Ethics and Values based Leadership

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W.K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION

EARTH UNIVERSITY

GCHERA GLOBAL CONFEDERATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION ASSOCIATIONS FOR AGRICULTURAL AND LIFE SCIENCES

TRANSFORMING HIGHER EDUCATION

● Foreword

The American University of Beirut (AUB), in partnership with the Global Confederation of Higher Education Associations for Agricultural and Life Sciences (GCHERA), EARTH University and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation has launched a project on "Transforming Higher Education". This project seeks to share five Key Elements of Success practiced by EARTH University and others with universities in Mexico and Haiti, and across GCHERA's global university network over a period of three years between July, 2018 and June, 2021.

The goal of the project is to advocate for the education of future leaders with the commitment to serve society—leaders capable of positively affecting changes in their environment, promoting peace and understanding, and respecting diversity while contributing solutions for the major challenges of the 21st Century. The project´s purpose is to encourage and facilitate change processes within the university as well as to promote greater university engagement with the larger community to achieve the twin goals of producing future leaders and change-agents, as well as fostering greater prosperity and equity in society.

This publication is one of a series of five papers that present Key Elements of Success the project seeks to share and which, taken together or individually, can contribute to facilitating university transformation processes. These five elements are considered fundamental in the successful education of leaders who will be prepared to offer solutions to the diverse and complex challenges of feeding an ever growing and more diverse population sustainably, mitigating and adapting to a changing climate while also contributing to the economic well-being of our communities. This requires leaders with strong ethics and values as well as solid grounding in theoretical knowledge and practical skills necessary to provide the technical, environmental and socially sensitive solutions required. The five Key Elements of Success presented in the series of papers are experiential/participatory education; community engagement; training in entrepreneurial education and business development; ethical and value based leadership; and decision-making and conflict resolution.

Three additional factors which enhance the impact of the five Elements of Success should be considered as well. The first is the role of the university professor as a facilitator of learning, the second is an explicit recognition that the five Elements of Success should permeate and be reinforced across the university educational system, including both curricular and co-curricular activities and programs and the third is the need for policy changes which are essential to their success.

The traditional role of the university professor as the repository of knowledge is increasingly being questioned. An educational system featuring the Key Elements of Success envisions a role for the professor as one who guides and facilitates student's learning through discovery, self-directed learning, analysis, reflection, group interaction, among others. The responsibility of the professor is to create a stimulating learning environment and provide students with real life opportunities to observe, develop ideas, apply theories, implement solutions and learn from the results. Rather than focusing on "covering the material", professors should be concerned with students learning on multiple levels, including problem solving and analytical skills, self-confidence, teamwork, personal relationship skills among many others. Professors should be recognized and stimulated for their innovations and contributions as "Facilitators of Learning". The professor's commitment to participatory education, to learning with and from the community, to providing continuous feedback and support requires time and commitment far beyond the delivery of lectures and supervision of laboratory sessions.

In addition to the changed role for the professor as the facilitator of learning, the entire university must be committed to the learning system oriented towards the five Elements of Success. As the five essays make clear, each element of success goes beyond the traditional classroom and involves everyone on campus and beyond, including community members. Participatory and experiential learning occur in the community, on farms, as part of research activities and as part of the university's commercial undertakings. Ethics and values are not just discussed and analyzed in the classroom but must be key features of the university environment, embodied in institutional policies and consistently demonstrated by university administrators, faculty, staff and students. The effective resolution of conflict is an acquired skill requiring systematic evaluation and analysis and should be actively practiced in relations between faculty, staff, administrators and students and well as between the university and the

larger community. Team projects in classes provide a fertile environment for fostering skills in resolving conflicts, as do co-curricular activities. The University engagement with the community involves administrators, faculty, students and staff as does the inclusion of entrepreneurship within the curriculum. Each of the five areas are complementary and reinforcing.

The successful integration of the elements of success will frequently require policy changes, and in many cases a rethinking of the university mission and vision. The education of leaders requires creating a student focused learning community and the university policies need to promote greater faculty, staff and student engagement with the community; student driven learning where students take on more responsibility for their own education; student led business ventures; student supervision of research, and other initiatives. Policy changes may involve changing study programs, institutional access by visitors from the community, student access to laboratories and fields, as well as the level of responsibilities given to students to reinforce their learning. University policies must recognize and reward the new role of the professor as the "Facilitator of Learning" as a valid and viable road to advancement within the University Community. Therefore, it is critical to consider policy changes to ensure any successful university transformation process.

