

Leadership Education through Extracurricular Civic Engagement

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Abstract

This study evaluates an experiential learning civic engagement model of leadership education at a liberal arts university in Ghana. The extracurricular program, in which students apply for and receive funding for service projects aimed at impacting children and youth, includes ideation; project management and diversity training; coaching; and structured reflection. Key objectives are positive impacts on the community, growth in students' leadership and project management competencies, and increased civic engagement on campus. Data for the evaluation included applications for funding and project leaders' submitted reports, post-interviews with student project leaders, and focus groups of community stakeholders. Findings indicate that student-led projects, particularly those in educational settings, can lead to academic and non-academic benefits for pupils and that relationships between university student volunteers and pupils, teachers, and parents, are a key mechanism for pupils' academic gains in the Ghanaian context. Service project leaders reported learning gains in 12 out of 13 leadership and project management competencies measured in the study. The opportunity for funding increased overall student, faculty and staff involvement in community service and brought greater equity to extracurricular community service. The research suggests that such programs can enhance the civic purpose orientation of the university.

Keywords: Higher education, Africa, experiential learning, civic engagement, leadership education, Ghana

Today's university students aim to have a positive impact on the world. This parallels a resurgence of civic purpose as a key objective of a liberal arts education. Universities often place the teaching and learning of civic purpose within the context of courses on leadership. This study investigates leadership education outside of the classroom and evaluates an extracurricular civic engagement model at a liberal arts university in Ghana. The program, in which students apply for and receive funding for service projects aimed at impacting children and youth, has three objectives: positive impacts on children and youth; growth in students' leadership competencies; and increased civic engagement on campus. This paper develops a conceptual framework for leadership learning through extracurricular civic engagement, describes the implementation of the model, and details an evaluation study to assess the first two years of the program across its three objectives.

"Leadership is cause, everything else is effect" (Adei, 2004, p.37), echoes the common view that development challenges in Africa are a result of decades of poor leadership. While many would dispute that poor leadership is the only cause of the myriad of problems facing countries on the continent, most observers and scholars would agree that strengthening the leadership capacity in Africa is part of the solution. Based on this premise, many undergraduate institutions in Africa are taking up the mantle of leadership education. Examples include Ashesi University in Ghana, where this evaluation study took place, as well as Africa Leadership University in Mauritius and Rwanda, Africa Development University in Niger, and the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration. Because young people are navigating important stages of cognitive, moral, intellectual, and ethical development during their undergraduate years (Owen, 2012), leadership education at the undergraduate level is seen as both a means for students to integrate these "vectors of development" (Chickering, 2010) and for African universities to contribute to the development of a future cadre of leaders for the continent.

Leadership Learning

Leadership education parallels three forms of learning emphasized by the liberal arts: acquiring knowledge and analytical skill or *epistemic learning*; student development or *eudemonic learning*; and learning which develops *civic purpose* (Sullivan, 2010). Undergraduate courses in leadership are often framed around the “being, knowing and doing” dimensions of leadership and include topics such as leadership theories, frameworks of ethical reasoning, and specialized skills, such as interpersonal skills, strategic planning, and policymaking (Dzurianin, Shortridge & Smith, 2013; Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2007; Rosch and Anthony, 2012). Learning outcomes aim to build knowledge, develop skills, and clarify values essential for effective leadership (Guthrie & Callahan, 2016). Cocurricular experiences—clubs, student government, resident hall assistants, etc.—and extracurricular experiences—civic engagement and community service—are important avenues for students to develop a contextual perspective on leadership and to engage with questions of civic purpose and values in a concrete way (Jenkins & Andenoro 2016; Magner, 2008; Rosch & Anthony, 2012). In this sense, leadership education is similar to professional education. According to Sullivan (2010), “professional education must provide space for aspiring professionals to learn how to think like professionals in making judgements of importance amid the uncertain conditions of practical experience” (p. 16). The same applies to leadership education. Aspiring student leaders need a space that supports them in using leadership knowledge and analytical tools, that guides them in deliberating about action, and that facilitates creating meaning from experience through personal reflection.

Leadership Learning Pedagogy

Leadership is a multifaceted concept; hence, leadership development programs benefit from a range of pedagogical approaches. Rosch and Anthony (2012) advocate for student-centered approaches, which place leadership educators in the role of facilitators and emphasize a collaborative learning process. Stover and Seemiller (2017) likewise point out that the lecture and textbook approach is associated with students’ use of surface learning strategies, while what is needed are deep learning strategies because leaders today must tackle complex problems amid contexts of volatility, uncertainty and ambiguity. They recommend a “vertical” approach to leadership development, where students move through stages and progress toward performing at higher levels and in more complex environments (p. 40).

This research adds to the discussion of leadership pedagogy by presenting a framework for leadership learning through extracurricular civic engagement based on a model of experiential learning. The program is part of a “menu” of opportunities for students to engage in leadership at different levels and is open to students after they have completed one or more seminar-style courses in leadership.

Extracurricular Experiential Learning Pedagogy

Extracurricular learning opportunities are not for credit, hence bring students’ intrinsic motivation to bear on learning through experience. Intrinsic motivation is associated with self-regulated behavior, self-regulated motivation, and self-regulated cognition (Young, 2005). The capacity for self-regulation is a key trait of effective leaders because it involves self-monitoring and self-correction and promotes an orientation toward life-long learning (Young, 2005). Beyond drawing on the capacity for self-regulation, making meaning from extracurricular experience is not an inevitable outcome. Dewey (1933) identified reflection as key to making meaning and developing skills from experience. Many researchers have since explored the role of reflection in constructing knowledge from experience.

