Collegiate recreation and intercollegiate athletics have an impact on individual, group, and community development of students who are participants, employees, and athletes and learn leadership within these environments. This chapter explores and applies leadership frameworks in recreation and athletics.

Connecting Collegiate Recreation and Athletics to Leadership

Cara W. McFadden, Donald A. Stenta

Recreation and athletics programs are developmentally powerful environments holistically engaging students in challenging situations. These focused experiences provide opportunities for intentional development of effective individual and team leadership that supports institutional learning goals. Developmentally based programs and interventions emerge when higher education professionals proactively design a leadership development curriculum that meets students where they are and takes them to new stages that facilitate their growth and development. This chapter discusses a variety of leadership models and perspectives that professionals could choose to infuse in their collegiate recreation and athletic environments for the purpose of developing student leadership capacity.

Collegiate recreation programs emerged following the lead of the Ohio State University and the University of Michigan. Both institutions created intramural programs in 1913, spawning the structure for recreation and intramural programs today. Michigan then opened the nation’s first intramural sports building in 1928 and more universities followed suit. In 1950, due to the lack of integrated sport activity, the National Intramural Association (NIA) was founded at Dillard University. The NIA was designed to facilitate intramural activities for students of color at predominantly White institutions and students enrolled at historically Black colleges and universities. The NIA evolved to become NIRSA, initially called the National Intramural and Recreational Sports Association, but now known as NIRSA: Leaders in Collegiate Recreation (NIRSA, n.d.). Although most recreation programs were founded as an aspect of a college or university athletic department, the vast majority of recreation programs report through a student...
affairs/life unit today. Other reporting lines include athletic departments, academic colleges/schools, or business/auxiliary units. Collegiate recreation programs today offer a wide range of activities in various facility types and styles. Most collegiate recreation departments include adaptive or inclusive programs, adventure/outdoor pursuits activities, aquatics, camps and community programs, competitive sports (intramural and sport clubs), group exercise or fitness programs, instructional and safety lessons, and personal training. Departments also include administrative support areas like advancement, assessment, business sponsorship, facilities management and development, marketing and creative services, membership sales and services, and student and staff training and development.

Intercollegiate athletics have been a focus on college and university campuses since the mid-1840s, with structures like local and national governing bodies developing over 60 years later (Smith, 2009). The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) was founded in 1906 and serves as the lead entity in shaping and developing national policy for athletics. Athletic departments on college and university campuses are led by an administrator typically called an athletic director, and are very complex organizations that include associate or assistant athletic directors (who typically serve as administrators for a large number of sports and supervise the coaching staff) and staff who are focused in business services, communications, facility development, fundraising and development, human resources, nutrition and high performance training, student-athlete development and academic support, and ticketing and customer service.

Collegiate recreation and intercollegiate athletic environments vary based on institutional size, organizational structures, societal expectations, and the university mission. Understanding the complexity of leadership development in these environments is imperative, as “successful collegiate leadership programs are embedded in and aligned with the following four contextual layers: higher education’s purpose, institutional mission, administrative support, and collaborative environment. Each of these layers contributes to or detracts from desired student learning outcomes” (Osteen & Coburn, 2012, p. 5).

Although recreation and athletics have seemingly similar goals in developing students and supporting athletes and physical activity, the efforts that exist on college campus today are not typically aligned. There is great potential, however, in exploring leadership development in the context of physical activity, sport, and recreation.

Rapid local and global change requires institutions of higher education to increase leadership development programs within their select university environment. Roberts (2007) identifies leadership development as a priority and expresses that leadership learning is the primary purpose of higher education. Collegiate recreation and intercollegiate athletic programs typically engage in participant, employee, and athletic training development.
where the learning is focused on skill development based on the work of the employee or the skill level of the athlete's performance.

This lack of clarity is evident in the collegiate recreation and intercollegiate athletics literature. Although uses of conceptual models are limited, this does not mean that leadership perspectives are not being used. We sought to identify current efforts and share these so more professionals in collegiate recreation and intercollegiate athletic environments will have resources to guide their practice. This chapter explores student leadership development through the use of the Social Change Model of Leadership Development (SCM; HERI, 1996; Komives & Wagner, 2009) as a foundation for developing leadership capacity as well as comparing the model to the Relational Leadership Model (RLM; Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2013) and the Leadership Challenge (Kouzes & Posner, 2006).