We hope that this series of documents will be helpful to your university as you engage in a process of transformation. Please take them as an invitation to open a dialog and stimulate discussion to enhance the university transformation process[1].

James B. French | Project Director

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1   What is written in this series of documents represent the views of the authors and does not necessarily represent the thinking or vision of American University of Beirut, GCHERA, EARTH University or the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

Ethics and Values based Leadership

Irmino Perrera Díaz[1]

The historical impossibility of a simplistic approach

Leadership is probably the most debated issue in the history of humanity, as can be seen from the amount of works published on the subject. The explanation for it seems simple enough: the exercise of leadership determines the future; it is difficult to find something more important than that. However, despite pondering the matter for millennia, we are still very much in the dark where the exercise of leadership is concerned. For many years, researchers analyzed the traits of great leaders in order to identify their characteristics and thereby improve leadership training. A review of 20 different studies (Geier 1967) identified around 80 leadership traits, but only five of them were common to four or more of these studies. In subsequent decades, the only thing that could be said in this regard was that "leaders are not like other people," though the particular traits found varied greatly from one study to another (Kirkpatrick & Locke 1991). One of these studies considered leaders' effectiveness as being contingent upon the situation – with some focusing on the quality of task performance and others on the quality of interpersonal relations (Fielder 1969). As was to be expected, this study did not shed significant light on the matter. These serious hypotheses, and many others, fill the bookshelves of university libraries. The diversity of approaches prompts many to argue that, on account of so much manipulation, the term leadership loses clarity and potency to the point of running the risk of becoming a fetish.

Perhaps a good strategy to shake off this type of nihilism, which invalidates the importance of these concepts that are

fundamental for organizational and social development, is to approach them with a more critical view of the findings. In his descriptive research on political leaders, some years ago James McGregor Burns proposed a type of leadership that had a significant impact in academic circles: transformational leadership, defined as a process in which "leaders and followers help each other to advance to higher levels of morale and motivation" (Burns, 1978). According to Burns, a leader is a role model for his followers, transmits motivation and passion, encourages them to explore new ways of doing things and seeks to influence each individual. Some universities transformed these findings into concepts such as leadership image design, ways of motivating colleagues, effective communication, among others. As expected, success has been limited. This has little to do with the scientific findings *per se,* which are very clear, but rather with the way of interpreting them and converting them into a teaching tool. Levels of morale and motivation, the basis of Burns' notion of leadership, increase in the measure that the leader's values are superior.

A leader who articulates his management style around a values structure and moral principles deposits his trust in the team, with transparency and respect for individual members. This demonstration of trust is a basic condition that enables the team members to develop a strong sense of belief in their leader and to follow him, assuming challenges without fear of the risks they may encounter. Values-based leadership presupposes an interest in the sustained personal and professional development of colleagues, regarding this as a necessary and permanent condition for improving the organization and strengthening the competencies of the leaders themselves.

Several studies have shown that intrinsic motivation, which emerges from within when we are truly interested in behaving in a certain way without seeking a reward (Deci 1975), is a far more powerful tool for attaining a goal than offering a reward. This can only be achieved through high value standards. Leaders who operate according to their values subordinate their own personal interests to those of the team, are open, receptive and transparent, enjoy interacting with their staff, democratize the organization's successes and acknowledge their own contributions without false modesty. Similarly, they are not afraid to recognize their mistakes and errors, which may probably be one of the most important traits of an honest and trustworthy leader. Such an environment is essential for colleagues to be motivated by the task in hand and be inspired by their leadership.

The challenge of values education to create leaders

Ethics is a branch or discipline of philosophy that studies the nature of good and evil, their relationship with morality and their implications for human behavior. Ethical values are those elements that regulate, and ultimately define, an individual's conduct. Thus, behavior, including that of leaders, is governed by values that define their effectiveness as team leaders. In today's world, where corruption and mistrust are some of the chief concerns of governments, institutions and citizens, and progress in accepting human rights and the democratization of information increasingly invalidate autocratic, non-inclusive, authoritarian and non-transparent leadership styles, only leadership governed by values can generate the trust, optimism and motivation necessary to lead society toward a better future.