The connection between reflection and knowledge construction through experience has been investigated from a number of knowledge domains, such as service learning, educational psychology, and adult learning. In their empirical study of service-learning programs in the United States, Eyster and Giles (1999) compared changes in the capacity for

problem analysis of students in highly reflective versus less reflective service-learning programs. Only students in the highly reflective service-learning programs showed significant growth in their ability to frame problems and solutions in significant ways, in the coherence of their practical action strategies, and in cognitive development. Psychologist and educational theorist David Kolb (1984), in his work on experiential learning theory, proposed a 4-step cycle for learning from experience: (a) concrete experience, or learning by encounter; (b) abstract conceptualization, or learning by thinking and analytical reasoning; (c) learning through reflecting; and (d) active experimentation, or learning by doing. Guthrie and Jones (2012) apply Kolb's model of learning from experience to leadership education facilitated by student services programming, such as that provided by Career Services, Campus Recreation, and Multicultural Affairs departments. They emphasize that experiential learning and reflection have a dual purpose in leadership education: as a way to make meaning out of concrete, real-world experience with leadership; and by building a habit of personal reflection, a characteristic of effective leaders.

Adult cognitive development theory is another knowledge domain that has explored the connection between reflection and knowledge construction. An example is the Reflective Judgement Model (RJM) developed by King and Kitchener (2004). The RJM identifies a 7-step progression in the way individual views of knowledge and concepts of justification are related to the way judgments about controversial ill-structured problems are made. Interventions addressing complex social issues are examples of controversial ill-structured problems that require reflective judgement. According to King and Kitchener, development of reflective judgement "appears to unfold in a slow, steady manner following a sequence of stages... Interventions may yield increases in performance but not dramatic changes, after all, each stage represents a dramatic shift in world view and one's role as a knower" (p. 16). Educational interventions that stimulate progression in reflective judgment "encourage students to examine their assumptions, gather and interrogate the available evidence from multiple perspectives, and be responsible for offering their own conclusions of the evidence" (p. 16).

The extracurricular civic engagement model implemented at Ashesi University builds on students' intrinsic motivation and applies Kolb's 4-step experiential learning cycle to leadership learning. The model offers undergraduate students the opportunity to make meaning from real-world experience with leadership, to build a habit of personal reflection, and to grow in their capacity for reflective judgement. Because the model relies on students' intrinsic motivation to engage in community service, it is not taken up by all students. However, by providing project funding, the model aims to lower barriers for economically disadvantaged students to become involved in extracurricular community service and to take on leadership roles.

Evaluation Study of Leadership Education Through Extracurricular Civic Engagement Program Overview and Context

In 2015, Ashesi University, a private, non-profit liberal arts college of about 1,000 students located in Ghana, received a 2-year grant from the Ford Foundation to support student-centered community service projects aimed at benefiting children and youth in Ghana. Student-centered, in this context, implies that funded projects are student-initiated, but in some cases, the leadership team includes students collaborating with staff or faculty. The program is called the Fund for Service to Children and Youth and is structured to allow students to apply for two levels of funding: one-time requests of \$500 or less, typically for supplies; one-off events, volunteer transportation, etc., dubbed Tier 2 projects; or funding between \$1,000 and \$10,000 for larger-scale projects, dubbed Tier 1 projects. Tier 1 requests can be for new or existing social interventions and require a detailed application covering the project aims, budget and timelines. There is a panel interview with project leaders, and once funded, project leaders undertake workshops on

ideation, managing diversity, budgeting, and project management. Students are offered individual coaching and are required to submit written project reports and reflections.

The Office of Student and Community Affairs, which oversees all student services, administers the Fund for Service to Children and Youth program. The objectives as stated in the original grant proposal are three-fold: (a) leadership growth of service project leaders; (b) benefits to children and youth participating in funded projects; and (c) increased participation in civic engagement by students, faculty and staff on campus. In addition to coordinating workshops, conducting coaching, and overseeing the submission of project reports, a program officer from the Office of Student and Community Affairs visits project sites and interacts with participants. The grant also included funding for an evaluation study to determine the extent to which the Fund for Service to Children and Youth is achieving its main objectives. The evaluation study was guided by a model of leadership learning through extracurricular civic engagement visualized in the logic model in Figure 1 below.

