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*Committed to Serve...Learning to Lead*



Gwynedd Mercy  
University

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## **Introduction**

The Gwynedd Mercy University Griffin Student Leadership Institute (GSLI) is committed to the development of graduates who will be effective leaders who are passionate toward those in need, and who are compelled to act within the spirit of social responsibility. The Institute is celebrating its fifth year of successful leadership education and training, with more than 125 students completing one or more tiers of the program.

The Exceptional Leaders program is intended to bring one's University leadership experience into the context of one's career and the needs of society. Exceptional Leaders explore issues connected to both Service and Social Responsibility as they meet with a professional leader in their chosen field.

In the fall of 2016, the third cohort of Exceptional Leaders was matched with an external mentor in their chosen field who also had a connection to the Mercy Mission. Students were also matched with an internal mentor who was a faculty or staff member here at GMercyU. Each student leader met with both mentors to share conversations about leadership as it related to one's professional and personal life. Their stories have been captured within these pages. We thank them for sharing their experience, their wisdom and their own leadership journeys. We hope that you, the reader both enjoy and learn from the words of our GSLI Exceptional Leaders.

**Carol A. Gruber, Ph.D.**  
**Dean of Students**  
**April, 2017**

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## Connecting My Web

*Cierra Adkins*



*“My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive; and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style.”*

- Maya Angelou

When I think about my leadership journey, I am reminded of a spider building a web. The first thing she has to do is jump from one wall to another. Then she has to turn around and take another scary jump. Only after many such jumps can she turn around and actually see the strong and beautiful thing she has created.

When I was in first grade, my parents were told that I was potentially deaf and needed a hearing aid because I had trouble comprehending information, that the probability of a tumor was huge, and that I would never be able to read higher than a fifth grade level. In order for me to go to school and learn what other kids my age were learning, I had to go to a classroom called the “resource room.” Ms. Comey, the teacher assigned to the room, held my parents’ hands and told them that she would help me through this to prove them wrong. She wanted me to prove that I did not have any of those disabilities. By fifth grade, and with the help of Ms. Comey, I was qualified to test out of the resource room and to go to class with my friends. I had taken the first leap, connected the first line of my web with much pride and happiness. However, I decided *not* to test out because she challenged me more once she saw continuous progress in my behalf. Now that I am a 21 year-old woman at Gwynedd Mercy University (GMercyU), Ms. Comey is my definition of a leader. She fought for me, and with me, to complete my eight years of grade school. She knew her cause, saw the vision, and followed her beliefs. Because of Ms. Comey’s leadership and dedication, I was able to stand in front of my peers at graduation and read a speech prepared for my track and field coach. Once graduation was over, a second line of my web was connected, but I was still too young to understand what this web was and where I was going with it.

A leader is born a leader. God brought humans on earth with a special purpose, but it is the humans’ responsibility to take that leap of faith and determine what purpose they serve and how to become better. For years, I assumed that I was incapable of being a great leader. However, as I grew I became wiser. I started to learn about myself: my strengths and my weaknesses, my hopes and dreams, and my successes and failures. Determining who I was helped me to better myself, which gave me the motivation to wake up and excel every day. There is a speaker named John Maxwell who I learned from, who described that there are five different levels of leadership. Level one is entitled the “position level” which means people follow you because they have to. This does not make you a leader; in fact, the people in an organization or job will give you the least amount of energy because you only care for the title and not the roles that make someone a good leader. Most natural born leaders will skip this first level and go straight to the second level which is called the “permission level.” This level is about building relationships with the people around you. The people you are surrounded by will follow you because they want to. I learned that this indicated the three following things:

1. You are a good listener;
2. You observe the ones that are around you, and
3. They are learning from you.

I learned that building trust and a strong relationship with people is the foundation of a great leader. In my two years of being a Resident Assistant (RA) on campus, I take forth this level of leadership to my residents. For both years, I had residents that I did not know the first time we met, but for the entire time, I made sure I gave them my attention to build trust.

The third level is considered the “production level” which describes having momentum. Being involved in my track and field team at GMercyU, I make sure I show my momentum at practice because the end results in a competition with the team is the best part of the sport. Without a certain goal, there is no momentum in your

work. Now level four is “people development” which is determined not by a leader’s power, but by their ability to help empower others. This is more like team building and helping a group become as one. My RA staff has to work together to keep a positive atmosphere and good energy throughout the residence halls. The fifth and final level is called “pinnacle level” which is by far the hardest because there are many that do not want to go for a big leadership position simply because it can be too much work for them. However, what I learned was, I am a different type of leader to different people.

I also realized that my awareness of different people’s leadership can change. For example, within one meeting with my external mentor, Robert Alston, and internal mentor, Tricia Brown O’Hara, my understanding of their leadership styles shifted through all five levels. During my first meeting with Robert Alston, we discovered many ways that I could be successful in the criminal justice field. It was a pleasure to be invited to the home of Robert and his wife for dinner. Robert managed to teach me so much in a short amount of time. Our first discussion was the reading “Honest Self- Understanding,” which reflects on being aware of your own strengths and limitations. Becoming aware of your personal understanding of your strengths and limitations will build better relationships with those who surround you. As author and founder of the American Leadership Forum Joe Jaworski says, “Before you can lead others, before you can help others, you have to discover yourself” (“Emotionally Intelligent Leadership,” pg. 35).

One of the most difficult questions I was asked by Robert was, “what are your strengths and weaknesses as a leader?” I personally was never a huge advocate of talking about myself. At this moment I realized I needed to get out of my comfort zone and really think about who I was as a leader. So I finally figured it out and came up with a few answers stating, “my strengths are being organized, great listening skills, and building a community, while my weaknesses are not speaking up, letting things go, and a not being assertive.” While I finally gave those answers, I realized it was not in depth as I thought they should be. As the conversation continued, we followed through to talk about my future goals as a criminal justice major. I stated that my goal was a “wild dream.” My wild dream is changing the prison system as a whole, reducing recidivism rates, and building a foundation inside and outside of the prison to get inmates the correct education and training for a job for a new life. The people that gave me the momentum to go forward with this dream are my parents. They always challenged me and gave me the courage to follow my dreams and to make a change. This was not about proving others wrong, but about proving myself wrong. There are many people that are within the prison system that come out and want a new life for themselves. However, this new life is very slim to none because of the title they carry around as being a former inmate. With this label, the only opportunities waiting for them are the same exact opportunities that led them to the prison system the first time. As Ms. Comey helped me get the label of being “stupid” off my head in grade school, I want to be the leader to help get the labels out of the heads of those who are looking for change.

Describing my goal as a “wild dream” showed some lack of confidence I had with my idea. However, I never felt more pleased to see the happiness on Mr. & Mrs. Alston’s faces. They told me to not call this dream “wild” because it is great and so, they expanded my vision with different programs that could help with supporting my action plan and different people I could get in touch with. Building my dream with people who are involved in the same field with much more knowledge was a moment I wish to rewind back to. This was definitely my step of getting out of my comfort zone. I did not talk about my dream often because I felt it was too farfetched and people would have doubt about it. But, I was comfortable with telling them something that meant so much to me. As we continued on with this topic, the last point of the reading was “learn to hear the positive and the

negative.” I was already great at taking criticism into consideration of making myself better. Robert states that I need to understand myself further than I do now, and that I am already a leader due to being on the track and field team and being a Resident Assistant. My strengths he witnessed were being very articulate, ambitious, confident, and enjoyable. The negatives that I took into consideration were me being too nice a person to make an eager pitch, and the fact that I am young. He claimed that being young can be a curse and a blessing: too young to connect with people and to get this moving immediately, but young enough to get this idea out to people to start thinking of some changes.