Resources to Support Practitioners

Reviewing the literature related to leadership development can be overwhelming to professionals who may not have the time to dedicate to the study of leadership. There are resources available to practitioners, for example, *The Handbook for Student Leadership Development* (Komives, Dugan, Owen, Slack, & Wagner, 2011) and *The Student Leadership Competencies Guidebook* (Seemiller, 2013). Both provide resources for practitioners and express the responsibility for practitioners to apply critical thought processes to leadership education and development.

The National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs (NCLP) publication titled *Collegiate Recreational Sports and Student Leadership Development* (Blumenthal, 2010) includes an issue with emphasis on leadership through intercollegiate, intramural, and recreational athletics. The issue highlights the role of collegiate recreation leadership development, the need for athletic leadership development, and intramural sports captains’ leadership capacity, and it provides updates regarding sport and leadership development (Blumenthal, 2010).

Leadership Development Models

Selecting a model or perspective provides support for applying theory to practice.

Too often practitioners think only of programming when they ponder ways to use theory in practice. While programming is important, theory is also extremely helpful when advising or counseling students, advising student organizations, designing classroom instruction and training initiatives, and formulating policy. (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p. 369)

Intentionally using one of the leadership perspectives mentioned throughout this issue provides a foundation for an integrated leadership approach.
that can be applied in the collegiate recreation or athletics environment to enhance the development of student leadership capacity.

**Social Change Model as a Foundation.** Over 20 years ago, the Social Change Model of Leadership Development (SCM) was developed by leadership educators through a grant from the Dwight D. Eisenhower Leadership Development Program of the U.S. Department of Education. University educators use the SCM to describe the values that are necessary for leaders to develop as an individual, within a group, or as part of a community (HERI, 1996; Komives & Wagner, 2009). A leadership development model like this is a useful tool to define concepts that can be applied in leadership programs and activities. The SCM approaches leadership as “a purposeful, collaborative, values-based process that results in positive social change” (Komives & Wagner, 2009, p. xii).

Overall, the model’s focus is to advocate for social responsibility and the common good. To accomplish this, the model is composed of seven core values that interact with individual, group, and community stages, with the goal being to engage others in collaborative work (Dugan, 2006). (See Table 1.1.)

An eighth value, focused on change, brings together all seven values to affect change (see Figure 1.1). Although each set of values influences the others as represented in the arrows, research shows that leadership development occurs with the individual first, then in the group context, which in turns inform community development and change (Dugan, Bohle, Woelker, & Cooney, 2014).

Implementing this model is a challenge because university environments are complex and sometimes difficult to navigate. For example, students at community colleges and institutions with a large commuter base tend to have significant diversity of student enrollment type, including international students, first-generation students, and adult students, who, along with traditional aged college students, bring diverse experiences into the university environment. Students come to the university with a complexity of multiple identities and grow and change during their time at the institution.

The use of models such as the SCM and other leadership perspectives that follow provide resources for practitioners to better understand these complexities. These models provide faculty, staff, and students with tools to create and support initiatives in and out of the classroom that enhance the development of students’ leadership capacity.

**Relational Leadership Model.** The Relational Leadership Model (RLM) is a model that can be considered in the collegiate recreation or intercollegiate athletics context. This model, developed by Susan Komives, Nance Lucas, and Tim McMahon (2013), essentially reframes leadership as a “relational and ethical process of people together attempting to accomplish positive change” (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2007, p. 14). The RLM emphasizes the elements of being purposeful, inclusive, empowering,
Table 1.1 The Critical Values of the Social Change Model

**Individual Values**

**Consciousness of Self**
- Being aware of the beliefs, values, attitudes, and emotions that motivate you to take action. Being mindful or aware of your current emotional state, behavior, and perceptual lenses.

**Congruence**
- Acting in ways that are consistent with your values and beliefs. Thinking, feeling, and behaving with consistency, genuineness, authenticity, and honesty toward others.

**Commitment**
- Having significant investment in an idea or person, both in terms of intensity and duration. Having the energy to serve the group and its goals. Commitment originates from within, but others can create an environment that supports an individual’s passions.

