Servant Leadership in a Baccalaureate Nursing Program: A Case Study
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Background and Literature Review
- Benefits of leadership skills for entry level nurses
  - Teamwork
  - Increased care coordination
  - Higher care quality
  - Improved outcomes
  (Anderson, 2016; Fahlberg & Toomey, 2016)
- Greenleaf’s (1977) Servant Leadership Theory mirrors nursing leadership skills
  - Valuing people
  - Service to others
  - Building community
  - Collaborative decision making
  (Focht & Ponion, 2015; O’Brien, 2011; van Dierendonck, 2011)
- Literature primarily focused on defining theory (van Dierendonck, 2011)
- Gaps identified in the literature
  - Demonstration of servant leadership in nursing practice (Anderson, 2016)
  - Implementation into nursing education (O’Brien, 2011)

Methods

Data Sources
To capture the complexity of leadership development in a baccalaureate nursing program, this study involved collection of several forms of evidence in multiple phases.

Document data
- Nursing program’s
  - Website
  - Student handbook
  - Course catalog
  - Program description
  - Relevant course syllabi
- Full-time faculty semi-structured interviews (n=3)

Human participant data
- Nursing program
  - Recent alumni surveys (n=15)

Participants
Survey Participants
- Identified through the college’s alumni office
- Program alumni, graduated within the last two years (i.e. 2015 and 2016 graduates)

Interview Participants
- Recruited through purposive sampling using professional contacts
- Full-time baccalaureate nursing program faculty for at least one year

Data Collection
- Review of publicly accessible documents
- IRB approvals obtained
- Emailed invitations to alumni with an electronic survey link. The survey was open for two weeks and took participants two to 12 minutes to complete.
- One member of the research team recruited and conducted the semi-structured faculty interviews; interviews were audio-recorded and took 30-45 minutes; relevant course syllabi were also requested from interview participants for review

Results
After comprehensive data analysis, all data sources revealed eight themes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Data Example</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service to others</td>
<td>“There’s a huge emphasis on service. We have a Service Day where we cancel classes...that’s just the culture of this college.” (faculty interview)</td>
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<td>Holistic care</td>
<td>100% felt “holistic approach to work” was incorporated in the nursing program (alumni survey)</td>
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<td>Building community</td>
<td>Students can choose “to focus on the care of patient groups in a rural African community” in an international nursing opportunity (nursing program website)</td>
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<td>Compassionate care</td>
<td>“We bring [compassion, care] right at the foundational level, explaining it as part of the nursing metaparadigm, what does, care compassion mean?” (faculty interview)</td>
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<td>Humility</td>
<td>“I liked how...the nursing program taught us how to be servant leaders without being push-overs, humility and strength at the same time” (alumni survey)</td>
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<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>“One of the things we’re doing that I think is helpful is developing the relationship between the seniors and sophomores...the seniors come alongside to encourage the sophomores” (faculty interview)</td>
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<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>The nursing history project “introduces the student to the professional nurse’s roles and functions” (historical and conceptual basis of nursing syllabus)</td>
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Discussion

The empirically-found themes match key principles and characteristics of Greenleaf’s Servant Leadership Theory and, thus, supported study propositions.
- Rival theories considered
  - Christian paradigm
  - Transformational Leadership Theory
- Rival theories complimentary to servant leadership as critical to the nursing program.
- Future research could include multiple case, intervention, or longitudinal studies.

Conclusion

- Study propositions were supported by data and empirically-found themes.
- The results of this study provide insight into the complex process of incorporating servant leadership development in entry-level, specifically baccalaureate, nursing programs.
- As all nurses are leaders every day, it is important to understand how to incorporate leadership development into nursing programs.

Abstract & references available upon request