What is Leadership? What is Leadership Studies?

Leadership is inherently a collective activity; it implies a relationship between multiple people. In its simplest form, for leaders to exist, there also must be followers. So it is incoherent to speak of leaders or leadership without at the same time considering followers.

In its most general form, we can think of leadership studies as encompassing the complete study of human societies and their evolution. How do human collectivities form, evolve, make decisions, interact with one another? In short, how do societies function? In principle, any question of sociology, anthropology, history, organized religion, political science, economics, social psychology, or any other aspect of human society, can be understood or described as a leadership studies question. This is the case whether we are speaking of the simplest possible relationship (two people) or the most complex possible (the organization of the current global economy).

Note also that the term “leadership” and the field “leadership studies” both presume that human beings are inescapably social creatures, and that we create, define, and make meaning in our lives in relationships with others. There are many ways to show this point, here are four obvious ones: 1) The fact that individual human beings in the world come into existing through sexual reproduction, and that the birth and development of a human child requires the nurturance of parents, which in turn implies the existence of families or family-like organizations. Simply put, to survive, we must to a considerable degree live together. 2) The fact that the very grammar of our minds, our ability to think complex thoughts, depends on the existence of language, a common human system for communication that evolved collectively over many, many years and of which we are all the common beneficiary. 3) The fact that in modern societies today, we are all inextricably tied up in complex systems of social cooperation that provide order and set the context for our lives: these systems include the basic institutions of society, and in particular law and government. We are all tied up with one another, whether we like it or not. 4) The fact that we are also members of one or more particular communities (political, religious, social, ethnic) whose existence precedes our individual lives and that likely will endure past out own individual lifespan, and that many people draw their most concrete plans of life and define themselves in relationship to these communities.

This emphasis on the inherently social nature of human beings and the notion that leadership inherently involves collectivities is at first glance in some tension with one of the dominant political ideals of modern Western societies: that of individual liberty, and the image of human
beings as autonomous law-givers with strong individual rights that society cannot intrude upon. This tension is the topic of an enormous body of modern political philosophy. Here we simply observe that there is no contradiction between recognizing the irreducibly social nature of human life and placing high value on individual liberty and individual conscience. Indeed, social progress and societal advance are sometimes made precisely by individuals or groups of individual who challenge societal convention. Providing space for individual liberty can thus be seen as one of the mechanisms by which groups or collectivities promote progress.

Often in leadership studies, we focus not on leadership in its most generalizable form but rather discuss “leadership” in a more specific sense: the role of deliberate human agency in bringing about change. One way to define “leadership” in this sense is as follows: “making something happen that wouldn’t have happened otherwise.” Here is the thought process behind this definition of leadership: often as human beings in complex societies we find ourselves embedded in institutions, cultural norms and practices not of our own choosing, institutions which seem to move by the force of their own gravity. The attempt to alter how these practices operate—for instance to try to change a law, or a cultural norm, or how property is distributed, or how schools are organized—requires deliberate human volition. This is not to say that deliberate human volition is the sole cause of social change, and still less to say that deliberate human volition always or even usually produces the desired effects. But when we see a person or number of people trying to make something new happen, or do things a different way, it is common to call that person (or those persons) “leaders.”

What is meant by that common use of the term is that the person or people “see” (or believe they see) a way to alter or improve the functioning of the community (or society), and that they engage in action designed to bring the desired changes into practice. On some occasions, this may involve the use of brute force, but in most cases the actual process of change involves a heavy dose of persuasion, or persuasion combined with force. “Force” here could mean political pressure, social pressure, or economic pressure, in addition to literal police or military force.