Values formation cannot result from the passive transmission of a concept. It is something more complex than that. In the sphere of educational practice and its moral implications, it is possible to establish at least two generally accepted core postulates. Firstly, that we teach what we know, but we inspire and obtain commitment through what we are. Secondly, that nobody can give to others what they do not possess. These premises are beyond question. Values-based leadership is founded upon them. In essence, it is the predominance of personal values in the actions of leaders, which consequently requires each teacher to assume leadership in the formation of values.

Unlike learning a concept or mastering a technique, values formation calls for deliberate, systemic, multidimensional efforts aimed at developing the personality of each member of the academic community. It requires the consolidation of curricular and co-curricular actions within an educational program. In doing this, it is essential to link the cognitive and affective aspects, understanding that in the process the students have needs, interests and motivations. We should also link the regulatory and meaningful elements from the motivational point of view. Rubenstein (1967:700) argued that "if we experience something as a duty and know that it does not function as such merely in an abstract sense, the duty becomes an object of our personal aspirations. The socially

significant becomes personally significant." Also required is an assessment exercise within the educational process, carried out in a participatory manner. Assessments are, inevitably, associated with the personal values of the assessor.

Values formation at EARTH

EARTH University has a clear definition of the values it seeks to inculcate in its community. These are: human development, academic excellence, ethical conduct, sustainable development, social conscience, the search for knowledge and biodiversity conservation. The "EARTH" man or woman may be defined as a professional whose values instill a commitment to agricultural improvement, rural social development and environmental management. This last sentence summarizes the essence of the university's values, and its main educational challenge.

The training exercise in values is implemented through a set of components. Probably the least important of these are the **dedicated subjects** that impart humanistic content, covering topics connected with morality and ethics. In these subjects, the student undoubtedly acquires knowledge. A very important component is the **crosscutting implementation of values formation** in the curriculum. In this regard, every teacher, through his or her particular subject, reveals to the students the reasons for an action to improve production, for example, or the requirement for an environmental assessment in the design of a production system. The **academic program,** which integrates curricular and extracurricular educational influences, is based on the formation of values.

This, however, has a limited role in values formation. A key factor is the **pivotal transformative** action of EARTH students. In carrying out projects for their academic courses, students must substantiate their value - and this value is not only economic. They must also demonstrate that their project is valuable because of the good it does to men, women and children, to the community and to the environment, beyond the logical requirement of financial profitability. The Business Projects are a case in point.

Beyond the planned structure of educational activities, values formation is an **intrinsic value of academics and officials.** Real-life examples include the following, to cite just a few:

- EARTH's mission is more than a mere slogan; it is a tool for the daily exercise of analysis and decision-making to solve problems. Teachers apply it continuously and consciously.
- The EARTH campus strives to foster diversity among its students; in practice, this provides a living social laboratory. A large number of students from very low-income homes interact with a small group of students from middle-income families, and another smaller group of high-income students, all living together in the same spaces.
- Critical thinking is encouraged in the classroom. The teacher promotes analysis, and the development of alternative courses of action, which enhance the students' capabilities, based on interaction with other students, agricultural workers and other members of the local community.
- The effort to place students in different scenarios for growth includes not only their work within the University, but also in the community and in different cultural settings such as internships, which also have values-based objectives.

EARTH University has conducted this process and has garnered significant recognition from its graduates. In a recent survey that included 245 graduates, students were asked about the quality of teaching at EARTH in a total of 47 competencies or skills, both general and specific to their courses. The graduates assigned a score of 8.86, out of a maximum of 10 points, to Ethical Commitment, which is above the average score for other general skills, and far higher compared with specific skills, as shown in the following graphic.
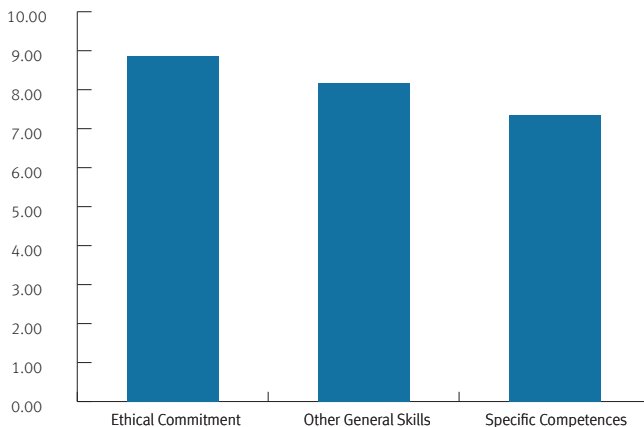

