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# **Cultural Leadership:**

## **An Evaluation of a Cross-Cultural Awareness and Youth Leadership Development Program for Jewish & African-American Youth**

**Class 4 2008**

*Prepared for*



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## Introduction

Cultural Leadership is an innovative youth leadership education program that takes young leaders from the Jewish and African American communities and transforms them into agents of social change. The intensive, year-long experience guides small groups of selected high school students through a process of leadership development that fosters self-knowledge and awareness and builds leadership competence. Participants explore their cultural heritage and social history, and examine issues of discrimination and social injustice through the lens of the Jewish and African American experience. Youth learn through cross-cultural experiences, traditional classroom-based instruction, and formal skills training, through travel to places of social and historical significance, and through interaction with prominent leaders from the local, national, and global communities who serve as mentors and role-models.

The Cultural Leadership program is modeled after Operation Understanding, which was first established in Philadelphia in 1985 by a former U.S. Congressman as a way to reinforce ties between the Jewish and African American communities. The program was later replicated in the Washington D.C. area as Operation Understanding D.C by the current Cultural Leadership founder. The program model was then adapted and transplanted to the St. Louis area and has evolved into the current model of Cultural Leadership. Like Operation Understanding, the purpose of Cultural Leadership is to promote cross-cultural understanding between Jews and African Americans, to educate youth about their cultural heritage and social history, and to urge them to confront inequality and injustice and resolve pressing social problems as activists and agents of social change. The program's formal mission statement is articulated as follows:

*Cultural Leadership exists to create a more just and equitable community by educating high school students to recognize and resolve issues of privilege and injustice through the lens of the African American and Jewish experience. Our students develop leadership skills, build relationships, facilitate dialogues and create change in their circles of influence.*

The students selected for participation in Cultural Leadership are sophomores and juniors in high school who reside in the greater St. Louis metropolitan area. They are recruited to apply through their schools and houses of worship (i.e., churches or synagogues) and are selected through a rigorous screening process. Program eligibility was restricted to students of African American or Jewish heritage who strongly identify with their race, ethnic, or cultural communities. All students must possess a natural curiosity about the world around them, and must demonstrate potential as future leaders. Once selected, youth must formally commit to attending all program elements, and to participating in a 24-day travel experience with their Cultural Leadership peers and trip leaders.

Cultural Leadership has been operating within the St. Louis area since 2004, recently concluding its fourth program cohort from 2008. The program is now mid-way through its fifth year of implementation serving an incoming cohort of students that includes non-Black and non-Jewish youth. The year-long program, as implemented in 2008, was comprised of the following curricular components:

- **Youth weekend retreats**, which are typically two to three days in length and involve formal instruction, guest lecturers, video presentations, facilitated group dialogue, and skill-building exercises;

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- **Youth sessions**, which are typically 6 hours in length, and are comparable to youth retreats with regard to content and forms of instruction;
  - **Challenge activities**, which are held outside of the formal program structure and are designed to challenge students to view society from different perspectives (e.g., school swap) or to move students outside of their comfort zones (e.g., pledging to confront discrimination and injustice);
  - **Cultural and religious events and activities**, which provide students with opportunities to become immersed in another culture and to share and celebrate diverse cultural traditions;
  - **24-day travel experience**, which involves travel to more than 12 cities across the Eastern and Southern U.S., meetings with prominent leaders, and visits to historical places and cultural venues of importance to social justice movements.

The program also includes a voluntary parent component that is aligned with the student curriculum. It is intended to introduce parents to similar content and material introduced in the youth program as a way to reinforce lessons and concepts, and to help parents best support and encourage their children's participation. Both the student and parent components are staffed by a full-time Project Director and are led by teams of professional facilitators.

### **Purpose of the Report**

The present report is the product of a single year evaluation of the Class 4 Cultural Leadership program. The evaluation was conducted by EMT Associates, Inc. through a one-year contract with the non-profit Cultural Leadership organization. The evaluation was designed to convey relevant information to the program's Executive Director, Board members, and staff about the observed strength of the program design, the quality of program delivery, and its associated outcomes, as a way to help shape, strengthen, or refine program elements for future cohorts of students.

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## Evaluation Approach

The evaluation of Cultural Leadership was conducted by EMT Associates, Inc., a California-based research consulting firm with more than 25 years of experience conducting local, state, and national evaluations of public sector programs. The purpose of the evaluation was to follow a single cohort of program participants and their parents and caregivers over their year-long involvement to document their experiences in the program, to gather feedback reflecting their satisfaction with participation and perceptions about program's value and impact, and to measure any changes in attitudes, perspectives, or actions that might be related to their involvement.

The local evaluation plan included both process and outcome evaluation components. The **process component** was used to assess the logic of the program model, the quality of the program design, and the strength of implementation. It reflects a management-focused approach to evaluation that emphasizes "hands-on" collaboration between program managers and the evaluation team, and incorporates the use of a) cooperative planning and decision-making to establish a shared understanding of the evaluation purpose and the selection of appropriate data collection approaches, b) interim reporting to deliver continuous, constructive feedback, and c) responsiveness to the informational needs of the program management. The process evaluation of Cultural Leadership involved a range of measurement approaches, including the use of logic modeling to describe the program model and to clarify the relationships between program purpose, activities, and intended outcomes and extensive documentation of participant feedback to identify program strengths, weaknesses, and future challenges, and to assess their overall satisfaction. The process evaluation helps to determine how well the program is functioning, identifies elements that contribute to success or failure, and provides useful information to support management decision-making.

The **outcome component** of the evaluation included qualitative measures of both student and parent perceptions regarding the impact of the Cultural Leadership on its participants, and quantitative, pre-post measures of key youth outcomes that were theoretically linked to the program design. These included measures of cultural identity, attachment, and belonging, and students' orientation toward persons of other races, ethnicities, and cultures. The outcome portion of the evaluation also focused on examining the movement of students toward social activism, while involved with the program, and documenting the focus and nature of their proposed actions.

## Evaluation Questions

The evaluation study was led by a series of broad research questions that were intended to guide and frame the various data collection activities. These questions include the following:

### *Process Evaluation Questions*

- What is the nature and strength of the relationships between the program's purpose and objectives, structure and activities, and their intended outcomes?
- How do program participants view the program experience? What are the identifiable strengths and weakness of the program design from the perception of its participants? In what ways could the program be strengthened to further enrich the experience of its participants?

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### ***Outcome Evaluation Questions***

- In what ways did participants feel that they had been impacted by their involvement with regard to changes in knowledge, perspectives, attitudes, behaviors, or future orientations?
- In what ways did parents feel that their children had been impacted by their program involvement?
- Were there any observable changes in students' sense of **cultural identity, belonging, and attachment** or their **orientation toward other diverse groups** based on comparisons of survey responses between the time students entered the program (baseline) and the time of program exit?
- What was the nature and extent of students' engagement in social action during the second half of their leadership training? Did students demonstrate increased social activism in their school and community life by the conclusion of their experience?

### **Data Collection Activities**

The evaluation involved several data collection activities to document information about the program and to record participants' perceptions about their experiences. These included:

- **Program Observation**  
Initial observations were conducted during the January and February youth retreats using a prepared observational protocol in order to familiarize the evaluation team with the program approach and to observe the group dynamics among youth and their peers, and youth and the program facilitators.
- **Participant Feedback Questionnaires** (January, February, May, October)  
Participant feedback questionnaires were used throughout the program year as tools to document student and parent reactions to specific program content and method of delivery, and to capture participants' perceptions about the impact of their experiences. Feedback forms were developed by EMT for a sampling of retreats and parent sessions as part of the formal evaluation. Program-administered feedback questionnaires were also developed by program staff in collaboration with EMT to collect interim feedback. Results were shared with the evaluation team.
- **Group Interviews** (n=24 students, 6-8 students per group)  
Youth who participated in the 24-day study tour were asked to participate in small group discussions with a facilitator from the evaluation team upon returning to the St. Louis area. The purpose of the interview was to capture collective insights about the impact of the travel experience and the impact of Cultural Leadership overall.
- **Travel Journaling**  
Students' reflections about their observations, actions, and emotional responses to the people and places they visited on the student tour were used as tool to evaluate the overall impact of the travel experience. Students were asked to respond to a brief set of questions to help them reflect on how their experiences had affected them and potentially challenged, reinforced, or expanded their existing belief systems. To best capture their

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perspectives in a timely manner, students were asked to complete a Travel Reflections booklet at two time points during the 24-day trip. Each booklet included a brief set of open-ended items. Responses were analyzed using a qualitative analytic approach that involved inventorying responses and then grouping them into common themes as a way to capture the nature and variation of their perceptions, and to understand how their travel experience ultimately impacted them.

- **Pre-Post Survey Administration** (Baseline n=28; Follow-up n= 26)  
At the first January 2008 retreat, students were asked to complete a baseline questionnaire that included the 12-item Multi-Group Ethnic Identity Measure, a standardized attitudinal survey instrument comprised of two scales measuring **cultural identity and belonging** and **other group orientation**. The MIEM was re-administered as part of a 12-month follow-up questionnaire in December of 2008 to measure changes that might be attributable to participation in Cultural Leadership. Results were compared for all participants with paired intake and follow-up questionnaires (n=26).
- **Alumni Follow-Up Surveys** (TBD)  
Students who participated both in Class 4 and earlier program cohorts will be administered a follow-up alumni survey to gauge their impressions about the longer-term impacts of their program experiences and to document progress toward achieving social action.

