

Soaring with Collaborative Service-Oriented Development and Design Thinking: A Needs Analysis to Redesign the Leadership Development and Civic Engagement Minor

Dr. Jennifer Bragger

Summary:

I have been a proud member of the Montclair State University community since 1997. Believing in the transformative power of education as a public good, I am personally and professionally invested in innovating inclusive curricular and cocurricular leadership development programs that center service-learning and energize students to design their own future and the future of their communities.

Montclair State University is expanding community engagement, accepting the mantle to create a more inclusive and equitable society, and innovating despite significant disruption. To lead the future of higher education at the local, state, and national levels, it will need to offer imaginative, rigorous, and collaborative academic programs *unbound* by structures and practices that weigh down access, growth, and learning. The [Leadership Development through Civic Engagement \(LDCE\) minor](#) has the potential to soar as one of those academic programs.

Directing the minor, working with the [Bonner Foundation](#), and serving on the [Steering committee for the Next Generation Service Corp](#) has made me aware of how important it is to create curricula that facilitate the integration of content-based knowledge and experiential learning. As a teacher, advisor, and mentor of undergraduate and graduate students, I have also learned how important it is for students to interact with others who have different interests and strengths. As such, I propose conducting a needs analysis to collect information about current and future service-oriented leadership development trends and the leadership development needs of Montclair State University, [its diverse body of students](#), and organizations in our community. This will allow us to determine the best ways to modify the minor and to attract students that might not otherwise consider or have the time to complete a service-oriented leadership minor.

A needs analysis will also enlighten us as to the curricular and cocurricular experiences that best align the learning and experiences within the minor with student preferences, organizational needs, and the [strategic direction of Montclair State University](#). As a result of this needs analysis, we anticipate adding courses in [Design Thinking](#), coaching and mentoring, and cross-sector service-learning as well as strengthening our relationship with both [Student Development and Campus Life](#) and [Hispanic Initiatives](#), but want these decisions to be evidence-based. Ultimately, the Leadership Development through Civic Engagement Minor will [cultivate student success](#) by ["provid\[ing\] all students with well-resourced educational, co-curricular, and student life experiences that transform their concepts of individual potential and prepare them successfully to engage and excel in careers that benefit and contribute to society."](#)

My Interest: Invested, Personally and Professionally

Several years after joining Montclair State University, Dr. Valerie Sessa invited me to teach [PSYC 294: Psychology of Leadership](#), a service-learning and General Education course, to freshmen in the Emerging Leaders Learning Community. This transformed my life in multiple ways: (1) it transformed my ideas of mentoring and teaching as an active two-way process (2) it motivated me to engage in service with my husband and children, which transformed our lives (3) it set my professional trajectory toward directing the LDCE minor (4) it piqued my passion to investigate *how and why* service develops leaders and leadership, setting the stage for receiving funding that is answering these questions.

As Director of the Leadership Development and Civic Engagement minor, I recruit and advise students, hire adjuncts, and design and teach courses in the minor. Every Fall, I collaborate with the [Office of Residence Life](#) in training their newly hired Resident Assistant cohorts through specially designed sections of PSYC 294. In addition, I am currently [doctoral faculty in the Ph.D. in Industrial Organizational Psychology](#) and [Co-PI on a longitudinal three-year, \\$474,000 National Science](#)

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[Foundation grant investigating the processes through which service-oriented leadership develops.](#)

Engaging in these responsibilities has reinforced my belief in the necessity of service-focused leadership development processes in the development of collaborative and effective leaders.

a. Providing Strategic Direction: Montclair State University Leading Higher Education

As Sir John Templeton noted, "virtuous individuals, specifically, those who serve others, are critical for a healthy functioning society" (Templeton, 2012). When serving others, if things go according to plan, servers are likely to act similarly in the future. However, when things do not go as expected, servers can engage in reflection about flawed processes and failures in connecting and communicating with others (Sessa, 2018). It has recently been noted that such service-focused leadership development is deficient in the government (McDonald et. al. 2020) and that the college years are a critical period for developing abilities to serve and to lead (Komives, 2009). As such, we propose investigating what changes and additions to the minor will best align the learning and experiences within the minor with student preferences, organizational needs, and the [strategic direction of Montclair State University](#). Some universities focus on producing and teaching knowledge; other universities focus on ensuring student experiences that integrate gained knowledge with practical experiences increasing their marketability and improving the world they live in. Through redesigning this minor, Montclair State is uniquely positioned to lead the charge of developing students to lead through serving others in their community. [Noting the recent Inside Higher Ed article about the Leadership Development Program at University of California, Irvine](#), strengthening our relationship with both [Student Development and Campus Life](#) and [Hispanic Initiatives](#) may create opportunities and connections unique to Montclair State University.

