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## Reflective Essays

The American University School of Public Affairs Leadership Program is an intensive six-semester program during which students are challenged to think critically about both leadership theory and its application through classroom discussions and service projects. Though the typical curriculum was forced to be less hands-on during my time at AU because of the coronavirus pandemic, the program nonetheless brought themes of efficacy, effectiveness, and others to us regardless of medium. This included workshops on critical thinking, lectures on the evolution of leadership theory, and social action projects that forced us to tackle issues facing the Washington DC community.

This program increased my knowledge of leadership by molding the effectiveness of leadership that I have observed in leaders with the hands-on pragmatism of bureaucracy and logistics. Through a heavy focus on case studies of both individuals and situations, the program was able to complement the notions of effective leadership that we have come to expect in our public servants - e.g. honesty and integrity - with the need for results-oriented problem-solving. From analyzing leaders such as Steve Jobs in the private sector to public safety crises such as the Boston Marathon Bombing, my knowledge of leadership has become more grounded beyond the mere ideals we strive for our leaders to encompass.

Personally, the Leadership Program has changed my view of leadership by introducing me to the notion of transformational leadership. Under this approach, the leader seeks to empower individual growth amongst his/her followers in a manner that both addresses issues at hand while also appealing to the motivating factors of the followers themselves. Not only do I find this approach appealing from a moral standpoint, but I believe that the subsequent empowering

of the followers allows them to be better independent problem solvers and thus best prepares them to tackle issues that the group as a whole.

One key take away from the program that I have would have to be the understanding that leadership - much like the problems that leaders will face - is fluid and ever-changing. That is to say an overarching leadership philosophy can be adopted (such as my appreciation for the transformational approach), but any leader should understand that certain situations are best left delegated - especially when those delegated have a particular underatind or expertise - while other situations benefit from quick and decisive leadership. Therefore, I thoroughly appreciated the diverse public and private sector case studies explored throughout the program, where we were able to study the ethos of the leader(s) against the challenges of different situations.