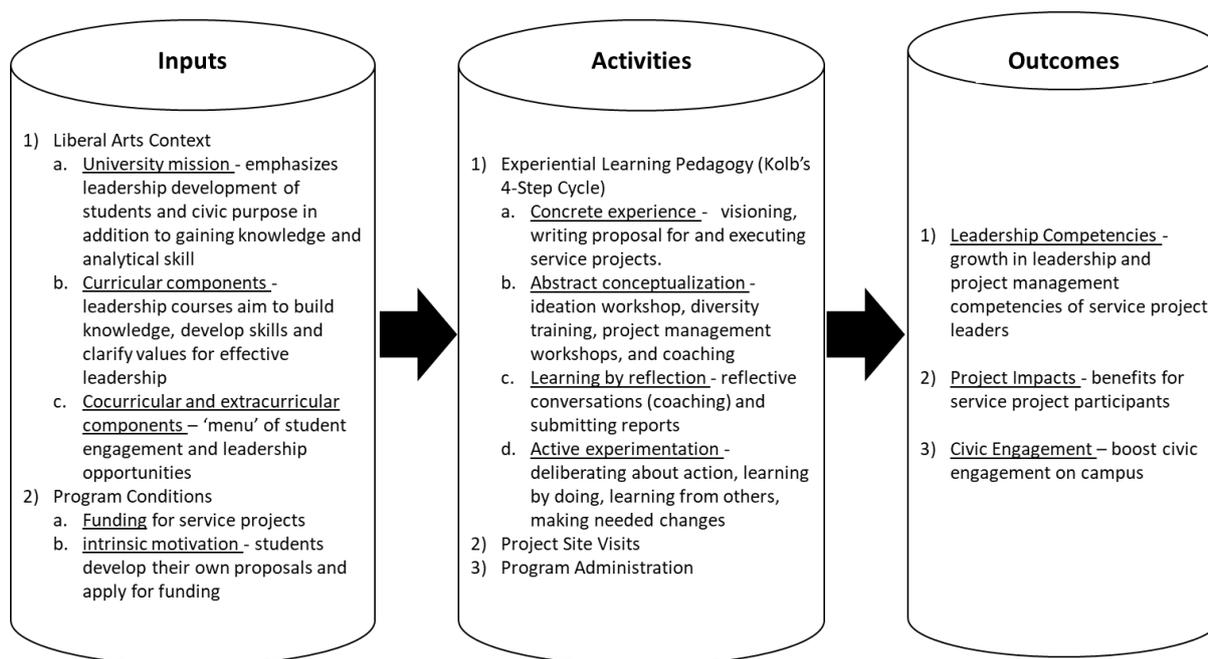


Figure 1. Program logic model for leadership education through extracurricular civic engagement.

Evaluation Study

The evaluation study began in August 2017 after the initial 2-year grant period. The purpose of the evaluation study was to assess the degree to which the extracurricular civic engagement program was meeting its objectives and to give formative feedback to the Student and Community Affairs team administering the program. The study posed three evaluation questions based on the objectives stated in the original grant proposal.

Question 1: To what extent does the Fund for Service to Children and Youth experiential learning civic engagement program develop the leadership and project management competencies of students?

Question 2: To what extent do service projects selected for funding impact children and youth in Ghana?

Question 3: To what extent does the Fund for Service to Children and Youth boost civic engagement among students, faculty, and staff on the Ashesi University campus?

The next section describes the leadership and project management competency framework used to assess the leadership growth of students awarded funding for their

community engagement projects. This is followed by a description of the methods used to collect and analyze the data for each of the three research questions, the results of the evaluation study, and a discussion of the implications and limitations of the approach.

Leadership & Project Management Competency Framework

A widely accepted definition of leadership is “/a process whereby an individual, influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse 2016, p. 6). This definition captures the varied ways today’s university students may influence positive change within their workplaces, communities and societies over their lifetime. This definition also accommodates the dual nature of leadership: to influence others toward a vision for change and to achieve desired goals through skills in management (Northouse, 2016). The evaluation study of the experiential learning civic engagement model aimed to assess students’ learning gains in both aspects of leadership—framed as a set of competencies in project management and in the domain of influencing others toward a vision for change.

Project Management Competencies.

The Project Management Institute (PMI), the world’s leading project management organization, describes projects as “temporary endeavours that are undertaken to create a unique product, service or result” (Project Management Institute, 2017, pg. 4). In the case of the extracurricular civic engagement model, students apply for funding for new service projects or pilot projects, or initiatives that are part of existing clubs or on-going social interventions. Regardless of the project type, in their proposals, student leaders are asked to identify a set of activities and outcomes to be completed within a specified period, hence meeting the PMI’s definition of a project. Undertaking these projects provides students with an opportunity to develop and hone project management competencies through experience.

Academics and professional organizations have proposed different frameworks for the skill areas and knowledge domains of program management. A commonly used framework is contained in the PMI Body of Knowledge (PMBOK). The PMBOK groups project management activities into five process groups: (a) initiating, (b) planning, (c) executing; (d) monitoring and controlling, and (e) closing. The activities in these process groups draw on 10 knowledge areas: (a) project initiation management, (b) project scope management, (c) project time management, (d) project cost management, (e) project quality management, (f) project human resources management, (g) project communications management, (h) project risk management, (i) project procurement management, and (j) project stakeholder management. The PMBOK framework covers 49 project management activities tailored to suit specific projects based on scope and need (Project Management Institute, 2017).

The conceptual framework used to assess project management learning gains made by students through the extracurricular civic engagement model drew from the PMI framework to obtain six competencies deemed appropriate for the scope of one or two-semester student-run service projects. The six competencies assessed in the evaluation study include the ability of student leaders to: (a) define the scope of their projects; (b) plan for effective execution of their project; (c) monitor progress and identify problem areas; (d) make needed changes to project plans; (e) manage the unexpected; and (f) report to stakeholders. Learning and applying these project management competencies to their service projects prepares future leaders to drive projects effectively and go together with leadership competencies in the domain of influencing others toward a vision for change.

Competencies for influencing others toward a vision for change.

Delving into the early literature on modes of influence often begins with Aristotle’s view of pathos, ethos, and logos. Influencing others through *ethos* depends on the personal character of leader; *pathos* involves putting the followers into a specific frame of mind; while *logos* offers apparent proof by the specific words of the leader. This model establishes credibility as a key characteristic of leadership which contributes greatly to a leaders’ ability to influence others. More recently, the ability to influence others has been characterized as a set of “soft skills” considered necessary for effective leadership. One such skill is

emotional intelligence, popularized as an essential element of leadership in the late 1990s. The theory postulates that a person's ability to understand and manage emotions and interpersonal relationships has a more significant impact on leadership success and team performance than other qualities, such as intellectual capability (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). Though Dabke (2016) confirmed the essential role of emotional intelligence in leadership effectiveness, his studies indicated that emotional intelligence failed to be a significant predictor of perceived effectiveness of the leader by their followers. Turner and Muller (2005), in their extensive review of the literature on leadership competencies, identified 15 additional skills, outside of project management, which are success factors for leadership. The conceptual framework used to assess learning gains by students in influencing others toward a vision for change includes a subset of seven competencies identified by Turner and Muller (2005), which can be seen to reflect Aristotle's emphasis on communication and includes emotional intelligence as a leadership competency. The seven competencies chosen as being appropriate to the scale and purpose of student community engagement projects include: (a) seeking mentorship and coaching, (b) strategies for decision making; (c) staying focused on goals and objectives; (d) managing expectations; (e) emotional intelligence; (f) building and leading a team; and (g) effective communication. Figure 2 below represents the conceptual frameworks for the 13 leadership and project management competencies used in this evaluation study of the experiential learning civic engagement model at Ashesi University.

