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Final Essay on Leadership Growth

When I entered American University as a first-year student, my ideas of a leader were minimized to leadership in the grandest scales. Leaders were presidents and ambassadors and CEOS. One could aspire to be that type of leader, but for anyone outside of that highest role of responsibility, their style of leadership didn’t matter - or couldn’t be evaluated. My ideas of leadership quickly changed as I began the leadership program. We learned a lot about those grand leaders, but we also focused on leaders within our community and how we were all leaders within the program. My definition of a leadership changed from “someone who has power and manages a large group of people” to “how one works with a team and utilizes their strengths for greater good.” A leader doesn’t make decisions that will make them look good, but decisions that will improve the work or lives of others.

I made a lot of friends and strong relationships from the leadership program. As I leave American University its an amazing realization to look at how we have all grown as leaders. I have experienced increased awareness in myself on how I like to lead and my forms of leadership that are most successful. I also think it allowed me and my peers to gain awareness on how our methods of leadership are received by others. The consciousness of how your leadership is perceived by others is important to have and it makes for a successful team and strong communication.

When working with a team both during my first-year issue group project and on the team of first year teaching assistants, I believe I demonstrated in multiple ways my ability to work with others. It takes a lot of planning and direct communication, as it was hard to schedule times to meet and hold me team members accountable on the first-year issue group project. My second year, as a first-year teaching assistant I learned a lot about the type of mentor I was and how that played into my ability to work on a team. Because my team members of other teaching assistants were so different, specific strengths and traits of mine were highlighted and used strategically to make the team efficient in our work.

My theoretical knowledge about leadership has been built by having in-depth discussion with my classmates and professors. Lectures and exercises in this situation have been extremely useful in building my theoretical understanding of leadership. In the practical sense, all of the hands-on opportunities to be a leader withing my greater American University community built my knowledge of practical leadership. As someone who learns by doing, this program worked well with my learning style and allowed me to grow exponentially as a leader. Once I realized what area I was passionate about working in, I had no fear to look for leadership opportunities in that area. I was able to continue on campus organizing as a youth activist with Advocates for Youth and served as the president of Student to End Abortion Stigma. I believe that the leadership program does a good job in preparing its students to not back away from opportunities of leadership, but to embrace them and incorporate them into everyday life.