There are some people in this world who think leaders have to be “perfect” in any leadership role. As a human being, no one is perfect and having a title does not make a person “perfect.” So, what makes an ideal leader? When being asked to define an ideal leader, the qualities that may be important are intelligence, determination, and readiness. Although these qualities are good to have, I believe the answer is much deeper than that. Certain talents and skills within a person that make someone a good leader may not come out through their educational experience. Many are born with natural talents and some may not discover them quickly. My answer to the question *what makes an ideal leader* is this: someone who shows empathy, someone who is not scared to fail, and someone who follows their purpose. No leader is perfect, but each hour, day, and year, those types of skills are evolving.

GMercyU has helped me experience mercy. I always believed it was God opening doors for me to go through and see what I can learn. During my freshman year, I joined the track and field team as a way of becoming involved in school. That also gave me the opportunity to show my leadership skills, both on and off the field. During that time, I kept going through the doors that God let me leap through but I still did not understand why I was going so many different directions with this web flowing behind me. Like in grade school, I was challenged to go further. I became involved in the Student-Athlete Advisory Council (SAAC), giving me a chance to lead among my peers. Next, being a RA in Alexandria Hall helped me evolve as a person. Becoming an RA was a way to build a community from a variety of personalities and opinions, by far the hardest challenge of my college career. As a RA I learned social skills, integrity, organization, networking, and time management—all of which help me to lead on a daily basis. I was starting to understand why I jump from wall to wall but I had not yet turned around to capture the art I was making.

Maya Angelou once stated “my mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive, and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style.” There is a reason that I was put on Earth and I believe it is to be a leader. Finally, I am extremely honored to be a part of something special such as the Griffin Student Leadership Institute’s Exceptional Leadership Program (GSLI). I learned everything I can to reach my full potential as a leader from Robert and Tricia. This program is about self-reflection and both mentors of mine pulled out so much good in me that I was not aware of.

I understand now why I have been going from wall to wall my whole life. I finally turned around to see such an amazing web I built, through a lifelong process of trying, sometimes failing, but finally conquering. Leaping from my first “wall” meant stepping through the door that God opened, taking that leap of faith. However, there was no promise of it being easy. Once I landed on the far wall, I knew the success of that experience. But like a spider spinning a web, I was lost in the moment and did not always know where I was going. When my college web is completed—on May 13, 2017—I can officially use my web to start catching the important information and gathering the people I need to help build my future dream. And yet I know that this journey through GMercyU was only the beginning stage, and I still have a long way to go!

## **My Purple Crayon**

*Natalee Danko*



*“To be a good citizen is to work for positive change on behalf of others and the community.”*

– HERI

Ever since I was a child, I have always aspired to be a doctor. I distinctly remember filling out an “I want to be a \_\_\_\_\_ when I grow up” notecard that would eventually be put up on the bulletin board along with every other kindergartener’s notecard. At a young age, I knew I wanted to challenge myself. I yearned to make an impact in the world. I craved to be the best version of myself possible. Of course, I would not have been able to phrase it into those exact words at the mere age of five. Nonetheless, I had a plan for my future. I had a direction on how I was going to fulfill these unrested desires. With this in mind, I proudly filled out “I want to be a doctor when I grow up” in purple crayon upper-case print.

For the next thirteen years I feverishly worked towards this goal of becoming a physician. I studied hard, skipped two grade levels in math, was president of the service club at my high school, was a Girl Scout the entire time I was in elementary, middle, and high school, and by the end of my senior year I graduated top ten of my class. I was determined to get into an excellent biology program that would prepare me for medical school. With tremendous excitement and the tenacity to immerse myself in every ounce of knowledge Gwynedd Mercy University had to offer that would benefit my journey to medical school, I started my thrilling voyage in college. Much to my dismay, I hit a roadblock within the first month of college: I loved biology. I had a newfound love and appreciation for a subject that I never had before that rooted from my general biology lecture and lab. I knew that I no longer wished to pursue my career as a doctor and wanted to do something in the biology field.

The issue that comes with this sudden change of aspirations is that I had no idea what specifically I want to do in this area. The two research assistant positions I did the past two summers have pointed me in the direction of research, but there are so many divisions of research that it leaves a broad area of uncertainty of what my future holds. As someone who always has a plan and always strives to get it done as efficiently as possible, this undetermined path I had laid out before me stressed me out. I thought that when I applied for the GSLI exceptional leaders program that I would be paired with mentors that would tell me what path I should take. I wanted someone to give me a definite direction to work. I was so unsure of if I should go to graduate school after my bachelor’s. I was unsure of going into the workforce after college. I was unsure of what area of biology to do research. I wanted answers.

Unfortunately, that is not how it works. These mentors are meant to guide me as I made these decisions about my future; they cannot make these decisions for me. I learned that no matter how much I plan for the future, the plans are always going to change and I have to keep an open mind to the ever-changing line of doors of opportunity that are constantly opening and closing. I need to take advantage of the available possibilities, and I will have to wait and see where life takes me.

One of the wonderful people who helped me get to this realization is my external mentor, Jessica Rufe. She is a Gwynedd Mercy University alumna who, like me, was a biology major with minors in chemistry and psychology. She is currently an Operations Manager in Laboratory Sciences at KellyOCG. As she is in the field I want to go into, I looked for her opinion on the next step in my career. However, she explained that the only person who has a say in my future is me. One of the other conversations I had with her was about the privileges we have. There is a privilege quiz on Buzzfeed that Jess and I took, and I was told that I live with 64 out of 100 points of privilege. On this quiz were many points of privilege that I had never thought about; some examples are: never having to rely on public transportation, having unpaid internships, considering myself to be physically attractive, never having to go to bed hungry, being comfortable with the gender I was born in, and having never considered suicide. Taking this quiz and having this discussion gave me a new perspective and appreciation for the life I have been given and also a new perspective on the struggles that everyday people face.

Some of the first few texts Jess and I read and discussed had messages that were already familiar. “Honest Self-Understanding” is about becoming more aware of your strengths and limitations. It talks about knowing yourself, seeking feedback from others, and learning to hear the positives and the negatives. I am a firm

believer in continuous self-improvement, and this article of text cemented this idea I had of self-reflection, taking advantage of my strengths, and accepting my flaws while simultaneously trying to improve them to grow as a person. The second text is a poem called “Fall in Love” which discusses finding your “love.” This love is used with the same meaning as your passion or drive. The poem wants the readers to find something that is going to wake you up in the morning and gives you joy and gratitude. Another mentor in the GSLI program, Christine Eberle, said she thinks the intent of the author was to convey a message that “the best way to set our rudder for life is to have our imagination seized by a passion that inspires us.” What I take away from this is that I must find a job that utilizes my passion and inspires an excitement for another day of work.

My internal mentor, William Kershner, also read the same texts and watched the same videos as Jess and I. One of the texts Bill and I discussed was “Citizenship” which talks about recognizing and fulfilling your responsibility for others or the group. This article stood out to me because I have learned about emotional intelligence in my psychology classes and it was intriguing to see this concept applied to leadership. The text discusses that being a good leader means being a good citizen in an organization. Then the text defines a good citizen being someone who works for “positive change on behalf of others and the community” and then proceeds to give examples on how to this. While discussing the definition of emotional intelligence that I learned in class, I admitted to never having made the connection between emotional intelligence and leadership, but I agree with the text; there seems to a clear correlation between the two. Then I made the realization that we as a society are overlooking a massive group of untapped potential of leaders because of our patriarchal views. On average, women tend to have higher emotional intelligence due to their communicative behavior and being conscious of others’ emotions. In a society where there is a wage gap between women and men and unconscious biases of a women’s competencies, we are therefore not only hurting women by almost exclusively putting men in leadership roles, but we are hurting ourselves because there are women who would prosper in such positions. Having made this connection, I now feel more confident in my existing leadership positions and any leadership positions I may hold in the future.