### **Structure of the Report**

The evaluation report is structured into seven sections. The first section offers a more detailed description of the Cultural Leadership program structure and components to establish background and context for the evaluation discussion. The section also introduces a logic model to explore the relationships among needs in the target population, program goals and objectives, activities, and anticipated outcomes, and examines the Cultural Leadership program model within the context of the youth leadership development field. The second section draws from data collected from student participants at selected retreats and program sessions to capture their impressions of the classroom-based portion of the Cultural Leadership experience. The third section of the report focuses on the experience of parents who attended one or more parent sessions during the 2008 year to gauge their impressions of the overall quality of programming and the perceived impact of participation on themselves and their children. This section is followed by a detailed discussion of the 24-day travel experience that occurred in the Summer of 2008, summarizing students' reflections on the people they met and the things they encountered. This section was excerpted from a stand-alone report that was prepared by EMT in August of 2008 after the conclusion of the 24-day student tour. The report next turns to a discussion of outcomes associated with participation in the program. This fifth section presents both qualitative information gathered from students reflecting their overall impressions of their program and its impact, and a discussion of the quantitative survey data collected at baseline and again at program exit measuring changes in student orientation and attitudes. This section is followed by a discussion of the progress made by participants toward implementing social action. It focuses on the time period between the conclusion of the 24-day study tour and the final 6 months of the program year. The report concludes with a set of findings and recommendations, based on the material presented that may be used to help shape future programming.

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## **The Cultural Leadership Program Model and Logic**

Cultural Leadership is now in its fifth year of implementation, having successfully graduated four previous cohorts of youth participants. The purpose of this section is to provide a more detailed description of the Cultural Leadership model as it was implemented during the Class 4 program year. This section will answer key questions related to who and how many students participated, how they were selected for inclusion, and what types of activities they engaged in over the duration of their involvement. It will also examine the strength and logic of the program model by explaining the underlying rationale for how the program attempts to achieve intended change. This section also briefly discusses the Cultural Leadership model within the context of the youth leadership development research literature and examines congruence between the Cultural Leadership program concept and a leading theoretical model of social-change oriented leadership development.

### **The Program Model**

The following is a basic description of the Cultural Leadership program design and its components, beginning with a discussion of the recruitment and selection process used to identify students for participation, and a profile of the characteristics of participants who were ultimately selected.

### **The Participants**

The Cultural Leadership program structure can accommodate up to 32 students in each cohort. There are several eligibility requirements for prospective participants. All students must reside in the greater St. Louis area and must be sophomores or juniors in high school at the time of their selection. Program eligibility was restricted to students who are African American or Jewish, although consideration is being given to expanding the program to members of other race/ethnicities for future cohorts. To satisfy eligibility, African American candidates must be of Black or African descent, must have lived within the U.S. for at least five years, and must self-identify as African American. Jewish students must have at least one Jewish parent, must belong to a synagogue and have knowledge of Judaism, and must identify themselves as Jews. Students must undergo a rigorous screening and selection process to be chosen for inclusion. They are evaluated on their prior accomplishments and potential for future leadership based on the student application and recommendations from adult leaders in their schools, communities, or houses of worship. Once students are selected, they must commit to attend and participate in all programmatic components, including a 24-day study-tour across portions of the U.S. with Cultural Leadership peers and staff members. Students who fail to fulfill this commitment are asked to leave the program.

In 2008, a total of 29 students were initially selected to participate in Class 4. By the conclusion of the 2008 year, there were 26 students who had remained active. This represents a rate of retention of approximately 93%, which is exceptionally high among voluntary youth programs. Among those who were initially recruited to participate, 72% were African-American and 28% were Jewish. African American girls were somewhat disproportionately represented, accounting for nearly half all participants. African American males accounted for another 25% of participants, with Jewish students equally divided between males (13%) and females (13%). The group of high school students from Class 4 was drawn from 16 different public and private high school sites from across the St. Louis region. All youth participants had one or more parent(s) attend at least one parenting session during the year of their involvement.

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## **Specific Program Activities**

### *Youth Classroom-Based Instruction*

The classroom-based instructional component includes a combination of youth retreats and meetings scheduled on a monthly basis totaling 120 hours of classroom-based instruction. Later youth retreats shifted their focus toward cultivating and testing a set of practical leadership skills that would support their efforts as social change agents. Specific skills addressed in the curriculum include facilitation training, public speaking, fundraising, community organizing, and working effectively with the media.

### *Cross-Cultural Learning Experiences*

Within the classroom settings students had the unique and important opportunity to engage in facilitated cross-cultural dialogue with their high school peers on a range of difficult issues involving social privilege, inequity, and injustice. Participants were also given the opportunity to learn first-hand about customs and cultural traditions of different groups. Many of the scheduled youth retreats allocated time outside of the classroom to attend religious and cultural ceremonies and celebrations, for example, attending synagogue and African American church services, celebrating major religious holidays, such as Easter and Passover, often in the homes of other Cultural Leadership students and their families, and attending a Bar Mitzvah to promote cross-cultural awareness and understanding. Parents also contributed to the program by providing meals during youth retreats and meetings.

### *Challenge Activities*

Outside of the structured classroom-based sessions youth were asked to engage in “real-world” experiences that challenge their perspectives or that pushed them to challenge themselves to do something “outside their comfort zone”. In the early portion of the program, youth made pledges to confront discrimination or inequities that they experience in their own lives or to expose themselves to new circumstances or situations. One example of a challenge activity was a “school swap” or exchange between students who attended more privileged high schools offering strong academic opportunities and those attending under-resourced public schools.

### *Summer Travel Experience*

From June 9 to July 2 of 2008, the students from Cultural Leadership embarked on a 24-day tour through ten major cities across the Northeast and Southern U.S. As part of their travels, students were given the opportunity to meet with a number of prominent, contemporary political and religious leaders, social activists, journalists, legal advocates, authors and historians, and other key historical figures who have been at the center of social justice movements throughout history. Students also visited historical places, museums, and cultural venues to learn more about the African American and Jewish experience first-hand.

In the 24-day trip, Cultural Leadership students and staff adhered to a rigorous itinerary that took them through New York City, Washington D.C., Atlanta, Birmingham, Montgomery, Selma, New Orleans, Jena, Jackson, Little Rock, and Memphis over a twenty-four day period. Students participated in tours, lectures, training sessions, volunteer projects, and interactive discussions, and had opportunities to immerse themselves in aspects of African American and Jewish culture by eating, worshipping, and spending free time among the people and communities they visited.

### *Parent Instructional Series*

The parents of Cultural Leadership students were asked to participate in a voluntary, adjunct parent program that was designed to align with the material covered in the student programs.

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### *Alumni Participation*

Once students complete the one-year leadership education curriculum they become alumni of the program and are encouraged to keep in connection with class peers and program staff, and to volunteer with the program, for example, by supporting recruitment and fundraising activities. There are at least three alumni events held each year that include a going away (on the summer trip) party, a party to celebrate students leaving for college, and a hosted lunch for student alumni and their parents held the Saturday after Thanksgiving.

## **The Logic Underlying the Cultural Leadership Model**

A logic model approach can be used to describe a program and its purpose and to articulate its underlying rationale by diagramming the relationships or linkages between a) the problems, needs, or unrealized opportunities in the target population and community, b) the stated purpose and objectives of the program that have been outlined to address these needs, c) the mechanism of change for achieving these objectives, and d) the resulting outcomes and impacts.

### **Defining the Need for Cultural Leadership**

The first step in building a program logic model is to define the need or problem in the target population or community that the program is attempting to address or resolve. In the case of Cultural Leadership, the global issue that was defined as the target of change is the presence of racial and ethnic discrimination, privilege and inequality, and social injustice in society. The program intends to confront these issues by cultivating a group of young leaders who possess the necessary self-knowledge, understanding, and competence to be able to plan and carry-out social actions that create positive change. However, less explicitly, the program also strives to address needs among individuals and within society to create new social norms, conditions, and opportunities that are conducive to cultivating young leaders. These include the need for greater opportunities for cross-cultural communication and meaningful dialogue among young people, and opportunities for youth to learn about and explore issues of culture, social history, and conflict in relevant and meaningful ways.

The program could also be conceptualized as addressing needs to transform the often normative view of young people as ‘victims’ or ‘problems’ and to recognize their potential contribution as important resources. The program also addresses the need for young leadership that represents diverse and often overlooked perspectives, the need for greater opportunities for youth civic engagement, and for more meaningful, hands-on opportunities to develop practical leadership skills.

### **Program Objectives**

The 2008 Cultural Leadership program for Class 4 was guided by a set of key program objectives that communicate what the program aimed to accomplish. These objectives have since undergone minor revision to more fully capture the overall mission, purpose, and goals of the Cultural Leadership experience. The revised set of objectives includes the five following statements of program intent. To:

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#### **How Students Define Needs—**

*“People must be willing to admit that racism still exists and that it is still relevant.”*

*“We need to talk to each other and learn from each other.”*

*“People need to educate themselves about differences so they can learn to appreciate them.”*

*“Leadership roles need to come from minorities who can ally themselves with people in power.”*

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- Educate youth about the causes and consequences of social injustice;
  - Promote cross-cultural awareness and understanding by immersing youth in diverse cultural experiences, dispelling ethnic and cultural stereotypes, and encouraging cooperation, mutual respect, and dialogue,
  - Provide direct exposure to leaders of social movements as mentors and models of social activism to demonstrate how youth can become agents of social change
  - Develop leadership competence through use of practical skills training, including instruction on public speaking, facilitation, community organizing and working with the media
  - Move youth to initiate change in their families, schools, neighborhoods and other circles of social influence.

### **The Program Elements**

To achieve these objectives, the Cultural Leadership organization has designed a comprehensive curriculum that incorporates a wide range of components and instructional strategies, including:

- **Didactic instruction** using traditional forms of classroom instruction, guest lecture, and video presentations to teach cultural, historical and social concepts;
- **Experiential learning** activities, including cross-cultural immersion, travel and field experiences integrating living history, interaction with prominent role-models, elements of service learning, and use of dialogue and self-reflection; and,
- **Task-based instruction** involving the integration of skill-building activities or exercises that focus on building competence through task completion.

