

Socio-Cultural Discussions at Texas A&M University Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership

In the spring of 2006, over 1200 Texas A&M undergraduate students participated in the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL), sponsored by the University of Maryland, College Park. The study focused on understanding key leadership outcomes as defined by the Social Change Model of Leadership (Astin, 1996) as well as leadership efficacy and cognitive development. A key finding of the study was that students' level of participation in socio-cultural discussions as part of their college experience predicted every leadership outcome of the study.

Leadership Outcomes

Social Change Outcomes	
Consciousness of Self	Awareness of the beliefs, values, attitudes, and emotions that motivate one to take action
Congruence	Thinking, feeling, and behaving with consistency, genuineness, authenticity, and honesty toward others; actions are consistent with most deeply-held beliefs and convictions
Commitment	The psychic energy that motivates the individual to serve and that drives the collective effort; implies passion, intensity, and duration, and is directed toward both the group activity as well as its intended outcomes
Collaboration	To work with others in a common effort; constitutes the cornerstone value of the group leadership effort because it empowers self and others through trust
Common Purpose	To work with shared aims and values; facilitates the group's ability to engage in collective analysis of issues at hand and the task to be undertaken
Controversy with Civility	Recognizes two fundamental realities of any creative group effort: that differences in viewpoint are inevitable, and that such differences must be aired openly, but with civility. Civility implies respect for others, a willingness to hear each others' views, and the exercise of restraint in criticizing the views and actions of others.
Citizenship	The process whereby an individual and the collaborative group become responsibly connected to the community and the society through the leadership development activity. To be a good citizen is to work for positive change on behalf of others and the community.
Change	The ability to adapt to environments and situations that are constantly evolving, while maintaining the core functions of the group
Additional Outcomes	
Leadership Efficacy	Measure of one's confidence with leadership tasks
Cognitive Development	Measure of one's growth in critical thinking ability

What are Socio-Cultural Discussions?

For the purposes of this study, socio-cultural discussions were defined as interactions with other students outside of class centered around the following topics:

- Talked about different lifestyles/customs
- Held discussions with students whose personal values were very different from your own
- Discussed major social issues such as peace, human rights, and justice
- Held discussions with students whose religious beliefs were very different from your own.
- Discussed your views about multiculturalism and diversity
- Held discussions with students whose political opinions were very different from your own.

It seems clear from this list that one of the most important things we can do in working with college students is facilitate these kinds of discussions occurring. As a predictor of leadership outcomes, socio-cultural discussions are not about what they talk about with us, or what they hear presented to them. It is about what they discuss with other students. In what ways can you increase the likelihood that students will have these sorts of discussions, particularly in informal situations?

Astin, H. S. (1996). Leadership for social change. *About Campus*, July/August.

For more information about the MSL, see <http://leadershipstudy.net/>. For information specific to Texas A&M students, see <http://studentactivities.tamu.edu/leadandserve/msl> or contact Krista Bailey at (979) 845-1133 or kbailey@stuact.tamu.edu.