One other text I discussed with my mentors is a poem called “Traffic Light” by Shel Silverstein. This poem is about people who are stopped at a traffic light and wait there for an indefinite period of time in the hope that it will turn green. This poem clearly should not be taken literally. The traffic light represents a challenge or “block in the road” that is preventing these people from reaching their desired destination, and these people have been waiting at this light for months with no sign of it turning green. What I think is meant by this poem is that these people need to be proactive and make the changes necessary to get to their goal. They could break the rules and go through the red light, which I would not advise because we should all follow traffic regulations however for the sake of symbolism I will say the poem wants people to take risks. This can be applied to being a leader because leaders are the ones who push envelopes and go against social norms. This has been proven time and time again with scientists who publish theories and data that does not complement the existing beliefs on the subject matter. As someone who wants to do research, I hope to one day make groundbreaking work that challenges the current theories of a subject and sparks further experiments to investigate or add onto my findings.

Shortly before discussing this poem with him, Bill and I had a conversation that sticks out to me the most out of any conversation I have had in this program. He brought up Mr. Coletta, a professor from Gwynedd Mercy University who passed away a year ago by discussing the impact Mr. Coletta’s passing had on him and how he knew so many people who were connected to this man. This gave rise to a memory I have of Mr. Coletta on Biology Shadow Day. My Aunt Lisa from Nevada was in town and accompanied me as I explored the classes in McGuire Hall when she recognized Mr. Coletta in the labs. She had him as an AP biology teacher in high school, and he was the one who inspired her to be a pharmacist. My aunt stopped him to say hello, and I will not forget how warm and inviting Mr. Coletta was towards me. He gave me a tour of the labs and offered me his advice on how the biology program would best suit me. I can say, with confidence, that Mr. Coletta is the reason why I committed to Gwynedd Mercy.

When I had Mr. Coletta as a professor, it was clear that he loved his job. He met each class with a big grin and established a friendship with every one of his students. Mr. Coletta is a full embodiment of what I wanted to be when I was in kindergarten. His job challenged him. His job made an impact on every student with whom he came in contact. He strived to be the best version of himself. At the end of this GSLI Exceptional Leaders Program it is evident to me that Mr. Coletta also embodied what it takes to be a Mercy leader.

These past seven months have been a journey full of uncertainty, self-questioning, and self-discovery. When I first started the program, I was uncertain of what area of research I want to do. I questioned my plans of going to graduate school. Now that I am at the end of this program, I can say that I am still uncertain. However, I no longer am unsettled by the unknown. I made peace with the fact that I am unsure of what particular career. I know that if I do not lose my ambition and take advantage of the opportunities that I make for myself, I will have a successful career. Through this program, I also discovered leadership in myself that I did not see before. I have more confidence in my ability to lead because of my emotional intelligence. I now know being a leader also means taking risks and going against the social norm. I am also becoming more aware of the Mercy leaders who have touched my life.

In conclusion, if I were to go back to Kindergarten, I would write: "When I grow up I want to be a leader" on that notecard in my childish but oh so wonderful purple crayon.

**Open Your Mind and the Rest Will Follow**

*Rosemarie DeBarberie*



*“One of the most sincere forms of respect is actually listening to what another has to say.”*

– Bryant H. McGill

## ***Introduction***

We are asked many questions throughout life. Who do you want to be when you grow up? Where do you see yourself in five years? Who is your biggest role model? How do you deal with confrontation? Can you give me an example of a time when you were faced with hardship, and how did you overcome it? I have always answered these questions in the moment, not allowing myself time to compose an appropriate answer. To me, it elicited a raw and genuine response. If you were to ask me the same question twice, you would probably get a more or less detailed version of the same answer or sometimes an entirely different response. I do not believe in having a definite and finite sense about anything in life. I believe we are always learning, changing, and experiencing things that affect us both cognitively and emotionally, as this mold we are forming is malleable and should be able to twist and turn and even break from time to time. It is all a part of the process that helps us develop a mature sense of life.

In preparation for this paper, I went back and read through my application for the Exceptional Leaders Program to revisit where I was at that point last year. I was surprised at my reaction to my answers. Obviously, there are some things I would change, but in general they portrayed me and how I would think of myself. With that being said, I am grateful to have had the time to sit down with both my mentors to discuss, think through, and learn some new things about them, all while learning about myself. The readings and time with Sr. Kati McMahon and Katie Peisochenske have allowed me to extend my thoughts through theirs. The perspective of two different views when localizing thoughts and ideas on the same topic was something I found interesting. The difference between the two of them is extraordinary, but they both still encompassed a core sense of passion, empathy and a solid foundation of Mercy. All these things I feel I could attain the most growth from. Coming into this program I wanted to focus on communication, something I feel we, as a society, fail to execute well. During this journey, I have realized that most of my communication problems arise from my dispositions, and this would not be the only lesson I acquired throughout the duration of the program.

## ***Background***

I do not know a life that is dull; I do not know how to clear my schedule and focus on one thing at a time. I am often so busy I forget what day it is, but what I do know is my ability to survive in any situation I have ever faced. Throughout the hustle and bustle of my life, I have educated myself on the skills needed to evolve as a direct reflection of my surroundings, consistently converting my life and adapting to the things needed and expected of me. Being raised in a large family, I have always been quick to learn to do things differently. My parents were hard working and devoted to us, but some of the time we were left to fend for ourselves. Please do not infer this as a negative connotation to my childhood. I say it so you understand that sometimes this is how large families operate. Without even knowing it at the time, this was one of the best things our parents ever bestowed upon us. From this family dynamic, we learned to stand alone when needed, lift each other up when necessary and work together whenever possible. We were surrounded by a constant support system that did not need instruction or praise to function.

This philosophy built a solid infrastructure for me to flourish from as a child. It prepared me for many of life's obstacles, and also provided plenty of room for growth. While I was very unaware of the leadership roles I was acquiring over the years, I also did not realize how much it had merged into my personality. Through these experiences, I was able to see the many mistakes I have made and learned from. It is hard to acknowledge the things I have done wrong or the fault in my ways, but as time has passed I feel it is an ample contribution to how I move forward. Learning to embrace and not run from the good and the bad is something that will benefit me throughout life. Also, I feel it is important to admit your weaknesses and work through your strengths while utilizing lessons from your role models and former leaders. No one is perfect,

and no one has all the answers. We as humans continue to rise and fall in life. If we choose to allow our minds to open and feed our ability to contrive our thoughts, we can strive to be better.

### ***Mentors***

When I met Katie, my external mentor, a graduate of Gwynedd Mercy University, she was eager to meet me and for us to get to know each other. She greeted me with a smile and immediately I felt comforted by her positive and friendly demeanor. Our first meeting started off very introductory and routine, then quickly transformed into a light and entertaining conversation discussing our jobs in the medical field. Katie has a way about her that is completely accepting, tolerant and open. She made each of our meetings an enjoyable part of the program. We managed to discuss the readings in an informal manner that made them relevant to our current employment, essentially allowing me to connect the meanings and lessons of our talks to real life. One of the first poems we discussed, *Fall in Love*, is one of her favorites. I sat and listened to Katie explain how this poem made her feel and the excitement she felt when it had made its way back into her life. We also discussed the effects that nursing school has on a person. The highs and the lows, the moments of feeling defeated and the overwhelming joyous feelings of small victories such as passing a test, even if it's only by a percentage of a point. She never made me feel inadequate the way school can leave you feeling at times. It was nice to share stories and tips on how to get through and discuss the importance of maintaining the drive to keep going. We also shared some personal stories that made our meetings more pleasurable. Before our first session, I was worried that we wouldn't have much to talk about and it would be primarily based on the readings and journals provided. I did not want the experience to be dull or forced. I am beyond thankful we were able to connect the way that we did. I hold a great deal of respect and admiration for Katie and look forward to every meeting we have.

