Leadership and the Humanities

Dr. Wren
Fall Term, 2011

Course location: Jepson Hall 107
Class meeting time: MW 10:30-11:45
Office location: Jepson 241
Office hours: MW 3:00-4:30 and by appointment
E-mail: twren@richmond.edu

Course Synopsis

This course is intended to be a beginning point for the examination of the issues and concepts involved in the study of leadership. Note that this is a course addressing the foundations of leadership studies, and is not an introductory survey of existing literature on leadership studies. This means that our efforts this term will involve the careful reading of several classic texts that touch upon the problems and possibilities of leadership as a manifestation of – and response to – the problems and prospects of the human condition. The readings and class discussions will focus on a series of central questions designed to isolate the basic premises of leadership, which will in turn enable us to apply our new-found understanding to contemporary leadership issues and challenges. Completion of this course should also lay an appropriate “foundation” for further work in the field of leadership studies.

The “Spinning Your Web” Component

This is a special section of LDST 101, in that it is devoted to being the academic component of the men’s living-learning community devoted to leadership, better known as “Spinning Your Web.” As “Webbers,” you will have many co-curricular and extra-curricular opportunities to develop a sense of community and to explore the notion of leadership. This course will seek to contribute to these objectives. As the semester rolls on, we will have several out-of-the-classroom opportunities to experience and think about leadership.

One theme that will be unique to this particular section of LDST 101 will be an ongoing theme of applying our leadership insights to the historical case-study of the American Civil War. Although we will have no readings specifically devoted to this topic (the necessary facts and context will be supplied by the instructor), we can take advantage of living in the Capital of the Confederacy during the sesquicentennial of the Civil War to explore some of the leadership challenges faced by the participants. This
will include a field trip to the Confederate [Virginia State] Capitol, where the Capitol historian will give us a special tour based on the leadership decisions made in that building during the War. Depending upon time and resources available (and student interest), we can also seek special tours of the Confederate White House, the American Civil War Center, or a special exhibit at the Virginia Historical Society. On campus, I will seek to get us a session with University of Richmond president Edward Ayers, a renowned historian of the Civil War. In class, we will periodically begin our sessions by assembling as the “Confederate Cabinet” and read actual dispatches from 1861 and discussing them from a leadership perspective.

In addition to the Civil war theme, we will seek to provide opportunities for you to interact with campus and community leaders, and may attend a lecture in the Jepson Forum series on leadership.

All in all, the Spinning Your Web program should provide a richness to your experience at the University of Richmond unmatched by that of your fellow first-year students.

**Texts**


In addition, on occasion there will be supplemental readings assigned, which will be placed on electronic reserve.

**Course Requirements**

**1) Student response papers.** Our class discussions will benefit from the fact that a few students in each class period will have engaged the readings in a more formal manner in the form of a response paper. These papers—each student will do three over the course of the semester—are to be just that: your response to the issues posed and the responses provided by the assigned author(s). It will be your
responsibility to (a) identify an issue that you think is central [this can be accomplished in most cases in a brief paragraph]; (b) summarize quite briefly the author(s) response(s) to your chosen issue; and (c) assess the strengths and weaknesses of that response. These papers will be brief—three to four pages, double-spaced—and require no outside research. They are intended to serve the dual purpose of giving you practice at such analysis and helping to guide our class discussions. THESE PAPERS MUST BE SUBMITTED TO ME ELECTRONICALLY BY 5:00 P.M. ON THE DAY PRECEDING CLASS. (10% each; total of 30%)

(2) **application exercise.** One of our tasks this term is to make the effort to apply the theoretical content of our readings to actual leadership challenges and issues of the present. This will be accomplished by student “teaching teams” who will be responsible for conducting class exercises and discussion. At the conclusion of our class discussions of each major text, we will set aside a class day for application. The class will read some supplemental materials on reserve pertaining to a contemporary leadership issue. It will be the responsibility of the teaching team to plan and conduct a class session that examines and reflects upon the insights of the text for our understanding of the chosen issue. (5%)

(3) **midterm examination.** The purpose of the midterm examination is to allow you to pause and pull together the various strands of thought we have been pursuing. The process of review and, hopefully, the act of responding to the examination itself are intended to help you to consolidate your learning in the course. (25%)

(4) **final examination.** The purpose of the final exam is to cause you to reflect upon the larger issues of the course. It also is intended to help you refine your own individual conceptualization of leadership. It will be comprehensive. (35%)