In established democratic societies, we generally have the conceit that social change can be brought either solely by persuasive leadership, or by such leadership combined with “nonviolent” social, economic, and political pressure. But even within democratic societies, there are many exceptions to this rule (i.e. the American Civil War ended slavery in the U.S.; persuasion alone did not.) And democratic societies themselves are almost always founded in blood: they come into being as new political communities either by violent breaking away from colonial overseers, by forcible conquest, or by internal revolution. Even when the transition events establishing democracy are relatively peaceful, the threat of force is an important factor: the force the revolutionary class is able to muster, or alternatively the inability or unwillingness of the old guard to use force (i.e. the existing military) to repress change. Further, even established democracies continue to project force into the world to defend or advance their (perceived or claimed) interests; the U.S. is a prime example.

In this class we will be looking at leadership and change processes both within established democratic societies and in non-democratic societies. These observations are simply to challenge a simplistic dichotomy between “democracy” and “non-democracy.” Democratic societies come
into being through violence or threat of violence, and continue to employ violence periodically; non-democratic societies may have democratic elements that allow for social change activity to take place.

Here a word of clarification is in order. We have thus far discussed leadership as a collective social process, and introduced the notion that “leaders” are those who initiate or bring about change. Note carefully: leadership in this definition does not necessarily imply the existence of a hierarchy or providing leaders with authority or control over others. For instance, in an egalitarian marriage, the couple may still act collectively to advance shared ends, and at different times one partner or the other might exercise initiative (and hence leadership) without entering into a permanent relationship of dominance. One partner takes the lead at one time, the other partner at another. Equally important, the action component of leadership need not require any domination or coercion. It’s a nice day outside, and one partner proposes to the other they have a picnic; the other says that’s a great idea; and they go on to plan a picnic together cooperatively and without coercion. Leadership has taken place through the power of suggestion alone.

An open question—indeed one of the most important open questions in leadership studies—is to what extent larger-scaled leadership processes can or might conform to this ideal of voluntary, non-coercive cooperative behavior. In point of fact, colloquially the term “leadership” often has a second, quite distinct definition: “leadership” in this sense involves organizing a group or institution so that one or more people have authority over others. This authority may be merely the right to initiate proposals, or it may involve the right to tell others what to do and to impose penalties for non-compliance (firing a worker if one is a company boss, imprisoning a law-breaker if one is a magistrate). This is also a valid use of the term leadership, but it’s important to know that leaders in this sense—those who hold special authority in the group—may not in fact be agents of meaningful change.

In practice, these two aspects of leadership—initiating change and wielding authority—are often fused together in a countless variety of ways. Most of the interesting cases of large scale leadership-as-change involve at some point an engagement with authority, or an attempt to gain authority. Because we find ourselves in a complex society governed by law and other institutions, to make meaningful change we must engage with those institutions, one way or another. Likewise, persons who hold positions of authority can play a key role in promoting or frustrating change. Sometimes persons in authority unexpectedly become change agents in response to special circumstances. Much of the substance of leadership studies is exploring the complex relationship between leadership as change and leadership as authority. How do people develop, assemble, and use power to make things happen? And how can leaders be held accountable (to the whole community, to ethical standards, or to both) for the use, misuse, or non-use of such power?

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Thus far we have simply described leadership studies as involving the study of human social processes. But we are also concerned with the ethical evaluation of leadership and leadership
practices. Whether one is a leader or not is logically independent over whether the ends one promotes through leadership are ethically worthwhile. Further, to the extent leadership processes confer special privileges, power, or status on designated “leaders,” we must also be concerned with the ethical justification of leadership itself. Finally, we must consider whether the ethical exercise of responsible leadership requires that leaders have a particular kind of moral character.

Aristotle defines practical ethical action as involving doing the right thing, at the right time, in the right way, and for the right reason. That standard is a good place to start for evaluating leadership ethically.