### **Program Outcomes and Impacts**

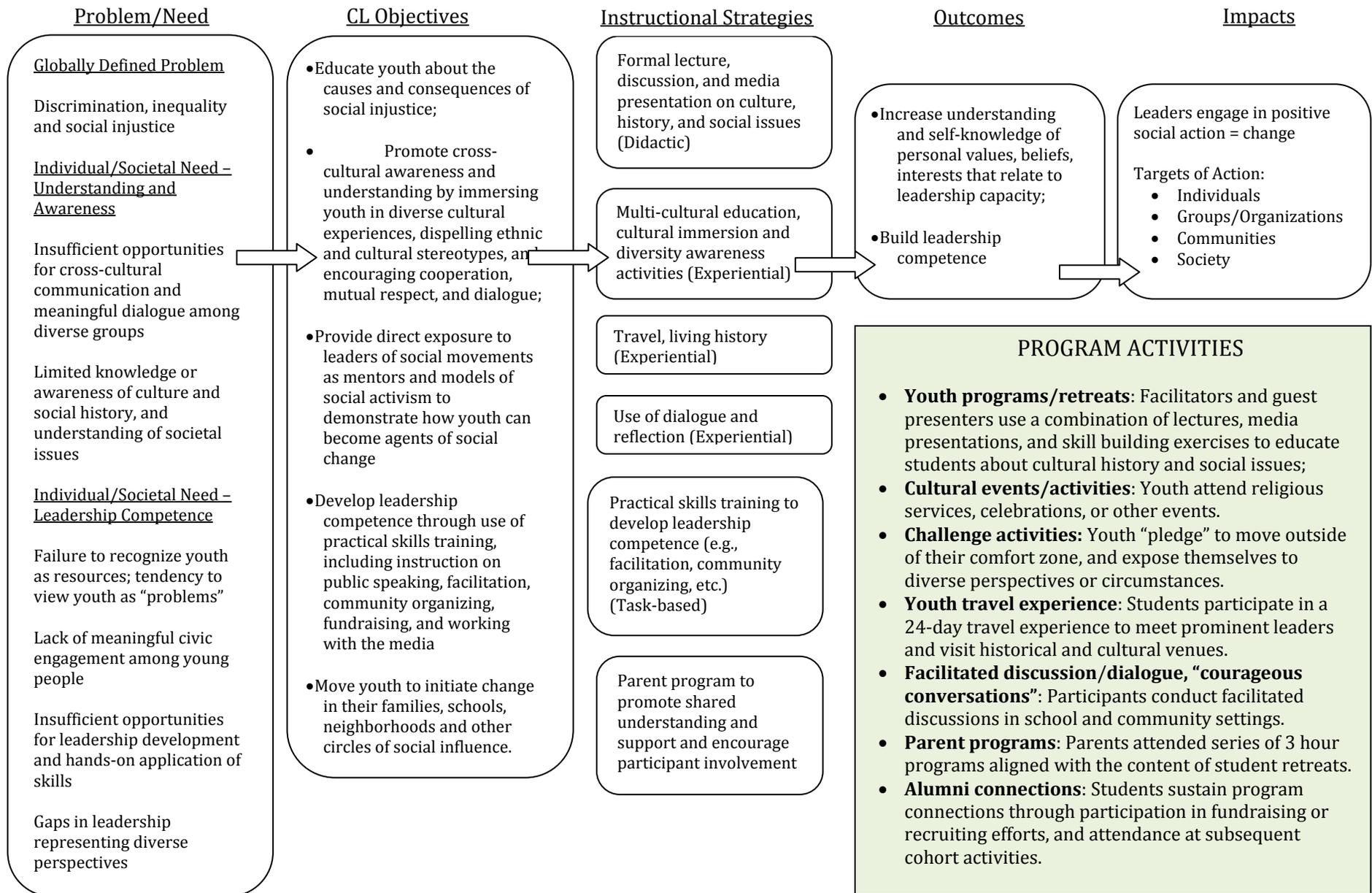
The program strategies function as the mechanisms of change that produce targeted outcomes. The outcomes for Cultural Leadership focus on how the program aims to transform individual participants and how these changes ultimately translate into positive social action. Because the Cultural Leadership program model is strongly congruent in its design with a leading theoretical leadership model known as the Social Change Model of Leadership Development<sup>1</sup>, developed by the UCLA Higher Education Research Institute, the outcomes defined for Cultural Leadership within the logic model borrow from this theoretical framework. These outcomes include:

- Increasing understanding and self-knowledge of personal values, beliefs, and interests that related to leadership capacity; and,
- Building leadership competence through practical skills training.

The two proposed primary program outcomes measure internal changes that effectively prepare and motivate youth participants to engage in social actions. These social actions target individuals, groups, and communities to influence positive change, and in turn, address the needs or conditions in society related to discrimination, inequality, and social injustice that the program aims to address.

<sup>1</sup> The Social Change Model of Leadership Development developed by the UCLA Higher Education Research Institute.

# Cultural Leadership Program Logic Model



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## **Conclusions**

This section used a logic modeling approach to clearly describe the Cultural Leadership program and its elements, and to articulate the relationships between needs and conditions in the community that the program aimed to address, the objectives that guided implementation, the specific strategies or activities that were the mechanisms for achieving intended change, and the resulting outcomes and impacts.

A goal for the evaluation of Class 4 was to provide feedback to the Cultural Leadership organization that might help clarify the underlying program rationale using a logic modeling technique. The first step toward this goal has been to revise stated program objectives to more fully capture each of the program elements and to begin to define the specific relationships among needs, objectives, activities, and outcomes. The logic modeling process can be an important evaluation tool because it can be used to test the strength of these program linkages, or more specifically, to determine whether program activities, as planned and implemented, were sufficient to produce intended outcomes. This approach can also be used to identify where elements of the program design might be refined or augmented to increase the strength of these relationships. These issues are addressed, in part, in subsequent sections of the report and should be the focus of future evaluation efforts. Another step for the evaluation moving forward will be to further operationalize the proposed program outcomes of increased self-awareness and leadership competency into measureable indicators that can be used to clearly quantify whether program outcomes have been achieved. These activities should be a key focus of future evaluation efforts.

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## **The Cultural Leadership Classroom Experience**

### **Developing Knowledge, Cross-Cultural Awareness, and Leadership Competence**

This next section of the report turns to the process component of the Cultural Leadership evaluation. The centerpiece of the process component was the measure of feedback from program participants, collected throughout the year, as a way to assess satisfaction and to make determinations about strengths and areas of improvement for each individual session. The present section offers a sampling of information and insights shared by students at two of the retreats held in January and October of 2008. Its purpose is to provide snapshot of 1) why students chose to participate in the program and how they initially perceived issues of discrimination and related stereotypes, and 2) how they reacted to specific content presented in the retreat setting, including content oriented toward promoting self-understanding and knowledge and content oriented toward building specific leadership skills.

#### **Opening of the Program**

The first meeting of Cultural Leadership was held in January of 2008 to coincide with the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday weekend. It was the first of three, multiple-day weekend retreats scheduled over the course of the year (January, April, and October). Between retreats there were seven monthly youth instructional sessions scheduled throughout the year. In all, students received more than 120 hours of total classroom-based instruction, not including time spent attending social and cultural events and engaging in challenge activities that were embedded in the program structure.

At the opening retreat in January of 2008 the youth selected to participate were asked to identify the reasons that they became involved with Cultural Leadership. Most offered one or more responses, which centered on the following themes:

- To learn about their own culture or about the relationship between the Jewish and African American cultures (41%);
- To learn about and be exposed to other cultures more generally (38%);
- To address issues of discrimination, to stand up for what's right, or create positive change (14%);
- To develop their leadership skills (14%);
- To meet new people and build new friendships (7%); and
- To build their resumes or to use on college applications (7%).

Students were also asked to identify stereotypes about both Jews and African Americans in society. Twenty-six students across both groups were able to identify Jewish stereotypes, 81% of which were negative and 9% of which were positive. Twenty-eight students were able to identify African American stereotypes, 96% of which were negative and only 4% of which were positive. Among those who identified negative stereotypes for their own cultural group, when asked how much truth was behind these stereotypes, about a quarter of Jewish students and nearly one-third (29%) of African American students responded that they were "somewhat true" or "very true", suggesting that students may have internalized many of the negative stereotypes pertaining to their own cultural identity.

When asked about whether Jewish and African American people faced prejudice in society from other groups, 74% of students 'definitely' agreed and 22% agreed 'somewhat' that African Americans faced prejudice. By comparison, when asked the same question about prejudice toward Jews only about 33% of students 'definitely' agreed and 42% agreed 'somewhat'. Among remaining respondents, about a quarter (25%) of participants did not perceive much or any prejudice toward Jews in society, compared to the 4% who shared the same feeling about African Americans. Interestingly, African American students were more likely to perceive prejudice toward both their own cultural group and toward their Jewish counterparts,

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than were Jewish students. This difference was most pronounced in responses regarding prejudice targeted at African Americans, with 81% of African Americans “definitely” perceiving prejudice, relative to 38% of Jewish youth.

### **Content of the January Retreat and Participant Reactions**

The initial student retreat reflected the focus of the early phase of the program on promoting cross-cultural awareness and acceptance and on educating youth about cultural and social history, race relations, and social inequality and discrimination. The opening day of the January retreat was dedicated to community-building among Cultural Leadership participants and engaging students in their first cross-cultural learning experience as Cultural Leadership members (i.e., attending synagogue). On the second day of the retreat students explored the meaning of becoming a social change agent and were introduced to the concept of “moving outside of a comfort zone”. Students also participated in an intensive fishbowl exercise that provided opportunities for self-expression and sharing of personal experiences, and taught concepts of listening with intent and recognizing and honoring differences. Students also participated in team-building activities and lectures and discussion of the history of social relations between Blacks and Jews, and engaged in a guided process of self-reflection. The third and final day of the retreat was devoted to additional cross-cultural awareness (i.e., attending an African American church service) and team-building activities, and further reflection on the retreat experience.

At the conclusion of the first retreat, students were asked to share their feedback about the experience and the extent to which they felt it had impacted them in each of the following ways. Responses were rated on a four-point scale ranging from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’. Among their responses:

- 70 % **strongly agreed** that the program provided an opportunity to learn something new about their own culture;
- 96 % **strongly agreed** that it offered an opportunity to learn something new about a culture other than their own;
- 75 % **strongly agreed** that Cultural Leadership challenged their perceptions on racial stereotypes or differences between races or cultural groups;
- 75 % **strongly agreed** that it provide an opportunity to understand factors contributing to racism; and,
- 96 % **strongly agreed** that it helped them make connections with other youth who are different from themselves.

