

Life and Leadership Skills: A New Arena for the University Classroom

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 **COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY**
IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK



Background

Across America, experts bemoan a crisis in higher education, one that goes beyond the oft-mentioned, practical worries over COVID-19 and student debt, instead concerning the university's bedrock ideal. A majority of students take more than 4 years to graduate from college, a third change their majors, and nearly half find themselves underemployed upon graduation (Marcus). These statistics point to a crisis of purpose. Although universities foster a rich intellectual dialogue and teach students invaluable critical reasoning and communication skills, many students spend their undergraduate years fumbling for traction, and they graduate feeling their studies lacked focus. These unfulfilled graduates translate into dissatisfied, less productive workers and citizens.

Introduction

This research builds upon Dr. Wadhwa's experience teaching Personal Leadership & Success as Professor of Practice at Columbia Business School and coaching individuals and corporations to reach their highest potential as founder and president of Mentora Institute ("About Us"). It seeks to adapt key insights from those arenas to the realm of undergraduate education, with the goal of developing a fellowship that will help young leaders cultivate the skills necessary to make a positive difference in the world.

Methodology

A large component of the research was an inquiry into the existing fellowship ecosystem, which is roughly divided into two categories. First, gap year programs designed to provide recent high school graduates with a break from academic rigor before their transition to college by introducing them to the wider world through experiential education and/or service learning. Second, prestigious postgraduate opportunities for recent college graduates designed to allow students to pursue further study in their respective fields or to encourage these gifted young people to utilize their strengths in service of humanity. Examples include The Rhodes Scholarship and Teach for America. The results of this investigation were compiled and analyzed, with a brief framework laid out for the Mentora Foundation Fellowship's structure.

Methodology, cont.

Professor Wadhwa's method focuses on helping individuals find Inner Mastery to achieve Outer Impact. This technique first prompts individuals to ground themselves in Five Core Energies: Purpose, Wisdom, Love, Growth, and Self-Realization. It then supports them as they learn to bring out these qualities in others, ultimately creating a culture in which people find meaning in their lives, their work, and their connections with others. First, a review was conducted of existing materials, to gain familiarity with the technique and to see how these materials might be adapted for the undergraduate audience. Then, edits were made to increase the relevance of exercises and examples to youth and to make them more accessible in today's digital world. Finally, new material was created: in-depth inquiries into the lives of renowned changemakers in the world today, providing fellows with contemporary inspiration of leadership in action.

Results and Implications

Ultimately, the fellowship should provide students with a roughly 9 month immersive experience, combining lessons from top faculty in the field of leadership education with community building, hands-on leadership practice, and personal reflection. This structure is designed to maximize both participant engagement and their ability to bring about long-term change. Only when fellows feel deeply connected to their Inner Cores will they be able to serve as the upstanding moral leaders today's world requires. They will also be members of a lifelong network of Mentora Foundation fellows committed to collaboration and accountability in changing the world.

Outlook

- This work is ongoing. Next steps include:
- Building out the curriculum to reach beyond the classroom into the social and professional worlds: the experience should leave fellows with a network of like-minded peers and mentors in their fields of interest.
 - Developing a website and social media presence for the fellowship
 - Determining program cost and securing outside funding
 - Running pilot programs to test fellowship structure and content
 - Recruiting the first cohort of students from around the country
 - Beginning programming in Fall 2022

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