WESTMONT COLLEGE VISIT
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT REVIEW

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CONTEXT:

During our day visit we interviewed Jim Halvorsen and Kathy Lunsford, Jonathon Hansen (a Westmont Alumni), three different student groups, Mark McCormick and Dave King, two faculty (Dr. Shirley Mullen, Dr. Jonathan Wilson) and Dr. Stan Gaede, the Provost. We also were able to spend about 15 minutes talking with Dr. Winters, the President of Westmont College.

Our goal was to examine the Leadership Development Program at Westmont, looking for the strengths and weaknesses of the program and examine possible opportunities for reorganizing the structure and incorporating leadership development into other areas of student affairs. In addition, we were cognizant of the Presidents desire to possibly incorporate “character development” as a focus into more of the student programs.

OBSERVATIONS FROM INTERVIEWS:

Jim and Kathy:

1. They emphasized that the culture at Westmont is to support student-led programs, but both of them seemed frustrated by the inability to advise these groups more proactively.
2. They felt the students are sometimes trying to do a full-time job when they are also supposed to be students (for example, Potter’s Clay they felt was too big to be only student run).
3. They felt the students experience gained in some of these involvements does not reflect the “real world”...we all have supervisors, have to keep records, need to be fair and clear in the process of selection, need to be able to evaluate programs, etc.
4. The lack of involvement on the part of advisors (faculty and staff) means missed educational opportunities for the students.
5. Not all students avail themselves of the leadership opportunities on campus. Jim estimated that only a few (approximately 20) are deeply involved, maybe 80 students are involved in an average number of leadership opportunities, and possibly another 200 do a few things in the leadership area.
6. They referred often to the Leadership Model (p.7) in the Leadership Development Notebook. When we talked with students about it, however, they were not aware of the model or how it fit together in terms of building upon their experiences.
7. Half of the Leadership Model focuses on the portfolio, but not many students develop a full portfolio.
8. The model also referred to Mentoring, but when questioned about how this takes place, Jim said that it is up to the students to take the initiative and seek out mentors and ask them to work with them individually or in small groups.
9. The Leadership Program was promoted through the activity fair, and desserts and meetings within the residence halls. There seemed to be a weak connection in introducing the freshmen to the concept of leadership development. They were given information on campus and community activities they could pursue, but they were left largely on their own to connect with a group.

Student Groups:

1. The students expressed concerns about not being prepared to take over their leadership positions. For example, they said there was no real “multicultural” training or orientation offered before they went on Potter’s Clay.
2. Some of the students seem to be able to make the connection between what they were learning in the classroom and what they were doing in their leadership work. By and large, however, they said they really didn’t see a connection between their academics and their experiences outside of the classroom and few faculty addressed it.
3. The students expressed an interest in having more involvement from staff and faculty. When speaking of the challenges of their roles, they spoke about how to select students to replace them (they struggled between choosing their friends or choosing someone they might not know as well); feeling unprepared for taking on some of the leadership responsibilities, taking much more time than they had originally anticipated and interfering with their studies and their “other” Westmont life.
4. The majority of the students said that the organization, planning and logistics of the trips/outreach took priority...they needed to get things done; however, they regretted they then had very little time to reflect on what they had learned or on what learning could take place through the “process” of leading.
5. The students were concerned that there was very little continuity from year to year. They seemed concerned that students were more focused on banking a wide variety of opportunities rather than making a longer-term commitment to one project.

Faculty Group:

1. The faculty seemed interested in having more interaction with students outside of the classroom. More faculty wanted to be involved in the Thursday seminar series and they wanted students to help the academic departments plan events.
2. The faculty wanted to see more leadership nurtured throughout the students four years. There seemed to be very little communication with faculty and advisors for student groups on campus. The faculty were interested in possibly linking internships and practicum experiences somehow with the leadership program.
3. The faculty seemed uninformed about the leadership program. They indicated it had not gotten much visibility as far as they knew.
4. The faculty indicted that Westmont had kind of “missed the boat” in terms of experiential education and service learning where students might have as a part of a course a community service/volunteer experience required.