### **Content of the October Retreat and Participant Reactions**

The content of the three-day October retreat reflected a latter program emphasis on helping youth building specific skills needed to become change agents. The retreat was dedicated to teaching students how to facilitate dialogue and to provide concrete practice opportunities to apply the skills learned. On the opening evening of the retreat students viewed a video on using facilitation as a tool for social change. Students then divided into teams and selected facilitation topics, which would be discussed in formal group facilitations that were planned for the following two-days and that would involve guests of Cultural Leadership participants who had been invited to attend. Students also spent time observing program staff engaging in a model facilitation, were given time to initiate planning for the following day, and began to engage in specific skill-building activities. Day Two of the retreat offered students the opportunity to conduct a brief practice facilitation and to receive feedback from staff and peers. Much of the remainder of the day involved engaging students in skill-building exercises (e.g., using probing questions, handling distracters, getting all voices in the room) to further cultivate their facilitation skills and to prepare for the formal evening facilitation. The second night of the retreat guests of students were invited to participate in two group facilitations and a single-large group debriefing session, and CL students

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received structured feedback from staff on their performance. On the final morning time was spent on self-reflection and processing of the previous evening's events before students initiated the second set of facilitations with invited guests. Students were again given the opportunity to debrief following the group-led dialogue and to share what they had learned.

Overall, 88% of CL participants reported that the instruction they received on facilitation at the retreat was 'very useful' with all others indicate that their training was at least 'somewhat useful'; however, only 67% of students 'definitely' agreed that they had received enough instruction to adequately prepare to facilitate a discussion effectively, and 83% agreed that 'much more time' or 'some more time' was needed. All students perceived value in the three-day experience, reporting that the retreat was useful in preparing them for a future role as a social change agent.

### **Conclusion**

These brief summaries of the January and October student retreats provide a snap-shot of the retreat structure and planned activities and a sample of reactions to content among participants. The specific information gleaned from these event-specific evaluations activities were summarized throughout the program year and were used to inform Cultural Leadership staff about curricular strengths and effectiveness of program delivery, as well as areas needing improvement, for each student session.

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## The Cultural Leadership Parent Component

### Promoting Shared Understanding and Creating a Community of Support

The youth retreats and instructional sessions were supplemented with a parallel program that was designed for the parents/caregivers of participants. A total of seven parent programs were offered between January and November of 2008, each approximately 3 hours in length. In all, the parent program offered parents the equivalent of more than twenty hours of potential programming.

The programs were led by two group facilitators and covered the following content-related topics and activities:

- Welcome and Orientation
- Fishbowl
- Black History and Culture
- Jewish History and Culture
- How to Be Allies
- Understanding Racism, Discrimination, and Oppression
- Opportunities for Cross-Cultural Sharing

In all, a total of 47 parents/caregivers of Cultural Leadership students attended one or more parent programs throughout the year, and each student had at least one parent represented at one or more sessions. On average individual parents or couples attended an average of 4 out of 7 sessions offered, which represents an extremely high level of parental involvement.

An important component of the evaluation was not only to capture parents' perspectives on their children's involvement with Cultural Leadership, but also their satisfaction with their own program involvement. For each parent program, participants were asked to offer brief feedback to evaluate satisfaction with each session. At the conclusion of the final parent program in November of 2008, parents were asked to complete a lengthier follow-up questionnaire to document their perceptions of the program overall. A total of 19 forms were completed and returned by respondents representing 10 Jewish parents, 8 African American parents, and one parent self-identifying as 'other race'.

Parents were first asked about the frequency with which they had conversations with their child about his or her involvement with Cultural Leadership. Nearly 90% of parents responded that they spoke with their children "often" about the program and the remaining 11% spoke with their children occasionally. Ninety percent of parents also indicated that they were "very satisfied" with their child's involvement in the program. Parents unanimously agreed that they would "definitely" recommend the program to other parents of high school age children. Generally, there were no meaningful differences between Jewish and

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#### Parents' Perspectives on the Impact of Cultural Leadership on their Children

*"He has expanded his worldview and developed leadership skills. He's developed intense, meaningful personal relationships, and he's become committed to having a significant role in improving our world."*

*--Jewish parent*

*"He learned so much about his own culture and the Jewish culture. He has grown tremendously. He's more confident and has a new sense of pride."*

*--African American parent*

*"She has support for articulating her beliefs. She has learned to speak up for herself and for others. She has experienced "oneness." She has shared her cultural and religious upbringing."*

*--Jewish parent*

*"She is not afraid to speak out to injustice and she has been enlightened about how others perceive their "reality."*

*--African American parent*

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African American parents with regard to their overall program satisfaction or inclination to recommend the program to others.

Parents felt that their children were positively impacted by the program in a number of ways. Specifically, parents felt that Cultural Leadership:

- Helped their children gain confidence and maturity
- Motivated them to achieve change;
- Expanded their knowledge of culture and history and promoted cross-cultural understanding between groups;
- Instilled courage to articulate their beliefs and to confront inequity and injustice;
- Exposed them to new worldviews, life experiences, and opportunities;
- Fostered new and lasting relationships;
- Cultivated their leadership skills;
- Increased awareness of social injustices; and,
- Motivated them to achieve change.

Parents were also able to anticipate many potential ways that students could apply what they had learned through their experience in the future. Several parents felt that the lessons learned through Cultural Leadership would carry over into their child's college experience, by influencing students' interests and campus involvements. Others felt that Cultural Leadership might influence the career path that their children choose to pursue. More immediate influences on students' day-to-day life, including positively influencing the way that students interact with other people, particularly those of other race or ethnic groups, were also mentioned.

When parents were asked to identify ways that they felt the student portion of the program could be strengthened. The recommendations offered, ordered by frequency of mention, included (n=14):

- Expanding the program's eligibility criteria to include students from other cultures and race/ethnic groups;
- Adjusting program scheduling, with specific suggestions to reduce the length of weekend retreats and to avoid conflicts with school schedules (e.g., planning retreat weekends during final exams);
- Incorporating more "hands-on" opportunities for social action, such as organizing action plans or working on community service projects; and,
- Focusing more emphasis on the political process and the importance of civic engagement.

The remaining parents surveyed either offered no specific recommendations, or stated that the program did not require any improvement. It should be noted that many of the recommendations offered have emerged in feedback from previous classes and have been given consideration by staff where feasible. For example, for the first time in 2009, student membership was expanded (Class 5) to include students who are neither Jewish nor African American.

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### **Parents' Perspectives on the Most Important Aspect of their Participation**

*"It reinforced positive feelings and made me want to stay involved in the future."*  
--Jewish parent

*"It was wonderful to get to know other parents and to hear about their experiences first hand."*  
--Jewish parent

*"Learning about Jewish customs and traditions and the similarities and differences between their culture and my own."*  
--African American parent

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Separate from their perceptions about the impact of Cultural Leadership on their children, parents were also asked to evaluate their own experience with the parent component of the program by rating the quality of the program content, the quality of the program facilitation, and their personal satisfaction with their involvement. On questions concerning the quality of program content, 89% of parents agreed that it was 'very true' that content of the parenting sessions was interesting, 83% agreed that content was informative, and 79% agreed that content was relevant to their own life experiences. All other respondents agreed that these statements were at least 'somewhat true', with none rating them as 'not very true' or 'not true at all'. Each of the two program facilitators were also rated very highly, with 90% or more of respondents stating that it was 'very true' that each facilitator was knowledgeable about the content presented, was effective at facilitating group discussion, and was responsive to parents' questions. When asked about their overall satisfaction with participation, 79% of parents indicated that they were 'very satisfied' and 21% percent indicated that they were at least 'somewhat satisfied'.

Parents were also asked to offer recommendations for how the parent component of Cultural Leadership could be improved. The few recommendations mentioned (n=10) included:

- Reducing the length of the parent program;
- Creating more opportunities for parents and students to interact in joint activities;
- Offering more opportunities for small group discussion;
- Offering more opportunities for socialization;
- Placing greater emphasis on similarities over differences;
- Encouraging parents to be more open in group discussions; and,
- Varying the location (e.g., allowing parents to host programs).

Once again, the remaining parents either offered no specific recommendations, or stated that the program did not require any improvement.

### **Conclusion**

Parent involvement has been identified as a crucial element in the success of most youth programs, although it is often difficult to achieve, given the competing priorities and time and scheduling constraints facing many contemporary families. The fact that students' families universally attended at least one parenting session, and that on average parents attended at least half of all sessions offered, demonstrates a high level of engagement and support among family members and offers evidence that parents perceived a great deal of value in attending.

Based on participants' feedback, the parent component appeared to be very well-received. The few recommendations offered to enhance parent satisfaction were relatively minor, and could be reasonably incorporated. Feedback also suggests that parents were highly supportive of their children's involvement and felt that the program had positively impacted them in a number of profound ways. Parent recommendations to improve the youth component of the program generally validated similar recommendations offered by students, which are discussed in the following sections, and should be given consideration for future cohorts. One exception to this statement concerns recommendations to resolve school scheduling conflicts, which, unfortunately, may be unavoidable given that students originate from so many different school settings.

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## Cultural Leadership Travel Experience: Reliving History and Making Connections

The next section of the report focuses on one of the most important and impactful elements of the Cultural Leadership experience from the participants' perspectives. This reference is to the opportunity for students to leave the classroom and embark on a twenty-four day tour across portions of the U.S. to explore history and contemporary society from a new experiential perspective. Cultural Leadership students and staff adhered to a rigorous itinerary that took them to New York City, Washington D.C., Atlanta, Birmingham, Montgomery, Selma, New Orleans, Jena, Jackson, Little Rock, and Memphis. Students participated in tours, lectures, training sessions, volunteer projects, and interactive discussions, met with prominent leaders, visited historical venues, and had opportunities to immerse themselves in aspects of African American and Jewish culture

The Cultural Leadership (CL) travel experience teams the benefits of experiential learning and living history with cultural immersion. On their travels, students become directly engaged in the learning process through observation, interaction, and reflection upon the places they visited and the individuals they met, whose personal stories have shaped American social history and culture. Educational researchers have argued that this use of primary source material and field experience can be an important tool to promote cross-cultural understanding and to enhance comprehension of content knowledge related to multicultural learning (Farmer, J., Knapp, D., and Benton, G., 2006). Similar to "cultural plunge" activities used in university teacher education programs (Nieto, 2006), the CL experience also creates opportunities for students to come in contact with people in real-life settings who are culturally different from themselves, to gain insight into the characteristics, circumstances, and histories of cultural communities and their leaders, and to explore their own personal values, biases, and belief systems.