(5) **class attendance and participation.** The essential approach of this course is best captured in the phrase “shared learning experience.” The implication is that instructor and students will be fellow sojourners in the search for insights into leadership. This means that it is imperative that you complete the assigned readings prior to each class. You will be expected to attend class, and to enlighten us with your insights. Attendance will be recorded. Unless you have a legitimate reason for being absent (which must be communicated to the instructor prior to class), any absences will lower your final grade. (5%)

**Note:** While I have an appreciation for the educational possibilities of personal computers and other electronic devices in the classroom, my experience has been less satisfying. Use of electronic devices during class sessions is prohibited unless a convincing rationale is presented to, and accepted by, the instructor. As a sign of respect to peers, instructor, and the content being covered, students will be expected to remain in the classroom throughout the class period.

**The Questions of Leadership**

Our efforts in this course will take the form of a continuing inquiry into some of the central questions of leadership. By parsing some of the great works of the (Western)
tradition, we will glean a variety of answers. To these we must add our own reasoned responses. Because there will always be differences in the answers to the central leadership questions, this class will be one of intellectual engagement, where each of us must contribute to a reasoned dialogue. Although undoubtedly other questions will spring up, the following queries will guide our discussions. By the end of the term, we should be able to respond to these queries in an informed manner. We will know not only how our chosen commentators answered these questions, but we will also begin to devise our own responses. I stress begin because this course is intended to be just that: a beginning in your thinking about leadership, hopefully a part of an intellectual quest that will occupy you for life.

The “questions of leadership” can be separated into three categories:

A preliminary question

The most basic question we will address is also one of the most important:

What is leadership?

Although we will address this issue in a preliminary way at the outset of the course, in reality the answering of this query will occupy you throughout the term, and, indeed, for a long time to come. The reason that our response will be so long in coming is not that leadership cannot be defined – in fact, we will have an adequate starting point before we complete our initial class – but because the topic is so rich and complex that I will encourage you not to take a simplistic and reductionist approach. Part of the joy of the class will be our continual uncovering of further nuances about the nature of leadership.

The leadership template

The heart and soul of our analysis this term will center around the questions contained in something I call the “leadership template.” For those of you who eventually take LDST 300, Theories and Models of Leadership, you will find that modern leadership scholars study something called “implicit theories” of leadership – that is, “implicit beliefs and assumptions about the characteristics of effective leaders” that “influence the expectations people have for leaders and their evaluations of leader actions.” (Yukl, 2006, pp. 129-130). For purposes of this course, I have co-opted (and to some extent expanded) the term “implicit theory of leadership.” To me, implicit theories of leadership are the result of an individual’s answers to a series of fundamental questions about leadership, and, indeed, the human condition. How one responds to these central questions will, in turn, determine one’s definition of leadership, the ends it serves, the respective roles of leaders and followers, and indeed, one’s fundamental values. Applying the template of leadership to our texts will allow us to perceive the “implicit leadership theory” of each commentator we encounter. And, because we will continually be debating the wisdom of the responses we come across, in the process you will be developing your own implicit theory of leadership.
Now, a word about my use of the term “template.” The dictionary defines “template” as “a gauge, pattern, or mold used as a guide.” Back in the day, before the use of icons on computers, there used to be a thin plastic overlay that we placed over the “function” keys at the top of our keyboards to tell us what “F1” could do, etc. Those days are (thankfully) over now, but the questions of the “leadership template” perform a similar function. By, in effect, placing the questions of the leadership template alongside the texts we will be studying, we can use the questions of the template to make sense of our texts from a leadership perspective. Because few of our readings address the central issues of leadership in a direct fashion, our template can help us puzzle out the implicit leadership theories of each commentator, and to thereby gain an expanded knowledge of leadership for ourselves.

Below, I set out the ten questions of the leadership template, together with a brief elaboration. Further explication will come in class.

10. **What is the leadership challenge?**

Another way of putting this question is: “What causes the need for leadership?” In other words, what perceived problems or challenges sparked the individual to consider a reaction that we might label a leadership response? The perceived nature of the challenge quite logically has a great impact on the content of the response. Having identified the challenge at the outset, after completing our study of the text we can look back and consider whether or not the commentator’s leadership response was adequate and appropriate. This question also invites analysis of the role of context in leadership.