A common assumption in the ethical study of leadership is that the leader leads for the good of the whole, not for their own personal pleasure, power, wealth or aggrandizement. On this view, the leader is a kind of servant to the group: one who takes on the stresses and responsibility of enhanced initiative or authority in order to advance the ends of the group as a whole. This is not to say that leaders are to be egoless or self-sacrificial; the good leader benefits from the opportunity to lead because she or he gets the benefits of living in a well-run community. The paradigmatic case is Plato’s description of the philosopher-kings (and queens) in *The Republic*, who do not place inherent value on the act of ruling, but do so anyway on the understanding that the well-being of the entire community depends on their ruling, and that a city governed by philosopher-kinds will protect the way of life of philosophers better than any other. Hence, the civic duty to lead and personal self-interest are on Plato’s account aligned.

Such alignment is rarely achieved in the real world. Those who lead may do so largely because of civic duty or to advance other moral convictions or principles. But they may also, at the same time, receive other kinds of benefits: the ego benefits of positive reputation and recognition; a pleasure in exercising power, being able to guide the actions of others, and being able to make things happen; and opportunities to convert leadership responsibility into personal gain. This latter motivation, when put in practice, is generally condemned as “corruption.” But reputational benefits and the pleasure and power are often treated more ambiguously, often under the all-encompassing term “ambition.” Personal ambition poses clear danger insofar as it may motivate leaders to engage in acts or decisions aimed not at the good of the whole but at advancing their own ends. But sometimes ambition is treated positively, as a source of energy that can motivate leaders to get things done. Honest glory-seeking may cause great things to get done even by people who are not saints. A major strategy of constitutional theorists of the American Republic such as James Madison was to harness ambition in productive ways.

Yet ethical leadership does not consist simply in leaders leading for the sake of those governed. We must also consider that we live in a world with multiple groups and multiple leaders. To take the paradigmatic case, we live in a world of nations. Do leaders of nations have moral obligations to citizens in other nations? Most people, upon reflection, would say yes. To say no would be to say that any act of genocide or nuclear holocaust inflicted upon the civilian population of another nation could be justified if it led to benefits for the members of that nation. (One might reply that the reason nations don’t regularly commit such barbarities against other populations is because they fear the reputational costs of doing so. But this begs the question of
why there are such reputational costs: it is because most nations believe that such acts are morally heinous.)

The ethical responsibility of leaders to members of other groups (be they nations, opposing teams in a sports leagues, or anything else) may not be clearly perceived by leaders. The voices of those impacted by a leader’s action may not be heard, or heard but not valued, by leaders before they act. In democratic societies, for instance, elected leaders are accountable only to voters in their own jurisdictions—not to persons in other nations, or for local and state politicians, persons in other districts and states; not to persons lacking the right to vote; not to persons not yet alive. Even well-intentioned leaders may have difficulty in perceiving, let alone accurately gauging, the impact of their actions on all those affected. Further, the pressures on leaders to advance the interests (or perceived interests) of the community can overwhelm concern for those in other communities.

This is one key reason why leaders are prone to making ethical mistakes—or to be more precise, to undertake courses of action that are ethically indefensible. Because leaders are prone to such errors, a major ongoing concern is how to correct and if necessary remove leaders who do bad things. The Hebrew Bible describes the emergence of prophets precisely as a response to these problems; the Biblical prophet may be a court insider who calls kings (like David) to task when they commit evil, or it may be literally a voice in the wilderness who calls the entire community (leaders and followers together) to account for their collective moral failures. In modern democratic societies, we have carved out institutions such as universities dedicated to the purpose of free inquiry, that afford its members the freedom to think and speak without restriction, and hence an ability to question power and authority. Various laws also are intended to protect whistleblowers who call attention to criminal activity conducted in government organizations or in corporations. In practice, however, it is difficult and uncommon—but not unknown—for individuals to buck social pressure and lodge either formal protest or quieter noncompliance against ethically questionable or malignant actions undertaken by one’s community. Questioning leaders and leadership structures is thus a key part of leadership itself, and part of the process by which communities evolve and progress over time.