In the first question posed to students, they were asked to identify the two or three individuals they encountered on the trip who they found to be the most interesting or intriguing, and to state what impressed them the most about these people, either positively or negatively. When asked what it was that appealed to them the most about the individuals that they identified, there was a broad range of responses. Many students were generally impressed by the life stories that were shared and the accomplishments that these individuals had made. Students also mentioned personal attributes of some speakers that they found to be particularly appealing, including their determination, dedication, passion, enthusiasm, strength of conviction, and ability to inspire others. Other traits that students valued were openness, honesty, outspoken-ness, humility, and the ability to make students feel comfortable and welcomed. CL students also cited specific qualities that made certain speakers stand out. For instance, several students mentioned that they had found strong personal role models among the individuals they had met, for example, in being successful leaders of their own communities, or in demonstrating that young people can make a difference. In some instances, students mentioned that a specific insight an individual had shared was what made them so impactful; while in other instances, the aspect that made them most interesting or intriguing was that their viewpoints were either different from, or in opposition to, the views of CL students. For one individual, the quality that made him stand out was the method he used to convey his message, which students stated was to "*showcase our ignorance*" as a way to teach the importance of being well-informed.

In all, the individuals who were assembled to meet with CL students over the course of their twenty-four day journey, together, personified the leadership qualities that the program is hoping to cultivate in its young people, brought students face-to-face with their own social histories, and allowed them to experience cultures, both their own and others', in new and meaningful ways.

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Students were also asked about the different locations that they visited, and to gauge which of these influenced them most deeply. For the first half of the trip through New York, Washington, D.C., and Atlanta, the top five places that students mentioned included the New York Tolerance Center, the Innocence Project, the Harlem Children’s Zone, the National Urban League, and the Holocaust Memorial Museum. For the second portion of the journey, the leading places mentioned included the tour of New Orleans and the Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward, Jacob’s Camp, a Southern-based summer camp for Jewish youth, the Slavery and Civil War Museum, Jena, Louisiana, center of the Jena 6 civil rights case, and the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church, the site of the 1963 Ku Klux Klan bombing that killed four young African American girls.

There were several reasons offered by students for why certain places influenced them more deeply. For some, the places they visited provided positive inspiration by demonstrating what can be accomplished; other places opened their eyes to the presence of inequality, injustice, and inaction. Benefits of experiential learning were also reflected in students’ responses. For example, one student remarked on how the visit to Ellis Island had helped him make the connection to what he had previously learned in the classroom. Another student was able to contrast the ethnically integrated communities he observed in New York City with his own more racially homogenous high school and noted the value in seeing the difference. One other student talked about how the opportunity to work with Habitat for Humanity felt “real” and gave students the sense that they had accomplished something meaningful. Many emphasized the powerful nature of confronting history first-hand.

Students were also asked to think about the things that they had heard or observed on the trip that have challenged the way they think or feel, or that have helped them see things from a new or different perspective. Their responses demonstrate the full depth of their program experience. Answers they gave included:

- Interacting with and accepting people who have opposing viewpoints, or those who see the world through a different lens;
- Learning about religious beliefs and customs that are outside of more mainstream culture (e.g., Orthodox Judaism, Islam);
- Confronting the realities of inequality and injustice throughout history and in contemporary society, both locally and on a global scale;
- Responding emotionally to the experience of a slavery re-enactment and gaining appreciation for the power of derogatory language;
- Acknowledging and lamenting a limited awareness and knowledge of their own culture and cultural history;
- Feeling frustrated with government inactivity;
- Realizing the potential for individuals to make a difference;
- Appreciating the sacrifices that have been made throughout history to achieve social justice and equality; and,
- Reevaluating decisions about how to make the most impact, where to focus their own efforts, and whether their past attempts at social change agency had been powerful enough.

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**Reaction to Historical Places**

*“I always love being where history took place and seeing it with my own eyes. Experiencing the tablespoons of slavery at the museum changed my life forever.”*

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Through their experiences, students reported feeling greater acceptance, tolerance, and understanding of difference, even when others’ beliefs ran counter to their personal values, gaining newfound awareness about history and social issues, and feeling inspired to take action. Of all the experiences that students mentioned, however, the one referenced most frequently as having had a profound impact was the encounter with a White Baptist minister in Jena, Louisiana. For many, this meeting

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forced the realization that there are those in the world in positions of authority who do not share what students had presumed to be universally-held assumptions about what constitutes an ideal society. Some youth reacted to this realization with feelings of anger and alienation, while others felt the experience had only further strengthened their convictions about the importance of social change and their own role in achieving it. Some drew practical lessons from the interaction, such as the importance of listening without judging as a way to establish dialogue, while others gained a new recognition of the real difficulties awaiting them as social change agents.

Students were also asked how learning about historical experiences of Jews and African Americans in American society had influenced the way they think about contemporary issues of race and cultural relations. Again, there were several themes identified across responses. Specifically, the process of learning about history had:

- Increased an awareness of racist undercurrents that often exist in society and made them more attuned to the implications of their own words and actions, and the words and actions of others;
- Inspired them through models of leadership and demonstrated how unity can be achieved;
- Conveyed concepts and ideas that they felt they could incorporate into their own change efforts, such as the concept of *tikkun olam*, a Hebrew phrase meaning “repairing the world”;
- Strengthened their own cultural identity and conveyed the importance of learning about culture and history;
- Presented a historical context that deepened their understanding of the nature and origins of racial conflicts.

At the conclusion of each set of questions, students were given a final opportunity to share any further thoughts or feelings. Students almost universally elected to provide additional comments. In many of these comments, students expressed their gratitude for the opportunity, recognizing that it would not have been possible in the absence of the CL program. Students also reemphasized the insights they had gained and the things they had learned, which included the ability to question and think-critically. Responses also reflected a new self-awareness and a realization that they had more in common with one another than previously thought. Most articulated what it was about them that had changed as the result of their CL experience.

There were just a few recommendations that emerged from students’ shared responses and from overall impressions of the project. While student reactions to nearly all aspects of the trip were overwhelmingly positive, two types of experiential learning activities stood out as being particularly meaningful for students and could be further incorporated into the travel itinerary. It was clear from students’ comments that they highly valued their interactions with people whose viewpoints were different from their own. Many saw this as an opportunity to test their skills in creating dialogue, and as a result questioned the effectiveness of their own approach to influencing others’ belief systems. Students also expressed an interest in having more opportunities for volunteerism and active, hands-on learning like what they experienced in New Orleans constructing houses for Habitat for Humanity. One student emphasized the value of not just learning about the social activism of others, but actually taking part in it to feel that they have made a difference. The only remaining recommendation that filtered through students’ comments was that the full itinerary for the trip may be so compacted as to not leave much time for students to absorb and reflect on their experiences. Many students expressed the desire for more down time, while one indicated that occasionally students felt “rushed” and were unable to take in an experience fully due to the need to move onto the next venue. Accordingly, consideration

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could be given to lightening the travel schedule by choosing from among the speakers, places, and activities that resonated most strongly with student participants.

**Conclusion**

The twenty-four day Cultural Leadership tour across portions of the U.S. has been referred to as a “transformational journey” by the staff and students who experience it. The trip itself represents an extraordinary opportunity to bring students into contact with a constellation of individuals who have been instrumental in shaping American social history. Through the experience, students have the opportunity to explore and encounter elements of history, contemporary society, and culture in a way that reaches beyond the realm of most young people’s life experiences. Based on students’ reflections, it is clear that the trip represents a unique and effectual educational tool that has taught students about the importance of their own culture and origins, about qualities of leadership, and about how individual people can transform entire communities.

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## Perceived Impacts of Cultural Leadership and Observed Changes in Attitudes and Orientation

Youth and program staff celebrated the conclusion of their year-long involvement with a formal graduation ceremony held in January of 2009. From this point, students become members of an alumni network of former program participants and who, ideally, will maintain long-term contact with program staff and their Cultural Leadership peers into the future. At this point of transition, students were asked to respond to a lengthy interview questionnaire that was designed to capture the essence of what they felt they had taken away from the Cultural Leadership experience, and how they felt they had changed as a result of their involvement.

Students shared a number of personal perspectives about what they had undergone over the course of the program year. Shown in order of the frequency of mention, they specifically conveyed that program had helped them to:

- Realize the importance of speaking up and taking positive action;
- Navigate differences among people in a more positive and constructive way;
- Recognize discrimination and injustice and be more aware of how these issues impact society;
- Value their own culture and history and to appreciate the connections between African Americans and Jews;
- Understand how their personal actions or inactions affect others;
- Avoid stereotyping, be less judgmental, and be more open to differences;
- Expect more from themselves and from others; and,
- Enhance their ability to listen.

Students were also asked to identify the aspect or element of their experience that impacted them the most. The most striking quality of their responses was the breadth of the answers that they provided. Rather than conveying consensus about a single 'best' program element that outshined all others, their range of responses indicated that individuals were able to take something away from the program that was uniquely personal to them. This demonstrates that the program was successful in achieving good balance in program quality across many of its programmatic elements. Several students remarked that the most important aspect of the program was the way that it had influenced them internally, promoting personal growth in areas such as increasing motivation, building courage, and enabling them to better realize their own value and potential. Other students pointed to more tangible program elements as being most important, most notably the travel experience, and specifically the opportunity to meet prominent leaders face-to-face and to learn about people and organizations that are working to create positive change. Also mentioned were the opportunity to become more educated about issues and to develop leadership competency.