Figure 1: Perception of the quality of skills training at EARTH Analysis of Ethical Commitment

Source: Rodríguez 2019

However, an honest approach should also recognize a fifth factor that influences the exercise of values formation at EARTH. The creation of a new man/woman has been the cornerstone of the project undertaken by the founders of EARTH University. The community that has formed since then significantly shares this altruistic interest, initially espoused by this small group of creators. It may have been an unconscious process, but not spontaneous. **Recruitment processes based on organizational culture** have determined that our educators - diverse, critical and sometimes antagonistic – inevitably agree on one thing: their values. In educational terms, their work has been based less on coordination and more on the standardization of attitudes. To a great extent, this has also had an impact on the selection of students; the "tribe" selects them not for their knowledge or skills, but for their potential attitudes.

Case study: Creating leaders with values

EARTH´s Multicultural Fair is a student-led initiative that began in the early years of the university. This event includes a wide range of activities and calls for an entire year of effort by a group of leaders. The organizers are final year students, chosen by their peers for their leadership qualities to carry out this demanding task, which adds to their curricular and extracurricular obligations.

The Fair generates income through its activities. For example, student leaders organize sales of traditional dishes emblematic of the countries represented in EARTH's student community; in fact, the students themselves are the ones who prepare and sell these foods. They also invite artists to give presentations that display the cultural wealth of these same countries. In addition, they organize concerts by well-known popular groups to attract more visitors, and thereby increase the funds raised by the Fair, using the event to showcase other student projects.

Many of those who visit the Fair probably think that this effort is yet another business initiative aimed at making profits for student leaders and their collaborators. However, this work is completely altruistic. The students do not receive a single penny of the substantial funds generated. That money is used for very different purposes.

The vast majority of EARTH graduates come from very poor families, who would be unable to afford to travel to see their child graduate as a professional, after arduous years of study. The funds raised by the Multicultural Fair are used to help these families. In 2018, the profits were used to cover the cost of more than 40 international airline tickets, transfers of parents from the airport to the university, plus the payment of some food services. These airfares can be expensive, since they not only benefit residents of Central America and the Caribbean, but also students who live in the rest of Latin America and in Africa.

This student initiative, led and implemented by the students themselves, who for the most part do not receive any direct benefit from their work, is not only an expression of a selfless exercise to help the community; it is also a space for promoting cultural diversity, integrating different generations of students as well as an exercise in Project management.

With the achievements come new challenges

The focus of university education should be on developing transformative leadership among professionals, regardless of the academic course followed. It is an effort to create competent leaders through learning and the appropriation of relevant scientific and technical knowledge. Scientific and technical skills should not be seen as an end in themselves in university programs, but rather as effective tools in the hands of leaders committed to the construction of a more prosperous, just, inclusive and safe world, where human dignity is the central value. Aristotle already understood that this should be the correct approach when, justifying his interest in understanding virtue, he affirmed that the purpose of his inquiry was not to explain virtue, since in that case his study would be useless, but rather to learn how to be good.

In traditional universities, as has been the case historically in primary and secondary education systems, the most common way of incorporating values education into academic projects has been to "pad out" the curriculum with courses or subjects of a humanistic nature, sometimes to the detriment of technical courses. In other words, a "checklist" or "box ticking" strategy has been employed. EARTH University, which is not exempt from

problems, makes a major effort to ensure that values training permeates the entire educational program. A part of this exercise is specified in the plans and programs, and another takes place through the inherent power of the teacher's leadership. Formal investigations, and other less structured commentaries, corroborate the social and environmental commitment of EARTH graduates. The current discussion here does not revolve around the validation of the argumentative devices to which we resort to justify today's predominant view regarding the necessary role of the university in values formation. The focus of concern is on questions such as: Which values do we mean? What is the relationship between values and the university curriculum? How can the university address values education and how does it measure the results of this effort? These are the current challenges, and they are enormous.

