such as "Wednesdays in Mississippi," (WIMs) a movement in which Height served as the recruiter and coordinator (Height, 2003). WIMs brought women from northern cities to Jackson, Mississippi to meet together and discuss civil rights issues. Height (2003) recalls, "By the end of the [first] summer forty–eight women from six northern cities had met and talked with some three hundred southern women, nearly half of whom were white" (p. 177). Height's facilitation of this event demonstrates how she worked as a bridge leader, connecting people to the movements she helped lead and building relationships (Morris & Staggenborg, 2004).

Outside of the NCNW, Height also fostered connections with other leaders of various social movements and groups. This collaborative spirit led to the founding of the National Women's Political Caucus in 1971 alongside Gloria Steinem, Betty Friedan, and others (Jackson, n.d.). Height also had substantial political impact as she was a consultant to multiple US Presidents, including President Dwight D. Eisenhower and President Lyndon B. Johnson. Height was honored with the Presidential Medal of Freedom and Congressional Gold Medal (Jackson, n.d.).

Case study written by Hannah Sunderman (2019)

Figure 9. *Case study of commitment reflection.*

CASE STUDY OF CONGRUENT LEADERSHIP

What is going on in this case study?
What are the key moments?

_____
_____
_____

Based on her actions, what might Height value?

_____
_____
_____

How did Height demonstrate commitment?

_____
_____
_____

How did commitment influence Height's impact as a leader?

_____
_____
_____

How can you apply what you learned from Height to your leadership?

_____
_____
_____

Building upon the content covered during to fall portion of the intervention, the spring portion of the intervention was discussion-based. Small groups read *Commitment* (HERI, pp. 40-47) and answered concrete, conceptual, and application questions, such as (a) "Where, according to the article, does Commitment come from?"; (b) "How do leaders who have a high Commitment act, think, and feel? Describe what it might be like to be led by them"; and (c) "What does it look like for you to keep growing in Commitment? How can this contribute to positive social change?" Then, small groups watched and discussed a variety of relevant video clips selected by

small group leaders. For example, one small group watched the video *Power of Commitment* from the TEDx-Kids@SMU event (Jonathan, 2017).

After watching a video clip, small groups again discussed concrete, conceptual, and application questions, such as (a) "This video uses a lot of sports imagery. How do sports/physical activity compare to and connect with the work of leadership and social change" and (b) "What does it look like for you to remain committed to your passions and values even when it is challenging?" Notably, the spring portion of the intervention was primarily held in a hybrid format based on the preferences of each small group. While a handful of small groups preferred to meet entirely in person, most of the small groups had some participants in person and on campus. In contrast, other participants joined virtually via Zoom.

DISCUSSION OF OUTCOMES/RESULTS

As with the Consciousness of Self and Congruence interventions (Sunderman & Hastings, 2021, in press), we evaluated the year-long intervention (i.e., Fall workshop and Spring small groups) with a survey built on the intervention objectives. Utilizing the response anchors suggested by Seemiller to evaluate student leadership learning (2013; 1 = Did not increase, 4 = Greatly increased), participants assessed their development on the following four statements: (a) my understanding of Commitment; (b) my ability to identify areas of passion; (c) my ability to examine Commitment in others; and (d) my ability to demonstrate Commitment. Based on the recommendations of Seemiller (2016), an aggregate total ≥ 3.0 ("moderately increased") indicated that the objectives had been sufficiently developed. We asked participants to complete the survey following the spring semester (i.e., six months after the first part of the intervention and two months after the second part). By having time between the intervention and the evaluation survey, we avoided the Honeymoon Effect, a typical evaluation pitfall occurring when participants overestimate the impact of an experience immediately after it ends (Rosch & Schwartz, 2009).

Ultimately, 74 mentors participated in the overarching programmatic survey (N = 180, 41%). Due to survey attrition, 56 mentors evaluated the intervention. Regarding year in school, 15 participants were sophomores (27%), 21 were juniors (38%), and 19 were seniors (35%). Regarding gender, 33 participants were women (59%), and 23 were men (41%). Regarding race/ethnicity, 52 participants identified as white (93%), two participants identified as Black or African American (4%), one participant identified as Hispanic or Latinx (2%), and one participant identified as Asian (2%).

The results of the evaluation survey are shown in Table 1. The average participant response was greater than 3.0 on the four intervention objectives, signifying acceptable development of the objective (Seemiller, 2016). The aggregate average of participant responses across the four questions was 3.09 (i.e., "moderately increased" on the scale of 1 = Did not increase to 4 = Greatly increased; Seemiller, 2013), which satisfied our pre-determined threshold.