2. **What is the perception of human nature?**

In a phenomenon like leadership that is dependent upon a relationship between leaders and followers, the assumptions one makes about the human condition become critical. Subtopics that should occupy our attention include: is human nature essentially individualistic or communal? Are humans unregenerate or perfectible? Are they capable of governing themselves? The answers to such questions fundamentally shape the conception of the leadership relation.

3. **What is the proper end or purpose of leadership?**

This question is often related to the initial query regarding the leadership challenge; that is to say, the intended “end” of leadership is often some form of solution to the perceived problem. But this question is really getting at a deeper issue. It asks about the aspirations that drive the leadership relation, and about the moral purpose of leadership. Uncovering these can yield enormous insight into the consequent structures, relationships, and processes.

4. **What is the epistemology of leadership?**
This is another term that may require explanation. By this I intend to ask the question: “How do we know what to do, and if what we are doing is correct?” Usually this involves identifying some external standard to guide behavior and measure success. For example, that standard may be the common good, the actions of the market, or truth, or the commentator could even look to the outcomes of certain appropriate processes as the appropriate guide for behavior. Although the potential for overlap with other questions exists here as well (e.g., the “common good” could be both end and measure of success), our focus here is on what the participants in the leadership process look to as they seek to realize their ideal of leadership.

5. **What is the role of the leader?**

This question includes such issues as who should be chosen as leader, as well as role expectations for the leader. It is worth noting that this single question is really the sole focus of the modern social science version of “implicit theories of leadership.” This demonstrates, in turn, how much more widely we are casting our net.

6. **What is the role of followers?**

This query explores the other side of the leadership equation: the followers (in the public sphere, this will be “the people”). Since most of our readings this term are set in historical periods prior to the rise of important private organizations (like corporations), most of our discussions will revolve around the role of the people in the public sphere. Therefore, we will address such issues as: where does sovereignty reside? What are the expectations of the people? When can the people legitimately resist their leaders? Later, as you think about the role of followers in modern organizations [not our focus this term], parallel issues will come up, but the themes will be “empowerment,” “followership,” “whistle-blowing,” and the like.

7. **How should leaders and the people [followers] interact?**

This clearly relates to and derives from the previous questions, but the focus is different: instead of looking at leaders and followers (the people) in isolation, we will look at the nature of the relations between them, and what might be called the leadership process, in which leaders and followers interact as they seek to achieve societal or organizational goals. Several issues will arise: what is the nature of this relationship (should it be one of deference or equality)? In the public sphere, this means that we will need to contemplate matters such as these: what kind of “social contract” is there, and what are the implications? What is the role of representation? Although we will not be addressing such matters in this class, later, when you encounter more modern social scientific scholarship on leadership, say, in the Theories and Models of Leadership class, you will encounter narrower, more focused approaches to the leadership process.

8. **How is the matter of diversity and/or minority interests addressed?**
This is an issue of paramount importance to us as we consider modern-day leadership, both in terms of the ends of leadership and in the nature of the relationships among the participants. You may be surprised to find out that concerns of this nature are of relatively recent vintage. For a very, very long time it was merely assumed that everyone had identical interests, and/or that those who did not were to be excluded rather than assimilated. Witnessing the early stirrings of concern for this issue will be one of the intriguing storylines of this course.

9. What institutions and processes must be designed to accommodate the premises and assumptions revealed in the answers to the questions in the leadership template?

Given the fact that most of the commentators we will be studying are seeking to address a perceived leadership challenge, it should come as no surprise to us that most also come forth with some specific institutional and/or policy recommendations to remedy it. Having parsed their work, using the template of leadership to identify their key assumptions and premises, we are in a better position to evaluate each commentator’s proposed solution. Does it solve the problem? What other difficulties does it bring in its train? Is the proposed solution consistent with the commentator’s underlying premises and values? This last leads us to the next template question.

10. What values become evident in the course of answering the preceding questions?

It is important to recognize that no stance on the preceding questions (or any question, for that matter) is value-free. In claiming that humans are individualistic or communal, perfectible or unregenerate, we are, in part, setting out different value claims that might be contested by others. In a similar vein, choosing appropriate actions by looking to the market rather than some version of truth is also making a claim that is subject to debate. These debates are all about values, and we will be engaged in trying to identify the values of our commentators (and of ourselves), and subject them to scrutiny. For example, we will identify (and label) such values in tension as freedom and order, hierarchy and equality, individualism and community, and the like. Many have acknowledged that values are at the heart of leadership, and part of our learning this term is to become better fitted to identify values and their implications.