**Group Values**

**Collaboration**
- Working with others in a common effort, sharing responsibility, authority, and accountability. Multiplying group effectiveness by capitalizing on various perspectives and talents and on the power of diversity to generate creative solutions and actions.

**Common Purpose**
- Having shared aims and values. Involving others in building a group’s vision and purpose.

**Controversy With Civility**
- Recognizing the fundamental realities of any creative effort: (1) that differences in viewpoint are inevitable, and (2) that such differences must be aired openly but with civility.

**Community Values**

**Citizenship**
- Believing in a process whereby an individual or a group becomes responsibly connected to the community and society through some activity. Recognizing that members of communities are not independent but interdependent. Recognizing individuals and groups have responsibility for the welfare of others.

Because it is a key assumption of the SCM that the ultimate goal of leadership is positive social change, “change” is considered to be at the “hub” of the SCM.

**Change**
- Believing in the importance of making a better world and a better society for oneself and others. Believing that individuals, groups, and communities have the ability to work together to make that change.

ethical, and process oriented. Because the model is considered to be an aspirational model (Haber, 2008), leaders and organizations can consistently apply aspects of the model in a continuing quest for improvement and excellence. The most important aspect of the model is the focus on values and relationships that emerge from a values-driven approach to leadership.

This definition and the elements of the model intentionally bring together people who are working with one another toward a common journey. But it is the inclusion of three key aspects that serves as a way to think differently about leadership in recreation or athletics contexts: relationships, ethics, and change.

These recreation or athletic contexts almost always celebrate wins in terms of one team dominating another team for a championship or for a series of accomplishments where there are winners and losers. The competitive environment appears only to link to traditional models of leadership, and coaches, athletes, administrators, and fans alike might have a narrow view of what leadership means in these contexts. So it might seem inconsistent to enter into an exploration about leadership development with a focus on relationships. But there is plenty of room to discuss a focus on
relationships in competitive and team environments. If a more relational environment could be developed, and if competitive sport also included regular reflections about the relational process of people coming together, professionals in these areas could make significant differences in developing students as leaders. This can happen while also honoring the competitive process, respecting talent and effort, and providing challenges for personal and group mastery and excellence.

Programs that operate from a “win at all costs” mentality can struggle in infusing ethical behavior for student-athletes and participants in collegiate recreation programs. Athletes and fans alike can benefit from links to ethical standards in competitions. Sportsmanship programs across the country seek to encourage deep fan commitment and engagement, while at the same time putting the athletic challenge into perspective: that the athletes are students first, and the sport offering can lead to productive connections to community pride that should result in contributions to the common good (Reid, 2010). However, these connections are not made easily and without interventions. High school and college recreation and athletic administrators ought to be structuring sportsmanship activities that can lead to enhancing and improving the common good.

In addition, ethical behaviors can be discussed in student staff training programs, outdoor adventure settings, or athlete development meetings, but what about actively discussing these issues in competitive environments? How often does this happen? When looking at continuing challenges with NCAA infractions or with university leadership challenges, one wonders how young people can find role models to lead the path regarding these behaviors. This role modeling needs to occur in sharp and positive ways, with coaches and staff structuring more focused behaviors for athletes. Lack of positive role modeling could lead older students to develop poor habits and traditions that lead to hazing and unethical and/or illegal practices.

Although a focus on relationships and on ethical processes is an important aspect of the RLM, it is perhaps the intentional connection to “positive change” that sets the stage for taking leadership concepts to the next level. Positive change in recreation and sports can exist when athletes are approached with a full development plan, where needs inside and outside of the classroom and on and off of play venues are honored. Positive change in recreation and sports can occur when traditional methods of leading groups are used so that coaches can direct plays and practice schedules, but that team captains can also be engaged so that peer involvement can facilitate learning. Positive change in recreation and sports can occur when fans, staff, and administrators understand the impact that can be made in a community when a proper focus is placed on health and well-being, community pride and engagement, and academic achievements and graduation rates (Komives et al., 2013). Athletes who shun responsibilities to serve as role models, who do not think of their place in their communities,
Table 1.2 Relational Leadership Model Applied to Recreation and Athletics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RLM Element</th>
<th>Application to Recreation and Athletics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purposeful</td>
<td>Intentionally develop all athletes, participants, and student employees into leaders; create intentional training programs; align theory and published research findings to program development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive</td>
<td>Encourage diverse viewpoints; teach and train about managing conflicts in a positive manner; facilitate challenge by choice principles in adventure programming; develop curriculum for leading sociocultural conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering</td>
<td>Seek to understand individual differences; provide information needed for the full participation of individuals; expect upper-class students to be role models; facilitate mentorship programming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical</td>
<td>Apply rules of play consistently; practice positive sportsmanship; do not cheat; credit individuals with their useful ideas and contributions; uphold high personal ethical standards; uphold standards and rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process oriented</td>
<td>Build community; debrief events and activities; conduct postgame/postexperience reflection activities and opportunities; give all participants opportunities for involvement and feedback; offer structured feedback sessions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and who lack a structured vision for giving back to their communities miss incredibly important opportunities to grow a generation of interested, engaged, and committed citizens. This potential positive change has been absent for too long and can be developed with high school and college students.