Next, I met with Sr. Kati. I was consciously aware that this made me more nervous than anything else that had been presented to me thus far. I had the preconceived notion that I was going to be a disappointment to her. When I received the email and application for this program I did not completely understand what was expected of me, but I was honored to have been approached with the opportunity. Honestly, it was something that intrigued me. I am always up for new experiences and things that are outside of my comfort zone, even though I have an internal struggle with being apprehensive towards unfamiliar things. We met in the parlor, two couches facing one another with a coffee table separating us. I remember sitting there reminding myself to be open, appropriate and respectful. I sat with my hands crossed and tried to conduct myself in a way that would make my mother proud. Sr. Kati opened the conversation with a warm series of exploratory questions inquiring about me. The dialogue was challenging, as I find it uncomfortable to have conversations that focus on me. After some brief questions, the discussion developed into more of a conversation and less of an interview. The transition amended my initial idea of how this meeting would play out. Sr. Kati surprised me. She was open and firm with her conversation, the type of conversation I prefer to take part in. Every time we met we spoke of consciousness of self, an ongoing lesson in many forms for me. She is very experienced in many aspects of life; supported by a commendable timeline of accomplishments. I remember always leaving our meetings questioning myself and where I was at that moment in life. There was always something she spoke about that stood out to me. Our meetings provoked thoughtful exchanges and left me examining the things I could change about myself, my life, my points of view, and how I interact with other people. I always left with a sense of enlightenment. We discussed the readings in a deeper profound manner, and less of a desultory conversation, which evoked more depth to the meaning behind it.

Sr. Kati was aware that one of my primary goals was to construct better forms of communication with coworkers and organizations with which I am involved. Communication is a topic we discussed often, but unbeknownst to me through these talks she had managed to bring out more self-awareness in our conversations. I do not believe this was intentional but a result of the natural progression of our conversations. We spoke about the ability to authentically listen when someone else is speaking, having the

capacity to take in what they are saying, and how to conduct a conversation. Looking back, she was doing exactly that, and I, in return was able to grasp the full meaning behind it.

Both of these admirable women cultivated the most productive part of this experience for me. We were able to work through the material of the program, but in their distinct way, they guided me towards a new form of thinking and processing. I was experiencing the changes and developments this program was founded on. The value I have for the Exceptional Leaders Program I owe to them. The structured dynamic of the program works on many levels: first, the initial level of self-thought and processing; second, effectively writing down your personal journal entries; third, a discussion with your mentors. Finally, the process of reflection and conclusion is applied. The program is admittedly a lengthy process, and each step results in significant worth once it is complete. The last time I spoke with Sr. Kati I told her how much I enjoyed the readings and work that were not mandatory or linked to anything regarding school or work. It was a chance to break away from the monotony of my daily life and put effort into something that will enhance my abilities and perhaps, my whole future. I also believe if I were to take these readings and go through the process again, I would learn something different about myself and take away even more valuable skills. I enjoy the ability to continually advance my knowledge in unexpected forms. The Exceptional Leaders Program has been a gratifying process.

### *Conclusion*

We cannot change our past, and there has never been a time when I wanted to. I learn from every road traveled in life. Being able to take what I have learned and continually apply it to future struggles and situations holds more value than having the perfect outcome. The communication progress I have inherited through this program reflects a change in my position. Instead of focusing on how to be heard, I have learned how to listen and understand others. I have learned to take the time to focus, set goals to achieve, and work on how to reach them. I now configure conversations to adhere to the differences between the people I am surrounded by. For example, I let it take a natural course instead of a directed one. I have started to make myself available, set aside the appropriate time to handle a situation and focus on suitable conditions, like being accepting and allowing for flexibility. In regards to the consciousness of self, I try not to forget to take the time and take care of myself, and to be aware of my success as much as my faults. It is hard not to overlook the accomplishments and focus on fixing the struggles. I have learned I have to acknowledge every aspect of myself. To become a good leader, you can only be effective if you are acutely aware of your purpose, communication, commitment, and collaborative skills. For example, knowing the difference of when to step up or step away. Most importantly I have learned about the effectiveness of change. Change is what evolves us. Our lives are the product of one's willingness to accept or reject the change we create or find ourselves a part of, as well as the ability to modernize our thoughts and ideas. I did not want to relate my experience solely to one part of my life such as school, work, or one particular personal experience. I will take away sustainable pieces that I will translate in any forum, using the skills I have learned in the Exceptional Leader Program as I continue my journey. I hope to take a strong foundation of knowledge to help apply it to the next step.

The first question I answered on the application for this program was; what is leadership? What are the qualities of an effective leader? My response was as follows, "Leadership can host a variety of definitions and terms relating to the direction a person can influence and lead others. The word leadership also derives a sense of power, the ability to take control and dictate to a group. The base of the word by definition is to be in charge or command of, which is an exceptional quality to have in a position requiring leadership. Other qualities in an experienced leader may not be the ones you read about from a definition; many great leaders display traits such as having integrity and confidence. Being an honest and forthright person can help open the lines of communication as well as build a respectable rapport with a group. Allowing each individual to be involved is also an excellent quality, supporting each other and inspiring growth and advancement towards

your goal. Leadership should not mandate one-way thinking. It should be firm but forgiving. It should address the things that are important and guide people to do what is best. It should display passion, care, and mercy for others. Through the good and the bad, a leader continues to be the strength and support, the backbone, the muscle, the brain and the heart of any operation."

While I do not disagree with my original answer, I would like to add to it. I would add the strength required is not of the physical nature; rather one needs mental strength. I would stress the importance of the ability to be conscious of the steps you take and the direction you want to go. A leader must also be versatile in communication, delegation, instruction, and outcome. The responsibilities of a leader are constantly adjusting and changing and the leader must be willing to adapt and learn in constructive ways to produce the best results towards a goal. Each reading, media presentation, meeting, and self-reflection has had a positive impact on my experience, even if some of it was a struggle. The process of the program has served me well, and I am thankful and appreciative to have had the opportunity to be a part of it.

## **Leaders: Understanding and Applying the Social Change Model of Leadership**

*Michelle Handy*



*“When a flower doesn’t bloom you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower.”*

– Den Heijer

The Exceptional Leader Program is founded on the Social Change Model of leadership. This model calls you to consider individual, group, and societal values while striving to live as a leader in all areas of your life. Through my involvement in the program, I have had the opportunity to read strong works, hear compelling ideas, and discover myself more fully. My partnership with my internal mentor Dr. Barbara Jones and my external mentor Janice Nuss gave me the space to work through the social change model in a compassionate and open environment.

My conversations with Dr. Jones and Janice unfolded throughout the semester and focused in on three key elements of the Social Change Model, including consciousness of self, common purpose, and citizenship. Each of these components correlated to how I, as a leader, can empower myself and those around me. In particular, I think of the words of Alexander Den Heijer: “When a flower doesn’t bloom you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower.” This quote has weaved itself amidst my work in the program and holds a special place in my heart. I feel this program has enabled me to fix the environment while respecting the needs of the flower.

The first step of the social change model and ability to perform as a leader is to know or be conscious of yourself. Knowing yourself includes being mindful of your strengths, limits, and desires. I feel this component of the program is vital because to be a good professional, you need to have a solid foundation of who you are and why you do what you do. To explore this, Janice directed me to complete an activity that I found incredibly beneficial. She encouraged me to create my own mission statement. The only guideline was to write one for my personal life and my professional life. Completing this activity was easier than I imagined and gave me a sense of the values I hold strongly. I felt mindful of who I am and what I stand for as I worked on this activity. During our conversation, we were able to talk about how to be authentic, something I strive to be daily. The values should be as transparent as possible between the two lists. I noticed in my own response the desire to take care of myself so I can take care of others. This idea is huge when looking at working not only in the professional world but also in the human services field. If I am overextending myself or not being honest about my limits, I may burn myself out and lose the drive that compels me to do the work I feel called to do. Likewise, to be a good leader I need to demonstrate how to take care of myself and model that behavior for those around me. By doing this, I hope to inspire them to similarly look after themselves and their wellbeing.