However, the level of motivation is commensurate with the scale of the challenge. We know how important it is to create ethical leaders with strong values, and the danger posed by not doing so, given that the "cult to unreflective knowledge has taken hold in the minds and way of being of individuals involved in the educational process, who perceive themselves and behave as mere transmitters of knowledge. We believe more in science than in ourselves, but the dramatic point is that science does not confront life, we do." (Rugarcía, 1991, p.75).

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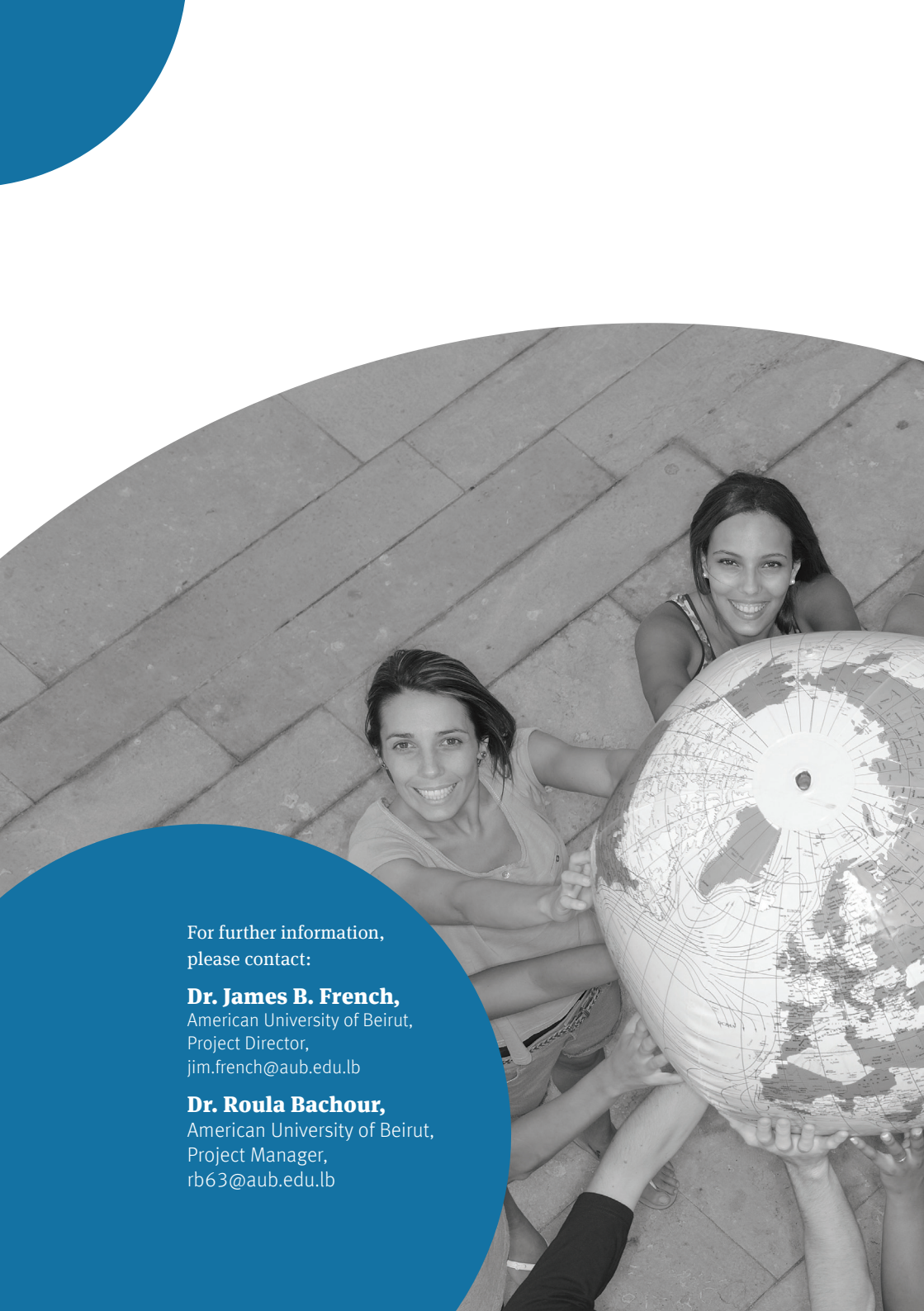
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