Students who are involved in the leadership process must truly understand themselves before they can effectively work with others to influence change within their communities (e.g., collegiate recreation, athletics, or the university as a whole). This occurs by knowing (knowledgeable), being (aware of self and others), and doing (to act). Overall, the goal must be purposeful and the student must have a commitment to the activity (Komives et al., 2013). Table 1.2 illustrates how elements of the model apply in recreation and athletics settings.

Leadership Challenge. In the late 1980s, Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner wished to understand what leadership behaviors the best leaders engaged in during their regular work. Through a series of surveys and focus groups, hundreds of tasks and observable practices were revealed and were grouped into five leadership “practices.” The five practices include challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, modeling the way, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 1987).
Table 1.3 The Five Practices and Ten Commitments of Leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Commitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model the Way</td>
<td>1. Clarify values by finding your voice and affirming shared ideals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Set the example by aligning actions with shared values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspire a Shared Vision</td>
<td>3. Envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge the Process</td>
<td>5. Search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and by looking outward for innovative ways to improve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enable Others to Act</td>
<td>7. Foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Strengthen others by increasing self-determination and developing competence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage the Heart</td>
<td>9. Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


An assessment called the Leadership Practices Inventory (Kouzes & Posner, 1987) was developed to provide feedback about leadership styles. This assessment grew from research with managers in private sector organizations, whereas follow-up studies were conducted with educational institutions including student organizations through a student version of the Leadership Practices Inventory (Kouzes & Posner, 2006).

The most significant development with this framework is the inclusive tone of the five leadership practices. Prior leadership assessments like the Strategic Leadership Style Instrument (Reagan, 1993) offered feedback across eight different leadership styles, where at least three were considered negative leadership styles. The Leadership Challenge (see Table 1.3) encourages leaders to think about how to incorporate all five practices in their experiences and posits that all five practices should be represented for organizational success. The outcome of this approach is a movement toward more positive, inclusive, and asset-based considerations about one’s leadership style. The more positive tone in this model, where all five practices contribute equally and in tandem with one another, can dispel a “this is right; that is wrong” approach in understanding leadership. The inclusive nature of this model allows leaders with preferences for different practices to prosper in equal ways.
Environment Changes

With the constant interconnections between students, institutions, and society, it is imperative that as advocates for fostering student leadership capacity we critically think about college students and their development within campus learning environments. The developmental ecology model developed by Renn and Arnold (2003) describes the interactions students have with the campus environment and their peers. The researchers suggest that the ecology model could be useful for creating intentional interventions to promote the development of college students (Renn & Arnold, 2003). Studying recreation and athletic environments could assist in better applying this understanding.

Recreation. The mission statement of collegiate recreation departments drives the purpose and goals for the organization. Typically these settings are influenced by the university mission and goals set to support lifelong learning and educational experiences. Departments are multifaceted in regard to the components (e.g., facilities, peers, sport club activity, professional staff, customers) that contribute to the environment. The placement of these departments within the university also guides the mission; some departments are found in the division of student affairs or athletics. One of the most prevalent factors that describe the purpose of collegiate recreation on most campuses is a holistic approach, where there is focus on physical, mental, and emotional development (Franklin & Hardin, 2008).