Another point that came up in my response was the need to be present with the people I spend my time with, whether that be in or out of the office. One of the best things we can give another is our undivided attention. It helps others feel heard and important. It also helps us stay present in our lives instead of ruminating about the past or fretting about the future. I am glad Janice suggested this activity because it made me think about how I hope to be seen as I enter the professional world. Taking this understanding of the values I hold enables me to be conscious of myself and strive to fix the environment to support my needs and those of my peers. Modeling mindfulness and authenticity will enable my clients to see it is possible to be true to yourself. My example serves to reorganize the space, making it open and inviting. This approach is vital considering I hope to work as a therapist professionally. I can help my clients see themselves because I better know myself. In reference to Heijer’s words, I am better able to fix the environment because I know what elements are not working as they should. It may not be obvious but upon reflection, it becomes clear.

The second element of the social change model that we discussed at length was the need for common purpose. Our supplementary readings and material included a TED Talk entitled “How Great Leaders Inspire Action.” I found this talk particularly thought-provoking. One sentiment Simon Sinek raised was as follows: “Why does your organization exist? Why do you get out of bed in the morning?” This question digs deep into the element of why. I feel it translates itself brilliantly from the need to know oneself because upon doing that, we are better able to know why we do what we do. I think of my volunteer and internship experience thus far and feel connected with the integrity of the agencies and the work they do. If you do not feel connected to what you do, passionate even, then you lose your ambition towards helping those in your path.

I have interned in the field of drugs and alcohol and psychosocial oncology. In both capacities, I have worked with children and youth and know my life is fulfilled by mentoring them. One experience that comes to mind in particular is Camp Mariposa, a program for children 9-12 years old with addiction in the family. I have volunteered over the past five years for this program and also interned with the agency. I look forward to my weekends at the sleep-away camp, wondering how I could be excited for limited sleep, screaming children, and endless drama. However, each and every time Camp comes around, I feel so blessed to work with the kids. I have facilitated group therapy with them and seen such honest and genuine answers that it inspires me. My coworkers and I talk at length about how this program is so crucial in changing the lives of the kids with whom we come into contact. Our core staff is strong and united because we understand the why of the program. We empower our campers with education, coping skills, and support.

Knowing who I am and my role in the program makes me feel connected with the both the agency's mission statement and my own. At camp, I aim to spend time with kids and be present. So often they do not have that one-on-one contact they need. I look back on my five years of volunteering with the program and feel I have continued to grow in line with the values we teach and the goals we hold. I strongly believe in Sinek's sentiment that the why you get out of bed makes a difference. Janice and I talked about the field I hope to work in upon graduation. I know I want to work with at-risk youth and with those who have mental health concerns.

Keeping this in mind allows me to look for appropriate jobs rather than for anything that happens to pay. While it may pay the bills, my soul needs to feel fulfilled by the work I do. Comparably, I need to remind myself that those I encounter need to feel that way as well. As a leader, I am able to help them recognize this need in their journey to becoming their best self.

Citizenship is not only a call of the social change model but also of social workers. I will graduate in a matter of months with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Human Services and a minor in Psychology. In the fall, I will be moving on to a Master of Social Work program. The call to engage with social policy and social justice is evident. I spoke with Dr. Jones in great detail about how social policy affects funding and the availability of services. With constant changes in the political climate but the unmoving need for social services, I know I need to advocate and be an active citizen to ensure the rights of others are upheld. I need to stand up in the face of injustice and fight for those who are being marginalized. I once heard an analogy that I find very powerful in terms of recognizing social injustice. A young child who has never learned to drive just sits in a car mindlessly. But those of us who know how to drive cannot help but call out from the passenger seat and critique other drivers. Once we are made aware of social injustice, it is like learning how to drive: we cannot remain silent or be ignorant.

The citizenship component of the social change model is the most demanding I believe because it requires continued commitment to this value. However, I am up for the challenge. I feel as a leader, I am called to help others align themselves similarly. The only way to take care of Heijer's flower is to fix the environment and watch it thrive as a result. It is our duty to ensure then that our country, our workplaces, and our homes are in line with this belief. There is no sidestepping around it because in knowing ourselves and our common purpose, we inevitably find ourselves in a position to be good citizens.

The Exceptional Leader Program at Gwynedd Mercy University partnered me with two incredible mentors, facilitated conversations with insightful supplemental materials, and helped me better know myself. The social change model of leadership is, I believe, one that helps you discover your role as a leader, an individual, and an agent of change. Following my participation in this program, I feel aptly prepared to leave and be an active citizen while keeping in mind my own values and my commitment to helping others. I will water the flower, feed it with fertilizer, and watch it grow.

## **Thinking Back on my Leadership Journey**

*Jenny Kyoung*



***“Do the best you can until you know better.  
Then, when you know better, do better.”***

- Maya Angelou

I often surprise myself when I join any type of leadership program or take on a leadership position. Throughout middle school and high school, I was thought of as the shy and quiet girl. I was reluctant to participate in anything. Even the word leadership was a term that seemed out of my reach. I never really saw myself as a leader. Ever since entering college, I've done an about face and I have become a person I never thought I could be in a million years.

It is amazing to think of how I ended up at Gwynedd-Mercy University and how I have grown in self-awareness and confidence. I realize how blessed I am to be given this sort of leadership development opportunity.

Applying to be part of the *Griffin Student Leadership Institute's Exceptional Leadership Program* was probably one of the best decisions I have made. It has been so meaningful and has had a positive personal effect on me, helping me to become who I want to be. Through participation in this program, I have been able to gain a new understanding and perspective on leadership through the support of my mentors, faculty and staff, and friends who rode along this journey with me. All in all, this opened the doors for me to shape myself into a confident, emerging professional and incorporate these skills into all areas of my life throughout the upcoming years.

This program enabled me to capture the purpose and meaning of true leadership. Prior to joining this program, I used to think that leadership meant leading others and taking control of your group. This may be partially true, but I have learned that there is whole lot more to leadership than what I've always assumed. Leadership is defined as a way to create an inspiring vision for the group aimed towards the future, motivating the group to engage with that vision, and supporting and coaching the group in achieving their vision. Leaders have to be willing to help others and set a clear direction to steer their group on in the utmost efficient and professional manner. The best leaders are the ones that have a strong motivation for change, possess the skills of social intelligence, and the ability to focus on the things that need dire attention or improvement. I am happy to say that I was able to expand my knowledge on the word leadership from the guidance of my two wonderful mentors as well as my personal experience and growth in college.

At the start of this program, I felt it was such a privilege to be part of the program. I discovered I would be the youngest student in the program. I was ecstatic, but I realized something even greater on the night of the dinner we had back in October of 2016. I was introduced to my two mentors who greeted me with such great enthusiasm. It was also the night where we shared our first conversations. I was given the privilege to be mentored by two exceptional women who demonstrate their qualities of distinctive Mercy leadership in their professions and carry a strong desire to serve others by committing their time and hard work.