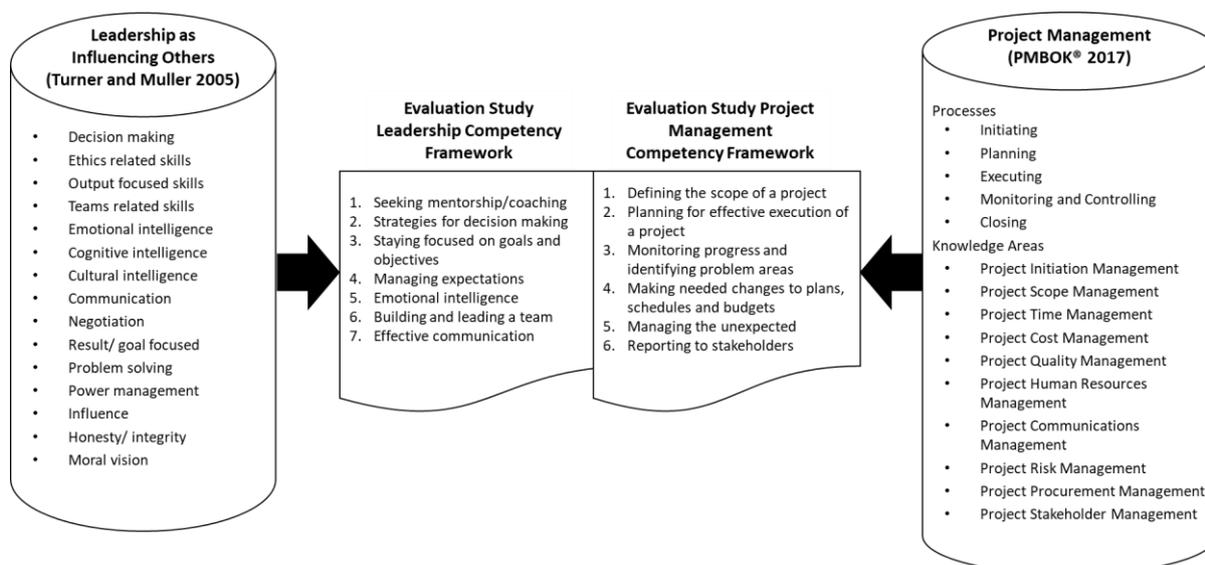


Figure 2. Leadership and project management competency frameworks adopted for the evaluation study.

Methods

An interpretive approach was used for the evaluation study because the key objectives of the inquiry were to understand leadership learning from the perspective of service project leaders and to understand project impacts from the perspective of the beneficiaries of those projects (Schwandt, 1998). In the sections below, sources of data used to answer each of the three research questions are detailed, followed by a description of the process of analysis and interpretation. This is then followed by the main findings of the study.

Question 1: To what extent does the Fund for Service to Children and Youth experiential learning civic engagement program develop the leadership and project management competencies of students?

For evidence of growth in students' leadership and project management competencies, sources of data included initial applications for funding, student leaders'

reflections contained in their submitted reports, and transcripts of semi-structured post-interviews, which focused on student leaders' perceptions of their learning gains on the seven leadership and six project management competencies. Eleven interviews of student leaders who received Tier 1 funding for their service projects were conducted. This was out of 14 projects that had received funding between 2015 and 2017. Interviews were roughly 45 minutes in duration and conducted in person or by phone, depending on availability. In addition to open-ended questions, project leaders rated their perceived learning gains across the 13 leadership and project management competencies on a 5-point Student Assessment of Learning Gains scale (Seymour, Wiese, Hunter, & Daffinrud, 2000): No Gain = 1, Little Gain = 2, Moderate Gain = 3, Good Gain = 4, and Great Gain = 5.

These multiple sources of data gave researchers the opportunity to explore students' growth in leadership and project management competencies over time, from the initial application for funding, at multiple points during project execution, and leaders' own perspective on their leadership experience following the completion of their projects. There was an attempt to validate findings by bringing goals and objectives stated in the original application into the semi-structured post interviews.

Question 2: To what extent do service projects selected for funding positively impact children and youth in Ghana?

For the purpose of answering Question 2, the study focused on assessing the impacts on participants in service projects that took place in area schools. This choice was made as a result of time and resources constraints, and the fact that the majority of funded service projects do take place in area schools. Four focus groups of community stakeholders were conducted. One focus group was held with pupils from area schools where the service projects took place. Two pupils from each of four projects were randomly selected and letters sent to schools and parents requesting consent for participation in the focus group. A second focus group with parents or guardians of the participating pupils was conducted simultaneously. All pupils and parents who were sent letters participated in the focus groups. Two additional focus groups of teachers from two of the schools whose students were involved in projects were also conducted. Focus group facilitators were fluent in multiple local languages and English to allow for free expression and conversation.

The focus group method was adopted because it granted the researchers the opportunity to explore impacts on project participants from different perspectives: the students, their parents and their teachers. The random selection for the focus groups was an attempt to remove potential bias in interpreting the results. It was also important to create a focus group atmosphere free of anxiety and fear of the need to tell a single story. Focus group facilitators knew the local language, worked to establish rapport, and were somewhat familiar with the school environments where the focus groups took place.

