

Profiles in Leadership: Special Topics

Jepson School of Leadership Studies

• LDST 390-01 MW 12:00-1:15 pm

Alan Rudlin----- Spring 2024

Introduction

"Those who forget history are doomed to repeat it." George Santayana

"I never won a fight in the ring. I always won in preparation." Muhammed Ali

In America today, those who rise to serve as leaders in business, non-profits, community organizations, and government policy come from widely varied backgrounds. Many have never studied, as you do here at Jepson, to learn the skills to act as good leaders in different contexts. Most colleges and graduate schools will educate and prepare you for an occupational or specialty subject matter focus, but they typically have not viewed the academic mission to teach leadership skills. Jepson is dedicated to leadership studies, so in that mission we will seek to identify some key components of good leadership. There are good odds you will be acting in a leadership position in the future,

So, how do you prepare yourself for that day? If you are called on to become a leader or policy advisor to leaders-- in government, nonprofits and community organizations, business, or another context—what are the lessons and axioms you turn to for guidance and inspiration? This course says that learning leadership skills is more than a matter of natural instincts or on the job lessons. We will study and discuss the kinds of critical leadership judgments that are essential, and assess how develop leadership traits are developed.

Leaders often have to decide and act with limited information and time, without the luxury to do research or extensive reflection. We will discuss some paradigms for making leadership judgment calls, in difficult, conflicting, and often controversial circumstances. Our class is based on the belief that leadership lessons are a learned form of critical thinking.

This course will proceed in two parts.

- In the first half leading up to Spring Break, we will study in detail the lessons of failed leadership from recent history, focusing on the formative early years of America in Vietnam, 1960-65. We will discuss how deeply flawed leadership judgment calls were repeatedly made by "*the best and the brightest*", highly talented and credentialed people of great erudition. These leaders included the key national policy advisors and political actors in America, who were and choosing the country's leadership decisions. We will examine and learn lessons from how, step by step, these leaders made fateful choices leading to a national and international quagmire, and resulting in tragic losses.

As we focus on the flawed public policy decisions in America's initial five years of the Vietnam War, we will see how those decisions led to a steep decline in public trust in the government and national institutions, an inheritance that still afflicts our country today and may be contributing to our national political polarization. Without civic trust, democracy is at risk. So, how can future leaders such as yourselves work to rebuild that trust? From our class discussion and readings we will mine the "nuggets of wisdom" that you can apply in your future careers, whether you are a policy leader or are advising others in leadership. And we will look at the ethics of leadership decision making and how ethical values are essential for good leadership judgments.

- In the second half of our class after Spring Break, we will look at a variety of current challenging leadership issues arise. These may include some contemporary settings, such as leadership challenges in the news today affecting colleges, the Middle East, and other contexts generating policy debates. Distinguished speakers from different backgrounds will come to address our class, and they will invite your discussion about how leadership choices are made. In looking at contemporary leadership challenges, I may assign short readings from current issues. I also welcome your suggestions on situations where you think there are leadership issues to be examined.

Learning Outcomes

This course is intended to engage your thinking "outside the box", beyond technical concepts of problem solving. The objective is to illustrate how the most highly valued trait in any leader-- good judgment, often only achieved by years of experience-- can be stimulated and developed by studying the critical ingredient of leadership in historical and current contexts. You will see how leadership perspectives need to be combined with ethical values. The goal of this course to give you a head start on learning "good judgment" for your future leadership challenges.

Reading Materials

The principal required reading is *Dereliction of Duty* by H. R. McMaster (Harper paperback). It is a readable and critically acclaimed analysis by a highly decorated former military officer and scholar, who later was appointed by the President as his National Security Advisor. There will also be shorter reading assignments from *Lessons in Disaster*, by Columbia historian Gordon M. Goldstein. Both books provide context for our discussions, not memorization of historical details.

McMaster's book details how key leaders in the White House, Departments of Defense and State, and the Pentagon, fell short of their constitutional responsibilities and made avoidable poor leadership decisions, deepening America's descent into the swamp of Vietnam. Goldstein's book illuminates the thinking of the first National Security Advisor, McGeorge Bundy, whose flawed leadership in 1960-1965 contributed to the failures in Vietnam.