Cassie Romano, my external mentor, is a maternity care nurse at Einstein Hospital. She is also the President of the Nursing Honor Society at Gwynedd-Mercy University called Sigma Theta Tau. I remember seeing Cassie for the first time during my freshman year of college at an SGA meeting where she was sharing with the students her experiences as a nurse as well as her past experiences as a student at Gwynedd-Mercy University. She was a role model to me because she embodied all of the qualities and goals that I wanted to achieve in my life. I was astonished and delighted when I found out she was assigned to be my external mentor. Cassie reminded me that nursing is not easy and it will eventually get harder, but she also reassured me that it will all be worth it in the end if I put my mind to it and strive for what I want. In the upcoming months, I will be starting clinical rounds in the hospital, working hands-on with patients diagnosed with all different types of problems. No matter how challenging the workload could get, I have to keep in mind that as a nursing student, I must embrace my job with integrity working hard to improve the health of the patient while maintaining a professional composure throughout the process. Cassie displays a strong passion for her profession and she is very committed to the work she does. She handles many different tasks every day, working twelve hour shifts, taking online classes at Drexel University, and attending her meetings or events for the nursing honor society.

I had the opportunity to observe how Cassie runs her meetings and the way she spoke for the Sigma Theta Tau Induction ceremony. I immediately wanted the confidence she displayed. It was hard for me to even process how many things Cassie had to accomplish every single day, so I asked her, "How do you do it?" She shook her head with a smile and replied saying, "I don't even know how myself, but you have to push through and make the best out of it." In this case, time management and organization are also key to making things more efficient. I learned from Cassie that, as a leader, you may be placed in many different situations and it may be challenging. It is crucial to be confident in whatever you do and put your best foot forward for the best outcomes.

Michelle France, my internal mentor, is part of the Campus Ministry team at Visitation House at Gwynedd-Mercy University. I was thrilled when I met Michelle and she always greeted me with the sweetest smile and the warmest hugs. Michelle is joyful and confident, friendly and sincere, thoughtful and determined. I have learned so much about Michelle through our meetings. During our first encounter, I remember being very open and comfortable in her presence. The time flew by before I even realized it. I was able to be and express myself honestly throughout our conversation. The way Michelle thinks, acts, and behaves inspires me. I know what we have shared will continue to help me grow.

From some of the conversations we shared, Michelle told me that when she really wants or believes in something, she will pursue it in a passionate and respectful way. This encourages me to be confident in myself and when I really want something, to have the courage to go and get it. One of the quotes she likes is from Catherine McAuley. As the foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, Catherine would remind the sisters, "tenderness in all things." Tender is Michelle's name for God and it is this quality for which she wants to be remembered. Michelle values being tender and authentic in her relationships. Moreover, she believes that trust is the foundation on which all relationships are built. It is the first stage of human development on which all the others are built. Leaders know the power of building trust and trust definitely comes into play for my future profession as a nurse. In the healthcare world, it is necessary for medical professionals to build trusting relationships with patients, doctors and families and to give them the information they need to know about the care being provided. It is important to assure a patient that what they are experiencing is natural and appropriate. Nurses need to be trustworthy authorities and patient advocates. Michelle taught me that as a leader, building trust is essential. We also need to keep in mind that just because you're a leader, does not mean you're perfect. There is always room for improvement and growth and this can lead the way to great success.

I am thankful to have been able to experience this leadership journey with both Cassie and Michelle. They have both taught me so much and deepened my knowledge of leadership, demonstrating the skills one needs to be a merciful leader.

When I reflect back on the conversations I had with my mentors as well as both the past and present experiences I've recently gone through, I can happily say that I have had the greatest opportunity to apply leadership qualities during my two years here on campus. This campus has given me the strength to become more involved within the community and learn to grow as a leader. If it wasn't for the words of encouragement or push of motivation from my peers and my family, I would definitely have not held the positions I have had or even tried to get involved around campus.

One of the first leadership experiences I've dealt with was becoming the Treasurer of the Student Activities Committee on campus, or also better known as S@C. The main goal for S@C is to provide entertainment and events around campus and to help students create a more unified and positive community. During my freshmen year of college, I remember being a general member of this club, and when elections were being held for next year, I was able to gain the courage to run and undertake a role on the Executive Council. I was fully aware of the responsibilities that came with the position such as managing the budget, updating status to certain

individuals, planning events, and making logical decisions to benefit others. Taking on the role of Treasurer for S@C gave me a greater understanding of how I should act as a leader and what it truly means to be one, especially when it came to leading my own committee.

The second leadership experience I've been exposed to was being elected as the Corresponding Secretary starting next fall for the Student Government Association on campus, and also known as SGA. The main mission for SGA is to apply high quality and realistic solutions to the problems of the university community by being the voice for the students as a whole and representing all individuals on campus that wish to have a voice in government. I have held the position as a special representative for this club for two consecutive years which was during freshmen and sophomore year of college. However, as an upcoming junior, I felt it was time for a change and that I should take on one of the Executive Council positions for this club. This position also holds many responsibilities as a leader such as formulating promotional ideas, planning and coordinating dinners, maintaining the SGA board, and making use of social media updates. Juggling schoolwork with extracurricular activities is definitely challenging in college, but I learned to manage and balance out my work through the experiences I have thus far endured. There will be various mistakes and difficulties that will arise as a leader, but the important thing to keep in mind is how we act and respond to them. In order for anything to become effective, I learned that I must be able to learn from my mistakes, rather than becoming upset or thinking negatively about them.

As my journey in the Exceptional Leaders Program is coming to an end, I muse on how much I have grown as a person and my development as a leader. When working towards a change, I will conduct myself in a way that will improve the circumstances for others just as this program has done for me. I will start utilizing all the knowledge that I have accumulated and continue to demonstrate it within the organizations I am part of as well as in the future. It has been a true honor to have worked and come into contact with such great people with very big hearts that want to share their time to help the needs of others or steer them towards the routes of success. Though, this is only just the beginning and I still have much to learn as I continue down my path of life, I am blessed and thankful to have been given the chance to learn more deeply about myself and find my voice as a young, growing professional leader.

## **Me, My Team, and My Community**

*Nicole Martin*



***"Inspired leaders think backward; why, how, what.  
People don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it."***

- Simon Sinek

Leadership is defined as "the action of leading a group of people or an organization." The person who acts as a leader in a particular group is at the center of the group's power. The importance of a leader is evident and obvious; one who keeps the group together and motivated ensures the unit moves in a positive direction toward its goal. Personally, I believe leadership is a vision that one has and is willing to share with others to work toward a common goal. The leader must be empathetic when leading a group allowing time to listen and encompass all team members' ideas and suggestions. Thoroughness is another fabulous quality to have as a leader ensuring that your work will be completed to its fullest potential. I believe a leader should lead as well as team-build with the entire group so that every person feels as though they are equally important to reach the ultimate end goal. Most importantly, a leader should always strive for continuous improvement. Regardless of one's expertise there is always room to improve, and ways to ensure continued success.

The Social Change Model of Leadership consists of individual values, group values, and community values. Individual values encompass consciousness of self, congruence, and commitment. The consciousness of self references one's strength in the ability to be aware of personal beliefs, values, attitudes and emotions that motivate an individual. Congruence is thinking, feeling and behaving with consistency, genuineness, authenticity, and honesty. Congruence must also encompass respect for others while working in group settings. Commitment is the energy that serves as the driving force to get the job completed. Group values consist of collaboration, common purpose and controversy with civility. Collaboration is working with others to achieve a shared goal. Common purpose is sharing the same view or working towards a shared goal with the same perspective in mind. Controversy with civility is the ability to share differences with respect towards each other's opinions. Lastly in the Social Change Model are community values. Citizenship serves as the basis for the importance of achieving good, strong community values. Citizenship is the "process whereby the individual and the collaborative group become responsibly connected to the community and the society through the leadership experience." Individual values drive one to achieve set goals in life. My individual values were shown throughout my leadership experiences beginning in high school and I have encouraged myself to continue to mature my individual values.