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### Students' Perspectives on Ways Cultural Leadership Challenged the Way They Think or Feel

*"This experience challenged who I thought I was and who I thought I was in relation to others in my own ethnic group. My opinions of other people have changed, my expectations of myself have been altered greatly. I want more from myself and I want others to expect more from themselves."*

*"Cultural Leadership helped open my eyes to the discrimination endured by Jews and helped me feel a link with them. It has also shown me the necessity of speaking up and the danger of silence."*

*"It made me realize that I cannot passively sit by and wait for others to lead."*

*"I think that before the program I was more likely to put people in categories instead of really looking at them three-dimensionally. I've learned to look past the surface."*

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## Areas of Program Influence

Youth were also asked to respond to a set of fixed-response items that focused on the potential ways that the program might have influenced them. In analyzing their responses, it was clear that the vast majority of students felt that they had been moderately to strongly influenced in all key areas of intended outcomes. More specifically:

- **100 percent** of students felt the program had had a **strong or moderate influence** on their desire and determination to become agents of change;
- **100 percent** also felt that program had a **strong or moderate influence** on their ability to challenge or influence others' ideas and opinions in a positive way;
- **96 percent** believed Cultural Leadership had **strongly or moderately influenced** their awareness or understanding of culture and race;
- **96 percent** indicated that the program had a **strong or moderate influence** on their sense of empowerment and belief in their own ability to affect change.

Lesser impacts were reported in the areas of relationship building and skills development, although ratings were still strong. For example:

- **80 percent** of youth felt Cultural Leadership had a **strong or moderate influence** on relationships with peers in the program;
- **80 percent** felt that the program had helped them to develop skills to support community organizing efforts or to work effectively with the media; and,
- **77 percent** perceived a **strong or moderate influence** on their relationship with people of other races or cultures outside of the program, with 19 percent believing that the program had had **some influence** in this area.

Another area of interest for the evaluation related to strength of program influences was whether students entering the program from different cultural backgrounds might bring with them different perspectives about issues of race and discrimination and could potentially be impacted differently by the experience. When disaggregating mean or average responses by cultural group, there were some interesting differences in how much students felt the program had influenced them in different areas, suggesting that students may, in fact, have been impacted differently based on their cultural identity. The largest differences in ratings between Jewish and African American youth were found on measures of cultural identity and orientation toward inter-cultural relationships, compared to only small disparities between groups around more motivation-oriented or skills-related areas of impact. For instance, the largest gap between groups was observed on an item measuring the program's influence on relationships with peers inside of Cultural Leadership. Jewish students were much more likely to report a strong influence in this area, whereas African American students were more likely to report a 'moderate influence', 'some influence', or 'not much influence at all'. This difference may reflect the fact that African American students accounted for three-quarters of all Cultural Leadership participants in Class 4 and as the dominant group, had a more

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## Students' Perspectives on Whether Cultural Leadership Met or Exceeded Expectations

*"Cultural Leadership has greatly exceeded my expectations. I am never afraid to stand up to prejudice. I am constantly working and planning on ways to positively influence the world. I believe I can change the world...I've never had such confidence and power."*

*"Cultural Leadership is more than what I expected. It has brought together different people from different parts of the city and connected them, educated them, and made them into change agents."*

*"It has exceeded expectations. I have many connections now, and my knowledge of the civil rights movement has grown exponentially."*

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culturally-homogenous peer environment, which may have led them to perceive less influence from the program in this area. There were also considerable differences between the two groups on how they perceived the program had influenced relationships with people of other races or cultures outside of Cultural Leadership, with Jewish students perceiving stronger impacts from the program in this area than African Americans. Differences in perceptions about the extent of the program's impact on knowledge and appreciation of own cultural history and identity were also found, with African American students feeling much more strongly, positively influenced by the program in this way than their Jewish counterparts. This difference may reflect greater access among Jewish students to supplemental education focusing on the history and culture of Judaism as part of their formal religious instruction, and a selection bias associated with limiting participation to Jewish students who are actively involved with their synagogue. The occasional references among African American students to a desire for the same type of awareness of their cultural history and background that they had observed among their Jewish counterparts, suggests that many African American students may not have comparable avenues outside of Cultural Leadership to explore their own culture and history, and that their participation in the program provides a unique opportunity for this form of learning.



## Cultural Leadership Participants Perceptions Regarding the Impact of their Experience 2008 Follow-Up Survey Administration (n=26)

	Strong Influence	Moderate Influence	Some Influence	Not Much Influence	No Influence	Mean Rating	Mean Rating Jewish	Mean Rating African American
Awareness or understanding of issues of culture and race	20	5	1	0	0	4.73	4.63	4.78
	76.9%	19.2%	3.8%	0.0%	0.0%	--	--	--
Knowledge and appreciation own cultural history/ identity	14	9	1	1	0	4.44	4.00	4.65
	56.0%	36.0%	4.0%	4.0%	0.0%	--	--	--
Relationships with your peers in Cultural Leadership	15	6	2	3	0	4.27	4.88	4.00
	57.7%	23.1%	7.7%	11.5%	0.0%	--	--	--
Relationships with people of other races or cultures outside of CL	13	7	5	1	0	4.19	4.50	4.10
	50.0%	26.9%	19.2%	3.8%	0.0%	--	--	--
Desire and determination to become a change agent	21	4	0	0	0	4.84	4.75	4.88
	84.0%	16.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	--	--	--
Ability to challenges or influence others' ideas and opinions in a positive way	18	7	0	0	0	4.72	4.63	4.77
	72.0%	28.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	--	--	--
Sense of empowerment/ belief in your own ability to affect change	19	6	1	0	0	4.69	4.50	4.78
	73.1%	23.1%	3.8%	0.0%	0.0%	--	--	--
Skills to be effective as a social change-agent—facilitations skills	18	7	0	0	0	4.72	4.75	4.71
	72.0%	28.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	--	--	--
Skills to be effective as a social change agent—community organizing	12	8	5	0	0	4.28	4.38	4.24
	48.0%	32.0%	20.0%	0.0%	0.0%	--	--	--
Skills to be effective as a change agent—working with the media	12	9	5	0	0	4.27	4.13	4.33
	46.2%	34.6%	19.2%	0.0%	0.0%	--	--	--

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### **Participant Feedback about How Cultural Leadership Could Be Strengthened**

In addition to providing feedback about their personal experiences with the program, there were also several opportunities over the course of the year for students to offer recommendations for how the program could be strengthened. The two main sources of information reflecting students' evaluation of the program overall were the the small group interviews conducted at a mid-way point in the few days following their 24-day study tour and the final feedback questionnaire administered at the conclusion of the program year as part of an exit data collection process. The sentiments expressed by students at the end of the program tended to reinforce what was expressed in focus groups, and for this reason, the information from each source has been combined into a single set of recommendations.

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These included:

- **Limiting the number of speakers and amount of content:** There was strong consensus among participants, particularly with regard to the Summer trip, that too much material was covered in the amount of time allotted. Many students found it difficult to maintain their focus and to absorb information due to fatigue. Other students felt that over-scheduling had compromised opportunities for discussion and reflection that were integral to the learning process.
- **Integrating other cultural groups:** Another frequently mentioned recommendation was to allow participation from other race, ethnic, or cultural groups. Participants argued that the program would benefit from more diverse perspectives and viewpoints. One student also suggested that the program may need to move beyond conventional ways of defining culture and race to accommodate mixed-race or multi-racial cultural framework.
- **Offering more opportunities to engage in concrete experiences outside of the classroom.** Another predominant theme that emerged in both focus group discussions, in travel journals, and on written feedback forms was the desire for more concrete opportunities to engage in community service or social action projects as part of their program involvement. For example, one student commented that “I learned more about Jewish history, but making a better world is something I’ll have to learn elsewhere” as a way to explain why expectations of the program were not fully met.

More minor recommendations offered by students included:

- **Integrating additional content.** Some students outlined specific requests to integrate additional content into the curriculum or to add locations to the travel itinerary. The specific content requests included coverage of Malcolm X, James Baldwin, and other prominent Black leaders outside of the Civil Rights Movement, and including more focus on current social and political events. One student also requested that Money, Mississippi be included on the travel itinerary. With regard to strengthening specific content areas, student mentions included the need to strengthen the community organizing session, and to offer more explanation of Jewish holidays.
- **Balancing demographic composition:** Many responses focused on the need for greater balance in the demographic composition of participants, specifically with regard to the gender balance and the balance between African American and Jewish students. Occasionally, students also

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### **Selected Comments Involving Areas for Improvement**

#### ***Group Composition***

*“I think the only problem with the program was the imbalance between Blacks and Jews. The program should be more even to get the best results”*

#### ***Amount of Material Covered***

*“I would say have fewer speakers. We were all so exhausted by the end of the day. It’s just hard to take everything in when there’s just so much.”*

*“I would change the amount of downtime. We listened to so many speakers over the trip. I would get so tired and would focus more on trying to stay awake than what the speaker was saying.*

#### ***Opportunities for Hands-On Learning Experiences***

*“We talk a lot, but we really need to get out in the community and do a lot more stuff....”*

*“...I think most of us are comfortable talking in the group, but not outside of the group. Maybe it’s just going out there and actually doing stuff. We talk so much, but we don’t actually DO.”*

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expressed an interest in having more diverse political and socio-economic diversity among participants. Specifically students discussed integrating more conservative viewpoints, and an interest in recruiting students from more diverse social-economic backgrounds. Specifically, within one focus group interview sessions, students communicated that, in their view, the selection of Jewish students from predominantly affluent backgrounds had acted to reinforce some of the stereotypes that the program was hoping to dispel. In addition to discussion about balancing composition, there was some mention within the focus groups discussions of limiting the overall number of students who were recruited and enrolled in the program. Some commented on having too many voices, while others questioned the commitment level of some of their peers in the program.

These recommendations offered by students provide important insights into ways that the program could potentially be further strengthened. Many of these recommendations are given further consideration in a final discussion of evaluation findings and recommendations for modifying the program for future classes. Overall, students' comments reflected very positively on the entire Cultural Leadership experience and their personal accounts offer evidence that the program had a deep and substantial impact on the way in which they viewed themselves and their role in bettering the world around them. The next discussion seeks to build on students personal accounts of the magnitude of these program influences by quantifying some of these selected program impacts.