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In this course, we will be exploring above both the major topics described above—leadership as social process, and the ethical evaluation of leadership—in a variety of ways, using a variety of sources and methods drawn from several of the humanities disciplines: philosophy, political theory, history, religious studies, and narrative (fiction and nonfiction). Roughly speaking, the course has two component parts: one part consists of classic accounts of leadership offered by a number of influential historical thinkers—Plato, Sun Tzu, Machiavelli, Thomas More, as well as one contemporary political theorist (and former university president) Nan Keohane. The second part consists of case studies of leaders in diverse settings: the four ordinary persons described in Eyal Press’s Beautiful Souls who bucked enormous social pressure to stand up to wrongdoing or evil in four distinct contexts (early Nazi persecution of Jews pre-holocaust, the Serb-Croat war of the 1990s, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and white collar crime the American financial community); the founder of a major world religion whose life had immeasurable impact on
multiple civilizations (Buddha); an ordinary citizen who galvanized the Civil Rights movement in the U.S. (Rosa Parks); and the extraordinary life of Nelson Mandela and his critical role in bringing about a largely peaceful, democratic revolution in South Africa.

As the syllabus shows however, we will bob and weave back and forth between the case studies and the theoretical material—and between each of the different dimensions of leadership described above (i.e. leadership as assembling and using power, leadership as making change happen, ethical questions raised by leadership). The class is intended to be a journey in itself, but also a first step in a longer journey for those of you who choose to go on to become Leadership Studies majors or minors.

**Course Expectations**

To succeed in this course, you will need to meet several core expectations. These are not optional and not negotiable.

- You must attend every class (arriving on time—i.e. two minutes early).
- You must prepare for class by doing the assigned reading in a thoughtful manner, prior to class
- You must be attentive in class
- You must make an effort to participate in class discussions
- You must complete the written assignments on time
- You must attend each of four class film nights, on these dates: September 30, October 21, November 18, and December 2.

In addition, it is also highly advisable that you:

- Visit the professor periodically in office hours, especially when you have questions
- Take good notes both while reading and in class
- Review those notes after each class session
- Write down questions as you are reading you would like to raise in class
- Spend time with your classmates talking about the ideas in the reading outside of class time

Finally, there are a few key classroom comportment rules we will observe:

- All electronic devices (phones, laptops, etc.) must be turned off and put away before entering the classroom, and must stay off until you leave the classroom
- You should go to the bathroom prior to class and not get up in the middle of class to go, barring a genuine emergency
- Don’t bring food into the classroom, but beverages are acceptable provided you dispose of them appropriately after class
- Pay both the professor and your classmates the respect of listening to what they have to say. The way to indicate you are listening is through periodic eye contact.
Developing Thinking, Reading and Writing Skills

Learning to Read for College

Reading must be the fundamental default activity of all college students. When you are not doing anything else, you should be reading. This class will require that you do a lot of reading. In your first year of college as a whole, it’s likely you will be asked to read more serious, demanding books than you’ve read in your entire life to this point.

We live in a culture that has devalued deep reading and thinking. Why then read books, as opposed to just a series of short articles or excerpts? Because books are still the best technology we have for allowing a sophisticated train of thought—or body of knowledge—to be communicated from one human mind to another. A book allows the author to explore an event, person, or question in sustained depth, to present a sustained argument supported by evidence, to make connections between different events or phenomena, or to explore all sides of a disputed question thoroughly. Or a book may simply expand or stimulate our imaginations, our moral consciences, our sense of what is possible in human life. To read an interesting, important, or imagination-expanding book is one of life’s great pleasures—but it is a pleasure it takes effort to cultivate. Think of reading a book as engaging your mind with someone else’s mind in an extended, in-depth conversation. If your reading takes the form of a thoughtful, internal conversation with the author, when it comes time to write your papers—your actual chance to “talk back” to the author and his or her ideas—you won’t be struggling to generate material from scratch; instead you will simply be transcribing and refining the conversation you’ve already had in your brain. Good writing is fundamentally a result of good thinking, and good thinking comes about via the practice and habit of being in conversation with good thinkers—such as the authors we will be reading this semester.