To help you absorb the text readings, the class website offers some charts on timelines, maps and cast of characters you should review at the outset of classes. It will help you with the context of our studies about Vietnam.

Class Discussion and Attendance

Each class will combine lecture with a strong emphasis on student participation. I will call on you to get your perspective on what we are reading and learning. In addition, we may have some scenario role playing in the second half of the course. Class attendance is expected and will be noted. Your vocal participation is essential. I may give you short assignments to report on for the next class. In the second half of the semester we will examine some controversial topics for leadership issues. I expect we will have diverse and vigorously expressed views, from which we will learn how difficult leadership topics should be debated in a respectful manner. As one of this country's founders memorably said, this class ..."***will be based on the illimitable freedom of the human mind. For here we are not afraid to follow truth wherever it may lead, nor to tolerate any error so long as reason is left free to combat it.***" [T.Jefferson].

Grades

Grading will be based on class attendance and participation, a mid-term essay, and a final paper, not to exceed 20 pages. I will provide more details at our first class on January 17, but in broad form here is what to expect. For your midterm paper, due after Spring Break, you will submit a short paper that either [1] summarizes what you think the key leadership lessons learned were from our studies of Vietnam 1960-65, or alternatively [2] [a] assesses one key leader from that period or [b] analogizes the leadership issues we've studied from Vietnam to another historical or current context. For your final paper, you will be expected to identify and select a topic of your choice, stimulated by the readings and class discussions, which I will approve after you submit the topic. Alternatively I can give you an assigned topic. You are encouraged to create your own topic for my approval. Final paper topics must be submitted for my approval in advance before 3/18/24.

Communications: I'm happy to respond to emails: alan.rudlin@richmond.edu. On request I can arrange to talk in person, such as before or after one of our classes.

Class Assignments-See the initial classes chart attached for assigned weekly readings in the McMaster and Goldstein books. Once the final lineup of speakers is confirmed, a supplemental chart for the second half of the semester will be posted. There may be some news articles assigned to be read, but there will be no more text book readings.

Here's your first written assignment: send me a short essay via email **before our January 22 class** telling me the following about yourself:

- Why did you choose to be a student at Jepson?
- What is your major?
- If you worked before college, what was your work, and what if any life lessons did you learn from it?
- What do you see yourself doing with your degree in the next 5 years, and the long term?
- You may have had one "formative life experience" that has shaped who you are. It may have been positive, or negative; it may have been growing up. Good leaders are reflective —reach deep inside here and tell me something that is part of who you are today, or perhaps that is shaping who you want to be.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES

Use of tablets and phones is not permitted in class. If taking class notes on a laptop is essential, that is permitted so long as that is the only laptop use in class. **Recording class sessions is also prohibited.** All devices must be silenced and placed out of view during class.

THE HONOR CODE AND USE OF AI

As a student at the University of Richmond, you are bound by the Honor Code. The Honor Code prohibits the use of any unauthorized assistance. For this course, the use of text-generating artificial intelligence tools (such as, but not limited to, ChatGPT) will be considered unauthorized assistance. This includes the use of generative AI for any stage of the work from conception to completion. As we all work our way through understanding what are the permitted boundaries of using AI, let me know if you have any question on this issue.

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

1. Preparation and Class Participation	25%
2. Mid term essay	20%
3. Responding to short assignments	15%
4. Final Paper	40%

If you have any emergencies please advise me re: missed classes or scheduled deadlines.

Grades: while I use numbers to help track your work and performance, your final grade will be a letter grade:

A+, A, A-	97-100, 93-96, 90-92
B+, B, B-	87-89, 83-86, 80-82
C+, C, C-	77-79, 73-76, 70-72
D+, D, D-	67-69, 63-66, 60-62

HOW TO SUCCEED IN THIS COURSE WITHOUT ANXIETY

1. Attend all classes. Worry less about notetaking than about staying engaged in the discussion.
2. Complete all readings in advance of class meetings.
3. Speak up in class. Be an informed participant in discussions by drawing on the texts, and when you learn who are speakers, think about some probing questions to ask them in class.
4. Write a final paper that addresses what you think is an important leadership situation or example in our society, and that you feel strongly about. See me if you need suggestions.