b. Aim Overview: Innovative and Inclusive Analysis

Given the LDCE minor is almost two decades old and given Montclair State University's renewed commitment to community engagement, a needs analysis is essential for the modification and expansion of the minor since it prioritizes decision making informed by the students who will complete the minor and the organizations who will employ these students. Through *interviews, surveys and focus groups*, we can investigate student preferences and organizational needs for the curricular and cocurricular offerings in the minor as well as through additional aligned community engagement and leadership programs at Montclair State University. Through this needs analysis, we aim to create a broader, more flexible minor attractive to a greater number of students by adding electives and service experiences [representative of a diverse study body](#).

c. Specific Activities:

We propose conducting the following activities:

1. In order to determine (a) possible benefits of the minor to student career trajectories (b) barriers to completing the minor (c) courses, experiences, and skills that students would like to see become part of the LDCE minor or of other experiences at Montclair State University, and (d) students thoughts about how to best incorporate diverse perspectives of service and leadership, cross sector collaboration and design thinking into the minor ***we will survey, interview, and conduct focus groups of current students and past graduates of the LDCE minor, as well as Bonner Leaders, and Next Generation Service Corp students at Montclair State University .***
2. In order to determine (a) courses, experiences, and skills that would attract new populations of students to the minor (b) barriers to completing the minor (c) modifications that would reduce or eliminate such barriers, ***we will survey, interview, and conduct focus groups on students who are not in the minor and not in service-oriented leadership development programs.***

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3. **We will survey and interview leaders from Student Development and Campus Life and Hispanic Initiatives, organizational leaders and key contributors, and human resource professionals (alumni and others) about the types of leadership experiences, competencies and behaviors they believe are needed to improve the effectiveness of their organization, what types of skills and behaviors current leaders are deficient in and what skills and behavior they would like to see in graduates (future leaders).** We will also ask these leaders and HR professionals about what they believe are the best ways to teach students about cross sector collaboration and design thinking.

d. Projected Timelines and Outcomes:

1. **End of Spring 2024 Semester:** By the end of the Spring 2024 Semester, we will have collected qualitative and quantitative data from (1) current students and past graduates of minor (2) current students not in the minor (2) current students and past graduates of the **Bonner Leadership Program** and **Next Generation Service Corp** program.
2. **End of Fall 2024:** By the end of the Fall 2024 Semester we will have collected qualitative and quantitative data from leaders, individual contributors and HR professionals in a variety of organizations, including Montclair State University's [Student Development and Campus Life](#) and [Hispanic Initiatives](#). In addition, the quantitative and qualitative data from the needs analysis will be analyzed and suggestions for modifying the minor as well as modifying or developing other leadership development programs will be proposed.
3. **End of Spring 2025:** The results from the needs analysis will result in expanded curricular and cocurricular offerings in the minor as well as other student service and development initiatives at Montclair State University. By May 2025 we will have reviewed electives offered in all of the colleges at Montclair State University and reached out to department chairs to ask their interest in being involved in the minor. If the HEAL Fellowship is renewed, then we will also produce new required courses for the minor that integrate the science and the practice of leadership development. For example, we could create a **service-learning course that integrates design thinking and/or one that involves cross-sector collaboration**.

e. Needed Resources:

Release time for Spring 2024 and Spring 2025: to have the time to conduct the needs analysis, review course offerings throughout Montclair State University, and design new curricula.

Support: As part of the project, I will undertake a formal mentoring relationship with Ms. Mélissa Vélez, Student Success Coordinator of Psychology, as she assists me with these projects. Mélissa is a first-generation student studying [Public and Organizational Relations](#). She frequently discusses the transformative power that my [PSYC 633 \(Leadership: Theory and Development\)](#) course had on her life, both personally and professionally. We will meet regularly (weekly) as part of this mentoring relationship in order to facilitate a two-way process of development. These projects will be completed outside of her work duties, as she is exploring independent study or internship options in her MA program. A Curriculum Specialist and an Instructional Specialist will be ideal for this project. We will also invite both IO Psychology as well as [Sociology graduate faculty and students](#) to partner with us in the data collection process.

References

[A complete list of references can be found in this Google Document.](#)

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