Question 3: To what extent does the Fund for Service to Children and Youth boost civic engagement among students, faculty, and staff on the Ashesi University campus?

Data for answering Question 3 came from project reports submitted by service project leaders while executing their projects. Leaders were asked to report the number of volunteers and the different volunteer roles. Post-interview questions with project leaders also asked about the number of student volunteers and faculty and staff who supported projects as a way to verify the earlier figures.

Method of Analysis and Interpretation

The process of analysis and interpretation of the data was as follows. First, all sources of data, including applications for funding; leaders' submitted reports and reflections; project leader interview transcripts; and stakeholder focus group transcripts; were loaded into NVIVO. The data were then coded for *similarity relationships*—repeated themes or common features—and *contiguity relationships*—connections or influences of one thing on another (Maxwell, 2013). Two authors separately reviewed and coded the data and generated lists of similarity and contiguity themes. These themes were then compared,

refined, and finalized as the main outcomes of the study. In addition, project leaders' perceptions of their learning gains in each of 13 leadership and project management competencies were tallied and a mean calculated for each competency. The mean score is simply meant to suggest the relative level of perceived growth between competencies from the perspective of the students. The mean has no statistical significance since it is not based on a random sample.

The two authors who analyzed the data were involved in the implementation of the project to some degree. One of the authors co-wrote the original grant proposal and was involved in the panel interviews for prospective Tier 1 projects. The second author taught the training workshops on project management for Tier 1 project leaders and was a mentor for several project leaders. The third author, who conducted the project leader interviews, was a recent graduate of the institution and was involved in a service project that received Tier 1 funding during his time as a student. Although authors' involvement with the project is a potential source of bias, it was also important for gaining access, especially for community stakeholders. Given that formative feedback to the Student and Community Affairs team administering the program was an important objective of the evaluation, it was in the interest of the authors to identify strengths and weaknesses of the model and areas that needed improvement. Protocols, instruments, and consent forms used for the study were approved by the university's Human Subjects Review Committee (IRB).

Results

The presentation of the results will proceed as follows. First, an overview of the service projects carried out by students awarded Tier 1 funding for their projects. This will be followed by a discussion of the main similarity and contiguity themes derived from the analysis and interpretation of the data for each of the three evaluation questions. Finally, overall results of the evaluation study relevant for institutions considering the implementation of similar leadership learning programs will be discussed, including the study's limitations.

Overview of Tier 1 Service Projects

During the two-year grant period, 14 service projects received Tier 1 funding of between \$1,000 and \$10,000 for interventions aimed at children and youth in Ghana. Eight funded projects focused their interventions within schools and addressed issues such as reading, science, ethics, robotics, mentorship and recycling. The remaining projects addressed issues such as childcare, street children, youth in agriculture, and sanitation. Over 1,000 community members engaged in funded projects with varying levels of participation. Participation by children and youth ranged from one-time workshops to weekly meetings over a semester or an academic year; to engagement several times a week with university student mentors or tutors; or twice-weekly football training, daily childcare, or in the case of the youth in agriculture project, an intense focus on five youth who worked regularly on an experimental farm for one year.

Question 1. To what extent does the Fund for Service to Children and Youth extracurricular experiential learning program develop the leadership and project management competencies of students?

To determine growth in students' leadership and project management competencies, project leaders were asked in an interview to rate their learning gains across the 13 leadership and project management competencies conceptualized in Figure 2. Table 1 below details the results. Project leaders reported learning gains between 3 (Moderate Gains) and 5 (Great Gains) on 12 out of the 13 competencies. One student chose a 2 (Little Gains) on *staying focused on goals and objectives*; this competency had the lowest mean score of 3.3. The second-lowest mean score was *reporting to stakeholders* with a mean learning gain of 3.6. Project leaders felt they had made the most gains overall in the areas of *strategies for decision making* and *making needed changes to plans and schedules*.

Table 1
Leadership and Program Management Learning Gains

Leadership Competencies	Mean (N=9)	Program Management Competencies	Mean (N=10)
1. Seeking mentorship and coaching	4.0	1. Defining the scope of a project	4.0
2. Strategies for decision making	4.2	2. Planning for effective execution of a project	3.8
3. Staying focused on goals and objectives	3.3	3. Monitoring progress and identifying problem areas	4.1
4. Managing expectations	4.1	4. Making needed changes to plans schedules and budgets	4.2
5. Emotional intelligence	4.0	5. Managing the unexpected	3.8
6. Building and leading a team	3.9	6. Reporting to stakeholders	3.6
7. Effective communication	3.8		

Note. Learning Gains scale: No Gain = 1, Little Gain = 2, Moderate Gain = 3, Good Gain = 4, and Great Gain = 5 (Seymour, Wiese, Hunter, & Daffinrud, 2000).

During the interviews, project leaders answered questions about each of the primary tasks and indicators of success written on the original proposals submitted during the application process. The proposals typically listed between three and five tasks, and between three and five indicators of success. Most leaders reported completing between one-half and two-thirds of the tasks and being able to measure less than half of their original indicators of success. Most leaders stated, either in the interviews or in reflections submitted while projects were ongoing, that once their projects began, the reality on the ground was different from their expectations. An example of this realization was communicated in the reflection from the leader of ReadHub:

Plans tend to change when actual field implementation starts because the people have very specific needs that need to be addressed, sometimes by being dynamic in approach. I have also learnt that it is important sometimes to take tough decisions and to be realistic about what is most important and needs to be done, and do it, instead of hanging on to my ideals of what would look great if done. For instance, reducing the class sizes was one of the most difficult things for me because I really wished I could assist every student in need. However, the reality is that a large class given the limited number of volunteers would not be helpful because students would not receive the maximum attention that they require to improve. That decision had to be made by the team, and is showing signs of producing better students at a much faster rate.