Before college, I was involved in several activities holding leadership positions throughout school experiences and within my community. I took the leadership position during group assignments, on teams, in service projects, and on planning processes. I was classroom leader in a unique program offered by my high school. Our school was the only school east of the Mississippi River to provide this program, and I attended the National EAST Conference three years in a row. In addition to these studies, I also served as vice president in the Best Buddies Club for two years and served as president for a year. Along with these positions of leadership, I was also fortunate enough to be able to attend the Best Buddies Leadership Conference at Indiana University. Although many of my experiences taught me essential qualities for leadership, I was never truly "taught" how to lead. Some of my natural personality traits and characteristics seemed to help me with this task, however, others made it difficult. I envision a leader who is motivated as well as driven, confident, compassionate, empathetic and committed. I believe one has to possess the first circle of the Social Change Model, individual values, to begin the journey of becoming a leader. Without these qualities, success as a leader and subsequent growth in these qualities will not allow for movement within the Social Change Model.

The next circle in the Social Change Model is group values, consisting of collaboration, common purpose, and controversy with civility. The group values circle is the circle on which I have been focusing improving

throughout this program. Over the last several months, I have watched TED talks, read poems or stories, and met with two exceptional women who are the epitome of leadership, Dr. Deborah Schadler and Andrea Vettori. At one of our meetings, we talked about a co-worker of mine with whom it is tough to find common ground. Andrea is the director of the Mary Howard Health Center. She supervises staff of approximately twenty health care professionals as well as manages her own panel of patients. Andrea shared many of her experiences of managing challenging situations with many diverse people. Dr. Schadler, who is the coordinator for the undergraduate special education program as well as the director of the Autism Institute also shared multiple experiences working with diverse groups of people. Although they did not have to share their personal experiences, their sharing made me feel like I was not alone in experiencing such different people who make collaboration difficult. One of my most dominant qualities is that I am extremely outspoken. Some people take my personality the wrong way, and people often say I'm aggressive or assertive. I don't think this is a negative quality to have as a leader when dealing with diverse people, but I have been trying to improve my communication with others, so I can efficiently achieve controversy with civility. Recently this semester, I have been doing a lot of group work assigned by professors to master our nursing lab skills. Simon Sinek referenced the "golden circle" in his "TED Talk: How Great Leaders Inspire Action" as the way great leaders think. "What," "How," and "Why" are the components of the circle an average person follows. Simon says, "inspired leaders think backward; why, how, what." He says "people don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it." This quote resonated with me and made me look at myself as a leader. I choose to be a leader because I want to be able to collaborate, serve with a common purpose and achieve controversy with civility. I will do this by continuing to be diligent in watching my body language, keeping an open mind while respecting others' responses and exemplifying empathy not only in my nursing skills lab but everywhere with everyone. Continuing to improve my communication will allow me to be a more efficient communicator and stronger leader. Strengthening these qualities has also allowed me to look at the third circle of the social change model, community values.

Community Values is the last step in the Social Change Model because once we change our attitude and strengthen our beliefs, we are then able to help others do the same. I did not learn something specifically through the curriculum of this program but rather of the program as a whole. This program has helped me meet other students who share the same attitude, beliefs and visions I do who are also interested in becoming empowered to make changes and be involved within our community. The GSLI Leadership Program was built to identify potential leaders, foster their growth to exceptional and allow them to share their knowledge and serve the community. Through the GSLI Leadership program, I have learned the essential qualities to becoming a leader and the importance of exercising every quality in everything I do. The networking that has been achieved through this program is unlike any other and too high to go unnoticed. This final stage of the model does not mean the model stops. It is designed in a circle to continue growing, learning, networking, collaborating and serving.

When offered the invitation to become a member of the Griffin Student Leadership Institute program, I was hesitant and nervous that I would not excel. The application sat in my email and got lost in the lengthy list of school emails. Then, I received another email that said the application had been extended another week. I thought to myself, this is meant to be. I started gathering my application materials and writing my essay. After submitting my materials, I anxiously awaited a response as to whether I would be the newest member of the program. About a week went by, when I received an email that I had been accepted. I was delighted at the

thought that I was given a chance to better myself with other students who wished to do the same. Next, we were invited to a dinner that would allow us to see the outline of the program, meet our mentors as well as other accepted students. After the dinner, I felt confident that I was not alone and my mentors would be there when I needed them. Through the program, I have endured many struggles that could have held me back, instead these challenges pushed me to focus on my materials and work harder.

The GSLI program has introduced me to the Social Change Model of Leadership that I can follow to strengthen my leadership qualities as I become a more efficient leader. Being a leader is not a natural born talent. It is something that takes hard work and dedication. The person who leads in a particular group is at the center of the group's power leading the team to success. Leading is an exceptional trait that involves unique qualities with which I was privileged to be born but chose to seek out and strengthen throughout my lifetime. Taking the path to enhancing these qualities has brought me into the Griffin Student Leadership Institute program for which I am forever grateful.

## **Leaders in Life**

*Danielle Rainier*



*“Here’s to strong women. May we know them, may we be them, may we raise them.”*

– Anonymous

While I was a very active leader in high school, I do not think I truly experienced a position of leadership until I got to college and served as an RA for two years, a general member of the Student Activities Committee for four years, and a work study student in the Office of Student Activities and Leadership Programs for four years. The skills I have learned at Gwynedd Mercy University will help me through the rest of my life no matter where I go, and help me be a Distinctive Mercy Graduate and leader. Through the Griffin Student Leadership Institute program this year, I have looked deeper into my personal philosophy of Mercy leadership through encounters with my two mentors, the assigned readings, and the Social Change Model of Leadership. Over the course of this year in GSLI, I have had the opportunity to work with two brilliant people and see many different styles of leadership. Three types of leadership that have stood out to me during the past year as a GSLI mentee are those demonstrated by my mentors Christine Eberle and Dick Target, and in a broader sense, by strong women who have inspired me. All their models of leadership can be traced back to the individual, group, and community/societal values of the Social Change Model in some way and have influenced how I want to be as a leader.

While I have gotten to know her on multiple occasions these past four years, my first GSLI meeting with Christine Eberle came at possibly one of the most emotionally draining days during my senior year. If it wasn't the cold, rainy weather that made it an awful day, then it was the fact that I had barely a whisper of a voice due to a recent cold. There was also the fact that it was November 9, 2016, the day after we elected the person I believe to be the most unqualified tyrant of a man to lead our country. You could tell I was distraught and lost. I did not know what to expect and Christine felt the same. We talked about what the future of America was going to be like. How are we supposed to live with a leader who clearly does not support the people who need the help the most? While this meeting had come at a time of little hope, there was a lot of great discussion. We talked about what we can do as leaders in our own community to get through this.

Our first meeting was rough, but Christine was able to see me on one of my better days later in the year. Three months after the election, she ran into me the Monday after the Women's March on Washington. Christine had known I went with some other students at the University, so she immediately asked me how it was. I told her it was amazing and so incredible to see such a large number of people, women specifically, fighting for their rights, refusing to be silenced, and standing together. Most of all, I felt more hopeful for the next four years than I did on the day after the election. Christine observed that she had the opportunity to see me the day after the election and now, days after the Women's March on Washington, and the difference was astounding. She could see the change in my attitude and how I held myself.

Christine was able to relate my feelings about the election and Women's March to GSLI through the different styles of leadership and how the way you lead can impact a community, whether that be a positive or a negative impact. Christine has consistently challenged me to look at things on a deeper level. She takes everything given to her, breaks it down, and looks at it from every possible angle to find the best way to tackle it that leaves her staying true to herself, helpful to others, and getting the point across. I immediately knew that I wanted my leadership to impact the community in a positive and thoughtful way no matter what I end up doing in my life. To be as aware and understanding as Christine would be the best leadership skill I could gain as her mentee.