But how then to read thoughtfully? First, cut out the distractions. Turn off social media, the Internet, and anything else that might tempt you to turn your mind away from what you are reading. Find a quiet space where you can concentrate fully on the text. Second, set yourself an attainable goal for how long you will concentrate fully on reading the text. Whether its thirty minutes, an hour, or two hours, set a goal, and stick to that goal, with the aim of increasing it over time. If you can learn how to sit in the library or somewhere for three consecutive hours, reading for 45-50 minutes at a time, then taking 10-15 minute breaks each hour, you will over the course of the week get a lot done—and more importantly, have a lot of fruitful conversations with great thinkers and writers. Third, take notes as you go—either in the text margins, or in a notebook. This is helpful in keeping track of the author’s train of thought, and will help you remember arguments and key points when you go back to review or re-read. Fourth, when you are done reading a section, write down a few key points the author made, or alternatively some questions you have about the author’s arguments. Fifth, as you are reading, think not just about the face value arguments of the text, but also about the author’s intended audience and purpose. Why and for whom was this book written? Being able to answer that question often is very helpful in understanding the text as a whole. Sixth—and this is the most advanced skill, and one that will take time to master—think critically about what you are reading. Even the most brilliant texts, texts that have impeccable internal logic and that will make you smarter simply by reading
them, have limitations of perspective and purpose. What does a text written in the 16th century about the human condition have to say that is of enduring value to us today? Thomas More can’t answer that question—it is our job as students to answer that question ourselves.

Written Assignments, Quizzes, Exams

- Every Wednesday at the start of class, starting Wednesday August 26, there will be a short five-question reading quiz that you will have five minutes to complete.
- A two page opinion piece written in response to Eyal Press’s Beautiful Souls and contemporary whistleblower cases, due by email at Midnight, Monday Sept. 2. The prompt for this paper will be distributed in class Wednesday August 28.
- A six-page take-home mid-term exam, covering Buddha, Plato, Sun Tzu, Machiavelli, and Thomas More, due Friday October 4. Prompts will be distributed Wed. Sept. 25.
- An eight page paper covering the Rosa Parks and Nan Keohane books (with choice of writing two separate essays, or one integrated essay), due Friday November 8. Prompts distributed Wed Oct. 30.
- Final exam consisting of True/False questions on two essays.

Grade Composition

Weekly Quizzes (10%)
Verbal Participation in Class (10%)
Two-page Beautiful Souls paper (4%)
Take-home mid-term (16%)
Eight page Parks/Keohane paper (20%)
Nelson Mandela paper (20%)
Final Exam (20%)

General Grading Standards

“A” work is well-written, well-argued, and thoroughly conversant with the source material, containing no major inaccuracies or contradictions, and illustrating subtlety and nuance of argument. “A” papers consist of interesting, substantial thoughts well-packaged in technically proficient writing.

“B” work attempts to forward an argument and shows good familiarity with and understanding of the source material, and is generally well-written. There are generally two genres of “B” work: papers that have some of the qualities of an “A” paper, but also contain serious flaws; and papers that contain no serious flaws, but also lack originality or depth of perceptiveness, or simply fail to be persuasive.
“C” work makes an attempt to complete the assignment but contains substantial flaws, either of writing quality, inadequate comprehension of the material, unsupported arguments, and/or logically contradictory or implausible arguments.

“D” and “F” work refers to papers that are seriously inadequate and fail to meet the basic requirements of the assignment.

**Attendance Policy**

Each unexcused absence will lead to 2% being taken off your final grade. No exceptions. Why? Because every class matters. A head count will be taken at the start of each class and if anyone is missing an attendance sheet will be distributed. Falling asleep in class will lead to at least 1% being deducted. Repeated tardiness may also lead to a grade penalty.