Residence Life Staff:

1. They felt that the advisors needed more training. They expressed concern that after past budget cuts the efforts of the Leadership Development Office had been hampered.
2. They indicated there are no “feeder” programs for resident advisors—orientation advisors serve as small group leaders.
3. They indicated that other than resident advisors there are no other leadership training opportunities at the College.
GENERAL OBSERVATIONS:

1. There is a weak or non-existent connection between the curriculum and involvement opportunities.

2. There is a general reluctance on the leadership staff’s part to “intervene” in the workings of student groups. They indicated that the students determine how much they should meet with them. However, when meeting with students and the alumni, they seem interested in having more assistance, support, involvement. One individual (student) stated, “Such independence in the extreme can allow for a lot of time wasted”. Another person stated, “When everything is done by the students, there are many missed educational opportunities when someone with experience and knowledge could offer important observations and suggestions.”

3. There could be more ways to get the word out to students about the Leadership Program. Freshmen are not guided into the Leadership Process.

4. We question the value and purpose of the portfolio. Some students indicated it served as a group “handbook” to be passed on to the next officers...others said it was a good idea but they didn’t have time to put into it. We had concerns about the confidentiality of the portfolios. Who were the students expected to share them with?

5. The “training” and “orienting” of students before their leadership experience (Christian Concerns, Potters Clay, etc.) should be reviewed. Also the students seemed to indicate there was no opportunity for guided reflection either during or after their experience so that stereotypes, observations, interactions with others from a different culture, etc., could be explored. There also seemed to be a lack of “debriefing” time after the experience.

6. The students seemed to enjoy and value their community service opportunities. They expressed concerns, however, that those who got involved in the leadership roles were high achievers who were focused on the tasks that needed to be accomplished and there was no time to worry about “character development”.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The role/definition of the advisor with student organizations should be discussed and addressed. Conversations with the students in the leadership roles should occur where some agreement on the level of involvement of the advisor is agreed upon. This conversation should not just be led by the students’ interest in getting advice, but should also be informed by what the College feels the students need to learn in their leadership experience and what are the multiple ways this learning can take place. Defining learning outcomes for leadership involvement might help in defining these goals even more. This may also be a place to involve faculty in determining how they and/or their classes might focus on developing leadership qualities in students.

2. The leadership seminars seemed to receive a mediocre response. Our recommendation would be that these seminars be discontinued and to use that time instead to possibly train peer leadership consultants to go out to the student groups and help them with various issues as they arise. You might consider forming a Leadership Council made up of students in multiple positions along with a few faculty and staff. This group could serve in an advisory capacity to Student Leadership Programs and provide some training and support for the students who are in the most challenging positions. It also could provide a
vehicle for communication to make sure the student groups are not covering the same ground, competing for funds or members, etc.

3. The Mentoring piece of the Leadership Development Model seems vague and totally up to the students initiative. This is difficult for students because often they may not know what they need or could be helped by in terms of a mentor. The mentoring could be linked more with faculty as advisors/mentors to groups or creating “coaches” from staff members instead of mentors.

4. Possibly use Chapel time to promote leadership. Invite speakers who are leaders in a variety of contexts and then provide an opportunity for students to discuss how their experience and wisdom might apply in their leadership positions.

5. The concept of character development could be incorporated throughout student programs, but it would take intentionality on the part of the student affairs staff. Determining what this means, and again designing some learning outcomes for each area would help make it happen. This could be a very rousing staff development program with the faculty participating: How Does Westmont Define Character Development? When we asked the faculty, their responses ranged from practical wisdom tied into the Old Testament virtues to another faculty member describing it as “character formation” that would include cultivating habits, making sacrifices, making personal corrections in one’s behavior, and introducing interventions on campus. I think I mentioned before that another avenue for this type of campus-wide discussion could be on the model that Azusa Pacific University has used: a Common Day of Learning focused on Character Development. This involves faculty, students, and staff giving and attending workshops on the topic. It certainly would increase the visibility of the topic and its importance to the institution!

6. Many of the students and staff we talked with expressed concern about having a place for the unseen and unexalted leaders in the group. How do they get recognized, found and assisted...those students who may not have the titles of student leader, but really get things done. Both students and staff referred to them as “diamonds in the rough”. One way to address this could be involving freshmen their first year on campus in the leadership model, giving them opportunities to attend workshops, “practice” leadership skills, serve as “junior-assistants” in a student group of their choice. At USC a similar program was called The Emerging Leader Program(this is Judi’s program) and focused on in-coming freshmen, with upperclassmen being the coaches/mentors in the group. It did not take a lot of the students time, but it started them thinking of themselves as leaders early on in their college careers. With this in mind, we also think it would be helpful to move the “Leadership Development” Program or character development programs under the Director of First Year Students. The program needs involvement by faculty in order to connect the experience with the curriculum right from the very beginning.