Project plans typically were reduced in scope and more realistic indicators of success were substituted. For example, one project, called Future of Africa Mindu, stated on the application that volunteers would meet street children in Accra each weekend, serve the children with healthy meals, register them for the National Health Insurance scheme, and establish a drop-in center by raising additional donor funds. However, the project leader stated in the interview that she quickly learned that the issues surrounding children living and hawking in the streets are complex. She scaled back the project to focus on providing weekly meals to 100 children and showing compassion and commitment to the children. She ensured that volunteers on the project went to the site every week regardless of other constraints on their time, such as assignments, exams, or holidays.

In the small number of cases where leaders stated in the interview that the project team had accomplished all the tasks and indicators of success on the application, the tasks typically supported a more focused overall objective. An example is project Tontro, which set up and ran a robotics club with 25 junior high school students meeting twice a week. The project team successfully ordered the electronics, robotics and programming

equipment, formed the club, met bi-weekly, developed the curriculum, and taught the children to make robotic cars and other projects out of tin cans, plastic bottles and other recyclables—precisely what was stated on the application for funding.

Below is a selection of quotes from project leader reflections submitted during the time the projects were ongoing. These quotes highlight project management challenges students were facing, which in turn, led to learning and growth.

I have learnt that it is very important for any project to be flexible to accommodate any relevant changes. For instance, when the rains and goats did not help our grasses to grow, we had to leave the planting of the grass out without compromising our main goal of keeping the place clean. (Leader of Transite)

I have realised that I'm beginning to delegate more work to others rather than micro-managing everything. (Leader of Sesa Mu)

Commitment is key for this project's success. In addition, good time management is necessary if targets are to be achieved. (Leader Mentors Network)

Table 2 below paraphrases some of the ways project leaders found the workshop and coaching sessions for service project leaders helpful, for example in managing funds and reducing costs, narrowing the project's scope, measuring progress, incentivizing volunteers, communicating with stakeholders, and discussions about sustainability. Table 2 also lists suggestions that project leaders gave for improving the administration of the program. In particular, leaders noted that they often benefited from discussions with their peers.

Table 2

Project Leader Perceptions of the Usefulness of Workshops and Coaching

Workshop usefulness

- Evaluation techniques helped measure progress
- Project management techniques
- Managing funds; reducing costs; using fewer resources for project activities
- Identifying the right volunteers
- Help with project sustainability
- Realistic goals
- Steps for successful implementation
- Narrowing the scope
- Setting milestones and working to achieve them
- Understanding how to keep volunteers incentivised
- Learning the importance of collaborating with other projects working in the school
- Insights on how to manage teams
- How to meet deadlines
- Understanding participants when executing the project
- Initiating conversations with parents and other stakeholders
- Evaluating, documenting, and reporting of issues on the project
- Communicating project activities
- Setting timelines and enforcing them

Coaching usefulness

- Helped to implement the project well, offered support
- Source of regular advice on options for executing the project and balancing it with academics
- Provided logistical support
- Helped find alternatives to addressing challenges
- Helped keep the project on track
- Useful to meet regularly for advice
- Helped to create a sustainability plan for the project
- Helped gain ideas and gave feedback concerning the project
- Useful to meet to review the progress of the project

Suggestions

- Scheduling and timing of sessions needs better coordination
 - Sessions where project leaders share lessons learned amongst each other
 - Some sessions tailored to specific projects
 - Sessions could be more intense
 - Project leaders can run some of the sessions
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Taken together, data from the applications for funding, submitted reports, and interviews show students developing as leaders in several ways. First, there is evidence of engaging in reflective judgement: reality on the ground challenged project leaders' assumptions about complex social issues; interacting with participants brought new information and evidence into view; and leaders encountered the need for flexible approaches and plans for action. Second, based on their own assessments, project leaders made moderate, good, or great learning gains in 13 leadership and project management competencies with which students often struggle. Finally, the evidence points to an experiential learning civic engagement opportunity that integrates the knowledge and analytical tools of leadership with the uncertain conditions of practical experience. Through reflective conversations and reports, students constructed valuable insights about themselves as leaders.

Question 2. To what extent do service projects selected for funding positively impact children and youth in Ghana?

Table 3 below summarizes the feedback from the pupil, parent, and teacher focus groups which focused on service projects taking place in area schools. Feedback emerged across four themes: academic benefits, non-academic benefits, relationships, and challenges. Pupils and teachers mentioned concrete academic gains for participating pupils in spelling, reading, math, and science, and improved grades. One mechanism for academic gains (i.e., a contiguity theme) appeared to be related to hands-on learning activities and child-centred approaches to learning.

Table 3
Summarized Feedback from Beneficiaries and Stakeholders

	Pupil Feedback	Parent Feedback	Teacher Feedback
Academic Benefits	<p>Hands-on activities helped pupils connect learning to the real world.</p> <p>Learning success gave pupils a sense of pride, which led to more significant efforts toward homework and academics.</p> <p>Pupils mentioned concrete academic gains in spelling, reading, math, and science.</p> <p>Several students reported improved grades.</p> <p>Mentoring helped by filling in the gaps, for example when a pupil was absent.</p> <p>Pupils liked the fact that they can contribute what they know when the Ashesi students are teaching them.</p> <p>Ashesi students check their homework.</p> <p>When parents express a sense of pride in their children's accomplishments that also helps.</p>	<p>Parents notice that children participating in projects speak English more.</p> <p>Project participation affects pupils' attitude toward learning "how they carry themselves," how they dress, self-perception, time and effort on homework.</p> <p>With Mentors Network, parents are encouraged to lend their support.</p>	<p>The teachers report tangible academic impacts in science and math, completion of homework, and improved attendance.</p> <p>The teachers recognize that practical applications, especially in science, improve students' interest and performance.</p> <p>Teachers have observed students who initially didn't like math, grow to like the subject.</p> <p>One project bought textbooks in each subject for the teachers; teachers appreciated this resource.</p> <p>The Ashesi students use child-centred approaches to learning, and teachers recognize the benefits.</p>
Non-academic Benefits	<p>The children feel good about the non-academic benefits, such as learning concrete skills in football, learning to plant a tree using plastic sachet, etc.</p>	<p>Some projects bring the children to campus - this is a motivator and parents appreciate it because it shows their children a</p>	<p>Teachers recognize the non-academic benefits of mentorship, which builds confidence and charisma. Teachers mentioned that students with mentors began to dress well and have a</p>