**Assigned Reading/Course of Study**

**Monday August 26**

Review syllabus

Read preface of Eyal Press, *Beautiful Souls*

**Wednesday August 28 (Quiz date)**


**Monday September 2**

Eyal Press, *Beautiful Souls*, Chapters 3-4 and conclusion

**TWO PAGE PAPER DUE BY MIDNIGHT**

**Wednesday September 4 (Quiz date)**

“The Legend of the Buddha Sakyamuni”


**Monday September 9**

Karen Armstrong, *Buddha*, Chapters 3-4

**Wednesday September 11 (Quiz date)**

Karen Armstrong, *Buddha*, Chapters 5-6

**Monday September 16**

Plato, *Gorgias*, pp. 1-70

**Wednesday September 18 (Quiz date)**

Plato, *Gorgias*, pp. 70- end
Monday September 23
Sun Tzu, The Art of War (complete)

Wednesday Sept 25 (Quiz date)
Machiavelli, The Prince (Chapters 15-26)

Monday Sept. 30
Thomas More, Utopia, Book I (read ahead in Book II if you can)

CLASS FILM NIGHT: “A Man for All Seasons”

Wednesday October 2 (Quiz date)
Thomas More, Utopia, Book II

TAKE-HOME FINAL EXAM DUE FRIDAY OCTOBER 4 AT 5 p.m.

Wednesday Oct 9 (Quiz date)
Jeanne Theoharis, The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks, Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2

Monday Oct 14
Jeanne Theoharis, The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks, Chapters 3 and 4 to page 94

Wednesday Oct 16 (Quiz date)
Jeanne Theoharis, The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks, Remainder of Chapter 4 from page 94 and Chapter 5

Monday Oct 21
Jeanne Theoharis, The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks, Chapter Six

CLASS FILM NIGHT: “Boycott”

Wednesday Oct 23 (Quiz date)
Jeanne Theoharis, The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks, Chapter Seven and Conclusion

Monday Oct 28
Nan Keohane, Thinking About Leadership, Introduction and Chapters 1 and 2

Wednesday October 30 (Quiz date)
Nan Keohane, Thinking About Leadership, Chapter 3

Monday November 4
Nan Keohane, Thinking About Leadership, Chapters 4 and 5

Wednesday November 6 (Quiz date)
Nan Keohane, *Thinking About Leadership*, Chapter 6

**FRIDAY NOVEMBER 8, EIGHT PAGE PAPER ON PARKS AND KEOANE BOOKS DUE AT MIDNIGHT**

**Monday November 11**


**Wednesday November 13**

Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Parts Two and Three

**Monday November 18**

Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Parts Four and Five

**CLASS FILM NIGHT: “Cry Freedom”**

**Wednesday November 20**

Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Parts Six and Seven

**Monday November 25**


**Monday Dec 2**


Evening of Monday December 2: Class Field trip to see the film *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* in a local theater.

**Wednesday Dec 4**

James Read and Ian Shapiro, “Transforming Power Relationships: Leadership, Risk and Hope.”

**FRIDAY DEC 6, MIDNIGHT: EIGHT PAGE PAPER ON MANDELA BOOK DUE**

**FINAL EXAM: Tuesday December 10, 9 a.m. Optional Review Session will be held Sunday evening, December 8, time/place TBA.**
Jepson School of Leadership Studies
Common Syllabus Insert

Awarding of Credit

To be successful in this course, a student should expect to devote 10-14 hours each week, including class time and time spent on course-related activities.
http://registrar.richmond.edu/services/policies/academic-credit.html

Disability Accommodations

Students with a Disability Accommodation Notice should contact their instructors as early in the semester as possible to discuss arrangements for completing course assignments and exams.
http://studentdevelopment.richmond.edu/disability-services/policies.html

Honor System

The Jepson School supports the provisions of the Honor System. The shortened version of the honor pledge is: “I pledge that I have neither received nor given unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work.”
http://studentdevelopment.richmond.edu/honor/

Religious Observance

Students should notify their instructors within the first two weeks of classes if they will need accommodations for religious observance.
http://registrar.richmond.edu/planning/religiousobs.html