## Measures of Changing Attachment, Identity and Orientation

The outcome evaluation of Cultural Leadership aimed to supplement qualitative findings drawn from participant’s impressions of the program with selected quantitative measures of individual change that might be linked to a participant’s program experience. More specifically, the evaluation was interested in determining whether there would be measureable differences in student attitudes and orientations toward their own race or culture and to members of other groups that were culturally different from themselves.

At the outset of Class 4 evaluation, the evaluation team conducted a brief review of the research literature around multi-culturalism and cross-culturally oriented programming to identify potential measures that could be used to capture program outcomes related to the cultural elements of Cultural Leadership. The Multi-Ethnic Group Identity Measure (MIEM) was ultimately selected based on its availability, its established reliability and validity, and its intended use with adolescents and young adults.

At the time of the first January retreat, participants were asked to respond to 18 survey items that comprised the Multi-Group Ethnic Identify Measure (MIEM). The MIEM is constructed as a four point Likert scale that asks respondents to read a list of statements and to indicate if they ‘Strongly Agree’, ‘Agree’, ‘Disagree’, or ‘Strongly Disagree’ with each statement. The 18 items measure is divided into two separate constructs that include a 12-item **ethnic identity, attachment, and belonging** scale and a 6-item scale measuring **orientation toward other groups**. Ratings on each item are combined into an average or mean score for each scale.

Table  
**Comparison of Group Means from Baseline to Follow-Up Time Points**  
**Using a Paired Samples t-Test (n=26)**

	Baseline	Follow-Up	Mean Difference	Statistical Significance
Ethnic Identity, Belonging and Attachment	3.19	3.47	+.28	.001**
Other Group Orientation	3.52	3.55	.03	.726

Figure 1  
**Ethnic Identity, Attachment and Belonging Scale**  
 Change in Group Mean between Baseline and Exit (n=26)

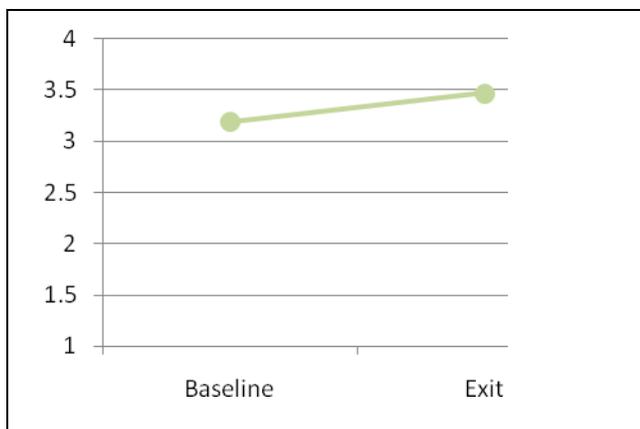
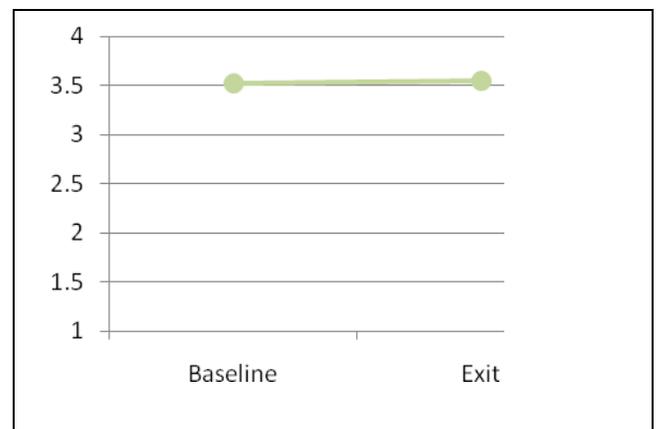


Figure 2  
**Other Group Orientation Scale**  
 Change in Group Mean between Baseline and Exit (n=26)



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## Results

At the baseline measurement time point, both African American and Jewish students scored relatively highly on constructs measuring both **ethnic identity and belonging** and **other group orientation**. This pattern was expected, given that participation in the program was voluntary and would likely attract students who were already personally attuned to issues of race and culture and who would express greater openness to diversity. At the baseline survey administration, the mean score on the **ethnic identity and belonging** measure was 3.14 on a possible 4-point scale. The mean score on the **orientation toward others** scale was somewhat higher at 3.52. There was little observed difference in average ratings on either construct between Jewish and African American students.

The MIEM measure was re-administered 12-months later at the time students exited the program, and calculated mean exit scores were compared to baseline levels. This baseline-to-exit comparison revealed an increase in **ethnic identity, attachment, and belonging** from the baseline mean of 3.19 to an average score at exit of 3.47. This positive change was statistically significant at the .001 level. By comparison, the **other group orientation** measure remained stable, with a small but negligible increase in average rating from a baseline mean of 3.52 to an exit mean of 3.55.

The results of the baseline-to-exit comparison suggest that the students who participated in Cultural Leadership felt a stronger sense of attachment and belonging to their own ethnic or cultural group by the time they had completed the program as compared to when they entered it. The impact on students' positive orientation toward groups outside of their own culture was less clear, although the failure to detect any meaningful change in orientation may be largely due to a 'ceiling effect'. This occurs when baseline rates are sufficiently high to allow little room for further improvement, as was the case with Class 4 students, who already showed a strong positive orientation toward other diverse groups at the time they entered the program. This was unlike other cross-cultural programs identified through the literature (Watkins, Larson, and Sullivan, 2007), where students entering the program were more likely to embrace negative stereotypes and express a more hostile orientation toward people of diverse groups.

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## Transforming into Agents of Social Change

### Transferring Skills from the Classroom Setting to the Outside World

The final focus of the outcome evaluation component was to consider whether the experience of Cultural Leadership would directly translate into expressions of social action, given the emphasis on enacting social change as an outcome of participation. Students were not explicitly required to initiate formal social action plans as part of their program involvement; however, given the momentum generated through the travel experience, their return home from the trip seemed a natural stepping-off point at which students might begin to initiate social change efforts outside of the program context.

Accordingly, upon returning to St. Louis in July of 2008, as part of a focus group discussion, students were asked to think about which issues in society they would most like to address and to individually outline plans for achieving change in these areas. Students were informed that in 6 months from the time of the group discussion these issues would be revisited to assess their progress.

Students identified a range of topics at the global, national, or local level that they would like to individually address, many of which related directly to what they experienced as part of their travel. Specific area of interest included:

- Addressing inequities in education, closing the achievement gap, and improving the quality of public education;
- Raising awareness about the housing crisis in New Orleans and raising funds to increase affordable housing;
- Confronting racism, racial stereotyping, discrimination, and inter-racial conflict;
- Raising awareness about the genocide in Darfur;
- Increasing civic engagement among young people;
- Educating people about their own culture and history; and,
- Fighting for women's rights concerning their reproductive health.

At the 6-month follow-up point, 18 students who had participated in the July focus group discussion reported their progress toward implementing their proposed plans. When specifically asked to assess their own progress toward accomplishing their change objectives:

- **39 percent** felt they had made **strong progress** toward implementing a plan for social action;
- **46 percent** felt that they had made **some progress**; and,

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#### Examples of Students' Plans for Social Action

##### GLOBAL

*"I'd like to take action to end the genocide in Darfur...I'd like to find a group of people that are just as passionate as I am. I'd like to create a local group to go around St. Louis to educate groups and schools about the genocide...and to collaborate with well-known organizations that raise funds for the victims.."*

##### NATIONAL

*"...the crisis in New Orleans where people are still without housing after nearly three years and not receiving justice in some cases. I plan to write to HUD to help address the problem with public housing."*

##### LOCAL

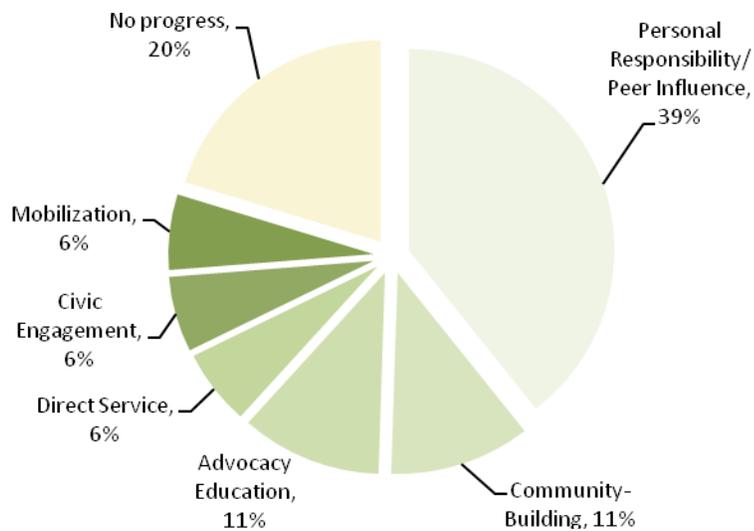
*"Young people are not active in politics. I'd like to help register young people and older adults to vote and to help them understand the significance of being an active citizen."*

*"There are many people at my school who are ignorant about how racist some of their comments are. I can be a change agent by talking to them, using the public speaking skills I have learned to make them understand what is wrong with what they are doing and how they can change."*

- **15 percent** felt that they **had not made much progress** or had made **no progress at all**.

Students were also asked to briefly describe what they had accomplished with regard to their issues of focus. Their descriptions were analyzed to determine both nature of their chosen involvements and the extent to which they had been successful in initiating and carrying-out planned activities. Efforts were categorized using an adaptation of a research framework that defines models of community involvement, which was conceptualized by the non-profit Center for Service Learning and Social Change. The different types of community involvement were then arranged along a continuum which ranged from informal, often impromptu, actions that emphasize personal social responsibility in day to day life, to more formal, structured community mobilization strategies that are targeted at the organization, community, or global level.