	Projects promote a sense of pride in students who participate.	new and different environment.	better attitude toward school.
Relationships	Relationships develop with Ashesi students; they sometimes go to the child's home when they have been absent, and also talk to parents about supporting their children in school.	Children open up to the Ashesi students; they can tell them when they don't understand something, which allows them to address academic challenges.	<p>Ashesi students have become role models; pupils now see that if they perform well, they can be like them.</p> <p>Visiting the Ashesi University campus motivates pupils to want to pursue tertiary education.</p> <p>The mentors that visit the children in their homes have a significant impact; in part, this is because they make the parents feel involved, in part it is because they can help the children when they've been absent or an issue at home is impacting their performance in school.</p> <p>Teachers feel that the mentorship programs that involve parents also improve the parent-teacher relationship and increases attendance at PTA meetings.</p>
Challenges	A challenge is that organization and frequency wane for projects over time.	Some parents are aware that their children are participating in projects and some are not, they are generally not clear on what activities the children are doing as part of the projects.	<p>Teachers felt that the reading club was not a very impactful project; one teacher mentioned that the Saturday meeting time made it difficult for teachers to support the project.</p> <p>Some projects are very short-lived. It's not always clear if projects are short-term by design or lose momentum.</p> <p>On occasion, some projects can be distractions and need to be well managed.</p>

Several other contiguity themes emerged regarding academic gains. Pupils mentioned the fact that they can contribute what they know when Ashesi students are teaching them. Parents attributed learning gains to their children speaking English more since participating in projects. An improved attitude toward learning and a sense of pride from learning success seem to produce academic benefits through greater effort on homework and academics (pupils and parents commented on this). Pupils mentioned that Ashesi students check their homework and the teachers reported better homework

completion. Attendance was another area of improvement that teachers noted for pupils with mentors. Pupils echoed this view and commented that mentors filled in the gaps when they were absent. Teachers also appreciated that the mentorship project bought textbooks in each subject for the teachers, which helped them prepare their lessons.

Pupils felt good about the non-academic skills they gained, such as skills in football and in learning to plant a tree using a plastic sachet. As in the case of academic gains, pupils stated that these skills gave them a sense of pride. Some projects bring pupils to the university campus and parents commented that this was a motivator and appreciated the opportunity for their children to see a new environment. Teachers noted non-academic benefits around increased confidence and charisma that came from the mentoring projects.

Relationships that developed between pupils, Ashesi University student volunteers, and sometimes parents, appear to be an important mechanism through which motivation and focus drive academic gains. According to teachers, when mentors visit the children in their homes, it makes parents feel involved, which positively impacts the parent-teacher relationship and increases attendance at PTA meetings. According to parents, their children open up to the Ashesi students and can tell them when they do not understand something, which allows them to address academic challenges.

Pupils, parents and teachers all mentioned some challenges with the student-run service projects taking place in schools. Pupils cited that organization and frequency of some projects waned over time. Teachers echoed that it is not always clear if projects are short-term by design, or if they simply lose momentum. Parents also were generally not clear on what activities children were doing as part of a project. This feedback from parents and teachers aligns with the lower learning gains reported by project leaders on the competency of reporting to stakeholders and this is an important area for improvement going forward. Care must be taken so that service projects in schools are not distractions from learning and that they are well managed. Expectations about the duration of projects and when projects are coming to an end must be clearly communicated to stakeholders.

Question 3. To what extent does the Fund for Service to Children and Youth boost civic engagement among students, faculty, and staff on the Ashesi University campus?

Prior to the Fund for Service to Children and Youth, students, faculty, and staff were engaged in community service. Forty hours of community service has been a requirement for the capstone leadership seminar since the university's founding, and student clubs have hosted a range of short-term and on-going service projects over the years. In the case of student clubs, faculty and staff typically serve as club patrons, offering guidance and participating in service trips. Additionally, several student-run service projects have received donor funding from outside organizations over the years, such as Dalai Lama Fellows and the Melton Foundation.

However, the opportunity for funding has significantly increased the level of civic engagement on campus since 2015. Roughly 160 volunteers, mostly students, but some staff and faculty, volunteered on Tier 1 funded projects. Every project leader interviewed stated that they received advice and guidance, either informally or formally, from a university faculty or staff member. Four funded projects had a faculty or staff member as part of the leadership team on the project, and in at least one case, several members of staff regularly volunteered on the project. Feedback from volunteers and project leaders pointed out that the funding was essential for bringing equity to community service. Particularly for students receiving financial aid—half of all students attending Ashesi University receive varying levels of financial aid—the cost of participating in community service, for example, paying for transportation, can be prohibitive.

Discussion of Evaluation Results

Many universities view developing students' skills in effective leadership as central to their mission. Universities strive to build a campus-wide culture of civic engagement and

to positively impact their host communities. This study suggests that an extracurricular experiential learning civic engagement model, in which students receive funding for service projects in the community, can play an essential role in achieving these objectives. The model builds on a liberal arts ethos that emphasises the leadership development of students, within the curriculum, co-curriculum, and extracurricular activities.