The ultimate query

Having worked through the types of analysis suggested above with regard to the chosen commentators (and ourselves), we will be in a position to contemplate a larger question:

How does the analytical approach that we have learned in this course help us to better understand and practice leadership?

The ultimate objective of our work is to enhance your understanding of leadership in such a way that you can utilize the insights in confronting your own leadership challenges. This will not be accomplished all at once, in one fell swoop. Instead, you are embarking
upon a lifetime journey of further learning. However, we will begin the journey by working through a series of applied case studies, in which you will have the opportunity to use our analytical approach to gain some insight into the leadership.

Course Schedule and Assignments

[NOTE: The assigned readings must be completed prior to the designated class period. Because the course of class discussion is unpredictable, we may fall behind the printed syllabus. Some “make-up” days have been inserted to help account for this. When needed, the instructor will indicate the necessary revisions to the schedule.]

Aug. 22
Introduction: What Is Leadership I
No assignment

Aug. 24
What Is Leadership II: Exploring the Leadership Template
Read syllabus
Traditional Classics, pp. 3-13

Aug. 29
The Moral Purpose of Leadership
Traditional Classics, pp. 14-54

ABLE response papers due 5:00 p.m. Aug. 28

Aug. 31
Plato: Introduction and Preliminaries
Plato, Part I, pp. 3-52
Part II, pp. 53-66

BAKER response papers due 5:00 p.m. Aug. 30

Sept. 5
Plato: Guardians and Justice
Plato, Part IV, pp. 112-129
Part V, pp. 130-156
Part VI, pp. 157-188

CHARLIE response papers due 5:00 p.m. Sept. 4

Sept. 7
Plato: Philosophical Ruler
Plato, Part VII, pp. 189-248

DOG response papers due 5:00 p.m. Sept. 6

Sept. 12
Plato: Education
Plato, Part III, pp. 67-111
ABLE response papers due 5:00 p.m. Sept. 11

Sept. 14  Plato: Concluding
          Plato, Part IX, pp. 275-334

BAKER response papers due 5:00 p.m. Sept. 13

Sept. 19  Make-up Day

Sept. 21  Application: Plato and the Leadership of Modern Democracy
          On reserve:

PLATONISTS lead discussion

Sept. 26  Ideal Leadership

CHARLIE response papers due 5:00 p.m. Sept. 25

Sept. 28  Machiavelli
          *The Prince*, pp. 5-80
          *Discourses* (*Traditional Classics*, pp. 219-222)

DOG response papers due 5:00 p.m. Sept. 27

Oct. 3    Make-up Day

Oct. 5    Application: Machiavelli and Moral Leadership
          On reserve:

MACHIAVELLIANS lead discussion
Oct. 10

**FALL BREAK**

Oct. 12

*The Nature of Legitimate Authority*

*Traditional Classics*, pp. 135-216.

**ABLE response papers due 5:00 p.m. Oct. 11**

Oct. 17

*Locke*

Chaps. I-IX, pp. 5-68

**BAKER response papers due 5:00 p.m. Oct. 16**

Oct. 19

*Locke*


**CHARLIE response papers due 5:00 p.m. Oct. 18**

Oct. 24

**NO CLASS**

Oct. 26

**MIDTERM EXAMINATION**

Oct. 31

*Application: Locke, Individual Rights and the Prerogative*

*On reserve:*

(readings TBD)

**LOCKEANS lead discussion**

Nov. 2

*Rousseau*

Books I & II, pp. 17-48

**DOG response papers due 5:00 p.m. Nov. 1**

Nov. 7

*Rousseau*

Books III & IV, pp. 49-103

Nov. 9

*Application: Rousseau, the Individual, and the Community*

*On reserve:*

Game theory:


ROUSSEAUEANS lead class discussion

Nov. 14 The Status of Followers
         *Traditional Classics*, pp. 219-275

Nov. 16 Challenges to Authority
         *Traditional Classics*, pp. 279-334.

Nov. 21 Make-up and Review

Nov. 23 THANKSGIVING

Nov. 28 Make-up and Review

Nov. 30 Conclusion: Educated Citizens, Public Intellectuals

*** FINAL EXAMINATION TBA ***