Athletics. There are over 460,000 intercollegiate student-athletes who compete in 23 sports every year. In addition, eight out of ten student-athletes will obtain a bachelor’s degree and more than 30 percent will earn a postgraduate degree (NCAA, n.d.). The intercollegiate athletic environment is composed of physical (athletic facilities, university facilities), social (housing, class group projects, family members, teammates), and cognitive experiences (in and out of class). Most of the literature surrounding intercollegiate athletics highlights the intense time commitment student-athletes contribute to being an athlete and how it affects their academic success (Miller & Kerr, 2003, Nite, 2012). Intercollegiate athletes are often marked as “at-risk” students especially during the first-year experience when students are transitioning from high school to college (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005). In Chapter 4, there is further discussion focused specifically on the transition of the student-athlete from high school to college.

Environmental scans in collegiate recreation and intercollegiate athletics can offer proper perspective about creating institutional priorities, professional association goals, and staff and student development activities. For over a century, most collegiate recreation programs have operated inwardly in developing recreation programming that responds to student needs and has been driven by participant satisfaction surveys and feedback. Facilities have expanded in order to support additional program offerings. Once based on intuition for the past 20 years or so, assessment activities have been
grounded in empirical research and are now aligned to a student learning agenda. This needs to continue. Collegiate recreation programs must develop a consolidated agenda that examines how participation in recreation activities can have a positive impact on student academic performance and other learning and developmental outcomes. Measurement should be in line with how academic partners prioritize the student learning agenda. If a college or university is focused on links to student academic success by measuring grade point averages (GPAs), then the collegiate recreation program and athletic accomplishment must also measure engagement and links to student GPAs.

**Balance of Challenge and Support.** Finding the right balance between challenge and support for students’ leadership development in these environments is vital. Sanford (1966) suggests students must be prepared and in a state of readiness before challenge is introduced. Students are ready based on internal maturation or environmental factors. Once the student is ready, challenge can be introduced; however, the student can tolerate the challenge based on the amount of support that is available (Evans et al., 2010). If there is not the right balance between challenge and support, the opportunity to develop leadership capacity could be lost.

Using the Social Change Model and other perspectives in comparison can assist in creating a supportive environment with intentional planning for a productive setting where students develop their leadership capacity in a productive manner. Creating this balance is important because students find themselves at differing stages within their development during their time in college.

Students can perceive their world and interpret experiences in two different ways, “(1) reinterpret the experience in ways that allow them to maintain their current lens or (2) change to a new lens that better explains the new experience,” (Wagner, 2011, p. 86). As students progress through the second way of interpreting their world, Wagner (2011) states that students experience a period of disequilibrium due to the transition between developmental stages. This idea of disequilibrium lends students to change their way of thinking and is referred to as readiness. Students thrive in environments and exhibit readiness when there are meaningful levels of challenge and support (Wagner, 2011).

Collegiate recreation and athletic environments that create such a balance provide students with the opportunity to manage their current stage of development with support and progress to the next stage of development by receiving accurate levels of challenge. For example, intramural officials receive significant amounts of training and support during official’s development programs. They are equipped with rulebooks, policy details, historical perspective, hand motions and style guidelines, and a uniform to do their jobs. However, during an athletic contest, they—and they alone—must blow the whistle, stop play, and make the call.
Conclusion

Understanding the practical use of leadership development frameworks is key for the success of building college student leadership capacity. Dugan and Komives (2010) suggest there is a critical juncture between research and practice that embrace theory and conceptual frameworks regarding the development of student leadership capacity that is grounded in social responsibility.

Connecting collegiate recreation and athletics to the models or perspectives explained in this chapter are complex and multifaceted. With the varying environments in recreation and athletics, there are myriad opportunities to develop student leaders by means of applying leadership developmental models. The use of a framework or model will be dependent upon the environment and context it is being used. Our hopes are that the following chapters provide deeper understanding and examples of how to integrate one or multiple frameworks in a variety of collegiate recreation and athletic environments. Professional staff serve as advisors, mentors, and supervisors, so these interactions with students are integral in the development and learning of student leadership capacity. Staff should use the suggested models and frameworks to form the leadership capacity of participants, student-athletes, and students employed in these unique environments.

References


Cara W. McFadden is an assistant professor in Sport and Event Management in the School of Communications at Elon University.

Donald A. Stenta is the director of student life recreational sports and a lecturer with the John Glenn College of Public Affairs at the Ohio State University.