

Whitworth's leadership-studies minor challenges students to look beyond conventional leadership

Danny Clapp had his post-Whitworth future all figured out. In fall 2000, the senior business-management major and president of ASWC knew he would graduate in May 2001 and then work his way into the upper echelons of the corporate business world. What Clapp hadn't figured into his plan was the life-changing classes and professors he encountered while earning a minor in Whitworth's Leadership Studies Program.

"What I was learning in the program, combined with my work in ASWC, brought my business-career plans to a halt and pointed me in a new direction," Clapp says. "I realized that I wanted to make a difference in the lives of college students the same way that my leadership-studies professors did in my life. I discovered that I had a passion for leadership and a passion for developing student leaders, and I realized that higher education, not business, was the career path for me."

That discovery led Clapp to Geneva College, in Pennsylvania, where he is earning a master's degree in higher education and working as a resident director.

Clapp is one of a growing number of Whitworth alumni who have completed minors through Whitworth's Leadership Studies Program. Spearheaded by Associate Professor of Education Jack Burns and housed in the School of Education, the program offered its first class in fall 1998 in response to the college's goal to become one of the region's leading institutions in student-leadership training.

"Whitworth had long been involved in leadership education, providing students elective leadership courses and service-learning opportunities," Burns says. "But there wasn't an established interdisciplinary program with collaboration between academic departments and student life, and we needed to develop critical components of leadership studies, including courses in leadership theory and skill development."

Leadership studies is an emerging discipline in undergraduate and graduate schools nationwide. Whitworth's program is modeled after that of the Jepson School of Leadership at the

University of Richmond, which is the flagship program in the country, and Washington State University's program, created by Burns, who was a student-affairs faculty member at WSU for 18 years.

"When I had the opportunity to develop a leadership-studies program at Whitworth, I was excited to see what could be created to train students in a Christian context," Burns says.

An interdisciplinary team including Burns, Associate Dean of Students Dick Mandeville, and Assistant Dean of Students Dayna Coleman provides course instruction for Whitworth's program, and an advisory board comprising faculty from a variety of departments provides general oversight.

According to Tammy Reid, '60, vice president for academic affairs and dean of the faculty, higher education provides an ideal setting for young adults to study and practice leadership.

"One of Whitworth's primary educational goals for its students, given our mind-and-heart mission, is to prepare students to make an effective contribution to the common good," Reid says. "The college years are an optimal time for young people to analyze and practice the beliefs and values upon which good leadership is based. Students who fully understand the attributes and strategies of leadership will be better equipped to step into leadership positions once they leave Whitworth."

The Leadership Studies Program graduated one student during its second year; since then the number of students has grown steadily, Burns says.

"By next year we will level off at about 20 students completing the minor each year," Burns says. "We also have quite a few students who take as many courses as possible, knowing that they will not be able to fulfill all of the minor require-

by Julie Riddle, '92



Contributing to the co

ments. This year we had 74 students enrolled in the five leadership courses we offered.”

Whitworth’s leadership-studies courses immerse students in leadership theory, including historical perspectives of leadership as well as an in-depth study of a new social-science paradigm based on the chaos theory first developed in math and physics.

“The uniqueness of the program centers on its academic grounding in theory that informs the practice of leadership,” Burns says. “Many students in the program are student-government officers who have wonderful leadership skills and great intuition about leadership, but they don’t have the theoretical understanding necessary to know when and how best to use their skills. The academic program fills that theoretical void and bolsters the students’ skills repertoire.”

Freshman English and math-education major Lindy Andres recently completed her first leadership-studies class and has already grown in many areas, including overcoming her fear of public speaking, learning when to share her workload by delegating and when to take charge, and embracing conflict to strengthen a team.

“I can think of nothing I’d rather do with my life than learn how to be an effective leader and how to love and serve people while empowering them to make a difference in the world,” Andres says.

A major component of the leadership-studies minor is the Transforming Leadership class, in which students read and analyze leadership historian James MacGregor Burns’ (no relation to Whitworth’s Burns) substantial tome, *Leadership*, which provides the theoretical basis for the course.

“Transforming leadership is about getting inside people’s hearts and learning what really matters to them, and then empowering them to take action to change their world in a positive way,” says junior education major and leadership-studies minor McCayla Hudson.

Each year teams of students put MacGregor Burns’ theory into practice by developing formal proposals detailing specific ways to help eliminate global hunger. The proposals are reviewed by a panel of Whitworth faculty

and former students who select one proposal for the students to implement on campus.

Previous projects have featured leadership-studies students and other Whitworth students sleeping outside near the HUB and fasting for up to three days; the meal money students save by fasting is donated to a specific hunger-awareness program. Project organizers bring in guest speakers and use visual aids, such as placing hundreds of white Popsicle sticks in the ground symbolizing people who die each day from starvation, to help the campus community understand and become more aware of the issues of global hunger and poverty.

“The project forces students to think about how well they are living out their faith in relationship to the significant hunger needs on this planet,” Burns says. “By experiencing hunger, if only for a couple of days, students become very aware of how easy it is to ignore the problem of hunger when their stomachs are always full.”

In the past three years, students have raised thousands of dollars to support programs worldwide, including Oasis House, an orphanage in China; the Food for Work Project, which is administered by a missionary in Ethiopia who provides food for families in exchange for their work in their communities; and the United Mission to Nepal, an organization that teaches Nepali villagers farming and rural-development techniques.

“The projects help students learn that world hunger isn’t going to be solved by mega-programs or by just throwing money at developing nations,” Burns says. “They learn that through significant personal commitment, and by taking small steps repeated multiple times, individuals connecting with other individuals can and do make a huge difference.”

The global-hunger projects are intense, demanding, and life-changing for students.

“The task seemed too large and the resources too small,” Hudson says of her experience. “But it was in those difficult moments that I saw myself grow, and now I have the confidence that I can do anything if I really put my mind and heart to it.”

Burns says that one of the most exciting results of the global-hunger projects and the leadership courses is seeing how students use their developing leadership skills in other areas, such as ASWC, Young Life groups, and other classes.

“It is quite rewarding to teach a discipline in which students begin to apply what they are learning immediately,” Burns says. “I know the course content will stick with students when they put into practice what they are learning as soon as they walk out of the classroom.”

Clapp’s experience in the leadership-studies minor not only changed his career plans, it altered the landscape of his Whitworth education.

“While the minor itself was extremely valuable, what set it apart as a key in my education was how the leadership-studies classes could be integrated with my other classes and with ASWC,” Clapp says. “I was taught, advised and equipped in my leadership classes, and in turn I was able to learn from, be guided by, and lead Whitworth’s student body. It was a wonderful opportunity.” ▲



Common good