Table 1. *Results of evaluation survey.*

Question	Average	% of Participants ≥ 3.0 Rating
My understanding of Commitment	3.05	78.5
My ability to identify areas of passion	3.16	80.4
My ability to examine Commitment in others	3.07	75.0
My ability to demonstrate Commitment	3.09	78.6
Note. Participants evaluated their development from the intervention utilizing the response anchors of 1 = Did not increase to 4 = Greatly increased (Seemiller, 2013). An average of 3.0 indicates a moderate increase in self-perceived participant development.		

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PRACTITIONER

The purpose of the current manuscript was to outline the development, execution, and evaluation of a leadership development intervention on Commitment, a value of the SCM (HERI, 1996). The intervention was created and

implemented among adolescents and college students engaged in leadership mentoring. This work offers implications for leadership educators and student affairs practitioners.

Namely, we encourage leadership educators to implement the Commitment curriculum and subsequent assessment strategy within their curricular and co-curricular settings. In providing a detailed description of the intervention, we sought to meet a need in the field for "descriptions of assignments and activities comprising the day-to-day teaching of leadership" (Smith & Roebuck, 2010, p. 136). For example, student affairs practitioners may find the Commitment curriculum advantageous for utilization among individuals within teams that will serve together for an academic year (e.g., advisory boards, student government representatives, or student ambassadors). Additionally, student affairs practitioners working with first-year students may consider implementing the Commitment curriculum to help students consider places on campus and in the community where they may have an impact.

Notably, student leaders on college campuses face significant leadership challenges (Posner, 2012), including motivating their peers. Incorporating the current intervention as training for college students in leadership positions may benefit both students and staff by discussing personal and organizational priorities, as well as the process of facilitating social change. While the target population of the current paper was college students who mentor, student affairs professionals and leadership educators may decide to utilize the material in alternative settings, such as a traditional classroom or, as previously mentioned, training for on-campus leaders. As practitioners implement the current curriculum, we suggest providing continued individual, one-on-one, or group reflection opportunities to sharpen meaning-making processes among participants.

Building upon the current paper, we recommend that scholars and practitioners utilize the Commitment curriculum combined with Consciousness of Self curriculum (i.e., the first Individual value of the SCM; Sunderman & Hastings, 2021) and Congruence curriculum (i.e., the second Individual value of the SCM; Sunderman & Hastings, in press). Teaching the three values together fully addresses the Individual Values of the SCM (HERI, 1998). In line with this suggestion, the leadership mentoring program in the current paper has completed an intervention for the preceding two years; first, on Consciousness of Self, and second, on Congruence. Likewise, the leadership mentoring program will complete a similar intervention next year on the fourth value of the SCM, Collaboration, continuing a pattern that will proceed until the seven values have all been at the center of a year-long intervention. Likewise, we recommend that student affairs practitioners combine the Consciousness of Self, Congruence, and Commitment curriculum. For example, practitioners may integrate the implementation of the three pieces of curriculum by starting a weekly student leader meeting with 15 minutes of content and activities or hosting a group retreat at the start of each semester that covers a different value of the SCM and provides time for group conversation. Additionally, we recommend that student affairs practitioners include students in the planning and implementation of the SCM curriculum to ensure the structure and activities matches student interests and preferences. Including students in the planning and implementation process illustrates the SCM's non-hierarchical structure (HERI, 1996).

Further, while we chose to use a case study of the 1998 Jamaican bobsled team in the fall retreat because 7th-12th grade mentees participated, we recommend the practitioners who implement the Commitment curriculum among exclusively college students incorporate the Dorothy Height case study directly into the intervention. The Dorothy Height case study offers in-depth and specific examples of one leader who worked within groups and teams to demonstrate Commitment and catalyze social change.

In sum, as the SCM is the most widely used leadership development model on college campuses (Haber & Komives, 2009), it is valuable for leadership educators to have an accessible SCM curriculum for utilization in curricular and co-curricular settings. In the current scholarship-to-practice brief, we sought to describe a leadership development intervention grounded in the Commitment value of the SCM, along with an accompanying evaluation strategy and results. By sharing our curriculum, workbook, and suggestions for implementation, we hope leadership educators and student affairs practitioners can implement their own Commitment intervention in various settings to strengthen students' capacity for leading social change.

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