This analysis showed wide variation in the types of social change activities that students had initiated. As shown in the graphic below:



- 39 percent indicated that they had engaged in socially responsible behavior or had positively influenced those around them;
- 11 percent reported networking or community building activities, such as becoming affiliated with social action groups or organizations;
- 6 percent had engaged in direct service to their communities in an area related to their chosen issue;

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### Examples of Student Actions at 6-Month Follow -Up

#### *POLITICAL ACTION/COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION*

*"I established a STAND Chapter at my school. We got a petition of 106 signatures that will be sent to the President-elect. I have clear plans for the upcoming trimester, now that I have met with the STAND National Director."*

#### *ADVOCACY THROUGH EDUCATION*

*"I've given presentations on diversity, facilitated a discussion, and spoke to an all-Jewish audience."*

*"I've written an essay article to the St. Louis Post Dispatch about how American students are educated..."*

#### *CIVIC ENGAGEMENT*

*"I have registered people to vote and have driven them to their polling places. I felt like the 17 people I helped vote really meant something, even though I couldn't vote myself!"*

#### *DIRECT SERVICE*

*"I've been to multiple schools to help tutor minority students."*

#### *NETWORKING*

*"I'm now affiliated with the Color of Change website and have watched and followed upcoming events and discussions."*

#### *PERSONAL SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY*

*"I've made myself aware of the social issues that concern me and have kept myself informed on the topic."*

*"I've stopped my friends from using certain language..."*

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- 11 percent had engaged in formal efforts to educate people in their schools or communities about important social issues;
  - 6 percent had worked to improve civic engagement and,
  - 6 percent had led or contributed to organized community mobilization efforts.

### **Results**

The results of the analysis produced a somewhat mixed picture with regard to students' success in planning and carrying out social action objectives. While some students had no difficulty defining an issue to be addressed and could articulate a clear vision for how they would like to achieve change, others struggled to narrow their interests or had difficulty identifying clear, attainable steps or actions that could be applied to change efforts. Further, while some students were able to document significant progress toward implementing their proposed plans, and in some cases, showed exemplary leadership as change agents, most students reported engaging in relatively unstructured, lower intensity activities such as staying informed about issues, or influencing immediate peers or family members through one-on-one discussion and modeling of Cultural Leadership's values. While it is important to not discount the benefit of these individual actions, if a goal of the program is to prepare and support students to effectively lead or contribute to social change movements on a larger scale, it may be necessary to provide them with more guidance and opportunities for concrete "real-world" experiences planning and executing social actions.

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## Conclusions and Issues for Consideration

The Cultural Leadership program identifies a group of prospective young leaders from two historically marginalized communities, and engages them in an intensive year-long process of cross-cultural and social awareness, self-discovery, and growth in leadership competency. This process is intended to urge students toward social activism by arming them with the knowledge, awareness and practical skills needed to confront issues of discrimination and injustice in society, and to better their communities through positive social action.

### Program Strengths

The evaluation of the Cultural Leadership program has several identified several key program strengths that contribute to the overall quality of the program experience. These include:

- **Establishing a program model that incorporates leading principles of effective youth leadership development.**

The recent research literature from the youth leadership development field has focused on identifying the principles, elements, or hallmarks of effective leadership development programs. The most widely referenced of these studies was conducted by Woyach and Cox (1996) who used interviews with practitioners from a range of youth leadership initiatives to determine consensus from the field regarding what constitutes effective leadership development practice in school or community program settings. These identified principles relate to both the content of leadership development programs and elements that are critical to the leadership development process.

The Cultural Leadership program model strongly incorporates most, if not all, of the principles identified through the research literature as being meaningful to leadership development. These content-related principles are at the core of the Cultural Leadership mission and purpose, and include promoting understanding of history, culture, and values of society, promoting awareness and understanding and tolerance of other cultures, peoples, and societies, and teaching specific skills and knowledge related to leadership. The program also features many of the process-related principles, including cultivating team-work and networking among peers, including youth in relationships with mentors and positive role models, and facilitating self-reflection and processing of learning. The program also clearly reflects the principle of respect and high expectations for participants, which is essential to effective youth programming.

- **Providing opportunities for exposure to prominent individuals, places, and encounters that fall outside of typical teenager's life experience.** The Cultural Leadership experience places students in direct contact with an extensive group of prominent historical and contemporary leaders and role-models whose personal stories have shaped American history, and who are the embodiment of the values and actions that the program aims to cultivate. This 'life-altering' opportunity is unique to the Cultural Leadership experience. The program also immerses students in diverse cultures to explore beliefs, traditions, and viewpoints that many would not otherwise have had the opportunity to experience. Students and parents alike felt this opportunity had helped open doors to greater acceptance and new worldviews.
- **Valuing youth as resources, and providing opportunities to cultivate leadership among youth who represent new and diverse perspectives.** The Cultural Leadership experience moves away from a normative view of young people as 'problems' or 'victims' and values them as

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important resources and contributors to society. The program also helps foster leadership competence among youth from communities whose viewpoints are not always fully represented.

### **Recommendations for Consideration**

Although participant feedback from parents and Cultural Leadership members was consistently positive across program elements, there were several reoccurring themes that emerged through student feedback (e.g., written feedback questionnaires, responses to focus groups interviews, and reflections offered in travel journals) that warrant consideration, and that might inform future program refinement efforts. Each of these themes is discussed below:

- **Balancing Content to Optimize Learning**

Participants often felt overloaded or fatigued by the volume of program content, particularly with regard to the travel itinerary, and repeatedly commented on feelings of exhaustion on the trip. Students also mentioned feeling rushed through material at times, both on the trip and in retreat settings, and expressed a need for more time to process information and to extend discussion and reflection. To avoid over-saturation, educational and instructional experiences should be balanced with additional unstructured opportunities for enjoyment, exploration, and self-reflection. While students felt it was important not to eliminate speakers or other core curricular elements, they did wish to incorporate more time for rest. Given the need to balance time and content, it may be useful to revisit satisfaction data from each retreat and the Summer trip, as well as to continue gathering feedback moving forward. This could guide program staffing in making clear determinations about which program elements or activities are most essential and may require more time, and whether any program elements might be shortened or eliminated.

- **Balancing and Diversifying Membership Composition**

An overrepresentation of some demographic groups, specifically with regard to the male to female ratio and the Jewish to African American ratio, may influence the balance of perspectives and an optimal group dynamic. Throughout their feedback, students expressed an interest in having more diverse perspectives represented and having a better balance among members. It should be noted that program staff did make a concerted effort to balance demographic representation, while avoiding over-representation of students from single home school sites as a way to side-step peer group influences. Although it may not always be feasible to achieve a perfect demographic balance, this selection criteria may be more critical to the success of the program than criteria to limit membership to one or two students from a single school site. In fact, there may be advantages to recruiting several students from an individual home school, particularly when students from different demographic groups can be drawn from the same site. This approach could potentially support students' social action efforts implemented in the school setting and could model positive intergroup relations within school environments.

Also mentioned in student feedback was an interest in having more politically representative speakers and role models featured through the program and to recruit students with different political perspectives. It was noted that program staff did attempt to incorporate more conservative viewpoints into the program curriculum, and intend to continue to address this challenge with future classes.

- **Expanding Eligibility Criteria to Include Additional Race/Ethnic or Cultural Groups**

There has been widespread interest in expanding the eligibility criteria to include students from other race/ethnicities or cultures, including students from White majority groups, and for the first time with Class 5, non-Black and non-Jewish students were recruited to participate. While greater inclusiveness may be desirable in many regards, it is also important to consider that a large part of

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the impact of the Cultural Leadership program is its power to connect Jewish and African American youth with their distinctive social histories and cultural origins, and to give them a place in the discourse around discrimination and social injustice from their cultural perspective. This program aspect was a significant motivation for why many students chose to participate, was reflected in their reactions to program elements, and potentially contributed to changes in ratings of cultural identity, attachment, and belonging. As Cultural Leadership incorporates more diverse culture and race groups, without otherwise altering the program curriculum, staff should be closely attuned to perceived relevance among students who are not affiliated with one of the two dominant groups, and who may not experience the same connection to the curriculum.

In addition to assessing program relevance for individuals outside of the predominant groups, it will also be important to observe how changing the demographic composition might influence the overall group dynamic. For example, research on one comparable youth development program, which aimed to bridge group differences and promote social justice, identified the shared experience of belonging to a marginalized community as the ‘cross-cutting identity’ that helped connect youth to one another. The researchers warned of the challenges of establishing a similar sense of solidarity when programs begin to integrate groups of youth that lack this shared experience and when the collective social history of the group is characterized by unequal relationships (Watkins, et. al. 2008). For this reason, it will be important to carefully monitor student responses moving forward and to be sensitive to how changes in composition might influence community-building, inter-group dynamics, and overall program impacts.

- **Emphasizing and Augmenting the Social Action Component**

Another predominant theme that emerged in focus group discussions, in travel journals, and on written feedback forms was the desire for more concrete opportunities to engage in community service or social action projects as part of their program involvement. In a case study of how students might go about implementing social change on their own initiative, many were able to document significant progress toward implementing action plans, and in some cases, showed exemplary leadership as change agents; however, many students had difficulty articulating a clear vision for what they would like to accomplish and how they would like to achieve change. Consequently, most students reported engaging in relatively unstructured, lower intensity activities, such as staying informed about issues, or influencing immediate peers or family members through one-on-one discussion and general modeling of Cultural Leadership’s values. While these personal actions reflect the positive notion of ‘acting with awareness’, if the ultimate goal is for youth to develop long-term commitments to work against injustice, it may be necessary to provide more guidance and opportunities for concrete experiences planning and executing social actions outside of the classroom. These opportunities can promote further development of team-building skills and other competencies (e.g., goal setting, assess resources, networking) and can provide structured support transition students from the classroom setting to the real world.

### **Final Comments**

The personal accounts and insights shared by students and their parents about the year-long Cultural Leadership experience tell a story about a “transformational journey” that has profoundly impacted the lives of those who experienced it. Within the youth development field, it is rare to find a program that students have collectively and consistently referred to as “life-altering” or to hear students convey how immeasurably they have been impacted in the way that it has been conveyed about this program. Although the program has recruited and selected an exceptional and articulate group of young people who can communicate the impact of the experience in an extremely powerful way, this should not detract from the fact that Cultural Leadership is an exemplary youth program, which offers an extraordinary life opportunity to its members.