The key components of the model include two tiers of funding, one-time requests of up to \$500 (Tier 2), or one- or two-semester requests of between \$1,000 and \$10,000 (Tier 1). In the case of the larger grants, the program includes a detailed application and interview; workshops for project leaders in ideation, project management, and diversity training; and one-on-one coaching. Project leaders submit budgets, timelines and reports. Coaching sessions and submitted reports are key opportunities for reflection on leadership and project management challenges and learning gains. The program is administered by a student services team, including a program officer who conducts field visits and interacts with stakeholders. The evaluation study of the first two years of the experiential learning civic engagement model at Ashesi University in Ghana revealed several significant findings discussed below.

First, students who applied for and received Tier 1 grants for service projects perceived learning gains in important leadership and project management competencies. From the perspective of experiential learning pedagogy, learning gains in leadership and project management came from (a) students' concrete experience of leading service projects; (b) abstract conceptualization of curricular content in leadership, and knowledge gained through workshops provided for service project leaders; (c) learning through reflection in coaching sessions and by submitting reports; and (d) active experimentation through developing proposals, learning from others and making needed changes (Kolb, 1984). Developing and implementing interventions for complex social issues also gave project leaders practice in reflective judgement (King & Kitchener, 2004). Reports submitted by project leaders while implementing their projects, and during leader interviews conducted for this study, show students examining their assumptions, confronting new evidence about stakeholders and the nature of complex social issues, and making needed changes based on new evidence and perspectives.

Second, student-initiated community service projects appear to impact participants positively. This study examined the impact of the subset of funded projects that took place in area schools. Pupils, parents and teachers reported both academic and non-academic benefits for participants. For school-based projects in Ghana, essential mechanisms for educational gains appear to be hands-on learning activities and student-centred teaching approaches, and through relationships formed between university student volunteers and pupils, and in some cases, relationships formed between university student volunteers and teachers and parents.

Third, the availability of funding increased the level of civic engagement among students, staff and faculty on campus. More students became involved in community service because there were more projects touching on a greater variety of interest areas. Funding also brought equity to community service, allowing students on financial aid to participate because funds could cover volunteer costs such as transportation. Every project leader interviewed stated that they received advice and guidance, either formally or informally, from a faculty or staff member. These relationships can be characterized as mentoring relationships because they involve significant personal and professional connection and are outside the immediacies of a course (Chambliss & Takacs, 2014). Mentoring relationships can be some of the most impactful relationships students have during college and can influence students' level of academic engagement, career choices, and feelings about their entire college career (Chambliss and Takacs, 2014).

Importantly, the evaluation study revealed four areas of improvement for Ashesi University's implementation of the extracurricular civic engagement model and which institutions implementing similar programs should consider: (a) greater intentionality around pre-, during, and post-project reflection; (b) increased support for student leaders in

communicating with stakeholders; (c) facilitation of project leaders learning from each other; and (d) guidance for student leaders in identifying realistic and measurable indicators of success. In the current program, reflection occurred during the project implementation phase through coaching and submission of reports. However, according to Eyler (2002), reflection before the service project begins “prepares students to be observant, thoughtful, and prepared to notice the ways in which their experience does not match their expectations” (p. 526). Post-project reflection is “an opportunity to consolidate learning, to examine where one has travelled in understanding... and to identify questions and issues yet unresolved” (Eyler 2002, p. 530). Eyler also recommends varying the context of reflection: individually, with peers and with stakeholders.

Project leaders rated their learning gains in *Reporting to Stakeholders* among the lowest out of the leadership and project management competencies that were measured. Feedback from the stakeholder focus groups also echoed this challenge, with stakeholders sometimes unclear about the intended duration of service projects in the schools and when projects were wrapping up. The importance of clear communication with stakeholders should be emphasized and supported by the program. The program officer should also check-in with stakeholders at key points during the implementation and winding down of service projects.

During the interviews, several project leaders remarked that they benefited from discussions with other project leaders. Facilitating learning from peers could be done through an online forum or periodic sessions with project leaders. One person commented in the interview that the training sessions could be run by student leaders themselves, which is a suggestion worthy of consideration going forward.

The final area for improvement came from asking project leaders in the interview about the indicators of success stated in their original project proposals. Many of the indicators of success were overly ambitious and would have been challenging to measure. Reading gains, for example, could not be measured unless a valid pre- and post-assessment had been planned. Measuring the impact of providing meals and meeting weekly with street children in Accra is another example of a measurement challenge. Recognizing that measuring the impacts of social interventions is particularly difficult, more guidance should be provided, first in the application process for Tier 1 funding, and then, during the project management workshop for projects that receive funding. Training could help project leaders refine their initial indicators of success so that they become more realistic and measurable going forward.

Finally, the evaluation study design had limitations. There was no pre-test data for leadership and project management competencies, so the degree to which student project leaders made learning gains beyond their own perceptions is difficult to gauge. Additionally, project leaders chose to participate and may have already had leadership strengths. The scope of the focus group data only included school-based projects. Finally, the evaluation was conducted internally, and though we were keen to identify areas for improvement, an outside researcher may have identified a different set of outcomes.

Conclusion

Leadership education is similar to professional education and must integrate the knowledge and analytical tools of leadership with the laboratory of real-world experience. This study shows that a well-structured extracurricular civic engagement program can support the leadership and project management development of students and at the same time provide benefits to the community and get more faculty, staff and students civically engaged. The study tested the model at a liberal arts university in Ghana aiming to contribute to the development of a future cadre of leaders for Africa. Future research could help refine the model, determine which components are essential, and test its portability to other geographical and institutional contexts.

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