The first time I met my external mentor was actually at the Griffin Student Leadership Institute Conference in 2016. I was presenting with some students about our trip to San Carlos, Arizona and the work we can do as advocates for Native Americans. I remember wondering who the older gentleman was in the back of the classroom who kept asking questions and giving his input. I would soon learn that man was Dick Target. If you were to ask any faculty or staff on campus if they knew of Dick Target, they would immediately respond, "Oh I know Dick Target!" Dick is a friend of Gwynedd Mercy University and active participant in almost everything. He's supportive and a staple in the family atmosphere that the campus thrives on.

The second time I had the opportunity to meet Dick Target, and actually introduce myself, was at the kick off for GSLI this year. He immediately shook my hand, pulled me in, and said, “I’m not like the other mentors. I like to meet five to six times a year instead of the three so we can work together, get to know each other better, and help each other.” I laughed and internally began to panic, as my schedule for the fall semester was already jam packed. I decided to joke with him and say, “Oh, good luck finding time with me” and he immediately responded, “Oh we’ll find time!” Dick was true to his word and we were able to formally meet twice off campus at Old York Road Country Club and a couple of times in passing at events on campus. There was the Catherine’s Cupboard blessing, Sigma Thanksgiving Outreach, the Voices Cocktail Party where I was also able to meet his lovely wife, Kathy, and we are planning to have two more meetings before the semester is over.

Each meeting so far has been filled with discussions about my future after Gwynedd and how I should strive to get a job doing not only something I love but something that I deserve. Dick talked highly of the students on Gwynedd’s campus but said they often tend to settle for whatever job comes first and not the job that they deserve, the job where they can best use their talent and skills. He told me to find a job that pays well and is willing to train me in different departments so I can figure out what suits me best. Dick understands that a person is more successful when they are in a position in which all their skills are being utilized. I admired this because I very rarely put my foot down and I needed someone to tell me, “You deserve this. You worked hard for it. Ask for what you want, not what they’re hoping you’ll settle for.”

After each of these meetings, I began to see how Dick was not only helping me prepare for the inevitable job search and future, but he was also influencing my leadership. There is a part of me that wants to be like Dick Target when I get older. On the one side, he is successful, so successful that he can retire, still work some days, and spend his free time doing service for a community he adores, and on the other side, he is full of so much life and compassion. He talks about his family with so much adoration and the people around him as if they were all his best friends. Dick is the person you could talk with about anything because he genuinely cares. He is the embodiment of “Fall in Love,” a poem from the GSLI readings, attributed to Fr. Pedro Arrupe SJ. The poem talks about what you love being the reason for and deciding everything. Dick lives his life with so much love, joy, and gratitude for everything around him, and that makes him a great leader. If there was one thing I could take from being his mentee, it would be to lead with love and love everything you do.

One of my favorite quotes is “Here’s to strong women. May we know them, may we be them, may we raise them.” While the quote is by an unknown source, it is something I strive to follow. I have always had strong women in my life, but I appreciated them more when I came to Gwynedd. It all started with Catherine McAuley and her main mission in life: supporting women and children. The Sisters of Mercy, founded by McAuley, are incredible women. I have had the privilege to meet several Sisters throughout these past four years and have always been left in awe of their compassion, amazing personalities, and ability to capture a room. They lead with mercy and work passionately on what they have identified as their Critical Concerns; earth, immigration, nonviolence, anti-racism, and women.

Another group of women I have come to admire this past year are all the women behind the Women’s March on Washington. This not only includes the women who assembled the team behind the movement, but also all of those who participated and continue to advocate for women’s rights. Being there in Washington D.C. for the March was amazing and so incredible to see. I was emotional the entire day starting with our walk up the steps as I saw a little girl sitting on her dad’s shoulders with a sign that said, “When I grow up, I want equal pay” and ending with the crowd of people who would clap and cheer for every person who came out of the train station back in Maryland where we parked. The solidarity and fighting energy that was felt throughout the crowd all day was intense. It wasn’t a fight with violence, but a fight for justice. This day taught me that, to lead successfully, you should be a strong leader who is supportive of your team. When you, as a leader, work with those you are supposed to be leading, everything is better and more cohesive.

Taking all the leaders I have interacted with and the leader I aspire to be, you can see the connection between them and the Social Change Model of Leadership. Christine's dedication to mercy and her passion to do what is best for those around her falls under the individual values. Dick gives everything his all and his dedication to every community he belongs to which falls under community/societal values. The Sisters of Mercy and the women at the Women's March on Washington fall under group values because they collaborate with a common purpose and, when differences in viewpoint arise, they react with civility. The purpose of the Social Change Model of Leadership, in the end, is to create change. The ultimate goal is to make a better world and a better society. With what I learned this year as a GSLI mentee and my continued observation of other leaders, I can become a Distinctive Mercy leader and change the world for the better.

## About The Authors

**Cierra Adkins** is a senior Criminal Justice major and member of the GMercyU Track and Field Team. Besides being a member of the CSAC Conference All-Academic Team during all of her years here, Cierra has developed her leadership skills as a Resident Assistant. When not going to classes, or performing her duties as an RA, or competing in Track, Cierra is a case worker and legal clerk intern for the City of Philadelphia.

**Natalie Danko** is a junior Biology/Chemistry Research major who has the ultimate goal of pursuing her Ph.D. in genetics. She is a scholarship recipient in the Ethics in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (E-STEM) program here at Gwynedd Mercy University. Natalie is also a recipient of the McAuley Scholarship, a member of Sigma Phi Sigma, a member of the Student Association of Science, and a member of the University's Campus Hearing Board.

**Rosemarie DeBarberie** is a junior who is completing her Bachelor of Science Degree in Nursing. Besides working as a labor and delivery technician and taking nursing courses to finish her BSN, Rosemarie is a member of Sigma Phi Sigma, the National Mercy Honor Society. Additionally, she has spent a number of years as both a coach and member of the Board of Directors for local recreation and high school cheerleading teams.

**Michelle Handy** is a senior Human Services major whose goal upon graduation is to obtain her MSW and to work with children and youth who have mental health concerns. Michelle has spent several years working with children and youth in both a camp setting and a drug and alcohol rehabilitation program. She is a member of Tau Upsilon Alpha National Honor Society for Human Services, speaks French, Greek and American Sign Language, and is an experienced traveler abroad. She is an active member of St. Agnes Church, and is a current member of the Girl Scouts of America.

**Jenny Kyoung** is a sophomore Nursing major who has literally been on the fast track in the Griffin Student Leadership Institute. Jenny had the unusual opportunity to complete both the Emerging Leaders and the Evolving Leaders program during her first year at GMercyU, therefore making her eligible as an Exceptional Leader this year. Jenny serves as a Special Representative in the Student Government Association, and as Treasurer of the Student Activities Committee. She speaks both Korean and English fluently.

**Nicole Martin** is a junior Nursing student and a rising officer in Sigma Phi Sigma. Nicole's dedication to the health care of others is evidenced by her current work as both an Emergency Room Technician for Aria Health as well as her work as an EMT-B for the Levittown-Fairless Hills Rescue Squad. When not going to school or working as an EMT, Nicole spends time with her two children and her wonderful husband Charles.

**Danielle Rainier** is a senior Marketing major who has also been actively involved in leadership opportunities since she stepped foot on our GMercyU campus. Danielle has been a member of the Student Activities Committee for four years, a Resident Assistant for two years and has spent time as both a Griffin Ambassador and an Orientation Leader. She has also been involved in GMercyU's Alternative Spring Break, volunteering with children on the San Carlos Reservation in Arizona, with food insecurity issues in Cincinnati, and at Mercy Farm in Benson, Vermont.